



Highlights of [GAO-07-1196](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Section 587 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 required GAO to address (1) the trends in the number of conscientious objector applications for the active and reserve components during calendar years 2002 through 2006; (2) how each component administers its process for evaluating conscientious objector applications; and (3) whether, upon discharge, conscientious objectors are eligible for the same benefits as other former servicemembers. GAO’s review included the Coast Guard components. GAO compiled numbers of applications based on data provided by the Armed Forces. However, these numbers do not include the numbers of applications that are not formally reported to the components’ headquarters. Also, the Defense Manpower Data Center does not maintain separate data on numbers of applications for conscientious objector status; it does maintain data on reasons for separation. GAO used these data to help assess the reasonableness of the component-provided data and to compile demographic data.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any recommendations in this report. The Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs were provided a draft of this report and had no comments.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-07-1196](#). For more information, contact Brenda Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Number of Formally Reported Applications for Conscientious Objectors Is Small Relative to the Total Size of the Armed Forces

What GAO Found

During calendar years 2002 through 2006, the active and reserve components reported processing 425 applications for conscientious objector status. This number is small relative to the Armed Forces’ total force of approximately 2.3 million servicemembers. Of the 425 applications the components reported processing, 224 (53 percent) were approved; 188 (44 percent) were denied; and 13 (3 percent) were pending, withdrawn, closed, or no information was provided.

Component	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
Army	25	47	53	33	23	181
Army Reserve	2	8	14	9	3	36
Army National Guard	1	7	11	7	0	26
Navy	8	2	3	9	9	31
Navy Reserve ^a	0	0	0	0	0	0
Air Force	2	15	10	12	6	45
Air Force Reserve	1	2	1	0	0	4
Air National Guard	1	1	0	1	2	5
Marine Corps	8	8	11	6	10	43
Marine Corps Reserve	7	21	14	5	3	50
Coast Guard	1	1	1	0	0	3
Coast Guard Reserve	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	56	113	118	82	56	425

Source: GAO analysis of components’ data.

^a The Navy Reserve reported no applications during this period.

Each component considers applications from servicemembers who wish to be classified as conscientious objectors. Each component’s process is essentially the same, taking an average of about 7 months to process an application. After the servicemember submits an application, arrangements are made for a military chaplain and a psychiatrist to interview the applicant. An investigating officer holds a hearing and prepares a report. An authorized official or board makes the final decision and informs the commanding officer, who informs the applicant that he or she has or has not met the burden of proof necessary to establish the claim. Officials from all the components stated that they attempt to temporarily reassign applicants to noncombatant duties while their applications are pending.

Conscientious objector status is not considered when determining eligibility for benefits; the primary determinant is the type of discharge—honorable or under honorable conditions (general). Of those 224 servicemembers whose applications were approved for conscientious objector status, 207 received honorable discharges, 14 received general discharges, and information on the remaining 3 was not available. In addition to the characterization of discharge, a servicemember may have to meet other eligibility requirements—including years of service—to receive certain Veterans Affairs benefits.