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Report to the Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans' Affairs and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

June 2000

ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

Enhanced Brigade Readiness Improved but Personnel and Workload Are Problems

GAO

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National Security and
International Affairs Division

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The Honorable Christopher Shays
Chairman
The Honorable Rod Blagojevich
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans' Affairs
and International Relations
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

Over the past 25 years, changing defense needs and budgetary pressures have led to an increased reliance on Army National Guard and other reserve forces in the national military strategy. These reserves provide combat forces as well as a large percentage of the Army's requirements in support areas such as civil affairs, public affairs, quartermaster, transportation, chemical, ordnance, and engineering. Moreover, the Department of Defense projects an even greater reliance on the reserves in the future to help ease the high pace of operations of active forces. Reserve units such as the National Guard's 15 Enhanced Separate Brigades, the Guard's highest priority combat units, provide fighting forces at about 25-30 percent of the cost of active units due to lower personnel and other operating costs. However, reserve units are not designed to deploy as quickly as active Army units. They generally train only about 39 days each year, including one weekend per month and one annual 2-week training exercise. As a result, the Department of Defense expects they would receive some additional training prior to deploying to a war zone if they are mobilized by the President during wartime.

The Enhanced Brigades were introduced in 1993 to provide a flexible backup to active Army units during wartime. The brigades receive specialized training and higher priority than other National Guard units for personnel and other resources during peacetime. This is to ensure that once called to active duty they can be assembled, trained, and be ready to move to a war zone within 90 days. Seven of the brigades provide light infantry foot soldiers, and eight are mechanized, or equipped with tanks with heavy weapons or other types of armored vehicles, such as Bradley fighting vehicles. A brigade generally has between 3,000-5,000 soldiers and is composed of 3-4 battalions. Battalions contain 3-4 companies, which in turn, are composed of 3-4 platoons of about 16-44 soldiers each.

In 1995, we reported that the Enhanced Brigades were not able to meet readiness goals under a new training strategy called "Bold Shift".[1] This strategy was adopted in 1991 after the Persian Gulf War, when the three National Guard combat brigades that were called to active duty took longer than predicted to train for their missions. While the decision created controversy between the National Guard and active Army, the two brigades that completed training were not deployed to the Persian Gulf. The new strategy introduced many changes to the brigades' peacetime training, such as refocusing and prioritizing training on mission-essential maneuver tasks at platoon level (rather than at higher levels that require more complex integration of skills). However, our 1995 report found that the brigades were still unable to master their many training tasks and recruit and retain enough personnel.

Because of the continuing importance of these brigades and concerns about military readiness, you requested us to reexamine the Enhanced Brigades' readiness. Army units report on their readiness based on assessments of whether the unit has the personnel, equipment, and training needed to be ready to deploy for their assigned mission quickly. Our review examined (1) whether the brigades are meeting current training and personnel readiness goals, (2) the key reasons for any continuing difficulties in meeting these goals, and (3) whether the Army has an effective system for assessing brigade readiness and the time required for the brigades to be ready for war.

[1] *Army National Guard: Combat Brigades' Ability to Be Ready for War in 90 Days Is Uncertain* (GAO/NSIAD-95-91, June 2, 1995).

Results in Brief

The brigades continue to have difficulty meeting training and personnel readiness goals, despite improvement in some areas. Only 3 of the 15 brigades reported that their platoons met training goals for mission-essential maneuver tasks such as attacking an enemy position or defending against an enemy attack.[2] In addition, only 10 (42 percent) of the 24 mechanized battalions met gunnery standards, which require annual firing of live ammunition at stationary and moving targets. However, this was an improvement over gunnery levels in 1993, when only 31 percent of the battalions met the standards.[3] Moreover, only one brigade was able to meet personnel staffing goals in 1999. On a more positive note, individual training has improved significantly. Since 1993-94, completion rates for job training for all soldiers, and required and recommended leadership courses for officers and sergeants have improved by between 10-15 percentage points.

According to officials, the key reasons for the brigades' continuing difficulties in meeting the readiness goals are (1) personnel shortages and (2) too much to do in the time available although many other problems also influence readiness. Authorizations for full-time support personnel, who help prepare training exercises and operate the brigades between weekend drills, have been cut from 90-100 percent in the early 1990's to 55-64 percent. In addition, officials told us that the brigades continue to have difficulty recruiting and retaining enough personnel to meet staffing goals due to the strong economy, less desire to join the military, high personnel attrition, and other problems. At the same time, war plans and training guidance do little to focus or prioritize the broad and growing range of missions the brigades must be ready to perform. Consequently, the brigades find it difficult to narrow training to a predictable and realistic set of skills for the time available.

[2] Maneuver refers to movements to place troops or material in a better location with respect to the enemy.

[3] As discussed on page 8, this improvement occurred despite the use of higher gunnery standards in 1998.

The Army does not have an effective system for assessing brigade readiness. The current system relies primarily on the subjective view of commanders and does not require the use of objective criteria or established training goals in reporting unit readiness. As a result, brigade estimates, that they would need 42 days or less of training to be ready for war once called to active duty, are unrealistically low. Experiences during the Gulf War and a 1996 study by the RAND Corporation[4] indicate that 70-80 days would be needed to prepare the brigades for deployment. Some brigade officials told us they feel pressured to report they can be ready with 42 or less days of training to avoid low readiness ratings. Accurate assessments of readiness are further confused by inconsistencies between Army training guidance and actual war plans, as well as the readiness rating criteria. Training guidance calls for the brigades to be trained and ready to deploy 90 days after they are called to active duty. However, war plans give some brigades considerably more time to be trained and moved to the war zones.

