

Cohen addresses readiness news

By Linda D. Kozaryn
American Forces Press Service

Is the military ready to fight or not?

According to the news, two Army divisions aren't ready for war and half the Army's Apache attack helicopters are grounded for repairs; high operations tempo is hurting retention; and public debate over the future of Puerto Rico's Vieques Island has halted Navy combat training there.

While there have been some drains on readiness, America's first-to-fight forces are indeed ready, Defense Secretary William S. Cohen said in a mid-November interview with American Forces Press Service.

"All our forward-deployed forces still are in a very high state of readiness, the highest because they are the ones who may be called upon to go into battle," Cohen said. He acknowledged, however, that peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, the Persian Gulf, and the latest in East Timor, have taxed America's armed forces.

News stories spotlighted C-4 ratings that commanders of the 10th Mountain and the 1st Infantry divisions gave their units when the Army reported readiness ratings in late October. Cohen said the ratings, the lowest on the scale, did not surprise Pentagon officials, because elements of the divisions are deployed in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Whenever such elements go on peacekeeping missions, the division's warfighting readiness depreciates, Cohen said.

When units return from peacekeeping operations, service members need to refresh combat skills that went unused, he added.

"As a last resort, of course, you could always use these forces in an emergency basis, but (military leaders) are going to manage it now so that will not be the case," Cohen

noted. "It really is a question of proper management. I think we can deal with it, and will deal with it successfully."

When news media jumped on the ratings story, DoD officials explained that the commanders had lowered their readiness assessments because they were concerned they might not be able to disengage from the Balkans in time to meet major theater war requirements.

The officials said the Army is modifying its reporting procedures to reflect division readiness for units with dual missions — small-scale contingencies and major theater war requirements. They said DoD is creating a plan to speed up units' retraining and redeployment time line.

Defense officials plan to use Army National Guardsman more, thereby freeing active duty units for their principal wartime missions. For instance, Virginia's 29th Infantry Division and Pennsylvania's 28th Infantry Division are slated to deploy to Bosnia in October 2001 and October 2002, respectively. Officials are also working to designate substitute units that would deploy in the initial phases of a major conflict in place of those stationed in the Balkans.

Army officials discovered defective power train assemblies in the Apache helicopter and grounded the fleet of 743 on Nov. 5 pending inspections and parts replacements where necessary. Cohen termed the Army's quick, decisive action "a good thing."

"It doesn't mean all of the Apaches are going to have this problem, but it's important that we reduce and minimize any risk to the pilots," he said. "As soon as each aircraft is inspected, they'll go back out. The ones that will get the priority inspections, of course, are the ones that are forward deployed."

Operations tempo (the intensity and num-

ber of operations) and personnel tempo (the time a service member spends away from home station) are affecting overall readiness, Cohen said.

Missions in Kosovo, Bosnia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere place high demands on both equipment and people, reducing the tempos are one of his major concerns, he added.

"All the services now are focusing on this," he said.

Examples, he noted, are the Air Force's air expeditionary force plan and the Navy's efforts to reduce the number of crew inspections and other activities once ships get back in port.

Military leaders clearly understand high optempo impacts members' family life and are trying to manage it so service members will have more time with their families, Cohen said. "This is the one thing that we constantly talk about at every meeting that we have. When we go to the White House to meet with the president, the chairman and I raise this as an issue in terms of the impact on retention."

The effects of high optempo are of special concern, he said, in high-demand units such as Patriot batteries, reconnaissance and electronic warfare aircraft units and airborne warning and control units.

"We're trying to manage, to slow down, the tempo so we don't wear them out," he said.

U.S. forces have been in the Persian Gulf region since Operation Desert Shield in August 1989 and in Bosnia since the Sava River bridge crossing in December 1995. This year, service members added Kosovo and East Timor to their list of ongoing operations. When will these missions end?

"We can't predict an end date," Cohen said. "We try to talk in terms of 'end states.'"

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For information, call the Family Support Center at 963-4407. (AFPN)

Reservist

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ational leadership, followership, communication and supervisory skills," said Master Sgt. Edie Getz, the flight chief for Charleston's ALS.

Students must complete three research papers, three oral presentations as well as perform classroom exercises, she said.

"I feel I will be a more effective leader and able to counsel my peers," Simmons said about his return to the security forces squadron after completing ALS.

He said ALS will also provide benefits to civilian employers.

"Employers on the outside were excited about my leadership and management training from the Air Force Reserve," said Simmons, who faced questions similar to classroom instruction during his interview process.

