Since the mid-1990s, the pace of operations and the resulting “tempo” in the military services have been subjects of growing concern, both within the defense community and among the general public. It is usually argued that high tempo and overseas deployments place added burdens on soldiers, primarily by taking them away from their home station and increasing the amount of household disruption and family separation that is inherent in military life. Such effects, if they are real and persistent, could ultimately undercut personnel retention and recruiting. It was precisely for these reasons that Congress enacted new legislation requiring additional compensation for military personnel who are deployed for lengthy periods.

As this report has indicated, however, tempo and its effects are not simple issues. First, the Army data systems discussed here, while sufficient for determining overall levels of unit and personnel tempo, provide only a partial picture of deployment history for individual soldiers. Second, the most visible aspect of tempo—the amount of time spent away from home—is only part of the phenomenon. Deployments also increase workload, shift the focus of training, and require cross-unit movements of personnel in ways that affect both individual quality of life and unit readiness. To paint the full picture, the Army (along with the other services) needs a broader mechanism for tracking the various types of deployments, unit activities, and workload.

Despite that limitation, we have found existing data informative for describing some key aspects of recent deployments in the Army’s Active Component forces. The first observation is that, over time,
Army deployment levels have increased appreciably. DEPTEMPO data indicate that for soldiers in TOE units, the average time deployed rose nearly 30 percent between 1997 and 2000. The number of units with lengthy periods away from home was also up sharply. For example, the number of units reporting more than 120 days of annual DEPTEMPO more than doubled (from 94 to 222 units) since reporting began in 1997. However, the fraction of the force affected remains relatively small. Out of 1,400 units reporting, only 222 had 120 days or more DEPTEMPO in the year ending October 2000, and only 89 had 180 days or more.

How does this affect the typical soldier? The DEPTEMPO data show that the average soldier in TOE units was “away from home station” for about seven days per month, counting all types of deployments. That implies about 85 days away in a 12-month period. Within those 85 days, the DEPTEMPO data allow us to distinguish two primary classes: within-country deployments (to local training areas or Combat Training Centers) and overseas deployments (on operational or humanitarian missions). The majority of the 85 days were for within-country deployments. Only about 22 days were attributable to operational or humanitarian missions, typically to SSCs in overseas locations.

Of course, these results varied by skill and type of unit. The average soldier in an Armor unit was away almost 10 days per month, compared with less than 5 days for members of some types of units. This reflects the fact that the combat arms branches spend considerably more time in field training than other branches. The support branches, however, experience a large proportionate increase in time away when a deployment occurs, and they must continue supporting the installation even when some of their members are deployed.

The individual personnel data, which go back to 1994, confirm that these trends have been under way for most of the past decade. These data show that rates of major deployments and lengths of tours rose sharply between 1994–1995 and the 1996–2000 timeframe.

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*The personnel data are limited, because they cover only major overseas operations and exercises, but they allow us to take a longer view for the aggregate Army and to examine a given soldier’s experience over a career rather than at just one point in time.*
largely because of the Bosnia and Kosovo operations. When it occurs, such a deployment is typically a disruptive event in a soldier’s life; it may also be unplanned. Moreover, the recent deployments, dominated by Bosnia and Kosovo, were for lengthy periods—6 months in most cases, and up to 12 months in others (e.g., division staff).

Nonetheless, the impact has been confined to a modest fraction of the total Army, which contained about 500,000 soldiers during most of this time period. During a given year, most soldiers do not deploy at all. Those who do deploy may be away for long periods, but fewer than 4 percent are subject to repeat deployments during a three-year period. The same observation holds true over a seven-year period: Repeated contingency deployments are experienced by only a small fraction of the force.

A similar picture emerges when one examines the total amount of time that a soldier is deployed over a period of several years. We analyzed three-year periods during the 1990s and found that fewer than 10 percent of the force were away for major deployments more than one-sixth of the time. And fewer than 1 percent were away more than one-third of the time—the equivalent of 120 days per year.

