

German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr)

History



The [Bundeswehr](#) was established in 1955 after strong discussions about re-militarizing Germany (the *Wiederbewaffnung*) after World War II. After an amendment of the constitution (*Grundgesetz*) West Germany became a member of NATO in 1955.

In 1956 conscription for all men between the ages of 18 and 45 was introduced, later on augmented by the introduction of a civil alternative with a longer duration of service (see Conscription in Germany).

During the Cold War, the [Bundeswehr](#) was the backbone of NATO's conventional defence in Central Europe. It had a strength of 495,000 military, about double the strength of reserve forces and 170,000 civilian personnel. The Army consisted of three corps with 12 divisions, most of them heavily armed with tanks and armored personal carriers (APC). The Air Force (*Luftwaffe*) owned a high number of tactical combat aircraft and took part in NATO's integrated air defence (NATINAD). The Navy was tasked and equipped to defend the Baltic Approaches and to contribute in containing the Soviet Baltic Fleet.

German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr)

History (continued)



After reunification in 1990, the [Bundeswehr](#) absorbed parts of the *National Volksarmee (NVA)* of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which was being dissolved at the time. As of 1993, the [Bundeswehr](#) participated in humanitarian relief and stabilisation operations in Africa (UNOSOM II), on the Balkans as well as in UN-lead observation commitments in Asia and Africa.

In 1999, the NATO war in Kosovo was the first offensive conflict in which the German military actively took part since World War II.

In 2000, the European Court of Justice opened the previously all-male (besides medical divisions and the music corps) [Bundeswehr](#) to women.

German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr)

History (continued)

The sustainability of forces was directly depending on the ability to mobilize a large number of troops. This was guaranteed by NATO and by our reservists.

After the German re-unification and the break-up of the Warsaw Pact, the German Armed Forces were significantly reduced in the early 90's.

Today conflict prevention and crisis management are the top priorities for the [Bundeswehr](#) – including the war against global terrorism.

The publication of Germany's new Defence Policy Guideline on 21st May 2003 initiated the present restructuring of the [Bundeswehr](#) and also marked the starting point for all considerations regarding the Reservist Concept.

Transformation is the keyword.

[Organisation](#)





Organisation

The [Bundeswehr](#) currently consists of about 261,700 military and about 100,000 civilian personnel.

The Army is organized into 5 combat divisions and also participates in multinational command structures at the corps level.

The Luftwaffe is divided into 3 divisions, and the Navy into 2 flotillas. The Central Medical Services and the Joint Service Support Command are each organized into four regional commands. All of these branches also have general commands for training, in service support, and other general issues. The [Bundeswehr](#) does not have a command structure comparable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the United States, e.g.

The [Bundeswehr](#), in general, is still among the world's most technologically advanced and well-supplied militaries, as befits of Germany's overall economic prosperity and infrastructure. Its budget is, however, steadily shrinking and among the lowest military budgets in NATO in terms of share of GDP.



Organisation (continued)

The publication of Germany's new Defence Policy Guideline on 21. may 2003 initiated the present restructuring of the [Bundeswehr](#) and also marked the starting point for all considerations regarding the [Reservist Concept](#).

Transformation is the keyword.

In order to achieve this objective the German Armed Forces

- have to be designed in a manner in order to meet mission requirements – that applies to structure, to personnel, to training and to equipment under the motto “**organise and train as you fight**”,
- have to achieve all this within the very limited financial resources being provided.



Organisation (continued)

Therefore the former strength of 495.000 active soldiers is being reduced to 252.500 by 2007 including conscripts and an average of 2.350 reservists continuous on active duty and the reserve forces will be reduced to a strength of roughly 80.000 men.

The current strength of the restructuring forces with the aim to increase the effectiveness under the aspect of the reduction of the defence budget is (as of Dec 2005):

- Army: 113.000 soldiers
- Navy: 19.400 soldiers
- Air Force: 46.700 soldiers

Support units to the forces mentioned above have a strength of 59.900 men of all three branches as well as 22.700 soldiers in medical service.