"They would give me a scenario and ask how I would handle a situation with a co-worker," he said. "They seemed impressed with the training I've received."

After the first day of class, it made no difference to the other students whether Simmons was from the Reserve or from another active duty unit.

"They were all individuals working together," Getz said.

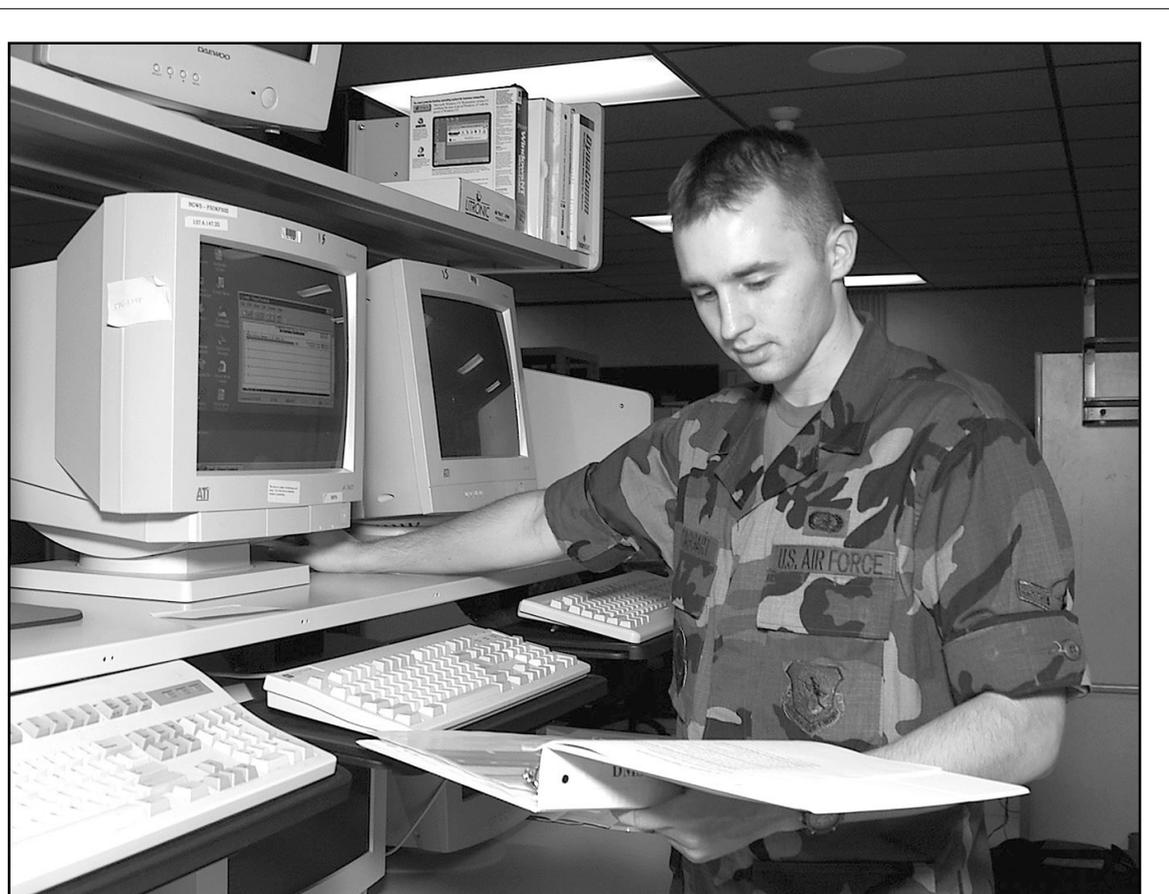
She said the total force concept is taught as part of the curriculum. "It helped to have Senior Airman Simmons here to illustrate the point," she said.

Simmons said he also found the total force concept at work in the classroom as well as his career field.

"It was similar to security forces in that the Air Force personnel all work as one team," he said.

ALS fulfills Professional Military Education 1 for senior airmen, which was only available in a correspondence course for Reserves before.

"Airman Leadership School offers a secondary means of obtaining the professional military education needed to sew on staff sergeant stripes," said Sturgeon, "and there is one reserve slot in each class scheduled this year."



System set up

Airman Kip MacTaggart, 437th Communications Squadron, is creating a Defense Message System. The DMS will enable the different branches of the military to communicate by computer for official purposes such as sending classified material from desktop to desktop.

Senior Airman Corey Clements