One reason for this is the regular rotation of soldiers across Army assignments. The vast majority of deployments occur among soldiers serving in TOE units. Very junior personnel, such as first-term enlistees, spend most of their time in such units. More senior personnel, however, rotate between TOE and TDA organizations. Armor NCOs, for example, spend over 40 percent of their time in TDA units. Since few soldiers deploy from TDA units, the deployment rate over an entire career would be considerably lower than the rate in a TOE unit.\(^2\)

How much all of the above matters depends to a large degree on the ultimate effects on morale and retention. The scattered and intermittent incidence of deployments may explain why, so far, attempts

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\(^2\)The presence of “unaccompanied” tours (without family) complicates this picture further. For example, about 6 percent of Army personnel are in Korea, primarily on one-year unaccompanied tours. Since these are “permanent change of station” moves, they are different in many ways from deployments, but they do increase the amount of family separation experienced by many soldiers during a career.
Deployments and Army Personnel Tempo

to find such effects have been inconclusive and ambiguous. Effects upon retention are uncertain. Recent analysis indicates that deployments can exert negative or positive effects on retention, depending on the circumstances and number of deployments experienced by the individual.3 Overall, however, Army retention rates have been holding steady, consistent with the small number of people impacted. Indeed, some internal Army tabulations indicate that retention rates, if anything, are higher for units that have experienced a deployment.4

Both sets of deployment data that we examined lead us to conclude that a simple look at static measures of tempo and deployment statistics (whether the number of soldiers deployed or the number of unit days of DEPTEMPO) does not by itself explain a “tempo” problem. How, then, does one explain the widely felt concerns about tempo? We believe that there is a problem, and that it results from two sources that are hard to measure using traditional military record-keeping systems. The first source, in our view, is the overall workload, generated by the combination of the warfighting mission, the new SSC missions, and the day-to-day demands of operating a unit and installation in peacetime. The workload strain is felt acutely when the unit is not filled to 100 percent in the first place—as is often the case in Army units, particularly in support units.

This workload problem also appears to be unevenly distributed. As we observed repeatedly during visits to units, workload resulting either directly or indirectly from SSC deployments affects two subgroups to a much greater extent. These two subgroups are (1) the commanders and staffs of battalions, brigades, and divisions and (2) the members of support units, primarily nondivisional, that have both deployment and garrison support missions to perform. Commanders and staff officers in TOE units must oversee current opera-

4 Unpublished tabulations of enlisted retention, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, 1999. This should not be taken as conclusive, however; unit-specific retention rates can be affected by a host of factors, including tax-exempt payments and bonuses that can affect both the direction and timing of a soldier’s reenlistment decision. In addition, recent retention rates for officers have shown some adverse trends, particularly lower retention among captains; that could be an effect of the civilian economy, military workload (see below), or deployments.
tions and training, plan future events, and support the training of higher and lower echelons as a matter of course. When an unexpected deployment occurs, the brigade staff (for example) must plan the new activity, supervise the movement of soldiers and units, support the deployed element while it is overseas, and maintain essential functions for the stay-behind elements at the home station. Support units such as Military Police, Adjutant General, and Finance must train for their deployment mission, deploy in support of SSCs, and also meet the requirements of their garrison support role. This workload, unfortunately, is hard to estimate. To date, there has been no mechanism for collecting systematic information on workload in Army units.

The second source is more subtle, arising from the dynamics of the entire system that must sustain the peacetime force, prepare and train for SSC deployments, and adhere to various peacetime operational and personnel policy constraints. Leaders in field units often noted that other factors often play an important role in the degree of stress and disruption caused by deployments. Even relatively small deployments (particularly SSC deployments) divert the focus of unit leadership, cause turbulence from cross-leveling and tailoring of the force, and require specialized training. Those effects then impact other units, which must supply the filler personnel and support the training and deployment of the deploying force.

The effects of tempo may not be due, therefore, to the pace of deployments by themselves. Rather, it is likely that tempo is coupled with a number of other factors to place stress on the military system. To begin with, during this period many Army units were filled to less than 100 percent of their stated wartime personnel requirement. Although the Army has long operated with this personnel shortfall, its existence becomes an acute problem when commanders must scramble to deploy a unit at nearly full strength.5 Second, as shown by the analysis of Bosnia deployments described in Chapter Four, even small deployments have larger ripple effects across the force, creating extensive personnel turbulence and disrupting unit training cycles. Third, these SSC deployments must be conducted in the con-

5Near the end of the study period, the Army announced a new policy aimed at filling divisional units to 100 percent of their authorized strength. If sustained, that policy would ameliorate this problem for TOE units.
text of a force that has experienced reductions in resources, while still attempting to achieve other paramount goals (i.e., maintaining readiness for a major theater war and training the future soldiers and leaders in warfighting skills).\(^6\) This picture leads us to conclude that the major focus of Army concern about deployments should probably be not on the individual soldier effects but on overall force management, to evenly distribute the burden, minimize short-term readiness impacts, and ensure that longer-term skill development and warfighting capability are sustained.

\(^6\)There are some indications that today’s junior leaders in the Army are receiving less experience in field operations while they are in operational units—the main assignments where such experience can be accrued. See Leed (2000b) for a further discussion of the potential impact on tactical leader development.