

October 2006

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Reserve Components Need Guidance to Accurately and Consistently Account for Volunteers on Active Duty for Operational Support





Highlights of [GAO-07-93](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) and Congress have expressed concern with the frequency and length of time that volunteer reservists serve on active duty. In fiscal year 2006, DOD nearly doubled its fiscal year 2005 estimate for the total maximum levels of reservists volunteering to be on active duty for operational support, as shown in the table. Congress required GAO to review the reasons behind the increases and expressed an interest in understanding which reservists were being included or excluded from these numbers. In this report, GAO (1) identified the factors that led to the increase in DOD's requests for the maximum number of volunteer reserve personnel authorized to be on active duty for operational support since DOD's initial request in fiscal year 2005 and (2) assessed the extent to which the reserve components have consistently reported the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity since 2005. In conducting this review, GAO analyzed agency documents and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD and the reserve components develop guidance to clarify and consistently define the categories of operational support that should be included in the reported amounts. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with the recommendation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-93.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Reserve Components Need Guidance to Accurately and Consistently Account for Volunteers on Active Duty for Operational Support

What GAO Found

DOD's requested authorization levels for reserve personnel voluntarily on active duty for operational support grew substantially between fiscal years 2005 and 2006 for two reasons. First, when developing its fiscal year 2005 estimate, DOD used data reported annually that excluded some reservists serving in operational support capacities. Second, the definition of operational support was not included with the legislation and DOD did not distribute an official definition until 6 months after the fiscal year 2005 authorized levels were in place. Based on the published definition and greater outreach to personnel responsible for monitoring the number of volunteers for this type of active duty, most reserve components submitted higher estimates for maximum levels for fiscal year 2006. DOD submitted the same estimates in fiscal year 2007 as fiscal year 2006 because the number of volunteers did not change greatly.

The reserve components have not been consistently identifying the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity since this monthly reporting requirement was adopted in fiscal year 2005. The reserve components are inconsistently including certain categories of personnel in their reported numbers. For example, two of the six reserve components do not include personnel serving as voluntarily recalled retired reservists in their reported totals, even though this category is listed in DOD's definition of operational support. In addition, only three of the six components include reservists serving on extended active duty missions in their reported numbers. GAO also found that the Navy Reserve erroneously submitted cumulative amounts instead of the highest amount of volunteer reservists each month for 6 months, so that it appeared to exceed its maximum authorized level three times. DOD is implementing a change to its Defense Manpower and Data Center to systematically generate the highest count of reservists each month, but the effectiveness of this change depends on whether the components update and align their policies and systems to provide these data. DOD is in the process of developing an instruction and only four of the reserve components have updated or have plans to update their guidance to clarify and consistently define what categories to include when accounting for these operational support reservists. Without updating and aligning their guidance, inconsistencies and errors in the reported numbers of operational support reservists may continue.

Maximum Authorized Number of Active Duty Reserve Personnel for Operational Support from Fiscal Years 2005 to 2006

Maximum number of reservists authorized	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006	Difference	Percentage change
Army Reserve	5,000	13,000	8,000	160%
Army National Guard	10,300	17,000	6,700	65%
Navy Reserve	6,200	6,200	0	0%
Marine Corps Reserve	2,500	3,000	500	20%
Air National Guard	10,100	16,000	5,900	58%
Air Force Reserve	3,600	14,000	10,400	289%
Total	37,700	69,200	31,500	84%

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

United States Government Accountability Office

Contents

Letter		1
	Results in Brief	4
	Background	5
	Conclusions	13
	Recommendation for Executive Action	14
	Agency Comments	14

Appendix I	Scope and Methodology	16
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Appendix II	Comments from the Department of Defense	18
--------------------	--	----

Appendix III	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	20
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Table		
	Table 1: Maximum Authorized Number of Active Duty Reserve Personnel for Operational Support from Fiscal Years 2005 to 2006	10

Abbreviations

DMDC	Defense Manpower and Data Center
DOD	Department of Defense
FY	fiscal year
NDA	National Defense Authorization Act

