

One team - One fight?

**A Look At the Incentive Gap Between Deployed Department of the Army Civilians
and Soldiers Supporting Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom**

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I certify that this is my original work, and that it has not been previously accepted for publication.

Abstract

As the Global War on Terrorism continues, the armed forces are straining to keep up with the operational tempo. Agencies and commands within the Army are asking for Department of the Army civilians to volunteer to serve in support capacities to help make these forces go further. While guidance for service members is definitive in terms of pay, incentives, and benefits received under deployment circumstances, the guidance is less refined for deploying DA civilians. This article identifies some of the discrepancies between soldiers and DA civilians as well as provides recommendations to close the perceived gap in caring for these two groups.

Introduction

As the Global War on Terror continues to stretch our nation's armed forces to the limit, it is also beginning to show signs of reaching into the civilian workforce as well. An increasing number of commands and organizations are asking volunteers to serve in supporting roles primarily in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. Current guidance or the interpretation of this guidance is often vague and unclear for the deploying civilians. Much like our income tax codes, one can interpret this guidance quite differently. The Office of Personnel Management and the respective service human resources commands owe the civilian workforce clear, concise, and easy to understand policy guidance that mirrors the compensation, and benefits of a deployed service member for the period of deployment and beyond.

I will compare and contrast the current policies for uniformed members and DOD civilian workforce members deployed to the CENTCOM Areas of Responsibility (AORs). I will do this by reviewing appropriate regulations, policy memorandums, and other written materials.

I intend to focus this analysis in the areas of compensation, incentives, levels of training/fitness, and post deployment benefits. As members of the Total Army Team, there seems to be quite a wide gap between the different tiers of service. Active duty, Reserve and National Guard, DA civilians, and contractor personnel all seem to have divergent rules governing salaries, incentives, and benefits. As a civilian member of the sustaining base, I will restrict the discussion to the differences between active military personnel and the Department of the Army (DA) civilian workforce members. In addition to the presentation of the facts, I will also propose possible solutions to

decrease the size of the perceived gap between what deployed soldiers and what deployed civilians can expect in terms of the total benefits package." In an era where the Army likes to use the motto, "One team - One fight" I think we are still a long way from being equals. [England, 2002]

Compensation

While serving the Army in either a military or civilian capacity should not necessarily be "about the money", some recent efforts to generate support for deploying DA civilians have been taking this approach. Read ahead information and command sponsored briefings have run some incredible numbers past the workforce in an attempt to appeal to the mercenary nature of the workforce. Figure 1 below compares the monetary compensation for two people. One set of figures depict a DA civilian in a mid-level management grade of GS-12 Step 5, the other an active duty captain with 10 years of service.

Deployed DA Civilian (GS12 Step 5) Benefits Assuming 12 Hour Days, 7 Days a Week			Deployed Army Captain		
Straight	8 Hours Mon-Fri	\$ 5,102.93	BASE PAY		\$ 4,728.60
Overtime	4 Hours Mon-Fri & 12 Hours Sat	\$ 4,104.53	Basic Allowance for Subsistence		\$ 183.99
Holiday Pay	12 Hours Sunday: Separate Maint Allowance	\$ 3,061.76	Basic Allowance for Housing		\$ 1,069.00
		\$ 700.01	SAVE PAY		\$ 100.00
	Danger Pay	\$ 1,275.73	Hazardous Fire Pay		\$ 225.00
	Foreign Post Differential	\$ 1,275.73	Family Separation Pay		\$ 250.00
	Monthly	\$ 15,520.70		Monthly	\$ 6,556.59

Figure 1: Data drawn from USAOTC DA Civilian Briefing and from the Leave and Earnings Statement of a deployed Army Captain with 10 years of service. NOTE: Per IRS regulations, all civilian income is taxable.

