

TRANSITION FROM A STRATEGIC RESERVE TO AN OPERATIONAL RESERVE - - MISSION ALMOST ACCOMPLISHED

*Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs)
Tom Hall Reports on the State of the Guard and Reserve.*

On 15 January, the Council was honored to welcome back Assistant Secretary for Defense (Reserve Affairs) Tom Hall for a luncheon at the Cornell Club of New York. Secretary Hall has held his current post for some seven years and has been asked by President Barack Obama to continue. He last spoke to the Council in November 2006. (See The Log, Winter 2006, at 23).

Secretary Hall is a retired two-star Rear Admiral who served almost 34 years in the Navy including a combat tour in Vietnam. He has also served as Chief of the Naval Reserve and as Executive Director of the Naval Reserve Association. The Secretary is also a member of the Navy League New York Council.

When I came up here a couple of years ago, I wanted to talk to you a little about the reserve components of our services. At that time, they were 46 percent of our military. They are still 46 percent of our military - - 1.2 million people. But what has changed a little bit is we are up to 700,000 mobilizations now. This is the largest mobilization since World War II.

We were in the process two years ago of converting from what was basically a "Weekend Warrior." [In the past, for Guardsmen and Reservists] the expectation was that you would go to the drill, you would do 14 days of annual training, get educational benefits, you would deploy around, fly or do whatever but you would probably not go to war. So, we did not equip [these] forces with the equipment, we did not train them the same way and we created different expectations.

Message Number One: The Weekend Warrior is dead forever. When people join today we say: "You are going to go to war. You are going to go to war along side your colleagues."

This War on Terror is a long one and, as President Bush has said and as I know President Obama realizes, we have got to win this. It is going to be a long battle and a tough battle. So, our Guard and Reserve are absolutely critical to our forces.

What we have been doing over the past two years is putting in place about 200 changes in the law. The Commission on the Guard and Reserve, met for two years and has just reported out. [It] gave 95 sug-



Secretary Tom Hall addressing the Council. "Message Number One: The Weekend Warrior is dead forever." (Photo: R.H. Wagner)

gestions on how we ought to transition the Guard and Reserve. Secretary [of Defense Robert] Gates has agreed with 82 of those. We sent a couple over to VA who didn't agree with 11 of them. But, basically about 80 percent of the Commission's report was agreed with.

We published an instruction called: "The Operational Reserve." It tells about how we are going to utilize, equip, train and take care of our Guard and Reserve. That is where we stand.

Recruitment and Retention

Ido not expect any reduction in manpower. In fact, I expect us to grow somewhat in the Guard and Reserve.

You would think that if some people have gone

two or three times, voluntarily or mobilized, then recruiting and retention would be going south. I get asked that. I got asked that by Leslie Stahl on "Sixty Minutes." She said that recruiting and retention must be going south.

Last year was the best recruiting and retention in the Guard and Reserve in the seven years that I have been there. The first four months of this year, all six of the components, Guard and Reserve, have recruited at 118 percent. The Army Guard last month recruited 144 percent of their goal. So, right now, it is the best [recruiting] over the past seven years and it is the best retention since 1991.

She said "How could this be?"

I said: "Isn't it possible we could be doing something right, Leslie." I think we are. I think these are very patriotic young men and women and Congress has been very generous with the bonuses.

The best program we have had is entrepreneurship at its best. [A person] is going to find someone to come into the Naval Reserve. When he finds them and gives us their name, he is going to get \$1,000. When they complete boot camp, when they join and when they are successful, we will give him another \$1,000. So, for that successful person you can get \$2,000. We have found that it is better than the overhead on maintaining recruiting stations and lots of buildings. Every person is a recruiter.

We had a young man in Georgia who is up to \$78,000 now and he is doing that as a profession. He is recruiting successful people, putting them in and they are great. They have to meet all of the quality standards.

The other thing that I will tell you is that the quality standards are very good. Ninety percent plus [are] college graduates. The Air Force and a couple of others are at 99 percent. High schools are only graduating about 70 percent. But we are taking 99 percent. The average is 92 percent, the upper mental categories are all above 60 percent. Very importantly, we had this category, Category 4, which was the lower mental group, we had a goal of no more than four percent - - we are only taking one percent. My message to you is that very high quality are coming and joining in record numbers and they are staying.

Some people will say that it is the economy. Okay, the economy I will admit does play into some-



Navy Reservists deploying with the Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group qualify for M-16 rifle training as part of their six-week training to become Navy Customs inspectors in the Middle East. Secretary Hall noted that reservists in theater have "the very same equipment and they are trained to the very same standards [as the active forces]" U.S. photo by Chief Mass Communication Specialist Cliff Bergstrom.

what. But, they do not stay just because of that so it is very good.