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

October 31, 2006

The Honorable John C. Warner
Chairman
The Honorable Carl Levin
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Duncan L. Hunter
Chairman
The Honorable Ike Skelton
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

Since the end of the Cold War, the reserve components¹ have become an integral part of military operations. As of May 2006, the Ready Reserve comprised roughly 44 percent of the total military force. The Department of Defense (DOD) has increasingly relied on both involuntarily mobilized and volunteer reservists since the first Gulf War, as well as in a series of military operations from 1994 through 2001 for contingencies in Haiti, Bosnia, Southwest Asia, and Kosovo. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, DOD has depended more heavily on the reserves for overseas operations and homeland missions. The department and Congress have expressed concern with the frequency and length of time that volunteer reservists are mobilized or voluntarily serve on active duty, which can lead to overuse of reservists and stress on the reserve force,

¹ The Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Navy Reserve, and the Marine Corps Reserve comprise the DOD reserve components or reserves.

impairing the availability and ability of reservists to respond quickly to contingency missions.²

Prior to October 2004, the extent to which reservists could volunteer to serve in military operations was restricted by legislation, which became known as the 180-day rule. The rule stated that DOD must count in its congressionally authorized, active duty, annual end strength levels any reservist serving in an active duty role and performing special work for longer than 180 days. As a result of the rule, DOD could use reservists to perform mission-essential tasks for a limited period of time without considering them as a permanent addition to the force. DOD officials believed this rule limited volunteerism, service continuity, and their flexibility in using volunteer reservists in a variety of missions. To work around this rule, the services allowed reservists to volunteer multiple times in succession as long as each active duty service tour lasted fewer than 180 days. These actions resulted in volunteer reservists serving on active duty for extended periods of time without being accounted for under the active duty end strength numbers.

Enacted in October 2004, the Ronald Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 (NDAA) included a mechanism to provide oversight over the number of reservists volunteering to be on active duty for operational support. The act eliminated the 180-day rule and created a requirement for Congress to annually authorize the maximum number of volunteer reserve personnel to be on active duty for operational support purposes. The act did not define the term operational support, but provided for the Secretary of Defense to define operational support in a separately published regulation. The act also provided that a reservist on active or full-time National Guard duty for a period greater than 3 years or for a cumulative period of more than 3 years within the past 4 years was to be counted against the active duty end strength authorization. DOD then required the reserve components to report their

² GAO has also issued a number of reports and testimonies reviewing the increased use of reserve forces related to mobilization, availability, and readiness: *Military Personnel: DOD Needs to Address Long-Term Reserve Force Availability and Related Mobilization and Demobilization Issues*, [GAO-04-1031](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 15, 2004); *Reserve Forces: Actions Needed to Better Prepare the National Guard for Future Overseas and Domestic Missions*, [GAO-05-21](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 10, 2004); *Military Personnel: A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Address Long-Term Guard and Reserve Force Availability*, [GAO-05-285T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 2, 2005); and *Reserve Forces: Army National Guard's Role, Organization, and Equipment Need to Be Reexamined*, [GAO-06-170T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 20, 2005).

monthly highest numbers of these reservists in order to monitor that they did not exceed their maximum authorized levels. In the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2006, most of the reserve components had significantly increased their estimates for the maximum number of reserves authorized to be on active duty for operational support. The total authorization level nearly doubled compared to the fiscal year 2005 authorization level. DOD's fiscal year 2007 requested authorization for volunteer reservists remained consistent with the fiscal year 2006 maximum levels.

Congress required that we review the reasons behind the increases from fiscal year 2005 to fiscal year 2006, as well as the factors used to develop the fiscal year 2007 levels.³ Congress also expressed an interest in understanding which reservists were being included or excluded from the number of reservists activated for operational support purposes. The objectives of this report are to (1) identify the factors that led to the increase in requests for the maximum number of volunteer reserve personnel authorized to be on active duty for operational support since fiscal year 2005 and (2) assess the extent to which the reserve components have consistently reported the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity since 2005.

