Audit Report

OVERSEAS ABSENTEE BALLOT HANDLING IN DOD

Report No. D-2001-145 June 22, 2001

Office of the Inspector General
Department of Defense

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Acronyms

DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
FVAP	Federal Voting Assistance Program
FPCA	Federal Post Card Application
GAO	General Accounting Office
MODIS	Military Origin-Destination Information System
MPS	Military Postal Service
ODIS	Origin-Destination Information System

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June 22, 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS
DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT: Evaluation Report on Overseas Absentee Balloting in DoD (Report No. D-2001-145)

We are providing this report for information and use. We conducted the evaluation in response to a request by the Secretary of Defense. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), in coordination with the Federal Voting Assistance Program, provided comments on an informal draft of this report. Those comments conformed to the requirements of DoD Directive 7560.3 and were considered in preparing the final report.

We appreciate the cooperation that we received during this evaluation. Questions on this report should be directed to Mr. Michael A. Joseph (mjoseph@dodig.osd.mil) or Mr. Timothy J. Tonkovic (ttonkovic@dodig.osd.mil) at (757) 766-2703. See Appendix H for the report distribution.

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Office of the Inspector General, DoD

Report No. D-2001-145 **June 22, 2001**
(Project No. D2001LF-0058)

Overseas Absentee Ballot Handling in DoD

Executive Summary

Introduction. On November 28, 2000, the Secretary of Defense requested that the Office of the Inspector General, DoD, review the procedures for handling overseas absentee ballots, ballot cancellation and postmarking procedures, and any discrepancies between those procedures and how they were implemented. The Secretary stated that he wanted to make sure that DoD had done everything in its authority to ensure that active duty personnel, their dependents, and DoD civilians were encouraged to vote and understood the absentee ballot process.

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (the Act) requires States to permit absent uniformed Service voters and overseas voters to use absentee registration procedures and to vote by absentee ballot in Federal elections. Executive Order 12642, "Designation of the Secretary of Defense as the Presidential Designee," assigns primary responsibility for Federal functions of the Act to the Secretary of Defense. DoD Directive 1000.4, "Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP)," September 4, 1996, delegates authority to the Director of Administration and Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense, to carry out the Federal Voting Assistance Program responsibilities of the Secretary of Defense.

The goals of the Federal Voting Assistance Program are to inform and educate U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote, foster voting participation, and protect the integrity of the voting process. The Federal Voting Assistance Program developed a variety of comprehensive resources that are useful to voting assistance officers and potential absentee voters. The Federal Voting Assistance Program also does considerable work with the States to simplify absentee voting procedures. In addition, for the November 2000 election, the Federal Voting Assistance Program provided training sessions to a worldwide network of voting assistance officers. As of September 2000, there were about 257,800 active duty personnel, 117,600 dependents (age 18 and over) of active duty personnel, and 86,600 DoD civilians located overseas. DoD faces the same challenges as the entire United States in its attempt to increase voting participation, especially among the younger population of eligible voters. The DoD challenges are magnified because of the worldwide dispersion of active duty personnel.

Objectives. The primary evaluation objective was to assess the effectiveness of overseas absentee voting procedures and policies within DoD. Specifically, we evaluated pertinent procedures and policies, including standard cancellation and postmarking procedures, and determined whether discrepancies existed between the procedures required by DoD regulations and how those procedures were implemented.

Results. The Federal Voting Assistance Program and the Services' voting assistance programs provided valuable information and assistance to many overseas active duty military personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents for the November 2000

election. For the 1,267 respondents who completed our questionnaire on the overseas absentee balloting process, participation in the November 2000 election was higher than the Federal Voting Assistance Program-reported voting rate for overseas military absentee voters in the 1996 Federal election. However, the Services' implementation of the program could be improved, as one-third of the active duty respondents stated that they understood the absentee ballot process only to a small extent or not at all. Specifically, DoD should:

- ensure more effective oversight of its voting assistance program;
- improve consistency in Service implementation of voting assistance programs, to include voter encouragement and understanding of the absentee ballot process;
- ensure that unique issues related to Navy ship and remotely deployed unit operations are addressed in a timely manner, when possible; and
- continue to work with the States to resolve or focus attention on issues related to standardization and simplification of the absentee ballot process, voter residency issues, feedback to voters, and increased use of technology.

Improving the DoD voting assistance program and working with the States will help DoD ensure that potential overseas absentee voters are provided the information needed to exercise their right to vote if they choose to do so. See the Finding section for details of the evaluation results.

Several bills are being considered by Congress to improve the absentee voting process. We fully endorse any Federal or State actions that would lead to more uniform and simple voting procedures and requirements, thus reducing the burden on DoD voting assistance officers and absentee voters.

Our review of policies and procedures for moving first-class mail at selected overseas locations uncovered no systemic Military Postal Service problems that would have unreasonably affected ballot handling. However, the timelines used by some States for mailing out voting materials could present problems for overseas voters, considering the reality of moving first-class mail to and from overseas locations. See the Finding section for a discussion of that issue and Appendix F for details on our review of postal operations.

Summary of Recommendations. We recommend that the Director of Administration and Management, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), revise DoD guidance to require the Services to ensure that all DoD overseas absentee voters are supported by Unit Voting Assistance Officers and to specify the maximum number of eligible voters that a Unit Voting Assistance Officer should support. We also recommend that the Director of Administration and Management, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), provide oversight of Service policies to ensure consistency with DoD regulations. Those policies should establish controls to ensure program continuity, expeditious dissemination of voting information and materials, designation of Senior Installation Voting Officers, and provision of training on absentee voting procedures to voting assistance officers and overseas military members.

We also recommend that the Secretaries of the Military Departments develop Unit Voting Assistance Officer guidance for ships, submarines, and remotely deployed units

in planning voting assistance strategies prior to known deployments. We recommend that the Inspectors General of the Army and the Navy include their Service's voting assistance program as an item for specific review. We also recommend that the Federal Voting Assistance Program continue to coordinate with State election officials to resolve absentee voting issues related to standardization and simplification of the overseas absentee ballot process, voter residency requirements, feedback to voters on the status of balloting materials, and increased use of technological solutions for completing the absentee ballot process.

Management Comments. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), in coordination with the Director of Administration and Management, stated that the Federal Voting Assistance Program has a proven record of meeting the voting needs of active duty military personnel and overseas citizens on a non-partisan basis. The 75 percent voting rate for military personnel in the November 2000 election showed the overall success of the program. The Assistant Secretary agreed, however, that some aspects of DoD voter assistance efforts could be improved. The Assistant Secretary concurred with our recommendations and agreed to revise procedures to ensure voting assistance support is provided to all active duty personnel and their family members, including deployed, dispersed, and tenant organizations. The Assistant Secretary offered an alternative proposal to specify the maximum number of eligible voters that a Unit Voting Assistance Officer should support. He stated that it is not feasible for his office or the Federal Voting Assistance Program to make this determination, and he will defer to the Services on this issue. The Assistant Secretary also commented that the Federal Voting Assistance Program will review Military Department voting plans and policies to ensure they are consistent with the DoD Directive.

The Assistant Secretary stated that the Federal Voting Assistance Program will continue to work with the States to improve absentee voting procedures. Issues will include voter residency requirements, acknowledgement of receipt of absentee registration materials, and expedited handling of balloting materials. The Assistant Secretary also stated that the Federal Voting Assistance Program will continue to pursue new technology to improve the absentee registration and voting processes. See the Finding section for a discussion of management comments and the Management Comments section of the report for the complete text of the comments.

Evaluation Response. The comments from the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) are responsive and additional comments are not required.

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Background

On November 28, 2000, the Secretary of Defense requested the Office of the Inspector General, DoD, to review the overseas absentee ballot process. Specifically, the Secretary stated he wanted to make sure that DoD had done everything in its authority to ensure that DoD active duty military personnel, their dependents, and DoD civilians were encouraged to vote and understood the absentee ballot process. He also wanted to make sure that ballots mailed through the Military Postal Service (MPS) were processed promptly and properly. The Secretary of Defense memorandum is in Appendix B.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) was tasked by the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to review the DoD implementation of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (the Act). Inspector General, DoD, and GAO representatives coordinated their overseas efforts for meeting with Service members, DoD civilians, and dependents; interviewing voting assistance officers; and reviewing postal operations. Included in the congressional tasking to GAO was a request to determine the number of overseas DoD absentee ballots that were disqualified and why they were disqualified. In addition, GAO is conducting other reviews focused on issues related to people, processes, and technologies of the election process and related to voting accessibility for people with disabilities.

Representatives from the Office of the Inspector General, DoD, and GAO administered questionnaires to 1,267 active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents and 153 Unit Voting Assistance Officers at the locations shown in Appendix C. A separate questionnaire was designed for each group. Dependents of active duty military personnel and dependents of DoD civilians were included in the dependent group. The questionnaires focused on an individual's awareness and perceptions of the absentee ballot process, voting resources, and the effectiveness of Unit Voting Assistance Officers. After completion of the questionnaires, all of the respondents participated in group discussions and were asked questions related to their experiences with overseas absentee voting.

Congressional Interest in Resolving Absentee Ballot Concerns. As of May 2001, Congress was considering several bills designed to correct some of the difficulties reported after the November 2000 election. The legislative proposals address many concerns, including:

- State acceptance of absentee ballots;
- State voter residency requirements for overseas active duty personnel;
- voter registration;
- use of buildings on military installations as polling locations; and
- improving voting technology.

Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act. The Act (section 1973ff, title 42, United States Code) requires States to permit absent uniformed Service voters and overseas voters to use absentee registration procedures and to vote by absentee ballot in Federal elections. The Act also states that the President shall designate the head of an Executive department to have primary responsibility for Federal functions of the Act. On June 8, 1988, the President issued Executive Order 12642, "Designation of the Secretary of Defense as the Presidential Designee," under the Act.

Presidential designee responsibilities include working with State and local election officials to implement the Act; prescribing an official post card form to be used by absentee voters for registering to vote and for requesting an absentee ballot; distributing material on State absentee voting procedures; and reporting on the effectiveness of the voting assistance effort. Many States and territories have enacted laws allowing citizens covered by the Act to register and vote absentee in State and local elections.

Absentee Ballot Mailing Privileges. Section 3406 of title 39, United States Code, states that balloting materials under the Act shall be carried expeditiously and free of postage. Balloting materials may be mailed at branch post offices at camps, posts, bases, and stations of the Armed Forces established outside the United States.

