

Served in Iraq? Come Work for Us

Reservists and the skills they've honed are in demand at a slew of big companies



IT WAS JUST THE EVENING commute home. On Mar. 30, Marine Corps Major Keith Canevaro was commanding a convoy of 30 civil affairs troops back to their camp after a day of work at the provincial government center in Ramadi, in the heart of Iraq's insurgent-plagued Sunni Triangle. That's when a roadside bomb exploded ahead of him. The Humvee in front of Canevaro burst into flames. Shrapnel cracked the protective glass of his windshield. Insurgents opened fire from all around with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades.

Following a plan Canevaro had laid out during a morning briefing, the soldiers went into action. Designated medical personnel rushed to help the four wounded Marines. Others set up a defensive perimeter and began returning fire. Canevaro saw suspicious mounds and debris in the road, which warned him there were perhaps other bombs. Working multiple radios, he called in for a special explosives unit, a medical helicopter, and combat air support. Canevaro figured his team's quick response repelled the attackers and saved lives. The Marine Corps agreed, awarding him a Combat Action Ribbon for his performance.

TREMENDOUS PRESSURE

WHERE'S CANEVARO today? He's back home in Petaluma, Calif. Finishing up his military work, the stocky 35-year-old will return next month to his job as a program manager for optical telecommunications products at Cisco Systems Inc. Says Canevaro of his military experience: "Any young lieutenant who leads a platoon has had a lot more responsibility thrust at him than most people in the business world."

Not since World War II have so many reservists such as Canevaro seen combat. Nearly 180,000 are on active duty, and they make up 40% of the troops in Iraq. This reliance on the nation's citizen-soldiers puts tremendous pressure on the reservists, their families, and their employers back home. At times the system seems to be cracking. Reserve units were behind the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and the recent decision by one group of soldiers to refuse a mission after declaring their equipment unsafe. Both groups are facing disciplinary action by the military. Meanwhile, pundits, the media, and politicians continue to debate whether the country needs a larger number

CANEVARO He'll soon be back at Cisco after leading a Marine Corps unit

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army or a reinstatement of the draft.

Despite the myriad problems, reliance on citizen-soldiers in combat has brought some unheralded benefits to the military, including the reservists' entrepreneurial savvy and maturity—their average age is 32, four years older than the average active-duty soldier. And they often bring much-needed expertise in specialties such as information technology, health care, and construction.

What's less well-known is how much of a boon reservists are becoming to Corporate America. They return from their military service with far more seasoned management, people, and communication skills. That's why many big companies are going out of their way to recruit and retain them. Federal law requires that employers give reservists returning from military service their jobs back with the same

level of responsibility and pay. But Adolph Coors, American Express, General Electric, Harley-Davidson, and Home Depot find the citizen-soldiers so qualified that they actively recruit them, offering perks such as continued pay and health-care benefits when they are called into active duty, a practice known among reservists as double-dipping (table). "These are people who have to deliver results," says Dennis M. Donovan, executive vice-president for human resources at Home Depot Inc. "They have to think not just tactically but strategically. And they have to inspire people."

"SELLING DEMOCRACY"

JEFFREY CANTOR, a 38-year-old sales manager from Marlboro, N.J., who works for pharmaceutical maker AstraZeneca International, last year found himself in the Iraqi city of Kirkuk. The U.S. Army civil affairs officer was assigned to help establish a local government amid warring ethnic and religious factions. At Kirkuk's first city council meeting, an angry Sunni resident stood up to complain about protests in the streets that were frequently turning violent. At the heart of his complaint, Cantor reasoned, was the fear that the Kurds and other ethnic groups were gaining power at the expense of the Sunnis. As a sales manager, Cantor often had to mediate disputes between sales reps. So he drew on that experience, calming the man down by explaining that everyone would be given an equal chance to voice opinions and that the right to free

debate was better than when divergent views were stifled by the government. "I'm a salesman," Cantor explains. "I was selling democracy."

When they return to the civilian world, reservists often arrive with leadership skills they have honed in combat. Army Major David Wood, 41, commanded a helicopter squadron in Iraq and

to be on the field, leading from the front."

Reservists are also well-schooled in the art of compromise. Last year, John Pippy, 33, commanded an Army engineering unit in Iraq, overseeing construction workers in desert heat of 135F. He's now a state senator in western Pennsylvania. Last summer he found himself using his recently polished skills in the legislature,

where he reluctantly voted in favor of legalizing slot machines in the state—but only after securing funding from fellow lawmakers to make improvements at Pittsburgh International Airport. "A large part of my time in the military has been spent not being independent but on bringing coalitions together," says Pippy.

Still, heeding Uncle Sam's call can put a huge strain on many reservists' careers. Although employers are required to restore their jobs, small businesses can't always comply, and many are deeply burdened when an owner heads off to active duty. Many families see their incomes slashed when reservists move from civilian jobs to relatively paltry military paychecks. U.S. Navy reservist Warren White, 35, spent six months on active duty in Iraq last year, which took a big toll on his employer, a company that installs home-security and entertainment systems in the St. Louis area. After he got back in January, it took him six months to regain his pre-leave level of sales. And, of course, that's not to mention those who come back wounded, maimed, or so psychologically damaged that they are unable to return to their jobs at all.

The military acknowledges that the present system of leaning so heavily on reservists needs fixing. Strategic planners inside and outside of government are studying ways to

maximize the use of the reserves without burning out the reservists. But so far, Corporate America isn't complaining. It turns out that the U.S. involvement in Iraq, whatever else it has come to stand for, has become an unlikely but effective business boot camp. ■

—By Christopher Palmeri in Los Angeles, with Brian Grow in Atlanta and Stan Crock in Washington

These Companies Want You



Federal law requires that employers give reservists returning from military service their jobs back with the same level of responsibility and pay, but some employers go further:

ADOLPH COORS Makes up the difference between a reservist's regular salary and military pay for up to one year of active duty. An internal volunteer organization works with reservists' families, boxing and shipping donated items to the troops.

AMERICAN EXPRESS Provides full pay and benefits for up to five years as well as cash contributions to the employee's retirement plan.

GENERAL ELECTRIC Pays one month of full salary and makes up the difference in pay for up to three years. GE has a military recruiting division and leadership programs for military members transitioning to the corporate world.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON Mobilized employees receive the difference in pay and benefits plus frequent care packages. Reservists and veterans make up 14% of the company's employees.

HOME DEPOT Pays the difference in salary for entire length of duty for reservists called since Sept. 11, with more than 1,800 currently serving. The company has partnered with the Defense Dept. to put job information on government Web sites and in career centers. Employees can get transferred to another Home Depot store if the military moves their spouse to a new base.

Data: Company reports, the Defense Dept.'s National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard & Reserve

Afghanistan. Wood says his soldiers always seemed more enthusiastic about a mission when they knew a senior officer was taking part. Back home, as a vice-president at Jay Group, a packaging company in Ronks, Pa., Wood says he now often goes down to the plant floor to pack and ship products alongside workers. "You can't be what we call a coffee-cup commander," Wood says. "You have