To identify the factors that led to the increase in the number of authorized personnel, we reviewed policies, implementing guidance, and regulations, analyzed key legislation, and interviewed Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Reserve Affairs and reserve component officials to gain an understanding of their roles and effectiveness in developing the authorization levels for reservists on active duty for operational support. To determine the reliability of the estimates for the maximum authorization levels for the reserve components, we gathered reserve component officials' perspectives on their data systems in the collecting and reporting of reserve numbers to DOD. To determine the extent to which the reserve components have consistently reported the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity, we obtained documentation and discussed with reserve officials the consistency in application of the guidelines, including information on the structure of reserve data systems and the process for collecting and recording the numbers of reservists. The components and DOD also provided the highest number of reservists each month as reported to DOD. We found inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the data, based in part on definitional

³ H.R. Rep. No. 109-89, Title IV, at 310 (2005).

problems of categories of reservists to be included in reported numbers, generating data that we believe are not sufficiently reliable. As a result, we make a recommendation for executive action to improve the accuracy and consistency of information that is reported across the components. We conducted our review from June 2006 through September 2006, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. The scope and methodology used in our review are described further in appendix I.

Results in Brief

DOD's request for volunteer reserve personnel authorized to be on active duty for operational support grew between fiscal years 2005 and 2006 primarily due to two key factors: data used by DOD to prepare its fiscal year 2005 estimate did not accurately reflect all the reservists voluntarily serving in operational support capacities and DOD had not defined what constituted operational support prior to submitting the fiscal year 2005 estimate. According to DOD officials, when it developed its initial submission for maximum authorization levels, the department based its estimates on data reported annually by the reserve components for other purposes. The data excluded some reservists serving in operational support capacities. Once the numbers requested for fiscal year 2005 were approved by Congress and communicated throughout the reserve components, reserve officials with greater insight over the reservists serving in an operational support role realized that the estimates were too low and did not reflect the actual numbers of reservists serving in this capacity. Further complicating the issue, DOD's definition of operational support was not agreed upon or distributed until April 26, 2005, approximately 6 months after the fiscal year 2005 authorized maximum levels were in place. Based on the published definition and greater outreach to gather appropriate data from the personnel responsible for monitoring the number of individuals who volunteered for this type of active duty, most reserve components revised the fiscal year 2005 numbers and submitted higher estimates for the maximum authorized levels for fiscal year 2006. DOD submitted the same maximum levels for fiscal year 2007 as in fiscal year 2006 because there were no significant increases or decreases.

The reserve components have not consistently or accurately identified the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity since this monthly reporting requirement was adopted in fiscal year 2005. The reserve components are inconsistently including certain categories of personnel in their reported numbers, and components had different definitions of the personnel included within some reported categories. For

example, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard do not include personnel that are serving as voluntarily recalled retired reservists in their reported amounts, even though this category is listed in DOD's definition of operational support. Army personnel stated that these reservists are included in their active duty end strength numbers. In addition, only three of the six reserve components include in their reported numbers reservists who are serving on extended active duty missions, and two of these components have different definitions of the personnel included in this category. We also found that instead of reporting the highest number of these reservists each month, the Navy Reserve submitted cumulative numbers of reservists for 6 months, which led to erroneously reporting that it exceeded its maximum authorized level three times. According to Navy officials, these errors were caused by lack of access to personnel data due to Hurricane Katrina, and the errors were ultimately corrected.

To help address these inconsistencies and errors, DOD is implementing a change in its Defense Manpower and Data Center (DMDC) to enable DOD to systematically generate the number of each component's operational support reservists. However, the effectiveness of this automated reporting change depends on the components, which are responsible for updating and aligning their policies and systems to provide accurate data to DMDC. DOD is still in the process of developing a draft instruction and only four of the reserve components have updated or have plans in place to update their guidance to clarify and consistently define what categories of reservist to include when accounting for those performing operational support duties. Inconsistencies and errors in the reported numbers of operational support reservists may continue until DOD and the reserve components uniformly update their guidance to clarify and consistently define what categories of reservist to include in their reported numbers. Until this is accomplished, DOD and Congress do not have a clear picture of how many volunteer reservists are currently on active duty serving in an operational support capacity. We are recommending that DOD and the reserve components develop guidance that clarifies and defines the categories of operational support that should be included in the reported numbers so that accurate and consistent information is reported across the components. In its comments on a draft of this report, DOD concurred with our recommendation.