DoD Policies and Procedures

Secretary of Defense memorandum, "Federal Voting Assistance Program - 2000-2001," November 2, 1999, announced the DoD Voting Action and Information Support Plans for 2000-2001. The plans address implementation of the Federal functions of the Act and dissemination of information, guidance, and tasks related to the voting program. The plans also place special emphasis on Service command support.

DoD Directive 1000.4, "Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP)," November 25, 1980, updated September 4, 1996, delegates authority to the Director of Administration and Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense, to carry out FVAP responsibilities of the Secretary of Defense and establishes voting assistance guidelines for DoD Components. FY 2000 funding for FVAP was $4.9 million and included contracting, other services, and salaries. FVAP implements the Act by providing absentee voting information and materials to potential voters worldwide using a variety of resources, including the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, *Voting Information News*, the FVAP web site, the voting information center, and a toll-free telephone service.

The *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide* includes information on the use of the Federal Post Card Application (FPCA) for voter registration or requesting an absentee ballot and the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. The *Guide* also outlines State-by-State registration and voting procedures. *Voting Information News* is a monthly newsletter that contains information on elections. The newsletter is sent primarily to all voting assistance officers. The FVAP web site

offers additional information on the absentee voting procedure. The web site provides Federal and State election information and links to Federal agencies, State election organizations, Military Departments, and overseas organizations. For example, the web site includes information on who can vote using absentee ballots and how to register and apply for an absentee ballot using the FPCA. The voting information center is an automated telephone system offering election information. It includes candidate information and connections to the offices of elected officials. The toll-free telephone service is an ombudsman service that puts callers in touch with FVAP. Additional FVAP activities include the production and worldwide distribution of print and broadcast voter education information and the training of voting assistance officers.

DoD Directive 4525.6, "Single Manager for Military Postal Service," May 5, 1980, establishes the Secretary of the Army as the single manager for military postal matters for DoD and improves the effectiveness and economy of the MPS by integrating operating and transportation policy under the MPS Agency.

DoD Instruction 4525.7, "Military Postal Service and Related Services," April 2, 1981, supplements DoD Directive 4525.6 and U.S. Postal Service manuals related to the operation of the MPS and the transportation of mail within DoD.

Army Guidance. Army Regulation 608-20, "Voting by Personnel of the Armed Forces," August 15, 1981, establishes policy, responsibilities, and procedures for Army implementation of FVAP. The Regulation provides basic voting information needed by Armed Forces personnel, civilians officially attached with the Armed Forces overseas, and their dependents. The Regulation also establishes and assigns responsibilities for administration of the Army Voting Assistance Program to commanders at the company level and above. Army Adjutant General memorandum, "Instructions for Conducting the 2000-2001 Army Voting Assistance Program," March 1, 2000, implements FVAP, the Army Voting Assistance Program, DoD Directive 1000.4, and Army Regulation 608-20. The memorandum establishes and assigns specific Army voting responsibilities to the Adjutant General, commanders of major Army commands, installation commanders, and unit commanders down to company and detachment levels.

Navy Guidance. Bureau of Naval Personnel Notice 1742 (BUPERSNOTE 1742), "CY-2000 Navy Voting Program," January 19, 2000, provides guidance for the Navy Voting Program. The CY 2000 Navy Voting Plan, December 17, 1999, provides a checklist of Navy voting milestones and completion dates. The Navy Voting Plan does not establish specific command responsibilities for implementing the Navy Voting Program.

Air Force Guidance. Air Force Instruction 36-3107, "Voting Assistance Program," May 31, 1994, implements the Act and DoD Directive 1000.4. It informs personnel about voting and the opportunities to exercise the right to vote, including opportunities for absentee voting. The Instruction establishes specific voting assistance responsibilities down to the Senior Installation Voting Officer and unit voting counselors. Air Force Personnel Flight Memorandum,

"2000/01 Air Force Voting Plan," January 19, 2000, supplements the Instruction and the FVAP Voting Action Plan for 2000-2001. The Air Force Voting Plan reiterates specific responsibilities for Air Force headquarters, commanders of major commands and installations, installation directors of personnel, and voting assistance officers for each level of command.

Marine Corps Guidance. Marine Corps Order 1742.1 (MCO 1742.1), "Absentee Voter Registration Program," March 31, 1995, implements DoD Directive 1000.4 and the Navy Voting Program. MCO 1742.1 requires commanding officers at all echelons of command to provide assistance to absentee uniformed Service voters in the exercise of their voting privilege.

Objectives

The primary evaluation objective was to assess the effectiveness of overseas absentee voting procedures and policies within DoD. Specifically, we evaluated pertinent procedures and policies, including standard cancellation and postmarking procedures, and determined whether discrepancies existed between the procedures required by DoD regulations and how those procedures were implemented. See Appendix A for a discussion of the evaluation scope and methodology and for prior coverage.

Limitations on Use of Report Data

The results of the questionnaires discussed in this report are generally summarized by active duty respondents and by DoD civilian/dependent respondents. The time constraints of the evaluation did not permit presentation in this report of further in-depth analysis of the questionnaire results or of the comments provided during the discussion groups.

The organizations visited and the individual participants were not randomly selected; therefore, results cannot be statistically projected to the universe. The questionnaire results are descriptive and are not intended to be used for comparative purposes. See Appendix D for the active duty questionnaire and Appendix E for the Unit Voting Assistance Officer questionnaire used in our evaluation. The DoD civilian and dependent questionnaires were very similar to the active duty questionnaire.

The questionnaire and discussion group responses reflect the perceptions of active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents concerning the absentee ballot process; the accuracy of perceptions cannot be validated. The evaluation focused on the DoD program. The Office of the Inspector General, DoD, does not have authority over the non-DoD organizations involved in the process and this limited the work done to research issues related to voting procedures and policies that DoD does not control.

Postal Operations

Our review of policies and procedures for moving first-class mail at selected overseas locations uncovered no systemic MPS problems that would have unreasonably affected ballot handling. In addition, our review of postal records for the election time frame revealed no major disruptions. However, the timelines used by some States for mailing out voting materials could present problems for overseas voters, considering the reality of moving first-class mail to and from overseas locations. See the Finding section for a discussion of that issue and Appendix F for details on our review of postal operations.

Overseas Absentee Ballot Handling in DoD

Using a variety of resources, FVAP and the Services' voting assistance programs provided valuable information and assistance to many overseas active duty military personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents for the November 2000 election. Additionally, FVAP provides training to and works through a worldwide network of voting assistance officers. For those respondents who completed our questionnaire on the overseas absentee ballot process, participation in the November 2000 election was higher than the FVAP-reported voting rate for overseas military absentee voters in the 1996 Federal election. However, the Services' implementation of the program could be improved, as one-third of the active duty respondents stated that they understood the absentee ballot process only to a small extent or not at all. Specifically, DoD should:

- ensure more effective oversight of its voting assistance program;
- improve consistency in Service implementation of voting assistance programs, to include voter encouragement and understanding of the absentee ballot process;
- ensure that unique issues related to Navy ship and remotely deployed unit operations are addressed in a timely manner, when possible; and
- continue to work with the States to resolve or focus attention on issues related to standardization and simplification of the absentee ballot process, voter residency issues, feedback to voters, and increased use of technology.

Improving the DoD voting assistance program and working with the States will help DoD ensure that potential overseas absentee voters are provided the information needed to exercise their right to vote if they choose to do so.

Benefits of the Voting Assistance Program

FVAP and the Services' voting assistance programs provided valuable information and assistance to many overseas active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents during the November 2000 election. As of September 2000, there were about 257,800 active duty personnel, 117,600 dependents (age 18 and over) of active duty personnel, and 86,600 DoD civilians located overseas. The voting rate for active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents who completed our questionnaires was comparable to the voting rate of eligible citizens who voted in the United States. Fifty-one percent of our respondents used the absentee voting procedure to participate in the November 2000 election. An additional

4 percent of our overseas respondents voted in person in the United States, resulting in a total voting rate of 55 percent for all questionnaire respondents.

After each Federal election, FVAP surveys military personnel to determine the voting participation rate. The military voting participation rates in the November 2000 election were higher than military voting participation rates in the 1996 Federal election, as reported by FVAP and shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Federal Election Military Voting Participation Rates Reported by FVAP
(percent)

	1996	2000
Worldwide		
Absentee	39	48
In person	13	16
Attempted*	12	11
Total	**64**	**75**
Overseas		
Absentee	47	56
In person	2	4
Attempted*	4	12
Total	**53**	**72**

*FVAP surveys included the attempted category for those respondents who attempted to vote, but were unable to cast a ballot.

The November 2000 military personnel voting rates are also higher than the voting rates for the total U.S. voting age population including absentee and in person voters.

The goals of FVAP are to inform and educate U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote, foster voting participation, and protect the integrity of the electoral process. During Federal elections, FVAP stated that it provides services and voting materials to:

- Armed Forces Recruitment Offices nationwide for eligible U.S. citizens to apply for voter registration or to change their voter registration data;
- military voting assistance officers worldwide;
- more than 250 Embassy and consulate voting assistance officers; and
- about 13,000 State and local government officials.

Challenges Encountered by Overseas Absentee Voters

The overseas absentee voting procedure can be inherently difficult compared with stateside voting. Challenges encountered by overseas absentee voters included obtaining voting information and understanding State absentee voting procedures. We asked active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents about problems they encountered during the November 2000 election and any reasons they might have had for not voting.

Problems Encountered During the November 2000 Election. About three-quarters of the questionnaire respondents reported that they had at least one problem during the November 2000 election. The five most frequently cited problems with the absentee voting procedures were:

- insufficient information on the candidates or their election issues;
- no way to know if the FPCA was received;
- voting procedures were complicated;
- no response or delayed response to the FPCA; and
- difficulty in maintaining a current mailing address with local election officials.

Reasons for Not Voting. We asked respondents who did not vote to provide us their reasons for not voting. The five most frequently cited reasons were:

- respondents did not know how to obtain an absentee ballot,
- respondents had no candidate preference,
- respondents knew about the election, but were not interested in voting,
- respondents were not familiar with the candidates or issues, and
- respondents were discouraged by the absentee voting procedure.

Many of the problems cited by voters and non-voters related to State absentee voting procedures. In addition, reasons cited for not voting included personal preference issues. Neither State absentee voting procedures nor personal decisions about voting are controllable by DoD. DoD can encourage voter participation but cannot and should not attempt to force its Service members to vote. DoD faces many of the same challenges faced by the entire United States in its attempt to increase voting participation, especially among the younger population of eligible voters. The DoD challenges are magnified because of the worldwide dispersion of active duty personnel. However, DoD could improve non-voters' awareness and understanding of the absentee ballot process, which might encourage them to participate in future elections. Questionnaire results

revealed that more than one-third of the active duty respondents understood the process only to a small extent or not at all. Improving the oversight and implementation of the Service voting assistance programs would help solve absentee ballot problems related to voter encouragement and understanding.

