

GAO

Testimony

For Release on
Delivery
Expected at
2:00 p.m. EST
Thursday
March 10, 1988

Skill Qualifications of National Guard
and Reserve Members

Statement of
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Before the
Subcommittee on Military Personnel and
Compensation
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives



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041025/135251

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee:

We are pleased to be here today to discuss the skill qualifications of National Guard and Reserve members,¹ with specific emphasis on the Army's reservists. The ability of reservists to perform effectively, when mobilized, is increasingly important since they have been assigned greater responsibilities within the defense force.

I would like to comment on three areas relating to individual military skill qualifications: (1) the number of unqualified reservists, (2) reasons for reservists' skill deficiencies, and (3) service initiatives to improve reservists' qualifications. My testimony is based on preliminary results from two of our ongoing reviews. One review addresses general management issues facing the Reserves, and the other responds to your request that we examine individual skill qualifications in the Army and the Army's proposals to improve them.

GENERAL CONDITION OF
INDIVIDUAL SKILL QUALIFICATIONS

In general, reservists are considered to be "qualified" if they have the skills required for their duty positions. Military

¹These National Guard and Reserve soldiers are members of Selected Reserve units that generally train one weekend a month and participate in annual active duty training.

service data indicates that about one of every four reservists is not fully trained for his or her duty position.

The Reserve Forces Policy Board's most recent annual report stated that, next to the lack of personnel, the lack of individual skills was the most significant factor limiting reserve unit readiness in fiscal year 1987. Our preliminary analysis indicates that the Army's early-deploying reserve units have persons assigned to duty positions for which they are not trained.

REASONS FOR SKILL DEFICIENCIES

Training reservists is difficult. The Reserves are a part-time force that is required to train at least 38 days a year. Even though many reservists exceed this minimum number of days, training time is limited. For example, the average number of paid training days in 1985 for enlisted reservists was 42. In addition to the time constraint, there are a number of factors, such as the following, that affect the Reserves' ability to maintain high levels of individually qualified personnel:

- Training courses are often longer than the 38-day reservist training requirement. Individual training must also compete with other unit operational and training requirements, and reservists cannot always take time away from their civilian employment to attend training. This is

particularly the case for technical skill positions that require long periods of training. For example, the Navy identified 89 Naval enlisted positions that have been difficult to fill principally because of the required training time--the course length ranged from 16 days for an explosive ordnance demolition diver to 320 days for a hospital corpsman. Similarly, we identified 67 Army military occupational specialty (MOS) courses provided to reserve and active members that take more than 4 months to complete.

-- The Reserves rely in part on recruiting persons with prior military experience--active and reserve. These persons are already trained; however, in some cases their former military occupational skills are not needed in the units they join. Consequently, they must be retrained. In fiscal year 1987, about one half of the Army National Guard's and Marine Corps' enlistments had prior military service. According to the services, about half of these personnel would require retraining.

-- Geographic constraints also have an impact on individual skill levels. For example, by Department of Defense directive, a unit may only draw from the pool of individuals within a 100-mile radius of its location. Thus, persons with the needed skills are not always

available. Similarly, reservists who relocate may not be able to find units in need of their military specialties.

- Because of equipment modernization and mission assignment changes, reservists may not be qualified for their duty positions. The Army has fielded many new weapons systems and major equipment items in recent years. The introduction of new equipment in reserve units can result in new MOS requirements. For example, when the M-48/M-60 tank is replaced by the M-1 tank, a tank crewman must be retrained in a new MOS, as the old MOS will no longer be suitable.

TRAINING INITIATIVES

The services are aware of problems with military skills in the Reserves and are developing programs such as the following to address these problems:

- The Navy and Air Force have developed modularized training, which divides courses into segments that can be taught during a reservist's 2-week active duty training period and a certain number of weekend drills. The Navy has developed 7 modular courses since 1985 and plans to complete 13 more courses by the end of fiscal year 1990. The Air Force has developed training modules and packages for 170 occupations

to supplement on-the-job training, according to an Air Force training official.

- The Navy is also developing "Readiness Centers" that will be equipped with more training equipment and simulators than are found in its local reserve centers. These new centers will have full-time instructors and be able to support the training needs of the units in their geographic areas. A total of 40 centers are planned; however, to date the Department of the Navy has approved the development of only one center.

- In 1986, the Marine Corps began developing a new on-the-job training initiative for prior-service Marines who need retraining. The program combines supervised on-the-job training, correspondence courses, and two 2-week training sessions. This program could take a reservist up to 2 years to complete. Manuals for implementing the program have been developed for 15 of 35 occupational fields.

- The Coast Guard has almost completed initial implementation of its "STARFIX" program, which is designed to determine what types of training should be added to individual training plans so that they match mobilization requirements.

The Army also has a number of initiatives under way, which I will discuss later.

