

**REPORT TO ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEES  
ON  
SCREENING INDIVIDUALS WHO SEEK TO ENLIST IN  
THE ARMED FORCES**



**Office of the Under Secretary of Defense  
for Personnel and Readiness**

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The estimated cost of this report or study for the Department of Defense is approximately \$82,500 for the 2020 Fiscal Year. This includes \$80,000 in expenses and \$2,500 in DoD labor.

Section 530 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (Public Law 116-92)

SEC. 530. Study regarding screening individuals who seek to enlist in the Army Forces

(a) STUDY.—The Secretary of Defense shall study the feasibility of, in background investigations and security and suitability screenings of individuals who seek to enlist in the Armed Forces—

- (1) screening for extremist and gang-related activity; and
- (2) using the following resources of the Federal Bureau of Investigation:

(A) The Tattoo and Graffiti Identification Program.

(B) The National Gang Intelligence Center.

(b) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit an unclassified report in writing to the Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and House of Representatives containing conclusions of the Secretary regarding the study under subsection (a).

Each year the Department of Defense (DoD) recruits approximately 400,000 applicants for military service, of which approximately 250,000 individuals contract into the All-Volunteer Force. We remain committed to recruiting high-quality applicants representative of the nation they will serve. While today's economy has brought challenges to military recruiting, the Department has been steadfast that the Military Services adhere to established policies and requirements concerning the screening of applicants for service, and only enlist or appoint applicants that meet our high standards. (Note: This report is limited to the Military Services and thus does not include the U.S. Coast Guard.)

Each new member of the military, whether enlisted or officer, undergoes a thorough screening process to ensure he or she meets the high standards required to serve in today's military. This multi-tiered screening process enables a holistic view of each applicant. Using the tools available, we believe we have been effective at screening for individuals who possess or advocate extremist ideologies, or actively participate in extremist groups, and we continuously review our policies, practices, and methods for improvement. As an example, in Fiscal Year 2019, the Department launched a centralized screening capability that vets all military accessions in order to better identify and resolve indicators of questionable allegiance. This new vetting process has proven successful in identifying unique adverse information not available solely from the standardized background investigation form, Standard Form 86.

In addition to recent improvements, DoD also directed a study through the Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) to review internal policies and practices related to background investigations and security screening of those individuals seeking to enlist in the U.S. military. The objective of the study was to evaluate the Federal Bureau of

Investigation's (FBI) resources that could be incorporated into the DoD accessions process and the personnel security program to help better identify and screen out those individuals advocating domestic terrorist (DT) groups and domestic extremist (DE) ideologies. The resulting report, completed in June 2020, is attached for reference and additional details.

The PERSEREC researchers conducted a review of current and active DT and DE group literature. This included open materials, secondary sources, and unique datasets. They then developed and laid out process maps and conducted a policy review of military accessions and personnel security programs to determine points within the processes where additional action could be taken to enhance vetting of recruits. Finally, they conducted interviews with experts within the DoD, FBI, and National Joint Terrorism Task Force to discover potential opportunities to enhance screening processes.

The resulting report supported current DoD processes and policies while making the following recommendations:

1. Continuance of the Office of the Under Secretary for Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD(P&R))-Accession Policy's work with the FBI in evaluating the usefulness of the Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP) for use by personnel at the Services' recruiting headquarters in reviewing questionable/concerning tattoos.
2. When questionable tattoos cannot be appropriately determined using LEEP, OUSD(P&R)-Accessions Policy should facilitate the request of additional assistance from the FBI's Cryptology and Racketeering Records Unit (CRRU) by the Military Services' recruiting headquarters in determining potential meanings and significance.
3. The Office of the Under Secretary for Defense for Intelligence and Security (OUSD(I&S)) should collaborate with the FBI's Counter-Terrorism Division to develop an unclassified version of the FBI's Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism training.
4. DoD should collaborate with pertinent governmental stakeholders to develop a consistent definition for DE across the whole of government.
5. OUSD (P&R)-Accessions Policy should participate in OUSD(I&S)'s Publicly Available Electronic Information Working Group as a means to gain further insight in capabilities that may help to meet recruiting needs.
6. OUSD (I&S) should engage interagency partners to determine if changes to Standard Form 86 questions can be implemented to make them more precise, easily understood, and well-defined.
7. OUSD (I&S) should partner with OUSD (P&R) to consider adding a Separation Program Designator to Department of Defense Form 214 that identifies a separation for DE reason.

The DoD has already begun to implement recommendations 1-6. (Recommendation 7 remains under review for implementation.) This includes collaboration with the FBI to allow access of to the LEEP by the Military Services' recruiting headquarters (Recommendation #1 above). This portal provides access to National Gang Intelligence Center Online which includes a searchable sign, symbol, and tattoo database. This resource, currently in a pilot phase, allows the Military Services' recruiting headquarters to match concerning tattoos not resolved at lower recruiting echelons, bring greater understanding to the background of military applicants who present potential indicators of gang membership, and screen out these applicants earlier in the accessions process.

OUSD (P&R)-Accessions Policy has also piloted a process for the Military Services' recruiting headquarters to submit unidentified, concerning tattoos to the FBI's CRRU for research and analysis (Recommendation #2 above). This partnership allows direct and timely feedback to both decrease risk of enlisting bad actors while, at the same time, not needlessly turning away quality applicants simply because of a body marking or tattoo not readily interpreted. There has been promising results from the limited number of submissions that were not able to be clearly interpreted at the Military Service level.

OUSD (I&S) continues to work closely with the Security Executive Agent, the Suitability Executive Agent; the Security Clearance, Suitability, and Credentialing Performance Accountability Council's Performance Management Office (PMO); and other interagency partners to develop the Trusted Workforce 2.0 framework, which will not only change the Standard Form 86 questions, but make the vetting process as a whole more precise, well-defined, and more easily understood by participants (Recommendation #6 above).

DoD is exploring the use of the social media information in the conduct of background checks; however, more review and analysis are required before we will be able to determine how and if we can integrate this information into the background check process. It is important to note that although certain FBI resources, as well as, supplementary data sources like social media can enhance screening and vetting processes, complete reliance on data-driven solutions should be used with caution. The sheer number of data brokers/vendors claiming that data solutions alone can solve the problem creates a false sense of security and leads policy makers to believe that there are cheaper, easier alternatives to human investigation and vigilance. Curating electronic databases, defining business rules to reduce "white noise" and narrow down alerts to a manageable volume, and confidently pairing usernames/handles to an individual are ongoing challenges to further automating the vetting process. Further, if we were to become overly reliant on publicly available information, we would make ourselves increasingly vulnerable to false data generated by our adversaries' disinformation campaigns (e.g., spoofed accounts, identity theft, deep fakes, etc.). Databases alone cannot provide a full, whole-person determination of applicants.

Through extensive contact with applicants, recruiters and investigators develop and form a full picture of an applicant. Recruiters play a critical role and are the first line of defense for DoD to collect relevant information on an applicant. They often have extensive knowledge of an applicant's social network and behavior before he or she joins the military. This personal contact fills in the gaps to help identify applicants who may have extremism leanings but little identifiable online extremist activity. Ultimately, further training for recruiters and investigators on extremist indicators can help them coalesce a wide range of applicant data points to inform the investigative process.

In conclusion, DoD remains committed to ensuring that all personnel are treated with dignity and respect in an inclusive environment free from unlawful discrimination and maltreatment. This effort is accomplished while keeping each person's civil liberties intact. While this is not always an easy endeavor, it is critical to protecting our Service members and those our Service members are sworn to protect.





PERSEREC

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# Leveraging FBI Resources to Enhance Military Accessions Screening and Personnel Security Vetting

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Approved for Public Distribution  
Defense Personnel and Security Research Center  
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| ABSTRACT:<br>The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC) identified Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) tools and datasets that can assist with the identification of domestic terror and domestic extremist (DE) ideological indicators and group membership during the accessions and personnel security vetting processes. To accurately identify appropriate FBI resources, PERSEREC examined DE groups and ideologies, mapped the military accession screening and personnel security vetting processes, and interviewed FBI personnel to better understand available capabilities. PERSEREC found several examples of extremists who were active or former military Service members, and identified FBI capabilities, as well as others that could be integrated into the military accessions screening process and the personnel security program.                    |                              |  |  |                            |  |
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## **PREFACE**

The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center is committed to supporting its Federal Government partners in their mission to keep domestic extremists from using Government resources, personnel, training, and capabilities for their own violent purposes. The human and monetary costs of domestic terrorism are high, which makes it all the more important to deny extremists access to Federal resources. The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center supports the efforts to keep the Federal workplace safe, secure, and out of the hands of those whose loyalty to the Federal Government is compromised by their commitment to extreme or violent ideology.

Eric L. Lang  
Director, PERSEREC

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Defense Personnel and Security Research Center would like to thank the following agencies for providing assistance to our research team: Army Criminal Investigation Division Command, U.S. Army Recruiting Command, Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Joint Terrorism Task Force - Military Operations Support Team.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DoD is facing a threat from domestic extremists (DE), particularly those who espouse white supremacy or white nationalist ideologies. Some domestic extremist/terror groups (a) actively attempt to recruit military personnel into their group or cause, (b) encourage their members to join the military, or (c) join, themselves, for the purpose of acquiring combat and tactical experience. Military members are highly prized by these groups as they bring legitimacy to their causes and enhance their ability to carry out attacks. In addition to potential violence, white supremacy and white nationalism pose a threat to the good order and discipline within the military. Service members are prohibited from participating in or advocating for supremacist and other extremist ideology. Most Service-level policy directs Recruiting Commands to screen for and disqualify applicants who belong to domestic extremist/terror groups or espouse DE ideologies. The objective of this research study was to evaluate the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) resources that could be incorporated into the DoD accessions program and the personnel security program to help better identify and remove extremists.

## METHODS

A literature review was conducted of white supremacist and white nationalist groups that are active in the United States. Using a variety of data sources, including open source research, secondary sources, and unique datasets, five major groups as well as lone actors were identified and evaluated for recent activity targeting the military. Additionally, unique indicators (e.g., tattoos, symbols) associated with each group were identified.

A policy review was conducted to develop a process map and outline of the military accessions process and the personnel security program. This allowed for the identification of nodes within these processes where additional information and insight would enhance screening and vetting determinations.

Finally, representatives from Federal agencies were interviewed to better understand domestic terror and domestic extremism. Interviews were conducted with the FBI, DoD, and the National Joint Terrorism Task Force to identify FBI resources and opportunities to enhance screening and vetting processes. FBI subject matter experts were asked to review a summary of these resources for completeness and accuracy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Office of the Under Secretary for Defense for Personnel and Readiness' (OUSD [P&R]) Accession Policy should continue to work with the FBI to evaluate the usefulness of Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP) accounts for personnel at Recruiting Headquarters who are responsible for reviewing and approving accession applicants with questionable/concerning tattoos. These accounts will provide recruiting personnel with access to intelligence that will promote a more comprehensive understanding of applicants who may present symbolic images that the Recruiting Commands cannot positively identify.



- OUSD (P&R) Accessions Policy should facilitate information sharing between each of the Services' Recruiting Headquarters and the FBI's Cryptology and Racketeering Records Unit. When highly qualified applicants have concerning tattoos that cannot be identified through traditional means or the resources available on LEEP, they may request the Cryptology and Racketeering Records Unit to analyze tattoos for potential meanings and significance.
- Office of the Under Secretary for Defense Intelligence and Security (OUSD [I&S]) should collaborate with the FBI's Counter-Terrorism Division to develop an unclassified version of the FBI's Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism training. The training should highlight some of the most active Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism groups as well as lone actors and present obvious and non-obvious linguistic cues as well as common symbols used by extremists to self-identify and spread their message. This type of training will provide recruiting personnel, background investigators, security managers, and other personnel security professionals with greater insight into these groups and ideologies and, ultimately, enrich military accession screening and personnel security investigations.
- DoD should work with other Government stakeholders to develop a consistent definition for DE across Government.
- Accessions Policy should join the OUSD (I&S) Publicly Available Electronic Information Working Group. This Working Group would give Accessions Policy insight into Publicly Available Electronic Information capabilities that have the ability to meet recruiting needs.
- OUSD (I&S) should work with the Performance Accountability Council Program Management Office and other Trusted Workforce 2.0 partners to determine if changes to Question 29, Association Record, on the Standard Form 86 can be implemented. Broad concepts such as terrorism need to be broken down into smaller, more precise questions. Furthermore, good survey questions need to be unequivocal and instructions must be easily understood and have well-defined terms.
- OUSD (I&S) should work with OUSD (P&R) to consider the addition of a Separation Program Designator to the DD 214 that equates with domestic extremism and an update of DoDI 1332.14 and DoDI 1332.30.

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## INTRODUCTION

Section 530 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY20 directs the Secretary of Defense to submit a report on the “feasibility of using the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] Tattoo and Graffiti Identification Program and NGIC [National Gang Intelligence Center] to screen for white nationalists and individuals with ties to white nationalist organizations as part of background investigations and security screenings of individuals who seek to enlist in the Armed Forces.” In response to the NDAA, the Office of the Under Secretary for Defense for Personnel and Readiness (OUSD [P&R]) – Military Personnel Policy (MPP), Accession Policy (AP), and Office of the Under Secretary for Defense Intelligence and Security (OUSD [I&S]) requested that the Defense Personnel and Security Research Center (PERSEREC)<sup>1</sup> conduct a broader study by identifying all FBI databases and tools that may help military accessions and personnel security programs better identify applicants who may be affiliated with the white supremacy/nationalist movement, to include membership in, or participation on behalf of domestic terror (DT) or domestic extremist (DE) groups.

