



## An Interview with

# Thomas F. Hall

The Honorable Thomas F. Hall is the fourth Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs. He is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy (class of 1963) and retired from uniformed service as a Rear Admiral, USN.



Secretary Hall being briefed by U.S. trainers of Afghan Army



Secretary Hall speaking at Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve meeting

**JFQ:** When you first assumed your present duties, were you given a specific mandate, or an open road?

**Secretary Hall:** I think we need to go back even a little bit before that to see how I got here because I served 34 years as an Active duty officer, and to be associated with the Guard and Reserve as a former Active duty officer is a little bit different. But while I was serving in the Navy, I had the chance to serve as the deputy director of the Naval Reserve before I went to my North Atlantic Treaty Organization command in Iceland. So I spent about a year with the Naval Reserve, and when I finished my tour of duty in Iceland, I came back and was actually the last Active duty commander of the Naval Reserve, and I served in that capacity for 4 years. During those 5 years, I discovered what many Active duty officers sometimes don't admit: that Active duty officers don't always know a lot about the Guard and Reserve, and I didn't. But I learned a lot in those 5 years, and then I went out into the civilian world and served as the executive

director of the Naval Reserve Association. So when I came to look at this job, I had had about 10 years of experience with the Guard and Reserve.

As we went into the 1990s and actually past 9/11, it became my belief that our construct for the Guard and Reserve that we had all developed in the '90s had really changed forever. And the idea of the Guard and Reserve being a strategic force waiting to mobilize perhaps once in their lifetime to fight the "Big War" was probably gone forever, and our Guard and Reserve forces were going to be used more. We had a lot of things about them that we needed to change, and they were going to become what we call the operational Reserve. So when I went to the President and offered my services, it was because I believed that the Guard and Reserve were going to be more important than ever, were going to be used more, and that we fundamentally needed to change the way we recruit, train, equip, and utilize our Guard and Reserve forces. When I came to the job, I came with that orientation. I expressed my desire to serve and to be part

of that transformation of virtually 46 percent of the military. Again, even among our own ranks, we don't always realize that almost half of this corporation called defense is invested in the Guard and Reserve. So how we use that, and what the return on investment is of those almost 1.2 million people, is going to be extremely important for our country. I came with that framework, that background, and also a desire to serve. I offered my services, and the President appointed me, and we're almost 4 years later now.

**JFQ:** Secretary Rumsfeld once observed to the press that you go to war with the army you have. We also go to war with the strategic Reserve we have. If our Reserve forces have enabled transformation of the Active forces, how has our Reserve transformed to serve as an operational Reserve?

**Secretary Hall:** Of course, *transformation* is a word that you hear everywhere, and in fact all of our forces are transforming, and it is essential that the Guard and Reserve transform along with the Active duty force if we are going to have one force. We can no longer afford not to use the Guard and Reserve in an operational way. We needed to transform the way we equipped the Guard and Reserve, and we can talk a bit more about the equipping strategy. We needed to transform the way we mobilize our Guard and Reserve. We really had a mobilization process that was rooted in the industrial age rather than the technology age. We knew very well how to flow our time-phased deployment plans, we knew how to get big formations into the various theaters of operation, but we didn't always know how to correctly force-package and how to be agile, so we needed to transform that entire process.

We also needed to look at the jointness, which I hope we'll talk some about, of our Guard and Reserve, because they are going to fall in on joint formations. The question of "Do we provide joint education, joint training, for our Guard and Reserve?" was critical, and the answer was, "Probably not as well as we should have." The regulations and the mobilization

On May 30, 2006, Col David H. Gurney, USMC (Ret.), and Dr. Jeffrey D. Smotherman of Joint Force Quarterly interviewed the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs Thomas F. Hall in his office at the Pentagon.

authority of the Guard and Reserve are based largely on a strategic Reserve rather than an operational one. So we looked at the bank of laws, policies, and regulations in this area. And again—not many people know this, and I appreciate your journal helping us put out some of this information—in the past 2 years, because of the partnership of the Department of Defense [DOD] with our elected officials, and really because of Congress, we've changed 120 provisions of the law that affect the Guard and Reserve—probably the largest legislative changes in history over a 2-year period. The laws go all the way from how we compensate, how we provide benefits, and how we mobilize our Guard and Reserve. So we needed to overhaul this entire structure and look at it from top to bottom and see how we would transform that force to meet the realities of the war on terror.

