

Defense Report

AUSA



The Reserves Must be Supported

One of the first decisions the Carter administration should make is whether it will provide wholehearted support for the Reserve components of all the military services or continue the recent history of giving little more than lip service to the idea of well-manned, well-equipped Reserves.

While all the armed forces are experiencing significant shrinkage in reserve manpower the Army is suffering most. The present Administration and the Congress have been happy to approve the Army's "Total Force" concept of integrating Reserve and National Guard elements but they have not seen fit to provide the incentives needed to keep qualified men and women active in the Reserves. Quite to the contrary, the Administration recently sought to eliminate administrative duty pay for Reserve commanders and to prevent federal employees who are also reservists from getting paid leave while training. Fortunately, Congress rejected both ideas.

In this atmosphere of "lip service only" the numbers of reservists have been shrinking rapidly. The Army National Guard is authorized 400,000 paid positions but, at last report, had just 365,000 people on board—a shortage of 35,000. The Army Reserves is authorized 219,000 personnel but has only 195,000. The Reserve components of the other services are experiencing the same sort of shortfall. Administration reaction to the shrinking strength has been to simply cut authorizations—an apparent effort to provide more achievable recruiting goals and, at the same time, save money.

There is little doubt that the absence of Selective Service pressure plays a major role in the Army's problem. The draft brought men into the Army for two years then committed them to serve at least four more years in the active Reserve. Deprived of that source, Reserve leaders have tried hard to recruit volunteers but the incentives have been insufficient to convince sufficient young men and women to give up some of their leisure time to serve in the Guard or Reserve.

The membership of the Association of the United States Army has recently approved a resolution to support improved Reserve recruitment and retention incentives. The AUSA members from the regular Army, the Reserves and the civilian sector suggested incentives like educational assistance, enlistment and reenlistment bonuses, improved medical care (necessitated by training injuries) and a variety of retirement improvements.

If the Total Force is to work well enough for the regular forces—and the Nation—to be able to rely on the availability of reservists to respond quickly and effectively in an emergency, the reserve manpower must be there, trained and ready, before the emergency arises.