
Defense Report

AUSA



The U.S. Soldier Overseas— How Long Should He Stay?

Beginning with the occupation forces in Germany and Japan after World War II, the United States has maintained substantial combat power overseas in support of a wide-ranging foreign policy. As late as the end of 1978 the number of U.S. troops overseas was almost a half million.

The public view of the life of our soldiers, sailors and marines overseas is most often derived from recruiting posters designed to make a tour of duty in Germany or deployed on an aircraft carrier appear enticing. There is no overt attempt to deceive prospective recruits but the hard fact is that what may seem different and exciting today becomes pure drudgery after many months of repetition. The drudgery can be escaped rather quickly by Marines on Okinawa or Soldiers in Korea because the tours of duty for most people in those less-well developed countries is only 13 months. A good soldier can keep his eye on the ball that long.

The bulk of the soldiers who go to Germany have enlisted for three years and will serve 30 months there. Two-year enlistees will have 18 months in Germany until he or she is ready to reenlist or be discharged. During that time they spend a major portion of their time in the field on maneuvers or in training areas, under all kinds of weather conditions and with little opportunity to enjoy the good life in one of Europe's most hospitable countries.

During rare moments of free time the U.S. soldiers in Germany find their pay does not stretch far enough for travel and they are trapped into whatever leisure activities are available locally. Unfortunately, this frequently consists of little other than clubs on military bases where liquor is cheap or civilian night life where a wide variety of drugs is available. Boredom is often translated into alcohol or drug abuse with resulting denigration of discipline, morale and unit effectiveness. The problem is particularly acute for the single soldiers living in the barracks. While there have been seven adjustments to the cost-of-living allowance for married soldiers in Germany over the past few years there are no allowances for the single men and women.

One obvious bit of help for the barracks-bound soldier in Germany would be to provide a cost-of-living adjustment. The Army hopes to institute one in the next fiscal year (FY'80) after having it stripped out because of cost of FY'79. Another obvious course of action would be to keep the younger, more susceptible people overseas for a maximum of 24 months.

There is no indication that the need for U.S. service people overseas will be diminished very soon. Our efforts to keep peace in the world will be well-served by providing our deployed forces with the wherewithall to live in dignity among our allies. The plausibility of our recruiting blandishments will be enhanced, too.

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