Background

Although reserve personnel have been used for contingency and emergency operations through the involuntary "Presidential Reserve Call-

up” and “Partial Mobilization” authorities, a significant number of reserve personnel on active duty for these and other missions have been provided on a voluntary basis.⁴ Agency officials stated that these volunteer reservists’ roles could include filling in for an existing active duty mission temporarily (such as an infantryman or pilot), providing needed special skills (civil affairs or engineer), or participating in training exercises that result in support to active duty missions. Legislation has evolved since 1980 to provide DOD with more flexibility in managing these volunteer reservists.

The Defense Officer Personnel Management Act⁵ was passed in 1980 to amend Title 10 of the U.S. Code. The act required that Congress annually authorize total strength levels for each military service for active duty personnel, with some exceptions. The act also established the 180-day rule for reserve members serving on active duty for special work. Reserve members on active duty who performed special work for 180 days or fewer were excluded from being counted against active duty personnel end-strengths.

Title 10 of the U.S. Code at Section 115, which governs personnel strengths for the military, gave authority to the Secretary of Defense to vary active duty and Selected Reserve end-strengths above the level authorized by Congress. Prior to October 2004, the Secretary of Defense could increase active duty end strength paid by active duty funds by up to 3 percent, increase the end strength for active duty and National Guard paid by reserve funds by up to 2 percent, and vary the end strength authorized for the Selected Reserve by up to 2 percent.⁶

On October 28, 2004, the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2005 was enacted.⁷ The act amended 10 U.S.C. § 115 by establishing an annual authorization requirement for the maximum number of reserve personnel authorized to be on active duty for operational support, thus creating a new accounting category. It also added a provision that allows the Secretary of Defense to

⁴ Section 12301(d) of Title 10 of the United States Code authorizes the service secretaries to order a reservist to active duty with the consent of that member, as opposed to being called up or mobilized involuntarily in a time of war or other national emergency.

⁵ Pub. L. No. 96-513, §102 (1980).

⁶ 10 U.S.C. § 115(e) (2003).

⁷ Pub. L. No. 108-375.

increase the maximum strength authorized for certain reservists voluntarily on active duty to perform operational support by up to 10 percent.⁸

Authorization Levels Increased Due to Inaccurate Information and Lack of an Operational Support Definition

DOD's estimates for the maximum number of volunteer reservists authorized to be on active duty for operational support increased between fiscal year 2005 and fiscal year 2006 as a result of two key factors. First, DOD developed its fiscal year 2005 estimates using inaccurate data from a data source that could not distinguish volunteer reservists on active duty for missions that would be considered operational support from other reservists. Second, DOD did not formally define operational support prior to establishment of its fiscal year 2005 maximum authorized levels and did not release a definition of operational support until 6 months after the maximum authorized levels were passed under the NDAA. DOD increased its estimates for fiscal year 2006 after the reserve components reviewed historical numbers of these reservists based on the published operational support definition. For the fiscal year 2007 estimates, the reserve components submitted the same maximum levels as fiscal year 2006 because there were no substantial increases or decreases in their numbers, according to DOD officials.

DOD Based Its Initial Request on Data That Did Not Accurately Reflect the Number of Volunteer Reservists on Active Duty for Operational Support

One key factor that contributed to the increase in authorization levels requested for fiscal year 2006 was that DOD's initial request for fiscal year 2005 was not developed using data that accurately reflected the maximum number of reservists on voluntary active duty for operational support. In developing the estimate submitted for the fiscal year 2005 NDAA, DOD used data that was provided by the reserve components for other purposes. DOD derived its estimates from an annual data call where reserve components provide information about reservists' activities throughout the year. These data identified reservists involved in such missions as domestic emergencies, counter-drug activities, major exercises, and mobilizations. According to a DOD official, they compiled the estimates from various categories that represented what they considered operational support. They automatically eliminated some categories from their count, such as some counter-drug activities and mobilizations, because they assumed that the reported data in these categories only included involuntary active duty reservists. DOD

⁸ Pub. L. No. 108-375, § 416 (c)(4).

informally provided the estimates to the reserve components for their review, but had to submit the estimates before some reserve components could respond.

