

TEXAS PUBLIC

EMPLOYEE

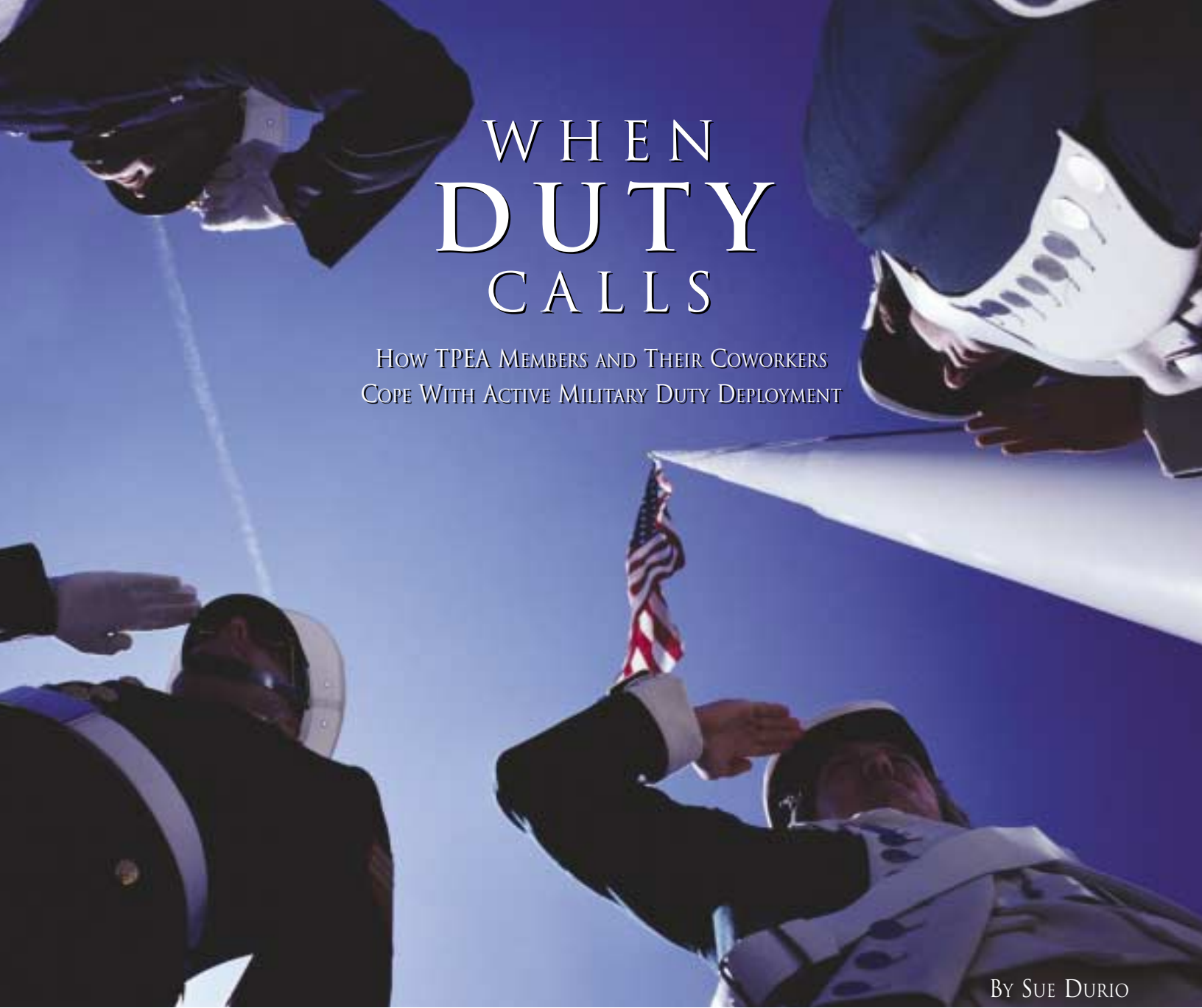
JULY 2003

WHEN DUTY CALLS

TEXAS STATE EMPLOYEES
HEED THE CALL TO
SERVE THEIR COUNTRY

TPEA 2003 CONVENTION:
ANYTHING BUT CONVENTIONAL

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



WHEN DUTY CALLS

HOW TPEA MEMBERS AND THEIR COWORKERS
COPE WITH ACTIVE MILITARY DUTY DEPLOYMENT

BY SUE DURIO

MILITARY RESERVISTS Gilbert Jordan and Dan Cross

know all too well the importance of being flexible. Both men expected to be

far from home when their families gathered for this summer's Memorial Day

and Fourth of July holidays. Instead, last-minute orders brought the two

TPEA members home — to the relief of their families, coworkers and bosses.