Voting Assistance Program Oversight

FVAP Oversight of Service Voting Assistance Guidance. FVAP did not ensure that Service voting assistance guidance included all requirements specified in DoD Directive 1000.4. DoD guidance requires that the heads of the DoD Components:

- provide information and assistance to all eligible voters;
- ensure command support at all levels for the FVAP;
- designate an officer of general or flag rank as the Senior Military Voting Officer to manage the voting programs;
- designate trained voting officers at every level of command with one senior voting officer at each installation (Senior Installation Voting Officer, paygrade O-4 or higher where possible) to coordinate the programs conducted by subordinate units and tenant organizations;
- obtain and disseminate voting information and materials expeditiously, including in-hand delivery of FPCAs by August 15 to eligible overseas voters;
- require the Inspectors General of the Military Departments to include FVAP as an item for specific review;
- provide for continuing evaluation of command voting programs; and
- ensure all Service members receive at least one briefing or training period devoted to absentee registration and voting during years with Federal elections.

The DoD Voting Action Plan 2000-2001 established training as an annual requirement, rather than as a Federal election year requirement. That inconsistency should be resolved.

Although the Services' guidance was generally based on the DoD Directive, Table 2 illustrates some of the inconsistencies between the requirements in DoD Directive 1000.4 and Service guidance.

Table 2. Comparison of DoD and Service Voting Assistance Program Guidance

Requirement of DoD Directive 1000.4	Service Voting Assistance Program Guidance Includes DoD Requirement			
	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps
Provide information and assistance to all eligible voters	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ensure command support at all levels	No	No	Yes	No
Designate O-7 or higher as Senior Military Voting Officer	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Designate trained voting officers	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Designate a Senior Installation Voting Officer	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
In-hand delivery of FPCA by August 15 to uniformed Service members	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
In-hand delivery of FPCA by August 15 to civilians and dependents	Yes	No	Yes	No
Military Inspectors General include FVAP for review	No	No	Yes	Yes
Ongoing evaluation of voting program	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Federal election year briefings to uniformed Service members	Yes	No	Yes	No

Some requirements in DoD Directive 1000.4 were issued in the Services' voting plans rather than in regulations. Issuing the policy in Service regulations would ensure widest dissemination of DoD policies and procedures and emphasize the

importance the highest levels of command place on exercising the right to vote. We also believe correcting the significant inconsistencies between DoD and Service guidance is important to maximizing the success of the Services' voting assistance programs.

We recognize that Service differences will prevent the policies from being identical. However, it is essential that the Director of Administration and Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense, provide oversight to ensure that the Services' guidance includes DoD requirements, such as those of DoD Directive 1000.4 listed in Table 2.

Service-Level Oversight. The Services did not provide the oversight needed to ensure that voting assistance policies were fully and consistently implemented so that personnel were encouraged to vote and received the information, training, and materials needed. Although a general or flag officer held the title of Senior Military Voting Officer in each of the Services, overall responsibility for managing the voting program was delegated to a lower level. For example, one Service had delegated the responsibilities to a non-supervisory, grade 11 General Schedule (GS-11) civilian employee. The voting program managers promoted voter participation through web sites, voting action lines, or other means. However, they acknowledged that there were no controls or feedback systems in place to ensure command support for FVAP, timely ordering and dissemination of voting information and materials, and that military members received required training. Further, there were no Service-level controls to ensure that the Unit Voting Assistance Officers were trained or that a Senior Installation Voting Officer was assigned at each installation or equivalent to coordinate support for the voting program at all subordinate units and tenant organizations. For those locations we visited where Senior Installation Voting Officers were assigned, we reviewed voting program initiatives at the installation level and asked about any controls or feedback systems in place for ensuring that the voting program requirements were met. Even though Senior Installation Voting Officers were assigned at some locations, there were instances of:

- installations not following DoD or their own Service voting program guidance requirements;
- Senior Installation Voting Officers not coordinating with all subordinate units and tenant organizations; and
- subordinate units and tenant organizations not supported by either their host installation or their own chain of command.

In addition, the Inspector General of the Army had reviewed the voting program in 1998, but was not performing recurring reviews of the program. The Inspector General of the Navy did not review the voting program. As a result, voting program initiatives varied significantly and the success of the program at a particular location was dependent on individual efforts.

Service Implementation of the Voting Assistance Program

The Secretary of Defense stated that he wanted to make sure that overseas military members, their dependents, and DoD civilians were encouraged to vote and understood the absentee ballot process. FVAP and Service voting assistance programs encouraged many DoD personnel to vote and assisted them with the absentee voting procedure. However, the Services and installations within a Service varied considerably in how FVAP was implemented.

Encouragement to Vote. The American Forces Information Service and FVAP provided advertisements, newsletters, posters, and other material designed to encourage voting. The American Forces Information Service and FVAP efforts are intended to be politically neutral and encourage voting without coercion. Additionally, strong command emphasis for voter registration and participation existed at some installations and ships. For example, at one installation, there were community outreach efforts at the local DoD school, voting assistance tables at installation recreational activities, and door-to-door voter registration drives. At another command, a senior military officer videotaped voting advertisements. Several installations had voter registration information and voting assistance at fixed locations, such as the post office and the community center. Several discussion group participants suggested that having voting assistance and materials at a fixed location provided an option other than their Unit Voting Assistance Officer. For details of absentee voter assistance best practices, see Appendix G.

The questionnaires asked active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents to rate the emphasis placed on voting at their installation, ship, or submarine. Although 56 percent of the active duty respondents found that command emphasis was sufficient or too much, 44 percent rated the emphasis as not enough or none (insufficient). The perception that local command emphasis was insufficient was significantly higher among junior enlisted and all ship-based active duty respondents. The civilian/dependent[1] respondents' perception of command emphasis was similar to that of active duty respondents. In contrast, more than 80 percent of the Unit Voting Assistance Officers were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with command emphasis. Although the design of the questionnaires does not allow the establishment of cause and effect relationships, the voting rate was significantly higher for respondents who thought that command emphasis was sufficient than for those who thought command emphasis was insufficient.

Discussion group participants suggested that Service voting assistance programs could be improved if they were advertised and organized similar to the Combined Federal Campaign.[2] The participants said that the Combined Federal

[1] Because responses for DoD civilians and dependents were generally similar, we combined them for presentation purposes in this report.

[2] The Combined Federal Campaign is the only authorized fund-raising solicitation at DoD installations and organizations on behalf of charitable organizations.

Campaign appears to consistently receive strong support and emphasis from multiple levels of command.

Understanding of the Absentee Voting Procedure. Although information on absentee voting was available from several FVAP resources and through voting assistance officers, not all overseas absentee voters were aware of those resources. Further, not all voting assistance officers were trained in the absentee ballot process. Additionally, many discussion group participants were not aware of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. Approximately one-third of the active duty respondents understood the absentee ballot process only to a small extent or not at all.

Availability of FVAP Voting Resources. The Secretary of Defense memorandum "Federal Voting Assistance Program - 2000-2001" requires that commanders and the heads of DoD Components ensure that voting information and materials, such as the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, FPCAs, and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots, are obtained and disseminated in a timely manner. Further, DoD Directive 1000.4 requires the heads of DoD Components to ensure in-hand delivery of FPCAs by August 15 of even-numbered years to eligible voters who are serving outside the territorial limits of the United States.

Generally, the installations, ships, and submarines we visited had sufficient quantities of voting information and materials on hand. However, some installations and ships did not have readily available voting materials, including FPCAs and Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots. Additionally, Senior Installation Voting Officers stated that there were no formal controls to ensure the necessary voting materials were received and disseminated in a timely manner. Approximately three-quarters of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer respondents were somewhat satisfied or satisfied with the quantity and timeliness of voting materials received. About 70 percent were somewhat satisfied or satisfied with the method for requesting voting materials. The Army Unit Voting Assistance Officers were less satisfied with the methods for requesting voting materials than the other Services. However, more than 85 percent of the active duty and civilian/dependent respondents who used the Unit Voting Assistance Officers to obtain voting materials were somewhat satisfied or satisfied that the materials were available on request.

Awareness of and Satisfaction With FVAP Voting Resources. FVAP provides voting assistance and information to overseas absentee voters through a variety of resources, including the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, the FVAP web site, and a toll-free telephone service. The questionnaires asked about awareness of and satisfaction with those resources. Although many respondents were not aware of the resources, those who had used the resources were very satisfied with them. Table 3 shows the percent of active duty personnel and civilian/dependent respondents who were aware of FVAP resources.

Table 3. Percent of Awareness of FVAP Voting Assistance Resources		
	Percent Aware	
Resource	Active Duty	Civilians/Dependents
FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide	60	52
FVAP web site	49	58
FVAP toll-free telephone service	25	30

Table 4 shows the level of satisfaction for the respondents who rated satisfaction with FVAP resources.

Table 4. Percent of Satisfaction with FVAP Voting Assistance Resources		
	Percent Satisfied	
Resource	Active Duty	Civilians/Dependents
FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide	91	85
FVAP web site	90	85
FVAP toll-free telephone service	79	72

The questionnaire asked Unit Voting Assistance Officers to rate the usefulness of five FVAP resources: the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, *Voting Information News*, the FVAP web site, the voting information center, and the toll-free telephone service. A large majority of the Unit Voting Assistance Officers had access to the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, *Voting Information News*, and the web site. However, 43 percent of the Unit Voting Assistance Officers stated the voting information center was not available to them and 54 percent stated the toll-free telephone service was not available to them. Of the Unit Voting Assistance Officers with access to the resources, more than 90 percent found the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, *Voting Information News*, and the web site to be useful or somewhat useful. More than 80 percent found the voting information center useful or somewhat useful, but only 60 percent found the toll-free telephone service useful or somewhat useful.

From the discussion groups, it became apparent that not all voters would have had access to all of the resources even if they had been aware of them. For example, Internet availability varied at the locations we visited. In addition, the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide* included a toll-free telephone number for use from stateside, but did not include toll-free telephone numbers accessible from foreign countries. Many of the discussion group participants expressed frustration that they could not use the toll-free number in the *Guide*.

The toll-free numbers for overseas locations are listed on the web site, but, as shown in Table 3, less than half of the active duty respondents were aware of the web site.

