
Defense Report

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The Army Tells Reservists—Be Ready to Report When Called

For some time there has been concern among Army Reserve and National Guard commanders that in the event of an emergency significant numbers of their officers and enlisted men might not report for duty when called, claiming vital community or industrial involvement. The situation could be reminiscent of the beginning of World War II when some members of a few reserve units known better for their fancy uniforms and social functions than for their combat readiness scrambled to be discharged before the units were called to active duty.

Although the U.S. Army of 1941 relied greatly on the National Guard and Army Reserve to build up its combat forces the U.S. Army of 1977 needs good reserve units to simply get along in the early stages of combat. So many combat support units are now in the reserve structure that the regulars can no longer operate, even for a short time, without them.

The Army has now told reserve component commanders that the time to find out who will not report in the event of a mobilization or other emergency is now, not after the unit is called up. Any reservist whose occupation or personal situation would interfere with his or her ability to respond quickly to active duty orders should be transferred into the Standby Reserve at once. If they are eligible, of course, they can become members of the retired reserve or simply be discharged from the reserves.

The reservists and guardsmen affected by the order are all in units that conduct 48 training assemblies each year plus annual two-week "camps." They are paid for attendance at this training and the cumulative bill for their salaries plus other expenditures for transportation, ammunition, food and housing totals into the hundreds of millions of dollars. The government has wasted its investment in any reservist who accepts the pay and training then will not or cannot report when needed.

Beginning immediately the Army Inspector General will make a specific check of every Reserve unit in its annual general inspection to make sure the commanders have done whatever is necessary to guarantee their people will report when called.

Of course the new Army directive includes provisions for delays when unexpected events make a reservist unavailable. It also states very clearly that reserve commanders are authorized to use the full force of their authority, including the possibility of court martial, against a unit member who hides his true availability until the moment of call-up.

While the directive may seem harsh to some it mainly serves to emphasize how badly the Army needs its reserve elements. They have been trained and paid. They should be ready when needed.