JUST FIVE DAYS BEFORE PRESIDENT BUSH TOLD THE NATION ON MAY 2 THAT OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM WAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED, Jordan was packed and ready to leave once again for active duty with his Navy Seabees unit. A master chief with the 9th Naval Construction Regiment based in Fort Worth, Jordan first received notice in late February that he'd be shipped out within a week, destination unknown. No stranger to active duty, the 27-year military veteran had been based in Iceland during the Gulf War, where his unit built landing strips, bridges and other infrastructure to support the accompanying Marine expeditionary units.

"I only had a week's notice this time, and my boss almost had a heart attack when I told him," laughs Jordan, who's been with the Texas Department of Transportation for 26 years and oversees maintenance operations for its six-county El Paso District. "He was new to the job, so it was a shock. But I had total support from everyone, from my supervisor to my coworkers."

This time, Jordan left for active duty in early March, returned home in mid-April and expected to be shipped out again by the first of May. Not so. "I got word four days before I was to leave that we weren't going," says Jordan. "My boss was jubilant, but I was a little disappointed; you don't train year after year, and not have the desire to serve when the need arises."

Like Gilbert, Dan Cross is accustomed to being called to active duty on short notice. A sergeant of correctional officers with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice – Huntsville Unit, Cross has served in the Army Reserve his entire 17-year TDCJ tenure. "We usually get about two weeks' notice, but this time they let us know a month out," says Cross, who was deployed in late January. "With the extra notice, I was able to start passing off work to coworkers."

As a lieutenant colonel with the Military Police, Cross is sent to various locations across the county where he helps train National Guard units for mobilization. "A lot of these units don't have the equipment, personnel or training to be ready to go overseas," he says. "We help them get where they need to be before shipping out." His orders were for a year, but Cross anticipates being released earlier. In late May, a break from duty

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brought him home to Huntsville where he was able to attend Memorial Day services honoring the 7,000 veterans residing in the Huntsville area.

Cross and Gilbert are among hundreds of state workers who were called to active duty in the last year. While the loss of their skills and experience can leave a void, coworkers are generally ready and willing to carry the extra load in their absence. “It can be a huge impact, especially if there are unique skills needed for the job,”

said Jan Thomas, human resource director at the Texas Workforce Commission. “One option is to hire temporaries but in many positions — like an expert in a certain computer system — it’s hard to find someone who can fill in.

Usually it’s not something where you can just go out and get a temp.”

The other option is to job-share the work

among coworkers. “Most coworkers are glad to help out. They know that everyone has to make sacrifices and they’re ready to step in,” she says. To ease the transition, she recommends having standard operating procedures in place for all positions, and making sure employees understand their agency’s disaster recovery plan.

As might be expected, the two state agencies typically hardest hit by active duty service of military personnel are the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Of TDCJ’s 40,000 employees, 682 are subject to military activation and 281 are currently on active duty — the highest level in recent years, including Desert Storm. Most are correctional officers, and 12 percent are correctional officer supervisors. “Since we’re a quasi-military structure, our people know where they stand,” notes TDCJ Public Information Officer Larry Todd. “If we lose a sergeant, his lieutenant has to step up and take over. We’ve been able to absorb the work with no problem because we are so large.

“Supervisory positions are left open to the returning military personnel,” he adds. “It’s the law, and it’s the right thing to do. In the interim, another supervisor has to take over and become acting supervisor or we just double up duties.”

DPS also has had a high number of employees deployed in the last year. “At any one time, 40 out of our 7,500 employees were on active duty status,” says Human Resource Director Paula Logan. “That’s more than most agencies, but actually about the same as the number we have on maternity leave at any one time.”

