



March 29, 2005

PAUL E. VOGEL
VICE PRESIDENT, NETWORK OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT: Audit Report – Processing of Overseas Military Absentee Ballots
(Report Number NO-AR-05-007)

This report presents the results of our review of the Processing of Overseas Military Absentee Ballots (Project Number 04WG012NO000). The Postal Service vice president, Network Operations Management, requested the audit. Our objective was to assess the Postal Service's performance in processing overseas military absentee ballots for the national election in November 2004. We conducted the audit jointly with the Postal Service's International Transportation and Network Support group and the Intelligent Mail Implementation group.

The Postal Service's special procedures expedited the processing and delivery of military absentee ballots for the 2004 national election. In addition, the Postal Service and the Military Postal Service did a commendable job in ensuring military absentee ballots were postmarked. However, some challenges remain in counting and tracking absentee ballots and gaining compliance from local election offices on time frames for delivering ballots.

The Postal Service did not collect \$121,062 in additional postage for using Express Mail to expedite military absentee ballots. These funds represent potential additional revenue and will be reported as such in our Semiannual Report to Congress. We made two recommendations and two suggestions in this report.

Management generally agreed with our findings and recommendations. However, they do not intend to pursue reimbursement from the Department of Defense (DOD) for use of Express Mail service. Postal Service management indicated that during the planning process they made a conscious decision to absorb the Express Mail expense as a part of a collaborative effort with the DOD. Since this intent was communicated to the DOD, they believe it would not be prudent or ethical to request reimbursement. Management generally agreed with our suggestions; however, they indicated the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) office—not the Postal Service—is the preferred organization to address the suggestions. Given the rationale provided, we consider management's comments responsive to our recommendations and suggestions. Management's comments and our evaluation of these comments are included in the report.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff during the audit. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Robert J. Batta, Director, Network Operations – Processing, or me at (703) 248-2300.

/s/ Mary W. Demory

Mary W. Demory
Deputy Assistant Inspector General
for Core Operations

Attachments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Office of Inspector General completed a nationwide audit of the Postal Service's performance in processing overseas military absentee ballots for the national election in November 2004. Our review focused on military absentee ballot operations at international service centers in New York, New York; San Francisco, California; and Miami, Florida. The Postal Service vice president, Network Operations Management, requested the audit. We conducted the audit jointly with the Postal Service International Transportation and Network Support group and the Intelligent Mail Implementation group.

Results in Brief

The Postal Service's special procedures expedited the processing and delivery of military absentee ballots for the 2004 national election. However, the counting and tracking of absentee ballots could be strengthened. The Postal Service's overall success in processing the military absentee ballots resulted from excellent planning, execution, and effective partnering with the Military Postal Service (MPS). This reduced the potential for delinquent and uncounted military ballots caused by mail processing delays.

The Postal Service did not collect \$121,062 incurred by using Express Mail to expedite the processing and delivery of overseas military absentee ballots.

Summary of Recommendations

We made two recommendations to address issues identified during our audit. We recommended Postal Service management use the Confirm¹ service to improve the tracking and monitoring of military absentee ballots and request reimbursement from the Department of Defense (DOD) for \$121,062 incurred by using Express Mail service. We also suggested management provide feedback to local election officials, military service members, and the MPS on the importance of adhering to the recommended time frames for requesting and mailing ballots, and inform

¹ Confirm is a service that provides information on when the Postal Service sorts mail on automated processing equipment. It uses a PLANET code (Postal Alpha Numeric Encoding Technology, a 12-digit barcode) to track mail electronically. Confirm provides electronic tracking information about outgoing or incoming First-Class Mail and Standard Mail (A) mailpieces.

local election officials of the military postage exemption for balloting materials.

**Summary of
Management's
Comments**

Management generally agreed with our findings and recommendations. However, they stated they do not intend to pursue reimbursement from the DOD for use of Express Mail service. Postal Service management indicated that during the planning process they made a conscious decision to absorb the Express Mail expense as part of a collaborative effort with the DOD. Since this intent was communicated to the DOD, they believe it would not be prudent or ethical to request reimbursement. Also, management generally agreed with our suggestions. However, they indicated the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) office—not the Postal Service—is the preferred organization to address the suggestions. Management's comments are included in Appendix B of this report in their entirety.

**Overall Evaluation of
Management's
Comments**

Given the rationale provided, we consider management's comments responsive to our recommendations and suggestions.