We are making recommendations to help provide the Enhanced Brigades with realistic and manageable training requirements and improve assessments of the brigades' readiness for military missions.

Brigades Have Made Some Progress, but Continue to Have Difficulty Meeting Training and Personnel Goals

Platoon proficiency in mission-essential tasks in 1998-99 was similar to that in 1993-94, while gunnery qualification and individual and leader training rates improved by about 10 percentage points. Even with these improvements, however, less than half of the 24 mechanized battalions met gunnery standards, and 20-25 percent of leaders had not completed the courses required or recommended for their grade level. In addition, only one brigade met staffing goals.

[4] *Postmobilization Training Resource Requirements: Army National Guard Heavy Enhanced Brigades;* RAND Corporation, 1996.

One-fifth of Brigades Met the Goal for Platoon Proficiency in Mission-Essential Tasks

Achieving platoon proficiency in mission-essential maneuver tasks, such as executing an attack or a withdrawal, is a critical part of the brigade's peacetime training strategy.[5] Commanders are given the discretion to select the tasks that will be included in peacetime training. Proficiency in these tasks is the prerequisite for progressing to training at company and higher levels. The Army's goal is to have all platoons rated as either "trained" or "needs practice" in at least 70 percent of the mission-essential tasks. A "trained" rating means that the unit is fully trained to perform the task. A "needs practice" rating means that the unit can perform the task with some shortcomings. The third rating, "untrained," means that the unit cannot perform the task to Army standard. The 259 platoons we examined rated their proficiency on an average of about 20 tasks each.

In 1998, only 3 of the 15 brigades reported that all their platoons met the Army's goal for proficiency in platoon level mission-essential tasks (see app. III). Five other brigades had 90 percent or more of their platoons meet the goal. In 1993-94, the training goal was higher—all platoons were to receive a "trained" rating in all mission-essential tasks. But, at the time no brigade met the goal. A comparison of the 1993 and 1998 task ratings is shown in table 1. Brigade officials at 12 of the 15 brigades told us that proficiency levels for 1999 were similar to levels reported for 1998. Three brigades did not respond to our request for updated data.

Table 1: Summary of Platoon Tasks Rated as Trained, Needs Practice, or Untrained in 1993 and 1998

Year	Trained (percent)	Needs practice (percent)	Untrained (percent)
1993	14	61	25
1998	14	68	19

Note: 1998 totals do not add due to rounding.

Source: Our analysis of brigade records.

[5] The basic training strategy and goals are set forth in U.S. Army Forces Command/Army National Guard Regulation 350-2, dated June 12, 1998, and revised October 27, 1999.

Battalions' Gunnery Proficiency Has Improved

In 1998, only 10 (42 percent) of the 24 mechanized battalions met gunnery standards, which require annual firing of live ammunition at stationary and moving targets (see app. IV). However, this was an improvement over gunnery levels in 1993, when only 31 percent of the battalions met the standards. It should also be noted that the standards in 1998 were higher than in 1993.[6] Brigade officials did not identify any significant changes in proficiency in 1999.

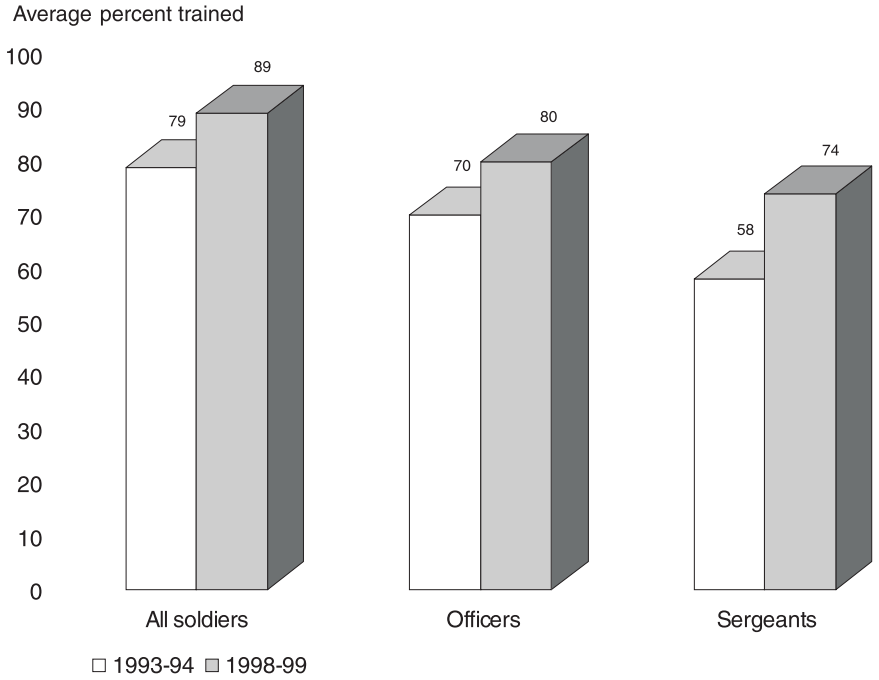
Individual Training Has Improved Significantly

As shown in figure 1, completion rates for job training for all soldiers, and required and recommended leadership courses for officers and sergeants, have improved since 1993-94. In 1998-99, all 15 brigades met the Army's goal of having 85 percent of all soldiers trained in their military job.[7] In 1993-94, less than one-half (43 percent) of the brigades met this goal. Completion rates for officer and sergeants' leadership courses also increased significantly, although no brigade met the goal of having all officers and sergeants complete all required or recommended courses for their grade level (see app.V). According to Army officials, the Army has decided to lower the completion rate goal for sergeants from 100 percent to 85 percent of the required and recommended courses. This change will take effect in fiscal year 2001.