SKILL QUALIFICATIONS OF SOLDIERS IN
THE ARMY RESERVE AND THE NATIONAL GUARD

I would now like to turn to the results of work we have in process on the skill qualifications of soldiers in the Army Reserve and the National Guard. As you requested, we have undertaken a detailed analysis of Army qualification data and an evaluation of the Army's proposals to improve soldiers' qualifications to perform their jobs.

Our work shows that

-- reservists may be less skilled than the Army's data indicates, and

-- the Army does not know how many reservists are proficient in their jobs.

We found that, though soldiers are termed "MOS-qualified," they are not necessarily fully qualified in their jobs. Rather, "MOS-qualified" soldiers may have been trained in only a portion of the tasks that the Army considers critical to proper job performance. Since a relatively small number of reservists take

the Army's Skill Qualification Test (SQT), the Army lacks overall information on reservists' proficiency.

MOS Qualification Standards

Over the past 10 years, the Army has devoted considerable resources to identifying critical job tasks that soldiers must be able to perform to do their jobs proficiently and to survive in combat. Combat-related tasks are described in a Common Task Soldier Manual, which applies to all soldiers, regardless of their occupational specialties. Specific job tasks are described in a separate Soldier Manual for each of the Army's more than 350 job specialties.

The responsibility for training soldiers is shared by the Training and Doctrine Command, which operates the Army's training schools and centers, and the individual units to which soldiers are assigned. Army schools provide training in the basics of the occupational specialties that soldiers perform when assigned to a unit. This training is referred to as Advanced Individual Training (AIT).

The Army generally awards an MOS to a soldier upon successful completion of AIT. However, based on the Army's objective to minimize the cost and length of formal training programs, soldiers are not always trained in all critical job tasks during AIT.

Depending on the MOS, the AIT covers 20 percent to 100 percent of critical tasks. At the unit level, first-line leaders, normally noncommissioned officers in supervisory positions, are responsible for providing initial training in the critical tasks not covered in AIT and refresher training in the tasks taught during AIT.

Meaning of "MOS Qualification"

Army data indicates that about 73 percent of Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers are "qualified" in their jobs. This statistic, however, relates only to the percentage of soldiers who hold the MOSs called for by the duty positions to which they are assigned. Also, one should not infer from this statistic that these soldiers are qualified to perform all their job duties according to Army standards. The soldiers may or may not have been trained in their units in the critical job tasks not covered in AIT, and they may or may not have received adequate refresher training at the unit level. The Army does not collect information on whether soldiers have been trained in all critical job tasks.

Reservists May Be Less Skilled Than the Army's Data Indicates

Although, overall, the Army's MOS 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 MOSs called for by their duty positions. As shown in table 1, in the Army Reserve, 133 occupational specialties were in this category.

Table 1: Percentage of Personnel with Appropriate MOSs for Their Assigned Occupational Specialties (December 31, 1987)

<u>Percentage of personnel who have MOS for assigned position</u>	<u>Number of Occupational Specialties</u>	
	<u>Army Reserve</u>	<u>National Guard</u>
70 to 100	146	151
60 to 69	112	75
50 to 59	67	54
0 to 49	66	91

According to Training and Doctrine Command officials, 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. As shown in table 2, these occupations include positions requiring repair capability for equipment such as the Bradley Fighting Vehicle and the Abrams Tank.

Table 2: Examples of Occupations in Which Soldiers Are Trained in Less Than 60 Percent of Critical Tasks During Advanced Individual Training

<u>Occupational specialty</u>	Percentage of tasks taught	<u>Number of soldiers assigned</u>		
		<u>Army Reserve</u>	<u>National Guard</u>	<u>Total</u>
Chemical operations specialist	57	3,927	3,275	7,202
Tactical telecommunications center operator	56	2,237	2,770	5,007
Multi-channel communications system operator	55	913	3,808	4,721
M-1 Abrams tank system mechanic	54	12	172	184
Bradley system mechanic	50	185	3,032	3,217
M60/A3 tank system mechanic	48	310	2,531	2,841
Single-channel radio operator	44	2,220	5,639	7,859
Light wheel vehicle mechanic	29	9,140	17,853	26,993
Cannon crew member	28	4,509	20,423	24,932
Unit-level communications maintainer	28	1,010	3,999	5,009

Accordingly, a considerable responsibility rests with Army Reserve and Guard units to provide initial training in tasks not covered during AIT. Refresher training at the unit level is equally important because, as noted in studies conducted by the Army Research Institute, skill degradation occurs rapidly if initial training is not reinforced. According to the Institute, soldiers must have both initial school training and subsequent individual training at the unit to become and remain proficient in critical job tasks.

