2 careers, 2 jobs

Reservists juggle heavier load since 9/11

By Brendan McGarry
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Never before has the military used the "total" all-volunteer force on the kind of sustained basis that is the norm these days.

And the reserve component plays a critical role supporting wartime operations abroad.

National Guardsmen and reservists make up more than a quarter of the 1.9 million service members who have deployed since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"The reserve component — the National Guard and federal reserve — has saved the country from a draft," said retired Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Dennis McCarthy, executive director of the Reserve Officers Association.

Reserve forces have been called to action throughout the nation's history, from the Revolutionary War to the Persian Gulf War. Indeed, the Guard — the "organized militia" of the states — prides itself on being the nation's oldest military component and the only one with a dual state-federal mission.

But the high pace of activations today has spawned newfound appreciation for the contributions of the country's 1.1 million "part-time" warriors, advocates say.

"Before 9/11, there was much more of a 'first-team, second-team' attitude, and a question of doubt — can these guardsmen, can these reserves, really perform at the level that we need them to?" McCarthy said. "That doubt has largely been put to rest."

Retired Air Force Reserve Chief Master Sgt. Lani Burnett, executive director of the Reserve Enlisted Association, said many reservists come from specialized civilian careers — aviation and law enforcement, for example — with skills that only enhance their military performance.

"We balance two careers and two jobs," she said. "We've always been there to respond to mission requirements."

Retired Air National Guard Brig. Gen. Stephen Koper, president of the National Guard Association of the United States, said the Army and Air National Guard truly represent America, springing from 3,000 hometowns across the nation.

"They serve with their friends and neighbors," he said. "They have a great civic sense that encompasses not just their federal military mission but their homes, schools, churches … the makeup of the Guard is a microcosm of American society."

Yet the heavy reliance on the Guard and reserve to support the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan also has ignited debate about their role as an operational or strategic reserve force.

During Hurricane Katrina, one Guard unit from Louisiana and another from Mississippi were deployed overseas, though some 50,000 guardsmen from those states and other parts of the country responded to the disaster on short notice.

"Under the Cold War concept, we were a strategic reserve," Koper said. "We were never going to get called unless Armageddon was upon us. Following 9/11, that went away."

Congress, recognizing shortages of equipment and full-time personnel, began to dramatically increase funding for the reserve component. The National Guard and reserve, for example, received $9.4 billion for new equipment in fiscal 2009 — about 8 percent of the Defense Department procurement budget — up from $2.7 billion in 2001. And last year, the chief of the National Guard Bureau was elevated to four-star status.

But despite the enhanced role and profile of the nation's reserve forces, advocates say Congress and the Pentagon can and should do more to address gaps and inefficiencies in equipping, as well as training, mobilizing and deploying those forces.

"These old 'strategic reserve' concepts have died hard," Koper said. "There's a lot of it still floating around." □

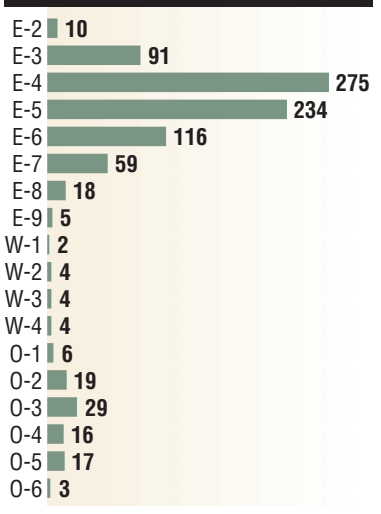
CASUALTIES

National Guard and reserve members who have died or been wounded in action in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, as of April 18:

OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM	
Hostile deaths	596
Nonhostile deaths	185
Wounded in action	6,477

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM	
Hostile deaths	86
Nonhostile deaths	45
Wounded in action	433
Total casualties	**7,822**