Despite a low number of cases in absolute terms, individuals with extremist affiliations and military experience are a concern to U.S. national security because of their proven ability to execute high-impact events. White supremacy or white nationalism groups, claim to have both active duty service members and veterans as members (FBI, 2008). Members of these groups also claim ongoing attempts to join the U.S. military with the intention of acquiring combat and weapons training. Membership of active duty U.S. military personnel and veterans is highly prized by DT groups for several reasons. Military members bring legitimacy to their groups’ militant causes, which enhances their ability to push their agenda and attract recruits. Access to service members with combat training and technical weapons expertise can also increase both the probability of success and the potency of planned violent attacks.

## UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT

Since 2014, the United States has witnessed a resurgence in white supremacy and white nationalist activity. The 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, was the country’s largest gathering of white supremacists in decades. According to a study from the New America Foundation, between September 12, 2001 to June 11, 2016, right-wing extremists were responsible for more deaths in the U.S. than any other type of extremists (Bergen, 2015). In the past 10 years, white supremacists have been responsible for 54% of all domestic extremist-related murders in the United States (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 2018).

The terms white supremacy and white nationalism are often used interchangeably, with adherents of both frequently sharing the same core beliefs. White supremacy is commonly defined as the belief that the “white race” is superior to all other races and should, therefore, dominate or purposefully exclude other races. Furthermore, white supremacists

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<sup>1</sup> PERSEREC is a division within the Office of People Analytics (OPA), a component within the Defense Human Resources Activity (DHRA).

propagate a conspiracy theory that states that the white race will become extinct because of the influx of non-whites who also happen to be controlled by people of the Jewish faith, sometimes referred to as “white genocide” (ADL, n.d.). White nationalism is rooted in the core beliefs of white supremacy, but extrapolates these beliefs into a vision of nationhood and citizenship based upon racial identity (ADL, n.d.). White nationalism only differs from white supremacy in that it offers a fully articulated and tangible end state to be achieved. White nationalist beliefs vary, particularly on how to handle non-whites. Some believe that they should be violently expelled from a whites-only nation-state, while others believe in allowing for a mixed-race society with the government serving only to promote the interests of a dominant white ruling class.

A popular white supremacist slogan sums up the underlying ideology that drives the movement and its online subculture in 14 words: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.”<sup>2</sup> This slogan captures the movement’s core belief and is the key to understanding their world view—that unless direct action is taken, Jews and minorities endanger the existence of the white race. This fear rallies white supremacists, who believe that almost any action they take is justified if it will help “save” the white race. The 14 words serve as a slogan and call-to-arms for the white supremacist movement. The mere phrase “14 words” can be used by white supremacists to invoke their core ideas.

The white supremacist movement is broad and includes various segments and subgroups, including traditional white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, and, more recently, the alt-right. Traditional white supremacists are the oldest and most prominent subgroup within the white supremacy movement and include groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which is still active and engages in recruitment efforts. Neo-Nazi groups revere Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany and seek to create a fascist political state. Neo-Nazi groups in the United States include National Alliance, National Socialist Movement (NSM), Atomwaffen Division (AWD), and The Base. AWD has been among the deadliest groups to emerge since 2016; its members are responsible for five murders. White nationalists include most groups from the broader white supremacy movement, including the KKK, neo-Nazis, and the alt-right. Their main focus is on white identity and creating a white ethnostate.<sup>3</sup>

The alt-right is made up of a diverse set of people connected to white supremacy. Although aspects of the alt-right date back to 2008, the movement rose to prominence in 2015. The alt-right rejects mainstream conservatism and favors a more implicit and explicit form of conservatism that embraces racism and white supremacy and advocates for the interests of white people (ADL, 2018). Although the alt-right’s ideological beliefs stem from orthodox white supremacy, the distinct online subculture that evolved on websites like 4chan, 8chan, and Discord heavily influenced and shaped the movement. Alt-right groups and

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<sup>2</sup> David Lane, a notorious white supremacist ideologue, coined the 14 words.

<sup>3</sup> An ethnostate is a proposed state that is ruled by a specific ethnic group. In this case, a white ethnostate would be exclusively for white people and would exclude non-whites.

figures include Identity Evropa/American Identity Movement, Patriot Front, Richard Spencer, and Jarod Taylor.

Unaffiliated white supremacists and far-right terrorists also pose a serious threat. Four recent attackers were not affiliated with any groups and were radicalized online through popular far-right forums and social media platforms, including 8chan, and/or were inspired by a previous attacker. The Christchurch shooter Brenton Tarrant was not a member of a white supremacist group and was inspired by Norwegian far-right terrorist Anders Breivik.<sup>4</sup> John Earnest, who allegedly attacked the Poway Synagogue in California in April 2019, was also not affiliated with any groups, was radicalized on 8chan, and was directly inspired by Tarrant. In August 2019, Patrick Crusius, who was also inspired by Tarrant, allegedly conducted an attack in El Paso, Texas.

## **KEY TERMS**

In everyday parlance and even in public communications from Government officials, the terms terrorism and extremism are often used interchangeably. This blending of terms requires some differentiation. For the purposes of this report, the term *domestic* is defined as acts by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States (or its Territories) with limited or no foreign direction (Bjelopera, 2017).

### **Domestic Terrorism**

There are three elements needed to characterize an action as DT. These include existence of a federal or criminal violation; threat of or use of force or violence; and the furtherance of a political or social ideology. In this report, DT specifically refers to criminal acts specified in Title 18 U.S.C. 2331(5): Involving acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; appear to be intended to:

- Intimidate or coerce a civilian population;
- Influence the policy of government by intimidation or coercion; or
- Affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping; and,
- Occurring primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States.

The United States does not have a designation list for DT groups or entities. However, there are violent, organized movements that fall under the DT umbrella. These include:

- Racial/ethnic,
- Anti-government/anti-authority,
- Animal rights,

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<sup>4</sup> On July 22, 2011, Anders Breivik conducted two terrorist attacks in Norway, killing 77 people. Breivik was not affiliated with any white supremacist groups.



- Environmental rights, and
- Anti-abortion.

### **Domestic Extremism**

The terms extremism and DE are often used interchangeably within DoD. DoD policies define these terms as “advocate racial, gender, or ethnic hatred or intolerance; advocate, create, or engage in illegal discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of or use force or violence or unlawful means to deprive individuals of their rights under the United States Constitution or the laws of the United States or any State; or advocate or seek to overthrow the Government of the United States” (Department of Defense Instruction [DoDI] 1325.06; Army Regulation [AR] 600-20, Air Force Instruction [AFI] 51-903, Marine Corps Recruiting Command Order [MCRO] 1100.1). DoD’s definition of DE aligns with racial/ethnic organized movements, and is similar to, yet distinct from the FBI’s preferred terminology “racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (RMVE).” RMVE is defined as “threats involving the potentially unlawful use or threat of force or violence, in furtherance of political and/or social agendas which are deemed to derive from bias, often related to race, held by the actor against others, including a given population group. RMVEs use both political and religious justifications to support their racially- or ethnically-based ideological objectives and criminal activities (FBI, 2020).”

### **ENLISTMENT POLICY**

According to Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 1304.26, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, the primary reason for establishing entrance standards is to reduce the opportunity for individuals who may become disciplinary problems or security risks or who may be detrimental to good order and discipline from enlisting. With respect to the Army, any military applicants who are determined to be members of extremist groups or criminal gangs will be disqualified from enlistment (United States Army Recruiting Command [USAREC] Message 19-027, 2019). Similarly, within the Navy, applicants are disqualified from enlisting if they “reveal any extreme prejudice or vices against any individual(s), or have a history that they illegally denied the rights of any individual or group” (COMNAVCRUITCOMINST 1130.8K, 2016). At the time of enlistment, Marines sign the Statement of Understanding *Participation in Gangs, Extremist Organizations or Activities*, acknowledging that Marines are prohibited from engaging in extremist organizations and activities (MCRO 1100.1).

### **DOD POLICY ON DISSIDENT AND PROTEST ACTIVITIES**

Per DoDI 1325.06, military personnel are prohibited from actively participating in organizations that promote and support “supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes.” Active participation includes acts such as fundraising and

demonstrating and, more notably, having tattoos or other body markings associated with such organizations.<sup>5</sup>

Identifying various forms of participation are important because, as discussed later in this report, the United States is facing an increased threat from lone actors who may advocate extremist beliefs but have no official membership with DT groups. Furthermore, DoDI 1325.06 states that active participation also includes engaging in activities that help achieve the objectives of these organizations while negatively affecting "...the good order, discipline, or mission accomplishments." This language empowers Commanders (COs) to take administrative action against those who promote and advocate white supremacy or nationalist ideologies.

## **SECURITY AND OTHER POLICY**

Supremacy and extremist activity is also prohibited under Service components' and other DoD administrative policies on Security, Human Resources, Military Equal Opportunity regulations, and the Insider Threat Program. These policies vary in terms of detail and breadth of provisions. Army Regulation 600-20 *Army Command Policy* (2014), for instance, mentions that extremist activity and participation "may result in being reported to law enforcement authorities." Navy personnel are prohibited from participating in any extremist organization per Operations Naval Instruction (OPNAVINS) 5354.1 *Navy Equal Opportunity Program*. Navy Military Personnel Manual (MILPERSMAN) 1910-233, *Mandatory Separation Processing*, and MILPERSMAN 1910-160, *Separation By Reason Of Supremacist or Extremist Conduct*, include "supremacist or extremist conduct" as an event that triggers mandatory separation processing. AFI 36-02706, *Equal Opportunity Program Military and Civilian*, briefly mentions hate group activity and the use and/or posting of discriminatory epithets, signs, or symbols. Marine Corps Order (MCO) 5354.1E, *Marine Corps Prohibited Activities and Conduct Prevention and Response Policy*, requires the documentation of incidents only if substantiated. It does not specify the type of documentation and focuses on reporting of incidents through the chain of command and equal opportunity offices rather than law enforcement.

### **National Security Eligibility**

Individuals applying for national security eligibility, colloquially known as a security clearance, are also held to a high standard of conduct and are prohibited from membership in extremist groups. Executive Order 13764, *Amending the Civil Service Rules, Executive Order 13488, and Executive Order 13467 To Modernize the Executive Branch-Wide Governance Structure and Processes for Security Clearances, Suitability and Fitness for Employment, and Credentialing, and Related Matters*, requires investigation of individuals applying for employment in Federal service to determine if they meet U.S. National Security requirements. Relevant information includes "Knowing membership with the specific intent of furthering the aims of, or adherence to and active participation in, any foreign or domestic organization, association, movement, group, or combination of

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<sup>5</sup> Having a single tattoo may not be sufficient for disciplinary action.

persons (hereinafter referred to as organizations) which unlawfully advocates or practices the commission of acts of force or violence to prevent others from exercising their rights under the Constitution or laws of the United States.” This requirement is implemented in the Standard Form 86 (SF-86), *Questionnaire for National Security Positions*, through the following questions:

- Are you now or have you EVER been a member of an organization dedicated to terrorism, either with an awareness of the organization's dedication to that end, or with the specific intent to further such activities?
- Have you EVER knowingly engaged in any acts of terrorism?
- Have you EVER advocated any acts of terrorism or activities designed to overthrow the U.S. Government by force?
- Have you EVER been a member of an organization dedicated to the use of violence or force to overthrow the United States Government, and which engaged in activities to that end with an awareness of the organization's dedication to that end or with the specific intent to further such activities?
- Have you EVER been a member of an organization that advocates or practices commission of acts of force or violence to discourage others from exercising their rights under the U.S. Constitution or any state of the United States with the specific intent to further such action?
- Have you EVER knowingly engaged in activities designed to overthrow the U.S. Government by force?

According to the Adjudicative Desk Reference (2014), concerns may arise with allegiance when applicants are members of, or associate with, a domestic organization or group with extremist ideologies. However,

“. . . the emphasis is on association with or membership in the organization as well as on participation in specific illegal actions. If an organization engages in or advocates illegal activities, membership alone may be a security concern that needs to be considered. Denial or revocation of [a security] clearance based on membership alone usually requires evidence that the subject joined the group “knowingly” and “advocated” or “participated” in its activities.”

## **CURRENT STUDY**

The purpose of this research effort was to identify FBI resources that could be used to assist in the screening of military and personnel security applicants for the purposes of identifying applicants who may be members of DT groups or those who espouse racially motivated extremism. As the lead agency on terrorism, the FBI has developed unique resources to assist in their investigations, some of which can be applied to detecting extremism. To achieve this purpose, information about active white supremacy and white nationalist groups were reviewed to enhance the understanding of their ideological

underpinnings. This review helped identify potential indicators of membership or participation that recruiters and background investigators should be looking for when screening and vetting applicants. The accessions screening and personnel security vetting processes were then mapped to identify opportunities to introduce new data sources, and other resources, that could help identify applicants who may present indicators of white supremacy or white nationalist associations or ideologies. By characterizing the threat, and distinguishing relevant investigation nodes within the screening and vetting processes, unique FBI data sources and tools that may augment these processes could then be identified.