[6] The Army structures 12 gunnery tables to develop and test proficiency in a progressive manner. For example, table I requires individual crews to engage stationary targets with a stationary tank or fighting vehicle. Table VIII requires individual crews to demonstrate proficiency against single, multiple, and simultaneous targets while the crews are stationary and moving. In 1998, the minimum standard for M1 tanks and M2 Bradley fighting vehicles was for 85 percent of assigned crews to be qualified at the eighth level annually. In 1993, the standard was 75 percent for tank crews and 60 percent for Bradley crews.

[7] This percentage did not include soldiers in or awaiting basic training because they could not yet be expected to be qualified in their job. If these soldiers are included, only two brigades met the goal, but seven others were within 2 percentage points.

Figure 1: Course Completion Rates for All Soldiers, Officers, and Sergeants, 1993-94 and 1998-99



Source: Brigade records.

Personnel Problems Remain

Maintaining the appropriate number of trained personnel ready to deploy is also a key element of readiness. The National Guard's goal generally calls for at least 90 percent of the required personnel, and 85 percent of the required number of trained personnel and leaders, to be available to deploy to a war zone.[8] However, only one brigade reported that they met this goal as of September 1999 (see app. VI). The main difficulty for the brigades was in maintaining the requisite number of overall personnel, and trained personnel, available to deploy. In September 1999, the brigades were staffed at an average of about 96 percent of required personnel. But, personnel available to deploy averaged only about 82 percent, and the number of trained personnel available to deploy averaged only about

[8] Army Regulation 220-1, September 1, 1997, Unit Status Reporting, defines the specific requirements for this goal. "Required" personnel refers to the number of personnel needed for wartime.

76 percent. The availability of leaders was not a major problem, on average over 89 percent were available to deploy. According to National Guard data, the primary cause of non-deployability for the brigades is incomplete training; but disciplinary, legal, medical, and other problems also frequently prevent personnel from being ready to deploy. Historically, the brigades have found it difficult to maintain the 85-90 percent level of personnel deployability. According to readiness reports, from January 1990 to September 1999 only one brigade consistently maintained this level of personnel deployability. Seven brigades did not meet this goal during this period.

To help reach the Guard's personnel deployability goal, the brigades are authorized to recruit about 110 percent of their required personnel.[9] During 1998-99, they were able to staff at an average of about 97 percent (see app. VI), up from 94 percent in 1993-94. During both time periods, only about one-third of the brigades were able to recruit over 100 percent of their required personnel.

Readiness Hampered by Personnel Shortages and Multiple Missions

Brigade officials identified a number of problems that hamper training readiness. Many of these problems are interrelated, and many are long standing. To focus on the key problems, we provided commanders in all 15 brigades with a listing of potential problems and asked them to revise the list as necessary and rank the problems in order of their severity. Twelve brigades responded. As shown in table 2, these brigades ranked shortages of full-time support personnel and recruiting and retention as the two problems having the most impact. The problem of too much to do in the time available was also cited frequently as a major problem. This issue was not specifically identified on our original listing of potential problems provided to the brigades. However, brigade officials mentioned it so often that it ranked third in importance. This problem is a longstanding one for the brigades. Their potential missions are many and varied, and expanding. However, little guidance is provided to help prioritize and focus their training to what can reasonably be achieved in 39 days each year.

[9] Each brigade has a different authorization directed at certain key positions, but the average is about 110 percent. In 1993, the brigades were authorized to recruit up to 125 percent of their required strength.

Table 2: Brigade Rankings of Problems Undermining Readiness

Problem	Average points (0 to 8)
Shortages of full-time support personnel	7.4
Personnel recruiting and/or retention	6.8
Collective training (unit training at platoon level and above)	5.5
Organizational changes	4.9
Individual training	4.6
Gunnery qualification	3.5
Peacetime training goals set unrealistically high	3.1
Lack of integration between active Army advisers and/or associated units	2.6

Note: Points were calculated by averaging the total number of points the brigades assigned to each problem. The problem ranked by a respondent as most severe received 8 points, the problem ranked as next most severe received 7 points, and so on.

Source: Our analysis of brigade officials' responses to our survey.

Officials Rated Personnel Problems as Critical

Brigade officials cited shortages of full-time support personnel as the most important problem undermining readiness. These personnel help prepare training exercises and plans, perform administrative duties such as processing payroll information, and operate the units during the week while unit personnel are at their civilian jobs. In the early 1990s the brigades were assigned between 90-100 percent of their requirements for these personnel. However, due to reductions in military forces after the end of the Cold War and increases in the priority of other National Guard units, the brigades are now assigned only 55-64 percent of requirements. As of March 1999, this meant that the average brigade actually had only 177 full-time support personnel out of 282 required. Brigade officials viewed this as a critical problem that has led to poorly planned training events and increased dissatisfaction among soldiers because of delays in salary payments, lost opportunities for schooling, and other problems.