[USAOTC, 2005, Slide 17] [Defense and Accounting Service, 2005]

By the figures above, the DA civilian earns significantly more than the active duty captain does. However, since the lion's share of the compensation comes from the civilian's overtime worked, it would be quite easy to reduce the overtime and holiday pay significantly to close the gap between the two salaries.

The most glaring difference between the two, military and civilians, is the fact that the military is exempt from paying income tax on the first \$6,315.90 earned monthly in the combat zones. While the actual salaries appear to be quite different, the gap closes when considering military housing and subsistence allowances are always tax exempt. [Internal Revenue Service, 2005] For the civilian counterpart, all pay and allowances are taxed at the same rates as if they were working within the continental United States. There are no tax exemptions for deployed DA civilians, although there have been unsuccessful legislative attempts to change this. [US Army CPOL, 2005] Another interesting factor when it comes to salaries, when a DA civilian deploys for an extended period of time, their pay reverts to a much lower rate that does not benefit from any "location pay." This is somewhat offset by receipt of a separate maintenance allowance for being separated from family members and home.

Incentives

Army recruiters have missed their targets now for 4 months running. This is in spite of some very enticing incentive packages assembled for not only entry-level soldiers, but also as re-enlistment bonuses as well. [Burns, 2005] Conversations with sources within the Army's Recruiting Command have hinted that these bonuses may even be moving higher, upwards of \$40,000 for the most sought after recruits. Other programs are targeting married recruits by dangling the offer of up to a \$50,000 low

interest mortgage so that these entry-level recruits can become homeowners almost immediately. [Moniz, 2005]

As it stands, the incentives for serving as a uniformed member of the Army seem to be much more appealing to those offered to a recruit's civilian counterparts. While I have few complaints regarding the incentives received, I have much more experience than the typical high school or college graduate entering the workforce. I've benefited from a number of educational and service experiences that have gotten me where I am today. Unless the civilian personnel system becomes more proactive, fewer and fewer young people will see service as a DA civilian as a viable option for employment.

In FY 2005, the Army's advertising and recruiting budget for new recruits topped \$480 million dollars. [Department of the Army, 2003, Slide 16] The amount of dollars spent trying to entice military recruits is much greater than the Army spends trying to recruit our future logisticians, budget analysts, engineers and scientists. While spokespeople in Recruiting Command have often stated, as the economy gets better, prospects for recruiting worsen. This also makes for an impending train wreck for the civilian component as well when workers leave the government from both the high and lower grade positions. With average employee ages in the high 40s, many people are less than a decade from potential retirement. As the economy improves, so do their retirement accounts. Whom can we count on to step into these key positions?

Incentives may also play an important part for not only entry recruiting, but also to motivate DA civilians to volunteer for overseas duties in the major CENTOM areas of responsibility in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait. If a low cost \$50,000 mortgage is appealing to an entry level soldier, it would be equally appealing to a young DA civilian

employee. OPM and Department of the Army should consider incentive packages that would include forgiveness of college loans, centrally funded educational opportunities, and intern/professional development programs for civilians volunteering to support our forces in the field. Again, the "One team - One fight" mantra seems to be coming up short for the civilian component.

Level of Training and Fitness

Whether a person is a soldier in uniform or a civilian supporting the force both deserve to have the appropriate training and meet certain medical/physical standards prior to deployment to a combat theater. While there is a process for doing this through the various power projection platforms, located through the United States, one has to wonder if this is actually providing the adequate training for civilians deploying into harm's way. The second part of this equation includes the level of physical, dental, and medical fitness for civilians to deploy to an austere, physically rigorous location.

The situations in Iraq and Afghanistan have certainly blurred the lines of where one can expect the relative safety of the "rear areas" defined in previous conflicts. With few exceptions, we've not seen a battlefield like this since perhaps the Tet Offensive in 1968 where the rear area sanctuaries were under heavy attack. Today, all military and civilian personnel are at equal risk be they on the roads outside compounds or within the relative safety of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). The enemies we face do not differentiate between uniformed and civilian targets. When it comes to the preferred methods of attack, use of improved explosive devices (IEDs) and harassing mortar/rocket attacks, the insurgents see any occupation force as targets.