## METHOD

In this research project, a qualitative approach was used to collect information and gain a better understanding of

- DT and DE and indicators of potential association or affiliation, and
- Measures for screening military applicants and vetting personnel security applicants for DT and DE indicators.

The results from this approach helped identify FBI resources that could enhance current screening and vetting processes. Qualitative methodologies used in this study included a literature review, a policy and procedural review, and subject matter expert (SME) interviews.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted to gather information about white supremacy and white nationalism ideologies, and about known DT and DE groups that promote white supremacy or nationalism and claimed to target the military for recruitment. The following groups are discussed

- AWD,
- Identity Evropa/ American Identity Movement (AIM), and
- Unaffiliated white supremacists/white nationalists.

The review includes information related to each group's

- History and ideology,
- Symbols and iconography,
- Venues for communication, and
- Evidence of current or former military Service member participation.

A combination of open source research, primary and secondary sources, and proprietary datasets from a private sector risk and intelligence company were used for this literature review. The latter is a collection of data—both text and media—from social media and communication platforms on which white supremacists and other threat actors engage such as Telegram and Discord. Investigative journalists and research organizations (e.g., Bellingcat, ProPublica, and Unicorn Riot) were relied on to provide white supremacist groups' leaked communications and to reveal and confirm the identity of active and former military personnel who are members of white supremacist groups.

## POLICY AND PROCEDURAL REVIEW

A review of DoD and Service-level directives, instructions, and memorandums related to military accessions, enlistment standards, and personnel security was conducted. The

purpose of this review was to understand current screening and vetting processes, to identify record checks within each of these processes where information could reveal affiliations with DT groups or support of DE ideologies, and to assess which, if any, FBI resources could introduce unique information into these processes.

## **SME INTERVIEWS**

Unstructured interviews were conducted with SMEs from Federal agencies to better understand the issue of DT and DE adherents enlisting in the military, to familiarize and confirm accessions and screening processes, and to identify available FBI resources that could be integrated into accessions screening and personnel security vetting.<sup>6</sup>

Telephone interviews and email communication were conducted with the following agencies and offices:

### **1. FBI**

- Domestic Terrorism Operations Targeting Unit (DTTU)
- Domestic Terrorism Strategic Analysis Unit (DTSU)
- Domestic Terrorism Operations Section (DTOS)
- Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS)
- Counter-Terrorism Division (CTD)

### **2. Department of Defense**

- OUSD (P&R) MPP – AP
- United States Army
  - Criminal Investigation Command (CID)
  - USAREC
- Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA)
  - Federal Investigative Records Enterprise (FIRE)
  - Expedited Screening Center (ESC)

### **3. National Joint Terrorism Task Force (NJTTF) – Military Operations Support Team (MOST)**

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<sup>6</sup> Accession and personnel security process and procedure summaries were reviewed by SMEs to verify accuracy, and a summary of FBI resources identified during the course of this effort was reviewed by FBI SMEs to ensure its comprehensiveness and accuracy.



## RESULTS

The primary goal of this study was to identify FBI resources that could help the military accessions community and the DoD's personnel security program better identify applicants who may be members of DT organizations or advocates of white supremacy and white nationalism ideologies. To identify these resources, an understanding of the history and ideology of each of these groups was necessary, as well as the ideologically aligned, but unaffiliated, lone actors. This understanding helped identify potential indicators that could be detected during military accessions screening or the personnel security background investigation. The accessions and personnel security processes were mapped to assess where these indicators would most likely become evident. With assistance from the FBI's DTTU, DTSU, and DTOS, as well as the NJTTF - MOST, resources that could help recruiting personnel and personnel security background investigators better detect applicants with ties to DT groups or who espouse DE ideologies were identified. This section of the report presents the results of these three lines of inquiry.

### DT AND DE GROUPS

The objective of white supremacy and nationalist DT groups and some extremists is to prepare for and accelerate a societal collapse, using the resulting instability to establish a white ethnostate in the United States. These DT groups and extremists hope to use paramilitary training and the sharing of survivalist information to bring about this collapse through violence. DEs associated with the military potentially exploit their military experience and training to facilitate and aid their DE activities.<sup>7</sup> They may also invoke their military service as a smokescreen of false patriotism to obscure or justify their violent ends and goals.

Out of the many extremist groups active in the United States, three groups were selected for discussion because of their activity and connections with current and former military Service personnel. A brief history of each group is provided, along with group symbols,

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<sup>7</sup> The number of current and former military personnel who ascribe to white supremacist and white nationalist ideology is unknown. According to a 2019 *Military Times* poll that surveyed 1,630 active duty military, one third said they "personally witnessed white nationalism or ideologically driven racism within the ranks" (Shane III, 2020). However, this poll was based on an unscientific, convenience sample. These types of samples may yield biased results as they are not representative of an entire population.

As specified in 10 USC 481, the DoD conducts Workplace and Equal Opportunity (WEO) surveys of the Armed Forces every 4 years. The purpose of these surveys is to gather information on racial/ethnic relations across the Services. These studies use random stratified sampling of the entire Armed Forces populations, active duty and Reserve components, respectively, and then scientifically weights responses so that estimates represent the entire population of interest. Results from the most recent 2015 WEO Survey with Reserve component members found white Reserve members (90%) were more likely to report that racist/extremist organizations or people were not a problem at their duty station compared to other race/ethnicities, whereas Hispanic (85%), black (76%) and Asian (76%) Reserve members were less likely to indicate the same (Daniel, et. al, 2018). Data from the 2013 WEO survey with active duty members found that 87% of active duty members believed racist/extremist groups were not a problem at their duty station (Namrow, et. al, 2014). When breaking these results out by race/ethnicity, white and Hispanic Active Duty personnel (88%) were more likely to indicate that racist/extremist groups were not a problem at their duty station, while black (81%) and Asian (81%) Active Duty personnel were less likely to report the same.

known current and former Service members, and communications from group members who purport to be current or former Service members. Additional information about these groups, as well as other white supremacy groups will be provided in PERSEREC's forthcoming resource guide on white supremacy groups and causes (PERSEREC, forthcoming).

### **Atomwaffen Division**

AWD is a neo-Nazi accelerationist group that advocates for the collapse of society through violence, and to rebuild a white ethnostate. It is considered to be one of the deadliest neo-Nazi groups in the United States. Its members plotted attacks and committed five murders. Members planned to damage water systems and the U.S. power grid. Before its official disbanding, the group was estimated to have around 80 members plus a significant number of initiates spread across 20 cells in the United States (Ware, 2019). As of July 2020, AWD has rebranded itself as the National Socialist Order.

According to AWD chat logs obtained by ProPublica, "its largest chapters were in Washington, Virginia, and Texas" (Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan, 2018). The group also had a high concentration of members in central Florida and Texas and various smaller chapters spread throughout Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Kentucky, Alabama, Ohio, Missouri, and Oregon. The current activity of these chapters is unknown.

### **Known Current or Past Military Members**

AWD members were identified as either active or former service members, including the group's co-founder:

- The AWD cofounder served in Florida's Army National Guard. In 2018, the cofounder plead guilty to possession of an unregistered destructive device and improper storage of explosive materials and sentenced to 5 years in prison (Associated Press, 2018).
- An AWD member was a U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal stationed in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. In July 2018, the Marines discharged him for his ties to AWD and his involvement at the Unite the Right rally.
- A recruiter for AWD enlisted in the U.S. Navy (Villarreal, 2020). He allegedly tried to recruit twelve individuals on the now-defunct Iron March forum.
- An AWD member, and Army veteran, trained other AWD members in firearms and hand-to-hand combat. According to AWD chat logs obtained by ProPublica in 2018, the Army veteran stated he was building assault rifles and offered assistance to AWD members: "Give me the parts and the receiver and I'll get it all together for you" (Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan, 2018). He also encouraged AWD members to enlist in the military to receive training and later use it against the U.S. Government.

## Communication

In early 2018, YouTube and Discord banned AWD from their platforms for violating the Terms of Service - specifically related to hate speech (Liao, 2018; Cox, 2018). Until its disbanding, AWD was posting white supremacy propaganda and videos on Telegram (Bedingfield, 2020). AWD was also using the neo-Nazi, online forum Iron March to communicate with other members and like-minded individuals.

In November 2019, Iron March data were leaked, revealing AWD messages, communication, and recruitment efforts targeting military members. In 2016, AWD's co-founder posted about basic training: "Will be in basic training for a few months, then specialized training. Will be out of all training in september. HAIL victory comrades. Also, any questions about the Atomwaffen Division send to TheWeissewolfe" (ArsTechnica, 2019). In an exchange with another Iron March member, the cofounder, and now Service member bragged about sharing his white supremacist views while in the military. Figure 1 shows an exchange between the cofounder and another member.

| Meta       | Content   |
|------------|---|
| [REDACTED] | are you worried at all of being found by your mates or someone, now being in the military?<br><br>what do you think if you were to get caught listening to that nasheed you posted earlier?<br><br>you'll be straight fucked surely |
| [REDACTED] | I was 100% open about everything with the friends i made at training. They know about it all.<br><br>They love me too cause im a funny guy  |
| [REDACTED] | fucking cheeky  |
| [REDACTED] | Yea. I'd say the craziest shit and get away with it   |
| [REDACTED] | my mate told me of a guy in his batallion who was caught calling somebody a n [REDACTED] and almost was sent home..<br><br>maybe it was because they were in benning?   |

**Figure 1** Screenshot of Exchange on the Iron March Forum Regarding AWD's Co-founder's Military Service

### **Symbols as Potential Indicators**

When translated, the German word “Atomwaffen” means “atomic weapon.” The white nationalist group’s logo is a radiation symbol on a Waffen-Schutzstaffel (SS) shield (see Figure 2). Waffen-SS was the military branch of the Nazi’s SS organization. This logo is sometimes tattooed onto group members’ bodies to show membership and commitment to the cause (see Figure 3).



**Figure 2 Atomwaffen Division Flag**



**Figure 3 AWD's Cofounder's Atomwaffen Tattoo**

### **Identity EVROPA/American Identity Movement**

AIM is a white supremacist group originally founded under the name Identity Evropa (IE). Following its launch, IE quickly began to spread its propaganda across the United States, particularly on college campuses through an operation the group calls “Project Siege,” which consists of IE supporters posting propaganda and hosting recruitment seminars on

and around campuses (Flashpoint, 2017). On March 8, 2019, the group's current leader Patrick Casey announced the group's rebranding to AIM. The rebranding was the result of an embarrassing leak of group communications on the platform Discord. The rebranding was a strategic move to maintain its "clean" public image and promote "Americana" in an attempt to gain a foothold within the mainstream American "conservative party," with the likely goal of electing similarly minded candidates into political offices.

IE/AIM described their objectives as "an American Identitarian organization. As such, our main objective is to create a better world for people of European heritage particularly in America—by peacefully effecting cultural change. Identity Evropa is thus an explicitly non-violent organization (ADL, n.d.)." IE/AIM summarizes its views into "five principles: nationalism, identitarianism, protectionism, non-interventionism, and populism" (ADL, n.d.). Their goals include seeking political positions for its members and promoting several political candidates to run in the 2020 U.S. elections to shift the power structure in the United States and influence U.S. immigration policies.

As of March 2019, the group has around 500 members according to the ADL (ADL, n.d.). There is high confidence that the group's size has increased since March 2019 owing to IE/AIM's aggressive recruitment and propaganda efforts displayed on its social media accounts. IE/AIM members and supporters are spread across the country and are present in approximately 36 States, with a majority in California.

#### **Known Current or Past Military Members**

Below are IE/AIM members who are current or former service members, including two of the group's leaders. In March 2019, Unicorn Riot—a media organization that exposes far-right groups and other social issues—leaked the group's Discord chat logs. Below are IE/AIM members that Unicorn Riot identified to be active or former military personnel; Researchers confirmed their most recent status:

- The group's founder was a former Marine sergeant and light armored vehicle crewman.
- The group's former leader is an Army veteran.
- As of October 2017, a member of the group was enlisted with the Alabama National Guard and served as a civilian security guard for Richard Spencer, a leading far-right figure who coined the term alt-right.
- A Lieutenant Colonel, serving as a physician in the Army Reserve, is a member of IE/AIM (Mathias, 2019; Shepard, 2019).
- A specialist in the Army joined IE in 2017. Later that year, he created a recruitment poster and uploaded it on the IE Discord server. The specialist is no longer in the Army (Mathias, 2019).
- An IE/AIM member is in Texas Army National Guard in. In August 2019, the Texas National Guard spokesperson stated that the individual remained a member of the Texas National Guard after undefined "corrective action" was taken (Mathias, 2019).



