

Understanding the Five Branches of the Military



When you decide to join the military, you have a very important decision ahead of you - choosing your branch of service. Each branch plays a unique role in the security of our country. While they all work together to some extent, their purposes can be very different and they can offer different jobs and specialties. In order to choose the best branch for your needs and interests, you must understand the differences between the five branches of military - Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard along with their reserve components.

Air Force

The Air Force is the most recently established branch of the military and was officially established as a separate branch in 1947. Its main purpose is to support the security of the United States through air and space exploitation. It is a main supporter of ground forces by providing air support during missions. The Air Force has two reserve components - the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserves.

Army

The Army is the oldest branch of the military and was established in 1775. The Army is considered to be the ground force of the military. Even though there are aviation units within the Army, their main missions are on the ground and the majority of the soldiers who serve have a job related to ground forces.

The Army is also the largest branch of the military. Along with active duty soldiers, the Army also has two reserve components - the Army Reserves and the Army National Guard. The main difference between the two is that the Reserves fall under federal management and the National Guard falls under the jurisdiction of the state where it is located, though the Guard can be activated for federal missions if necessary.

Navy

The Navy was also established in 1775 and is considered to be the defender of the seas. While those serving in the Navy also operate on land, their main mission is on the sea.

The Navy is also a main supporter of the Air Force in providing air force carriers for transporting aircraft and providing a runway at sea for aircraft. Like the Army and the Air Force, the Navy does have a reserve component associated with it.

Navy Requirements to Join

Marines

The Marines are the second smallest branch of the military. Their purpose has changed somewhat over the years. When it was first established in 1775, it was under the Navy as a ground force element of the branch. It was basically assigned the task of taking over the beaches when the Navy brought them into a mission.

In 1798, it was established as a separate branch and since that time has slowly moved more towards ground force operations. While they do have their own air support, they are still mainly supported by the Navy for air operations and, of course, for operations by sea. The Marines, however, do not have their own medical corps. You will not find jobs for medics, nurses and other medical personnel if you choose to join the Marine Corps.

The Marines are supported by the Navy medical corps. There is not a Marine Corps National Guard but there is a Marine Corps Reserves unit.

Coast Guard

The Coast Guard is the most forgotten branch of military service in many circumstances. While also being the smallest branch, many people do not realize that the Coast Guard is a separate branch with active duty military members. The Coast Guard was originally established in 1790 and has undergone several changes as to the department it falls under within the government including the Treasury Department and the Department of Transportation. In 2002, the Coast Guard was moved to fall under the Department of Homeland Security. If the need arises, it can be called to missions under the Department of the Navy. The Coast Guard's primary purpose is to control illegal immigration by sea and conduct sea rescues. The Coast Guard also has a reserves component known as the Coast Guard Reserves. Regardless of the branch of service that you choose, the rank structure remains the same. Even though an E-2 may be referred to by different names among the branches, the pay rate for an E-2 is the same across all of the branches. You will not be eligible to higher pay by joining the Navy versus the Air Force for instance. You do however have the

possibility for higher incentive pay based on special training or skills that are obtained. For instance, those who are airborne qualified in the Army and maintain that status are entitled to an extra \$150 per month. There are multiple MOSs or jobs that have skill sets attached where additional pay is possible such as pilots, some medical fields and SCUBA.

When choosing your branch of military service, it is important to first decide what you would like to do within the military. After you have decided on a career choice, look at the branch that offers that possibility. If there is more than one branch that offers your job of choice, talk to the recruiters for those branches as well as others who have served. Those who have served in the military can typically be your best resource for information as they can give you firsthand experience about that particular career field in their branch.

Joining the military is an important decision and one that should not be taken lightly. It is a minimum of an eight-year commitment regardless of how long your active duty contract is for when you sign your contract. You should be certain of not only your job, but also your branch of service as there is basically no way to back out of your commitment once it has been made. Take the time to conduct the research and speak to many about your decision until you are comfortable with signing on the dotted line. There are many benefits and advantages to military service but you need to ensure that it is the right decision for your lifestyle and career goals.

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