An Army official estimated that, under the best of circumstances, it would take about 1 year, or an additional 38 training days, beyond completion of AIT to fully train a reservist. The official stated, however, that in actual practice it takes much longer to complete this training because of (1) other demands made on available training days, such as administrative requirements, personnel matters, and equipment maintenance, (2) the limited availability of equipment and training facilities, (3) the lack of qualified trainers in some units, and (4) new training requirements that evolve from changes in a unit's equipment or mission.

The Army Does Not Know How Many Reservists
Are Proficient in Their Jobs

Although the Army has a means--the Skill Qualification Test--to evaluate the overall proficiency of its soldiers, only a relatively small number of reservists take the test. Consequently, the Army has no overall data on reservists' proficiency. Of those reservists who did take the test during fiscal year 1987, slightly less than two thirds passed.

The SQT is currently the Army's only objective means to assess soldiers' qualifications. The test evaluates a soldier's proficiency in a sample of critical job tasks drawn from Soldier Manuals for each occupational specialty. Each active duty soldier is required to take an SQT annually; however, reservists are

required to take the test only once every 2 years. The 2-year interval for reservists was established in recognition of the limited time available to reserve units for training and subsequent skill evaluation.

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 did take 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 did take an SQT during fiscal year 1987, about 65 percent passed the test. In comparison, about 92 percent of the 450,000 active duty soldiers who took the test during the same period passed.

ARMY INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE
RESERVISTS' SKILLS

Over the past several years, the Army has conducted numerous studies on the training of reserve soldiers. The two most notable involved (1) a May 1987 task force established to find solutions to

training and retention problems in the reserves and (2) an October 1987 task force (called an "action project" by the Army) formed to develop an overall training strategy for reserve soldiers and units. Each task force was initiated at the direction of the Army Chief of Staff.

The first task force--the Reserve Component MOS Qualification Training and Retention Task Force--was formed to address eight training- and retention-related issues that the Army believed required resolution. As a result, the Army has begun to take the following actions:

1. Develop a methodology for evaluating the percentage of soldiers who are MOS-qualified.
2. Identify hard-to-train occupational specialties and develop strategies to train soldiers who have these jobs.
3. Determine what qualification levels are needed for mobilization.
4. Develop training packages (to be configured specifically for reserve schools) that consider available training time and other factors that influence reserve training.

5. Assess the availability of qualified instructors for reserve schools.
6. Establish a plan for managing and monitoring training.
7. Develop and integrate regional and centralized training facilities.
8. Implement personnel procedures to reduce turbulence and attrition.

The second task force--the Reserve Component Training Strategy Task Force--presented the results of its study to the Army Chief of Staff on February 22, 1988. We understand that the task force identified 16 issues and proposed numerous actions that it believes are required to develop a comprehensive strategy for conducting, evaluating, and managing reserve training. A fundamental issue raised by the task force is whether or not reservists should be trained to the same standards as active duty soldiers, that is, whether reserve soldiers should be required to develop proficiency in all critical tasks. The task force proposed that the Army take the following actions, among others:

1. Improve commissioned and noncommissioned officers' capability to provide training to reserve soldiers.

2. Reduce the administrative burden on units to make more time available for training.
3. Improve training management.
4. Reduce the number of battle tasks units are required to accomplish.
5. Increase reservists' access to training devices and facilities.

Army officials told us that the Army will not decide on the proposed actions until next month.

While these initiatives, if adopted, should help to improve the qualifications of reserve soldiers, the Army's measurement of skill qualifications and its proposals to improve reservists' training appear to be focused on providing training in the basics of an occupational specialty, not on training for all critical tasks. "MOS qualification" does not necessarily mean MOS proficiency. An "MOS-qualified" soldier may have been trained in only a portion of critical tasks, while to be MOS-proficient a soldier should be trained in all critical tasks and receive necessary refresher training. While the Army has established the goal of training 85 percent of its reservists to be "MOS-qualified," it has not yet established a goal for MOS proficiency.

Another issue that the Army must address to ensure fully qualified reserve soldiers is the effectiveness of its training management. Our prior work and work conducted by the Army Audit Agency has shown problems in this area. In this regard we noted that the Department of Defense Annual Statement of Assurance² for fiscal year 1987 identified training management in the Army National Guard as a "material weakness." The report stated that

"Widespread individual and unit training management problems were identified in Army National Guard units. For example, individual training programs had not been established for soldiers not qualified in their duty positions; skill qualification test results were not being used to identify weaknesses in individual or unit training; [and] mission essential training was not always scheduled. Consequently, there was no assurance that soldiers received training in all the required tasks."

Over the next few months, we plan to continue our evaluation of skill qualifications in the Army Reserve and National Guard. This work will focus on identifying underlying causes of skill qualification problems and on evaluating the Army's proposals to address the problems.

²This report is prepared in accordance with the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act.

Madam Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or Members of the Subcommittee may have.