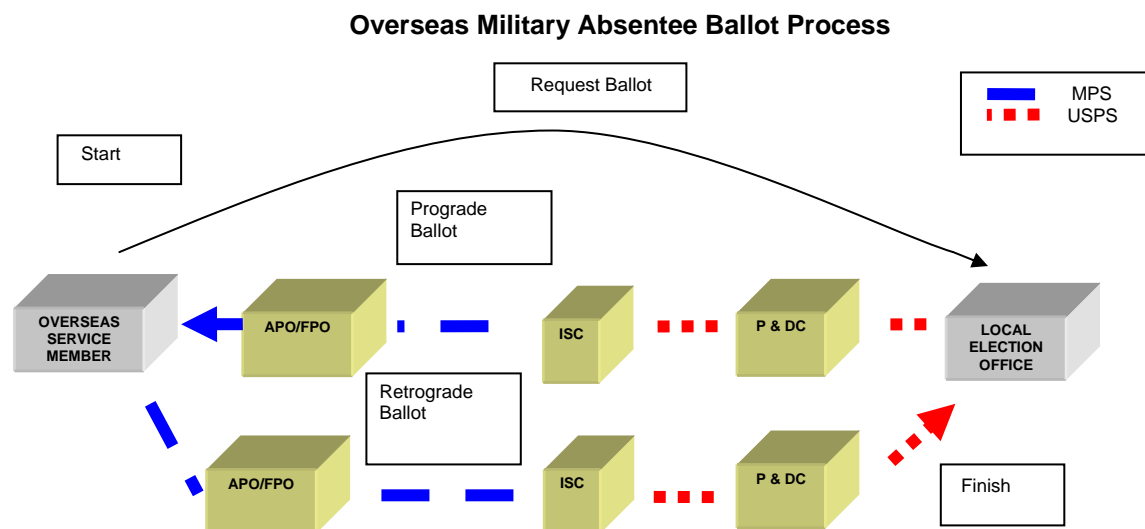
INTRODUCTION

Background

The overseas military absentee voting process is a shared responsibility among four entities.

- Overseas service members, who request and complete the ballots.
- Local election offices, which send out blank ballots and receive completed ballots.
- The Postal Service, which processes military absentee ballots at international service centers (ISCs) and processing and distribution centers (P&DCs). Processing includes both prograde and retrograde operations. Prograde operations are the mailing of absentee ballots from local election offices to service members located overseas. Retrograde operations are the return of completed absentee ballots to election officials.
- The DOD's MPS which ensures the ballots are given priority handling at the Army/Air Force Post Office (APO) and Fleet Post Office (FPO).

The diagram below outlines the overseas military absentee ballot process.



During the 2000 national election, there were highly publicized reports of delayed and uncounted military absentee ballot mail. News media also reported election officials disqualified military absentee ballots on the grounds that they lacked postmarks. As a result, the Postal Service and the DOD's MPS combined efforts to expedite the processing and delivery of absentee ballots to and from overseas military post offices for the November 2004 election.

On August 10, 2004, the Postal Service adopted special procedures for processing absentee ballots. The goal of these procedures was to expedite the handling of this mail so that all absentee ballots from overseas service members would be counted in the November 2004 election. Chart 1 outlines these procedures and any subsequent revisions made during the process.

Chart 1. Special Overseas Military Absentee Ballot Procedures for the 2004 Election

Original Plan (August 10, 2004)	Revisions During Process
Prograde (Export)	Prograde (Export)
Notify election officials of special process, September 1–10, 2004.	–
Collect ballots from election offices and process through Express Mail, September 20–October 8, 2004.	Express Mail processing extended to October 23, 2004.
Retrograde (Import)	Retrograde (Import)
Normal processing before October 1, 2004, and after November 12, 2004.	–
Expedited processing October 1–29, 2004.	–
Express Mail processing October 30–November 1, 2004.	Express Mail processing extended from October 30–November 12, 2004.
Expedited processing November 2–12, 2004.	–

**Objective, Scope, and
Methodology**

The objective of our audit was to assess the Postal Service's performance in processing overseas military absentee ballots for the November 2004 election. To assess performance, we reviewed policies and procedures for processing military absentee ballots, observed the processing of the ballots, and analyzed delivery performance for ballots sent through First-Class and Express Mail. We conducted this audit jointly with the Postal Service International Transportation and Network Support group and the Intelligent Mail Implementation group.