- An IE member was identified as a Minnesota National Guardsman. A spokesperson for the Minnesota National Guard stated that the individual was removed from basic training and an investigation into his actions was opened (Mathias, 2019). As of early August 2019, he was permitted to remain with the Minnesota National Guard as it was determined that his activity occurred prior to joining the military and he expressed regret for his involvement with IE.
- In the IE Discord logs, a now former Marine revealed, in his very first message, his full name and his service in the Marine Corps.
- IE/AIM's Connecticut state coordinator was a Lance Corporal in the Selected Marine Corps Reserve. He distributed propaganda in New York, Connecticut, and Washington. In May 2019, he was administratively separated from the military (Mathias, 2019).
- A former Lance Corporal is the Southern California coordinator for IE. He participated in the Unite the Right rally, and distributed propaganda on college campuses in Southern California. In March 2019, he was "administratively separated" from the Marines (Mathias, 2019).
- A Master Sergeant with the U.S. Air Force has been an IE member since 2017, and concurrently served as the Colorado state coordinator. He remained a member of the group after it rebranded to AIM. According to the Air Force Chief of Media Operations, on September 11, 2019, he "was demoted to the rank of Technical Sergeant and an administrative discharge board recommended discharge" (Roberts, 2020).
- An AIM member from Montana, and a former member of the Army National Guard, left the military amid an investigation into his ties to AIM (Mathias, 2019).
- An IE/AIM member, who also served in the Army Reserve in New York, distributed propaganda in multiple cities across New York. According to an Army spokeswoman, the investigation was completed and the individual was permitted to stay in the Army Reserve.

### **Communication**

IE/AIM maintains an active presence on several online platforms including its official website, [americanidentitymovement\[.\]com](http://americanidentitymovement[.]com), and on several social media platforms popular with white supremacists, including Telegram and Bitchute. IE/AIM leader Patrick Casey also maintains a Telegram account with over 6,000 subscribers. IE/AIM's Telegram channel—which has 2,400 subscribers—includes over 630 images displaying the group's propaganda distribution efforts across the country, including banners, posters, and stickers posted at various colleges, public libraries, Veterans parks, and other public locations (see Figures 4, 5 and 6).





**Figure 4 Recruitment Poster Gould Created and Posted on the IE Discord Server**



**Figure 5 AIM "Shield" Printed Out as a Sticker**

**EMBRACE YOUR IDENTITY**



**AMERICAN IDENTITY MOVEMENT**

**Figure 6 AIM Poster (Billings Gazette, 2019)**

### **Symbols as Potential Indicators**

IE/AIM uses a variety of symbols in the furtherance of their cause. The original symbol of IE was that of three triangles within a fourth. After their rebranding, IE/AIM adopted American cultural icons and themes (see Figure 7). Often their symbols use the red, white, and blue of the American flag; cultural symbols such as Uncle Sam; or the bald eagle to evoke an association with American culture. These symbols are designed to prime potential recruits with the idea that IE/AIM is a patriotic movement rooted in American culture and history. These symbols could potentially be used as tattoos, but there is little evidence of their widespread use.



**Figure 7 IE & AIM Logo**

### **Unaffiliated White Supremacists/White Nationalists**

There are a number of cases of active and former military personnel, with no ties to groups or organizations, who ascribe to white supremacist ideology and engage in far-right

extremist activity. Unaffiliated white supremacists serving in the military may not be members of any group, but may attend meetings, participate in online chats and forums, and read literature produced by other DT/DE groups. Although white supremacist groups may be disenfranchised from the military and disagree with its engagements and interventions, many join to receive the proper training and skill set required to prepare for what they believe to be an imminent “racial holy war” (aka RAHOWA) or the “boogaloo.”

Boogaloo typically refers to militia extremists. Unlike the concept of a racial holy war, boogaloo specifically includes the acquisition and stockpiling of weapons, ammunition, and survival gear. Boogaloo proponents also encourage adherents to prepare themselves physically and tactically by participating in military-style combat training and reading military field manuals.

In 1983, Louis Beam, Jr., wrote the essay, *Leaderless Resistance*, which is well known among white supremacists and far-right extremists. He recommended that, to avoid U.S. government disruption and infiltration into groups, white supremacists should do away with traditional organizations. Individuals should adopt a cell system, which consists of very small cells that operate independently from any larger organization. The cells and organizations should avoid taking orders from anyone else in the movement, but should instead loosely coordinate their activities based on a shared information infrastructure of widely distributed “newspapers, leaflets, computers, etc.” (Berger, 2019).

#### **Known Current or Past Military Members**

Researchers identified the following military members who were unaffiliated white supremacists and white nationalists<sup>8</sup>:

- Timothy McVeigh, an Army veteran who served in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, conducted the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. He was subsequently convicted and executed.
- In 1995, three members of the 82nd Airborne Division stationed in Fort Bragg, North Carolina were arrested and convicted in connection with the murder of a black couple. One individual openly displayed neo-Nazi material in his barracks and had white supremacist literature and pamphlets on Adolf Hitler at his home (Branigin and Prist, 1995).
- In 2019, a former Marine and National Guardsman, and at the time, current U.S. Coast Guard, was arrested for gun and drug charges. The Coast Guard identified online as a white nationalist. He allegedly plotted to kill Democratic members of Congress and left-leaning activists, political organizations, and journalists. Anders Breivik, the shooter from Norway, influenced his beliefs and his plans. He followed Breivik’s instructions for plotting and stockpiling weapons which are described in detail in Breivik’s manifesto. Breivik operated independently and was not a member of

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<sup>8</sup> In December 2019, two members of the Army National Guard were separated from Service for their leadership roles in an obscure Norse Pagan group that endorses white supremacy (Associated Press, 2019).

a white supremacist group—he inspired other far-right terrorists, including Christchurch attacker Brenton Tarrant.

- In September 2019, a United States Army Specialist was arrested for distributing information on social media related to explosives and weapons of mass destruction. Prior to joining, the Army specialist communicated with a U.S. Army veteran via Facebook for assistance with traveling to Ukraine to fight with the Azov Battalion, a far-right paramilitary group: *No former military experience, but if I cannot find a slot in Ukraine by October I'll be going into the Army...To fight is what I want to do. I'm willing to listen, learn, and train. But to work on Firearms is fine by me too* (FBI, 2019).

In December 2018, the Specialist discussed his ability to build improvised explosive devices in a Facebook group and provided a description of how to produce explosive material. He also discussed killing Antifa members and targeting cell towers or a news station. In the March 2020 leaked Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) chat logs, he provided detailed instructions on how to construct a chlorine gas bomb.<sup>9</sup> Although he frequently posted on FKD's Wire chats, it is unclear whether he was an official FKD member. In February 2020, the Army Specialist pleaded guilty to distributing bomb instructions (Helsel, 2020). He is awaiting sentencing.

- On May 30, 2020 an Army Reservist and two military veterans were arrested and charged with 1) conspiracy to damage and destroy by fire and explosion, and 2) possession of unregistered firearms. All three men are self-proclaimed members of the Boogaloo movement, and allegedly planned to incite violence during a Black Lives Matter protest in Las Vegas. The men were arrested while in possession of Molotov cocktails (Price and Sonner, 2020).

The criminal complaint states that these men are all members of the Nevada Boogaloo Facebook group, and one of the veterans posted "Start. Fermenting. Insurrection" on Facebook (Blankenstein et. al., 2020; Zadrozny, 2020). Additionally, A GoFundMe account was created for this veteran by a member of the Southwest Igloo A-Team, a known Boogaloo group.

- An Army soldier was arrested on June 10, 2020 and charged with conspiracy to murder and attempting to murder US military service members, providing/attempting to provide information to terrorists, and conspiring to murder/maim in a foreign country. According to media reports, soon after enlistment the soldier began following [online] several extremist groups and eventually reached out to one. He used a messaging app to engage with members of the Order of the Nine Angles, a satanic, neo-Nazi group. The soldier shared information about his unit's location and planned redeployment. In a restricted chatroom he wrote "If you know anyone in Turkey, tell them this info there." The soldier also provided a description of the unit's weapons and vulnerabilities, along with the size of the force on the installation (Williams, 2020).

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<sup>9</sup> FKD is a small international group that primarily operates online. Advocates for a race war (ADL.org, n.d.).

## Communication

As noted above, some white supremacists/nationalists use websites and social media platforms, such as Facebook, Telegram, and Discord, to connect and engage with other like-minded individuals. The following is a sample of military-related, online communications that support the ideology but have no DT or DE group affiliations:

- In 2010, a Marine Corps sniper team in Afghanistan posed in front of a Nazi SS flag (Koehler, 2019). NSM posted an image of the group in its Summer/Fall 2012 edition of *NSM Magazine* for propaganda purposes and replaced the Nazi SS symbol with the group's logo (see Figure 8).

## FAMOUS 'BEFORE' AND 'AFTER' PHOTOS

*A group of elite U.S. Marines was seen posing in front of an SS flag in Afghanistan some time ago. They received lots of flack from the brainwashed masses. To respect their privacy, we have shaded their eyes and faces. This is the 'before' photo.*

*After some wishful thinking, here is the 'after' photo...*



**Figure 8 Images of U.S. Marines Featured in the Summer/Fall 2012 Edition of NSM Magazine**

- Far-right extremists on Telegram regularly share and distribute numerous U.S. military manuals online, including a U.S. Army manual on improvised explosive devices (IEDs), airborne operations field manual, combat pistol training handbook, and close quarters combat techniques. Note that the channels and individuals sharing these manuals do not have confirmed military ties. This, however, demonstrates the admiration for and interest in military culture among far-right extremists (Flashpoint, 2019).
- Near the end of 2019, a user on a far-right extremist Telegram site encouraged others to join the “ZOG” (Zionist Occupied Government) military to obtain basic training (see Figure 9).<sup>10</sup> Another user warned military personnel to use caution when posting online

<sup>10</sup> ZOG is a common white supremacist belief that Jews control the U.S. government.



content as it could result in a non-judicial punishment or court martial (Flashpoint, 2019).

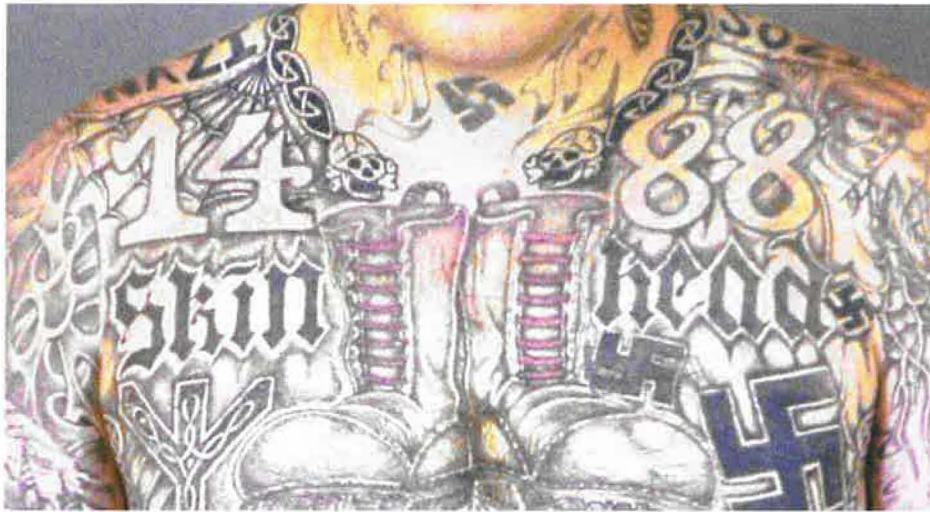
- In the leaked Iron March forum data, a user asked the forum if there are people in the military who share similar “anti-white” views (ArsTechnica, 2019). The following response was posted:

*In my unit (infantry) I've met quite a few rightists - some openly [National Socialist] NS, lots of neo-Nazis, others just nationalists, others red-pilled conservatives, others blue-pilled militiamen, even a couple Mormon extremists. You see plenty "of our kind" in the combat arms. But you have to be careful about it, Military Police are always watching and always eager to enforce the ban on extremist activity by military personnel. A good way people in the military find other rightists is to simply wear a shirt with some obscure fascist logo. I met my good buddy at a brigade luncheon when he noticed the Totenkopf on my shirt. On most bases you can see the occasional right-wing symbol. Sun wheel there, 88 here, Mussolini's face over there, a Templar cross tattoo. The symbols of SS units are especially common, even on things as public as cars, flags, and helmets.*

### **Symbols as Potential Indicators**

Individuals that ascribe to a white supremacist ideology often use and display the same references, icons, and symbology as white supremacist DT or DE groups. These symbols can be used by both unaffiliated and affiliated individuals, and their inclusion here is important as they are common across all groups. Common terms and icons include the following, some of which can appear as tattoos:

- The 14 words: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children,” sometimes appearing as the acronym WMSTEOOPAAFFWC (We Must Secure The Existence Of Our People And A Future For White Children—see Figure 8).
- 88: represents in alphabetic order the letters “HH,” standing for Heil Hitler (see Figure 8).
- Blut und Ehre (aka blood and honor): a popular Hitler Youth slogan.
- Celtic Cross: Although the Celtic Cross, a Christian symbol, may not denote white supremacist beliefs, white supremacists frequently use their version of this symbol (see Figure 9).
- SS: represents the Nazi-German military and police organization, Schutzstaffel. The SS bolts, “卐”, are also commonly used.
- German “Schwarze Sonne” (aka black sun): a symbol far-right groups appropriated from the Nazi-German SS (see Figure 9).