The reserve force is being restructured as well. The new Reserve Forces are categorized into

- Reinforcement Reserve
- Manpower Reserve
- General Reserve



Organisation (continued)

Further information can be found under the following links concerning

- [Benefits](#)
- [Budget](#)
- [Training](#)
- [Perspective](#)

National Reserve Forces Status

General information

The new „[Bundeswehr](#) Reservist Concept”, signed by the Minister of Defence on 10th September 2003 marks a substantial change of the German system for Reserve Forces. The main envisioned features are a volunteer-based reserve system, the reduction of assigned reservists to 80.000 in the future and a new structure of a categorization of reserve personnel. This will give the reserve a new face tailored to the needs of a [Bundeswehr](#) participating in worldwide operations.

In order to implement the new concept, the necessary legislative activities and the changes to directives and administrative procedures are well under way and in a final stage. However, the process of restructuring the complete German reserve forces will take approximately until end of 2007.

National Reserve Forces Status

Basic organization principles

The process of planning and reshaping the reserve forces is ongoing, and, therefore, detailed structures and figures cannot be presented for the time being.

The peacetime tasks of the [Bundeswehr](#), as there are

- international crisis prevention und conflict management,
- support of allies,
- protection of Germany and its citizens,
- rescue and evacuation operations,
- partnership and cooperation and assistance rendered by the [Bundeswehr](#),

will be accomplished by means of the peacetime structure and integrate reservists in the status of Reinforcement Reserve or Manpower Reserve.

National Reserve Forces Status

Basic organization principles (continued)

German laws define a member of the reserve as a citizen of German nationality, who served with the armed forces.

Those former soldiers may serve as a member of the reserve voluntarily as

- JNCOs up to the age of 45 years
- SNCOs and Officers up to the age of 60 years

Exemption: former professional soldiers until 65 years of age

Function of Reserves

Reservists support the [Bundeswehr](#) in the whole spectrum of the above tasks. They are complementary to the capabilities of the active forces and assist in achieving more sustainability of regular forces.

Reinforcement Reserve – an “active reserve”

All reservists will be assigned to structural posts for active personnel. For assignment, volunteers should be given preference. Reserve soldiers are assigned in order to achieve full operational capability and to increase the sustainability of units and agencies, and, furthermore, to retain indispensable capabilities for reconstitution. Roughly 10% of the peacetime establishment will be available to this kind of reservists. In addition key personal posts will be available to the reservist as a back up.

The Reinforcement Reserve may also contain specialists.

During their tour with the units etc. each reservist is entitled to certain [benefits](#). These are guaranteed by different laws to compensate any soldier's hardship during his tour of duty.

In general, the duration of the tour of duty should not exceed 90 days per calendar year. The only exception to this time limit is the service in a stabilisation / peacekeeping mission outside the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. For these missions, including the training prior to the mission, the extended time limit of 7 months per calendar year can not be exceeded.

Manpower Reserve – an “active reserve”

Only volunteers will be considered for assignment and all reservists will be placed on non-structural posts. The manpower Reserve is designated to make temporary provisions for filling vacancies or for compensating increased personnel requirements in order to enhance the sustainability of units and agencies.

The Manpower Reserve, moreover, has a vital part in retaining indispensable reconstitution capabilities. The manpower reserve consists of officers, NCOs and officer / NCO candidates, and, to the extent necessary, non-rated personnel. Specialists should preferably be assigned to the Manpower Reserve. They serve on a voluntarily basis during peacetimes.

During their tour with the units etc. each reservist is entitled to certain [benefits](#). These are guaranteed by different laws to compensate any soldier's hardship during his tour of duty.

In general, the duration of the tour of duty should not exceed 90 days per calendar year. The only exception to this time limit is the service in a stabilisation / peacekeeping mission outside the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany. For these missions, including the training prior to the mission, the extended time limit of 7 months per calendar year can not be exceeded.

General Reserve – a “passive reserve”

The General Reserve consists of all peacetime non-assigned / non-active reservists who will be available to be called up for augmentation of the armed forces in case of tension or war (reconstitution).

This reserve is not connected to any unit or post. By law, every former soldier of the German armed forces belongs to this type of reserve unless he belongs to the [Reinforcement Reserve](#) or [Manpower Reserve](#).

Age limits will apply during peace time; in an actual defence situation these age limits are obsolete.

These reservists belonging to the General Reserve are entitled to all monetary [benefits](#) in case they are serving voluntarily during peace time. During war time other benefits apply.

In general, these members of the General Reserve are not called up for duty in peace time.

Benefits for German Reservists

1. Remuneration

Each reservist is entitled to receive payments - when serving - according to his rank.

