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United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to Assistant Secretary of the
Army
(Manpower and Reserve Affairs)

March 1986

**RESERVE
COMPONENTS**

**Army Personnel
Qualification Data
Could Be Improved**



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**National Security and International
Affairs Division****B-221671**

March 26, 1986

The Honorable Delbert L. Spurlock
Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Manpower and Reserve Affairs)

Dear Mr. Spurlock:

We have completed our review of individual training in the Army's Reserve components—the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve. Our objectives were to determine whether the Army had an effective means of (1) qualifying individual reservists to meet their job requirements and (2) evaluating individual soldier proficiency.

The Reserve components use several programs to train soldiers in a military occupational specialty (MOS). These programs include

- U.S. Army service schools,
- U.S. Army Reserve schools,
- supervised on-the-job training,
- correspondence courses, and
- contract training.

We found that the Army had already identified several problems affecting Reserve component training and had either initiated or planned actions to correct them. These problems included

- units not adhering to guidelines on how to develop and administer supervised on-the-job training programs,
- inadequate systems for determining Army Reserve school work loads and the number of instructors needed, and
- the Training and Doctrine Command's not fulfilling its oversight responsibility for Army Reserve schools.

However, two problems still need attention. First, top level Army officials are not routinely using the most complete MOS qualification data available as an indicator of overall proficiency. Second, the skill qualification test (SQT) is not being administered to all soldiers who should be tested. More specific information on these problems is discussed below.

In conducting our work, we met with National Guard Bureau officials and Department of the Army officials in the offices of the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Operations and Personnel and the Office of the Chief of

Army Reserve. We also met with officials from Headquarters, U.S. Army Forces Command; Headquarters, Training and Doctrine Command; and Headquarters, First, Second, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Armies. Discussion with these officials focused on Headquarters oversight responsibility of (1) personnel qualification levels in Army Reserve and National Guard units and (2) the testing and evaluation of individual soldier skills.

We visited selected Active Army and Reserve component schools and selected National Guard and Army Reserve units to discuss the different means by which soldiers could become qualified in an MOS. At the units visited, we also reviewed soldier personnel and training records and results of SQT tests and calculated soldier qualification levels. Units visited are listed in appendix I. Our work was performed in accordance with generally accepted government audit standards.

Unit Personnel Qualifications

The Army defines its position needs in terms of skill levels that soldiers should possess to successfully carry out their jobs. Although skill level data is available, it is not being provided in Army reports of unit personnel qualifications. Reports on unit personnel qualifications based on skill levels would identify whether soldiers possess necessary skills and, thereby, would provide a more comprehensive assessment of unit qualification levels.

To become qualified, a soldier normally completes entry level training in a career management field, for example, infantry. Upon completion of entry level training, the soldier is awarded an MOS designated by a three-character code, for example, 11B—infantryman. This means the soldier has learned the basic combat skills and the basic technical skills for the MOS. The three-character code does not, however, indicate the soldier's skill level—the level of proficiency with which the soldier can successfully perform in an MOS.

Skill levels are indicated by numerical designations—1 through 5—which represent progressively higher levels of performance and grade. Five levels of training are established in support of these skill levels. The first level is initial entry (basic training and advanced individual training) which gives the soldier the foundation of professional and technical knowledge required to perform in a unit. Completion of initial entry training, combined with subsequent individual training at the unit, qualifies the soldier at skill level 1. The four subsequent levels of training are designed to prepare soldiers to perform duty positions at

higher skill levels. Adding two characters to the soldier's three-character MOS code discussed above identifies the soldier's skill level (fourth character) and special qualifications (fifth character). For example, "3P" in the fourth and fifth character positions of 11B3P indicate the soldier is qualified at skill level 3 and is a parachutist.

Army reports of unit personnel qualifications are based on the three-character MOS code. Because units may fill a position with soldiers having skills one or two levels below those required, the three-character code may not present an accurate assessment of qualification levels.

The following example illustrates the effect of using the three- and five-character codes to determine and report a unit's overall personnel qualification level. Assume that a unit has a duty position calling for 11B3P. If the unit does not have a soldier possessing a 3 skill level, Army regulations allow the position to be filled by soldiers having either a 1 or 2 skill level. Using the three-character code to report soldier qualifications, the unit would compare only the first three characters of the position occupied with the first three characters of the MOS held by the soldier filling the position. Accordingly, if either a skill level 1 or skill level 2 soldier is in the position, each soldier would be reported as qualified even though neither possessed the desired skill.

Conversely, use of the five-character code to report the unit's qualification level would show that the skill of a soldier possessing skill level 1 or 2 was less than that required for the position. Use of the five-character code, then, enables an assessment of the unit's personnel qualification status based on skill levels. At 28 of the 31 units visited, we calculated personnel qualification levels based on both three- and five-character codes. A comparison of results showed that qualification levels based on the five-character code declined by an average of 8.9 percent. Changes in qualification levels ranged from no reduction to a 30-percent reduction.