Although slightly improved since 1993-94, brigade officials ranked personnel recruiting and retention as the second most important problem. Recruiting sufficient numbers and types of personnel is essential to the continuing vitality of the brigades. However, even if recruiting efforts are successful, high rates of personnel attrition can quickly negate recruiting gains, as well as improvements in training. In 1993-94 the average annual brigade attrition rate was about 23 percent, compared to an average of

about 20 percent in 1998-99. According to officials, recruiting efforts are undermined by strong local economies, less desire for young people to join the military, and other problems. Many brigade officials also believed that National Guard and state programs that provide tuition for college or monetary bonuses for enlisting or staying in the Guard are too inflexible to adequately address local differences: some brigades suffer more from recruiting problems, others from retention problems. However, officials believe that bonus programs are directed primarily at recruiting new personnel rather than retaining existing personnel. According to these officials, many soldiers leave the National Guard immediately after completing college because the Guard cannot compete with the private sector's wages and has few substantial bonuses to retain enlistees once tuition aid ends.

Brigade officials were also concerned about attendance problems. According to the National Guard, continuous and willful absences were responsible for 11 percent of brigade attrition from August 1998 through July 1999. Some brigade officials stated that they have few effective sanctions to prevent personnel from missing attendance at drill weekends and eventually dropping out before their commitment ends.[10] However, several officials told us that they have developed aggressive programs to contact soldiers with attendance problems, or to send military police to soldiers' job sites to foster employer support and stress to soldiers the need to honor their commitment.

Multiple Missions Make It Difficult to Focus Training

Brigade officials also told us that another major problem in meeting training goals was that they have too much training to accomplish in the time available. In their role as state militia, the brigades must train for state missions such as providing emergency and disaster responses and supporting local community needs. At the federal level, their role is to provide a flexible backup for active Army units fighting either of two nearly simultaneous regional wars that U.S. military forces are required to plan for. The Army has identified a variety of potential missions for the brigades, including offensive and defensive combat activities, and replacing active duty units moved from peace operations to the war zones. The brigades must also be prepared to fight in the deserts of southwest Asia, as well as

[10] We note, however, that 10 U.S.C. § 10148 (b) provides a specific sanction of up to 45 days of additional active duty for training for any member of the National Guard who fails in any year to perform satisfactorily the prescribed training duty.

the mountains and cold climate of Korea, the two primary theaters used for planning purposes. However, according to brigade and Army war planning officials, war plans do not specify what Army unit the brigades will be assigned to, which mission(s) they will be assigned, or where they will deploy. As a result, it is difficult for the brigades to narrow their training focus to those tasks most likely to be needed, and whose standards can be met in the time available.

The list of potential missions for the brigades is growing. During our review, several of the brigades began to train their units to conduct peacekeeping operations in eastern Europe. Their participation in peacekeeping operations was recommended by the July 1999 Reserve Component Employment Study 2005, mandated by the Secretary of Defense to examine the use of reserve forces in all areas of defense strategy. The study concluded that the demand for such operations is likely to remain high for the next 15-20 years, and the reserves could help provide relief for overworked active duty units.

Our 1995 report also found that the brigades were trying to train for too many tasks, due to problems such as confusion over which mission-essential maneuver tasks were the most important. The Army agreed, and attempted to focus training on three basic maneuver tasks and the associated subtasks at the platoon level. However, we found that the number of tasks on which the platoons rated themselves has increased from an average of about 13 in 1993 to about 20 in 1998, and is highly variable. As shown in appendix III, the average number of tasks rated per platoon ranged from 5 in one brigade to 58 in another. To compensate for the difficulty in training both mission-essential maneuver tasks and gunnery, some mechanized brigades told us that they reduce training to cover only gunnery and part of their mission-essential maneuver tasks in any 1 year. Training for the remaining tasks is completed in subsequent years.

To provide more focused training, the Reserve Component Employment Study 2005 recommended that the Army study the potential for linking some brigades to the specific active Army divisions that they will be expected to assist during wartime, and for limiting a brigade's assignment to a single war zone. Guard officials have long cited the importance of knowing the active Army units and commanders with whom they will fight as a key factor that affects readiness. Moreover, they believe this concept can help to provide shared accountability for meeting training goals. Assigning the brigades to a single war zone could also help focus training

and logistical planning. This is because the training sites, points of embarkation, climate and terrain, and other planning factors are different for each war zone. Army officials told us they were considering these ideas, as well as others, as part of the process of transforming the Army to respond to new threats and take advantage of technological advances. Decisions in this area are expected to be made within the next 2-3 years.

Other Problems Also Hamper Readiness

Brigade officials identified a number of other problems that undermine readiness. For example, officials believe that requirements for unit training have grown due to the introduction of new technologies and other changes that have increased the complexity of training. Also, shortages of suitable local training areas and turnover among personnel in gun crews undermine qualification rates in tank and Bradley fighting vehicle gunnery. Many were also concerned about the practice of sending personnel to training courses during the 2-week annual training period. This 2-week period is generally the longest period of time available to conduct unit training in mission-essential maneuver tasks and gunnery. However, units often excuse personnel to attend individual training. According to officials, attendance at individual training courses at other times during the year is often hindered by civilian job demands, limited travel funding, and classroom space limitations. In 1998, only 2 of 14 brigades met the Army's goal that 75 percent of assigned personnel attend the annual 2-week training.[11] Average attendance was 67 percent. Officials believe that increases in funding and classroom spaces, and other initiatives in fiscal year 2000 will provide opportunities to improve attendance at annual training.

