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**Highlights**

Highlights of [GAO-03-554](#), a report to the Senate Committee on Armed Services and the House Committee on Armed Services.

### Why GAO Did This Study

The 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, New York Air National Guard, conducts supply missions for scientific research in the polar regions. Most unit members do not spend more than 30 consecutive days in the polar regions. Therefore, they are not eligible for hardship duty pay, which requires more than 30 consecutive days of duty in a designated hardship location. Congress considered legislation in 2002 to make an exception to the 30-day hardship duty pay threshold for polar duty. This legislation was not approved. In addition, the 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing proposed designating polar duty as a hazardous duty.

The Conference Report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 directed GAO and DOD to conduct separate reviews of special and incentive pays for polar duty. GAO assessed DOD's rationale for hardship duty pay and the implications of making an exception to hardship duty pay. In addition, GAO assessed the 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing's justification for hazardous duty pay for polar duty.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD, in conducting its congressionally mandated study of special and incentive pays for reservists performing polar duty, assess certain factors to determine if personnel performing polar duty should receive hazardous duty pay. DOD concurred with this recommendation.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-554](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-554).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart (202) 512-5140 or [stewartd@gao.gov](mailto:stewartd@gao.gov).

## MILITARY PERSONNEL

# DOD NEEDS TO ASSESS CERTAIN FACTORS IN DETERMINING WHETHER HAZARDOUS DUTY PAY IS WARRANTED FOR DUTY IN THE POLAR REGIONS

### What GAO Found

Hardship duty pay is intended to compensate military personnel assigned to areas for more than 30 consecutive days where quality-of-life conditions are substantially below those in the continental United States. DOD did not support the hardship duty pay legislation on the basis that this pay was not intended to compensate stays of short duration and the legislation circumvented a DOD process designating hardship duty locations and rates.

Granting an exception to the 30-day hardship duty pay threshold for 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing personnel deployed to the polar regions would result in minimal costs, but this exception could set a precedent for DOD personnel performing other short-term missions and could further increase costs. Had this exception been in effect in 2001-2002, the 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing estimated the costs would have totaled about \$127,000. The National Science Foundation would incur most of these costs because it reimburses DOD for logistic support in the polar regions. The costs of granting an exception for short-term missions conducted by DOD personnel at other hardship locations are unknown. Based on its review of the intent of hardship duty pay and the implications of granting an exception, GAO believes that an exception to the 30-day threshold is not justified under current DOD policy.

The 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing justified its proposal for hazardous pay on the basis of extreme working conditions and exposure to medical hazards. For example, maintenance personnel work in temperatures as cold as minus 59 degrees Fahrenheit without the protection of hangars and are exposed to potential medical hazards such as frostbite, hypothermia, and carbon monoxide poisoning. Unit officials expressed concern about the retention of personnel who require additional training for polar operations, but they did not know what impact hazardous duty pay would have on retention. Recent data from exit surveys show that dissatisfaction with pay was not among the most frequently cited reasons for leaving.

### The 109<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Operates 10 LC-130 Ski-Equipped Aircraft in the Polar Regions



Source: Department of Defense.