

The Inside Story of Commanding in the U.S. Army Recruiting Command

By Lieutenant Colonel Toimu (Troy) Reeves II

In early February 2005, I was notified that I would be promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel on 1 March, so I was not surprised when I started receiving e-mails congratulating me on my promotion. That's why—when I received a congratulatory e-mail from Lieutenant Colonel Beatrice Evans in mid-February—I responded by thanking her and stating that I was looking forward to the promotion. She replied, "I guess you have not been notified yet that you were selected for battalion command." At that point, I rushed to get online and found my name listed as a primary candidate for battalion command in the U.S. Army Recruiting Command (USAREC).

At the time, all other Chemical officers selected for command positions were assigned to Chemical, depot, or garrison commands. I was the only one slotted for USAREC. Prior to the assignment selection, I was a major who commanded 450 troops at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. As a captain, I had commanded the 181st Chemical Company, Fort Hood, Texas, and as a lieutenant, I was a smoke platoon leader at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, California. I never imagined that if I were selected to be a battalion commander, I would end up in Army recruiting!

I called a few friends who had served with USAREC, and all of them said, "Decline it" or "Don't do it." But, when I told my wife that I did not like what I was hearing about USAREC and that I was considering declining the command, she laughed and reminded me that I had never and would never retreat from a challenging job or an "impossible" mission. "So, let's go and take command," she said. I knew then that I was going to be a USAREC battalion commander.

Before taking command in May 2006, I spent much of my spare time studying and learning about the USAREC mission and the goals of the Houston Recruiting Battalion where I was to be stationed. By the time I assumed command, I knew that the battalion was transforming to include more than 300 personnel comprising the battalion headquarters (222 recruiters, plus others serving as commanders and civilian and contractor staff), 7 companies, and 48 recruiting stations. The battalion recruits more than 4,000 Soldiers from a 40,000-square-mile area of southeast Texas each year. On any given day, there are 800 to 1,200 Soldiers waiting to enter basic training.

I also learned that the annual mission is divided into twelve months, with a "recruiting month" starting in the middle of one month and ending in the middle of the next month. Regardless of when the mission is accomplished during the recruiting month (even if it is accomplished on the last day of the current recruiting month), the count immediately begins at zero on the

first day of the next recruiting month. And, due to the unending need for qualified Soldiers in our Army, the cycle never ends.

The facts I learned made recruiting seem "easy" before I assumed command. However, the task would prove to be difficult once I actually owned the recruiting guidon for southeast Texas.

After taking command, I learned that each recruiter needed to locate and talk to nearly one hundred prospects to gain one enlistment. I also learned that only three of every ten individuals who want to enlist will qualify physically, medically, mentally, and morally. I learned that to achieve the yearly goal, each recruiter needed to enlist an average of two recruits during the twenty to twenty-five days available for recruiting each month; and I learned that the command often surpasses the goal.

Most recruiters are stationed in communities that do not have a military installation; consequently, recruiters must learn to live and work in nonmilitary environments. The only information that many of the citizens of these communities have about the Army is derived from what they see on television. Therefore, recruiters must become skilled in telling the Army story and their own story so that the community may better understand the importance and nobility of their members who come forward to enlist as Soldiers. Recruiters must educate area citizens about the life of a Soldier so that they understand there are many facets not shown on the news.

We, as recruiters, are charged with informing members of the community about the various educational programs offered by the Army. One of the many excellent programs that



Recruits take the oath of enlistment at the Astros' baseball park in Houston, Texas, just before a game.

I endorse is the March 2 Success Program, which is offered at area high schools as a way to help raise student scores on state-mandated, scholastic-aptitude testing. It is our job to let the community know that the Army offers this free program, with no commitment to enter the Army. Of course, if desired, the program can also be used to help raise scores on military aptitude tests.

In this position, I have learned that it takes a special type of leader to motivate the community and a special type of recruiter to locate the best candidates to become Soldiers. Because not everyone is interested in or suitable for military service, a recruiter must become accustomed to rejection. But, recruiters also get to encounter those wonderful volunteers who make it through the enlistment process to become Soldiers and future leaders of their communities.

As a recruiter, you learn that retired military members, chief executive officers, businessmen, and citizens want to be a part of your recruiting efforts. That means you need to push yourself, put in many extra hours, get out of your office, and find them. They can tell their stories to others—many of whom have had military service and also want to help. This multiplies the recruiting force so that it is not just the recruiters out there trying to locate the best individuals to enlist in our Army; the leaders of our community also have a vested interest. You learn that if you do not enlist Soldiers and keep our Army strong, our way of life and the future of our Nation will be threatened. You learn that recruiting is on the front line of the War on Terrorism. And you learn that working on weekends and holidays is sometimes a small price to pay.

In October 2008, I passed the colors for the Houston Recruiting Battalion to Lieutenant Colonel Michael Bottiglieri. I am now the chief of staff for the 2d Recruiting Brigade of Alabama. However, I am so grateful that I accepted the arduous, challenging, and extremely gratifying responsibility of commander of the Houston Recruiting Battalion. There are so many memories of this vast community in southeastern Texas that I will cherish forever. I will never forget the hundreds of

contacts I've made with general officers and other military service members, chief executive officers, businessmen, prominent citizens, school administrators, and sports team owners in my community. In their own way, each of them became part of our recruiting efforts. I will never forget the many thank you notes that I received from parents of Soldiers who enlisted, extending their appreciation for transforming their kids into productive Soldiers and citizens. I cherish the many e-mails I have received from Soldiers, thanking USAREC for setting them on the right path and giving them hope for the future.

I will never forget the many times an anonymous customer at a restaurant paid for my meal because I was a Soldier in uniform. I will never forget the card that contained \$300 worth of restaurant coupons that was left on my car, along with a note that said, "Thanks for being an American Soldier and keeping us safe." It was signed, "Your neighbor."

I will never forget the role of USAREC Soldiers in ensuring that our Army—our total volunteer Army—is a ready and relevant force. We must keep our ranks filled with quality Soldiers so that we can continue to live in the strongest and best nation on Earth.

A recruiting assignment is definitely not an easy assignment. And as commander, I was required to serve as a role model to the Soldiers under my command and to future Soldiers who would soon begin their military journey. But, after twenty-eight months of command, I must admit that it was the most rewarding experience of my nineteen years in the Army. If you love interacting with the next generation, their parents, and the community and you want to try something totally different that will test and challenge you every day, the Army recruiting mission is for you. It was, and is, for me. It is a mission where only the best need apply.

HOOAH!!



Lieutenant Colonel Reeves was the commander of the Houston Recruiting Battalion from May 2006 to October 2008.