

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Investigations,  
Committee on Armed Services, House of  
Representatives

September 1990

# DEFENSE PERSONNEL

## Standards for Joint Duty Tour Length Averages Being Met



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National Security and  
International Affairs Division

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September 10, 1990

The Honorable Nicholas Mavroules  
Chairman, Subcommittee on  
Investigations  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As you requested, we examined whether the average length of military officers' joint duty tours<sup>1</sup> was consistent with 10 U.S.C. 664(e). This section, beginning with fiscal year 1991, requires that, with certain exceptions, the average length of joint duty assignments for (1) general/flag officers shall be not less than 2 years and (2) other officers shall be not less than 3 years. Under the law, the Secretary of Defense will have the overall responsibility for ensuring that joint duty tour averages in each service are met annually. Even though not yet required by law, DOD's interim policy is to adhere to the prescribed average tour lengths to the maximum extent practicable.

In this report we deal with the average tour length of officers whose joint duty assignments ended during fiscal year 1989. This report discusses (1) DOD management of joint tours and (2) how long general/flag officers and field grade officers remained on joint duty assignments. We briefed your staff on June 1, 1990, on the results of our work, and this report summarizes that briefing.

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## Results in Brief

For assignments that ended in fiscal year 1989, the average tour length for general/flag officers of each service exceeded 2 years, and the average tour length for field grade officers of each service exceeded 3 years. Our analysis also showed that of the 117 general/flag officers whose tours we averaged, 77 completed tours of 2 or more years, 17 received waivers from the 2-year tour, 20 served 23-24 months, and the remaining 3 served more than 21 months.

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## Tour Length Averages

10 U.S.C. 664 establishes procedures for computing the average length of joint duty assignments. It stipulates the average joint duty assignment tour length for both general/flag officers and field grade officers,

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<sup>1</sup>A joint duty tour refers to the time served in a joint duty assignment.

effective in fiscal year 1991. Several provisions of the law provide DOD flexibility in what data to use in computing average tour lengths. For example, the law allow tours shortened for specific reasons, such as retirement, suspension, or release from duty, to be excluded. In addition, DOD has the discretion to include or exclude overseas tours.

Because their stipulated average tours are different, general/flag officers' tours must be managed, tracked, and reported separately from field grade officers. Although management groups in the Offices of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have been created, the supporting management information system—Joint Duty Assignment Management Information System—is expected to be operational before fiscal year 1991. In the interim, service systems are being used.

Table 1 shows our calculation of tour length averages for general/flag and field grade officers based on service data.

**Table 1: Average Joint Duty Tour Lengths by Service** (Fiscal Year 1989)

Figures in months		
Service	General/flag officers	Field grade officers
Army	27	40
Navy	26	39
Marine Corps	28	37
Air Force	27	42

## Managing Individual Tours

The services use DOD guidance on assignment policies to manage individual officer reassignments. This guidance does not require the use of actual dates to manage such reassignments. The Army personnel management system currently uses actual dates to manage joint tours for field grade officers, while the other services use year/month data or estimated dates, such as the date of estimated return from overseas or the time an officer is required to report by, to track tour lengths.

In addition to establishing the average joint tour lengths, the act states that as a general rule the minimum lengths for joint duty assignments shall be 2 years for general/flag officers and 3 years for field grade officers. It also lists specific exemptions and exclusions from the minimum tour lengths. In addition, it grants DOD flexibility in managing field grade officers by allowing reassignment up to 60 days early and granting them credit for a full tour. About 2,644 field grade officers completed joint tours in fiscal year 1989.

## Length of Individual Tours for General/Flag Officers

Using information provided to us by the services, we identified 117 general/flag officers who completed joint tours during fiscal year 1989 and were included in our calculation of the average tour lengths. As shown in table 2, 77 of the 117 tours (66 percent) were tours of 2 or more years. Seventeen general/flag officers who did not complete the full 2-year tours obtained tour length waivers. Of the remaining 23, all had served more than 21 months, and 20 of these had served more than 23 months.

**Table 2: General/Flag Officers Completing Tours During Fiscal Year 1989**

Service	Completed tours	Tours of 2 or more years	Under 2-year tours	Granted waivers	Officers	Months
Army	36	24	12	7	4 served 1 served	23+ 21+
Navy	35	22	13	5	8 served	23+
Marine Corps	9	7	2	0	2 served	23+
Air Force	37	24	13	5	6 served 2 served	23+ 22+
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	

Note: In our calculations, we did not include tours which could be excluded under the provisions of 10 U.S.C. 664.

## Scope and Methodology

Because the Offices of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not have systems in place to collect data on average length of joint tour assignments for fiscal year 1989, we obtained data from the personnel offices of the individual services, but we did not verify the accuracy of the data. For general/flag officers we obtained dates that each reported to and departed from a joint duty assignment. In our calculations, we eliminated from our universe those tours which the Department of Defense would not be required to include in its computation of the average tour length.

For field grade officers we did not examine tour lengths for each individual but examined the universe of completed tours and the procedures each service used for computing the average tour length.

We conducted our survey between February and June 1990 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We did not obtain official comments from agency officials; however, we did discuss the matters contained in this letter with program officials during

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the course of our review and have incorporated their comments where appropriate.

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Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Chairmen, House Committees on Armed Services, Appropriations, Government Operations; and the Chairmen, Senate Committees on Armed Services, Appropriations, and Governmental Affairs; the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties. We will make copies available to others upon request.

Please contact me at 275-3990 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors are listed in appendix I.

Sincerely yours,



Paul L. Jones  
Director, Defense Force  
Management Issues



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# Major Contributors to This Report

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