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ARMY READINESS

Readiness Improved for Selected Divisions, but Manning Imbalances Persist

20020102 055



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Contents

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A
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Letter		1
	Results in Brief	2
	Background	3
	Divisions Report They Can Conduct Wartime Operations	6
	Impact of Peacekeeping Missions on Unit Readiness Has Varied	19
	Conclusion	21
	Recommendation for Executive Action	21
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	21
	Scope and Methodology	22

Appendix I	Comments From the Department of Defense	25
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Appendix II	GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments	27
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Tables		
	Table 1: Peacekeeping Missions and Personnel Deployed for Selected Divisions (Feb. 1998 Through June 2001)	4
	Table 2: Divisions Reporting Selected Military Occupational Specialties Shortages (Jan. Through June 2001)	11
	Table 3: Selected Military Occupational Specialty Fill Rates and Authorizations (May 2001)	12

Figures		
	Figure 1: Deployment Timeline and Number of Personnel Deployed for Selected Divisions (Feb. 1998 Through June 2001)	5
	Figure 2: Enlisted Personnel Manning Levels for the Five Selected Divisions (Dec. 1999 Through May 2001)	8
	Figure 3: Enlisted Personnel Grade Levels in the Five Selected Divisions (May 2001)	9
	Figure 4: Enlisted Personnel Fill Rates by Military Occupational Specialty in the Five Selected Divisions (May 2001)	10
	Figure 5: Aggregate Average Mission Capable Rate for Ground and Air Systems for Five Selected Divisions (Jan. Through June 2001)	17

Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	General Accounting Office
METL	Mission Essential Task List



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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

December 20, 2001

The Honorable Bob Stump
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable John M. McHugh
Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

In 1998 we testified that personnel shortages, assignment priorities, and frequent peacekeeping deployments were degrading the combat readiness of the Army's five later-deploying divisions.¹ In October 2000, you requested that we follow up our 1998 testimony to examine a number of issues associated with the readiness of the five divisions that had been considered later-deploying. In July 2001, we reported our initial observations on personnel readiness issues for these forces, particularly, the progress in achieving the goals of the Army Chief of Staff's manning initiative of October 1999.² This initiative was designed to ensure that all active Army units are assigned 100 percent of enlisted personnel in terms of the authorized numbers, grades, and skills needed to perform wartime missions. Since that report, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the Bush administration formulated a new military strategy. These developments may change how, when, and where these divisions will be used—as evidenced by the deployment of soldiers from the 10th Infantry Division in Operation Enduring Freedom.

¹ Such forces deploy in the event of a second simultaneous or nearly simultaneous major-theater war, or as reinforcements for a larger-than-expected first war. The Army has 10 active combat divisions, 4 of which—the 82nd Airborne, 101st Air Assault, 3rd Infantry, and 1st Cavalry—are "contingency" divisions, the first to deploy to a major-theater war. The 2nd Infantry Division, while not a contingency force, is currently deployed in Korea. The remaining five divisions—the 1st Armored, 1st Infantry, 4th Infantry, 10th Infantry, and 25th Infantry—are the focus of this report. For a transcript of our testimony, see *Military Readiness: Observations on Personnel Readiness in Later Deploying Army Divisions* (GAO/T-NSIAD-98-126, Mar. 20, 1998).

² See *Military Readiness: Preliminary Observations on the Army's Manning Initiative* (GAO-01-979R, July 26, 2001).

This report, which was largely completed prior to the events of September 11, 2001, focuses on the other unit-readiness¹ issues you requested that we review. We analyzed (1) the current state of the combat readiness of personnel, training, and equipment in these divisions and (2) the effect of peacekeeping missions on that readiness.

Results in Brief

On the basis of our examination of the Army's official readiness and training reports and discussions with division personnel, as of June 2001, the five divisions reported they were ready and able to perform all or most of their combat missions. Throughout the review period, these divisions reported that their readiness was at high levels both overall and in the specific areas of personnel, training, and equipment. Enlisted personnel levels were at or near 100 percent of their authorization compared with 93 percent as we reported in March 1998. The divisions also increased the numbers of assigned personnel by grades to more than 95 percent and skills (i.e., occupational specialties) to greater than 100 percent by May 2001.

These staffing improvements were due largely to the Army Chief of Staff's manning initiative. However, imbalances of occupational specialty staffing levels for certain combat support skills continue to exist among the five divisions. In one specialty, for example, one division had no positions filled, while another was staffed at 119 percent of its authorized level. In the area of training, each division met its requirements for training to prepare for combat missions. Reported readiness based on the amount of equipment on hand and the serviceability of that equipment² was high, indicating that the five divisions were able to perform their combat

¹ Unit readiness is the ability of units to accomplish their assigned missions. Commanders periodically report their units' readiness via the Status of Resources and Training System, which uses various indicators to assess the readiness of personnel, training, equipment, and the unit overall. Commanders also provide comments in these status reports when a unit's condition needs explanation or discussion. A commander cannot change the system's measurement of personnel, training, and equipment readiness, but he can change the unit's overall readiness level if he believes that it does not truly represent the unit's status.

² "Equipment readiness" is indicated in two unit status report resource areas—equipment on hand status and equipment serviceability status. "Equipment on hand" indicates whether units have their principal weapon systems and major equipment items compared with their wartime requirements. "Equipment serviceability" indicates how well units are maintaining their on hand reportable equipment. The serviceability rate is a percentage based on the number of days that reportable equipment is available to the unit and fully able to do its mission compared with the number of days it could have been available.

missions, although there were shortages of some items and difficulties in maintaining some equipment. Equipment shortages were attributed to outdated authorization documents and the incomplete fielding of new equipment. According to readiness reports, however, these shortages generally did not degrade readiness. Maintenance problems were primarily attributed to the shortage of personnel with specific repair skills and the difficulties encountered with old equipment.

Army officials found it difficult to quantify the varied effects of peacekeeping operations on the five divisions' readiness. According to division commanders, participation in peacekeeping operations improved readiness: it enhanced training for some support activities and provided leadership opportunities for junior officers and senior enlisted personnel. However, peacekeeping operations can also have negative effects. For example, absences from home stations due to peacekeeping can erode war-fighting skills, especially those that require the maneuvering of large armored or infantry formations. In November 1999, the Army recognizing the significance of ongoing peacekeeping operations and their effect on reported readiness, issued supplemental readiness reporting guidance to assist commanders in determining the availability of unit assets deployed for peacekeeping operations for redeployment to a war. As a result of the new guidance, reported readiness significantly improved for two divisions in the following month. Additionally, the guidance acknowledged the need for deliberate planning efforts for disengagement, recovery, reconstitution, and redeployment of Army forces and equipment committed to current and future peacekeeping operations. Divisions have developed disengagement plans designed to quickly recover and retrain units returning from peacekeeping operations to their critical war-fighting skills.

To address staffing imbalances for occupational specialties common to all its divisions, we are recommending that the Army develop and implement a plan to address those imbalances in making staffing decisions affecting the divisions and monitor its progress in alleviating the imbalances. DOD concurred with our recommendation.