Equipment

We did not have compatible equipment in the Guard and Reserve [in the past]. Many of you know that. You have either been in or flown equipment that was over age [which had been] cascaded down [from the active forces]. We have this year in the program of record, \$50 billion of new equipment going into the Guard and Reserve. \$30 billion is going into the Army Guard and the Air Guard. That equipment is dual use for homeland defense and also for fighting America's wars. We are pumping in a lot of equipment, it is first line and the goal is to ensure, particularly in the Army, that the equipment is very compatible.

Another thing I can tell you despite what you might read is when they "cross the brume," as they call

it, into Iraq or into Afghanistan, they have the very same equipment and they are trained to the very same standards [as the active forces]. I was just in Iraq a few months ago and talked with General Petraeus' people, and when I said "who are the Guard and Reserve", they said: "I don't know, they are just troopers. They do the very same job." They do the same job, so they are going to have the same equipment.

Benefits

The 200 changes in the law for Guard and Reserve has been the biggest legislative change in the history of the Guard and Reserve. It means that they are paid the same. When I came into the job, Guardsmen and Reservists who were mobilized were not paid the same, their families were not paid the same.

There was no medical system equivalent. We now have Tricare. It is the same system as active duty. If you join and you are a drilling reservist, you may go

into the military health care system, use that the whole time. If it becomes your policy of choice, you can stay with it as long as you stay in the Guard and Reserve.

Here is the premium for a world-class medical system for a single person - - \$42 a month. Full family coverage - - the whole medical, pharmaceuticals - - is \$176 a month. I don't know how that compares with other health care systems but it is probably pretty good. That I think is a lot of the retention that we get.

We have taken care of that. The pay is very good for young men and women. If you re-enlist in theater, it is tax-free. All the ones that I re-enlisted over there took that and why wouldn't they, they are very smart.

We are about at the 70th percentile today for military pay. You are not going to get rich in the military and you are not going to earn exactly what you would on the outside. But, we have finally worked up to the 70th percentile for an equivalent job on the outside so it is getting closer.

Probably more has happened in the family area than at anytime. When Barbara and I joined it was like: "If we would have wanted you to have a wife, we would have issued you one" and families could just take care of themselves.

That has changed dramatically. We have almost 700 family service centers nationwide, 400 of them in the National Guard. In every state, they are there to take care of the families, look after the families. They have ombudsmen and family groups.

We have a real challenge with Guardsmen and Reservists because they do not necessarily, particularly individual augmentees, have a unit [at home] to take care of them, so how do they get taken care of. We are spending a lot of time on that.

The other thing that we are spending a lot of time on is employers. I head the Employers Support the Guard and Reserve. We have 5,000 volunteers nationwide and in Europe that look after our employers. Employers are probably the greatest success story of this war. They take care of the young men and women, they do not discriminate against them.

I argued with Leslie Stahl over and over and she said "I found two or three cases where they have fired people."

I said: "Well, we took care of them." There should not be any. Yes, there can be one person but when we find them, the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice prosecute them. Out of 685,000, we have had about ten cases and every one of those has been prosecuted. The law is clear - - you cannot fire or get rid of a reservist because they mobilize and go serve

their country.

[The closure of military bases and armories has affected the Guard and Reserve]. You used to have lots of armories, you used to have lots of bases and people could drill by driving a few miles or go at night. Now, those are gone. What we are finding with the infrastructure not there, people are going a lot [further] and are spending a lot more of their own money. Many reservists spent all their money that they earned on that drill weekend just to get there and more. They were taking it out of their pockets so that is a disincentive.

I am very proud to say that one of our initiatives that has already been passed by Congress is where we pay people money now to go to drills. We will pay in critical skills, a travel allowance. The services can allow a critical skill to be defined as whatever they want. So, we have a foot in the door. The services are authorized. Now, it has to come out of their budget but we finally have recognized that [Guardsmen and Reservists] have to travel further because there is less infrastructure to drill so we are going to pay people and not expect them to buy those tickets.

Predictability

When Secretary Gates came in, we immediately said: "We need predictability, we need change in the mobilization parameters." On the 19th of January two years ago, he signed a rotation model which said the following. If you are on active duty and you go on a one year deployment, then we will give you two years at home before we rotate you. If you are in the Guard or Reserve and you go on a one year mobilization, we will give you five years at home with your family and your employer.

Leslie asked me and I told her that we are not there yet. We are a little bit over one-to-one, maybe one to 1.2 on the active duty. We are about 1.3 for the Guard and Reserve. The last units that we just mobilized last week were at 1.4 and 1.5. So, we are starting to get to a rotational model of predictability.