FVAP explained that the overseas toll-free numbers were not published in the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide* because of the timing of a change in telephone service contractors and the timeline requirements for printing the *Guide*. FVAP officials stated they would include the overseas toll-free numbers in future editions of the *Guide*. We believe that FVAP should include the overseas toll-free numbers and DSN numbers in all of its resources. Further, public awareness items, such as voting awareness posters, should include a blank space where appropriate toll-free, DSN, and Unit Voting Assistance Officer telephone numbers could be added.

Unit Voting Assistance Officers. At each DoD installation, ship, and submarine, the commanding officer has overall responsibility for implementing the policies and procedures of the Service voting assistance program. At some locations, a Senior Installation Voting Officer had been appointed to organize and direct the local voting assistance program. To assist the Senior Installation Voting Officer, Unit Voting Assistance Officers were appointed to organize and direct voting assistance support. Voting assistance responsibilities are collateral duties for the Service Installation Voting Officer and Unit Voting Assistance Officers. Materials and services provided by Unit Voting Assistance Officers are critical to overseas absentee voters successfully exercising their right to vote. Table 5 shows the support to overseas absentee voters provided by Unit Voting Assistance Officer questionnaire respondents.

Table 5. Specific Support Provided by Unit Voting Assistance Officers (UVAOs)

Support	Percent of UVAOs Providing Support
Conducted workshops or briefings on voting for unit members	59
Conducted workshops or briefings on voting for family members	25[1]
Conducted workshops or briefings on voting for civilians	24[1]
Made FPCAs available to voters by August 15, 2000[2]	93
Assisted individuals with the voting process	93
Displayed voting assistance materials	87
Involved base community organizations in the voting program	18

[1]Some UVAOs were not responsible for providing materials or services to DoD civilians or dependents.
[2]DoD Directive 1000.4 requires in-hand FPCA delivery by August 15. FPCA availability may not have meant in-hand delivery in all cases.

Voter Awareness of and Satisfaction With Unit Voting Assistance Officers. About one-third of the active duty respondents stated that they did not know who their Unit Voting Assistance Officer was. Awareness of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer was lower among junior enlisted, with nearly two-thirds of the junior enlisted respondents stating they did not know who their Unit Voting Assistance Officer was. Also, more Army respondents were unaware of their Unit Voting Assistance Officer than respondents from the other Services. About 60 percent of the civilian/dependent respondents did not know who their Unit Voting Assistance Officer was. The respondents who knew who their Unit Voting Assistance Officer was also reported a significantly higher level of understanding of the absentee ballot process. Discussion group participants stated that it would be beneficial if installation public affairs offices publicized the names and telephone numbers of Unit Voting Assistance Officers.

Although many of the respondents did not know who their Unit Voting Assistance Officer was, those who did were generally satisfied with the support provided. For those respondents who knew who their Unit Voting Assistance Officer was, more than 80 percent were satisfied with Unit Voting Assistance Officer availability, knowledge of the overseas absentee ballot process, and provision of balloting materials.

Unit Voting Assistance Officer Span of Control. One critical factor in Unit Voting Assistance Officer availability is the number of people served by the Unit Voting Assistance Officer. There was little DoD or Service guidance about how many voters a Unit Voting Assistance Officer can reasonably serve. Air Force guidance states that there should be one Unit Voting Assistance Officer for every 20 voters and allows that ratio to be expanded to one Unit Voting Assistance Officer per 40 voters. There was no other guidance on the subject.

More than 50 percent of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer respondents stated that they served 100 or more voters during the 2000 Federal election. About 30 percent of the respondents served 250 or more voters. Additionally, about one-quarter of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer respondents stated they were somewhat dissatisfied or dissatisfied with the amount of time available for performing Unit Voting Assistance Officer duties. As previously stated, voting assistance responsibilities are a collateral duty for all Unit Voting Assistance Officers.

A "one size fits all" concept will not work in determining how many voters a Unit Voting Assistance Officer should serve because of differences in Service and unit organizational structure. However, the Director of Administration and Management, Office of the Secretary of Defense, should determine a maximum number of voters to be served by a Unit Voting Assistance Officer. That determination should be made in coordination with the Services and consider the unique challenges faced by units that have employees on shift work, deploy without support groups that include voting assistance program representatives, are geographically separated from their chain of command, or are tenants on another command or Service's installation. Each of those challenges was raised by discussion group participants or by us in attempting to determine whether all absentee voters had access to a Unit Voting

Assistance Officer. As mentioned previously, several discussion group participants suggested that the voting assistance program would be better if organized similar to the Combined Federal Campaign. Some participants noted that although they did not know who their Unit Voting Assistance Officer was or where to get voting materials, there never seems to be a problem receiving Combined Federal Campaign materials even when deployed or on a ship.

Training for Unit Voting Assistance Officers and Voters. DoD recognizes the value of training its overseas absentee voters, as evidenced by the DoD Directive 1000.4 requirement for election-year training for all military members. The Directive does not require training for DoD civilians or dependents.

FVAP conducted 70 formal seminars and workshops at 62 locations worldwide before the November 2000 election. The seminars and workshops focused on the duties and responsibilities of Unit Voting Assistance Officers and highlighted the resources available to conduct a successful voting assistance program. The seminars and workshops were available to voting assistance officers; however, travel fund limitations and operational commitments by Service personnel often precluded attendance. Overseas absentee voters were also welcome to attend FVAP training at many sites. In addition, about 60 percent of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer respondents conducted briefings for unit members and about one-quarter conducted briefings for civilians and dependents.[3]

Unit Voting Assistance Officer Training. Unit Voting Assistance Officers rated the usefulness of five specific types of Unit Voting Assistance Officer training: FVAP workshop, FVAP web site, installation workshop, informal briefing, and self-taught with voting materials. Nearly all of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer respondents who received any type of training considered it to be somewhat useful or useful. Although FVAP conducted 70 seminars and workshops at 62 locations worldwide, 68 percent of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer respondents had not attended a FVAP seminar or workshop. Also, 68 percent had not attended installation workshops. More than half had not attended either FVAP or installation workshop training. "Self-taught" was by far the most common type of training for the Unit Voting Assistance Officer respondents. In addition, about half said they used the voting assistance officer training program available on the FVAP web site and about half said they attended informal briefings. FVAP maintained training rosters for attendees at its 70 workshops. However, no one in the Services was tracking training to ensure that all military voters and Unit Voting Assistance Officers were trained.

Training Absentee Voters. Despite FVAP and Unit Voting Assistance Officer training, about 60 percent of the active duty respondents and 80 percent of the civilian/dependent respondents did not receive one briefing, training session, or instruction period devoted to the absentee voting procedure

[3]Because some Unit Voting Assistance Officers were not responsible for providing voting assistance to DoD civilians or dependents, that percent may be artificially low.

for the November 2000 election. The absentee ballot process was understood to a moderate extent or more by a significantly higher percent of respondents who had received training than those who had not.

Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. Not all voters and Unit Voting Assistance Officers were aware of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. The Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot is a valuable resource for voters who have registered to vote and requested an absentee ballot, but who do not receive the ballot in time to vote. FVAP increased its efforts to make the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot available, more than tripling the number of Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots sent to overseas voters for the 2000 election than for the 1996 election.

Lack of voter awareness of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot became evident during the course of the evaluation. As a result, we began asking about Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot awareness in the discussion groups. Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots were discussed in about half of the groups. About three-quarters of those asked were not aware of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. Higher ranking military were generally more likely to be aware than lower ranking military and civilians; however, examples existed of senior military officers and Unit Voting Assistance Officers who were not aware of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot. In addition, about 10 percent of questionnaire respondents who were registered to vote stated they did not vote, in part, because they did not receive an absentee ballot or received it too late. Those respondents represent potential users of the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot and a potential 10 percent increase in the voting participation rate of our respondents. Such an increase based on awareness and use of one form is significant and warrants increased emphasis and training.

Voter Level of Understanding of the Absentee Ballot Process. Voter understanding is critical to successful use of absentee ballots. Questionnaire results revealed that more than one-third of the active duty respondents understood the absentee ballot process only to a small extent or not at all. The level of understanding was significantly lower for junior enlisted. The level of understanding was slightly higher for civilian/dependent respondents than for active duty respondents. Additionally, the understanding level for respondents who had previously voted using an absentee ballot was significantly higher than those who had not.

Providing accessible and trained Unit Voting Assistance Officers and providing training for absentee voters will improve understanding of the absentee voting procedures. Special emphasis should be given to training junior enlisted and individuals who have not previously used an absentee ballot to vote. The Services should consider using various training materials and military settings, such as pre-recorded FVAP videotapes, pre-deployment sessions, command indoctrination, and general military training sessions, to maximize the training availability and effectiveness.

Challenges for Ships and Submarines

Ship- and submarine-based assignments result in unique challenges for absentee voters. We visited one aircraft carrier, one command ship, three destroyers, and two submarines to examine any unique absentee ballot problems experienced by afloat personnel. All seven vessels were either homeported overseas or deployed during the November 2000 election.

Information Access. Ship- and submarine-based personnel reported that absentee voting was more difficult because of limited opportunities to obtain information. Ship and submarine crews told us that mail service is sometimes interrupted by changes in ports of call, duty assignments, or other operational considerations. Such changes can result in considerable delay for both inbound and outbound mail. For example, following the USS *Cole* bombing in October 2000, ships were diverted to unscheduled locations and some were unable to receive or send mail for about a month.

Discussion groups with ship and submarine crews also revealed that Internet service is not always available. When ships are at sea, Internet service is available via satellite, but service may not be available at all due to physical locations or operational considerations. Submarines normally do not have Internet service during deployments. Access to commercial long-distance telephone service is also limited. For example, long-distance service for other than official use telephone calls is available from ships, but costs crew members about $1 per minute.

Ship Unit Voting Assistance Officers. Ship-based personnel were as satisfied with the performance of their Unit Voting Assistance Officer as their shore-based counterparts. However, assignments aboard ship can limit the availability and accessibility of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer. Ship-based discussion group participants stated that some crew members did not have ready access to their Unit Voting Assistance Officer or voting information and materials because of their work shifts. In addition, Unit Voting Assistance Officers deployed aboard ships and submarines cannot tap into home port resources such as community, installation, and other support services.

Discussion group participants' comments revealed that remotely deployed shore-based units also encounter difficulties in receiving personnel support. For example, deploying units may not always be supported by Unit Voting Assistance Officers when those individuals are assigned to units other than the one deploying.

Although voting challenges will always exist for such units, advanced planning of voting assistance strategies could reduce the voting challenges. For example, members of deploying units could be encouraged to register to vote and request an absentee ballot prior to deployment. Additionally, obtaining voting materials could be included in pre-deployment checklists.

