

Chapter 8

Transition and Reintegration of Military Personnel to Law Enforcement Careers

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ABSTRACT

Over two million United States military service members have served in the theaters of Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. Many of these military service members are seeking employment in law enforcement upon discharge from active duty. The skills acquired from military service are complementary to many of the essential job functions of a law enforcement officer, thus a natural fit. In addition, military reserve police officers have seen activations for deployment to combat regions. These National Guard and Reserve service members make a rapid transition from military fatigues to a police uniform upon their return from deployment. After outlining the scope of the military deployment cycle, reintegration programs and preemployment assessment challenges are described in this chapter. The comprehensive description will provide psychologists working with law enforcement and related public safety agencies the necessary tools for both assessing and supporting the success of those reintegrating to their law enforcement careers.

INTRODUCTION

Wars winding down and military sequestrations have resulted in an increase of military service members seeking employment in law enforcement. Since 2012, the United States Army reduced its force by 80,000 soldiers and in July 2015, they announced plans to reduce their force by another 40,000 members by the end of fiscal year 2018 (Tan, 2015). “Under current reduction plans, the ‘Total Army,’ which includes

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0813-7.ch008

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active force, the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve, will drop to 980,000 soldiers. That includes 450,000 active soldiers, 335,000 Army National Guard soldiers, and 195,000 Army Reserve soldiers” (Lopez, 2015, para. 30). If “sequestration continues, the active Army is expected to shrink further to about 420,000 soldiers – a loss of an additional 30,000 soldiers” beginning sometime in 2019 (Lopez, 2015, para. 25).

The Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) estimated that 21% of their new hires have prior military experience (www.mpd.dc.gov). This is relatively consistent with the United States Department of Justice’s finding that 23% of the approximately 18,000 law enforcement departments in the country have Guard and Reserve members in their ranks who were activated into military service (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2010). Therefore, roughly one out of five police applicants have prior military experience. Consequently, the evaluating police psychologist in a preemployment screening must possess a basic understanding of military service, as well as the prevalence of mental health issues in soldiers who have served in combat-related overseas assignments. Asking appropriate questions is critical to understanding each service member’s psychological reaction to his/her deployment, and to assess if there are any ongoing mental health concerns that might impair suitability for a position as a law enforcement officer. Additionally, police psychologists play an integral role in easing a police officer’s return to work after being activated into military duty, while being mindful of federal laws and regulations that prevent discrimination against service members returning home from military assignments.

Police officers and military service members are kindred spirits (Clark, 2014). The military service member may consider a career in policing due to the similarities between military structure and law enforcement agencies. In turn, law enforcement agencies are interested in recruiting veterans due to their increased patriotism, maturity, leadership skills, tactical knowledge, physical ability, and team orientation (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2010).

However, police agencies are encouraged to exercise caution before entering into this seemingly beneficial relationship, as the military and civilian police forces have inherently different job descriptions. Moreover, multiple and rapid deployments of military personnel can result in difficulty transitioning and readjusting to the role of a civilian law enforcement officer. This can result in impaired judgment and impulsive behavior, particularly when it comes to the application of use-of-force techniques (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2010).

Over two million United States Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy personnel have served since 2001 in theaters of Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF); since 2003 in Iraq for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF); and since 2010 in Iraq and Afghanistan for Operation New Dawn (OND) (Curran, Allen, Clark, Craig, & Gardner, 2014). Of those deployed, approximately 27% were deployed more than once (Sayer et al., 2010). Moreover, “The United States military has fought two major wars in the last 10 years, relying heavily on the ranks of the National Guard and Reserves to bolster the strength of regular troops” (Clark, 2014, para. 23). As of August 11, 2015, there were 10,364 National Guard members deployed, 8,400 of whom were stationed in the Middle East region (National Guard Bureau Public Affairs Office, personal communication, 2015). A significant sub-group of deployed soldiers are National Guard and Reserve members, some of whom are civilian law enforcement officers. These officers must put their law enforcement careers on hold, and face similar challenges as full-time military personnel when they return home from active duty.

The reintegration experience of each service member varies due to numerous factors, such as the location and length of deployment, as well as the specific assignment while deployed. In addition,

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