Background

The Army maintains 10 active divisions—6 heavy and 4 light, each of which is assigned 10,000 to 15,000 personnel. Heavy divisions are armored or mechanized and equipped with tanks, fighting vehicles, and attack helicopters. Light forces are airborne, air assault, and infantry divisions tailored for operations on restricted terrain, such as mountains, jungles, or urban areas. We reviewed the following five divisions:

- 1st Armored Division—Also known as "Old Ironsides," is a heavy armored division with headquarters and three brigades in Germany and a fourth brigade at Fort Riley, Kansas.
- 1st Infantry Division—Also known as the "Big Red One," is a mechanized division with two brigades and headquarters in Germany and a third brigade at Fort Riley, Kansas.
- 4th Infantry Division—Also known as "Ivy," is a mechanized division with two brigades and its headquarters at Fort Hood, Texas, and a third brigade at Fort Carson, Colorado.
- 10th Infantry Division—Also known as the "Mountain" Division, is a light infantry division with headquarters and two brigades at Fort Drum, New York.
- 25th Infantry Division—Also known as "Tropic Lightning," is a light infantry division with headquarters and two brigades at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and a third brigade at Fort Lewis, Washington.

In addition to preparing to fight and win the nation's wars, these divisions have deployed soldiers and units periodically to peacekeeping operations. For example, since 1995 units from the 1st Armored, 1st Infantry, and 10th Infantry divisions have deployed at various times to Bosnia as part of an international peacekeeping force. Since February 1998, these divisions have deployed 12 brigade-size units and supported numerous smaller deployments. (See table 1.)

Table 1: Peacekeeping Missions and Personnel Deployed for Selected Divisions (Feb. 1998 Through June 2001)

Division	Brigade-sized deployments	Battalion-sized deployments	Deployments < 200 personnel	Total deployments
1st Infantry	8	1	0	9
1st Armored	4	1	0	5
10th Infantry	0	4	4	8
25th Infantry	0	1	15	16
4th Infantry	0	2	0	2
Total	12	9	19	40

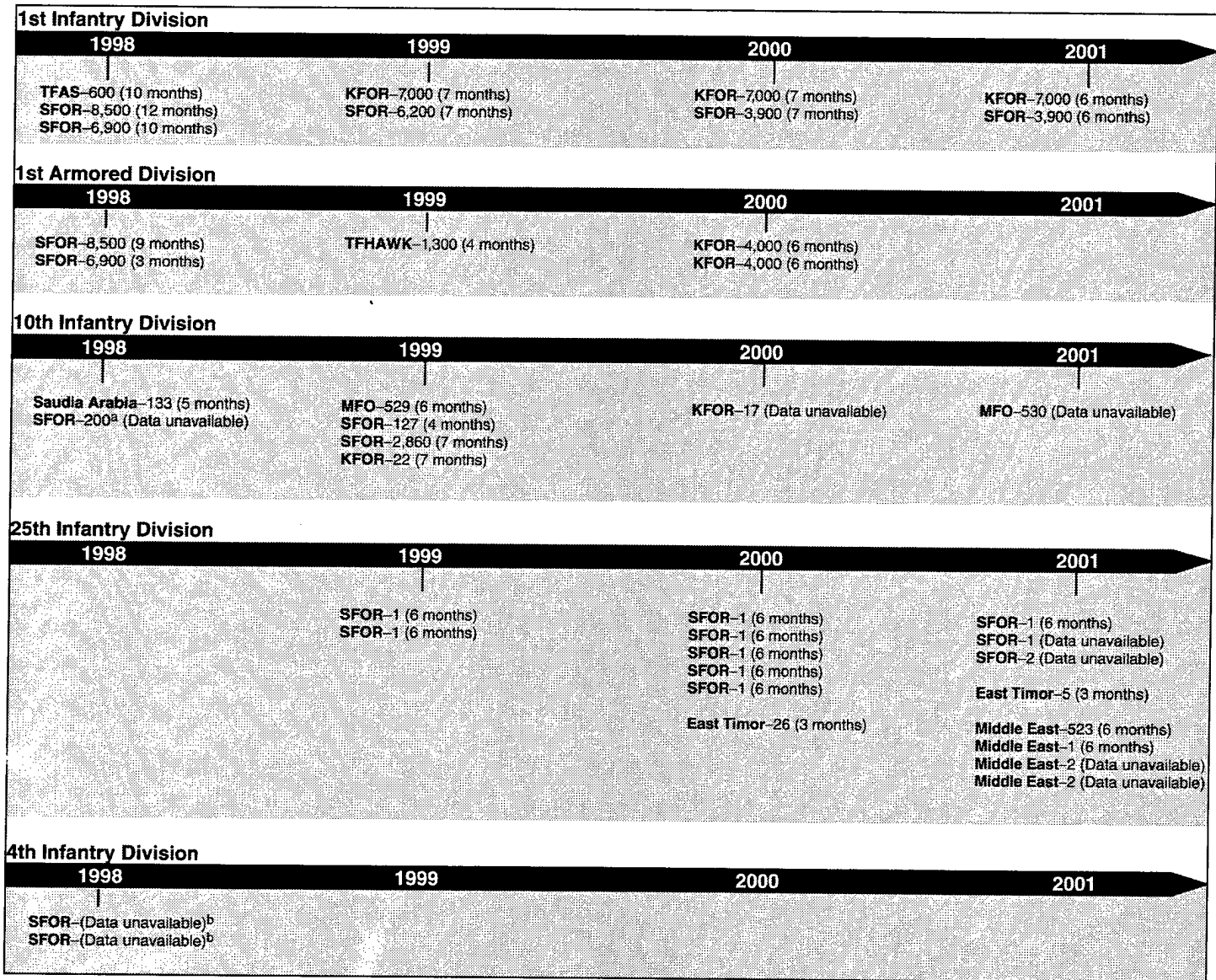
Legend

< means less than

Source: GAO's analysis of divisions' data.

Nearly 83 percent of all the deployments—to include all the brigade-sized deployments—were to the Balkans, while the remaining deployments were to the Middle East and East Timor. (See fig. 1.)

Figure 1: Deployment Timeline and Number of Personnel Deployed for Selected Divisions (Feb. 1998 Through June 2001)



Legend

- TFAS = Task Force Able Sentry
- SFOR = Stabilization Force—Bosnia
- KFOR = Kosovo Force—NATO Operation Joint Guardian
- TFHawk = Task Force Hawk—Albania
- MFO = Multinational Force Observers

Note: Each deployment shown on the timeline is placed beneath the fiscal year during which it began, first showing the name of the operation, followed by the number of personnel deployed, then the number of months deployed. If the data were not available, they are so indicated.

*According to a 10th Infantry division official, this number is an estimate of the number of soldiers deployed during 1998 for operations in Bosnia.

³The 4th Infantry Division deployed two battalions to Bosnia during fiscal years 1998–2000. However, the division could not provide detailed data showing the total number of personnel, exact year, or length of time deployed.

Source: GAO's analysis of the Department of the Army's and divisions' data.

Two of these divisions have been involved in transformation activities. The 4th Infantry is the Army's experimental division for advanced war-fighting concepts, and part of a brigade of the 25th Infantry is designated to test transformation concepts.

The manning initiative directed all Army units to be staffed at 100 percent of their authorized personnel by numbers, grades, and skills³—and thereafter to maintain those staffing levels—so that they have the personnel needed for wartime missions. The initiative redressed staffing imbalances that had developed in part because staffing priority had been given to the contingency divisions. It included certain measures to ensure the maintenance of adequate readiness; for example, units are to have no fewer than 70 percent of authorized personnel. The Chief of Staff also emphasized retention and described recruitment as his number one task.