**JFQ:** *In the face of the Long War and the increasing focus on civil defense, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, special operations, and stability and security operations, do we have the right mix of Active and Reserve forces?*

**Secretary Hall:** I've often said that before we determine that we're out of people, and that we need more people, we first have to look and see if we're out of balance. And the answer was clearly "yes" because I and my colleagues were constructing the Guard and Reserve to meet the Big War, and we were putting a lot of our force structuring—combat, combat service support, civil affairs, transportation, intelligence—into areas that we thought we would have ample time to mobilize, and plenty of time to train, and get these forces when we needed them. We suddenly discovered after 9/11 that no, we're going to need them right away. They can't operate with obsolete equipment. And we discovered that we were calling on certain very low-density units in a very high usage.

Let me give you some examples: civil affairs, transportation, military intelligence, military police. We have a large amount of those structured in the Guard and Reserve, and we were using them all the time. So we went to the individual Services and asked them to look at the balance they had. This also includes civilians, which we can talk a little bit about. And they came back initially and said, "Well, there are about 100,000 types of people that we need that we don't have. And we think there are about 100,000 types of people that we have that we don't need." Let's take the Army as an

example. We had a lot of artillery, field artillery, and air defense artillery. So all the Services together said that they were going to rebalance about 100,000, creating more Active structure and more Reserve structure in these very high-use areas. Since then, we've accelerated, and we have about 125,000 that we're going to rebalance. We're well along the road: we have 70,000 who we've rebalanced now, and we have 55,000 who we're going to rebalance up through the year 2011. When we do that, we will take those 125,000 people and create more structure in those areas that we're stressing.

**JFQ:** *Do any Reserve Component forces have formal or informal relationships with state militias? If not, should they? And how do you work with them?*

**Secretary Hall:** About 25 states have militias. A couple of points to remember are that these militias are formed by the states, controlled by the Governor, funded by the states, and are a state entity. So many of our National Guard and Reserve units have informal-type interactions with the state militias, some training and other things, but there's not a formal DOD connection to those state militias because those are controlled by the Governors. But I know in New York, for instance, that the New York Naval Militia and the Naval Reserve work very well together.

**JFQ:** *How have the Reserve Components engaged with interagency partners to see after their slice of the DOD mission?*

**Secretary Hall:** DOD is part of the interagency process in all that we do, and especially in homeland defense and homeland security. These past 2 years have been unbelievable in what we have undergone in the form of transition alone. Think about it: the first Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, Paul McHale, has stood up; the Department of Homeland Security has stood up; and U.S. Northern Command has stood up. All of these entities are focusing on defense of the homeland and security of the homeland. DOD, by way of U.S. Northern Command, normally supports the lead Federal agency. So the way I would characterize it is that DOD, through the Secretary, as ordered by the Commander in Chief, provides forces to support those interagency partners, and I think we have seen that in hurricane support and in the various interactions between the agencies.

**JFQ:** *In view of the increased operations tempo and personnel tempo that Reserve forces have been shouldering, are there any recruitment or retention challenges on the horizon? If so, how are these being addressed?*

**Secretary Hall:** One of the things I do in my job is to visit with the Guard and Reserves, young men and women who are serving, and their families. One of the great untold stories of this entire mobilization is the way the young men and women have answered the call to colors, just as the generations before them did. This is a wonderful story that Americans need to be told over and over. Many of our young men and women are volunteering for second and third tours of duty in the Guard and Reserve in Iraq and Afghanistan and other areas of the world, and we are experiencing a very high retention rate. In fact, our figures compare well to prior to 9/11. So I have often said that people would not stay in an organization that they don't like and that they don't believe in. People are staying in the Guard and Reserve in ever-increasing numbers. Virtually all of the Guard and Reserve forces, with the exception of probably the Naval Reserve by just a small amount, will meet their retention goals by the end of the year.

On the recruiting side is the challenge. Three of the seven components are experiencing recruiting challenges: the Army Reserve, the Naval Reserve, and the Air National Guard. They're all improving—and, by the way, the Army Guard, which at the beginning of the year was experiencing some shortfalls, is doing a magnificent job, and it appears that they're growing toward the 350,000 that they have projected. But the combination of good retention and hard work in recruiting means that by the end of the year, we have hopes that all the components, with perhaps the exception of the Naval Reserve, might achieve their end strength rather than continuing to have a challenge.

**JFQ:** *How is the future Reserve Component going to look vis-à-vis the past?*

**Secretary Hall:** There will be some small reductions, but it will be about the same size. You will see a force that has more compatible equipment with the Active Component; you'll have less legacy equipment come to the Guard and Reserve, which is important because training needs to occur on the same equipment that is going to be used in combat.