After the authorized levels were approved by Congress in the fiscal year 2005 NDAA and communicated throughout the reserve components, reserve officials with greater insight over the reservists serving in an operational support role realized that the estimates did not reflect the actual numbers of reservists serving in this capacity. Officials from the reserve components informed DOD that the maximum numbers requested were too low for force requirements. According to a DOD official, they scrutinized their initial data review and found that the information extracted from the data did not distinguish involuntarily activated reservists from voluntarily activated reservists. Once they realized that the data did not separate out voluntary and involuntary reservists, they recognized that some of the data from categories that had been excluded, such as mobilizations, should not have been completely excluded since it contained some volunteers. DOD's lack of formal coordination with the reserve components and its reliance upon existing data that did not specifically identify volunteer reservists on active duty for operational support contributed to DOD submitting a low estimate for fiscal year 2005.

DOD Lacked a Definition of Operational Support Prior to its Fiscal Year 2005 Estimate

Another key factor that contributed to the increase in DOD's fiscal year 2006 estimate for the maximum number of reservists authorized was that DOD did not have a definition of operational support prior to its initial estimate for fiscal year 2005. When the fiscal year 2005 NDAA was enacted on October 28, 2004, the act did not provide a definition for operational support to apply to the maximum authorization levels, but instead required the Secretary of Defense to prescribe by regulation the meaning of the term operational support.⁹

After the fiscal year 2005 NDAA was enacted, DOD met with reserve component officials in response to their concerns about the low authorization levels and also to develop a definition for operational support. In collaboration with the components, DOD established a definition for operational support, and on April 26, 2005—approximately 6 months after the fiscal year 2005 authorization levels for reserve personnel were made law—released the official definition with some

⁹ Pub. L. No. 108-375, § 416(m).

accounting and reporting guidelines. DOD defined operational support as: active duty, other than mobilized active guard and reserve duty, voluntarily performed by reservists; full-time duty, other than mobilized active guard and reserve duty, voluntarily performed by National Guard members; and active duty for training performed at the request of an operational commander, or as the result of reimbursable funding. The definition of operational support included

- active duty for special work,¹⁰
- active duty and active duty for training performed as the result of reimbursable funding,
- funeral honors duty performed not in an inactive duty status,
- voluntary active duty performed by recall reserve retirees not receiving regular retired pay, and
- active duty training performed as a result of a request of an operational commander to provide support.

The guidelines created a requirement for components to report to DOD the highest number of operational support reservists each month. Once the definition for operational support was established, reserve component officials that had direct responsibility for monitoring reserve personnel end strength reviewed historical data from their internal systems on the number of volunteer reservists serving in the areas included under the definition. The components determined that the numbers that were in fiscal year 2005 NDAA did not accurately reflect the number of reservists performing operational support. Most of the reserve components then submitted higher estimates for the maximum authorized levels in the fiscal year 2006 NDAA. Table 1 shows that five out of six reserve components provided larger maximum levels for fiscal year 2006, and the total authorization level nearly doubled compared to the fiscal year 2005 authorization level.

¹⁰ DOD previously defined active duty for special work as “a tour of active duty for reserve personnel authorized from military or reserve personnel appropriations for work on active component or reserve component programs. The purpose of active duty for special work is to provide the necessary skilled manpower assets to support existing or emerging requirements.” Department of Defense Directive 1215.6, Uniform Reserve, Training and Retirement Categories, paragraph E 1.1.2 (Mar. 14, 1997).