Until late 1984, Reserve component personnel reporting systems contained only three-character qualification data. However, systems which identify five-character data became operational in the National Guard and the Army Reserve in October 1984 and February 1985, respectively. While five-character code data is being used at the unit level to identify training requirements, it is not being used routinely by Army headquarters officials to assess qualification levels. Further, headquarters officials told us they had no specific plans for using this data in the future.

Reporting qualifications to at least the fourth character of the occupational code would provide information on the extent to which soldiers possess necessary skills. Such information could assist in assessments of the personnel qualification status of the Reserve components and also provide a broad indicator of future training requirements.

Reserve Component Individual Training Evaluation Program

The Individual Training Evaluation Program (ITEP) provides information to unit commanders on the effectiveness of training in maintaining and improving soldiers' skill proficiency. An important aspect of the ITEP is the SQT. The SQT is a written test used to evaluate a soldier's MOS and skill level proficiency. The test is used to (1) evaluate and compare soldiers in the same MOS, (2) provide an overall Army indicator of soldier proficiency, (3) provide a source of objective information for the commander on soldier strengths and weaknesses, and (4) provide a proficiency indicator for use in the Army's Enlisted Personnel Management System's decisions for Active Army personnel only. Army Reserve and National Guard units are required to administer this test every 2 years to soldiers in skill levels 1 through 4 who have been in a unit for 180 days.

We visited 31 Reserve component units in the First, Second, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Armies to collect and analyze SQT data. Six of the units visited in the Fifth Army did not administer the test. Moreover, 18 of the remaining 25 units did not administer the test to all soldiers required to be tested. A comparison of the number of soldiers required to be tested with the number actually tested is shown below.

Table 1: Number of Soldiers Required to Be Tested Compared With Number Actually Tested

	No. of soldiers required to be tested ^a	No. of soldiers tested	Percent of soldiers tested
First Army	260	134	52
Second Army	724	479	66
Sixth Army	108	71	66

^aFourth and Fifth Army units did not maintain this data.

Unit officials told us that participation in the SQT was not as it should be because of inadequate command emphasis. They also said that reservists lacked incentives to take the test.

Although Army regulations do not stipulate a passing score for the SQT, unit commanders and training personnel told us they considered 60 percent to be acceptable. Many soldiers who took the SQT did not score above 60. The percentage of soldiers scoring below 60 ranged from 21 percent in the Sixth Army to 66 percent in the Fifth Army. Unit officials attributed low scores to inadequacies in the reservists' motivation and preparation for the test.

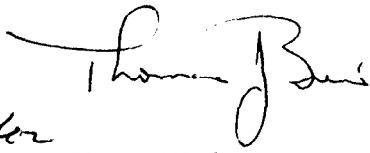
Failure to achieve full participation in the SQT limits the information available to commanders on soldiers' strengths and weaknesses. Such information could be useful in adjusting units' training plans to place increased emphasis on tasks where weaknesses exist. Additionally, test results are important in helping commanders determine the numbers of fully qualified personnel.

We understand from discussions with Training and Doctrine Command officials that the Army is currently evaluating the SQT. We are providing this information to help in that evaluation.

We have discussed our findings with officials at Headquarters, Department of the Army; Forces Command; and Training and Doctrine Command. We plan no further work on this assignment; however, we would appreciate being advised of your views on the matters discussed in this report.

We are sending a copy of this report to the Secretary of the Army.

Sincerely yours,


for Henry W. Connor
Senior Associate Director

List of Units Visited

National Guard

Colorado	HQ, 2nd Battalion, 157th Field Artillery: HQ Battery A Battery B Battery C Battery Service Battery
Georgia	HQ, 1st Battalion, 121st Infantry: HQ Company A Company B Company C Company D Company E Company
Louisiana	3673rd Maintenance Company 1083rd Transportation Company 1st Battalion, 141st Field Artillery
New York	127th Maintenance Company
North Carolina	514th Military Police Company HQ & HQ Detachment, 690th Maintenance Battalion HQ, 2nd Battalion, 252nd Armor: D Company
Texas	HQ, 1st Brigade, 49th Armored Division HQ, 6th Battalion, 112th Armor 249th Signal Battalion
Wisconsin	HQ, 32nd Infantry Brigade

**Appendix I
List of Units Visited**

Army Reserve

Delaware 946th Transportation Company

North Carolina 227th Transportation Company

Texas 383rd Quartermaster Battalion
 900th Quartermaster Company
 644th Transportation Company
 980th Engineer Battalion
 327th Chemical Company
 223rd Light Maintenance Company

Virginia 18th Field Hospital



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