The Army Does Not Have an Effective System for Assessing Brigade Readiness and Deployment Times

In 1995, we reported[12] that the Army did not have an objective system to analyze the brigades' peacetime training proficiency and link it to the number of training days required for them to be ready to deploy after they were called to active duty. As a result, brigade estimates of these training time requirements were subjective and unrealistically low. This situation remains largely unchanged, making it difficult to determine the impact of the brigades' training problems on their ability to meet time frames for wartime deployment.

[11] One brigade did not provide data.

[12] See note 1.

Training Readiness Assessments Are Subjective and Unrealistic

Army readiness assessments focus on whether units have the personnel, equipment, and training needed to be ready to undertake their assigned mission quickly.[13] Assessments of personnel and equipment readiness are generally based on calculations of the percentage of these resources available. For example, units with 85-100 percent of their officers and sergeants available to deploy would receive the highest readiness rating, and those with 64 percent or less the lowest. Assessments of training readiness are, however, based on the unit commanders' subjective estimate of the time needed for the unit to be fully trained for its mission once called to active duty. Estimates of 0-14 days are rated at the highest readiness category, and those estimating more than 42 days the fourth and lowest. The National Guard's goal is for the brigades to be rated at the third highest category or above: 42 days or less. Army guidance[14] calls for the commander to consider existing proficiency levels in gunnery, mission-essential maneuver tasks, and other training elements when estimating the time required to be fully trained. But, it does not provide the objective criteria, such as the percentage of mission-essential tasks fully trained, needed to link various levels of proficiency to required training time. The Army uses the same readiness reporting system and training time frames for active and reserve forces, even though it expects National Guard units will require more training than active units after call up.

As of September 1999, all 15 brigades reported that they met the goal for them to be fully trained for their mission(s) within 42 days from the beginning of training. In fact, most brigades have been reporting that they could be fully trained within 42 days since 1990, before they were named Enhanced Separate Brigades. However, models of the time required for the brigades to mobilize, train, and be ready to deploy developed by the Army and others estimate that training could require about 54 to 84 days, depending upon the assumptions made. The RAND Corporation concluded in 1996[15] that the better trained Enhanced Brigades would require 75-80 days of training. However, RAND also concluded that 75-80 days may be optimistic because it assumes a relatively high level of peacetime readiness. During the 1990 Persian Gulf War, the three National Guard

[13] Army Regulation 220-1, September 1, 1997, Unit Status Reporting, defines the specific procedures for reporting readiness.

[14] See note 13 above.

[15] *Postmobilization Training Resource Requirements: Army National Guard Heavy Enhanced Brigades*; RAND Corporation, 1996.

brigades that were mobilized estimated they would need 42 days or less of training to be ready to move to the war zone. However, the two brigades that completed training required 70 and 78 days.

The Army Inspector General and we have reported concerns about the subjective nature of the readiness reporting system for years.[16] In 1995, brigade and active Army officials told us that brigade officials felt pressured to keep training time estimates within 42 days to avoid low readiness ratings. In 1999, some brigade officials also acknowledged feeling pressure to report that they could complete wartime training within 42 days. Officials in one brigade reported that they had once tried to change their estimate to 90 days, but changed it back to 42 days as a result of the subsequent furor.

Brigade officials were also concerned about the accuracy of the system used to assess and report proficiency in mission-essential tasks, which is used in the overall assessment of training readiness. As indicated earlier (see page 7), the Army has not provided precise, objective definitions of what is required for a unit to be rated as "trained" or "needs practice" on a task. For example, according to Army officials, a unit could be rated as "needs practice" on a task regardless of whether it could perform the task to 99 percent of the standard or just 1 percent. Many units we talked to were also confused about how to record proficiency ratings in this system,[17] and failed to provide data or provided incorrect data. Further, due to personnel shortages many units combined personnel from several understaffed platoons into one or two complete platoons during training events where proficiency is evaluated. This practice raises further questions about the accuracy of the readiness ratings.

Army officials told us that they could not estimate training times for the brigades until it was clear which of the many potential missions they would actually be assigned. According to these officials, 42 days is a reasonable standard for measuring the readiness of active Army units, but does not represent the time required to train reserve units for wartime missions. Army officials also told us that they are currently circulating a draft change

[16] *Army Training: Evaluations of Units' Proficiency Are Not Always Reliable* (GAO/NSIAD-91-72, Feb. 15,1991) and *Special Inspection Report: Readiness Reporting Systems*, Department of the Army Inspector General, July 1989.

[17] The Army's Forces Command Regulation 220-3, June 1, 1998, prescribes the requirements for reporting proficiency in mission-essential tasks.

to the readiness reporting regulations that would replace the 42-day or less criteria with objective measures of training proficiency, such as the percentage of mission-essential tasks fully trained and personnel staffing percentage levels.

Inconsistent Guidance Confuses Requirements for Brigade Readiness

The Army's goal for the amount of time the brigades have to be ready to deploy is different from the requirements in the military war plans, as well as the training readiness reporting time frames. This has led to confusion about how quickly the brigades need to be ready to perform their mission(s). The Army's goal is for all the brigades to be assembled, trained, and ready to deploy within 90 days of the date they are called to active duty. However, latest arrival dates in actual war plans give some of the brigades considerably more time to be fully trained and transported to the war zones. Some Army officials told us that deployment times were tied to transportation availability and the 90-day goal was established in the early 1990s to provide a "mark on the wall" for training proficiency. We found no Army or National Guard guidance to help reconcile these timeliness criteria with the 42 days and other training readiness reporting time frames.