**Figure 9 A Full Body Tattoo Displaying “14”, “88”, Swastikas, Totenkopfs, and the Term “Skinheads (ADL)”**



**Figure 10 (From Left to Right) Celtic Cross, Black Sun (Telegram), Totenkopf (ADL.org, n.d.)**

## **MILITARY ACCESSION SCREENING PROCEDURES**

There are many steps in the military accession process that support the identification of applicants who may be hostile toward the U.S. government, espouse ideologies counter to the U.S. military’s mission and values, or be an active member of a DT group. Accessing into military service is a multistep process that puts applicants through rigorous phases of information sharing (e.g., personal interviews and completing enlistment forms), personal (e.g., home interview) and real-life social network interviews (e.g., work and school reference), medical screening, and aptitude assessment (e.g., the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Test [ASVAB]). This section of the report provides an overview of the accession screening procedures that help establish identity, employment eligibility and citizenship, moral conduct, and medical screening qualifications.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The average cost to get a new, non-prior-service Army recruit from the Recruiting Station (RS) to his or her first duty station is \$62.5K for One Stop Unit Training and \$81.4K for Basic Combat Training, followed by Advanced Initial Training (DAPE-MPA Information Paper; 2019). Therefore, it is critical that unqualified applicants are screened out of the accessions process as quickly as possible.

Qualifications are evaluated at both the RS and the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS). Each node within the screening process helps provide accurate information on each applicant, thus allowing for a comprehensive assessment of the individual, with a particular focus on suitability for service. In this section, the breadth of vetting each applicant for military Service is presented. Additionally, this section highlights the nodes that support the identification of subjects who may espouse extremist ideologies counter to the U.S. military's mission and values or who may be an active member of a DT/DE group.

Note: Each of the five branches of military Service have their own process for military accessions, but these processes tend to have more similarities than differences. In this section, the focus is on the Army's accession process. Any significant differences between the Army and the other Services are noted. Additionally, the Army sometimes uses different terminology than other Services. For instance, Army Recruiting Stations are analogous to Air Force Recruiting Offices, and Army Guidance Counselors are the same as Service Liaisons. For convenience and because it is the largest service, Army terminology is used throughout.

### **Recruiting Station**

The purpose of the RS is to support recruiters who educate and guide people with interest in serving in the U.S. military. Initial interviews between recruiters and potential applicants are usually informal, but it is a critical stage of the process because it is the first opportunity for recruiters to learn about applicants' backgrounds, ambitions, and qualifications. If recruiters believe potential applicants are likely to qualify for service and they have interest in serving in the Armed Forces, the accessions process is initiated.

Figure 10 shows the specific points at the RS where applicants provide information that may suggest they are unqualified for military service based on Service-level policies that prohibit the enlistment of individuals who are members of extremist groups or engage in prejudice or vices against others. These points include

- validating identity to ensure that background checks are conducted on the right people;
- confirming employment eligibility to ensure applicants are U.S. citizens or permanent residents residing in the United States;
- ensuring strong moral character through local police records checks, when appropriate, and checks of the FBI's criminal record checks (Army only);
- U.S. Army's Extremist Screening; and
- medical prescreening, to include tattoo screening where applicants are asked to share the meaning of their tattoos (note that recruiters may conduct follow-up questioning and Google tattoo images).

See Appendix A for more specific information about these records checks. The following is an overview of the major steps at the RS illustrated in Figure 10.



Validating identity occurs at multiple times during the accessions process, but it begins at RSs. Applicants enter personally identifiable information, demographic data, and personal background information on a series of enlistment forms. They also provide source documentation (e.g., birth certificate) to recruiters.<sup>12</sup>

Eligibility checks with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services to validate the social security number (SSN) and, if applicable, permanent residency are initiated by the Army Recruiting Command 72 hours prior to applicants' arrival at MEPS for initial military accession assessments (e.g., medical exam).

Criminal record checks are conducted to help recruiting personnel assess moral character. In some instances, applicants with serious misdemeanor and felony offenses on their records may request waivers. Waiver applications require applicants to provide detailed information about the circumstances surrounding the offense(s) and, within Army recruiting, are submitted to the Recruiting Station CO then to the Recruiting Company CO and finally to the Recruiting Battalion.

According to USAREC Message 19-027 (January 2019), individuals suspected of being in an extremist group or criminal gang (e.g., self-reported, tattoos, verbal and written cues) will undergo additional screening by the recruiting CO. Suspected applicants will be interviewed and assessed for extent of involvement, if any. Applicants' criminal backgrounds will be reviewed again.

The DD Form 2807-2 is a medical prescreening questionnaire required by DoDD 6130.3, *Physical Standards for Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction*. All applicants must complete this form prior to visiting MEPS. During the medical prescreening interview, recruiters ask applicants about health conditions as well as body modifications, including tattoos.

Depending on the Service, any tattoos visible on the face, neck, and hands are disqualifying. Furthermore, all Services prohibit applicants from enlisting with racist, extremist, sexist, or indecent tattoos (Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*; Navy Personnel (NAVPERS) 15665, *U.S. Navy Uniform Regulations*; AFI 36-2903 *Dress and Appearance of Air Force Personnel*).

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<sup>12</sup> State-issued driver's license or ID card, high school ID card, U.S. passport, marriage certificate, divorce decree, Social Security card/number, birth certificate, children's birth certificates, school transcripts, USCIS Form N-565, Dept. of State Form 1350, Foreign Service Form 240, I-551 Permanent Resident Card.

# RECRUITING STATION (RS)

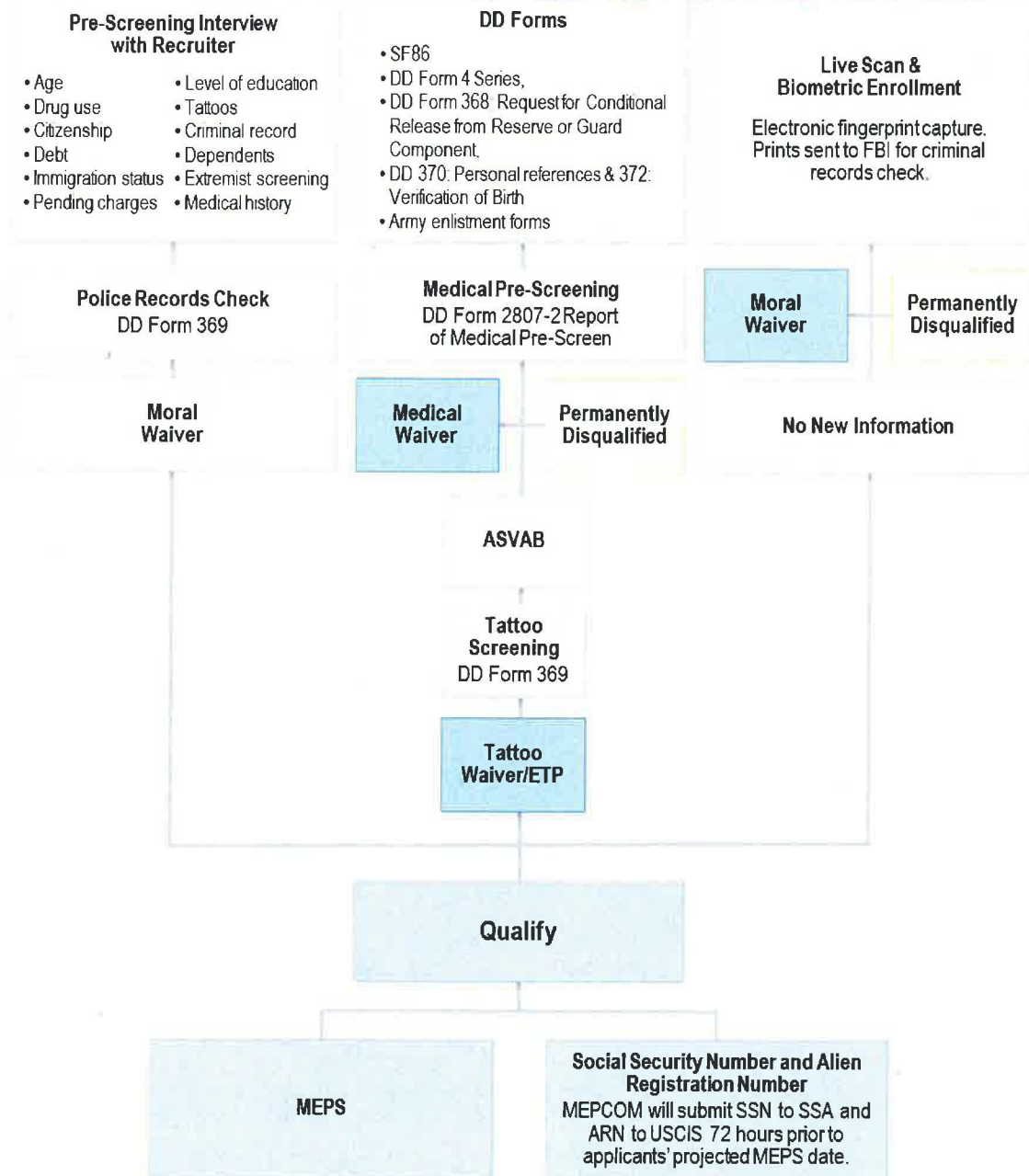


Figure 11 RS Screening Process

## **Military Entrance Processing Station**

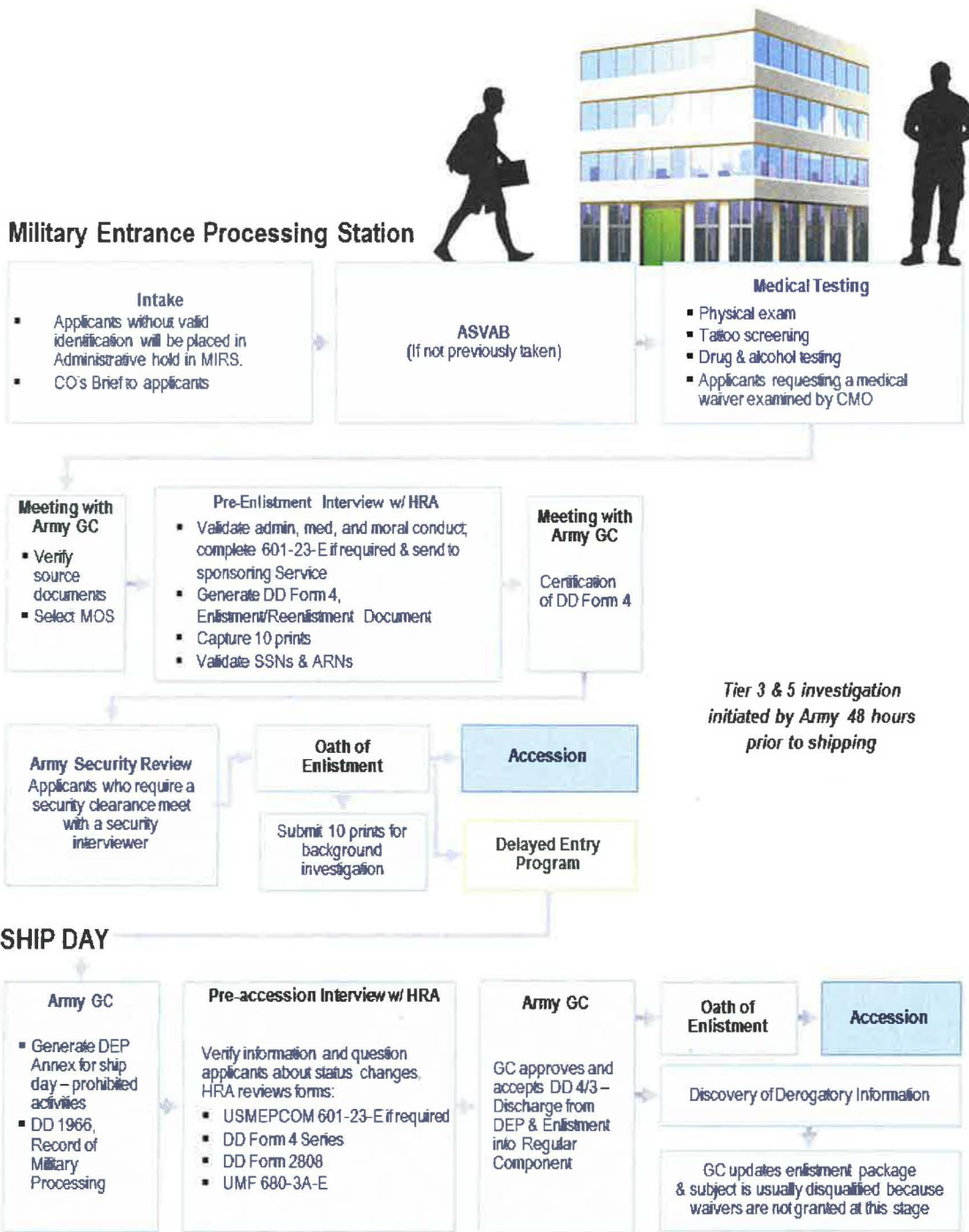
MEPS is a joint-service organization with the mission to assess applicants' physical qualifications, aptitude, and moral conduct based on the standards established by all five Services (retrieved May 4, 2020, from USMEPCOM.com). MEPS serves as the honest broker, ensuring that military accession applicants meet all enlistment standards. There are several points in the process at which vetting may help identify anomalous behaviors indicative of deception and associations with DT groups or DE behaviors.

