
Defense Report

AUSA



The Army Tries A New Reserve Incentive Program—It Probably Won't Do The Job

During the late 1960's and early 1970's there were waiting lines of men hoping to enlist in the Army Reserve or Army National Guard. To be sure, many of them were primarily motivated to find a sanctuary from the draft and possible service in Southeast Asia but the result was a fully-manned reserve structure that could have been a real asset to the Army in an emergency.

Draft calls were ended in 1972 and the trend of Army Reserve Component strength has been downward ever since. Today the combined Reserve and National Guard shortage in mobilization strength is in excess of 150,000 and, although the slide seems to be flattening out, there is no sign of a significant upturn. This condition is particularly alarming in view of the role the reserves are supposed to play in what is called The Total Army—a small, lean, very ready Active Army supposedly backed up by well-prepared reserve units. The Active Army is certainly small and lean but the reserve backup needed to make the whole setup work is simply not adequate.

This is not a problem that has arisen overnight or has just been recognized. The Association of the United States Army has been pointing it out for many months. Last year Congress appropriated just \$5 million to test a reserve enlistment bonus but the Defense Department only let the Army spend half that amount.

Now the Army has \$17.7 million committed to reserve incentives, with the bulk of the money allocated to encourage enlistments. A potential Reserve or National Guard recruit has two options, a \$1500 bonus for a four-year enlistment or educational assistance worth as much as \$2000. If the enlistee chooses the bonus, he or she collects \$750 on completion of initial training and qualification in a military specialty, with the balance being paid at the rate of \$200 per year with the final \$350 paid at the end of the fourth year. The educational assistance will pay up to \$500 per year over the four-year period, to the maximum of \$2000. For those already serving in the reserves a six-year enlistment extension will bring a bonus of \$1800. Because of limited funds this money is being made available only to help the highest priority units.

It is unfortunate that the Army must "buy" its reservists as it is now buying recruits for the active force. Throwing almost \$18 million at this problem may help some but there is no way it can bring the reserves to the state of personnel readiness needed to play their assigned role in the Total Army. The Administration and the Congress must quickly agree on a better way—including reestablishment of a capable Selective Service System—to get people into our reserve forces.