FVAP Coordination With States' Election Officials

Many of the problems cited by respondents to our questionnaires and participants in our discussion groups are outside the control of DoD. FVAP spends considerable time coordinating with the States and various organizations to resolve issues of overseas absentee voters. For example, FVAP has worked with State offices, such as the National Association of Secretaries of State and the National Association of State Election Directors, and other organizations, such as the Military Coalition and the National Science Foundation.

Each year, FVAP contacts the chief election officials in the States, the District of Columbia, and the territories to propose changes to policy or legislation that would simplify absentee voting procedures. As of May 2001, FVAP was working with the election officials on proposals related to timelines for mailing ballots, expanded use of the FPCA, notary requirements for all absentee balloting materials, restrictions on how early overseas absentee voters can request registration and/or absentee ballots, and requirements for absentee ballots to be received before election day. FVAP was also working on proposals related to special State write-in absentee ballots, electronic transmission of balloting materials, enfranchisement of citizens who have never lived in the United States, emergency authority for election officials in handling absentee ballots, and increased acceptance of the on-line version of the FPCA. A detailed discussion of most of the proposals can be found at the FVAP web site (http://www.fvap.ncr.gov). In addition, FVAP has coordinated with the States in the past to initiate several legislative and policy changes. For example, in 1999, FVAP worked with election officials from North Carolina regarding the electronic transmission of the FPCA for registering to vote.

Based on questionnaire and discussion group results, we identified several issues that FVAP should continue to work with the States, including standardization and simplification of the absentee ballot process; voter residency requirements; feedback to absentee voters on receipt of registration applications, ballot requests, and ballots; and opportunities for increased use of technology to resolve difficulties related to overseas absentee voting. Several of the issues raised by the discussion group participants are directly related to the proposals being worked by FVAP.

Standardization and Simplification of the Overseas Absentee Ballot Process. About 15 percent of all active duty respondents thought the process was complicated. Discussion groups reinforced that perception and mentioned different registration procedures and requirements for the States as a common issue. Although standard registration procedures and ballots for overseas absentee voters from all States is not practical in the near future, significant improvements can be made in standardizing and simplifying the process.

The *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide* discusses requirements for obtaining and submitting absentee ballots for the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and 4 U.S. territories for the November 2000 election. Those requirements include significant differences that could have confused the absentee voter, that made the voting process difficult, and that might have

discouraged participation of eligible absentee voters. We did not review applicable laws of the States or the District of Columbia nor did we attempt to identify differences of individual voting jurisdictions.

Timelines for Mailing Absentee Ballots. According to the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, the 50 States and the District had 17 different absentee ballot mailing date requirements for when to mail absentee ballots to voters for the November 2000 election. Those timelines varied widely. Ballots were mailed as early as 60 days before the election and as late as 13 days before the election.

Twenty-four States also had special write-in absentee ballots available by request for eligible voters who were unable to vote in person due to overseas or military duty. Special absentee write-in ballots are available sooner than regular absentee ballots and do not always include candidates and issues. Those 24 States had 11 different mailing date requirements for their special write-in ballots, as well as other differences. For example, Louisiana would have mailed a special ballot that included only Presidential candidates. California provided a list of candidates and issues current as of 60 days before the election with its write-in ballot. Virginia special write-in ballots were only available for election of State officials.

Three States required absentee ballots to be received from the voter prior to the election. Thirty-three States required absentee ballots to arrive by election day. Fifteen States had seven different grace periods, ranging from 2 to 15 days after the election. Nine of the 15 States required a postmark dated no later than the date of the election, and five of the 15 States required a postmark dated at least 1 day before the date of the election. One of the 15 States allowed a grace period but the *Guide* did not state when the postmark was required. Two States' grace periods were only for Federal elections. In several discussion groups, participants stated they did not like the grace period. They said that because the election would be over before their vote was due, they felt their votes were either not counted at all or did not count in States with grace periods. They stated they would prefer to have enough up-front time to process an absentee ballot that would be received in time to be counted with other election-day votes. In addition, potential postmark issues that made the news subsequent to the November 2000 election were generally related to States with grace periods. States that do not offer grace periods are concerned that a ballot is received by a certain date and are not concerned that the ballot was postmarked by election day.

Considering the realities of overseas mail and challenges with deployments, several States' timelines for requesting, receiving, and returning an absentee ballot could have resulted in votes not being received in time. According to the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide,* 14 States mail ballots to overseas voters 30 days or less before the election. Louisiana's regular absentee ballot was mailed 13 days prior to the election.

Although there are many political and legal issues related to changing dates for mailing ballots to voters, mailing ballots 45 days before an election would help ensure that all absentee voters have sufficient time to process their

ballots even if the mail system does not work as designed. We reviewed a limited sample of incoming mail at the post office at Naval Air Station Sigonella, Sicily, in February 2001, and found the mail had an average transit and receipt time of 8 days, with about 15 percent taking more than 8 days. In addition, during the period of October 7 through November 3, 2000, U.S. Postal Service reports show that about 20 percent of the mail sent from Italy to the Mid-Atlantic region did not arrive within 10 days. In effect, it could have taken 18 or more days for some Service members in Italy to receive and return mail from the Mid-Atlantic States, but at times, it can take longer. Of those 18 or more days, we believe that other than for 4 to 6 days, the mail was with the U.S.Postal Service, not the MPS, and therefore not controllable by DoD. Those transit and receipt times meant that if a Mid-Atlantic State mailed an absentee ballot exactly 30 days prior to the November 2000 election and if the voter picked up the mail the same day it was received and returned the ballot immediately, there would have been no problem with timeliness. However, if the State mailed the ballot less than 30 days before an election or if the voter was traveling, on leave, deployed, or otherwise not able to pick up the ballot on the day it arrived, or if the voter's mail was in the portion of mail that takes longer than normal, there was a chance that the ballot would not have been received by the State in time. Those problems were further complicated for deployed units, ships, and submarines, which have other challenges in receiving and sending mail. Additionally, if a military member was transferred before receiving an absentee ballot, the absentee ballot would have to be forwarded from one MPS post office to another, increasing the chance that the ballot could not be processed in a timely manner.

The mailing times cited are for a specific period of time and are not typical of mailing times to and from Italy. Our limited sample was not intended to be statistical and should not be generalized to all mail to and from Italy or within the MPS. However, the sample does allow for illustration of potential problems for voters registered in States that mail absentee ballots 30 days or less before the election.

FVAP recognizes the potential problems associated with the States' timelines for absentee ballots and has encouraged the States to use a 45-day timeline. In addition, FVAP recommends that overseas voters who are registered should request an absentee ballot, but use a Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot if the absentee ballot is not received within 25 days of the election. Following FVAP guidance, nearly every overseas voter registered in the 14 States that do not mail absentee ballots more than 30 days prior to the election would use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot.

Absentee Ballot Envelopes. Discussion group participants also identified ballot envelopes as a problem. The participants stated that some States require signatures on the outside of envelopes and others require voter identification or Social Security numbers. Participants expressed concern about identity theft. MPS officials also cited problems with ballot envelopes, stating that the U.S. Postal Service had returned a few ballots to the overseas voter rather than delivering them to the address for the State election official the voter intended. The postal equipment was reading the return address rather than the recipient's address.

Permanent Versus Temporary Registration. According to the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide*, 33 States accept the FPCA as permanent registration, but five States consider the FPCA as temporary registration, requiring a State form for permanent registration. Another 13 States waive registration but require overseas absentee voters to submit the FPCA for each election. That may, in effect, be similar to a temporary registration. It is impractical for DoD voting assistance officers to have copies of every State's registration form. As a result, the overseas absentee voter would need to go to a source outside of DoD to obtain forms for permanent registration. If the FPCA could be used for permanent registration by everyone, overseas absentee voters would only need to keep the States aware of their current mailing address.

Notarization and Witnessing Requirements. FVAP has worked with the States toward eliminating notarization and witnessing requirements on absentee ballots. However, for the November 2000 election, the *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide* identified eight States that required witnesses to sign either the completed ballot or the ballot envelope. One State required the FPCA to be notarized or sworn to before a commissioned officer and one State required the military commander's signature on the State absentee ballot certificate. In addition, two other States required a witness's signature on the FPCA.

Voter Residency Issues. FVAP has worked with the States to ensure that voter residency issues are resolved as FVAP is made aware of them. However, several participants in our discussion groups expressed frustration over problems they had encountered in establishing or maintaining voter residency. One individual informed us that he had used the same address for many years and successfully voted, but that for the November 2000 election, his request for a ballot was denied. The local election jurisdiction informed him that the address no longer existed. Another individual, a DoD civilian, stated that she had not lived in the United States as an adult and had been a military dependent overseas for most of her life. She is no longer a dependent and is working as a civilian overseas. She was not able to resolve voter residency issues and, as a result, did not vote in the November 2000 election. The *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guide* has guidance on voter residency, and several of the problems we identified could have been resolved if FVAP had been notified of the problems. We believe that FVAP can further reduce residency problems by ensuring that voting assistance officers are well trained on voter residency requirements and resources for solving such issues and by working with the States to help ensure that election officials are aware of potential problems.

Feedback to Voters on Receipt of Balloting Materials. One of the more consistent complaints heard during the discussion groups was that overseas absentee voters generally did not know whether their FPCAs or ballots were received. The FPCA includes a tear-off pre-addressed response for election officials to return to the voter to acknowledge receipt, but most discussion group participants had not received the response. About 30 percent of the respondents said one of their concerns was that there was no way to know whether State

election officials had received their FPCAs. About 15 percent of respondents stated that no response or a delayed response to their FPCA submission was a problem during the November 2000 election.

Opportunities for Increased Use of Technological Solutions. For the November 2000 election, FVAP conducted a demonstration project that allowed 84 active duty personnel to register and vote using the Internet. The 84 personnel were located in 21 States and 11 foreign countries and registered or voted electronically in Florida, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. Each one of the voters received instant confirmation when the vote was received and the ballots were counted immediately when the polls closed. FVAP used digital signatures, encryption, and other security measures to ensure the integrity of the voting process.

Although widespread Internet voting may not become a reality in the near future, FVAP should explore other opportunities for technological solutions to absentee voting problems. Several of the discussion group participants suggested that the process could be expedited if they could register to vote, request a ballot, and download or receive a ballot through the Internet or by fax. Despite security and cost issues related to such solutions, their potential implementation should be reviewed.

