

# Reserve Component Mobilization

## Rear Detachment, S1 and S4, Yearly SRPs Important

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Reserve component mobilization is transformative by nature and multifaceted and detailed by necessity, but it doesn't need to produce the overwhelming experience of near failure that is common among many deploying units. Reservists must expect federalization and should, therefore, plan and execute a pre-mobilization regimen designed to prevent the process of activation from becoming, as more than one commander stated, "more difficult and stressful than the actual fighting."

As a reservist mobilized multiple times and as a mobilization officer who prepared a detachment, company, battalion, and very nearly a separate infantry brigade for operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, I refined a set of staff processes and drafted command and control recommendations that will ease a reserve unit's transition to active duty. I began to gain this experience and develop these processes when the 1-338th Training Support Battalion sent me to assist the 829th Engineer Team during the alert phase of its preparation for OIF 1 in February 2003. My battalion S3 handed me the keys to a GSA vehicle, along with a copy of the Reserve Component Unit Commander's Handbook (FORSCOM Regulation 500-3-3, commonly known by its abbreviation RCUCH) and told me to spend the next few days prepping the 829th for in-processing at Fort McCoy. Fortunately, I was accompanied in this duty by Sergeant First Class Ken Nicks, who had mobilized units for OEF the previous year. He and I pored over the RCUCH and developed a plan: he would concentrate on logistics while I validated the unit on as many of the training and administrative requirements as possible. I advocate this same approach today, using the RCUCH as the baseline and



Courtesy photo

*First Sergeant Ralph Rosemore tosses a grenade during a Reserve unit's skills assessment.*

dividing the work of validation between expert teams or individuals, preferably external to the unit.

After a successful send-off of the 829th Engineers, my command sent me forward again, this time to assist the 395th Ordnance Company. Shortly thereafter, having become somewhat comfortable with the process, I took on a larger responsibility as mobilization officer for Wisconsin's 32nd Separate Infantry Brigade. I had realized a unit could develop plans for (if not actually complete) most pre-mobilization tasks; so, I began in my new position by evaluating the brigade company by company, teaching and encouraging the full-time staff to track their progress using Annexes G and E of the RCUCH. During this time, and subsequently while mobilizing the brigade's 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry, I honed the recommendations I detail below. These recommendations do not represent a complete list of mobilization best-practices. I cannot cover every RCUCH task in this article. Instead, I discuss three key issues — formation of a rear detachment, command emphasis on S1 and S4, and the need for proper, yearly Soldier Readiness Processing — so that a reserve unit, its command, and the support

activities on which it relies might mass their limited resources against the most critical and difficult tasks.

### Formation of a Rear Detachment

Arguably foremost among these tasks is the selection and preparation of a rear detachment. Nothing, perhaps with the exception of competent or incompetent leadership, affects morale as much as the state of a Soldier's family, finances, and feeling of security: his home life. A unit's rear detachment guards all three. The RCUCH only devotes one bullet to it: Plan to Transfer Facility Responsibility (Task 4-I-11). What does this mean? How and to whom can a unit fairly transfer this responsibility while also allowing enough time to train rear detachment personnel so they might have them ready prior to M-day?

Brigadier General Kerry Denson, deputy Adjutant General of Wisconsin, suggests that the appropriate time to bring the rear detachment on Title 10 status is when the mobilizing unit receives an alert.

"The plan, at the beginning of OIF and OEF, was to mobilize a unit at 110-percent strength," said BG Denson. "In that way the usual 6-7 percent attrition at the MOB

station would not bring a unit below 100 percent, and the remainder of the Soldiers above that 100 percent could continue on Title 10 status, returning to their state to serve as the rear detachment.”

This original concept presents multiple problems, most of them more important than funding or determining how to select the extra 10 percent (what would we do with low-density MOSs, send two-thirds or one-fourth of a Soldier?). Most notably: units could not predict by name or MOS the Soldiers composing that margin. These Soldiers could not train in advance on the peculiarities of operating a rear detachment, like how to distinguish and account for installation and MTOE property, how to prepare deployed-status unit status reports (USRs), how to manage derivative unit identification codes (UICs), how to facilitate very active and involved family support groups, how to coordinate the influx of gifts and support from local communities, and how to train an ever-swelling number of new recruits and AIT graduates.

