

For Reservists, Deployments Mean Sacrifice, Continued

The role played by Reservists changed greatly in recent years, from a force of mostly prior-service Soldiers who rarely deploy to a highly-trained, agile force who now deploy alongside their active duty counterparts. When the Reserve celebrated its hundredth birthday in April, more than 182,000 Reservists had been called to active duty since 9-11, with more than 41,000 mobilized more than once.

Now mostly focused on combat support, many Reserve units have capabilities either exclusive to or primarily in the Reserve. As a result, more than 1,400 reservists were stopped-lossed at the end of Sept. 2008, a reduction from recent years.

Cothran said the strain of increased deployments has led to problems in retaining junior officers, who still must find time to maintain their training between deployments. For enlisted reservists, however, retention numbers are up, partly due to large bonuses offered for re-enlistment. The numbers are so good that bonuses will be scaled back in the coming year.

One reservist who opted for a large bonus to stay in the Reserve is Staff Sgt. Nick Minecci, a historian with the 317th Military History Detachment. Minecci came back to serve after 12 years of active duty, having already deployed several times.

Minecci is now serving his third deployment as a reservist; upon completing his most recent tour, he extended for another full year. Fortunately, he said, he has the support of his wife and his family

"She said, 'I knew when I married you, this is what you do. Even though you're a reservist, I know you're going to be deploying,'" Minecci said.

Building financial security is an incentive, but before he decided to re-enlist and extend his tour, Minecci said he had doubts about remaining in the service.

"I think it's harder on them than it is for me in a lot of ways," he said. "It's been terrible. I didn't marry her to be gone, but these couple of years now of serious hardship and pain sets us up for success a decade from now," he said.

Minecci said his decision to stay in was based more on his sense of duty than financial incentive, though. He makes close to the same money deployed as in his civilian job in the U.S. Dept. of State. Like many older reservists, he sees deployment more as an opportunity to serve than a sacrifice. Some deployed reservists don't mind even taking a pay cut to serve their country for a year.

That was the case for Staff Sgt. Ralph Cleveland, who also serves with the 445th CA Bn. Back home in Sacramento, Calif., he owns an information security consulting business. He served four years of active duty in the 80's and Cleveland re-enlisted last year after taking his daughter to talk to a recruiter. He's now finishing his first tour of duty since joining 23 years ago.

"I knew (the deployment) would come up. I was in about 10 months when I got the call," he said. "It's a hardship for everyone who comes over here, but I've got a good family. I've got two young kids, and that's the hardest thing, for me and for them."

For Cleveland, having his family's support is important. He took a significant pay cut to deploy, going from six figures to an E-6 salary. Still, he said, he hasn't regretted his decision.

"It's something I've believed in since I was a kid," said Cleveland of his decision to re-enlist. "I felt like I left something behind. I wanted to finish what I started."

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