Conclusion

FVAP provides valuable resources for use by overseas voting assistance officers and potential absentee voters. However, awareness of the resources by potential users could be improved. Approximately half of our questionnaire respondents participated in the November 2000 election, which was comparable to participation rates in the November 1996 election. Opportunities existed to improve the voting assistance provided to potential overseas absentee voters, as one-third of the active duty respondents said they understood the absentee ballot process only to a small extent or not at all.

DoD should improve oversight of the voting assistance program and the consistent implementation of DoD requirements by the Services. Command emphasis at all levels is crucial. Voting materials and training on absentee voting procedures should be provided as required, with special emphasis for junior enlisted personnel and those who have not previously used an absentee ballot to vote. Additionally, properly trained and readily available Unit Voting Assistance Officers are essential to the success of FVAP.

Although some challenges will always exist for absentee voters who are remotely deployed, aboard ships, and on submarines, the Services can improve their voting experience by recognizing those challenges and planning for them well in advance of deployments, when possible.

Finally, many challenges to overseas absentee voters are not within the control of DoD. Regardless of how effective the DoD program is, some voters will not have the opportunity to vote if changes are not made in State and local voting

jurisdictions. FVAP has made considerable progress in working with the States to make the voting process easier for absentee voters and should continue to work with the States to resolve issues as they are identified. Several bills are being considered by Congress to improve the absentee voting process. We fully endorse any Federal or State actions that would lead to more uniform and simple voting procedures and requirements, thus reducing the burden on DoD voting assistance officers and absentee voters. The ongoing GAO review of State-related issues will be useful in that regard.

Recommendations, Management Comments, and Evaluation Response

1. We recommend that the Director of Administration and Management, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy):

a. Revise DoD Directive 1000.4, "Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP)," to:

(1) Require the Services to ensure that all eligible DoD overseas absentee voters are provided support by Unit Voting Assistance Officers, including those voters in deployed units, geographically separated units, ships and submarines, and subordinate units and tenant organizations on all installations.

(2) Specify the maximum number of eligible voters that a Unit Voting Assistance Officer should support.

b. Resolve the discrepancy between DoD Directive 1000.4 and the DoD Voting Plan on the timing of training requirements.

c. Provide oversight of Service policies to ensure consistency with DoD regulations. As a minimum, all Service regulatory guidance should include requirements to:

(1) Provide information and assistance to all eligible DoD voters.

(2) Emphasize command support at all levels for the Federal Voting Assistance Program.

(3) Designate an officer of general or flag rank as the "Senior Military Voting Officer" to manage each Service's voting program.

(4) Designate trained voting assistance officers at every level of command, with one Senior Installation Voting Officer at each installation or location (O-4 or higher where possible) to coordinate the programs conducted by subordinate units and tenant organizations.

(5) Ensure voting information and materials are disseminated expeditiously, including in-hand delivery of Federal Post Card Applications by August 15 of even-numbered years to eligible overseas DoD voters.

(6) Require the Inspectors General of the Services to include Service voting assistance programs as an item for specific review.

(7) Provide for continuing evaluation of command voting programs.

(8) Ensure all military members receive at least one briefing or training period devoted to absentee registration and voting during years with Federal elections or each year, depending on the outcome of Recommendation 1.b.

Management Comments. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) stated that FVAP has a proven record of meeting the voting needs of active duty military personnel and overseas citizens on a non-partisan basis. The Assistant Secretary stated that FVAP will continue to make improvements based on the results of its 2000 post-election survey, voter feedback, and the recommendations in this report. The Assistant Secretary agreed that FVAP implementation procedures and effectiveness can be improved for DoD-wide voter assistance services.

The Assistant Secretary concurred with most elements of the recommendation, stating that his office will revise DoD Directive 1000.4 to ensure the Military Departments include the DoD FVAP requirements in their regulations. The revision will include the requirement that Unit Voting Assistance Officers support all active duty personnel and their family members, including deployed, dispersed, and tenant organizations. Overseas installations will provide voting assistance to eligible overseas DoD civilian employees and their family members.

The Assistant Secretary concurred with the recommendation to specify the maximum number of eligible voters that a Unit Voting Assistance Officer should support, but stated that it is not feasible for his office or FVAP to prescribe a universal ratio of Unit Voting Assistance Officers to eligible voters. He stated that the Military Departments will determine an equitable ratio.

The Assistant Secretary stated that FVAP will review Military Department voting plans, policies, and training schedules to ensure they are consistent with the DoD Directive. The review will include command support of the program at all levels. Additionally, the FVAP review will include:

- assignment of a uniformed O-7 officer as the Senior Service Voting Representative and Service Voting Action Officers to manage each Service voting program,

- the appointment of an Installation Voting Assistance Officer to coordinate all installation voting activities,

- documentation recording the training of Installation Voting Assistance Officers and Unit Voting Assistance Officers,
- annual training for all Service members, to include general military training and basic training and command courses,
- development of a system to ensure in-hand delivery of the FPCA,
- development of command-wide voting awareness and assistance programs, and
- inclusion of the Military Department voter assistance programs as a Military Department Inspectors General item for specific review.

Evaluation Response. We consider the comments from the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) to be responsive. We agree with the alternative proposal offered by the Assistant Secretary to Recommendation 1.a.(2). He stated that the Military Departments will determine an equitable ratio for eligible voters supported by Unit Voting Assistance Officers and will include the ratio in Military Department policies. We recognize that the composition, mission, and size of military units are not conducive to a "one size fits all" ratio. Accordingly, we accept the alternative, but request that the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) oversee the Services' determinations to ensure they are reasonable.

2. We recommend that the Secretaries of the Military Departments require that all installations, ships, and submarines have absentee voting materials and access to voting assistance at a well-advertised fixed location.

3. We recommend that the Secretaries of the Military Departments require Senior Military Voting Officers to:

a. Establish controls and procedures to ensure:

(1) Program continuity.

(2) Voting information and materials are disseminated expeditiously, including in-hand delivery of Federal Post Card Applications by August 15 of even-numbered years to eligible overseas voters.

(3) Senior Installation Voting Officers are designated to coordinate the voting assistance program on an installation or at a defined location and to ensure that all DoD voters are supported by and aware of their Unit Voting Assistance Officer.

(4) All levels of voting assistance officers receive training.

(5) Overseas DoD absentee voters receive training during years with Federal elections, or each year, depending on the outcome of Recommendation 1.b. Special emphasis should be given to providing

training to junior enlisted personnel and those who have not previously used an absentee ballot to vote. The Services should consider various training materials and military settings for providing training, such as pre-recorded Federal Voting Assistance Program videotapes, pre-deployment sessions, command indoctrination, or general military training sessions. As a minimum, training should include:

(a) An overview of Federal Voting Assistance Program resources.

(b) Details on the absentee voting procedure and specific forms, such as the Federal Post Card Application and the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot.

b. Develop guidance for use by Unit Voting Assistance Officers for ships, submarines, and remotely deployed units in planning voting assistance strategies prior to known deployments.

4. We recommend that the Inspectors General of the Army and the Navy include their Service's voting assistance program as an item for specific review.

Management Comments. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy), in coordination with the Director of Administration and Management, concurred with the recommendations. He stated that an Installation Voting Assistance Officer will be assigned to coordinate all voting activities. He stated that for continuity purposes, Installation Voting Assistance Officer duties should be assigned to a DoD civilian at the GS-12 level or above. Further, the commander of each separate unit shall assign a Unit Voting Assistance Officer, at the O-2/E-7 level or above. FVAP will review Military Department plans and policies to verify they include a system to ensure the in-hand delivery of the FPCA. Annual general military and basic training on absentee voting will be conducted, with emphasis encouraging junior Service members to register and subsequently vote. Training and voting assistance will be provided for units preparing for deployment. Further, the Military Departments will designate at least one well-advertised fixed location where absentee voting material and voting assistance is available to all military personnel, family members, and civilian employees. In addition, the Inspectors General of the Services will include Service voting assistant programs as an item for specific review, evaluation, and assessment.

Evaluation Response. The comments by the Assistant Secretary are responsive.

5. We recommend that the Federal Voting Assistance Program continue to coordinate with State election officials to resolve absentee voting issues related to:

a. Standardization and simplification of the overseas absentee ballot process.

b. Voter residency requirements.

c. Feedback to voters on the status of submitted registration and balloting materials.

d. Increased use of technological solutions for registering to vote, requesting a ballot, and receiving a ballot.

Management Comments. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) concurred, stating that FVAP will continue to work with the States to improve absentee voting procedures. FVAP will continue to attend state and local election official conferences to provide information on FVAP and to provide and receive information on improvements to absentee voting procedures. Issues will include voter residency requirements, acknowledgement of receipt of absentee registration materials, and expedited handling of balloting materials. Also, FVAP will continue to pursue new technology to improve the absentee registration and voting processes.

Appendix A. Evaluation Process

Scope and Methodology

Work Performed. We reviewed pertinent laws, policies, and guidance dated from May 1980 through January 2000 related to the absentee ballot process and the Service voting assistance programs. We obtained information related to the voting assistance program for the November 2000 election from FVAP. We interviewed personnel involved with voting assistance programs at the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Services. We obtained policies and procedures for processing and handling overseas absentee ballots and for instructing Service members (and others) on voting requirements and deadlines. We also visited the MPS Agency and obtained policies and procedures for the MPS handling of overseas absentee ballots. We coordinated our efforts with GAO to minimize duplication and ensure adequate coverage of the overseas absentee voting issue.

We worked with the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) to establish the universe of overseas DoD installations, ships, and submarines. We selected a non-statistical, judgmental sample of overseas installations and ships and submarines that had been deployed during the election process. Site visits were conducted from February 7 through April 4, 2001. Active duty personnel and DoD civilians assigned to U.S. Embassies and consulates were not included in our evaluation. Additionally, we did not include overseas U.S. citizens who were not employed by DoD in our selection criteria.

At the selected installations, ships, and submarines, we used a three-phased approach to assess the overseas absentee ballot process. The first phase included administering 1,267 questionnaires to active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents. The questionnaires, one for active duty personnel, one for DoD civilians, and one for their dependents, were developed in coordination with GAO. A copy of the questionnaire for active duty personnel is at Appendix D. Similar questionnaires were used for DoD civilians and for dependents. The questionnaires were initially tested at one Navy installation.

Because the DoD civilian and dependent responses to the questionnaires were similar, we combined the two groups for analysis. Nothing in the questionnaires or in the processing of the questionnaires allows us to identify a specific respondent or the specific installation, ship, submarine, or unit.