Conclusions

The brigades' improvement in gunnery qualification levels and individual training is encouraging. Nonetheless, the brigades continue to struggle with problems in meeting training and personnel staffing goals after years of effort. The ability to conduct efficient training, focused on those tasks most likely to be needed, and whose standards can be met in the time available, is critical to readiness. Left uncorrected, these problems will extend the time required to prepare the brigades for war, and foster uncertainty as to their best use in the national military strategy. Multi-mission capability is important in the current military environment. However, to ask all the brigades to be ready for all missions all the time creates a climate of unrealistic expectations. The continued reliance on a subjective system for assessing brigade readiness and deployment times, using inconsistent criteria, which do not adequately recognize reserve training limitations and are not based on actual military requirements, only furthers the climate of confusion and unrealistic expectations.

Recommendations

To improve training and assessments of the Enhanced Brigades' readiness for military missions, we recommend that the Secretary of the Army, in consultation with National Guard leaders,

- assess different ways of assigning missions to the brigades, including the option of assigning individual brigades parts of the overall set of missions on a rotating basis, and define a mandatory core list of tasks and focused training goals for each assigned mission and
- establish objective criteria for assessing training readiness, and use war plan requirements to set goals for the amount of time the brigades have to be ready for war.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, the Department of Defense agreed with our first recommendation and stated that the Army is taking action. Specifically, the Army is working with the National Guard to study how missions should be assigned to the brigades as part of the plan to transform the Army into a 21st century fighting force. The Department generally agreed with our second recommendation. It stated that the Army is currently analyzing its readiness assessment procedures to identify ways to reduce subjectivity in training readiness assessments. But, the Department maintained that mission-essential task lists already provide a wartime basis for setting goals for the amount of time the brigades have to prepare for deployment.

Assessing proficiency in mission-essential task lists, which are intended to be based on wartime requirements, is one approach to setting a goal for the time the brigades have to be ready for war. However, if the Army intends to use this approach, it needs to clarify its regulations. As discussed in the report, there is currently confusion as to which of the several timeliness goals available is the appropriate one—the 90 days cited in training guidance and other documents, the dates in war plans, or the time required to achieve full proficiency in mission-essential task lists. Moreover, current regulations provide no objective criteria to translate a given level of peacetime proficiency in mission-essential tasks into the number of days that will be needed for a unit to be fully trained. As a result of this, and feelings of pressure to avoid low readiness ratings on the part of some officials, brigade estimates of the days needed to train have been unrealistically low for years. We continue to believe that it is important for the Army to clarify the goal concerning the amount of time the brigades

have to be ready for war by linking training requirements to time frames established in the war plans.

The Department's comments are reprinted in appendix VII. The Department also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are providing copies of this report to the Chairmen of the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations and Armed Services, and the Secretaries of Defense and the Army. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

If you or your staff have questions concerning this report, please call me at (202) 512-5140. The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix VIII.

Neal P. Curtin
Associate Director
National Security Preparedness Issues

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to examine (1) whether the brigades are meeting current training and personnel readiness goals, (2) the key reasons for any continuing difficulties in meeting these goals, and (3) whether the Army has an effective system for assessing brigade readiness and the time required for them to be ready for war. The scope of our review included the combat units from all 15 Enhanced Separate Brigades. Support units, such as artillery, engineering, and military police units, were not included in our analyses of unit training readiness. We also excluded equipment readiness from our review.

To determine whether the brigades were meeting current training and personnel readiness goals, we identified the goals outlined in U.S. Army Forces Command and Army National Guard regulations and policy documents, and discussed them with representatives from those organizations. We then requested data from each brigade to document their proficiency in each of the training goals during 1998-99. Our staff analyzed the data provided by the brigades and discussed it with brigade and associated active Army officials to ensure that we interpreted the data correctly. To determine changes in proficiency levels over time, we compared the current data with data from 1993-94 that we obtained from the seven original brigades during our previous review. We provided our analysis of this data to each brigade, and requested that they review the results for accuracy and identify any significant changes since the data was first collected. All 12 brigades that responded verified that the data was accurate, and 10 of the 12 identified no significant change in their readiness since our initial review of 1998 data. Three brigades did not respond to our request. We also visited five brigades to obtain a more in-depth understanding of their training approaches and philosophies, local conditions, and problems. We selected the brigades visited to provide coverage of the various unit types—light infantry, mechanized infantry, and armor—geographical diversity, and a mix of the original and newer units selected to be Enhanced Separate Brigades. We discussed the results of our review with the remaining respondents via telephone. We did not attempt to independently verify the information provided by the brigades.

To identify the key reasons for any continuing difficulties in meeting readiness standards, we provided each brigade commander with a listing of potential problems that could undermine training proficiency. We requested that brigade officials revise the list as necessary, rank each of the problems in order of their impact on training, and provide their recommended solutions. To ensure an in-depth understanding of the problems and issues involved, we also held discussion groups with brigade

commanders and other officials, and associated active Army officials at the 12 brigades responding to our request for a review of our analysis. We compiled a summary of the answers provided by brigade leaders by assigning points for each ranked problem, and then calculating the average ranking for each problem. We also discussed these issues with Department of the Army and National Guard officials.

To determine the effectiveness of the Army's system for assessing brigade training readiness and the time required for them to be ready for war, we analyzed brigade readiness ratings and deployment time estimates included in unit status reports from 1990 to September 1999. We compared this information with information and estimates included in unit training plans, studies by the RAND Corporation, the Army Inspector General, the Science Applications International Corporation, the Congressional Research Service, and our own office. We also discussed these estimates and the surrounding issues with National Guard and Department of the Army officials.