When it comes to targets for kidnapping, the insurgents seem to prefer to take civilian hostages rather than those in uniform. While they may be attempting to avoid an anticipated backlash by comrades in uniform, they seem to be willing to take the chances with civilian captives. Contrast the number of hostages currently held in terms of military versus civilian. The Army currently reports only one soldier as "missing in action." Contrast this with the Reuters Foundation [2005] scorecard of some 90 civilians of various nationalities currently being held by insurgents. [CNN, 2005]

The level of training not only speaks to things like actions under fire, but also the mental and psychological toughness required to serve in areas with this kind of stress involved. Military training, out of necessity, often hardens a soldier in an intangible way. The toughness of training teaches the military student how to deal with stresses and situations that the public can only imagine. To place relatively "green" civilian workers along side those in uniform may sound like a good idea, but I hardly think that the military charged with both fighting the enemy and guarding the safety of their civilian support personnel will agree. Without a doubt, the traditional support provided by the hundreds of thousands of DA civilians on a daily basis is appreciated and quite necessary, but in a combat zone, the military might simply appreciate additional troops able to provide normal garrison support services available at their home stations.

It's no secret that the current DOD civilian workforce is aging. Across the federal landscape, human resources managers have been looking into this looming issue for a number of years now, with little or no improvement in the outcome. [Congressional Budget Office, 2001, Figure 2] With the possibility of impending deployments, where will the burden lie? In terms of fairness, will it be fair to ask those in the minority, those

in the age brackets most closely associated with their military counterparts, to be singled out as potential candidates to perform emergency essential (E-E) duties in a combat zone while those personnel no longer physically able to deploy remain at home?

Post Deployment Care and Benefits

Post deployment care includes those services for our wounded, but also those that might return with problems and issues much more difficult to detect. In the event of the catastrophically wounded to include amputees, blind, deaf or otherwise disabled personnel, there appears to be quite a gap in terms of the planned care for these people. While enlistment contracts provide soldiers complete medical benefits as a term of their service, civilians are at the mercy of the same insurance programs that cover them during their peacetime job performance.

Soldiers wounded and treated for catastrophic injuries will receive care at the government's expense throughout the remainder of their lives as part of the government's "contract" with uniformed service members. Will this be the case for a civilian, be it government DOD civilian or contractor, in the same situation? As explained during a recent briefing at the Operational Test Command, the subject matter experts assembled explained to our civilian workforce, that while deployed the military medical systems would care for DOD civilians and even contractors. [USAOTC, 2005, Slide 17] The military medical personnel would provide care for the deployed civilians on an equal par with the deployed military members.

When the question about long-term care for a contracted illness or catastrophic injury sustained through accident or combat actions, the answers became less

appealing. Military medical personnel provide care to the incapacitated civilian; stabilize the patient, and then return them to their home station. Once home, they would return to the care of their health insurance program for continued care. If the long-term issues prevented them from working, they would be cared for under the standard "workman's compensation" system. [USAOTC, 2005, Slide 28]

The issues of psychological and mental health problems also add to the equation of caring for our returning service members. While the Veterans Administration is clearly making adjustments to their budget and care provider networks, this care does not appear to include caring for those DA or DOD civilians that may require the same care. [Camire, 2005] While our military seems to be taking mental health care very seriously, the alternatives for civilians serving overseas supporting these soldiers seem to be quite different. Much like the way DA proposes to deal with returning wounded civilians, each returning civilian would be required to foot the bill through their own health insurance program.

Recommendations

In an attempt to recruit a pool of volunteers to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan, a number of changes should be made to level the playing field for our "Army of One" and "One team - One fight" Army. All federal employees should be treated equally across the continuum from active duty forces, Army Reserve and National Guard, as well as those volunteers from the DA civilian workforce. Today, nearly four years into the Global War on Terrorism, the federal civilian workforce is still behind the curve for being treated equally for compensation, incentives, training, physical fitness, and post deployment benefits.