Figure 11 shows a high-level overview of the MEPS process. Prior to entering the Delayed Entry Program (DEP; described below), identity, employment, and citizenship status are validated during interviews with guidance counselors (GCs) and human resource assistants (HRAs). Fingerprints (FPs) are also collected for checks of the FBI's criminal history files, including the automatic National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Name-Based Search. Tattoo screening occurs during the medical exam, and newly discovered tattoos are reported to the GC and annotated on DD Form 2808. Concerning tattoos that cannot be identified will be referred to the Recruiting Commander for further consideration.

Applicants will meet with security interviewers to review the responses on their SF-86. Unanswered items on the SF-86 will be addressed, and if applicants' in-person responses are inconsistent with the completed SF-86 additional questioning will occur. See page 38 for more information on the personnel security program.

Once MEPS processing is complete and recruits have taken the Oath of Enlistment, most recruits will enter DEP. DEP allows recruits to ship to Basic Training at a later date – usually so recruits can complete their senior year in high school. Within the Army, recruits must sign the Department of the Army Form 3286, *Statement for Enlistment, United States Army Enlistment Program, Delayed Entry Program*, also known as the DEP Annex. The Annex summarizes recruits' contractual obligations, incentives, and acknowledgment of prohibited activities, including participation in extremist activities.

Finally, HRAs interview recruits on the day they are to ship to basic training. The purpose of this interview is to determine if the recruits engaged in prohibited activities or became involved with the criminal justice system while in DEP. For more specific information on the MEPS process, see Appendix A.



**Figure 12 Military Entrance Processing Station**

\* United States Military Entrance Processing Command (USMEPCOM) Integrated Resource System (MIRS)

## **U.S. Army Liaison Officer to the United States Military Entrance Processing Command**

Per DoDD 1145.02E (2018), the Secretary of the Army is the Executive Agent for USMEPCOM. As such, it is responsible for all programming, budgeting, and funding for USMEPCOM. Additionally, the U.S. Army has a Liaison Officer (LNO) assigned to USMEPCOM. When the FBI or other Federal Agency is investigating an individual going through the military accessions process or in DEP, these law enforcement agencies may work with the Army LNO or USMEPCOM to delay or stop recruits from shipping to Basic Training (personal communication, Army CID, May 6, 2020).

## **PERSONNEL SECURITY PROGRAM**

The purpose of the Federal Government's personnel security program is to determine if applicants for eligibility for access to classified information are loyal, trustworthy, and reliable. Information from the SF-86 is used to conduct a comprehensive background investigation. Once investigations are complete, adjudicators make a determination about eligibility by reviewing and evaluating information provided by subjects on the SF-86 as well as the results of checks conducted during the background investigation. When eligibility for access to classified information cannot be initially granted, military security clearance applicants are given an opportunity to respond to a Statement of Reasons. They may be unfavorably adjudicated by DoD's Consolidated Adjudication Facility (CAF) but can appeal an adverse decision either in person or in writing as part of DoD's established administrative process for clearance appeals.

### **Background Investigations**

Forty-eight hours prior to shipping to Basic Training or entering DEP, the Army Recruiting Command will initiate a Tier 3 or Tier 5 background investigation. Recruits who do not require a security clearance and those who require a Secret clearance because of their occupational specialty undergo a Tier 3 investigation. Recruits who require Top Secret clearances undergo Tier 5 investigations. These tiered investigations are broad in scope and will help validate identity, citizenship, and employment eligibility as well as moral conduct when adjudicated by DoD CAF.

Background investigations have standardized criteria for each investigation tier, provided by the Security and Suitability/Credentialing Executive Agents (EAs). Standard checks for higher tiered investigations are more comprehensive but always incorporate those required in lower tiers. For example, a subject interview is standard for a Tier 5, but not a Tier 3. However, to ensure the investigation service provider is resolving identified issues at each tier, the EA's created expansion criteria. This allows the ISP to resolve issues using other investigative techniques above the standards for a particular tier. For a tier 3 investigation, EAs require subject interviews for some derogatory information. This expansion for Tier 3s and other investigations types is the tool by which the ISP can conduct additional leads and checks to information on a person's loyalty, trustworthiness, and reliability.



## **Expedited Screening Program**

Prior to DEP or Basic Training, some applicants will be enrolled in the Expedited Screening Program (ESP). The Expedited Screening Center (ESC), within DCSA, oversees ESP. "All applicants for military service who enter into a contract for service and all Service members with an open initial national security background investigation will be referred to ESP if review of their SF-86 indicated a need to screen for potential risk concerning allegiance to the United States, foreign preference or foreign influence" (Directive-Type Memorandum – 19-008, *Expedited Screening Protocol*, July, 2019). The screening methodology includes seven foundational data sources and multiple direct and deep-dive tools. Currently, recruits may ship to Basic Training while these checks are ongoing. However, if the ESP identifies potential high-risk concerns, recruits must be held in place (i.e., DEP or Basic Training) until the issues are resolved (Expedited Screening Program Guide Military Departments' Accessions; August 2019). In the future, recruits will not be allowed to ship to Basic Training until ESP screening is complete and there are no unresolved issues.

Currently, USMEPCOM receives an encrypted spreadsheet from the Expedited Screening Center (ESC) with ESP status results (i.e., Unfavorable, Incomplete, Pending, Favorable). Applicants' records are updated in MIRS. Any status, other than Favorable, will result in an Administrative Hold entered into MIRS. These Holds are cleared when USMEPCOM receives approval from DoD CAF.

## **FBI RESOURCES**

The FBI resources described in this section were identified via Government reports and SME interviews. These resources were compared to the accessions screening and personnel security processes to determine which databases and tools could enhance these processes. Not all resources listed below are intended to be used for screening and vetting purposes. Some of these resources, such as training, are intended to bring situational awareness to recruiting headquarters, when appropriate, to the RSs, and to personnel security professionals.

### **Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal**

The Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP) is an FBI CJIS platform available to local and Federal law enforcement agencies as well as the intelligence community. It provides investigative and analytic tools and allows users to collaborate and share content. Within the LEEP platform is the NGIC Online, which provides wide-ranging information on gangs, including white supremacy and nationalist groups.

### **NGIC Online**

NGIC merges information on gangs from across Federal, State, and local law enforcement. The intelligence provided focuses on the criminal activity and trends of gangs, including the groups addressed in this report, that pose a threat to the United States (United States Attorney's Bulletin, 2017). NGIC Online includes:

- Gang encyclopedia
- Signs, Symbols, and Tattoo database, and
- Symbol Library.

Current military accession screening relies on the applicant's description of tattoo meanings. The information housed in NGIC may help Recruiting Headquarters identify concerning tattoos and bring a greater understanding to the background of these applicants who present potential indicators of gang membership.

### **Cryptology and Racketeering Records Unit**

Cryptology and Racketeering Records Unit (CRRU) consists of linguists, mathematicians, and former law enforcement personnel who examine cryptic communications, records, and symbols. Per discussions between the FBI and OUSD (P&R), Military Personnel Policy – Accessions Policy (personal communication, April 20, 2020), tattoo data will be sent to the CRRU, on a limited basis, when DoD is unable to positively identify symbols or symbolic meanings embedded within tattoos.

### **FBI Counter-Terrorism Division Training**

The FBI provides training on RMVE. Although the depth of this training is designed for the law enforcement and intelligence communities, the training can be modified for the military recruiting, personnel security, and insider threat communities. This training will provide personnel within the DoD community the insight to better detect applicants with potential ties to DE.

## **OPTIMIZING EXISTING RESOURCES**

During the course of this effort, SMEs identified resources outside of the FBI that may also support military accessions screening and personnel security vetting. These resources and tools are used across the Federal Government for various mission requirements such as investigations and personnel management.

### **Social Media Analytics**

Interviews with the FBI's DTTU, DTSU, and DTOS as well as the literature review revealed that social media is an important source of information for criminal investigations. Although criminal investigations are a very different context than screening or vetting for military accession or personnel security, it nonetheless suggests that social media might be a valuable source for those activities.<sup>13</sup> Recall from earlier in this section that DT and

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<sup>13</sup> Publicly available social media information has the potential to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and timeliness of employment screening and selection processes (Rose, 2014; Baweja, 2017). Prior PERSEREC research (Rose, 2017) found that almost 3% of a sample of military applicants had indicators of extremism posted on social media (e.g., liking hate groups, posting hate-related memes) and 10% had engaged in some sort of criminal conduct (as identified on social media and open source materials like online news articles). Military applicants are usually young and therefore less likely to have public records (e.g., credit report, FBI criminal record) that provide background information on their lives. Publicly



DE groups use social media to communicate with group members and other like-minded individuals, suggesting that social media checks may return indications of DT and DE affiliations. However, much of the activity relevant to DT/DE is occurring on encrypted platforms such as Discord, Telegram, and 8chan. Any online content, including social media, collected for military accession screening or personnel security vetting must be publicly available (Security Executive Agent Directive 5, 2016). There is currently no authority to collect private discussions within a group. However, DT groups need public platforms to recruit members; therefore, we may find indicators of extremist ideologies (e.g., likes, memes, and linguistic cues) on Facebook, Twitter, 4chan, Reddit, 8chan, and Telegram, among others.

### **SF-86: Question 29 Association Record**

Previous studies have found that Question 29 on the SF-86, *Association Record*, provides the lowest response rate of all the questions on the questionnaire (Buck et al., 2005, and McEachern et al., 2018). According to McEachern and coauthors (2018), SMEs believe the questions should be modified to improve response rate and collect information that will help inform the personnel security investigation and adjudication. Buck and colleagues (2005) recommend that recruiters ask the following questions rather than, or in addition to, Question 29 on the SF-86:

- Have you ever advocated or practiced discrimination or committed acts of violence or terrorism against individuals based on their religion, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, disability, gender, or loyalty to the U.S. government? (YES/NO)
- Have you posted or distributed literature or participated in public demonstrations to show your allegiance to or to promote an extremist organization or philosophy? (YES/NO)
- Have you ever provided labor, money, or other resources to extremist individuals or organizations? (YES/NO)
- Have you ever received training from or recruited or provided training for extremist organizations or causes? (YES/NO)
- Have you ever attended any meetings, participated in any websites or online discussions, or exchanged information in any way with individuals involved in extremist organizations or causes? (YES/NO)
- Are there any groups (such as countries, political groups, or religious groups) that you would feel obligated to defend if they claimed they were under attack by the United States Government? (YES/NO)
- If you answered “yes” to any of questions (a) through (f) above, please explain.

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available electronic information (social media + open source content) may provide highly relevant information that can be used to assess suitability for military service.

One SME consulted on this effort suggested that replacing Question 29 on the SF-86 with the questions above could improve response rate and the collection of actionable information. Such information would allow background investigators to ask questions that are more likely to yield “yes” responses from neighbors, employment references, education references, and others. For example, personal references might be more inclined to say that a subject is involved in an extremist organization or promotes these philosophies than say “Yes, the subject is a member of an organization dedicated to terrorism” (SME interview, name redacted, May 13, 2020).

### **Separation Designation Codes (SPD)**

Currently, the Navy is the only military Service that requires documentation on the DD Form 214 when subjects are dishonorably discharged and their misconduct results from participation in supremacist or extremist activities. Per MILPERSMAN 1910-160, *Separation by Reason of Supremacist or Extremist Conduct*, the misconduct must include “...illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, or national origin; or (advocating the use of force or violence against any federal, state, or local government or agency thereof, in violation of federal, state, or local laws... Cases will normally be processed under Misconduct - Commission of a Serious Offense (MILPERSMAN 1910-142, 2019 or Best Interest of the Service (BIOTS)” (MILPERSMAN 1910-164, 20219).

As noted previously, both the Tier 3 and Tier 5 personnel security background investigations conduct a military discharge inquiry. Updating DoDI 1332.14 (2019), *Enlisted Administrative Separation*, and DoDI 1332.30 (2019), *Commissioned Officer Administrative Separation*, to direct Services to add SPD codes related to extremist activities would give additional context to security clearance background investigators and help guide their investigations on prior military Service members applying for civilian and contractor positions. Additionally, this information would enhance the whole-person assessment made by adjudicators.

## **DISCUSSION**

Participating in, or subscribing to, the ideologies advocated by DT/DE groups adversely affects the readiness, good order, and discipline in the military and is in violation of DoD and Service-level policies. The purpose of this research effort was to identify FBI resources that could be used to assist in the screening of military and personnel security applicants for the purposes of identifying possible members of white supremacy and white nationalist groups, or those who espouse racially motivated extremism. Information about these groups were reviewed for the purpose of developing an understanding of their ideologies, and this helped identify possible indicators of membership and participation. The accessions screening and personnel security vetting processes were then mapped to distinguish relevant investigation nodes where unique FBI data sources and tools could be integrated to help identify indicators of white supremacy and nationalism group membership and associations.

