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## On the Military Reserve Service of the German Armed Forces

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## 1. Introduction

The German Armed Forces' reserve forces are an indispensable element of the Bundeswehr, the German Armed Forces. They play a **vital role in national and collective defence, homeland security, and international crisis management operations**. Reservists are **employed** in accordance with their training and availability **throughout the entire task spectrum of the Bundeswehr** and therefore make an important contribution to the individual tasks and overall mission of the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) regardless of where they serve. They **constitute the personnel potential required to support armed forces and their build-up capability** directly and indirectly.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Organisation of the Bundeswehr Reserve Forces

The Bundeswehr reserve forces consist of the categories *force reserve*, *territorial reserve* and *general reserve* (see figure 1).

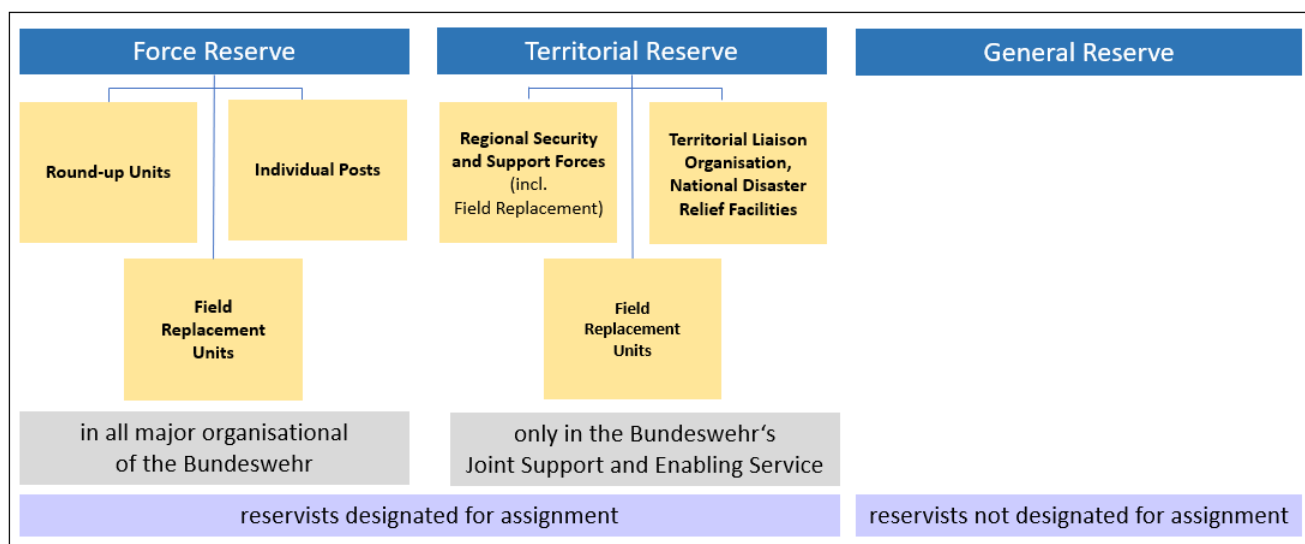


Figure 1: German Armed Forces' Reserve Categories<sup>2</sup>

- The *general reserve* encompasses **all reservists not designated for assignment**. Reservists of the *general reserve* who are eligible under military law constitute the potential for the long-term build-up of the Bundeswehr. Members of the *general reserve* can serve in the Bundeswehr if they are eligible to do so under military law. The *general reserve* does not have any materiel of its own.

1 *Strategie der Reserve 2019 – Vision Reserve 2032+*, booklet on the Bundeswehr reserve strategy, edited by the German Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVg) on 18 October 2019, p. 9 f., available only in German language at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/blob/148826/bdb81dfaea289ed8eb5dd50d5ac4da19/broschuere-sdr-data.pdf> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).

2 *Reserve Strategy*, issued as Subject Strategy K-10/5 by BMVg FÜ SK III 4, effective from 18 October 2019, p.15, available at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/resource/blob/171578/15defe6c78b9c8f56e4ff75f065bf4c1/download-sdr-englisch-data.pdf> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).

- The **force reserve** serves to provide personnel support across all major organisational elements. It includes **round-up units** and **field replacement units** as well as **individual posts** in the *reinforcement reserve* and the *personnel reserve* (see chapter 3). Round-up units serve to reinforce active-duty units and are generally organised and equipped like comparable active-duty units. They thus form the basis for the short-term build-up of capabilities. Field replacement units maintain reservists that are organised for rapid personnel augmentation.
- The **territorial reserve**, which is part of the *Joint Support and Enabling Service*, is employed to perform territorial liaison, security and support tasks. It comprises the *regional security and support forces* and the *liaison organisation of the territorial network* as well as *national disaster relief facilities*.

The **regional security and support forces** are established in accordance with and take account of regional conditions. They are placed under the administrative control of the responsible *regional territorial command*. The purpose of *regional security and support forces* is to reduce the burden on active-duty forces for protection and security tasks in the field of homeland security. They are an important element of the security forces employed for *host nation support* (HNS) operations in the transit country Germany. Moreover, the *regional security and support forces* play an important role in disaster relief operations. Local affiliated units support the *regional security and support forces*.

