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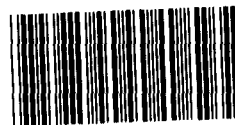
Testimony

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Readiness of Army Guard and
Reserve Support Forces

Statement of
Richard A. Davis, Senior Associate Director
National Security and International
Affairs Division

Before the
Subcommittees on Readiness, Sustainability
and Support and Manpower and Personnel
Committee on Armed Services



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Mr. Chairmen and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the readiness of Army National Guard and Army Reserve combat-support and combat service-support units, including reserve units that are part of the Army's high priority M+10 essential force. I would like to comment on three areas relating to Guard and Reserve combat-support and combat service-support readiness.

- Most of the Army's support forces are in the reserves, and a large proportion of this force do not have sufficient personnel, necessary skills, or the equipment required to perform their wartime missions.

- The Army's ability to meet military objectives in the early phases of a NATO conflict may be adversely affected by the lack of ready and available support forces, particularly those in the Army Reserve.

- Although the Army's data indicates that about three fourths of its reserve soldiers are "qualified" in their jobs, reservists may be less skilled than this data indicates. Furthermore, the Army does not know how many reservists are "proficient" in their jobs.

In 1968 the Army had just over 18 combat divisions and 1.5 million soldiers in its active force. Today it has the same number of combat divisions but only about half the number of soldiers as in 1968. Several factors have contributed to this change in the Army's force structure, including a substantial reduction in the size of Army combat divisions. In addition, the Army has changed the mix of its active and reserve forces. Most of the combat divisions were retained in the active force, but significant reductions were made in combat-support and combat service-support forces. The Army now has over two thirds (about 70 percent) of its support structure in the Army Reserve and National Guard.

As a result of this heavy reliance on reserve support forces, the Army must augment its active force combat divisions throughout the world before it can sustain them on the battlefield for a short period of time. Accordingly, a large portion of reserve forces must be well equipped, highly trained, and able to mobilize and deploy quickly.

However, a significant percentage of support forces assigned to assist combat divisions in the four major war-fighting commands--Europe, Atlantic, Pacific, and Central--report that they do not have sufficient resources to perform assigned missions. The primary reasons for units' reporting a not-combat-ready condition are a lack of sufficient personnel, necessary skills, or the equipment required to perform wartime missions. The lack of skill

qualifications was most often cited for units' reporting a not-combat-ready condition.

Included in the number of support forces that report resource limitations is a large number of Army National Guard and Reserve units required for initial combat operations in Europe. These units are assigned to the Army's "M+10 essential force," a term that refers to the approximately 10 divisions and required non-divisional support forces the United States has committed to assemble in Europe within 10 days of NATO mobilization. This condition raises questions about the Army's ability to meet military objectives in the early phases of a NATO conflict. In fact, some operational commanders believe that, should a conflict occur, the impact of support force shortages would be severe.

In general, reservists are considered to be "qualified" if they have the skills required for their duty positions. Although, overall, the Army's skill qualification data indicates that about three fourths of its reserve soldiers are qualified, we found that there are many occupational specialties in which 59 percent or less of the assigned soldiers have the military occupational specialties (MOS) called for by their duty positions. For example, in the Army Reserve, 133 occupational specialties were in this category.

We also found that reservists may be less skilled than the Army's data indicates. Although soldiers are termed "qualified" by

the Army, they are not necessarily fully qualified in their jobs. Rather, "qualified" soldiers may have been trained in only a portion of the tasks that the Army considers critical to proper job performance.

The Army generally awards an MOS to a soldier upon successful completion of advanced individual training (AIT). However, according to officials from the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, for nearly one third of the Army's more than 350 occupational specialties, AIT provides training in less than 80 percent of the critical job tasks soldiers need to learn to be fully qualified. Further, we found that a large number of reservists work in occupations in which they are taught less than 60 percent of critical job tasks during AIT. These occupations include positions requiring repair capability for equipment such as the Bradley Fighting Vehicle and the Abrams Tank.

The Army does not know how many reservists are proficient in their jobs. Although the Army has a means--the Skill Qualification Test (SQT)--to evaluate the overall proficiency of its soldiers, only a relatively small number of reservists take the test. The SQT is currently the Army's only objective means to assess soldiers' qualifications. It evaluates a soldier's proficiency in a sample of critical job tasks for each occupational specialty.

In fiscal year 1987, 74 percent of the Army's active duty soldiers took the SQT. In the Army Reserve and Army National Guard, however, only about 32 percent of the soldiers required to take an SQT for their MOSs took the test. Consequently, the Army lacks proficiency data on nearly 70 percent of its reservists, or about 334,000 soldiers. During a prior GAO review, unit officials told us that participation in the SQT was lacking because of inadequate command emphasis. They also said that reservists lacked incentives to take the test.

For the 156,000 reservists who took a skill qualification test during fiscal year 1987, about 65 percent passed the test. In comparison, about 92 percent of the 450,000 active duty soldiers taking the test during the same period passed.

The Army has undertaken several initiatives to address readiness problems that exist throughout the Army, and reserve forces should benefit from them. For example, while there are currently large personnel shortages, it appears that planned host nation support and expected unit productivity improvements from new equipment that the Army plans to buy over the next 5 years should help to alleviate this condition. However, providing reservists with necessary skills is a difficult task. Training time is limited, and there are a number of other factors, such as equipment modernization and mission assignment changes, that affect the reserves' ability to maintain high levels of individually qualified

personnel. While the Army has initiated efforts to find solutions to personnel retention and training-related problems, it is premature to predict whether these efforts will succeed.

Equipment shortages affecting the readiness condition of reserve forces are likely to remain a long-term problem. The Army is projecting substantial funding increases to implement its equipment initiatives. However, in light of the limited funding available for support force equipment in recent years and little prospect for growth in the defense budget in the near future, the Army's current funding projections to implement its equipment initiatives may be too optimistic.

More detailed information on the condition of reserve combat-support and combat service-support forces is contained in a classified statement, which has been submitted to the Subcommittees. Mr. Chairmen, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to respond to questions.