Divisions Report They Can Conduct Wartime Operations

Although the specific details are classified, each of the five divisions reported they can conduct most or all of their wartime missions. Throughout January to June 2001, these units reported their overall combat readiness and their readiness in personnel, training, and equipment to be at high levels. The division, brigade, and battalion commanders we interviewed considered the five divisions able to perform their wartime missions. Although the personnel levels for all five divisions are at or near 100 percent of the enlisted personnel that they are authorized, each has some shortages in grades and skills. In at least some cases, the redistribution of existing soldiers would fill these staffing shortages. Training also improved, which Army officials attributed to (1)

³ Skills are grouped by grade as follows: skill level 1, E1–E4 (lowest grades of enlisted personnel: Private, Private First Class, Corporal, and Specialist); level 2, E5–E6 (mid-level noncommissioned officers: Sergeant, and Staff Sergeant); and level 3, E7–E9 (senior noncommissioned officers: Sergeant First Class, Master Sergeant, First Sergeant, Sergeant Major, Command Sergeant Major, and Sergeant Major of the Army).

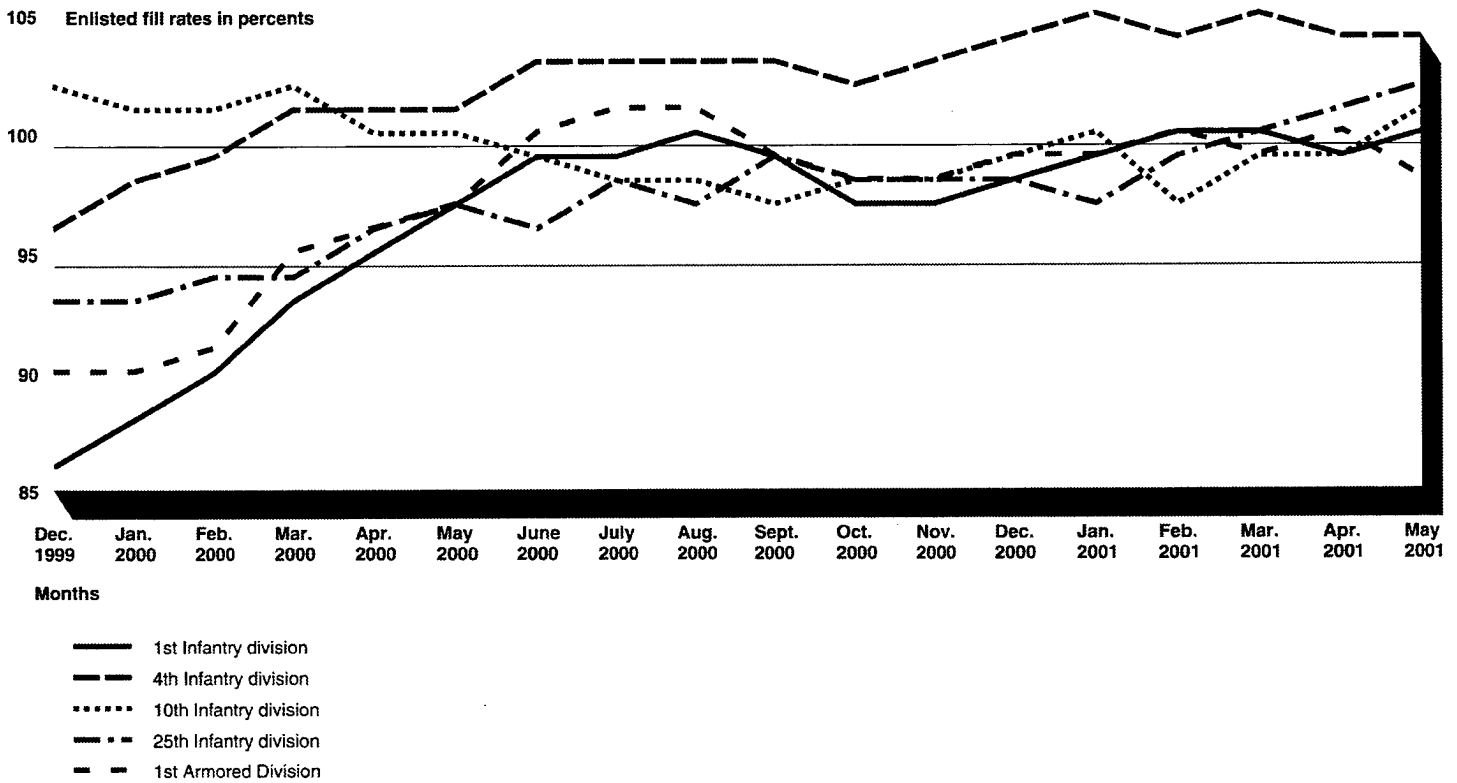
the increase in the number of personnel, prompted by the manning initiative, and (2) the implementation of a new funding policy for fiscal year 2001 that restricted the use of training funds to pay for other expenses. However, the Army could not show specifically how the new funding policy improved training or unit readiness. In terms of the amount of equipment on hand and its serviceability, readiness was high during fiscal year 2001, although some items were in short supply and some equipment difficult to maintain. Shortages were attributed to outdated authorizations and the incomplete fielding of new equipment; according to the Army's readiness reports, equipment shortages generally did not degrade readiness. Equipment maintenance problems were primarily attributed to the shortage of personnel with specific repair skills and the difficulties associated with maintaining old equipment.

Manning Initiative Has Increased Personnel Fill Rates, but Shortages in Some Skills and Grade Levels Persist

As we reported in July 2001, the manning initiative was largely responsible for staffing the reviewed divisions at authorized enlisted levels and, as a result, improving personnel readiness. For the time period January through May 2001, each of the five divisions maintained overall numbers of enlisted personnel at nearly 100 percent of authorizations,⁴ compared with the 93 percent we reported in March 1998. (See fig. 2.)

⁴ Our analysis did not include personnel data for the 25th Infantry Division's 1st Brigade, located at Ft. Lewis, Washington.

Figure 2: Enlisted Personnel Manning Levels for the Five Selected Divisions (Dec. 1999 Through May 2001)



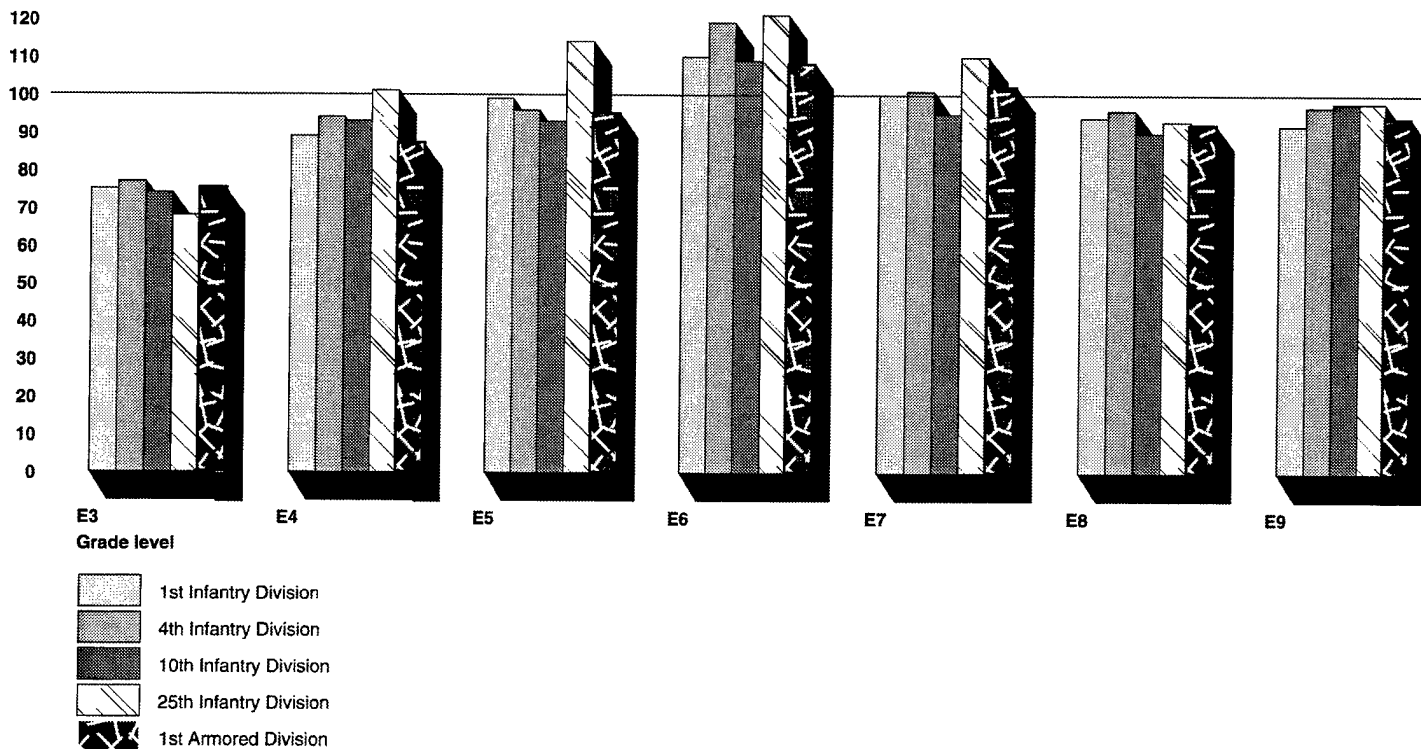
Note: Our analysis does not include personnel data for the 25th Infantry Division's 1st Brigade, located at Ft. Lewis, Washington.

