
Defense Report

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Army Plans to Stabilize Soldiers in Units—The Benefits Will Go Beyond Morale and Cohesion

The U.S. Army has undertaken to establish a "regimental system" of personnel assignments which would permit many soldiers to spend the bulk of their careers in companies or battalions of the same regiment. The soldiers in the units covered by the regimental system would go overseas together, then return to the stateside base from which they departed. If it can be made to work effectively, the regimental system will pay large dividends in improved morale and unit cohesion.

But the system will also pay excellent dividends in helping to deal with a phenomenon of the all-volunteer force that has been a source of difficulty and hardship: the nonavailability of jobs for the working spouses of service members. The number of spouses who contribute to the income of military families has risen sharply as more and more young people have been enlisted with the expectation of making a full career of military service. Unfortunately, the pay and allowances for junior soldiers does not go very far toward the adequate support of a family. In 1970, just before the all-volunteer system went into effect, just 30 percent of the wives of soldiers were working. By 1980 that figure had risen to 52 percent, one percent higher than the national rate.

Employers in the towns and cities around Army bases are often reluctant to hire Army wives because of the frequency with which Army families have been moving and the unpredictability of their tours at stateside posts. The reluctance is understandable, but the inability of Army wives to find employment has produced hardships that conspire to drive promising soldiers away from a military career.

Under the regimental system an Army wife seeking a job will be able to tell a prospective employer exactly how long her family will be assigned to the current posting and, when they leave to go overseas, she can tell the employer exactly when they will return. The element of uncertainty should be removed and, it is hoped, so will the reluctance to hire Army family members who otherwise have all the qualifications to be excellent employees.