



Highlights of [GAO-04-582T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Total Force, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S. military has deployed high numbers of active duty and reserve troops to fight the global war on terrorism and for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Ensuring that U.S. military forces are adequately compensated and that the morale of deployed troops remains high have been priorities for the Congress and the Department of Defense (DOD).

In response to congressional mandates, GAO has reviewed a number of issues concerning military personnel. For this hearing, GAO was asked to provide the results of its work on military compensation for National Guard and Reserve personnel and on the Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) program, a tool DOD can use to enhance retention of military personnel in critical occupational specialties. In addition, GAO was asked to provide its preliminary views, based on ongoing work, concerning mail delivery to troops stationed in the Middle East.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-582T.

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

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Observations Related to Reserve Compensation, Selective Reenlistment Bonuses, and Mail Delivery to Deployed Troops

What GAO Found

Reservists who are called to active duty to support a contingency operation are eligible to receive the same pay and benefits as members of the active component. Moreover, in constant dollars, basic military compensation has increased in recent years. For instance, an enlisted reservist in pay grade E-4 who is married with no other dependents and who is called to active duty experienced a 19 percent increase in basic military compensation between fiscal years 1999 and 2003. Despite these increases, income loss is a concern to many reservists, although DOD has lacked timely, sufficient information to assess the full scope and nature of this problem. Benefits for reserve personnel have also improved, notably in the area of health care. As GAO has previously reported, given the federal government's growing deficits, it is critical that the Congress give adequate consideration to the longer term costs and implications of legislative proposals to further enhance military pay and benefits before they are enacted into law. For example, proposals to enhance reserve retirement should be considered in this context.

Although GAO has not specifically reviewed the use of SRBs to enhance reserve retention, GAO has noted shortcomings in DOD's management and oversight of the SRB program for active duty personnel. GAO's observations of this program may be helpful in making decisions for the use of SRBs for reservists. Concerned about missing their overall retention goals in the late 1990s, all the services expanded their use of SRBs to help retain more active duty enlisted personnel in a broader range of military specialties, even though the program was intended to help the services meet retention problems in selected critical specialties. As a result, the cost of the program more than doubled in just 5 years—from \$308 million in fiscal year 1997 to \$791 million in fiscal year 2002. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of SRBs in targeting bonuses to improve retention in selected critical occupations is unknown. DOD has not conducted a rigorous review of the SRB program. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations to institute more effective controls to assess the progress of the SRB program, but has not taken action as yet.

Mail can be a morale booster for troops fighting overseas and for their families at home. GAO has been reviewing mail delivery to deployed troops and expects to issue a report soon. GAO's preliminary findings show that mail delivery continues to be hampered by many of the same problems encountered during the first Gulf War. First, DOD does not have a reliable accurate system in place to measure timeliness. Second, despite differences in operational theaters and efforts by DOD postal planners to incorporate lessons learned into planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom, postal operations faced many of the same problems, such as inadequate postal facilities, equipment, and transportation. Third, DOD has not officially tasked any entity to resolve the long-standing postal problems experienced during contingency operations. GAO plans to make several recommendations to improve DOD's mail delivery to deployed troops.