We performed our work from January 1999 through March 2000 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

National Guard Enhanced Separate Brigades

27th Infantry Brigade, Syracuse, New York

29th Infantry Brigade, Honolulu, Hawaii

30th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), Clinton, North Carolina

39th Infantry Brigade, Little Rock, Arkansas

41st Infantry Brigade, Portland, Oregon

45th Infantry Brigade, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

48th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), Macon, Georgia

53rd Infantry Brigade, Tampa, Florida

76th Infantry Brigade, Indianapolis, Indiana

81st Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), Seattle, Washington

116th Cavalry Brigade, Boise, Idaho

155th Armored Brigade, Tupelo, Mississippi

218th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), Newberry, South Carolina

256th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), Lafayette, Louisiana

278th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Knoxville, Tennessee

Platoon Proficiency in Mission-Essential Tasks, 1998

Brigade	Percent of platoons rated as trained or needs practice in at least 70 percent of tasks	Average number of tasks rated per platoon
1	95	12
2	100	22
3	67	16
4	0	14
5	100	17
6	73	21
7	100	10
8	96	Not available
9	54	41
10	88	10
11	97	13
12	41	18
13	90	58
14	92	23
15	25	5

Note: Includes only combat platoons.

Source: 1998 Brigade Training Assessment Models.

Battalion Proficiency in Tank and Bradley Fighting Vehicle Gunnery, 1998

Brigades	Percent of assigned crews qualified	Meet standard?
Brigade 1	Light infantry, not applicable[a]	
Brigade 2	Light infantry, not applicable	
Brigade 3		
Battalion 1 (Bradley)	73	No
Battalion 2 (Bradley)	88	Yes
Battalion 3 (tank)	54	No
Brigade 4	Light infantry, not applicable	
Brigade 5		
Battalion 1 (tank)	97	Yes
Battalion 2 (tank)	100	Yes
Battalion 3 (Bradley)	96	Yes
Brigade 6	Light infantry, not applicable	
Brigade 7		
Battalion 1 (tank)	100	Yes
Battalion 2 (Bradley)	90	Yes
Battalion 3 (Bradley)	98	Yes
Brigade 8		
Battalion 1 (tank)	97	Yes
Battalion 2 (tank)	94	Yes
Battalion 3 (Bradley)	87	Yes
Brigade 9	Light infantry, not applicable	
Brigade 10		
Battalion 1 (Bradley)	33	No
Battalion 2 (Bradley)	0	No
Battalion 3 (tank)	0	No
Brigade 11	Light infantry, not applicable	
Brigade 12	Light infantry, not applicable	
Brigade 13		
Battalion 1 (tank)	79	No
Battalion 2 (Bradley)	37	No
Battalion 3 (Bradley)	64	No
Brigade 14		
Battalion 1 (tank/Bradley)	61/51	No/No
Battalion 2 (tank/Bradley)	51/12	No/No
Battalion 3 (tank/Bradley)	66/37	No/No

(Continued From Previous Page)

Brigades	Percent of assigned crews qualified	Meet standard?
Brigade 15		
Battalion 1 (tank)	73	No
Battalion 2 (Bradley)	52	No
Battalion 3 (Bradley)	29	No

[a]Light infantry brigades are not equipped with tanks or Bradley fighting vehicles.

Source: Brigade training records.

Individual and Leader Training Rates, 1998-99

Brigade	Percentage of all soldiers qualified in their assigned job (goal: 85 percent)[a]	Percentage of leaders who completed professional military education courses (goal: 100 percent)	
		Officers	Sergeants
1	97	81	90
2	88	82	74
3	88	88	83
4	87	Not available	Not available
5	86	67	48
6	88	78	74
7	91	97	88
8	91	89	65
9	88	88	93
10	85	88	73
11	96	53	67
12	94	85	75
13	87	86	70
14	85	77	68
15	90	53	74

[a]Figures adjusted for soldiers in or awaiting basic training.

Source: Brigade records.

Brigade Staffing and Loss Rates, 1998-99

Brigade	Brigades meeting personnel goal	Percentage of required personnel actually assigned	Percentage of personnel leaving during the year
1	No	106	19
2	No	106	22
3	No	96	23
4	No	95	14
5	No	92	Not available
6	No	96	29
7	Yes	105	21
8	No	92	21
9	No	99	21
10	No	105	22
11	No	105	21
12	No	92	22
13	No	93	16
14	No	90	16
15	No	85	19
Averages	—	97	20

Source: Unit Status Reports and brigade records.

Comments From the Department of Defense

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1500

RESERVE AFFAIRS

18 MAY 2000

Mr. Neal P. Curtin
Associate Director, National Security Preparedness Issues
National Security and International Affairs Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C 20548

Dear Mr. Curtin:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, "ARMY NATIONAL GUARD: Readiness has Improved, but Enhanced Brigades Struggle with Personnel Problems and too Many Missions" dated April 13, 2000 (GAO Code 703279/OSD Case 1984). The Department partially concurs with the recommendations as presented within the draft report.

Now on p. 18.

The Army is working on the issues discussed within the report, and they have established timelines for transformation to ensure that all units are missioned to meet the National Military Strategy and Defense Planning Guidance. The Army is also developing improved policy and procedures to assess training readiness in order to reduce subjectivity in the commanders' estimates of training time required to achieve mission essential task list proficiency. The Department continues to be committed to having mission-ready Army National Guard enhanced brigades that support the security requirements of the nation.