Table 1: Maximum Authorized Number of Active Duty Reserve Personnel for Operational Support from Fiscal Years 2005 to 2006

Maximum number of reservists authorized to be on active duty for operational support	Fiscal year 2005	Fiscal year 2006	Difference from fiscal year 2005 to fiscal year 2006	Percentage change from fiscal year 2005 to fiscal year 2006
Army Reserve	5,000	13,000	8,000	160%
Army National Guard	10,300	17,000	6,700	65%
Navy Reserve	6,200	6,200	0	0%
Marine Corps Reserve	2,500	3,000	500	20%
Air National Guard	10,100	16,000	5,900	58%
Air Force Reserve	3,600	14,000	10,400	289%
Total	37,700	69,200	31,500	84%

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Fiscal Year 2007 Estimates Match Fiscal Year 2006 Maximum Levels

For its fiscal year 2007 estimates, DOD submitted a request for the same maximum levels as in fiscal year 2006. The reserve components reviewed their historical data as they did for the fiscal year 2006 estimates and updated them with data from fiscal year 2006. The reserve components found that there were no substantial increases or decreases in their fiscal year 2006 numbers that required changes in their estimated maximum levels for fiscal year 2007.

Reserve Components Are Not Identifying Numbers of Active Duty Reservists for Operational Support Consistently across Components

The reserve components have not been consistently identifying the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity since this requirement was adopted in fiscal year 2005. In its April 2005 memorandum that provided a definition for operational support, DOD directed the components to report the highest number of volunteer reservists serving in an operational support capacity each month so that DOD could monitor the amounts to ensure that components did not exceed the maximum levels authorized. On the basis of our analyses, we found that the reserve components inconsistently include various categories of personnel in their reported numbers because the components have different interpretations about what is included under DOD's operational support definition and how it applies to their existing categories. For example, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard do not include voluntary active duty performed by recalled retired reservists in their accounting amounts, even though this is one of the five categories listed under DOD's definition of operational support. According

to Army personnel, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard do not include these reservists because they consider them active duty and include them in their active duty end strength numbers. In addition, the reserve components are inconsistent on whether they include volunteer reservists serving on extended active duty in their reported operational support numbers. The definition of operational support provided by DOD does not specifically address extended active duty reservists. We found that three of the six reserve components—Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve, and Army National Guard—include extended active duty reservists in their reported operational support numbers, although the Navy and Air Force define the length of service for extended active duty reservists differently. The Navy Reserve defines them as voluntary recall reservists on 2 to 5 year tours. The Air Force considers them to be reservists volunteering to fill an existing, funded active duty position for 3 years or less. The Army Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, and Air National Guard do not include extended active duty reservists in their reported operational support numbers because they are currently being accounted for under active duty end-strengths.

In addition to these inconsistencies, we also found that one component's monthly reports of volunteer reservists serving on active duty for operational support have not provided DOD with an accurate accounting of the number of these individuals due to errors in the numbers reported. We found that in each month from January through June 2006, the Navy Reserve erroneously reported to DOD cumulative totals instead of the highest number of reservists in each month. A Navy Reserve official stated that they did not have complete access to personnel data during these months because they had to relocate their personnel database after Hurricane Katrina. As a result, the Navy Reserve appeared to exceed its maximum authorized level for 3 months—in January, February, and June 2006. The Navy Reserve did not discover this error until late July 2006, at which time they retroactively corrected the erroneously reported amounts.

To help address these inconsistencies and errors, the Defense Manpower and Data Center (DMDC) is in the process of implementing a system change that would allow DOD to have automated access to the number of volunteer operational support reservists. We reported in September 2006 that DMDC can extract some reserve personnel data, such as a reservist's number of deployments and citizenship, but it could not provide data

specifically on volunteer status from all six reserve components.¹¹

According to a DMDC official, the proposed change would only provide information from systems already aligned with DMDC that can distinguish volunteer reservists for operational support. DMDC also does not have the authority to direct the services to correct data errors and inconsistencies.

