

# FIELD MANUAL

## 7 PHASES. ONE PATH.

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The honest, step-by-step playbook for going from should I serve to ship day. Built by veterans. For those standing where we used to stand.

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# 01

## START HERE

Self-assessment, eligibility, and finding the real WHY before you ever call a recruiter.

### PHASE 1

*Most people who end up serving never planned on it. They reached a moment where staying the same cost more than changing. Phase 1 is the flashlight in a dark room — before any recruiter call, you should know where you actually stand and why you actually want to go.*

#### KEY POINTS

- Age minimums: 17 with parental consent for all branches. Maximums range from 29 (Marines) to 41 (Navy).
- Citizenship: U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (Green Card holder). Undocumented individuals are not eligible.
- Education: High school diploma preferred. GED accepted by most branches with higher ASVAB score minimums.
- Criminal history: Most misdemeanors are waivable. Sex offender registration and drug trafficking are permanently disqualifying.
- Drug use: Most branches allow marijuana history with honest disclosure. All recruits are drug tested at MEPS.
- Active Duty = full-time. Reserve = one weekend/month + two weeks/year. National Guard = state-based part-time with state mission.
- Find your WHY before any recruiter call. Benefits and pay are not enough to carry you through. A real answer is.

# 02

## CHOOSING YOUR BRANCH

Branch identity, honest comparison, and committing to who you want to become.

### PHASE 2

*Most recruits already feel a pull toward one branch before they can articulate why. That instinct is worth something. This phase is about understanding it, verifying it, and committing to it — so the research stops and the preparation begins.*

#### KEY POINTS

- Army: 150+ MOS options, 10-week BCT, AFQT minimum 31. Best for recruits who want maximum flexibility.
- Navy: Technical and travel-heavy, 8-week RTC at Great Lakes, AFQT minimum 35. Best for tech-oriented recruits.
- Marines: 13-week recruit training (longest enlisted basic), AFQT minimum 32. Recruits on identity and discipline.
- Air Force / Space Force: Highest entry standards, 8.5-week BMT, AFQT minimum 36. Best quality of life of any branch.
- Coast Guard: Smallest branch, highest AFQT minimum (40), maritime law enforcement and search & rescue.
- National Guard: State-based, same basic training as Active Duty counterpart, state-specific education incentives.
- Base pay is identical across all branches for equivalent rank and time in service.

# 03

## RECRUITER PREP

Pre-qualification questions, document gathering, and understanding what recruiters are actually evaluating.

PHASE 3

*The recruiter meeting is not a sales call — it is a pre-qualification interview. You walk in knowing your eligibility status, your documents, and your honest history. Recruiters reward prepared candidates with better MOS options and smoother processing.*

### KEY POINTS

- Gather your birth certificate, Social Security card, high school diploma or GED, and any medical or legal records before your first meeting.
- Be fully honest about medical history, legal history, and drug use. Omissions discovered later cause disqualifications that honesty would not.
- Know your ASVAB target score for your desired branch and MOS before the recruiter meeting.
- Understand the difference between a waiver and a disqualifier — recruiters can help with many things that seem like dead ends.
- Pre-enlistment medical screening forms (DD 2807-2) ask about every medical condition. Document your history in advance.
- Talk to recruiters from more than one branch before committing. Each branch recruiter will advocate for their branch.
- Guard/Reserve recruiters and Active Duty recruiters are completely separate — contact the right one for the component you want.

# 04

## ASVAB PREP

Subtests, AFQT scores, branch minimums, line scores, and a proven study strategy.