The most important thing for anybody is predictability. An employer wants to know: "When are you going to take my person, for how long and when are they coming home?" The family wants to know.

At the beginning of this war when I came into the job, we were letting people know in two weeks, 20 days, you are going. Now, under the law, it is a minimum of 30 days or you have to notify Congress, a goal of 90 and Secretary Gates has set a goal of six months, not 90 days. The last group we notified, we gave them 14 months notification - - 14 months from now you are

going to go and here is where you are going to go. Start working with your employer, start working with your family. We have had as high as two years. We never have less than 30 days notification for mobilization. Never do we have less than that unless they volunteer. So, we have made a lot of progress since I last talked with you.

When I came into the job, [mobilization] was 21 months, some people were being mobilized 23 months. Secretary Gates said: "It is one year" and he has stuck with one year. We had a couple of exceptions for 13 months or 13 and a half when they needed it but basically, it is one year. All that plays into recruiting and retention and plays into support from our employers. It is a good news story and it is going to get better.

We have a lot more capacity. We are growing the Army to 547,000. We are growing the Marine Corps to 201,000 from 176,000. We were at 331,000 in the Army Guard, we are at 358,000. We will go above 360,000. So, we are getting more capacity and when you get more capacity, not only can you meet the demand but it means less rotation so people don't have to go as often.

Going forward

I think you are going to see a more seamless military, one in which it is going to blur between the active, Guard and Reserve. I think we need to have a time where we can make it easier for people to serve. For instance, if you get an active commission and you get off active duty, you have to resign that commission and you have to apply for a reserve commission. If you want to come back on, you have to resign that, you have to go apply. We ought to have one commission. We ought to have a common pay and personnel system.

I think you are going to see a lot more jointness. For instance, we have Red Horse battalions, Sea Bee battalions and engineering battalions that all do the same job and they can be detailed to do each other's mission. So, I think you are going to see a lot more examining in all services where is the capacity. It is going to be driven a lot by finances.

I went down to the USS GEORGE BUSH (CVN 77) commissioning. It is the last of the Nimitz class - - a tremendous ship. But it is what a \$6 billion or \$7 billion ship and how many of those can you buy? It is going to be a real competition with all the



Secretary Hall sees a "tough choice" ahead for the nation's leaders. (Photo: R.H. Wagner)

weapons systems and the personnel costs. Secretary Gates and President Obama are going to have a big job because if you do all that, capitalize all that, rebuild the interstate system, take care of health costs, don't raise taxes, balance the budget, get the national debt down - - I don't know how you do all that. But those are the challenges that we are going to face.

The active duty forces have come down and I think, and many people think, that we reduced too much too fast and we cut the military too far. Secretary Gates immediately endorsed [when he entered office], as you might recall, 80,000 more. So, we are building back. To build back you have to recruit people and find them, it is very tough. We have been in that rebuilding my entire time there and that will be a primary question for President Obama and others. Are we the right size?

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Can we fight this war? Can we do it with the people we have? If not, if you are going to grow the military, where are you going to find that money. It is a tough choice.

A final thought

The biggest difference that I have noticed in this country is when I and my classmates came back from Vietnam, we found that the country was torn apart, we were blamed for the war, it was our fault. All we said was that we went and served. We were having riots and turbulence and the nation was against the war and the military took the brunt of it.

Today, it is totally different. I do not care whether people have a political difference or they do not like the war or do not like the President, it does not extend to our military. They honor them. There are parades. They take care of them. They give them their seats on an airplane. I have seen many of them and my wife has done the same thing. If you happen to be upgraded for any reason or you are up there and have bought a seat, I have seen them get out of first class and give it to our young soldiers and say: "You are the true heroes."

The PGA of America owns about 17 golf courses. They have decided for every one of those golf courses they will adopt a wounded warrior and their family and give them a free membership for life to that particular course. That is a wonderful benefit.

[Army trooper] Dan Nevins was one of the first ones selected and he now works for the PGA. I went down to see them and had a chance to play a round of golf with him. He has both legs amputated all the way up and has steel legs and he is a six handicapper. He just whipped me like anything. It is just such an inspiration, this young man.



Council Director Rob Black talks with Secretary Hall and Navy Leaguers Won Len and Nguech Ngu. (Photo: R.H. Wagner).

WHAT IS IT?



The correct answer is HMS BRISTOL (D 23), the Royal Navy's only Type 82 destroyer. Designed as escorts for a series of large British aircraft carriers, the Type 82 series was discontinued after the first ship was built because Britain decided against building the aircraft carriers they were to escort. Nonetheless, BRISTOL served in the active fleet from 1973 to 1987 including service in the Falklands War. Today, she is moored in Portsmouth harbor and is used as a strategic training ship. (Photo: R.H. Wagner).