You will see a force that has a tremendous amount more combat veterans. We will have the largest number of combat veterans in the Guard and Reserve than at any time since World War II. You'll see an experienced force where most of the top sergeants, top chiefs, and others will all have combat experience. You will find a force that is meeting more predictable rotational patterns. We have a model that says that you should expect to be called up once every 6 years. It doesn't mean you will be; we hope to be able to predict to those forces, their families, and their employers when we're going to call them up and how long we're going to use them.

Also, these forces should be mobilized for periods of 1 year or less. I don't think we can sustain extended call-ups where we're doing 18 to 21 months of mobilization. That's just too much of a stress on the employers, too much of a stress on the families and individuals. Our hope is to get to a goal of 12 months or less mobilization.



You are going to see a Guard and Reserve force that is more joint because our joint training systems, our joint training sites such as Fort Polk [Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana] and schools such as the National Defense University are incorporating Guard and Reserve in the courses. Our mid-level courses for senior enlisted and officers are both incorporating joint training, so you're going to see a much greater jointness. Plus, you're going to see people who have served in a joint way much more than in the past. Let's take an example. You're going to see Air Force truck drivers and Navy truck drivers driving in Army missions, so you're going to see people much more comfortable with joint solutions.

**JFQ:** *In 1971, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird introduced the Total Force concept. The intent was to hold Reserve and Guard leaders accountable for readiness and preparedness. How has the Reserve Component responded in the last three decades, if you can give us a historical perspective? And what do we need to do differently or better to meet the realities of the post-Cold War environment?*

**Secretary Hall:** A great misunderstanding lies in talking about the Total Force policy. I've heard, "We're walking away from it," "We

no longer endorse it," and "Is it any longer applicable?" And I say, "Yes, it is, and we're not walking away from it." What we're doing is merely expanding and building on it. It was the right policy at the right time to set the stage to launch us toward where we are now. It's the same way with any other kinds of policies that you modernize, change, and transform.

**JFQ:** *The Total Force concept also required the Reserve Component to meet a basic standard of training. Now that we're 20 years beyond Goldwater-Nichols and in a period where joint and interagency coordination supersede former Active duty and Reserve Component differences, how do the Armed Forces train and educate senior leaders so officers of different Services or components have similar skill sets to command?*

**Secretary Hall:** This is why joint training facilities are so important—the National Training Center [Fort Irwin, California] and the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, and all of our training institutions, all of our Service schools. We must train Guard, Reserve, and Active duty jointly. We are going to have Guard and Reserve personnel serving on joint staffs when they're mobilized, so they have to have joint training. Also, the training concept for Guard and Reserve has changed dramatically. When I go to the National Training Center and see a battalion going through, I can't tell whether they're Active, Guard, or Reserve. I have to ask the instructors. And I also ask the instructors if they notice any difference in the Guard and Reserve and Active duty units they train, and they say, "When I certify them, they're certified, and I'm not certifying anybody who isn't trained. When they come out the other end, they're going to be just as good or just as qualified, and we don't send anybody to the area of responsibility and go over the berm unless they're trained, and I see them there at the point."

**JFQ:** *There's been a lot of discussion about the role of the Reserve Component, and the National Guard in particular, for the domestic homeland security mission set, from planning to consequence management. This was even before the President's recent proposal to send 6,000 Guardsmen to monitor our Southern border.*

*How should the Total Force, as well as the Guard itself, change to respond to the complex network of domestic security tasks?*

**Secretary Hall:** This would be a good question for Paul McHale and [National Guard Bureau Chief] Steve Blum to address because they work in that area, but from my aspect, the President needs to be able to call on the Guard and Reserve for the defense of the homeland in any manner or at any time he sees fit. It is the duty of the Guard and Reserve, the duty of my office, and all of the leaders to make sure that we have the training and equipment and that we are prepared to respond. Our Guard and Reserve forces have demonstrated their readiness during the last year with Katrina and Rita. As I recall, we had a total mobilization of over 100,000 that were already mobilized and were meeting missions throughout the world. At the same time, we mobilized about 50,000 people to go to Katrina and Rita from the National Guard, and they did that without missing a beat, while meeting overseas commitments, which mirrors the view that the National Guard must be prepared to do all missions, both overseas and at home, and must train dually for both missions, and they are doing that. Of course, our Reserve Components have to be available under Title 10 to go to overseas missions or domestic missions. So I just think that we need to view this as a Total Force of 2.6 million men and women under arms that the President uses as necessary to meet both domestic and overseas missions. It is our job to make sure those forces are trained, equipped, manned, and ready to meet any one of those missions when the President calls.

