

Reserve Component Volunteers— Filling the Gap

By Lieutenant Colonel Trent M. Andrews

Soldiers of the United States Army Reserves and Army National Guard continue to volunteer to serve beyond their 12-month tour of duty. These Soldiers extend to serve in the Army's formations wherever their military occupational specialty (MOS), experience, and leadership can be used. They are staying in-theater to continue to serve from one to two extra months. A small number of Soldiers are even raising their hands to stay for a third consecutive year. Whether it is for monetary reasons, a poor job market back home, or just a strong pull by the mission, the list of volunteers fills several pages.

The mechanism these Soldiers use is the Contingency Operation–Active Duty for Operational Support (CO–ADOS) orders. These orders are ultimately cut by the United States Army Human Resources Command in St. Louis, Missouri, but the process starts with the Soldiers. They must find a unit with an opening for their MOS or skill set, then sign a Department of the Army (DA) Form 4187 and a volunteer statement. The gaining unit must prepare a letter of justification that demonstrates how the Soldier's skills are needed to meet the unit's mission requirements. Sometimes a Soldier's skill set is not necessarily the result of MOS training. This is another example of how America's National Guard and Reserve personnel frequently bring added value to their units. For example, one unit had a volunteer who was officially in the Signal Corps but also had in-depth experience with preparing contracts. This added bonus filled a critical need in the headquarters where she served out her additional six months in-theater under CO–ADOS orders.

The journey for these Soldiers begins like many other things in the military—by stepping up and putting their names and other required information on a volunteer form. These forms are gathered at CJ-1 (the joint military section) of Multinational Corps–Iraq (MNC–I) and distributed on a master list across the theater. Units looking for Soldiers to meet mission requirements can review the list and match their needs with the MOS, rank, and availability date of the volunteer. Once a tentative match is made, the coordination to prepare the CO–ADOS packet begins. The Soldier and gaining unit must sign the DA Form 4187, and the Soldier signs the volunteer statement to extend in-theater for the mutually agreed upon period of time. The gaining unit with the first colonel in the chain of command then signs a letter of justification for the Soldier to stay on active duty orders, and the entire packet is forwarded to CJ-1 for the next step in the review process.

When Reserve or National Guard units prepare to mobilize and deploy, they often have vacancies on their manning rosters, also referred to as battle rosters. Since Operation Iraqi Freedom has extended over multiple rotations, the number of Soldiers who have not deployed is small. A unit may then

actively seek Soldiers who are willing to return to Iraq for another rotation. Also, Soldiers may hear of a unit getting ready to deploy and volunteer to join that unit. These efforts work toward filling 100 percent of the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) requirements, but may still leave the unit short of meeting critical mission requirements not addressed by the MTOE. The 411th Engineer Brigade, a United States Army Reserve unit from New York, experienced such a deficit. The brigade discovered during its pre-deployment site survey that it would inherit a multimillion dollar Class IV yard containing construction materials for the numerous construction projects throughout the theater. The brigade's mission analysis identified a deficit of seven Soldiers to operate the Class IV yard. Efforts began in Kuwait to recruit Soldiers for this mission and initiate the CO–ADOS (then called CO–TTAD for contingency operation-temporary tour of active duty) packets to allow them to stay. Efforts continue to recruit Soldiers to fill this mission requirement as the unit deployed from Kuwait to its mission location in Iraq. The CO–ADOS mechanism contributed to the successful manning of the Class IV yard, which became critical to supporting surge construction operations for coalition forces and other MNC–I priority construction projects.

There is room for improvement in this process as it gains momentum. It would be beneficial for units preparing to mobilize and deploy to have a copy of the volunteer list before arrival in-theater in order to initiate the packets. This could be accomplished by distributing the list through United States Army Reserve Affairs to United States Army Reserve Command headquarters or to the mobilization platforms. This would help decrease the time it takes to match units' known requirements with the volunteering Soldiers.

Another significant improvement would be to allow Reserve Soldiers to serve on CO–ADOS orders with an Active Army unit (especially units without a joint manning document [JMD]), provided the MOS and grade/rank requirements are met. That change would have allowed a number of volunteers from the 411th headquarters to remain with the Active Army unit that replaced the 411th, which would have contributed to continuity and a seamless transition between the two rotations. Currently, an Active Army unit must have a JMD with Reserve Component authorizations for Reserve Soldiers on CO–ADOS orders to serve there. If the process of CO–ADOS approval allowed a letter of justification signed by a brigadier general or higher, seasoned volunteer Reserve Soldiers with necessary skill sets could remain in-theater.

The real focus of this article is to highlight the spirit of volunteerism of our nation's Citizen-Soldiers. Normal total deployment time is fourteen to fifteen months for Reserve and National Guard Soldiers, and those who volunteer and remain for an additional period of time demonstrate a patriot spirit that imbues the Army values. A total of 82 Soldiers from the 411th Engineer Brigade have volunteered to extend their service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. 

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