### **WHITE SUPREMACY AND WHITE NATIONALISTS**

Our review of the most active white supremacy and white nationalist groups that espouse found that their primary method of communication and recruitment is through the internet on platforms such as Discord, Telegram, and 8chan. Both Buck et al. (2005) and Fischer (2012) found that the internet is an important tool for radicalization and recruitment. Furthermore, Fischer claims that the “role of internet was unmistakable in leading to acts of terrorist violence,” and that espousing extremist ideologies online was the most common activity among “homegrown terrorists.” For instance, the 2019 attacks on mosques in New Zealand, carried out by a man with extreme-right ideological leanings, was intentionally live-streamed on social media as a call to arms (Bluic, Betts, Vergani, Iqbal, and Dunn, 2020).

Additionally, group members and unaffiliated DEs use tattoos as a means of communicating membership and commitment to cause and belief. Interpreting the meanings and significance of tattoos is time consuming because images may have multiple meanings, particularly when combined with other tattoos on the body (Resnick et al., 2014). Nonetheless, this interpretation is critical. Without it, DoD risks enlisting personnel who are detrimental to the good order and discipline of the military and who, in more serious cases, may become insider threats who use their authorized access to DoD facilities to cause harm to the Unit, the Service, or the United States.

### **INTEGRATING NEW RESOURCES INTO MILITARY ACCESSIONS AND PERSONNEL SECURITY PROCESSES**

Recruiting Commands conduct a significant amount of investigative legwork to ensure that they are accepting the most qualified individuals into the military. Similarly, the personnel security program is designed to collect relevant background information on individuals applying for sensitive positions and security clearances so that DoD CAF adjudicators can determine if they are reliable, loyal, and trustworthy. These screening and assessment processes are extensive and help prevent unqualified subjects and potential insider threats

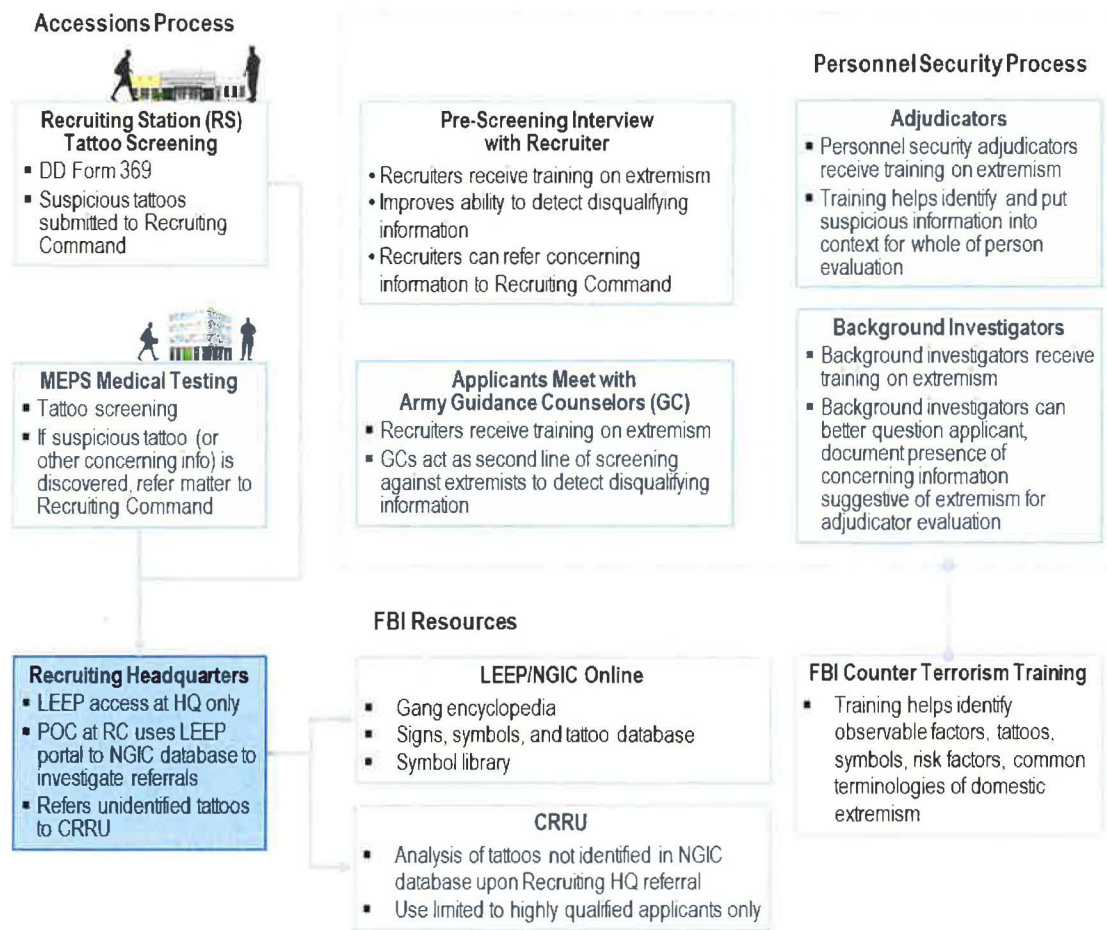
from joining the military or securing eligibility for access to classified information. Given the effort to screen and vet applicants, it is not surprising that the number of DT group members and DEs within the military is statistically low. Nevertheless, there remain opportunities to strengthen these processes through the shared use of FBI capabilities and training as well as additional commercial data solutions and modifications to existing DoD tools.

### **FBI Capabilities**

The FBI's symbols library and tattoo database will improve recruiters' recognition and identification of white supremacy and white nationalist tattoos, and enable them to screen out applicants earlier in the process. Additionally, in limited cases, the FBI will permit DoD to submit concerning tattoos that cannot be identified to its CRRU.

Figure 11 shows how these FBI resources could best be integrated. DE training would likely increase recruiters' and guidance counselors' abilities to detect extremist sympathies, tattoos, and behaviors. LEEP access at Recruiting Headquarters would improve the identification of suspicious tattoos. A limited referral relationship between Recruiting Headquarters and CRRU would help ensure that tattoos with extremist symbology not represented in NGIC could be identified.

FBI RMVE training is valuable for recruiters, background investigators, and adjudicators in the personnel security process. Recruiters and background investigators have significant in-person time with applicants and their real-life social networks. With training, investigators will be better able to identify concerning information for the whole-of-person evaluation. Further, with training, adjudicators will be able to make more informed decisions about whether an applicant presents a national security risk.



**Figure 13 FBI Resources Mapped to Accessions and Personnel Security Process**

## Social Media

Perhaps the “loudest” indicator of white supremacy/white nationalism involvement are social media postings. One of the most significant challenges in conducting these checks on military accession and security clearance applicants (and holders) is scalability. Human analysts cannot effectively and efficiently search the Internet on the hundreds of thousands of people each year that undergo DoD background vetting. Furthermore, these searches must be conducted in ways that protect privacy and civil liberties. First, consent must be obtained from applicants before a social media or broader publicly available electronic information (PAEI) collection can occur. For clearance applicants, consent is obtained when they sign the SF-86. Additionally, DoD Directive 5200.27 prohibits the collection of information on individuals who are not affiliated with DoD. Therefore, all social networking content must be scrubbed of third-party personally identifiable information before DoD personnel can assess the information associated with their subject of interest.

Finally, it should be noted that social media checks may not provide complete coverage because identity resolution is difficult. The prevalence of common names (e.g., Robert Smith), the savvy use of privacy settings, and even simple communication under an alias that cannot be linked directly to known personally identifiable information (e.g., full name, e-mail address, school) make identity resolution time-consuming and difficult. Thus, although social media might be a valuable source of information for applicants with DT/DE ties, it will be a substantial challenge to implement at scale. Significant effort will be required to identify, vet, and test commercial data vendors who collect reliable and useful social media data.

That being said, there are a number of commercial data providers with social media search and collection capabilities that may be scalable to DoD's requirements. Some of these providers have worked with the Federal Government, including DoD and FBI, and understand the challenges involved in conducting discreet searches for relevant information on subjects of interest. However, additional testing is needed to assess the operational effectiveness of such capabilities for screening and vetting use cases.

From an operational perspective, the accessions community will need to determine if social media checks should be conducted on all applicants, only those who go to MEPS, or on those who take the oath of enlistment. The personnel security community is currently working to address similar considerations. OUSD (I&S) established a PAEI working group (WG) which is responsible for identifying potential commercial data providers and assessing the operational impacts of integrating a data source of this nature into the background investigation.

## **SF-86**

The SF-86 was last revised in 2016, and the Performance Accountability Council (PAC), is leading the Trusted Workforce (TW) 2.0 effort with a goal of developing new investigative standards and adjudication guidelines by 2022. Modifying the existing language or adding additional questions on DT and DE can provide extra information for investigators. In particular, the current SF-86 question may have too strong an association with international terror groups.

The proposed revisions to the SF-86, presented in the Results section, are heading in the right direction but may require some adjustments. For instance, the terms "discriminated" and "extremism" are open to interpretation without formal definitions within statute or policy. As currently written, extremist applicants could claim that they treated people properly and that there is nothing extreme about their beliefs.

## **SPD Codes**

The feasibility of adding a new SPD code to the DD 214 for the purpose of identifying Service members separated for extremist activities should be explored. These codes were recently modified to limit the inclusion of personal information on the DD 214 (personal communication, May 12, 2020). Providing additional information, such as an "extremism"



SPD code, may be counter to DoD's motivations for limiting personal information on the DD 214.

## **DATA AND TRAINING TOGETHER CREATE EFFECTIVE SCREENING**

Although this report has demonstrated that certain FBI resources as well as other data sources like social media can enhance screening and vetting processes, reliance on data-driven solutions should be used with caution. Data solutions can create a false sense of security and lead policymakers to believe that there are cheaper, easier alternatives to human investigation and vigilance. An electronic database of possible threats requires that data be generated, collected, filtered, and transformed, and bias can be introduced at any point in that process. Databases cannot create a full, whole-person determination of applicants.

Through extensive contact with applicants, recruiters and investigators construct a full picture of an applicant. Recruiters, especially, are the first line of defense for DoD to collect relevant information on an applicant. They have extensive knowledge of an applicant's social network and behavior before they join the military. This personal contact will fill in the gaps of applicants that may have extremism leanings but have little identifiable online extremist activity. Ultimately, further training for recruiters and investigators on extremist indicators can help them paint a much fuller picture of an applicant and keep DoD safer.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to support rapid identification of military and security clearance applicants who espouse DE beliefs or belong to DT groups, the following recommendations are offered:

1. OUSD (P&R) Accession Policy should continue to work with the FBI to evaluate the usefulness of LEEP accounts for personnel at Recruiting Headquarters who are responsible for reviewing and approving accession applicants with questionable/concerning tattoos. These accounts will provide recruiting personnel with access to intelligence that will promote a more comprehensive understanding of applicants who may present symbolic images that the Recruiting Commands cannot positively identify.
2. OUSD (P&R) Accessions Policy should facilitate information sharing between each of the Services' Recruiting Headquarters and the FBI's CRRU. When highly qualified applicants have concerning tattoos that cannot be identified through traditional means or the resources available on LEEP, they may ask CRRU to analyze tattoos for potential meanings and significance.
3. OUSD (I&S) should collaborate with the FBI's CTD to develop an unclassified version of the FBI's RMVE training. The training should highlight some of the most active RMVE groups as well as lone actors and should present obvious and non-obvious linguistic cues as well as common symbols used by extremists to self-identify and spread their message. This type of training will provide recruiting personnel, background investigators, security managers, and other personnel security professionals with greater insight into these groups and ideologies and ultimately enrich military accession screening and personnel security investigations.
4. DoD should work with other Government stakeholders to develop a consistent definition for DE across Government.
5. Accessions Policy should join the OUSD (I&S) PAEI WG. This WG would give Accessions Policy insight into PAEI capabilities that can meet recruiting needs.
6. OUSD (I&S) should work with the Performance Accountability Council Program Management Office, and other TW 2.0 partners to determine if changes to Question 29, Association Record, on the SF-86 can be implemented. Broad concepts such as terrorism need to be broken down into smaller, more precise questions. Furthermore, good survey questions need to be unequivocal and instructions must be easily understood and have well-defined terms.
7. OUSD (I&S) should work with OUSD (P&R) to consider the addition of a Separation Program Designator to the DD 214 that equates with domestic extremism and updating DoDI 1332.14 and DoDI 1332.30.

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## **APPENDIX A: MILITARY ACCESSIONS PROCESS**

Enlistment qualifications are evaluated at both RS and MEPS. Each node within the screening process helps provide accurate information on each applicant, thus allowing for a comprehensive assessment of the individual, with a particular focus on suitability for service. This section demonstrates the breadth of vetting each applicant for military Service undergoes. This section also highlights the multiple nodes in this process that support the identification of subjects who may espouse extremist ideologies counter to the U.S. military's mission and values or who may be an active member of a DT group.

Note: Each of the five branches of military Service have their own process for military accessions, but these processes tend to have more similarities than differences. In this section, the focus is on the Army's accession process. Any significant differences between the Army and the other Services are noted. Additionally, the Army sometimes uses different terminology than other Services. For instance, Army Recruiting Stations are analogous to Air Force Recruiting Offices, and Army Guidance Counselors are the same as Service Liaisons. For convenience and because it is the largest service, Army terminology is used throughout.