**JFQ:** *A National Defense University faculty member wrote, "The Abrams Doctrine is widely interpreted as an expression of General Creighton Abrams' determination to maintain a clear linkage between the employment of the Army and the engagement of public support for military operations." Presently, we also understand that some alterations to that mix are under way. We're interested in understanding if you believe that the so-called Abrams Doctrine is at odds with the assessment that a new mix is needed to make a more agile military with the capability to fight today while retaining enough strategic depth for the higher-spectrum contingencies.*

**Secretary Hall:** General Abrams was a great Soldier and a great American. If he were

alive today, he would be rejoicing in the fact that his principle—that America should never go to war without its Guard and Reserve—is alive and well. Today, we have over 100,000 Guardsmen and Reservists mobilized to virtually every mission around the world. So America has gone to war with its Guard and Reserve—not as we did in Vietnam. So I would say that one of the things that we had walked away from and we are changing now to rejoin is that his doctrine is being shown today as the exact one we need, and we are at war with the Guard and Reserve—100,000 around the world—so the change and mix that we’re doing is supporting the Abrams Doctrine.

**JFQ:** *If the Reserve Component transitions to a more agile or lighter force, and the Guard moves into more homeland security missions, how will the Total Force maintain preparedness for the upper end of the spectrum of conflict?*

**Secretary Hall:** I don’t think those are exclusive. By the National Guard being prepared to meet homeland defense and any further missions they are called to overseas, to be trained jointly, to be properly equipped, and for the Reserve to be the same way, that does not mean that you aren’t going to be prepared for one or the other; it means you’re going to be prepared for both. If you execute those basic tenets, which is to get regulations correct, get the benefits and compensation correct, get the training correct, get the equipping correct, get the mobilization process correct, and get the usage correct, then you’re going to have a force that is ready to respond at home and overseas in an integrated way.

**JFQ:** *You are reputed to hold forth on the fact that we’ve uncovered a new “greatest generation.” If in fact that is your view, how is this generation to get the credit it deserves in the face of a press that tends to report things with an angle that may be more sensational or perhaps political—how are we to give them the credit they are due?*

**Secretary Hall:** I certainly would never criticize the press; they have their job to do, and they do that. I returned from Oklahoma this past week, where I go each year to award some scholarships and visit with young men and women, and I met a number of people who were joining the military, and I asked them why. They said, “Well, we just want to serve.” I say this is the next greatest generation



Secretary Hall and Secretary of Transportation display Statement of Support for Guard and Reserve

because I visit men and women at Walter Reed [Army Medical Center] who are wounded, who have lost legs and arms, who have made a considerable sacrifice. I have never found one who didn’t say, “What I want to do is get well and return to my unit and go back into the fight and help us win this war because we have to.” These are people who serve voluntarily, particularly the Guard and Reserve. These men and woman did not have to go—they are doing it willingly, and they want to protect their country. Tom Brokaw’s World War II generation will always be the greatest generation, but history will gradually show that this is the next greatest generation.

**JFQ:** *We would like to give you an opportunity to speak directly to our readership on this issue’s focus: the Total Force.*

**Secretary Hall:** We need to thank the employers of America. One of the untold stories and unsung heroes of America is our employers, and we know for sure that there are 300, probably 500 to 1,000, companies that are providing extra benefits or just extra help to the Guardsmen and Reservists who work for them. These employers maintain jobs for those serving when they come back, and they support families while these men and women are gone. These employers are patriotic in their own way, just like they were serving, because they say, “It’s important to let my employee go and serve the country, and I’m going to support him and his family while he’s gone.” I get on airplanes where I see flight attendants talk to young men and women in uniform, and the attendants tell them, “You’re going to

the wrong seat,” and there’s a questioning look on the part of the young men and women, and the attendants say, “You go up in first class because you’re America’s heroes.” That is something we all need to think about and to thank those employers for.

Once again, the families of our young men and women around the country are supporting these Servicemembers as they never have before. I was a Vietnam-era veteran, and when we returned from the conflict there, because of the political turmoil in the country, we were not welcomed. There were no parades. We didn’t question the political aspects; we just went and did our duty. Now, when I travel around the country, I see parades and homecomings. We see celebrations planned and communities turning out. So the support of America for the troops is overwhelming. There will always be political differences about how war is fought, but there’s no difference throughout the country that America supports its young men and women. So I see a different sense in America than I did during the Vietnam war.

And finally, I think that when we talk about our young men and women being better trained and the best military we’ve ever had, I believe that, because I spent a long time in the military. I see very, very bright, articulate young men and women who are willing to come and say, “The price of freedom is service for our country.” And they’re meeting that call, and I want to thank them, I want to thank their families, I want to thank the employers of America for supporting them.

**JFQ:** *Thank you, sir.*