In consequence, BG Denson and Joint Forces Headquarters – Wisconsin (JFHQ-WI) now plan to identify by MOS, civilian skill set, and previous mobilization time a pool of candidates from which to draw the rear detachment. These few would mobilize prior to alert, pass an official SRP at the MOB station, and complete the other administrative requirements necessary for Title 10 status. Then, by alert, these Soldiers could return to their command and begin rear detachment-specific training. To emphasize the importance of having a competent rear detachment at the very moment the unit leaves its army, BG Denson asks a few simple questions: “Who answers the phone five minutes after the unit leaves? And what will they do the first time the Intrusion Detection System on the vault sounds an alarm?”

### **Command Emphasis on the S1 and S4**

Second most important to pre-mobilization planning is to focus command emphasis and assistance on the appropriate areas: S1 and S4. Here a commander must usually muzzle his S3. Any good S3 reads so many TTPs and ponders continually and longingly how best to train for specific deployment scenarios that the temptation to immediately conduct high-speed, hands-on, urban assault night live-fire exercises springs to his mind. Or, perhaps more rationally, he lobbies to spend an extra drill weekend on the range or put emphasis against combat lifesaver certification, good ideas except insofar as they interfere with the main effort.

Lieutenant Colonel Michael Dosland, commander of 1-128th Infantry, experienced this. He said, “During pre-mobilization phase, planning and execution of training became a distracter for the command and staff group. We had to develop training plans for drill weekends, as well as a ‘mini-Annual Training’ executed just prior to mobilization. Though I refocused my staff with an



*Sergeant Aaron Masterson adjusts a 120mm mortar in the back of an armored personnel carrier.*

S1 and S4 priority, training and MOB station recon requirements from the gaining command contributed additional distracters.”

To allow some greater massing of the battalion’s staff effects, the 32nd SIB S3 section took on a portion of planning the mini-AT. JFHQ-WI allowed direct liaison between 1-128 Infantry, the gaining command, and the MOB station, an economy of force. Teams of 41As and 92Ys from brigade and JFHQ-WI worked both on drill weekends and in a full-time capacity assisting the battalion’s S1 and S4.

The decisive point for this effort, and the point where assistance from all levels of command should concentrate, is in identifying, verifying, and refining the Operational Deployment Document (ODD). Think of the ODD as the provisional MTOE for a mobilized reserve unit. The Combined Forces Land

Component Commander (CFLCC) dictates to National Guard Bureau the contents of this document, based on the requirements of the theater he commands. No reserve unit can begin to mobilize its Soldiers, plan fillers for mismatched MOS’s, decide which equipment it will take, or order equipment new to its configuration until possessing a solid ODD. Receipt of the ODD is the trigger for shifting emphasis from training to personnel and logistics.

In every instance with units I mobilized, we received the ODD too late. Commanders made decisions based on templates, best-guesses, and conversations with strategically placed friends in the Pentagon, the National Guard Bureau, the Reserve Regional Readiness Command, or theater. Needless to say, this guesswork creates rework but, because of the often constricted alert and home station timelines and because units rarely complete their pre-alert tasks to standard, execution must begin based on such structural assumptions.

A new system may soon require more pre-MOB training validation. For now though, emphasizing only S1 and S4 during the alert and home station phases makes sense. Units receive detailed individual and collective training assistance at the MOB Station. Certainly any hip-pocket or planned training, especially in the big four (weapons, comms, CLS, and battle drills), is worth conducting if time permits. But, units unprepared logistically and administratively cannot take full advantage of MOB station, theater-specific training resources and assistance because they continually must fix and devote time to issues with pay, equipment, individual Soldier readiness, and — sometimes also, as mentioned above — their rear detachments.