Source: GAO's analysis of the Army Personnel Command's data.

The divisions also increased, on average, the numbers of assigned personnel by grade to more than 95 percent (see fig. 3) and skills to greater than 100 percent (see fig. 4) by May 2001.

Figure 3: Enlisted Personnel Grade Levels in the Five Selected Divisions (May 2001)

Fill rates in percents

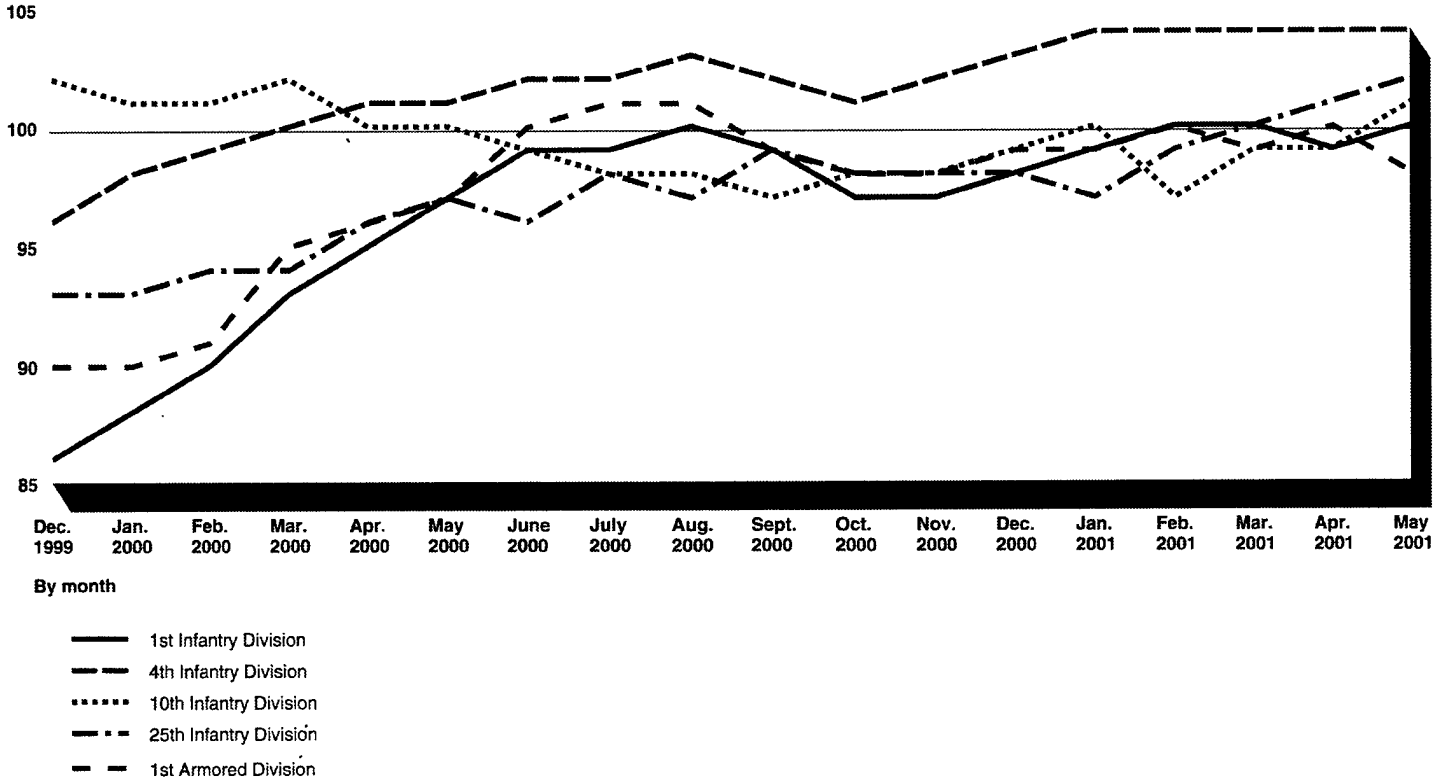


Note: Our analysis does not include personnel data for the 25th Infantry Division's 1st Brigade, located at Ft. Lewis, Washington.

Source: GAO's analysis of the Army Personnel Command's data.

Figure 4: Enlisted Personnel Fill Rates by Military Occupational Specialty in the Five Selected Divisions (May 2001)

Enlisted fill rates for all military occupational specialties in percents



Note: Our analysis does not include personnel data for the 25th Infantry Division's 1st Brigade, located at Ft. Lewis, Washington.

Source: GAO's analysis of the Army Personnel Command's data.

According to Army officials, the increase in personnel has had a great impact not only on personnel readiness but on overall readiness as well. They believe that the increase in personnel overall, as well as in grade and skill, increased the number of personnel available to train and perform maintenance activities, thereby improving overall readiness.

Though manning has improved significantly over the past 2 years, divisions still have shortages in certain combat support skills that Army commanders consider critical to their wartime mission. For example, at some time in those months, all five division commanders considered their staffing of specialty 96R—ground surveillance system operator—to be critically short. One commander listed it as critical in all 6 months, while another listed it for 5; the others did so in at least 2 of the 6 months.

According to Army officials at the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, this particular specialty has poor retention for initial term soldiers; retention is better for mid-term and career soldiers. Table 2 shows how many division commanders in a particular month reported a shortage for the specified military occupational specialty.

Table 2: Divisions Reporting Selected Military Occupational Specialties Shortages (Jan. Through June 2001)

Military occupational specialty	2001					
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June
27E — Land combat electronic missile system repairer	1	1	0	0	0	0
63Z — Mechanical maintenance supervisor	0	1	1	0	0	0
96H — Imagery ground station operator	1	0	0	0	0	0
96R — Ground surveillance system operator	4	4	4	2	2	2
97E — Interrogator	1	1	1	2	2	3
98J — Electronic intelligence interceptor/analyst	0	1	1	1	1	1

Source: GAO's analysis of data from the Army's Unit Status Reporting System.

