
Defense Report

AUSA



Mobilizing Military Retirees Is No Substitute for A Ready Force of Young Reservists

Manpower is of little value to the armed services unless the individual members of the manpower pool have been trained to perform military tasks. This is the basic reason behind the need to shorten the time it takes for the Selective Service System to get people to the Army's training centers. This is the reason all the services need a pool of trained Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines to fill the ranks of units deploying into combat or to replace early casualties. This is the reason why retired military personnel, within prescribed limits of age and physical condition, are subject to recall to active duty to replace younger people in an emergency.

Before the Defense Department was willing to acknowledge the need to revitalize the Selective Service System and before its functionaries decided to support registration for possible Selective Service there were frequent references to the substantial pool of trained manpower in the ranks of military retirees. Shortages in the Army's Individual Ready Reserve, the Department said, could be largely overcome by recalling the younger retirees. The Individual Ready Reserve is a group of former soldiers who have completed their period of volunteer service and are required to stay in the IRR until a total of six years of active and reserve service has been completed. In a mobilization situation the Army would need between 500,000 and 700,000 of these pre-trained people. The IRR is now between 300,000 and 500,000 short of those goals, depending on which one you accept as valid.

So how much of that shortage could be filled by retirees? There are about 160,000 enlisted and 18,000 officer retirees on the Army's rolls who are under 60 years of age. About 80,000 of these could relieve active duty personnel in support jobs but the vast majority range in age from the mid-forties to the late fifties and are hardly an ideal substitute for members of the IRR who have had recent service and are between 24 and 26 years of age. The IRR is stocked primarily with privates first class and corporals, the ranks that carry rifles, load cannon and climb telephone poles. The retiree ranks are populated with senior sergeants and, while their experience may be extremely valuable, we simply don't need as many of them.

The pool of retirees unquestionably represents a wealth of talent that could be put to very good use during a mobilization but it is foolhardy to expect the retirees to function as combat soldiers, in spite of their known willingness to be recalled to serve in an emergency. It would be much more to the point to look for ways to get more fully trained young soldiers into the IRR. One of those ways would be to use Selective Service to call young people for six months of training to be followed by assignment to inactive service in the IRR.