### **Soldier Readiness Processing**

No discussion of key pre-mobilization tasks should end without

mentioning the importance of Soldier Readiness Processing (SRP). While the Rear Detachment and ODD account for only a small portion of tasks in the RCUCH, the SRP — if conducted regularly and to a high standard — covers them nearly en masse. The process of SRP seems redundant to an outside observer and, therefore, a waste, especially as an annual event. In my opinion there are really three different SRPs, each with its own purpose: the ‘check-up,’ the ‘scrub,’ and the ‘trigger.’ The ‘check-up’ is the yearly version. In it, a unit focuses on maintaining a base set of individual files for mobilization. It produces a list of deficiencies against which the unit’s commander can prioritize staff effort. The ‘scrub’ occurs during the alert phase of mobilization. A unit identifies issues which would prevent a Soldier from mobilizing. It allows a commander to backfill before reaching the Mob station and reduces the expected 6-7 percent attrition. MOB Station conducts the ‘trigger’ SRP during the very first days of a unit’s mobilization. I call this the ‘trigger’ because it is the point when unit members really begin their journey down range. If considered separately, these functions no longer seem redundant but build toward mobilization preparedness.

Some TTPs for Soldier Readiness Processing: if alerted, or suspecting an alert, devote a portion of unspent Annual Training (AT) funds to a mini-AT/SRP (a good example of refocusing effort from S3 to S1); ensure adequate resourcing to identify and fix on-site as many problems with Soldier paperwork as possible; send full-time staff and key personnel through the SRP early so they can later manage the process and keep accountability of documents and personnel during the event; and, merge all newly created records immediately into the relevant personnel and medical files, copying them if necessary. A good SRP requires outside support from the unit’s command. A unit can scrub its files on its own but never, in my experience, is it self-critical enough or well enough acquainted with current SRP standards to make such a process worthwhile. A good SRP also requires follow-up from the command to ensure unresolved issues do not mangle.

Lastly, anticipating change to the process of reserve component mobilization increases a unit’s situational awareness and ability to plan and execute a mobilization. Deserving attention: a major revision of mobilization processes may soon occur.

According to BG Denson, “One of the biggest criticisms of the current mobilization process is the lack of predictability. The National Guard Bureau is aware of this and is striving to put our deployment schedule, what they call ‘Expeditionary Force Packaging,’ on a six-year rotation. This increased predictability would be a great thing for Soldier quality of life, for families, and — ultimately — for retention.”

Colonel Danny Nobles, commander of Fort McCoy, explained the rationale and math of Expeditionary Force Packaging. “Now, and in the past, reserve units have not really put together well-focused training programs, certainly not in a manner that meets certification and validation for deployment,” he said. However,



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except for some theater-specific requirements, units could accomplish and validate most post-mobilization training prior to alert. The six-year schedule would look like this:

- Year One:** Individual Soldier Readiness
- Years Two and Three:** Small Unit Collective Training
- Year Four:** Warrior Exercise (think Warfighter and Exeval)
- Year Five:** NTC (validation)
- Year Six:** Green Ramp (ready to go to war)

Ideally, units would stabilize key staff in Year Five, just prior to NTC, to combat the current transient nature of assignments and allow the staff to grow together before deployment. And, in Year 6, units would maintain a 72-hour readiness posture. Given roughly 360,000 Reservists, and having a sixth of the Soldiers in Green Ramp each year, the Reserves could deploy 60,000 Soldiers in a matter of days. Figuring 39 total days in the standard reserve training calendar, another 60,000 Soldiers could prepare and deploy in 40-60 days, a powerful and a better-trained force.

“The one thing to remember,” said BG Denson, “(is) no matter how we structure this, the enemy gets a say in how often the reserves deploy.”

The Reserves are now no longer just a strategic asset, waiting for the next war. Reserve leadership must focus all efforts to prepare their Soldiers mentally, physically, tactically, and technically for active service. Active duty leaders, in addition to the possibility of assignment to the many training support brigades responsible for advising and assisting in the mobilization of reserve units, may also — upon retirement from active service — find themselves leading reserve units overseas.

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