In addition to the shortages reported at the division level in table 2, brigade and battalion commanders told us they have experienced shortages such as aircraft electricians, aviation mechanics; and aircraft power train repairers. Even though brigade and battalion commanders reported some of these critical shortages on monthly reports, the shortages might not have been reported at the division level.⁵

Our analysis of fill rates for occupational skill specialties shows that one area that the Army needs to address is the imbalance of occupational specialty staffing levels among the five divisions.⁶ In some instances, one or more divisions have too few soldiers for a particular skill, while others

⁵ Division commanders have the authority to subjectively report or not report these shortages on monthly reports on the basis of their perceptions of how essential the specialties are to performing their mission.

⁶ In March 2000, we reported that aggregate measures of retention mask significant reductions that occurred among specific groups of enlisted military personnel in different occupational specialties. While the types of occupational groups that saw retention declines differed somewhat in each service, the majority of them were concentrated in the areas of communications and intelligence and electrical and mechanical equipment repair. See *Military Personnel: Systematic Analyses Needed to Monitor Retention in Key Careers and Occupations* (GAO/NSIAD-00-60, Mar. 8, 2000).

have more soldiers than authorized. As shown in table 3, the Army fill rate for these selected specialties ranged from 74 to 101 percent, yet the rates for the five divisions ranged from zero to 133 percent. For example, for specialty 96H—imagery ground station operator⁷—the Army fill rate was 74 percent, yet the 10th Infantry Division's fill rate was zero percent, compared with 119 percent for the 4th Infantry Division.

Table 3: Selected Military Occupational Specialty Fill Rates and Authorizations (May 2001)

Military occupational specialty	Army fill rate	Range of authorizations among divisions	Range of fill rates among divisions
27E — Land combat electronic missile system repairer	101%	12-58	67%–125%
63Z — Mechanical maintenance supervisor	99%	19-40	79%–103%
96H — Imagery ground station operator	74%	25-37	0%–119%
96R — Ground surveillance system operator	84%	58-59	75%–90%
97E — Interrogator	89%	10-12	60%–100%
98J — Electronic intelligence interceptor/analyst	85%	5-9	60%–133%

Note: Our analysis does not include personnel data for the 25th Infantry Division's 1st Brigade, located at Ft. Lewis, Washington.

Source: GAO's analysis of the Army Personnel Command's data.

The fill rates shown in table 3 are as of May 2001, but in our opinion are generally representative of the trend from December 1999 through May 2001. Our review indicates that, in at least some of these cases, the redistribution of existing soldiers would fill such staffing shortages. For example, for specialty 27E—land combat electronic missile system repairer—redistribution would fill three of the five divisions to 100 percent and the other two to 96 percent.

As we reported earlier,⁸ Army officials think it unlikely that the service can ever fill divisions at 100 percent in the grades and skills required; they

⁷ Imagery ground station operator supervises or participates in detecting, locating, and tracking ground targets and rotary wing and slow-moving fixed wing aircraft.

⁸ See GAO-01-979R.

estimate that about 94 percent may be the best they can do. Changes in requirements can be prompted by a need for greater expertise in a skill, by the unforeseen alteration of a mission, or by upheavals in global politics. For instance, the end of the Cold War led the Army to reduce the number of Russian interpreters it needs, while increasing its requirements for Spanish interpreters. Also, personnel with highly technical skills may not be easy to recruit, so a time lag to fill these slots is often inevitable.

Given the dynamics of rapidly evolving military technologies and the skills needed to employ those technologies, in concert with recent changes to the U.S. national security and military strategies, it is a challenging task for the Army to achieve its goal to man all of its active component divisions at 100 percent of its authorized enlisted personnel by the skills and grades needed. Army officials acknowledge there have been problems with recruiting and retaining personnel for these specialties, and several of them will be placed on the Army's top-25 recruiting list in fiscal year 2002.⁹ However, some of the specialties will remain difficult to staff because of (1) difficulties in recruiting personnel who can learn the skill; (2) lengthy advanced individual training courses; (3) small authorizations that, with the loss of a single soldier, can create drastic shortages in operating strength;¹⁰ and (4) incomplete equipment fielding and therefore the personnel are not yet needed. For example, the Army Recruiting Command added the specialty 98J—electronic intelligence interceptor/analyst, to its top-25 recruiting list at the priority-1 level for fiscal year 2002. However, the five divisions are authorized only five to nine positions, so the loss of a single soldier can create drastic shortages in operating strength. At the time of our review, two of the divisions still had empty slots for specialty 98J—electronic intelligence interceptor/analyst.

⁹ Each year, the Army targets 25 military occupational specialties as its top recruiting priorities on the basis of, but not limited to, (1) projected operational strength, (2) fill priority, (3) inclusion on the Army's 10 most critical military occupational specialty list, (4) initial training attrition, (5) training course length, and (6) recruiting history.

¹⁰ The occupational specialties included in tables 2 and 3, although considered low density by the Army, have Army-wide (active component) authorizations that range from more than 500 to around 850 personnel, compared with two of the Army's highest-density occupational specialties which have Army-wide authorizations that range from around 13,000 to more than 24,000 personnel.

According to division, brigade, and battalion commanders, shortages of personnel for combat or combat support occupational specialties can result in

- ineffective training that is not accomplished as intended by Army doctrine because troops learn "work arounds" rather than the skills that will be needed when they go to war and
- impaired ability to sustain critical combat equipment in a high-intensity conflict.

Divisions Reported Improvements in Training to Conduct Combat Operations

On the basis of our examination of the Army's official readiness and training reports and discussions with division personnel, as of June 2001, the five divisions reported they met their training requirements. Reported training readiness¹¹ improved early in fiscal year 2001, remained constant through May 2001 for three of the divisions, and was constant throughout the fiscal year for the other two. The commanders of the divisions attributed this improvement to the manning increase. As their units' complement of personnel more closely reflected the numbers, grades, and skills required for successful combat, their ability to train increased. During our review, none of the divisions reported being untrained in any mission-essential task.¹²

Even though commanders stated that training readiness was at high levels, some told us that the lack of experienced senior enlisted personnel in equipment repair (such as the military occupational specialty 63Z—mechanical maintenance supervisor, identified in tables 2 and 3) impeded development and on-the-job training of newer soldiers. Senior personnel are very knowledgeable concerning specific equipment, its peculiarities, and troubleshooting techniques. Without them, it takes longer for newer soldiers to become proficient in repairing equipment.

The Army also attributed training improvements to a new funding policy restricting the use of training funds to pay for other expenses, such as base

¹¹ An assessment of the unit's ability to perform its wartime missions.

¹² These tasks are derived from an analysis of a unit's assigned wartime missions. Mission-essential tasks for the reviewed divisions include deploying, attacking the enemy, conducting area defense, sustaining the force by providing personnel and logistical support, and protecting the force from enemy attack and from the effects of nuclear, biological, and chemical hazards.

operations and real property maintenance. However, the Army could not demonstrate this effect. Earlier this year we reported that, during fiscal years 1997–2000, the Army obligated almost \$1 billion less than the nearly \$4.8 billion that the Congress had provided for training.¹³ We found no evidence that this reduction in funding caused a cancellation or delay of any planned training.

Also as previously reported, since at least the mid-1990s, the Army has obligated millions of dollars less than it budgets for the conduct of training.¹⁴ For example, training in tanks has not been at the 800-mile level.¹⁵ As of June 2001, with only one quarter remaining in the fiscal year, it appeared that two divisions—the 1st Infantry and 1st Armored—were still not training at the 800-mile level. Therefore, the Army cannot pinpoint a finite correlation between the level of training funds received and the level of training readiness reported. According to division commanders, however, a primary drawback of the new funding restriction has been a decreased ability to maintain training ranges. Before the funding policy was changed, commanders could use training funds to pay for the maintenance and operation of these ranges.