Members of the *Reinforcement Reserve* and *Manpower Reserve* are entitled to additional pay per day up to a cap within a calendar year after having served for at least 24 days altogether as reservist within the forces. Additionally he is free of charge entitled to food, clothing and housing during his tour.

Members of the *Reinforcement Reserve* or *Manpower Reserve* may pledge to serve at least 72 days in the forces in a 3 year time limit (24 days minimum per year). For this commitment he will receive an incentive bonus for 24 days per year. Every day exceeding these 24 days per year will only be rendered according to the scheme above.

Former professional soldiers, who receive a pension, may serve in the *Reinforcement Reserve* or *Manpower Reserve* up to the age of 65. They will receive in addition to their pension (normally 75% of their last pay) the remaining 25% (adds up to 100% of last payment).

All reservists deployed outside the boundaries of Germany in a peacekeeping or humanitarian mission, will receive a reimbursement according to the regulations, which authorized the Bundeswehr to participate here in.

Benefits for German Reservists (continued)

2. Medical Service

Each reservist serving with the forces has medical care free of charge, including hospital service.

3. Job Security / Reimbursement of labour costs

The German “Job Reservation Act” guarantees each reservist while serving within the forces the job he maintained in the economy before his voluntary tour. His Employer has to continue to pay the reservist’s salary as a rough figure. The German government reimburses all expenses to the employer according to the presented documentation.

For this reason the employer has not to sustain a loss and therefore agrees more easily to call-ups of his employees to the armed forces.

Freelancers are eligible to claim, amongst others, a compensation for hiring a substitution during their tour of duty.



Budget

There are some 2.350 Reserve training slots per calendar day that form part of the [Bundeswehr](#) personnel budget for FY 2005 which allows funding of approximately 850.000 individual training days. It covers also the participation of reservists in missions abroad.

Due to the conscript system, the “Job Reservation Act” mainly covers Employer Support.

Additional regulations may be initiated according to the needs of the [Bundeswehr](#), of the reservists and of the employers.

Training

In respect of basic, advanced and continuation training, the same principles apply for active - duty personnel and reservists.

The training will be in line with the requirements of the reservist's assigned position. Not affected by this regulation is the reserve duty training conducted during a crisis, designed to enhance operational readiness or to secure the freedom of operation of the Armed Forces, and, furthermore, the reserve duty training by way of on-call duty as well as during a state of tension and defence emergency declared by the Federal Parliament (the *Bundestag*).

All reserve duty training within the context of assignments up to the maximum duration prescribed by conscription law is always compulsory training. Special foreign assignments (mission abroad) will not be counted against subject mandatory duration of the compulsory reserve duty training.

The focus is on the individual reserve duty training of personnel in command, administrative and specialized functions who must maintain and improve their proficiency and skills through regular reserve duty training. Within a two-year-period, voluntarily assigned reservists must attend, at least, one short reserve-duty training (approx. 2 weeks). The other reservists are to be called up to join an official event staged by their units. On this occasion they will be familiarized with their designated assignment and they will receive information and general support.

Training (continued)

Reservists earmarked for national disaster relief operation as well as for the protection of Germany and its citizens in peacetime must be trained and kept in practice by attending reserve duty training at regular intervals and with sufficient frequency in close cooperation with the responsible civilian agencies.

According to the career group, the periods for basic, further and advanced reservist training differs. The average assignment periods for officers are ten years, for NCOs seven years and for non-rated personnel four years.

The total assignment period may be extended especially for personnel posted in a field that has a shortage of personnel or requires special knowledge and qualifications. This applies as well to voluntary commitment. The overall duration of military service as a reservist will be twelve month for officers, nine month for NCOs and six month for non-rated personnel. Following completion of the obligatory military service as a reservist, additional periods may be attended for duty on a voluntary basis.

Perspective

Momentarily, most of the reservists are recruited from the big pool of reservist who formerly belonged to units which now have been deactivated.

With more time to pass by, the level of this pool will be reduced because most of those reservists expressed their wish to become part of the General Reserve or they are reaching the age limitations.

Up to date the number of reservists, expressing that they wish to serve with the Manpower Reserve and Reinforcement Reserve, fit the requirement for the years to come.

However, in long term thinking, the training of reservist has to improve and must be more attractive and more productive for the trainee. In parallel with the acceptance by the reservist, the employers' acceptance and support need to be improved.