



by Freddy Groves

Veterans on the road again

The government is calling on veterans to consider careers in commercial trucking with the creation of the Freedom Haulers initiative, a new effort to help veterans move into civilian driving jobs.

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), with its military driver program, is making it easy for experienced veteran drivers to get a commercial driver's license (CDL). In many cases you can get a waiver on both the skills and knowledge tests.

A few facts: Every state is part of the veteran skills-test waiver program and all have specific requirements. Seven additional states just joined the Even Exchange program, which allows qualified veterans with certain military driving experience to waive the knowledge test.

Eligibility: If you had a military driver's license for at least two years, with no suspensions or disqualifications, you can qualify if you apply within two years of leaving that position. (It used to be 12 months, but with the Freedom Haulers initiative, that's been extended.)

Benefits: Depending on the employer, jobs may offer travel, flexible hours, good pay, health and life insurance, and more.

For more information, see www.fmcsa.dot.gov/militarydriverprograms.

Check out the Even Exchange program at www.fmcsa.dot.gov/even-exchange-program. There you'll find a MOS list with the qualifying military occupations that can waive the knowledge test.

What if you didn't have a driving job during your active duty period and your MOS doesn't cover you for an automatic CDL? The GI Bill may cover up to 100% of commercial driver's license tuition at approved schools, depending on your eligibility and the program. In some cases that might include a housing allowance.

If you're starting from scratch (no military driving training) and want to go the GI Bill route, pick your school carefully. Federal regulators have recently removed or taken action against hundreds of CDL training providers that failed to meet requirements. Before enrolling, verify that the program is approved for your VA education benefits. Call the VA Education Call Center at 888-442-4551 (888-GIBILL-1) to verify a school's eligibility.

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257

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