Division's Reported Equipment Readiness High, but Some Shortages and Maintenance Problems Exist

On the basis of our examination of the Army's official readiness reports and discussions with division personnel, as of June 2001, the five divisions reported the amount of equipment on hand and the serviceability of that equipment was in a high state of readiness, indicating that the five divisions expected to be able to perform their combat missions. Although the Army met its goals for having certain percentages of equipment on hand and ready to perform its mission, some units reported shortages of certain equipment items and difficulty with maintaining old equipment.

¹³ See *Defense Budget: Need to Better Inform Congress on Funding for Army Division Training* (GAO-01-902, July 5, 2001).

¹⁴ See GAO-01-902.

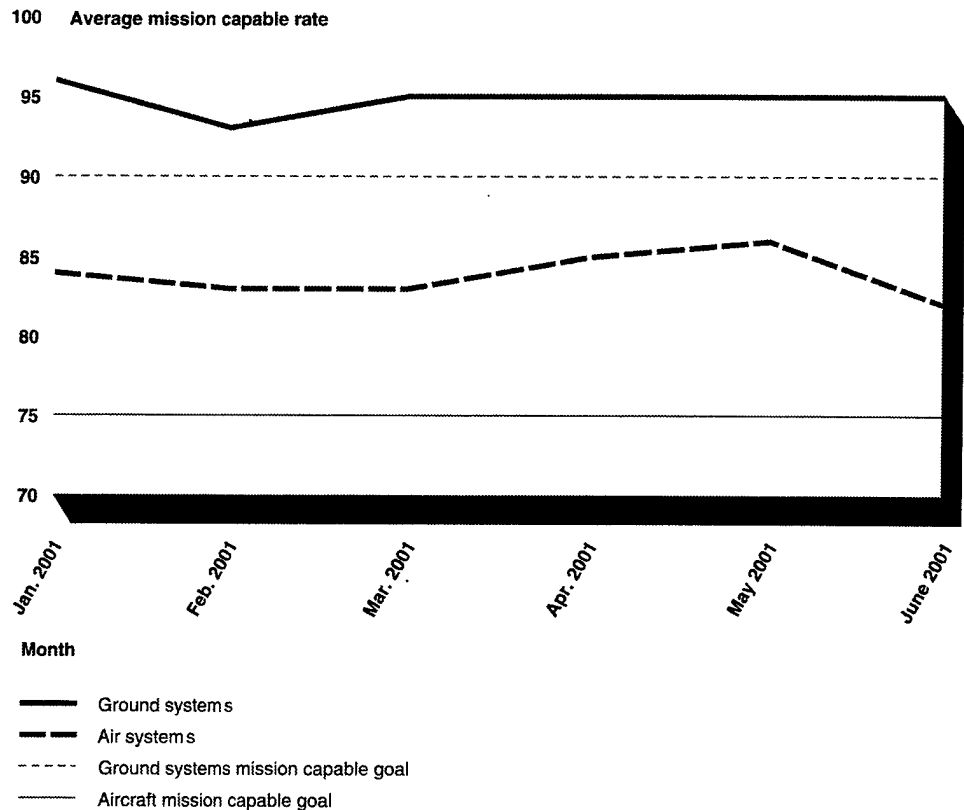
¹⁵ The Army's Combined Arms Training Strategy identifies (1) mission-essential tasks that units must be able to perform in time of war and (2) the type of training events or exercises and the frequency with which they should be performed in order to be ready in those tasks. It has established that the tanks will be driven, on average, 800 miles each year for home station training—the level of training needed to have a combat-ready force—and its budget request states that it include funds necessary to support that training. However, after publication of our report, *Defense Budget: Need to Better Inform Congress on Funding for Army Division Training* (GAO-01-902, July 5, 2001), the Army budgeted for only 730 miles in its fiscal year 2002 budget.

Division officials attributed equipment shortages to outdated authorization documents and the incomplete fielding of new equipment. Although unit commanders cited their top 5 to 10 equipment shortages in monthly readiness reports, they told us that these shortages did not degrade readiness. For example, one unit told us that several years ago, new secure-communications sets for radios were added to its authorized equipment list. The equipment started a phased entry into the supply system instead of an entry at the fully authorized level. The result of this phased equipment fielding is that the unit still does not have these vital sets for all its radios as authorized.

All the divisions reported the serviceability of their equipment to be at very high levels of readiness during the period of our review. Our analysis of the five divisions' reported mission capable rates¹⁶ showed that the average mission capable rates for the divisions' ground and air systems exceeded the Army's mission capable goals for those systems. (See fig. 5.)

¹⁶ Mission capable rates (also referred to as serviceability rates) are the primary indicator used by a commander to determine equipment readiness. A mission capable rate indicates the percentage of time during a particular reporting period that a piece of equipment can fulfill at least one or more of its missions. During each reporting period, commanders report an aggregate mission capable rate for all ground systems and air systems.

Figure 5: Aggregate Average Mission Capable Rate for Ground and Air Systems for Five Selected Divisions (Jan. Through June 2001)



Note: One air system has an Army mission capable goal of 70 percent versus 75 percent for the other air systems.

Source: GAO's analysis of data from the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics.

The aggregate average mission capable rates for the divisions' ground and air systems exceeded the Army's mission capable goals during the time of our review. However, we recently reported that although some Army aviation systems generally met their mission capable goals, spare parts shortages have adversely affected operations and led to inefficient maintenance practices that have lowered the morale of maintenance personnel.¹⁷ Although generally meeting their mission capable goals indicates that parts shortages have not affected mission capability, supply

¹⁷ See *Army Inventory: Parts Shortages Are Impacting Operations and Maintenance Effectiveness* (GAO-01-772, July 31, 2001).

availability rates and the cannibalization¹⁸ of parts from one aircraft to another indicate that spare parts shortages have indeed been a problem.

According to division officials, by having more people available to make repairs, the increased numbers of personnel have helped units maintain high equipment readiness. Maintenance problems that do exist are largely due to the shortage of personnel with specific repair skills—aircraft electricians, aviation mechanics, missile system repairers, and aircraft powertrain repairers—especially at the more experienced supervisory level, or difficulties encountered trying to maintain old equipment. For example, at one unit the lack of experienced repair personnel resulted in most of its mortar guns' failing a recent depot-level inspection. At the unit level, the repair personnel responsible for the inspections were not experienced enough to find the defects. If the unit had been called to deploy prior to the depot-level inspection, 4 of its 18 guns would have been incapable of performing their missions.

Army officials at another division said they did not always have the skilled personnel needed to fix new equipment. For instance, a unit had received new equipment to improve fire accuracy, but it lacked the trained personnel to repair the item. According to unit officials, if this item were to break during wartime, the unit's ability to sustain combat would be affected because the item would have to be sent to a depot for repair.

The maintenance of old equipment also presents a challenge. In June 1999, we reported that aging Army equipment was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain and that unit mechanics were devoting increasing amounts of time to keep equipment operating.¹⁹ During our review, one battalion commander at Fort Riley²⁰ told us that, every time the unit uses its nearly 30-year-old M-1A1 tanks for training, they break down; if he had to depend upon these tanks in wartime, he said, he would not have confidence in accomplishing his mission. His brigade commander,

¹⁸ The Army's definition of cannibalization, referred to as "controlled exchange," is the removal of components from equipment designated for disposal.