As of early October 2006, we found that each reserve component collected its operational support numbers from accounting systems that did not provide all this information to DMDC. For example, the Navy Reserve obtained its reported numbers from the Navy Reserve Order Writing System, which currently feeds into DMDC, but this system does not distinguish the highest amount of volunteer reservists each month. The Marine Corps Reserve's systems can provide volunteer information to DMDC, but it reported end of the month numbers, not the highest number of reservists during the month. The Army Reserve, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard each pull key data from external databases managed by the Defense Finance and Accounting System, but the Army Reserve's database did not provide the monthly highest number of volunteers. The Army National Guard compiles its number of volunteer reservists from its own systems and the Army Human Resource Command, which do not provide this information on volunteers. The DMDC official stated that the effectiveness of the proposed change to automate reporting on volunteer operational support reservists still depends on the components, which are responsible for aligning their policies and systems to provide the appropriate information according to changes in data reporting requirements. As a result, we do not believe that this system change will provide DOD with accurate information about the peak monthly number of volunteer reservists serving in an operational support capacity, unless the components align their policies and systems to conform to reporting requirements.

We found that DOD and the reserve components have not updated and aligned their guidance to clearly and consistently articulate and define what categories of reservists to include in accounting for and reporting on operational support levels. DOD released preliminary guidance in its April 2005 memorandum that defined the five categories of reservists that comprise operational support; however, they have not yet updated their

¹¹ GAO, *Military Personnel: DOD and the Services Need to Take Additional Steps to Improve Mobilization Data for Reserve Components*, [GAO-06-1068](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 20, 2006).

instruction that governs the use of and accounting for reservists. DOD is in the process of developing an instruction on accounting and reporting procedures in the new DOD Instruction 1215.6, which it plans to officially release in late October 2006. Even though DOD has not released its updated instruction, the Army National Guard published updated guidance based on DOD's April 2005 memorandum that provides examples of missions specific to the Army National Guard that are considered operational support. Another three components—the Army Reserve, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard—have plans in place to update their guidance to reflect operational support reporting requirements. The Department of the Army expects to release its updated guidance for the Army Reserve within the year. The Air Force Reserve plans to update its implementing regulations in March or April 2007 and, in the interim, has issued a policy memorandum that applies operational support requirements to its policies. The Air National Guard expects to update its guidance in the near future, and has an interim policy that addresses operational support similar to the Air Force Reserve. The two remaining components—the Marine Corps Reserve and Navy Reserve—have not updated their existing guidance to incorporate operational support accounting and reporting and do not appear to have immediate plans to do so until DOD releases new guidance. Until DOD and all of the reserve components update and uniformly align their implementing guidance, inconsistencies and errors in the reporting of the number of operational support reservists may continue. As a result, DOD and the components cannot ensure that they will not exceed the maximum authorized levels, which may impair the ability of DOD and Congress to oversee the use of volunteer reservists serving on active duty in an operational support capacity.

Conclusions

With DOD's growing demand for reserve personnel to augment its active duty forces to accomplish its missions overseas and at home, stress on the reserve force is a significant issue. Reservists have been serving on increasingly longer and more frequent tours of duty. However, reserve personnel are a part-time force and DOD must take care in managing the frequency with which it uses the reserves to complete its missions. It is critical that DOD and Congress have oversight over DOD's forces to ensure that its citizen-soldiers are not overextended.

In eliminating the 180-day rule, Congress gave DOD flexibility in managing its volunteer reservists to serve in a variety of missions, without limiting volunteerism and continuity of service. However, the reserve components continue to struggle with accurately and consistently identifying these

reservists each month. Updated guidance that clearly articulates what should be included and excluded from this accounting would help the components eliminate the inconsistent interpretations that currently exist. Until DOD and all of the reserve components update their implementing guidance in a uniform manner, inconsistencies and errors in the reporting of the number may continue and DOD will be unable to ensure that reported numbers are accurate and that maximum levels are not being exceeded. Lack of an accurate accounting of the number of voluntary reserve personnel serving in an operational support capacity defeats the purpose for establishing the reporting requirement, which in turn hampers DOD's ability to manage its forces and to minimize lengthy activations and stress on the reserve forces. This lack of visibility also limits Congress's oversight over the use, availability, and readiness of the reserve force to ensure that its citizen-soldiers are not overextended.

Recommendation for Executive Action

To ensure that the components can report accurate and consistent information about the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the reserve components to develop guidance to clarify and consistently define the categories of operational support that should be included in the reported numbers.