The **territorial network** with its **liaison teams** is based on Germany's municipal structures and comprises the whole country. It includes points of contact and coordination that advise, support and inform the local municipal authorities, the interior ministries of the federal states and the authorities of neighbouring countries. In the liaison teams, these tasks are performed exclusively by reservists.

A **basic designation for assignment** (Grundbeorderung – GBO) has been introduced in 2021 in order to **fully satisfy the requirements of the force reserve and the territorial reserve**. The GBO is the scheduling (to meet the augmentation strength of the Bundeswehr) of all Bundeswehr servicemen and women fit for military service upon retiring from active duty to the reserve for a period of six years. The goal of GBO is to establish the personnel basis for ensuring a rapid build-up in the event of a possible standby scenario or a state of tension or defence. If reservists are called up in situations other than a standby scenario or a state of tension or defence, the principle of voluntariness of service will still apply.

### 3. Types of Reserve Assignment

The aim of the Bundeswehr is to retain reservists in the armed forces by means of voluntary reserve duty for the duration in which they are assigned. Assignment is possible in the **reinforcement reserve** or the **personnel reserve** (see *figure 2*). Together, these constitute the augmentation strength, which must be planned by the major organisational elements in accordance with requirements.

- The *reinforcement reserve* comprises **all reservists designated for assignment on structural posts**. It serves to establish the full operational readiness of the major organisational elements (build-up).

- The *personnel reserve* comprises **all reservists designated for assignment on *non-structural posts***. It serves to compensate for personnel shortages and, above all, to cover temporary increases in requirements and to maintain or increase personnel readiness.

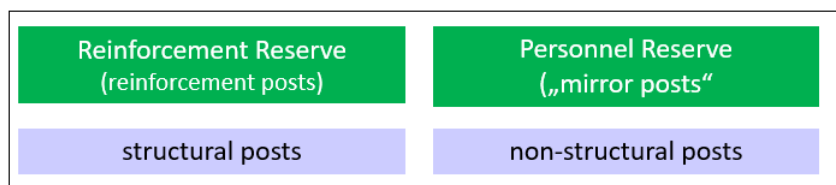


Figure 2: **Types of Reserve Assignment**<sup>3</sup>

More detailed background information about organisation and function of the Bundeswehr military reserve forces is provided, for example, by the *Reserve Strategy* of the German Federal Ministry of Defence.

#### 4. The Temporal Scope of Serving as a Reservist in the Bundeswehr

The duration of military reserve service in the Bundeswehr is **up to ten months per year**, depending on the reason for the exercise/service. The duration of **short reserve services** is **up to three days per reserve service**.<sup>4</sup>

The maximum duration of the military reserve service is

- three months per calendar year when participating in subsidiary support missions within the Federal Republic of Germany;
- three months when deployed abroad for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief;
- seven months when deployed in international crisis management operations for active military or civil-military contributions.<sup>5</sup>

The reserve service is **not limited in time**

- during exercises ordered by the German Federal Government as **standby duty** and
- **in the event of tension or defence**.

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3    ibid., p. 16.

4    *Reservist – Ihre »zweite« Karriere*, ed. by the Federal Office of Personnel Management of the Bundeswehr, 2017, pp. 13, available only in German language at: <https://www.reservistenverband.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/broschuere-reservist-ihre-zweite-karriere-data-2.pdf> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).

5    ibid., pp. 14 f.

## 5. The Numbers of Military Reserve Personnel in Germany

Currently, **about 34,000 Bundeswehr reservists are available for performing voluntary service** in regular exercises.<sup>6</sup> With an active force of about 183,000 soldiers (professional soldiers, temporary soldiers and voluntary conscripts)<sup>7</sup>, this corresponds to a share of about 38.5 percent. This level allowed for an average of about **4,100 reservists per day** to serve in the Bundeswehr throughout the year in 2022 (corresponding to a proportion of 2.25 per cent).

In 2023, 5,500 reserve posts are available for daily service,<sup>8</sup> and the number is to be gradually increased further to 7,500 by 2027.<sup>9</sup> This will only be possible if a total of 60,000 reservists is available in the near future. This figure was determined as the Bundeswehr's requirement for fulfilling the tasks of the Bundeswehr reserve forces.<sup>10</sup>

The basic designation for assignment (Grundbeorderung – GBO) now ensures access to about 15,000 soldiers who leave the Bundeswehr each year. Planned for six years, this will result in a potential of up to 90,000 reservists for the force reserve and the territorial reserve in the short term, which the Bundeswehr can firmly plan for its growth in the event of tension and defence, regardless of voluntary reserve service.<sup>11</sup>

**Theoretically, it would be possible to draw on a total of 930,000 service members of the reserve in the Federal Republic of Germany in the event of tension and defence.**<sup>12</sup>