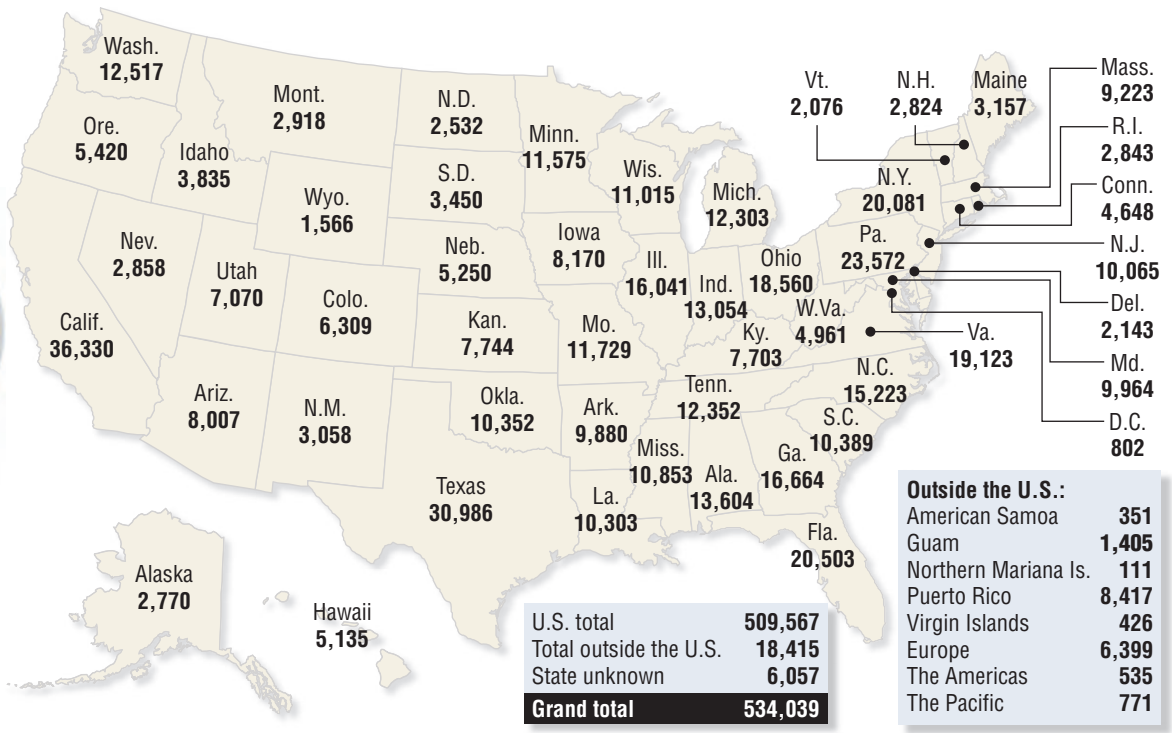
DEATHS BY PAYGRADE



Source: Defense Department
JOHN BRETSCHNEIDER/STAFF

WHERE THEY'RE FROM

Number of National Guard and reserve members who have deployed since Sept. 11, 2001, by state, territory and region based on home of record, as of Feb. 28:



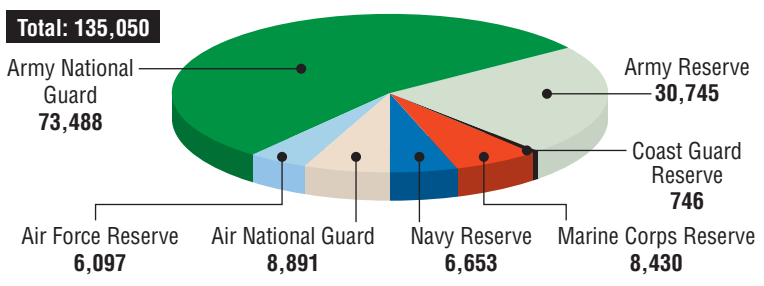
U.S. total	509,567
Total outside the U.S.	18,415
State unknown	6,057
Grand total	**534,039**

Outside the U.S.:	
American Samoa	351
Guam	1,405
Northern Mariana Is.	111
Puerto Rico	8,417
Virgin Islands	426
Europe	6,399
The Americas	535
The Pacific	771

Source: Defense Department
JOHN BRETSCHNEIDER/STAFF

WHO'S SERVING NOW

Number of reserve component members on active duty in support of operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom and Noble Eagle, as of May 5:



Source: Defense Department
JOHN BRETSCHNEIDER/STAFF