

RAND Research Brief

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How Did ODS/S Affect the RC? Evidence from the 1992 RC Survey

Operation Desert Shield/Storm (ODS/S) was the first major mobilization of reserve forces (the Reserve Components, RC) in almost 50 years. Since then, reservists have participated in numerous other operations, including the recent effort in Bosnia. Such mobilizations are likely to be more frequent in the future and are likely to have important effects on reservists' attitudes and the degree of support they receive from their families and civilian employees.

This study examines this issue, drawing on the results of two RC surveys of enlisted personnel and officers conducted by the Department of Defense (DoD)—the first in 1986, before ODS/S, and the second in 1992, after ODS/S. Researchers use the surveys to conduct descriptive analyses about changing attitudes and perceptions before and after the mobilization; the study also compares the responses of mobilized and nonmobilized reservists in 1992.

RETENTION-RELATED ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

From 1986 to 1992, the motivation for staying in the guard/reserve shifted: Enlisted personnel put less emphasis on immediate compensation and promotion and greater importance on educational benefits, whereas officers mentioned patriotic and job satisfaction motives more frequently. Both enlisted personnel and officers indicated a small but definite increase in levels of dissatisfaction with military pay and opportunities for education/training, perhaps partly reflecting the perceived higher risk of mobilization and the attendant potential economic losses.

On the positive side, respondents reported that they had fewer conflicts with their employers over the demands of reserve obligations; this more favorable attitude may reflect employer awareness of the significant contributions reservists made during ODS/S. And a little surprisingly (given the increased chance of mobilization),

attitudes of spouses remained stable from 1986 to 1992—a significant finding given how important the spouse's attitude is in reenlistment decisions.

In comparing mobilized and nonmobilized reservists, we found some significant differences. Mobilized officers and enlisted personnel reported higher proportions of unfavorable attitudes among their spouses; however, although mobilized officers reported higher proportions of unfavorable attitudes on the part of their civilian supervisors, enlisted personnel reported little or no difference in supervisor attitudes. Finally, although junior mobilized officers and enlisted personnel were much more dissatisfied with pay and benefits than their nonmobilized counterparts, overall satisfaction was almost the same in the two groups.

Although the study cannot speak definitively on how mobilization affects retention—see MR-943-OSD¹ for more on this subject—it does provide a useful first look. Reservists across most grades reported much lower subjective probabilities of reenlistment/continuation in the 1992 survey than in the 1986 one, but a simple analysis of continuation rates found little difference between the two periods. In effect, the data show no dramatic change in overall behavior that could be attributable to ODS/S.

PERCEIVED PROBLEMS IN MEETING UNIT TRAINING OBJECTIVES

The majority of reservists did not perceive serious problems in their units' ability to meet training objectives. There is remarkable similarity in the 1986 and 1992 groups in the level and type of concern expressed by reservists about the problems facing units in meeting training objectives. Uncertainty about the future status of the unit (not

¹Sheila Nataraj Kirby and Scott Naftel, *The Effect of Mobilization on Retention of Enlisted Reservists After Operation Desert Shield/Storm*, RAND, MR-943-OSD, 1998.

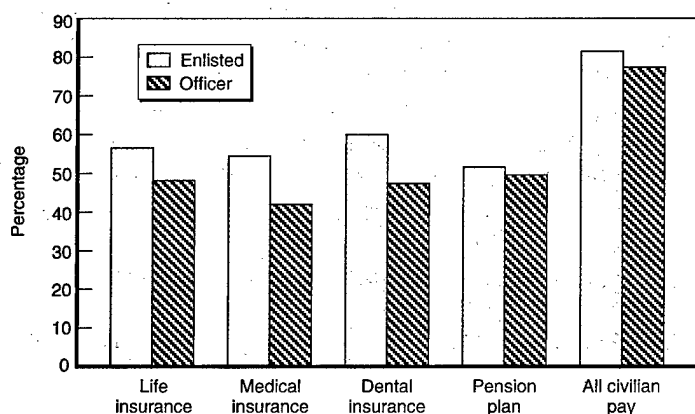
previously an issue) was a major concern voiced by a significant proportion of both enlisted personnel and officers in 1992.

In addition, there was little difference in rankings of problems by mobilized and nonmobilized reservists. This may indicate that peacetime perceptions of units' ability to meet training objectives could provide a good basis for designing changes in training and personnel policies that could enhance performance.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS FOR FUTURE RESERVE MOBILIZATIONS

Family and economic issues dominated the list of problems that reservists are likely to face if mobilized. Potential loss of income was the most important concern of reservists, mentioned by 35–40 percent of respondents, whereas burden on spouses and increased family problems were mentioned by 20–30 percent. The loss of civilian health benefits ranked third, mentioned by one-fifth of the reservists. Employer-related concerns—problems with employers when mobilized and returning, getting the same job back, damage to business practice, problems for clients and patients—were somewhat lower down the list.

The figure below—which shows the percentage of the mobilized sample losing civilian benefits and pay during mobilization—reveals why the loss of civilian benefits is such a concern. Depending on benefit and rank, between 40–60 percent of those mobilized lost benefits, with more than three-fourths of both enlisted personnel and officers receiving no civilian pay during mobilization.



Mobilized and nonmobilized reservists did not have drastically different perceptions of problems, suggesting that reservists have relatively accurate perceptions of the problems they are likely to face. However, nonmobilized reservists were more concerned about income loss and loss of civilian health benefits than were mobilized reservists, suggesting that the reality was not as bad as expected; and mobilized reservists expressed more concern than their counterparts about marital stability and their children, suggesting that this issue may be worse than expected.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The chief concern of reservists is potential economic losses if mobilized. Another major concern is loss of civilian health care benefits. Although reserve families become eligible for military health care upon mobilization, the loss of civilian benefits can cause serious problems. For those losing civilian benefits—a large group (as shown above)—the burden remains on the family to work out issues of location and access, possible transfer of medical records, and obtaining continuing care for chronic conditions. Directing efforts to maintain the same civilian-provided health care arrangements for families when reservists are mobilized seems warranted. This might be done through special TRICARE reimbursement mechanisms or through direct payments to families or employers. However, policies should be shaped so that employers who maintain coverage do not shift responsibility to the government.

Further focus on family-oriented programs for mobilized reservists supporting spouses and children also seems warranted. The precipitous shift of burden and responsibilities to spouses upon mobilization, the related effects on children, and the possible risk to marital stability might be alleviated through improved access to counseling and support during mobilization, especially during the stressful transition periods.

Finally, the fact that educational benefits were a much bigger drawing card in 1992 than in 1986 for younger enlisted personnel raises the question—largely unanswered—of whether such generally high-quality recruits are likely to have lower retention.

RAND research briefs summarize research that has been more fully documented elsewhere. This research brief describes work done for the National Defense Research Institute; it is documented in Costs and Benefits of Reserve Participation: New Evidence from the 1992 Reserve Components Survey, by Sheila Nataraj Kirby et al., MR-812-OSD, 1997, 190 pp., \$15.00, ISBN: 0-8330-2513-9, available from RAND Distribution Services (Telephone: toll free 877-584-8642; FAX: 310-451-6915; or Internet: order@rand.org). Abstracts of all RAND documents may be viewed on the World Wide Web (<http://www.rand.org>). Publications are distributed to the trade by NBN. RAND® is a registered trademark. RAND is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis; its publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of its research sponsors.

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