

Defense Quotables

Military Readiness: *The Strain is Showing*

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This year, the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Military Readiness held a series of hearings in Washington, around the country, as well as in Europe. During these hearings, Members heard from the senior leadership of the armed services as well as from small unit leaders about the current state of the nation's military forces. Three clearly defined and troubling trends were evident: 1) A chronic shortage of qualified personnel, especially mid-grade non-commissioned officers (NCOs), 2) a shortage of spare parts for rapidly aging equipment and, 3) an increased operations tempo (OPTEMPO). The result of these trends is a steady and serious decline in the readiness of our nation's military. Here, in their own words, are what the men and women of the U.S. military have recently said about their situation.

Shortage of Personnel

"To me, the real issue is manning...squads that normally have nine men in them, nine-man squads show up and they have six. So you will find platoons that have a squad zeroed out of them sometimes. You cannot do a number of the tasks that the organization was designed for when you don't have the people in it." *Brigadier General Samuel S. Thompson, III, Commanding General, Joint Readiness Training Center, 26 February 1999*

"The most glaring training weakness that we have is [that] our units are inevitably significantly undermanned when they come to us for training. It's like trying to train a basketball team with only four players. Without sufficient infantrymen or engineers or aviators to perform their roles, even the most daunting armored force loses some of its potency." *Brigadier General Rust Casey, Commanding General, 7th Army Training Command, 8 March 1999*

"The effect of too few forces is uncertainty and increased workload. Emerging personnel shortages are exacerbating the impact, further increasing the demand we place on our deployed crews." *Vice Admiral Daniel J. Murphy, Jr. Commander, Sixth Fleet, 8 March 1999*

"The Atlantic Fleet currently lacks about 7600 Sailors in afloat billets. This shortage, if not corrected, has the potential to both cause and accelerate declines in readiness, retention, and quality of life in all phases of the deployment cycle." *Admiral J. Paul Reason, Commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, 22 March 1999*

"If I had to identify the single area that has caused the greatest impact on the brigade's readiness, I would not hesitate to say that it has been the shortage of adequately qualified Sergeants." *Colonel Robert Williams, Commander, 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized), 22 March 1999*

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Shortage of Parts/Maintenance Difficulties

“I am still very concerned about spare parts availability, particularly in regards to jet engines. I’m equally concerned about the aging fleet. Not just in the air, but on the ground. Because that aging fleet not only impacts readiness, but it impacts our people as they work harder to keep older equipment ready and at less capability than newer equipment would provide.” *Brigadier General Daniel P. Leaf, USAF, Commander, 31st Fighter Wing, Aviano, Italy, 8 March 1999*

“...this week, we reported nine of 23 Hornets up, and 137 parts on order off station. This is an average of 10 parts per down airplane, as well as 15 what we call bare firewalls, 15 missing engines. So even if I had all the parts, without the engines, that is eight airplanes of 23 that we could not fly.” *Rear Admiral Timothy Beard, Commander, Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center, 26 February 1999*

“Mission Capable (MC) rates for the C-5 currently stand at 61%, significantly below the AMC (Air Mobility Command) goal of 75%; maintenance ‘cannibalization’ rates for spare parts are up 33% since 1995, an increase of 20% since September 1998 alone. Readiness spares packages (RSP fill rates, and flying hour achievable rates have also fallen. The C-5’s Total Not Mission Capable Rate due to Supply (TNMCS) rose from 11.6% to 13.1% last year.” *General Charleston Robertson, Jr. CINC, United States Transportation Command, 22 March 1999*

“A 75% Mission Capable rate for our front line air superiority fighter, the F-15C, means that on average there are 16 aircraft sitting on the ramp at Langley Air Force Base that cannot fly. For our bombers, a 54% Mission Capable rate for the backbone of our conventional bomber fleet, the B-1B, means there are nine aircraft at Ellsworth AFB, a full half of their fleet, simply not available to carry out their world-wide mission.” *General Richard Hawley, USAF, Commander, Air Combat Command, 22 March 1999*

“In just one week, I begin an eight week, \$1.5 million maintenance period, an allocation that is half of that originally envisioned by my port engineer as being necessary for the prudent long-term maintenance, repair and upkeep of the ship.” *Captain Joe Klipseis, USN, Commanding Officer, USS Anzio, 22 March 1999*

OPTEMPO

“Increased Operations tempo (OPTEMPO) is wearing out essential equipment at an accelerated rate, and personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) is causing retention problems in certain military specialties. Stateside units are “taxed” to fill billets in deployed forces.” *Admiral Harold W. Gehman, Jr., CINC, United States Atlantic Command, 22 March 1999*

“In Desert Storm, 1991, I would guess that we had about 525 ships, 550 ships. Today we have about 200, 225 fewer...the Sixth Fleet at that time was fifty to seventy-five ships. On the 15th of March when the carrier battle group goes, I’ll have a total of seven combatants.” *Vice Admiral Daniel J. Murphy, Jr. Commander, Sixth Fleet, 8 March 1999*

“Opstempo, the amount of time Marines are in the field training or away on deployments, is a constant concern. It impacts on our readiness and the retention of the force. On any day in the Second Marine Division, five of the nine infantry battalions are either forward deployed or preparing to deploy... Today, the reality is that while commitments have increased in the past five years, they are now accomplished with two less infantry battalions than the Division had just prior to the Gulf War.” *Colonel Robert B. Neller, Commanding Officer, Sixth Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, 22 March 1999*