### PHASE 4

*The ASVAB is not an IQ test. It is a knowledge test — and knowledge is trainable. Eight to twelve weeks of focused study with a clear plan separates recruits who qualify for any MOS they want from those who are locked out of their top choices.*

#### KEY POINTS

- The AFQT score is calculated from 4 subtests: Arithmetic Reasoning (AR), Math Knowledge (MK), Paragraph Comprehension (PC), and Word Knowledge (WK).
- Branch AFQT minimums: Army 31, Marines 32, Navy 35, Air Force 36, Coast Guard 40 (all require higher with GED).
- Line scores (like GT, CL, ST) determine MOS eligibility — a high AFQT doesn't guarantee access to every job.
- Official free prep: [official.asvab.com](http://official.asvab.com), [march2success.com](http://march2success.com), and Khan Academy (covers all math sections).
- Study plan: 8-12 weeks, 30-45 minutes per day. Start with a diagnostic practice test to identify your weakest subtests.
- Retest policy: 30-day wait after first test, 30-day wait after second, 6-month wait after third and beyond.
- The CAT-ASVAB (computer-based) adapts to your performance. P&P (paper) version is fixed. Both count equally.

# 05

## MEPS PREP

The medical processing station — what happens, how to prepare, and how the waiver process works.

PHASE 5

*MEPS is where eligibility becomes official. The medical exam is thorough, the security interview is serious, and the oath is real. Most recruits who are disqualified at MEPS were disqualified by conditions they could have disclosed earlier — not by conditions that were actually disqualifying.*

### KEY POINTS

- MEPS medical exam covers vision, hearing, blood pressure, dental, orthopedic screening, blood and urine tests, and drug screening.
- PULHES rating system: P (Physical), U (Upper extremity), L (Lower extremity), H (Hearing), E (Eyes), S (Psychiatric). Each scored 1-4; 1-2 is typically qualified.
- Be fully honest during the MEPS interview. False statements on a federal document (DD 2807) are a crime.
- Waivers can be submitted for many disqualifying conditions — timing and documentation matter. Ask your recruiter early.
- Get enough sleep the night before. Do not drink excessive water. Arrive on time — MEPS days start early (4-5 AM).
- Bring original documents: birth certificate, Social Security card, all medical records, any court documents.
- The MEPS security interview covers criminal history, drug use, mental health history, and financial responsibility.

# 06

## FITNESS & MINDSET

Branch physical standards, mental preparation for basic training, and the goodbye conversation.

### PHASE 6

*No one is ready for basic training on day one. Every service member who graduated went through days that made them want to quit — and found a reason not to. Phase 6 is about building the physical base and the mental framework that make those reasons easier to find.*

#### KEY POINTS

- Army ACFT (3 Repetition Maximum Deadlift, Standing Power Throw, Hand-Release Push-Up, Sprint-Drag-Carry, Plank, 2-Mile Run).
- Navy PRT: Push-ups, curl-ups, and 1.5-mile run (or 450m swim). Standards vary by age and gender.
- Marine Corps PFT: Pull-ups or push-ups, crunches or plank, 3-mile run. Among the toughest enlisted fitness standards.
- Air Force PT: Push-ups, sit-ups, and 1.5-mile run. Space Force uses Air Force standards.
- Minimum 8-12 weeks of progressive physical training before ship day. Don't show up in shape — show up overtrained.
- The goodbye conversation with family deserves more time than one hour before ship day. Have it honestly, in advance.
- Mental preparation: the drill instructor's job is to find your breaking point. Knowing that in advance is an advantage.

# 07

## PREPARING TO SHIP

The Delayed Entry Program, the waiting period, and what to actually bring on ship day.

### PHASE 7

*Ship day is the moment everything before it was building toward. The recruits who arrive prepared — physically, mentally, administratively — have an advantage that shows from day one of basic training. Phase 7 is about making sure nothing catches you off guard.*

#### KEY POINTS

- The Delayed Entry Program (DEP) holds your slot while you wait for a ship date — typically 1-12 months. Stay physically active and in contact with your recruiter.
- DEP violations (new legal issues, medical changes, positive drug tests) can result in release from the DEP and loss of your slot.
- What to bring: government-issued ID, Social Security card, any required medical documents, eyeglasses with current prescription (no contacts at basic), and minimal personal items.
- What NOT to bring: expensive jewelry, excessive cash, non-prescribed medications, or anything you can't afford to lose.
- Know your ship date, departure point, and what to expect on day one before you leave home.
- Settle financial obligations before you go: set up automatic payments, notify your bank, arrange power of attorney if needed.
- The moment you raise your right hand and take the oath, your military career begins. Everything before this was preparation.