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- 6 German Federal Ministry of Defence (2021): *Auftrag der Reserve*, available only in German language at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/ueber-die-bundeswehr/die-reserve-der-bundeswehr/auftrag-der-reserve-der-bundeswehr> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).
  - 7 German Federal Ministry of Defence (2023): *Die Bundeswehr in Zahlen*, available only in German language at: <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/ueber-die-bundeswehr/zahlen-daten-fakten> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).
  - 8 Wolking, Sebastian (2022): *Wie ein Ingenieur als Reserveoffizier Karriere bei der Bundeswehr macht*, VDI-Nachrichten, 27 December 2022, available only in German language at: <https://www.vdi-nachrichten.com/karriere/work-life-balance/wie-ein-ingenieur-als-reserveoffizier-karriere-bei-der-bundeswehr-macht/> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).
  - 9 Commissioner for Defence of the German Bundestag (2023): *Annual Report 2022*, 28 February 2023, Printed Paper 20/5700, p. 113, available only in German language at: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/057/2005700.pdf> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).
  - 10 German Federal Ministry of Defence (2021): *Auftrag der Bundeswehr*, op. cit.
  - 11 *Rückkehr zur Reserve: ‚Grundbeorderung‘ für alle ausscheidenden Soldaten*, Augen geradeaus!, 9 August 2019, available only in German language at: <https://augengeradeaus.net/2019/08/rueckkehr-zur-reserve-grundbeorderung-fuer-alle-ausscheidenden-soldaten/comment-page-1/> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).
  - 12 German Federal Ministry of Defence (2021): *Auftrag der Bundeswehr*, op. cit.

## 6. The Legal Basis of the Bundeswehr Reserve Service

All Bundeswehr operations are subject to the provisions contained in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany, the so-called **Basic Law** (Grundgesetz – GG)<sup>13</sup>.

Peacetime reserve duty is performed on the basis of the provisions laid down in the Fourth Section and in the Fifth Section of the **Legal Status of Military Personnel Act** (Gesetz über die Rechtsstellung der Soldaten, abbreviated Soldatengesetz – SG)<sup>14</sup> and the **Legal Status of Reservists Act** (Gesetz über die Rechtsstellung der Reservisten, abbreviated: Reservistengesetz – ResG)<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, in a state of tension or defence, the dormant provisions of the **Compulsory Military Service Act** (Wehrpflichtgesetz – WPflG)<sup>16</sup> will come into effect.

SG, ResG, and WPflG which only available in German language contain a large number of detailed regulations, on the basis of which the questions can be answered, among others,

- who is obliged to perform military service in the armed forces reserve forces;
- what the age requirements are for service in the armed forces reserve forces (minimum and maximum age);
- on what grounds military service in the Armed Forces Reserves may be deferred;
- when a person may be discharged before completing military service in the Armed Forces Reserves; or
- who may be excluded from the military reserves.

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13 *Basic Law* (Grundgesetz – GG) of 21 July 2012 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1583, 1588), in the corrected version published in the Federal Law Gazette Part III, subdivision number 100-1, as last amended by Article 1 of the Act of 19 December 2022 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 2478). The English translation available under the following link takes into account the amendment(s) of the Act by the Act of 28 June 2022 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 968) available at: [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch\\_gg/englisch\\_gg.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg/englisch_gg.html) (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).

14 *Legal Status of Military Personnel Act* (Gesetz über die Rechtsstellung der Soldaten, abbreviated Soldatengesetz – SG) in the version promulgated on 30 May 2005 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1482), as last amended by Article 5 of the Act of 31 May 2023 (Federal Law Gazette 2023 I No. 140), available only in German language at: <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/sg/SG.pdf> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).

15 *Legal Status of Reservists Act* (Gesetz über die Rechtsstellung der Reservisten, abbreviated: Reservistengesetz – ResG) of 21 July 2012 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1583, 1588), as last amended by Article 11 of the Act of 20 August 2021 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 3932), available only in German language at: <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/resg/BJNR158800012.html> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).

16 *Compulsory Military Service Act* (Wehrpflichtgesetz – WPflG) in the version promulgated on 15 August 2011 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1730), as last amended by Article 12 of the Act of 28 June 2021 (Federal Law Gazette, I p. 2250), available only in German language at: <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/wehrpflg/WPflG.pdf> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).



In addition, the German ***Military Penal Code*** (Wehrstrafgesetz – WStG)<sup>17</sup> as a further legal basis regulates, among others, the penalties to be expected for persons who evade military service. The relevant sections of this act also apply to persons called up for a military reserve service but only in situations of readiness, tension or defence, because in Germany, as mentioned before, the peacetime reserve service is a voluntary service.

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17 ***Military Penal Code*** (Wehrstrafgesetz – WStG) in the version promulgated on 24 May 1974 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1213), as last amended by Article 3 of the Act of 26 July 2023 (Federal Law Gazette 2023 I No. 203), available only in German language at: <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/wstrg/BJNR002980957.html> (last retrieved on 2 October 2023).