Responses to the questionnaires provided information about absentee voters' perceptions of command emphasis of the voting assistance program, understanding of the absentee voting procedures, and problems encountered during the November 2000 election. Many of the questions were about respondents' perceptions; the accuracy of perceptions cannot be validated.

Questionnaire respondents also participated in discussion groups, where they were asked questions to expand on their experiences with the absentee ballot

process. In addition to the questionnaires and discussion groups, we held forums at each installation, ship, and submarine to provide all personnel the opportunity to express their views on the absentee ballot process, and in some cases, to complete a questionnaire.

The second phase of our assessment involved contacting various levels of voting assistance officers regarding the implementation of the voting assistance program. We interviewed Senior Installation Voting Officers at some locations about controls over local absentee voting procedures; the level of assistance provided by Unit Voting Assistance Officers; and the degree to which the voting assistance program had been implemented. We also developed a nine-question questionnaire for Unit Voting Assistance Officers (see Appendix E). We administered 153 questionnaires to Unit Voting Assistance Officers. The responses provided information related to Unit Voting Assistance Officer training, awareness of and satisfaction with FVAP resources, and problems encountered by voters supported by Unit Voting Assistance Officers.

The third phase involved a review of postal procedures as they related to the handling of absentee balloting materials. We observed MPS operations at five aerial mail terminals, four fleet mail centers, 23 military post offices, and nine unit mailrooms. We reviewed mail processing reports at the U.S. Postal Service first-class mail gateway at JFK Airport, New York, New York. We reviewed first-class mail postmarking procedures and inspection reports at military post offices and, at some locations, performed limited sampling of inbound and outbound mail. We also reviewed Military Origin-Destination Information System reports for mail received at military post offices and Origin-Destination Information System reports for mail originating at MPS locations. The reports we reviewed covered September 9 through December 1, 2000. Although we reviewed postal procedures and operations at the time of our visit, we could not validate how the ballots were handled by the MPS during the November 2000 election. We did not review U.S. Postal Service procedures for handling ballots.

Use of Computer-Processed Data. We relied on computer-processed data from the DMDC to establish relative sizes of installation populations. Because we are not projecting the questionnaire results, the accuracy of the DMDC database is not relevant to the evaluation results and we did not evaluate its accuracy.

Methodology. DMDC analysts supplied active duty, DoD civilian, and dependent population data by installation as of September 2000. We divided the installations in our sampling universe by theater and by Service, and then into two strata to ensure coverage of large and small installations. For each Service, we selected a large and a small installation, when possible, from both the European and Pacific theaters. To ensure that the deployed population was represented, we added selected ships, submarines, and units that were homeported overseas or deployed during the November 2000 election.

For each of the installations, ships, and submarines, we requested that the command select 45 active duty personnel (15 junior enlisted, paygrades E-1 through E-4; 15 senior enlisted, paygrades E-5 through E-9; and 15 officers) to

respond to our questionnaire and participate in our discussion groups. Additionally, at the installations, we requested that the command select 15 civilians, 15 dependents, and up to 15 Unit Voting Assistance Officers to respond to our questionnaires and participate in our discussion groups. Participation did not always include the full representation of the requested personnel. See Appendix C for a list of installations, ships, and submarines visited.

Analytical Approach. We forwarded completed questionnaires, including those from the open forums, to GAO for processing. GAO contractor technicians keyed the answers into a computer data file. The records in the data file do not identify the participating personnel. GAO transmitted the data file, which contained the responses to all four questionnaires (active duty, DoD civilians, dependents, and Unit Voting Assistance Officers) to members of the Quantitative Methods Division, Office of the Inspector General, DoD, for analysis.

Our overall analytical approach for the responses was based on using the information collected with a minimum of modification. We applied edits to ensure the internal consistency of each individual's responses. We performed the edits and the analyses of the responses using the Statistical Analysis System, version 8.1.

Specifically, we employed the following three edits to produce the results contained in this report. All three of the edits apply to the responses of active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents.

- If an individual indicated that he or she was unaware of a particular FVAP voting resource, then any satisfaction rating given for that resource was deleted.

- If an individual indicated that he or she did not use an absentee ballot to vote, then any response given to the difficulty of voting by absentee ballot was deleted (question 9 in Appendix D).

- If an individual indicated that he or she did not know who the Unit Voting Assistance Officer was, then any response given regarding the performance of the Unit Voting Assistance Officer was deleted.

We did not employ any edits on the Unit Voting Assistance Officer responses.

Evaluation Type, Dates, and Standards. We performed this program evaluation from December 2000 through mid-May 2001 according to standards implemented by the Inspector General, DoD. Our scope was limited in that we did not include tests of management controls.

Contacts During the Evaluation. We visited or contacted individuals within DoD and the U.S. Postal Service. Further details are available on request.

Prior Coverage

GAO has issued Report No. 01-470, "Elections: The Scope of Congressional Authority in Election Administration," March 2001. GAO reports can be accessed over the Internet at http://www.gao.gov.

Appendix B. Secretary of Defense Request Memorandum

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

28 November 2000

MEMORANDUM FOR ACTING INSPECTOR GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Absentee Ballots

In recent weeks, the process by which absentee ballots are requested, cast and mailed by American military personnel serving abroad has been the subject of considerable interest and attention.

As I stated during my recent visit to the Middle East, the last thing that we want to do is to make it harder for those who are wearing the uniform of the United States of America and serving overseas to cast a ballot. I want to make certain that the Department of Defense does everything within its authority to ensure that every American in uniform serving overseas, as well as their accompanying family members and DoD civilian employees, is encouraged to vote and understands the process by which ballots must be properly completed. I also want to make sure that each and every ballot delivered through the Military Postal Service is processed promptly and properly as required under Department of Defense regulations.

To that end, I request that you undertake a review which would include but not be limited to: current standard procedures for overseas handling of military ballots; standard cancellation and postmarking procedures; and any discrepancies between established procedures and how those procedures have actually been implemented. Your review will serve as a basis for any changes that can and should be implemented by DoD in order to ensure that the voting rights of all U.S. military personnel are respected and that everything possible will be done to make sure that every vote counts.

Appendix C. Commands, Installations, Ships, and Submarines Visited

Office of the Secretary of Defense

American Forces Information Service, Alexandria, Virginia
Washington Headquarters Services, Washington, D.C.
Federal Voting Assistance Program, Washington, D.C.

Department of the Army

Secretary of the Army, Washington, D.C.
  Chief of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C.
    Army Broadcasting Service, Alexandria, Virginia
Commanding General, U.S. Army, Europe, and Seventh Army, Heidelberg, Germany
Commanding General, Eighth U.S. Army, U.S. Yongsan Garrison, Seoul, Republic of Korea
Commanding General, U.S. Army, Japan, Camp Zama, Japan
U.S. Total Army Personnel Command, Alexandria, Virginia
  The Adjutant General Directorate, Alexandria, Virginia
    Army Voting Action Office, Washington, D.C.
  Military Postal Service Agency, Alexandria, Virginia
1st Personnel Command, Heidelberg, Germany
Soldier Support Institute, Fort Jackson, South Carolina
Joint Military Postal Activity, Atlantic, JFK International Airport, New York
222nd Base Support Battalion, Baumholder, Germany*
293rd Base Support Battalion, Mannheim, Germany*
Camp Eagle, Republic of Korea*
Camp Long, Republic of Korea*
Camp Page, Republic of Korea*
Camp Zama, Japan*
Fort Bragg, North Carolina*

Department of the Navy

Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D.C.
  Office of Information, Washington, D.C.
    Naval Media Center, Washington, D.C.

*Site where questionnaires were administered; participating personnel had been stationed or deployed overseas during the November 2000 election.

Department of the Navy (cont'd)

Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Quantico, Virginia
  Marine Corps Voting Action Office, Quantico, Virginia
Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces Europe, London, United Kingdom
Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii
Commander, Fleet Air Mediterranean, Naples, Italy
Navy Personnel Command, Millington, Tennessee
  Navy Voting Action Office, Millington, Tennessee
Fleet Mail Center, Naples, Italy
Fleet Mail Center, Sigonella, Sicily
Fleet Mail Center, Yokahama, Japan
Fleet Mail Center, Yokota, Japan
Fleet Mail Center, West Ruislip, United Kingdom
Military Post Office, London, United Kingdom
Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan*
Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan*
Marine Corps Base Camp Smedley D. Butler, Okinawa, Japan*
Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California*
Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Japan*
Naval Air Station Sigonella, Sicily*
Naval Support Activity Gaeta, Italy*
USS *Albany* (SSN 753)*
USS *Briscoe* (DD 977)*
USS *Helena* (SSN 725)*
USS *Hopper* (DDG 70)*
USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV 63)*
USS *La Salle* (AGF 3)*
USS *Milius* (DDG 69)*

Department of the Air Force

Secretary of the Air Force, Washington, D.C.
  Office of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C.
    Air Force News Agency, Kelly Air Force Base, Texas
Commander, U.S. Air Forces in Europe, Ramstein Air Base, Germany
Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas
  Air Force Voting Action Office, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas
Aerial Mail Terminal, Alconbury, United Kingdom
Aerial Mail Terminal, Frankfurt, Germany
Aerial Mail Terminal, Kadena, Japan
Aerial Mail Terminal, Seoul, Republic of Korea
Aerial Mail Terminal, Yokota, Japan

*Site where questionnaires were administered; participating personnel had been stationed or deployed overseas during the November 2000 election.

Department of the Air Force (cont'd)

Mail Control Activity, Naha, Japan
Mail Control Activity, Tokyo, Japan
Beale Air Force Base, California*
Incirlik Air Base, Turkey*
Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan*
Kunsan Air Base, Republic of Korea*
Ramstein Air Base, Ramstein, Germany*
Royal Air Force Alconbury, United Kingdom*

Unified Commands

Commander in Chief, U.S. European Command, Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Germany
Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii
U.S. Forces Japan, Yokota Air Base, Japan
U.S. Forces Korea, U.S. Yongsan Garrison, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Non-Defense Federal Organization

General Accounting Office

*Site where questionnaires were administered; participating personnel had been stationed or deployed overseas during the November 2000 election.

The following two appendices are located in separate PDF files:

Appendix D. Active Duty Overseas Absentee Ballot Questionnaire (pages 38-40)

"http://www.dodig.osd.mil/audit/reports/fy01/01-145-D.pdf" (516KB)

Appendix E. Unit Voting Assistance Officer Overseas Absentee Ballot Questionnaire (pages 41-42)

"http://www.dodig.osd.mil/audit/reports/fy01/01-145-E.pdf" (549KB)

Appendix F. Military Postal Service Procedures

The MPS Agency manages the MPS, which processes mail for DoD, members of the Armed Forces, and other authorized agencies and individuals. Mail service is provided through military post offices operated by the Services as an extension of the U.S. Postal Service. Military post offices are established at most overseas installations and on larger ships. Balloting materials are treated as first-class mail.