### **RECRUITING STATION**

The purpose of the RS is to support recruiters who educate and guide people with interest in serving in the U.S. military. Initial interviews between recruiters and potential applicants are usually informal, but it is a critical stage of the process because it is the first opportunity for recruiters to learn about applicants' backgrounds, ambitions, and qualifications. If recruiters believe potential applicants are likely to qualify for service and they have interest in serving in the Armed Forces, the accessions process is initiated.

#### **Validation of Identity**

Establishing identity is a vital component of the military accessions process because it ensures that background checks, such as local police checks and FBI criminal history checks, are conducted on the right people. Validating identity occurs at multiple times during the accessions process, but it begins at RSs. Applicants enter personally identifiable information, demographic data, and personal background information on a series of enlistment forms. They also provide source documentation (e.g., birth certificate) to recruiters.<sup>14</sup> The information provided is validated against State and Federal databases, either at RSs or at MEPS.

Recruiters examine signatures on all source documents to ensure consistency. Lack of consistency is a potential indicator that applicants may be concealing their real identity by using fraudulent documentation (Buck et al., 2005). Additionally, recruiters compare information across various forms to identify inconsistencies with applicants' statements

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<sup>14</sup> State-issued driver's license or ID card, high school ID card, U.S. passport, marriage certificate, divorce decree, Social Security card/number, birth certificate, children's birth certificates, school transcripts, USCIS Form N-565, Dept. of State Form 1350, Foreign Service Form 240, I-551 Permanent Resident Card.

and responses. Interviews are also used to fill in missing information that most people would likely know or have access to, such as names and addresses of family members.

Finally, according to Buck (2005), the continuous contact between recruiters and applicants helps establish and verify identity. Recruiters visit applicants' homes, places of employment, and schools and may meet their family, friends, teachers, and coworkers. Anomalous behaviors of individuals within their real-life social network may be uncovered through these visits (e.g., classmate, school teachers/administrators, or coworkers not recognizing applicants' names).

### **Employment Eligibility and Citizenship**

Applicants do not need to be U.S. citizens to enlist, but they must be permanent residents and reside in the United States. To determine if applicants are eligible, recruiters will ask for source documents such as Social Security cards and I-551 Permanent Resident Cards.

Checks with the Social Security Administration and U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services to validate SSN and, if applicable, permanent residency are initiated by the Army Recruiting Command 72 hours prior to applicants' arrival at MEPS for initial military accession assessments (e.g., medical exam). Applicants may not ship to Basic Training if their SSN or permanent residency status cannot be confirmed.

### **Moral Conduct**

Each branch of the military requires that its enlistees be of strong moral character in order to promote good order and discipline and to reduce the likelihood of enlisting insider threats. Criminal record checks are conducted to help recruiting personnel assess moral character. In some instances, applicants with serious misdemeanor and felony offenses on their records may request waivers. Waiver applications require applicants to provide detailed information about the circumstances surrounding the offense(s) and, within Army recruiting, are submitted to the Recruiting Station CO then to the Recruiting Company CO and finally to the Recruiting Battalion. The Recruiting Battalion CO interviews all subjects with a history of felony convictions or adverse adjudications.

### **Standard Form 86, Questionnaire for National Security Positions (SF-86)**

All applicants are asked to complete the SF-86, even those who are not planning to enter a Military Occupation Specialty (MOS, i.e., job position) that requires a security clearance. At over 120 pages, this form is a comprehensive collection of information related to one's identity and background. Although not intended to be a recruiting tool, recruiters have come to rely on the information provided to guide their applicant screening process. For instance, Section 22 of the SF-86 asks the following:

- In the last seven (7) years have you been issued a summons, citation, or ticket to appear in court in a criminal proceeding against you? (Do not check if all the citations involved traffic infractions where the fine was less than \$300 and did not include alcohol or drugs)

- In the last seven (7) years have you been arrested by any police officer, sheriff, marshal or any other type of law enforcement official?
- In the last seven (7) years have you been charged with, convicted of, or sentenced for a crime in any court? (Include all qualifying charges, convictions or sentences in any Federal, state, local, military, or non-U.S. court, even if previously listed on this form).
- In the last seven (7) years have you been or are you currently on probation or parole? Are you currently on trial or awaiting a trial on criminal charges?

Within the Army, a “yes” response to any of the questions will initiate police records checks within the arresting jurisdiction (as identified by applicants).

### **Police Record Checks**

Within Army recruiting, criminal records checks are initiated when applicants self-report criminal conduct. The form DD 369, *Police Record Check*, is sent to the arresting law enforcement agency. The following information is requested:

- Does the applicant have a police or juvenile record?
- Is the applicant undergoing court action of any kind?

Army recruiters will also conduct court record checks when there is self-reported criminal conduct. The purpose of this check is to ensure that there is a final disposition because pending charges will disqualify subjects from enlistment and to confirm that subjects are not on probation, as this too is disqualifying.

### **Live Scan: FBI Criminal History Check**

Within the Army, applicants’ FPs are collected via Live Scan at RSs. FPs are sent to the FBI for a check of criminal history. These checks are submitted to the FBI under a non-criminal justice employment purpose code (I) rather than a national security purpose code (S). Therefore, these checks are limited in that they will not return criminal records sealed at the State level (FBI CJIS, May 11, 2020).

The Army found that the FBI FP checks usually confirm self-reported criminal conduct, but there are instances when new information is identified (USAREC, May 6, 2020). Depending on the severity of the offense and final disposition, subjects may be disqualified from enlistment or they may be able to request a moral conduct waiver. Note: The Army is the only military Service to conduct FBI checks prior to the initiation of Tier 3 and Tier 5 investigations at MEPS.

The automatic NCIC Name-Based Search is initiated by a FP submission for criminal history checks. A hit to an NCIC record results in a notification being sent to the agency that submitted the record to NCIC. It is at the discretion of the submitting agency to provide the record to the requesting agency (in this case, the RS). The NCIC files searched include

- Supervised Release,

- Protection Order,
- Identity Theft,
- Protective Interest,
- Violent Person,
- Missing Person,
- Known and Suspected Terrorist,
- Gang Member,
- Wanted Person,
- U.S. Secret Service Protectee,
- Foreign Fugitive-Interpol,
- Foreign Fugitive-Canada, and
- Sex Offender.

#### **Extremist and Gang Screening**

According to USAREC Message 19-027 (January 2019), individuals suspected of being in an extremist group or criminal gang (e.g., self-reported, tattoos, verbal and written cues) will undergo additional screening by the recruiting CO. Suspected applicants will be interviewed and assessed for extent of involvement, if any. Applicants' criminal backgrounds will be reviewed again. If it is determined that applicants are members of extremist groups or criminal gangs, they will be disqualified from enlistment.

#### **Medical Pre-Screening – DD Form 2807-2**

The DD Form 2807-2 is a medical prescreening questionnaire required by DoDD 6130.3, *Physical Standards for Appointment, Enlistment, or Induction*. All applicants must complete this form prior to visiting MEPS. During the medical prescreening interview, recruiters will ask applicants about health conditions as well as body modifications, including tattoos.

#### **Tattoo Screening**

Depending on the Service, any tattoos visible on the face, neck, and hands are disqualifying. Furthermore, all Services prohibit applicants from enlisting with racist, extremist, sexist, or indecent tattoos (Army Regulation 670-1, *Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia*; NAVPERS 15665, *U.S. Navy Uniform Regulations*; AFI 36-2903 *Dress and Appearance of Air Force Personnel*).

According to Resnick (2014) "These {tattoos} visual identifiers may be the Armed Services' first and best opportunity to gain a more complete understanding of the applicant's background and aspirations, and this valuable information should not be overlooked."

At Army Recruiting Stations, applicants are asked to explain the location and meaning of their tattoos or brandings. Nonconforming tattoos require an Exception to Policy (ETP) request. Applicants must qualify under the mental, physical, and conduct standards in order to submit the ETP. The request should include size, location, description, and explanation of what the tattoo(s) means to the applicant. A color photo of the tattoo must also be included in the submission. Company COs will then conduct face-to-face interviews with applicants submitting a tattoo ETP. The Battalion CO will review all documents and issue a determination (USAREC Message 19-071, August 2019).

## **MILITARY ENTRANCE PROCESSING STATION**

MEPS is a joint-service organization with the mission to assess applicants' physical qualifications, aptitude, and moral conduct based on the standards established by all five Services (retrieved May 4, 2020, from USMEPCOM.com). MEPS serves as the honest broker, ensuring that military accession applicants meet all enlistment standards. There are several points in the process at which vetting may help identify anomalous behaviors indicative of deception and associations with domestic terror groups.

### **Validation of Identity**

When applicants enter MEPS, they must present valid identification documents to the MEPS staff. Applicants who are not in possession of valid identification are placed in an Administrative Hold in MIRS and processing stops. Applicants then attend the Commander's briefing, where they learn about the day's activities. If required, applicants will take the ASVAB. Applicants are asked to provide their left thumb print, if biometrically enrolled, or a valid identification before they begin the test. Finally, while meeting with the GC (i.e., Service Liaison), applicants must produce the same source documents shown to the recruiter. GCs review the source documents for consistent signatures or evidence of alteration and review all documents to ensure they are not fraudulent. When inconsistencies are identified, applicants' processing pauses until the issues are resolved.

### **Citizenship and Employment Eligibility**

GCs review applicants' source documents to ensure they have not been modified and that the information presented on the cards (facial images, addresses) matches or aligns with the information provided by applicants.

### **Moral Conduct**

As previously mentioned, each of the military Services require its enlistees to have a strong moral character. Moral conduct screening is done to ensure that, upon enlistment, recruits will maintain good order and discipline. During the pre-enlistment interview (PEI) with the HRA, applicants' FPs are captured electronically and submitted to the FBI for criminal record checks. Additionally, applicants are questioned about their criminal histories and drug use. If new information is discovered, form USMEPCOM 601-23-E, *Report of Additional Information*, is completed and submitted to the RS and MEPS CO for evaluation.

## Medical and Tattoo Screening

Applicants attend a medical briefing where they review the completeness of their medical forms and records before moving onto the medical exam. During the exam, drug and alcohol tests are administered. Additionally, during the exam, a physician will document applicants' tattoos. This is the only opportunity in the accessions process for tattoos obscured by PT uniforms to be identified as this is the only time applicants are physically examined while undressed. Per USMEPCOM 40-1, *Medical Qualification Program* during the medical exam, a MEPS practitioner is responsible for annotating "clinically significant scars and tattoos on DD Form 2808...questionable or offensive tattoos should be referred to the appropriate Service liaison [Guidance Counselor]."

GCs will ask applicants about their tattoos and other body modifications while at MEPS. Concerning tattoos may lead GCs to ask questions about applicants' engagement with disruptive organizations such as DT groups. Tattoos identified that were not disclosed on the DD Form 2808 will be annotated on the same form by the MEPS physician. In some cases, GCs may forward concerning tattoos to their Company COs for determinations. The GC will complete this process twice: once during applicants' first visit to MEPS and again when applicants return to MEPS on their ship dates. Applicants also complete a limited medical inspection. The purpose of these procedures is to confirm that applicants still meet enlistment standards.

## Delayed Entry Program

DEP is used when recruits have completed MEPS processing and have taken the oath of enlistment but wish to ship to Basic Training at a later date, usually because they need to complete their senior year in high school. Recruits may spend up to 366 days in DEP. Within the Army, GCs meet with applicants prior to entering DEP and prior to shipping to Basic Training. During this meeting, the enlistment contract, MOS, and incentives are reviewed and packaged into the DEP Annex. Department of the Army Form 3286, *Statement for Enlistment, United States Army Enlistment Program, Delayed Entry Program*, represents the DEP Annex. The Annex summarizes recruits' contractual obligations, incentives, and acknowledgment of prohibited activities while in DEP and while serving as a soldier in the U.S. Army. Participation in extremist organizations and activities<sup>15</sup> is one of these prohibited activities.

*Participation in extremist organizations and activities by Army personnel is inconsistent with the responsibilities of military service. It is the policy of the U.S. Army to provide equal opportunity and treatment for all Soldiers without regard to race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. Enforcement of this policy is a responsibility of command, is vitally important to unit cohesion and morale, and is*

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<sup>15</sup> "Extremist organizations and activities are ones that advocate racial, gender, or ethnic hatred or intolerance; advocate, create, or engage in illegal discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of or use force or violence or unlawful means to deprive individuals of their rights under the United States Constitution or the laws of the United States or any State; or advocate or seek to overthrow the Government of the United States, or any State by unlawful means." (DA Form 3286)



*essential to the Army's ability to accomplish its mission.... Penalties for violation of these prohibitions include the full range of statutory and regulatory sanctions, both criminal [United States Code of Military Justice] UCMJ and administrative...(Department of the Army Form 3286)*

Examples of prohibited, extremist-related activities include public demonstrations or rallies, fundraising, encouraging other Soldiers to join extremist organizations, or distributing literature espousing extremist ideology when it appears that it could negatively affect loyalty, discipline, or morale of military personnel. Soldiers must acknowledge their understanding of these prohibitions.

### **Ship Day Interview with HRA**

Applicants meet with HRAs on their Basic Training ship dates and review all information provided during the PEI and disclosed on enlistment forms. Any changes related to derogatory behaviors (e.g., drug use, new criminal charges) may result in disqualification.