¹⁹ We also reported that serviceability rates did not provide a good assessment of equipment condition because equipment that is old, unreliable, and difficult to maintain may still be reported serviceable. See *Military Readiness: Readiness Reports Do Not Provide a Clear Assessment of Army Equipment* (GAO/NSIAD-99-119, June 16, 1999).

²⁰ Two separate brigades are located at Fort Riley; one is attached to the 1st Armored Division, while the other is attached to the 1st Infantry Division.

however, maintained that the brigade, as a whole, would be able to carry out its mission with the equipment on hand and equipment prepositioned in-theater. In October 2000, a team from the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics was sent to review this brigade and the other brigade located there to determine what was needed to raise the M1A1 fleet to current mission-capable standards and to maintain the fleet. The team and brigade staff identified problems with supply, maintenance, personnel, and training and identified possible solutions. The report stated that the total estimated cost of implementing all recommendations exceeded \$25 million.

Impact of Peacekeeping Missions on Unit Readiness Has Varied

On the basis of our examination of the Army's official readiness reports and deployment schedules and on discussions with division personnel, the number of peacekeeping missions and their effect on unit readiness have varied. According to division, brigade, and battalion commanders, these effects have been both positive and negative, but peacekeeping has not interfered with the divisions' ability to fight and win the nation's wars.

In March 1998 we testified that sustained increases in peacekeeping operations for three of the five divisions exacerbated personnel shortfalls and degraded unit readiness and training within those divisions.²¹ However, during this review, Army officials found it difficult to quantify the effects of peacekeeping operations, but they did offer several observations. These operations improve training for intelligence, medical, logistics, transportation, and engineering activities because they are called upon to perform tasks similar to their wartime tasks. Peacekeeping operations have also provided junior officers and senior enlisted personnel with leadership opportunities not normally available in a nondeployed status. However, we were told that peacekeeping operations can erode a unit's warfighting skills—especially those that require the maneuvering of large armored or infantry formations, a task considered crucial to the divisions' ability to perform their wartime missions.

Army officials told us that, for these five divisions, peacekeeping operations are no longer the exception, but are a regular part of operations. According to division, brigade, and battalion commanders, sustained peacekeeping operations have changed the five divisions from

²¹ For a transcript, see *Military Readiness: Observations on Personnel Readiness in Later Deploying Army Divisions* (GAO/T-NSIAD-98-126, Mar. 20, 1998).

later deployers to a war to early deployers to ongoing and smaller-scale operations. In November 1999, the Army provided unit commanders additional readiness reporting guidance—used in conjunction with Army Regulation 220-1, Unit Status Reporting—that recognized the significance of ongoing peacekeeping operations and their effect on reported readiness. The guidance was formulated to assist commanders in determining whether forces and equipment deployed to peacekeeping operations could be available to redeploy to a major-theater war within scheduled deployment time frames. Prior to the guidance, division commanders generally reported forces and equipment deployed to peacekeeping operations as unavailable for deployment to a major-theater war. The guidance also acknowledged the need for units deployed to peacekeeping operations to have specific plans in place for their disengagement, recovery, reconstitution, and redeployment of forces and equipment committed to current and future peacekeeping operations prior to those deployments.

For example, in November 1999, as a result of the unavailability of some forces and equipment for immediate deployment to a major-theater war, two divisions reported low levels of readiness. However, the guidance which provides for consideration that deployed forces and equipment could be recovered, reconstituted, and available for redeployment within deployment time frames, allowed the two divisions to report a level of readiness that reflected the divisions' actual readiness within major-theater war deployment time frames. Those division commanders reported that without the guidance, their divisions would have continued to report lower readiness levels that did not provide an accurate picture of the units' ability to meet wartime requirements. The divisions' reported readiness continued to remain at high levels through our review.

According to Army officials, since the reporting guidance was issued, the divisions have developed detailed plans to quickly recover and retrain them to their critical war-fighting skills, and to recover and reconstitute equipment for redeployment within established deployment time frames. For example, the 1st Armored and 1st Infantry Divisions in Germany have developed plans that include 4 months of training for peacekeeping operations, 6 months of deployment on such operations, then 6 months of redeployment and reintegration training. According to Department of the Army officials, all divisions that participate in peacekeeping operations have similar plans and those plans can be adjusted to retrain soldiers more quickly in the event of other contingency operations.

Additionally, to ease the burden of the divisions under review, the Army has extended their participation in peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Kosovo—commonly called rotations—to units of the Army Reserve, Army National Guard, and other corps-level units. Deployments for missions in Bosnia, which started in April 2001 and are expected to run through April 2005, will incorporate Reserve units and six National Guard-enhanced separate brigades. Furthermore, from June 2001 through May 2005, other active units from the Army's III Corps (Fort Hood, Tex.), V Corps (Heidelberg, Germany), and XVIII Airborne Corps (Fort Bragg, N.C.) will support peacekeeping rotations in Kosovo.

Conclusion

Since our last report, primarily because of the Army Chief of Staff's manning initiative, which increased enlisted personnel, staffing, and occupational specialties, the combat readiness of five divisions—the 1st Armored, 1st Infantry, 4th Infantry, 10th Infantry, and 25th Infantry—has improved. However, the Army's continuing imbalance of occupational specialty staffing levels among the five divisions, although a balance difficult to achieve, should be addressed. These imbalances continue to result in manning shortfalls in some occupational specialties deemed critical to readiness by commanders. While some equipment maintenance problems exist, none of them appear to be "show stoppers" in preparing for wartime missions.

Recommendation for Executive Action

To address staffing imbalances for occupational specialties common to all its divisions, we recommend that the Secretary of the Army develop and implement a plan to address those imbalances in making staffing decisions affecting the divisions and monitor the Army's progress in alleviating the imbalances. The Army's plans should include a means to prioritize the distribution of skilled personnel not only among these divisions but also wherever they are needed in the Army.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, the Department of Defense concurred with our recommendation that the Secretary of the Army develop and implement a plan to address staffing imbalances for critical occupational specialties. The Department further stated that the Army's manning initiative and innovative enabling programs and policies have provided an effective blueprint for managing the distribution of soldiers in critical occupational fields. Although imbalances in some critical skills have existed, the causes have been identified and the appropriate management actions taken to correct or smooth the imbalances.

We agree with the Department's view that the Army Chief of Staff's manning initiative, along with the Army's personnel management policies, provides a blueprint to guide and manage the distribution of soldiers in critical occupational specialties. However, the Army's manning initiative and personnel management policies have not yet resulted in the Army's meeting its fiscal year 2001 goals to staff its combat divisions, armored cavalry regiments, and early deploying nondivisional units at 100 percent of authorized enlisted personnel by skills and grades needed. We reported in July 2001 that the Army had achieved only a 93-percent fill rate by skills and grade level for its combat divisions and armored cavalry regiments, and only an 86-percent fill rate by skills and grade level for its nondivisional combat support units.²²

We agree with the Army's assessment that broad transformational change, equipment modernization programs and other short-term changes to force structure will continue to challenge the Army's management of soldiers in low-density and difficult-to-fill occupational fields. However, the staffing imbalances we identified in this report were representative of a trend from December 1999 through May 2001. Therefore, we continue to believe that the Secretary of the Army should take the steps necessary to ensure that the Army addresses staffing imbalances in not only these five divisions but wherever they are needed in the Army and continue to monitor the Army's progress in alleviating the imbalances. The Department's comments are reprinted in appendix I.

