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APNewsBreak: Army expelled 500 immigrant recruits in 1 year

By MARTHA MENDOZA AND GARANCE BURKE October 11, 2018



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Over the course of 12 months, the U.S. Army discharged more than 500 immigrant enlistees who were recruited across the globe for their language or medical skills and promised a fast track to citizenship in exchange for their service, The Associated Press has found.

The decade-old Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest recruiting program was put on hold in 2016 amid concerns that immigrant recruits were not being screened sufficiently. The Army began booting out those enlistees last year [without explanation](#).

The AP has interviewed more than a dozen recruits from countries such as Brazil, Pakistan, Iran, China and Mongolia who all said they were devastated by their unexpected discharges or canceled contracts.

Until now, it's been unclear how many were discharged and for what reason because the Army has refused to discuss specific cases. But the Army's own list, submitted to the

U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia last month, says 502 service members who enlisted under MAVNI were discharged between July 2017 and July 2018.

The list, which was unsealed this week after a request from the AP, offers “refuse to enlist” as the reason for expelling two-thirds of the recruits. That is the reason given for 35 percent of enlistee discharges Army-wide, according to a research study posted on a Defense Department website.

But at least one recruit whose paperwork said he was being discharged from the program for that reason said it was not accurate.

Badamsereejid Gansukh, whose recruiter told him his Turkish language skills would be an asset to the military, said he didn’t know he was discharged at all until he asked his congressman’s office this summer to help him figure out why his security screening was taking so long.

“I never said I refuse to enlist, not at all,” Gansukh said. In fact, he said, he had opted in for another year after getting a call from his recruiter.

Upon learning he was discharged, “I just broke down,” the Minnesota State University graduate said.

The Defense Department said it would not comment on individual cases.

Twenty-two percent of the discharged immigrants were told their entry-level performance and conduct was subpar, which Pentagon spokeswoman Carla Gleason said could include being injured. Ten percent — or 48 service members — were listed as being discharged because of an unfavorable security screening. This can include having family members in another country — which is typical for immigrants — or the military not completing all of the screenings in a reasonable period.

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There were three discharges for apathy or personal problems, two for having an encounter with police after enlisting, one due to pregnancy and another citing education, which could indicate a university opportunity.

Two “declined to ship” to boot camp, the list said, and two enlistees were discharged with the explanation “unknown,” which the Defense Department said it could not explain.

The names of the service members and other personal information were redacted from the list to protect their privacy.

All the enlistees had committed to active duty or reserves; many had been regularly drilling and training with their recruiters in preparation for boot camp while awaiting security clearances.

If a recruit hasn't started active duty, the U.S. Army and Army National Guard have "the authority to separate the individual and terminate the contract, whether at the applicant's request or at the government's convenience," Army spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell said in a statement Wednesday.

Margaret Stock, an immigration and national security law expert who helped create the MAVNI program, said the Army is not giving enlistees their legal right to appeal.

"They are trying to get rid of people," she said.

Eligible recruits are required to have legal status in the U.S., such as a student visa, before enlisting. More than 5,000 immigrants were recruited into the program in 2016, and an estimated 10,000 are currently serving. The vast majority go into the Army, but some also go to the other military branches.

Gansukh, a first-generation immigrant from Mongolia, said he had hoped to be a part of something larger when he enlisted, and believed his service would be an honorable way to seek citizenship in his new country.

"Now I feel like I was really targeted in a way," he said. "I feel isolated from the rest of the people who are living here."

Other recruits discharged this year amid stalled security screenings were equally devastated.

"It's just like you're dropped from heaven to hell," Panshu Zhao said earlier this summer after learning he was getting kicked out. The Chinese immigrant is a Ph.D. student at Texas A&M.

As the cases snowballed, some began suing.

In response to the litigation, the Army stopped processing discharges last month and reinstated at least three dozen recruits who had been thrown out of the service.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told reporters late last month that he supports the MAVNI program.

"We need and want every qualified patriot willing to serve and able to serve," Mattis said.

Mendoza and Burke reported from San Francisco.

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Newsom presents California as Trump alternative **LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Gavin Newsom was elected governor of California but the message in his victory speech was directed far beyond the state's borders and at one man: President Donald Trump. Newsom, who will replace fellow Democrat Jerry Brown in January, did not mention Trump by name, but his remarks

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NORTH OGDEN, Utah (AP) — A Utah mayor who was also a Utah Army National Guard major training commandos in Afghanistan was fatally shot by one of his Afghan trainees, officials said Sunday. Brent Taylor, 39, had taken a yearlong leave of absence as mayor of North Ogden north of Salt Lake City for his

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O'Rourke drops f-bomb on live TV during concession to Cruz
EL PASO, Texas (AP) — Rep. Beto O'Rourke didn't go quietly to defeat. Thanking his campaign supporters for their spirited challenge to Sen. Ted Cruz, he said on live television Tuesday: "All of you, showing the country how you do this. I'm so f---ing proud of you guys." The Texas Democrat has been k

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Jury convicts ex-deputy's husband in deadly confrontation
HOUSTON (AP) — A jury on Monday convicted the husband of a former sheriff's deputy of murder for the strangulation death of a man the couple confronted outside a Houston-area restaurant. Terry Thompson's trial will move to its punishment phase, where additional testimony will be presented before jur

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Officials: Teen shot by mother while sleeping has diedOKMULGEE, Okla. (AP) — Authorities in eastern Oklahoma say a 16-year-old girl has died after being shot in the head by her mother while she slept. Okmulgee County Sheriff's Investigator Duston Todd said in a news release that Kloee Toliver "succumbed to her injuries" Tuesday night. Toliver's mother, 7 hours ago

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2 California death row inmates found dead; suicide suspected SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Two condemned multiple murderers, including a serial killer, apparently committed suicide within hours of each other on the nation's largest death row, California officials said Monday. Corrections officials said they found Andrew Urdiales, 54, unresponsive during a securit

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Former Nazi SS camp guard, 94, goes on trial in Germany MUEENSTER, Germany (AP) — A 94-year-old former SS enlisted man went on trial Tuesday in Germany, facing hundreds of counts of accessory to murder for alleged crimes committed during the years he served as a guard at the Nazis' Stutthof concentration camp. Johann Rehbogen was pushed into the Muenster

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Judge: Conspiracy charges stand against Chicago officersCHICAGO (AP) — A judge has refused to dismiss charges against three Chicago police officers accused of participating in a cover-up surrounding the fatal police shooting of black teenager Laquan McDonald. Cook County Judge Domenica Stephenson ruled Monday. The bench trial is scheduled to start Nov. 2
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Fox News doesn't condone Hannity appearance with TrumpNEW YORK (AP) — Fox News said Tuesday that it has addressed the "unfortunate distraction" of Sean Hannity and Jeanine Pirro speaking at President Trump's campaign rally in Missouri the night before, and that it doesn't condone such behavior. The network did not say what, if any, discipline that the
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