Because about a fourth of the positions involve long-term deployments, the impact can be more severe. “One big challenge for us has been individuals taken out of the



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26-week Police Academy School,” she says. “They can’t just pick up in the middle of another school session, so we’re looking at what we need to do to help those recruits finish the program when they return.”

Even though federal law allows for the temporary replacement of active duty personnel, Logan says that’s often not feasible. “We’ve had some emergency management

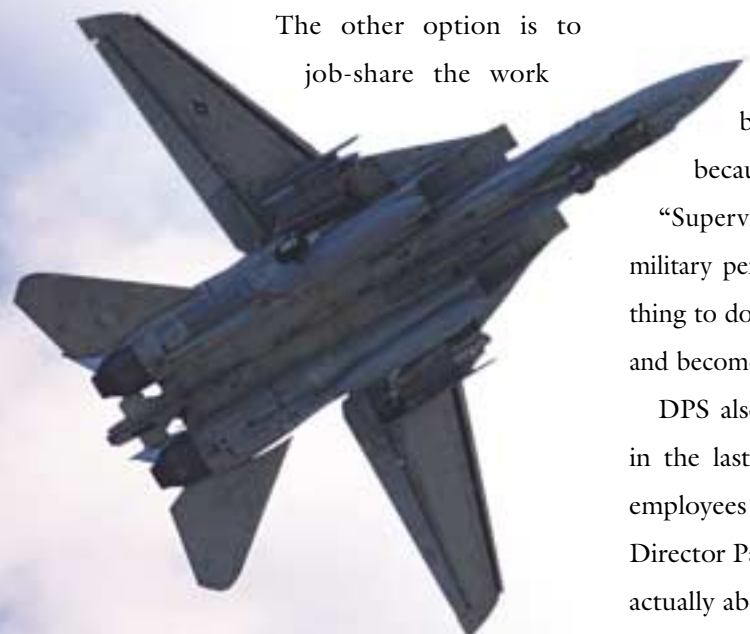
personnel leave, and in those cases we’ve hired temporaries,” she says, “but in most cases we just reassign people and make do. Coworkers understand and do what needs to be done.”

As for the military personnel, returning [to their regular jobs can be eased with some planning. “There’s a big difference between being a sergeant of correctional officers and a lieutenant colonel in the Army,” notes Cross. “Coming back into the workforce takes some transition-

ing. To ease that transition, I try to stay current with what’s going on with the agency, go on the website and keep up with what’s happening.”

Even so, catching up with months of mail, email and phone messages can be daunting. “Even after I was back three weeks, I was still trying to catch up,” laughs Jordan.

Sue Durio is a freelance writer from Austin, Texas



Considering Retiring from the State?

With the enactment of House Bill 3208 and the creation of a one-time retirement incentive, a record number of state employees may retire. TPEA wants you to carefully consider if retirement is the right option. Please remember:

If you retire, **REMAIN A TPEA MEMBER!** Annual dues for retirees are only \$30. TPEA works to maintain quality health coverage for both active and retired state employees. TPEA has been successful in increasing retirement annuities and supporting 13th Checks for retirees. TPEA will continue to lobby for you. Contact TPEA toll free at 1-888-367-8732 (888-FOR-TPEA) and we'll send you a retiree membership form with a postage-paid return envelope.

MAKE SURE RETIRING IS RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FINANCIALLY. The retirement incentive equals three months base salary, before taxes. The average incentive payment is expected to be \$8,000-\$10,000. You must balance this one-time payment against continuing to build the value of your retirement annuity through additional service. Even with 30 years service, your monthly retirement annuity will be less than 70 percent of your working salary. You increase your annuity 2.3 percent for each year served. And, some agencies are preventing retired employees from returning to service.

If you retire, **UNDERSTAND ALL OPTIONS AND MAKE SMART FINANCIAL DECISIONS.** If you receive a retirement bonus, consider rolling it into a state-sponsored 457 or 401k account to avoid paying taxes immediately. If you are not now in a state retirement savings plan, contact ERS to set up an account well in advance of retirement. Also, consider a partial lump sum distribution to increase flexibility and post-retirement income. Contact Integrity Asset Management to have an analysis done to determine if the partial lump sum option could benefit you, toll-free at 1-866-422-4264.