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| **Recruiters Recall Patriotism of Post-9/11 America**By Lisa DanielAmerican Forces Press ServiceWASHINGTON, Sept. 8, 2011 – Like so many Americans, Army Sgt. Cheri Depenbrock watched the horror of 9/11 unfold from her office television. What was different for the Army recruiter was how it changed her job in the weeks after.

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| Click photo for screen-resolution image*Like other military recruiters, Army Master Sgt. Juan Dozier witnessed a spike in patriotism following Sept. 11, 2001, that led many Americans into recruiting stations. U.S. Army courtesy photo*  (Click photo for screen-resolution image);[high-resolution image](http://www.defense.gov/DODCMSShare/NewsStoryPhoto/2011-09/hrs_20110810-A-ooox-001.JPG) available. |

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In seven years of helping ensure the Army met its recruiting goals, Depenbrock was used to reaching out to young people, telling them what the Army could do for them, and mostly answering their questions about how they could get their college paid for by signing up.“It was almost always for college, for money, and for having a full-time job,” she said, referring to the reasons people enlisted.Sept. 11, 2001, changed that. In the days, weeks and months thereafter, Depenbrock, like military recruiters around the nation, watched in amazement from her Cincinnati office as people who never would have thought of joining -- or rejoining, as many would have it -- approached recruiters with the sole purpose of defending America.“It was amazing the people walking into that office, the ages,” she said. “We had so many prior-service folks wanting to come back. I was amazed at how many older people tried. I know some of them were in their fifties. And, military-wise, we couldn’t do anything for them.”Some younger people with prior service did rejoin, Depenbrock said, and the first-time recruits were different. While patriotism has always driven young people to service, it was almost always matched with a desire for college money or new opportunities. Suddenly, they weren’t asking about money, she said. “It was all about the patriotism,” Depenbrock said. “They didn’t care about anything else. Money had nothing do with it. I swear, I think half those kids would have joined if we hadn’t paid them.”An annual Pentagon survey of young people’s propensity to join the military showed an 8-percent increase among young men likely to enlist immediately after 9/11, and remained high until 2005, a Defense Department official said.One of those young men was William Grigsby, now an Army staff sergeant who enlisted in early 2002. “The events of 9/11 had everything to do with my decision to enlist,” he said.Grigsby, an aircraft electrician on a three-year detail as a recruiter in Houston, graduated high school in June 2001 and was indecisive about his plans, first considering the Army, then college, and then deciding against both.Three months later, “I was working a dead-end job at a grocery store,” Grigsby recalled. He was driving home from the night shift on the morning of 9/11 when he heard a news report about two hijacked planes being flown into the World Trade Center in Manhattan.Almost immediately after, Grigsby said, his mind went back to joining the Army. As U.S. forces moved into Afghanistan to dismantle al-Qaida and their Taliban backers, “I watched in awe as our military forces took control of the country,” he said, adding that he had no reservations at the prospects of deploying to war.Recruiters from around the country remember post-9/11 as a time when many potential recruits came to them.Army Master Sgt. Juan Dozier calls himself “a recruiter of two different generations.” There was the generation before 9/11 -- his generation -- who enlisted for various benefits the military could provide.“There wasn’t so much of a sense of purpose, of ‘What can I do for my country?’” he said. “It was more, ‘I need the training or education money.’”Dozier didn’t begrudge them -- he was one of them. Raised in the tough Southside Chicago neighborhood of Englewood, Dozier enlisted in the Army in 1989 as a way out.“The only thing I wanted to do was have different scenery,” he said.“They took a chance on me being from Southside Chicago,” Dozier said, adding that his recruiters asked him to take a bus to meet them outside of his neighborhood because they were concerned about violence there.“The only time they came and got me was when it was time for boot camp,” he said.After serving as a motor transportation operator in Germany, then California and Texas, Dozier was working as a recruiter in Columbia, S.C., when 9/11 occurred. People began flowing into the recruiting station, and they were prepared to fight, he said.Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and his predecessor, Robert M. Gates, have praised the more than 3 million young people who have joined the military since 9/11, all knowing they likely would go to war.Dozier compared their mindset to that of peacetime recruits caught off guard by military interventions such as the Persian Gulf War that began in 1990.“Back then kids were saying, ‘I didn’t join for this, and a lot of them were trying to get out,’” he said. “These kids now, they know what they’re signing up for. For most of them, they know war is part of the job.”Recruiters say they now hear a mixture of reasons for enlisting, with many potential recruits still citing patriotism, but a growing number also looking for benefits such as health care.“When they come in now, they’re looking at benefits,” Depenbrock said. “They’re not talking about the GI Bill. -- they’re talking about a safety net.”  |
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