Scope and Methodology

As requested, we updated our 1998 testimony²³ to determine (1) the current combat readiness of personnel, training, and equipment in these divisions and (2) the effect of peacekeeping missions on that readiness. We obtained data from and interviewed officials with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Offices of the Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations; the Army Personnel Command; Army Forces Command; and U.S. Army Forces Europe; and division, brigade, and battalion commanders and staff from the 1st Armored Division, 1st Infantry Division, 4th Infantry Division, 10th Infantry Division, and 25th Infantry Division.

²² See GAO-01-979R.

²³ See GAO/T-NSIAD-98-126.

To determine the current combat readiness of the Army's personnel, training, and equipment in the selected divisions, we reviewed the Army's Unit Status Reporting Regulation 220-1 to determine the criteria for unit readiness reports and interviewed division officials regarding their readiness status and how it is reported. We reviewed reports in the Unit Status Reporting System from the five divisions and two separately reporting brigade combat teams located at Ft. Riley, Kansas for February 1998 to June 2001. We focused our assessment of the current state of combat readiness for each unit overall and in the measured areas of personnel, training, and equipment on readiness data for the time period January through June 2001. We analyzed the overall ratings as well as those for personnel, training, equipment on hand, and equipment condition. We trended reported readiness for each of the five divisions and the two separately reporting brigades located at Ft. Riley, Kansas for the time period February 1998 through May 2001. We also reviewed commanders' assessment letters, which provided a narrative assessment of a unit's readiness to accomplish its wartime mission. Additionally, to further determine readiness for the measured areas of personnel, training and equipment, we did the following:

- *Personnel:* We analyzed enlisted manning data for each of the divisions over an 18-month period; these data came in electronic form from the Army, Personnel Command. We compared authorized and assigned numbers from these data across the divisions²⁴ as well as across the Army overall. We gathered additional data and conducted interviews with applicable Army personnel to determine the reasons for manning imbalances and for low fill rates for specific military occupational specialties considered by division commanders as critical to sustaining combat.
- *Training:* We obtained and reviewed quarterly training briefings and mission-essential task list (METL) data from the divisions and the two separately reporting brigades. We analyzed METL assessment data to determine whether divisions were fully or partially trained. To determine whether the implementation of a new policy restricting the movement of operation and maintenance training funds improved readiness, we interviewed officials in the Resource Management Offices of the five divisions. We analyzed the operation and maintenance funds obligated for fiscal years 1998 through 2001.²⁵ For fiscal year 2001, the year the new

²⁴ Our analysis did not include personnel data for the 25th Infantry Division's 1st Brigade, located at Ft. Lewis, Washington.

²⁵ Data for fiscal year 2001 were as of the latest date available from each location.

policy became effective, we compared tank miles driven with operations and maintenance funds obligated. We also interviewed division, brigade, and battalion commanders to determine the effect that the new funding policy had on training and unit readiness.

- *Equipment:* We reviewed division equipment-on-hand and equipment shortage lists. We analyzed divisions' mission capable rates and compared those rates with reported readiness levels. We interviewed division, brigade, and battalion commanders, as well as division logistics officials to determine whether equipment shortages or serviceability issues adversely affected unit readiness or the ability to train.

To determine whether peacekeeping missions have affected readiness, we interviewed Department of the Army officials from the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, and division, brigade, and battalion commanders at four of the five divisions. We analyzed data on the number and types of deployments for fiscal years 1998 to 2001 and compared the timing of deployments with readiness indicators. We reviewed the Army's three-phase training plans to reintegrate troops returning from peacekeeping missions and retrain them to fight major-theater wars. We reviewed recently published GAO, Congressional Research Service, and RAND reports.

We conducted our review from December 2000 through October 2001 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this report to appropriate congressional committees, the Secretaries of Defense and the Army, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. We will send copies to other interested parties upon request. Please contact me on (757) 552-8111 if you or your staff have any questions about this report. Additional contacts and staff acknowledgments are listed in appendix II.



Neal P. Curtin, Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Comments From the Department of Defense



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-4000

18 DEC 2001

Mr. Neal P. Curtin
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Curtin:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) report, GAO-02-98, dated November 2nd, 2001, "ARMY READINESS: Readiness Improved for Selected Divisions But Manning Imbalances Persist," GAO Code 350018.

We have reviewed GAO's report on the readiness of selected Army divisions, and agree with the recommendation that the Army carefully manage the distribution of soldiers with critical occupational specialties. It is our view that the Army Manning Initiative and personnel management policies provide an adequate blueprint to guide and manage the distribution of soldiers in critical occupational specialties.

GAO Recommendation. To address staffing imbalances for occupational specialties common to all its divisions, the GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Army develop and implement a plan to address those imbalances in making staffing decisions affecting the divisions and monitor the Army's progress in alleviating the imbalances. The Army's plan should include a means to prioritize the distribution of skilled personnel among not only those divisions but also wherever they are needed in the Army.

DoD Response. The Army Manning Initiative, implemented in FY2000, set priorities and phased goals for fully manning Army units. These goals set aggregate requirements by grade and occupational skill, to be met by FY2003. The Army's leadership closely monitors implementation of the initiative, and adjusts its personnel programs and policies as appropriate to achieve its goals. The Secretary of the Army oversees planning and implementation of the manning initiative.

Last September, the Army attained its goal of manning the active divisions and regiments at 100 percent aggregate strength. Programs to man these same units at 100 percent by grade and occupational skill have been productive, but not yet fully successful. The GAO identified imbalances in six military occupational skills in the divisions they visited. Army soldiers fill over 200 different occupational skills and the Army individually manages each skill field to achieve strength and balance across the force, consistent with goals and priorities set by the manning initiative. The Army implements a number of precision recruiting and retention programs that target the "hard to fill" occupational skills.



**Appendix I: Comments From the Department
of Defense**

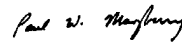
Of the six skills highlighted by GAO, four of these - missile repairman, mechanical maintenance supervisor, human intelligence collector and electronic intelligence intercept analyst - are characterized as "low density" specialties in divisions. As such, they are prone to wide deviations in operating strength resulting from some small changes in the number of soldiers assigned to units.

The inventory and balance of soldiers assigned in most of the six occupational skills has improved in the divisions since GAO's visit to the units. Each division is now manned at better than 90 percent of its authorization in missile repairmen and mechanical maintenance supervisors. Operating strength for ground surveillance systems operators is improving and is projected to be at 96 percent later this year, while electronic intelligence intercept analysts are projected to be at 94 percent, aided by an increased reenlistment bonus. Accession of human intelligence collectors, a language dependent skill with a high attrition rate in initial training, has been improving since FY1999.

Broad transformational change, equipment modernization programs and other short-term changes to force structure will continue to challenge the Army's management of soldiers in low density and difficult to fill occupational fields. The Army's Manning Initiative and innovative enabling programs and policies have provided an effective blueprint for managing the distribution of soldiers in critical occupational fields. Although imbalances in some critical skills have existed, the causes have been identified and the appropriate management actions taken to correct or smooth the imbalances.

We appreciate the opportunity to review and comment upon the final draft report. My point of contact for additional information or any questions you may have is Colonel Neil C. Lanzendorf, in our Directorate of Readiness Programming and Assessment. He can be contacted at (703) 693-5584/5585.

Sincerely,



Paul W. Mayberry
Deputy Under Secretary of Defense
(Readiness)

Appendix II: GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contacts

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Staff Acknowledgments

Other staff who made key contributions to this report were Connie W. Sawyer, Donna M. Rogers, Melissa McDowell, Lauren S. Johnson, Nancy Ragsdale, James E. Lewis, and Nadine Furr.

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