Agency Comments

The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs) provided written comments on a draft of this report. The department concurred with the recommendation. DOD stated that it will develop guidance that specifically addresses what is to be included when accounting for operational support. The department's comments are reprinted in their entirety in appendix II. In addition, the department provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services. We are also sending copies to the Secretary of Defense; the Secretaries of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force; and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. We will also make copies available to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Others making significant contributions to this report are included in appendix III.



Derek B. Stewart
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To determine the factors leading to the increase in the maximum number of reserve personnel authorized to be on active duty for operational support from fiscal year 2005 to fiscal year 2006, we reviewed and analyzed the authorization levels for fiscal years 2005 and 2006, and the requested authorization levels for fiscal year 2007. We also obtained documentation of the highest number of reservists each month that is reported to DOD and analyzed figures to identify any trends or patterns of change. To determine what categories of reservists should be represented by the numbers of reservists serving on operational support, we obtained documentation on the definition of operational support given to the components. We also interviewed DOD and reserve officials to gain an understanding of their roles and effectiveness in implementing Sections 415 and 416 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2005. We interviewed officials from DOD Reserve Affairs, Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, Navy Reserve, and Marine Corps Reserve. To determine DOD's authority and role in management of the reservists under the NDAA, we reviewed legislation and the history of relevant provisions of the law. To determine the reliability of the estimates for the maximum authorization levels for the reserve components, we gathered reserve component officials' perspectives on their data systems in the collecting and reporting of reserve strength to DOD.

To determine the extent to which the reserve components have consistently reported the number of reservists serving in an operational support capacity, we obtained DOD's memorandums, implementing guidance, and regulations. We obtained documentation from DOD and reserve components to determine the categories included and excluded from operational support. We interviewed DOD officials to determine its definition for operational support, how DOD intended its implementing guidelines to be applied, and to determine its interpretation of relevant legislation. We also interviewed officials to determine the consistency in application of the guidelines. From our interviews, we obtained information on categories of reservists that were being excluded from operational support. We reviewed and analyzed legislation to determine what was required to be included in operational support. Officials also provided information on the structure of their data systems and the process for collecting and recording the numbers of reservists. The components and DOD also provided the highest number of reservists each month that was reported to DOD. Due to definitional problems of categories of reservists to be included in reported numbers, we found some inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the data, which produced data that we believe are not sufficiently reliable. As a result, we make a

recommendation for executive action to improve the accuracy and consistency of reported monthly information.

We conducted our review from June 2006 through September 2006, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



RESERVE AFFAIRS

ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1500

OCT 18 2006

Mr. Derek B. Stewart
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Stewart:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO draft report, "MILITARY PERSONNEL: Reserve Components Need Guidance to Accurately and Consistently Account for Volunteers on Active Duty for Operational Support (GAO-07-93)," dated October 5, 2006 (GAO Code 350864).

The DoD primary action officer for this GAO study is Mr. Daniel J. Kohner, OASD/RA(M&P), who can be reached at (703) 693-7479 or via e-mail at dan.kohner@osd.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. F. Hall".

T. F. Hall

Attachment
As stated



**GAO DRAFT REPORT – DATED OCTOBER 5, 2006
GAO CODE 350864/GAO-07-93**

**“MILITARY PERSONNEL: Reserve Components Need Guidance to Accurately and
Consistently Account for Volunteers on Active Duty for Operational Support”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommended that the Secretary of Defense direct the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the reserve components to develop guidance to clarify and consistently define the categories of operational support that should be included in the reported numbers. (page 11/GAO Draft Report)

DOD RESPONSE: The Department concurs with the recommendation. The Department will pursue developing and publishing more specific guidance regarding what is to be included in accounting for “Operational Support.”

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Derek B. Stewart, (202) 512-5559

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Geraldine Beard, Renee Brown, Tracy Burney, Pawnee Davis, Laura Durland, Meredith Georges, George Poindexter, Terry Richardson, Gina Ruidera, and Karen Thornton made significant contributions to the report.

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