

# Review

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*The Indispensable Force: The Post-Cold War Operational Army Reserve, 1990-2010*. Katherine R. Coker. Fort Bragg, NC: Office of Army Reserve History, United States Army Reserve Command, 2013. <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo50644>.

*The Indispensable Force*, by Katherine Coker, offers a narrative history of the US Army Reserve in the 1990s and 2000s, when the Reserve transitioned from being a “strategic reserve,” deployed after the active duty army, to an “operational reserve,” frequently deployed along with the active army. *The Indispensable Force* extends the previous institutional history of the Reserve, *Twice the Citizen: A History of the United States Army Reserve, 1908-1995* by James Currie and Richard Crossland (1997). Synthesizing scores of military planning documents and publications, Coker’s narrative of the Reserve in recent decades offers a resource unlike any other available currently. Intended primarily for a military audience, this book will also be of interest to the general reader of military history and policy. While the length of this book, at over five hundred pages, may be daunting to the

non-specialist, the many photographs and works of art help make the text more accessible.

The introduction of *Indispensable Force* provides a brief overview of Army Reserve history from its beginning to the present.<sup>1</sup> Parts one and two then examine Reserve policy changes and operations in the 1990s, when the end of the Cold War stimulated a shift in national security objectives. Budget reductions and decreases in the number of active duty army led to an increased reliance on the Reserve, an approach that was tested in the early 1990s with large-scale deployment along with the active duty army during Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Throughout the nineties, Reserve forces continued to increase training and modernize equipment to support more rapid deployment capabilities. Part three examines Reserve experiences and strategies after September 11, 2001, a period when Reserve units mobilized more rapidly than ever before, particularly for deployments in Afghanistan and Iraq. During this time, Reserve leadership continued to refine strategies for training, deployment, and personnel welfare

that supported its mission to be an effective operational reserve.

Coker provides an invaluable service synthesizing an extraordinary amount of Reserve policies, initiatives, and operations from 1990 to 2010 into one text. Because of the book’s length, technical language, and level of detail, organizing more chapters would have improved clarity. Regardless, *Indispensable Force* is an important and useful work, providing the only current book-length narrative of Reserve history during this period. It is essential reading for anyone wishing to gain a better understanding of the evolution of the Army Reserve, its functions, and its role within the modern US armed forces.

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## Note

1. This introduction is also available in the brochure, “Army Reserve: A Concise History” (Office of Army Reserve History, 2013).