

New Roles for Civilian Soldiers

National Guard takes on increased responsibilities at home and abroad

By Karen Imas



A soldier from the 210th Military Police Company, North Carolina Army National Guard, hugs his children as he returns to Asheville Regional Airport on June 10, 2004, after being deployed for over 15 months in Iraq. Department of Defense photo by Tech Sgt. Brian E. Christiansen, U.S. Air Force.

National defense is a mission often associated with the federal government, yet increasingly states are playing a vital role, overseas and at home, in providing troops, technology and manpower.

When they are deployed, troops in the Guard must put their civilian lives on hold. The concerns about job security, diminished income, and time away from loved ones put great pressure on these troops and their families.

“The increasing frequency of call-ups is becoming a hardship for some members of the guard who make considerably less in military pay than in their civilian jobs,” said Rhode Island Lt. Gov. Charles Fogarty. “This has left some of our guard families in tight financial situations, forcing them to struggle to pay bills while their loved ones fight on behalf of our country.”

“One third of our Guard members make less in the military than at their civilian jobs and they are worrying about making ends meet,” Fogarty said.

In a survey of 481 Army National Guard members from six states, the GAO found that 450 of them had experienced pay problems. Families state-side bear the burden.

In the war on terror, record numbers of National Guard members are being called up for longer deployments. Since Sept. 11, 2001, half the nation’s Army National Guard and 30 percent of the Air National Guard units have been activated to meet the national requirements of the war on terrorism, according to a report by the General Accounting Office based on the congressional testimony of Janet A. St. Laurent, the GAO’s director of defense capabilities and management.

Deployments of this size, which have not occurred since the Korean War, are bringing atten-

tion to the challenges faced by “civilian soldiers” and their families.

Deployment Since Sept. 11 and the Federal Outlook

The National Guard is composed primarily of civilians who serve their country, state and community part-time (usually one weekend each month and two weeks during the summer.) Each state, territory and the District of Columbia has its own Army and Air Force National Guard units. The Army National Guard has 350,000 troops—38 percent of the Army’s force structure. The Air National Guard has about 107,000 troops—34 percent of the total Air Force.

For state missions, the governor, through the state adjutant general, commands Guard forces. The governor can call the National Guard into action during local or statewide emergencies, such as storms, fires, earthquakes or civil disturbances. In addition, the president can activate the Guard for participation in federal missions.

More soldiers were called up and served in support of this nation in 2003 than in any year in the past 50 years. According to the Department of Defense, approximately 140,000 Army and Air Force National Guard and Reserve troops were on duty as of June 30, 2004. While the Guard is under the joint jurisdiction of the states and the military, Reservists are strictly under the control of the U.S. Department of Defense.

forces to support ongoing military operations. The Department of Defense also expects that mobilizations of up to one year or more will be the norm for Guard components during that time.

Challenges for States

Some state officials are concerned that with longer deployments, the Guard’s absence may put states at risk if there is a terrorist attack or natural disaster. New York Gov. George Pataki appeared in Congress recently urging lawmakers to support a plan that would ensure that at least half of all Guard troops would remain available for use by states in the event of emergencies or natural disasters. As of the end of March, 41 percent of New York’s National Guard troops were deployed.

Another concern about large Guard deployments is that small communities may lose first responders, including police officers and firefighters—popular professions among National Guard members.

Some states feel the squeeze more than others. Many state officials say they have enough Guard members available to deal with local emergencies. Thirteen percent of Vermont’s Guard members are on federal active duty, for example, well below the national average of 30 percent.

While national retention is currently on par with 2003, the stresses of long deployments and fear of injury or casualty may have a negative impact on retention and recruitment rates. Between October 2003 and February 2004, the Rhode Island



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Left: Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum briefs reporters on the transforming roles of the National Guard. Department of Defense photo by Helene C. Stikkel.

Since the Gulf War, the active military has downsized some 35 to 40 percent. Consequently, there is greater reliance on the National Guard and on the Reserve. Guard units with certain specialties—especially military police, transportation and engineering—are in high demand.

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National Guard was running 20 percent below its 10-year average for enlistments. As one of the state’s largest employers, the National Guard’s contribution to the local economy is significant.

In addition to staffing shortages, the Guard faces equipment shortages, at home and abroad. Air and Army Guard units have reported that they are shorthanded with equipment overseas and that some of the equipment is outdated. Some Guard troops



A North Carolina National Guard truck evacuates residents from a trailer park near Greenville, N.C. in September 1999 after flood waters caused by Hurricane Floyd forced them from their homes. Hundreds of National Guard troops in North Carolina and surrounding states were called on state active duty to provide disaster and humanitarian relief for thousands of people hit by Hurricane Floyd. Department of Defense photo by Staff Sgt. Bob Jordan, Army National Guard.

expressed concern that the active Army receives the most current equipment and technologies.

According to the GAO report, 22,000 pieces of equipment belonging to the National Guard had to be transferred from non-deploying units to deploying units to meet the demand overseas. In the event of a domestic emergency, “equipment and personnel may not be available to the states when they are needed because they have been deployed overseas,” the report concluded.

The Guard Restructures for Increased Responsibilities

In response to the Guard’s increased responsibilities, National Guard Bureau Chief Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum outlined a plan last year to streamline the state military bureaus, the Army Guard’s state area commands, and the Air Guard’s state headquarters into single joint headquarters. Last summer, the National Guard Bureau began functioning as a joint headquarters and the state and territorial headquarters began functioning as provisional joint commands in October. The intent is to have the 54 joint force headquarters fully operational by October 2005.