Mail from the United States enters the MPS when it is received at overseas MPS aerial mail terminals (terminals) or fleet mail centers (centers) for distribution to military post offices. The MPS transports outgoing mail from military post offices to terminals or centers, where the mail is delivered to authorized commercial air carriers under contract with the U.S. Postal Service for delivery to stateside destinations. It is important to note that the MPS does not control mail from the United States until it arrives at a terminal or center. Likewise, the MPS relinquishes control of mail originating at a military post office once the mail leaves the terminal or center.

Mail Received by the Military Post Offices. First-class mail, including absentee ballots, that is destined for overseas military post offices is delivered to the U.S. Postal Service gateway at either JFK International Airport, New York, New York, or San Francisco International Airport, San Francisco, California, by the U.S. Postal Service. Mail is then sorted by ZIP Code, packaged in letter trays for overseas delivery, and flown to a pre-designated overseas commercial airport for transfer to a terminal or center.

The terminal or center sorts and distributes the mail to a military post office at an installation or routes the mail to a ship's scheduled port of call or to a deployed unit. Military Origin-Destination Information System (MODIS) reports for mail received by the MPS from September 9 through December 1, 2000, show the average number of days it took for first-class mail to transit from the United States to overseas military post offices. The average number of days it took for mail to travel from the JFK gateway to various terminals and centers was 1.9 days or less during that period. The average number of days it took for mail to travel from the San Francisco gateway to various terminals and centers was 1.8 days or less for the same period. The MODIS reports also show that the average number of transit days from the terminals or centers to the military post offices was 3 days or less. None of those averages would have significantly delayed the processing of balloting materials to active duty, DoD civilian, or dependent voters. However, the MODIS reports were for shore-based installations and did not include the time it takes to get the mail from the final shore-based installation to ships and submarines. Unique ship issues are discussed in the Finding section in this report. Although we cannot reconstruct the actual handling of balloting materials for the November 2000 election, we conducted spot checks of mail received at six military post offices during our evaluation that showed there were no significant delays impacting mail delivery to military post offices.

Mail Originating From Military Post Offices. Procedures for processing first-class mail originating at an overseas military post office were consistent with DoD Manual 4525.6-M, "DoD Postal Manual," December 1989, that requires expeditious handling and postmarks with dates. However, it was not possible to validate the actual handling of balloting materials during the November 2000 election or quantify how much balloting material, if any, was processed without the required postmark. The GAO is checking, as part of its work with the States, whether the States disqualified ballots because they were received without a postmark.

Our limited samples of outbound mail on hand at three military post offices showed that mail was generally postmarked with the current date. Because postmarking involves humans and machines, it is not a perfect process and some mail will be processed erroneously without a postmark. Additionally, because most balloting materials are marked "U.S. Postage Paid," some MPS postal clerks could erroneously believe that postmarks are not needed, despite the DoD Postal Manual requirements. MPS Agency personnel acknowledged that first-class mail could be processed without a postmark and date, but stated it was not a systemic problem in the MPS.

First-class mail destined for the United States from military post offices is transported to a terminal or center on regularly scheduled routes. After consolidation by the terminal or center, mail is transferred to commercial aircraft for regularly scheduled flights to the postal gateway at New York or San Francisco. Reviews at the terminals and centers did not disclose backlogs or extended delays and there were no discrepancy reports prior to the election identifying delayed mail. Our review of the handling of mail originating at military post offices did not identify systemic MPS weaknesses that would have unreasonably delayed the delivery of balloting material.

Unit Mail Clerks. Some unit members do not receive mail at the military post offices. Instead, unit mail clerks pick up mail from the military post office and distribute the mail to unit members. Although not under the operational control of the MPS, the unit mail clerks are part of the postal delivery system. At three Army locations, we visited nine units with mailrooms and mail clerks. Although mail was being delivered in a timely manner to recipients located at the units, the unit mail clerks at two of the mailrooms did not promptly send undeliverable mail to a forwarding address or back to the sender. For purposes of this report, undeliverable mail is mail that cannot be delivered as addressed and must be forwarded to the addressee or returned to the sender. One mailroom that we visited had 112 pieces of undeliverable mail. One piece dated back 9 months, to May 2000. At another unit mailroom, there was more than one full letter tray of undeliverable mail. None of the mail was November 2000 balloting material. We notified unit commanders of the undeliverable mail backlogs. They advised us the backlogged mail would be forwarded or returned promptly.

Systems for Measuring the Transit Time of Mail. Transit time for mail to and from overseas military post offices is calculated using a U.S. Postal Service measuring system called Origin-Destination Information System (ODIS) and MODIS. ODIS measures the average transit time for mail originating in the

United States to the U.S. Postal Service gateways by noting the postmark dates on a sample of incoming mail. The MODIS measuring system uses a date-barcoded label affixed to the outside of a processed tray of mail. MODIS provides the average transit time for a processed tray of mail from the gateway to the military post office. The ODIS and MODIS reports represent average delivery times for mail. Individual pieces of mail could take significantly longer than the averages.

Neither ODIS nor MODIS records the time U.S. Postal Service employees at the gateways spend handling and processing the mail that is destined for overseas military post offices. Although we have no reason to believe that unrecorded time was significant enough to have caused unreasonable delays of balloting materials, we cannot reconstruct the handling of balloting materials at the gateways for the November 2000 election.

Transit time for mail originating in a military post office destined for the United States is measured using the ODIS measuring system. The ODIS data shows the time from the originating post office, including military post offices, to the post office serving the addressee.

Appendix G. Absentee Voter Assistance Best Practices

Several installations, ships, and submarines had developed excellent initiatives to encourage participation in the November 2000 election and to assist potential absentee voters in understanding the process. The following are some of those best practices.

Command Emphasis. At an Air Force installation in Turkey, a Senior Installation Voting Officer and two Assistant Installation Voting Officers were appointed by the installation commanding officer. The commanding officer required mandatory attendance at Unit Voting Assistance Officer training sessions and ensured the Senior Installation Voting Officer attended FVAP-sponsored training. Installation Unit Voting Assistance Officers went door-to-door at the installation housing area and delivered "in-hand" FPCAs. They also established an installation web site for voter information and the Senior Installation Voting Officer established an installation-wide voting awareness committee with representatives from all installation departments.

At a Navy installation in Italy, the commanding officer and the Senior Installation Voting Officer were very supportive of FVAP. The Senior Installation Voting Officer contacted each unit and tenant organization to offer voting assistance support. In 2000, the Unit Voting Assistance Officers conducted voter awareness campaigns at morale, recreation, and welfare events; at unit-sponsored cookouts; and in the installation housing areas. All of the installation unit and tenant personnel had electronic access to the Senior Installation Voting Officer and her assistant through the installation intranet and installation voting information web site. The Senior Installation Voting Officer also set up and staffed voter registration and information tables at the local DoD school, two large on-base festivals, and a musical concert.

Encouragement to Vote. The Commander, U.S. Forces Korea, videotaped a commercial that focused on voting. The commercial aired on both radio and television from July through November 2000. The commander reminded active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents of their right to vote and encouraged individuals to participate in the process.

At an Army location in Korea, a ninth-grade dependent developed a command-supported, two-part school program to assist those eligible to vote. The first part was to hand out FPCAs to teachers, staff, and high school seniors. The second part was to set up a table in front of the Post Exchange on weekends during the spring semester. The student and others requested FVAP materials and supplemented FVAP materials with their own announcements and posters.

On a Navy ship, the voting assistance officer held a "Voting Day" on September 9, 2000, 2 days before a scheduled port visit. Due to mission requirements, the voting assistance officer anticipated that the port visit might be the last opportunity to offload first-class mail, including absentee ballots, in time to be counted. The ship's crew members were informed of their voting

opportunities via electronic mail, shipboard announcements, and the ship's plan of the day. Crew members were encouraged to stop by the dining area throughout the day for information and balloting materials, including Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots.

Awareness and Availability of FVAP Resources. At an Air Force installation in England, all of the active duty personnel, DoD civilians, and their dependents have access to the installation intranet. During 2000, various public service announcements and advertisements were placed on the intranet. In addition, installation active duty personnel have electronic mail addresses and received electronic mail about voting, including voter registration announcements, guidance on voter registration procedures, and other pertinent information. The installation post office also displayed public service voting announcements and maintained a supply of FPCAs and *FVAP 2000-01 Voting Assistance Guides*. Additionally, the installation tourist information center publicized the November 2000 election and urged everyone to exercise their right to vote.

Appendix H. Report Distribution

Office of the Secretary of Defense

Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)
  Deputy Chief Financial Officer
  Deputy Comptroller (Program/Budget)
Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy)
Assistant Secretary of Defense (Legislative Affairs)
Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)
Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs)
Director of Administration and Management

Department of the Army

Inspector General, Department of the Army
Auditor General, Department of the Army
The Adjutant General, Department of the Army
Military Postal Service Agency

Department of the Navy

Auditor General, Department of the Navy
Superintendent, Naval Post Graduate School
Naval Inspector General
  Deputy Naval Inspector General for Marine Corps Matters
Naval Personnel Command
Marine Corps Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs

Department of the Air Force

Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Financial Management and Comptroller)
Auditor General, Department of the Air Force
Headquarters, Air Force Director of Personnel Resources

Other Defense Organizations

Director, Defense Contract Audit Agency
Director, Defense Logistics Agency
Director, National Security Agency
  Inspector General, National Security Agency
Inspector General, Defense Intelligence Agency

Non-Defense Federal Organization

Office of Management and Budget

Congressional Committees and Subcommittees, Chairman and Ranking Minority Member

Senate Committee on Appropriations
Senate Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Armed Services
Senate Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services
Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs
House Committee on Appropriations
House Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations
House Committee on Armed Services
House Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services
House Committee on Government Reform
House Subcommittee on Government Efficiency, Financial Management, and Intergovernmental Relations, Committee on Government Reform
House Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform
House Subcommittee on Technology and Procurement Policy, Committee on Government Reform

Management Comments from the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management Policy) (pages 50-53) are located in a separate file:

"http://www.dodig.osd.mil/audit/reports/fy01/01-145CMTS.pdf" (765KB)

Evaluation Team Members

The Readiness and Logistics Support Directorate, Office of the Assistant Inspector General for Auditing, DoD, managed the project and prepared this report. In addition, personnel from the Quantitative Methods Division, Office of the Inspector General, DoD, provided technical assistance.