In terms of compensation, OPM and the Department of the Army should equate the appropriate WG or GS scales to the military pay scale for the duration of deployment. In that regard, the government should pay workers as "temporary hire" military personnel. They would be eligible for the same pay, benefits and allowances for the period of service while in a deployed capacity. The same tax exemptions would be in place for the entire time that they are serving in a combat zone, just like the soldiers they support. While this might be a non-incentive for those employees that are deploying for the pure monetary gain through different danger pay, post differential, and enormous amounts of overtime claims, it does put everyone in the theater on an equal footing.

The Office of Personnel Management needs to look at the current incentive programs offered the uniformed service members. Recruiters are working towards being able to offer recruits never before heard of incentives for enlisting for even short periods of service. If eligible, they could receive up to a \$50K benefit for just a four-year obligation. Add to that the myriad of other benefits offered our current military, it does appear that the skills and experience that even some of our younger employees are not as valuable as that of a high school graduating enlisting to serve at the bottom rung of the force. OPM and the corresponding service human resources commands should consider creating a benefits package for DOD civilians that while may not be heavy in the monetary rewards, could have some sort of parallel benefits package that would entice some of our recent graduates from high school and college to enter into the federal workforce. If we are going to continue to solicit volunteers from our workforce to support the deployed services in combat zones, we will not be able to do it with the

"graying" workforce members. We need to do something now in order to insure continuity for the future operations.

For those personnel that identify themselves as potential deploying E-E members, OPM needs to set and enforce standards to ensure that these personnel are prepared physically, emotionally, and financially to support deployments. This may include additional time for employees to conduct physical fitness training each week as well as augmenting the Federal Health Benefit Program with more frequent physicals. Placing a periodic fitness-testing requirement on E-E employees or potential volunteers is not out of the realm of the possible. Programs across the workforce may also reap benefits in productivity and reduce absentee rates. As a member of the "One team, One fight" family, shouldn't we be as ready as those we support?

Finally, as much as we'd like to think that our deployed civilians are being kept out of harm's way, the nature of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are placing all deployed personnel in extremely close proximity to the insurgent population. In spite of all the current technology, tactics, and precautions the weapons of choice to the insurgent and anti-government forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan are the suicide bomber, improved explosive device, and mortar/rocket attacks. Even working inside the most secure compounds is no guarantee against attack from these types of weapons.

This will continue to lead to both uniformed and DA civilian casualties as the Global War on Terrorism. As these casualties come home, the uniformed members enter into a well established system for care, presided over by either their services medical commands or the Veteran's Administration. In theater DA civilians receive routine and life-saving care, but will eventually have to leave the care of the government

and return to deal with their health provider from the Federal Health Benefits Program pool.

Keep in mind that while the government will provide care for an injured soldier's wounds and injuries sustained, the civilian will eventually wind up at mercy of an insurance company, Medicare/Medicaid, and Workman's Compensation. Health insurance, while heavily subsidized as a standard benefit, continues to cost civilian workers money. Even though this insurance may in fact reduce costs significantly, the out of pocket expenses and loss of income through a prolonged recovery may in fact bankrupt sick leave, annual leave and monetary balances quickly. The Department of the Army should provide some type of supplemental insurance at no cost or in the worst case a negotiated group rate to help offset the potential expenses for volunteer DA civilians that willingly go into harm's way.

Conclusion

While the average American youth may not be stepping up to enlist in the numbers we need, I believe that the members of the DA civilian workforce will. When doing so to serve in a combat zone alongside soldiers, they should receive the same level of compensation, benefits, and status as their uniformed counterparts. To provide less for the deployed DA civilians cheapens and calls into question the validity of the motto, "One team - One fight."

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