“This will ensure a rapid and coordinated response to any emergency, making the National Guard more versatile, relevant, and able to meet our national security challenges,” said Blum in congressional testimony.

The reorganization will also make it easier to implement one of the Guard’s homeland security pilot programs. Twelve states have been selected to field enhanced chemical, biological and incident

response task forces. The states in the pilot program are California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington and West Virginia.

Many of the concerns about longer and increased deployments have been bolstered by the April GAO report, which called for further restructuring of the Guard. The report, *Reserve Forces: Observations on Recent National Guard Use in Overseas and Homeland Missions and Future Challenges*, says that the Defense Department, the states and Congress face three major challenges with regard to balancing the Guard’s future role in overseas and domestic missions:

- the eroding readiness of Army Guard units that may be mobilized for overseas operations within the next few years;
- the need to determine how the Army National Guard should be structured and funded to support federal missions in the longer term; and
- how to balance homeland and overseas requirements.

Although the report commends Blum’s restructuring efforts, it recommends that the National Guard be restructured further to reflect its expanded role in defense. In order for Blum’s reforms to work, it adds, they must be backed up by federal funding and by increased cooperation among the Defense Department, Congress and the states.

“The way ahead includes making sure that no more than 50 percent of any state’s Guard force is involved in the nation’s war fighting effort at any given time so that between 50 and 75 percent of the force can be available on a no-notice, immediate basis for missions on their home turf,” Blum said during a speech at a recent National Governors Association meeting.

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—Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn

State Initiatives to Support the Guard

While decisions on restructuring the Guard will come from the federal level, state officials have been working to ease the strain on activated troops.

Many lieutenant governors across the country are taking the lead in ensuring that National Guard troops and their families are provided for during deployment and upon their return. Lieutenant governors are also working to guarantee that state needs, whether homeland security or natural disaster response, are met during periods of high National Guard deployment.

Continued on page 36



Virgin Islands Adjutant Gen. Cleave McBean, Retired Gen. Samuel Ebbesen, Lt. Gov. Vargrave A. Richards, and Gov. Charles W. Turnbull welcome returning National Guard members from a tour of duty in Afghanistan.

National Guard

Continued from page 21

The National Lieutenant Governor's Association, a CSG affiliate, has passed two resolutions supporting these goals—one urging state legislatures to pass military relief funds to support Guard members' families, and another urging balance between the Guard's state and federal roles (visit www.nlga.us to read the resolutions).

"Having the resolutions passed by NLGA has brought increased attention to the issue, leading to more initiatives among state officials to support the National Guard," said Julia Hurst, executive director of the association.

Military relief funds are part of a national effort to provide grants of \$500 to \$2,000 to families of National Guard members and reservists. The first military relief fund law came into effect in Illinois in February 2003. More than \$1.3 million in grants has been distributed to more than 2,500 families in the state to help with rent, utility bills and other expenses. Individuals can donate to the fund by checking a box on their state tax forms.

"There are 311,951 dependents of citizen soldiers who have plenty to worry about when their loved ones are stationed on the frontlines in the fight against terrorism," said Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn.

He has launched Operation Home Front, a Web site dedicated to offering services to National Guard members and reservists and informing them about their rights under the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act.

Maine Gov. John Baldacci and Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal also recently signed into law military relief fund legislation, and South Carolina's bill was awaiting Gov. Mark Sanford's signature as of this writing. Similar bills are pending in California, Connecticut, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Washington. Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner set up a military relief fund in April 2003 through executive order. Delaware also has pending legislation for a check-off box to appear on state tax forms that would allow individuals to donate to the fund.

The recently passed and pending military relief fund bills will not take effect until taxes are collected for 2004. In the meantime, state officials have responded quickly to other Guard needs, particularly equipment and supply shortages. They have done so through care package drives, working with corporations for donations of supplies, and lobbying on the federal level.

In Delaware, Gov. Minner appointed Lt. Gov. John Carney to lead a comprehensive program to help part-time troops in the state. One initiative would extend state health insurance benefits for Guard member families up to two years from the current six months.

Federal Legislation Addresses Concerns

In late June, the House and Senate passed their FY 2005 defense authorization bills, which addressed some of the Guard and Reserve readiness issues. As this article went to press, conference negotiations were about to begin. The Senate authorized the establishment of a commission to study Guard and Reserve roles and missions, including the pay and benefit process. The commission's report would be due at the end of 2005.

Both the House and Senate set aside funds for body armor and Humvees in response to equipment shortages faced by Guard members and reservists. The bills also seek to extend greater health benefits to Guard members and Reservists through Tricare, the health care program for active duty and retired members of the uniformed services. The Senate bill goes further by offering National Guard and reserves access to Tricare even when they are not deployed.

Rhode Island Lt. Gov Charles Fogarty, House Majority Leader Gordon D. Fox and Senate Majority Leader Teresa Paiva-Weed are leading the "Strong Families, Strong Troops" campaign, advocating for tax credits, education assistance, health care and financial protection for National Guard members and their families. There are 21 pending bills in the Legislature related to the initiative.

To bolster retention and recruitment, one of the Rhode Island bills would authorize the National Guard to establish a three-year program to pay a recruitment finder's fee for persons referring enlistees who complete basic training. Two related bills would provide free tuition to public universities in the state to the spouse and children of members of the Guard or reservists who die on active duty.

In the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the government passed a law in April 2003 ensuring that university students in the reserves and the Puerto Rico National Guard are not academically or financially penalized when called to duty. There are 6,000 Guard members and reservists enrolled in Puerto Rico's universities and advanced academic institutions.

As these initiatives show, although state officials can't control foreign policy or natural disasters, they can help support Guard members and their families adjust to the new reality.

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