DoD comments on the draft report recommendations along with technical comments are enclosed. The DoD appreciates the opportunity to comment on the GAO draft report.

Sincerely,

Charles L. Cragin
Principal Deputy Assistant
Secretary

Enclosure:
As stated

GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED APRIL 13, 2000
GAO CODE 703279/OSD CASE 1984

"ARMY NATIONAL GUARD: READINESS HAS IMPROVED, BUT ENHANCED BRIGADES STRUGGLE WITH PERSONNEL PROBLEMS AND TOO MANY MISSIONS"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATIONS / TECHNICAL COMMENTS

RECOMMENDATIONS : To improve training and assessments of the Enhanced Brigades' readiness for military missions, GAO recommend that the Secretary of the Army, in consultation with National Guard leaders:

RECOMMENDATION 1: Assess different ways of assigning missions to the brigades, including the option of assigning individual brigades parts of the overall set of missions on a rotating basis, and define a mandatory core list of tasks and focused training goals for each assigned mission.

Now on p. 18.

DOD RESPONSE : Concur. In October 1999, the Chief of Staff, Army, briefed his vision of the Army Transformation plan. Time lines have been established for Army transformation to ensure that all Army units are missioned to meet the National Military Strategy and Defense Planning Guidance. The Army's battle focused training doctrine and METL development process emphasize that RC units must concentrate their limited training time on the most critical wartime training requirements. The Army staff is working directly with the Army National Guard, conducting missioning study groups, and continues to review the best utilization of the Army National Guard enhanced Separate Brigades and Divisions.

RECOMMENDATION 2 : Establish objective criteria for assessing training readiness, and use war plan requirements to set goals for the amount of time the brigades would have to prepare for deployment.

Now on p. 18.

DOD RESPONSE : Partially Concur. The Army is currently analyzing its policy and procedures to assess training readiness for deployment. One proposal is to change current Army policy and procedures by reducing the subjectivity in the commanders' estimates. This reduction of commander subjectivity, and reliance upon quantifiable measures of readiness, should produce realistic readiness forecasts to achieve METL proficiency. The Secretary of the Army has established objective criteria for assessing training readiness. The Mission Essential Task List (METL), which is based on wartime requirements, is the objective criteria that all commanders use to establish goals. Army Regulation 220-1, Unit Status Reporting, directs commands to consider their METL in evaluating the total number of days to train to achieve METL proficiency.

GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED APRIL 13, 2000
GAO CODE 703279/OSD CASE 1984
"ARMY NATIONAL GUARD: READINESS HAS IMPROVED, BUT ENHANCED BRIGADES STRUGGLE WITH PERSONNEL PROBLEMS AND TOO MANY MISSIONS"

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATIONS / TECHNICAL COMMENTS

TECHNICAL COMMENTS:

Page2 , 2nd paragraph

Now on p. 4.

RECOMMENDATION: Delete the following: "Army units report on their readiness based on assessments of whether the unit has the personnel, equipment, and training needed to be ready to deploy for their assigned mission quickly." Replace with, "Army units report on their readiness based on assessments of whether the unit has the personnel, equipment, and training needed to undertake the full wartime mission for which it is organized or designed."

Page 3, first paragraph, last two sentences

Now on p. 6.

RECOMMENDATION: Replace the last two sentences with the following: "However, although training guidance calls for the brigades to be trained and ready to deploy ninety days after they have been called to active duty, current war plans neither require all brigades to be mobilized simultaneously nor trained concurrently."

RATIONALE: As written, these sentences suggest that because of war plan inconsistencies, considerably more time than 90 days may be available for enhanced brigade training and deployment. This statement masks the fact that not all brigades will be simultaneously called up upon the outbreak of hostilities, nor will all train concurrently (due to the physical constraint of suitable brigade-sized post-mobilization training areas).

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS TO THE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATIONS / TECHNICAL COMMENTS

TECHNICAL COMMENTS CONT:

Page 7, first paragraph, fourth sentence

RECOMMENDATION: Replace the words "…authorized to hire" with the word "assigned".

Now on p. 11.

RATIONALE: The word "authorized" in the sentence is inappropriately used. The enhanced Separate Brigades are authorized to fill their full-time support positions to 90 percent of requirements. However, funding for full-time Army National Guard manning (AGRs and MILTECHs) covers only 55 percent of the validated positions. This level of funding, when coupled with increases in priorities of other Army National Guard units, reflects upon the *assigned* strength of full-time support in the enhanced brigades which may, in fact, average between 55 and 64 percent as reported.

Pages 9 and 10, "Other Problems Also Hamper Readiness" paragraph

Now on p. 14.

RECOMMENDATION: Add the following sentence at the end of the paragraph: "A FY 2000 increase in classroom seat quotas and increased funding for schools and special training, together with the Army National Guard's Distance Learning Initiative, should provide ample opportunity for soldiers to attend annual training with their unit as well as participate in individual training.

RATIONALE: Incorporation of the above sentence into the report recognizes the Department's efforts to mitigate the difficulties service members face when forced to decide between annual collective unit training or individual/professional development training.

Page10, third paragraph

Now on p. 15.

RECOMMENDATION: Replace: "…. needed to be ready to deploy for their assigned mission quickly." Add: "…. needed to undertake the full wartime mission for which it is organized or designed."

RATIONALE: The modified description is based upon the definitions of readiness in Paragraph 3.1, Army Regulation 220-1.

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

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Bill Meredith (202) 512-4275

Acknowledgments

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