Our review focused on military absentee ballot processing at the following ISCs between October 1 and November 12, 2004: New York, New York; San Francisco, California; and Miami, Florida. We interviewed officials at the three ISCs and Postal Service Headquarters and MPS officials. We did not review military absentee ballot operations overseas or at the district or local levels. In addition, we did not examine the requesting of ballots from the local election offices.

We relied on the controls surrounding the Postal Service operational and application systems (including the Product Tracking System) to obtain the delivery performance data for Confirm/PLANET Code² and Express Mail pieces. We did not test the validity of controls over these systems. However, we verified the accuracy and completeness of the data. Nothing came to our attention to suggest the data used was unreliable.

We conducted this audit from September 2004 through March 2005 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included such tests of internal controls as were considered necessary under the circumstances. We discussed our observations and conclusions with appropriate management officials and included their comments where appropriate.

² A PLANET (Postal Alpha Numeric Encoding Technology) code is a 12-digit barcode. The Postal Service's barcode sorting equipment reads the barcode and makes mail processing information (such as when the date a mailpiece was processed) available to a Centralized Postal Service network server. The server can then be accessed to determine the delivery status of a mailpiece.

Prior Audit Coverage

During 2001, the Inspector General, DOD and the Government Accountability Office (GAO)³ reviewed issues related to overseas military absentee ballots.

An Inspector General, DOD report titled Overseas Absentee Ballot Handling in DOD (Report Number D-2001-145, dated June 22, 2001) reviewed DOD policies and procedures for moving First-Class Mail at selected overseas locations. The audit uncovered no systemic MPS problems that would have unreasonably affected ballot handling. The report also stated the timeliness of mailing voting materials could present a problem for overseas voters, considering the reality of moving First-Class Mail to and from overseas locations.

A GAO report titled Voting Assistance to Military and Overseas Citizens Should be Improved (Report Number GAO-01-1026, dated September 28, 2001) addressed the concerns of military and overseas voters. Concerns included the lack of feedback from local jurisdictions about the status of their applications for registration of ballots and the short time frames many state and local jurisdictions have for sending and returning ballots.

³ The General Accounting Office's name changed to the Government Accountability Office effective July 7, 2004.

AUDIT RESULTS

Assessment of Postal Service Performance

The Postal Service special procedures were effective in expediting the processing and delivery of overseas military absentee ballots for the November 2004 election. However, the counting and tracking of absentee ballots could be strengthened. The Postal Service’s overall success in processing the absentee military ballots resulted from excellent planning, execution, and effective partnering with the MPS. This reduced the potential for delinquent and uncounted military ballots resulting from Postal Service mail processing delays.

Expedited Processing and Delivery of Ballots

The Postal Service was successful in assisting the MPS in speeding up the processing of overseas military absentee ballots. Processing these ballots by Express Mail reduced mail delivery time frames by up to five days from normal First-Class Mail processing. As shown in Chart 2, prograde (export) ballots were expedited by up to two days and retrograde (import) ballots by up to three days. Furthermore, retrograde ballots sent by normal First-Class Mail met delivery standards between 84 and 95 percent of the time.

Chart 2. Overseas Military Absentee Ballot First-Class Mail: Summary of Processing and Delivery Performance

Processing	Delivery Performance
Prograde Ballots (transported as Express Mail)	Saved up to two days
Retrograde Ballots (transported as First-Class Mail)	Achieved First-Class Mail standards between 84 and 95 percent of the time
Retrograde Ballots (transported as Express Mail)	Saved up to three days

Prograde Ballots

Prograde ballots were consolidated at processing and distribution centers and expedited to the three ISCs using Express Mail, resulting in a savings of one to two days over First-Class Mail processing.⁴

⁴ We did not test prograde delivery performance. Expected savings are based on delivery standards for Express Mail (one to two days) compared to First-Class Mail (one to three days).

Retrograde Ballots Processed Using First-Class Mail

Retrograde ballots received up to three days before the election were processed and delivered through the normal First-Class Mail stream. A judgmental sample⁵ of 11,644 retrograde ballots showed the Postal Service’s compliance with First-Class Mail delivery standards for ballots sent from the three ISCs to local election offices ranged from 84 to 95 percent. (See Table 1 below.)

Table 1. Delivery Performance for Overseas Military Absentee Ballot First-Class Mail

Originating Facility	On Time	Late	Percentage On Time
New York	1,336	256	84
San Francisco	8,427	952	90
Miami	639	34	95

Note: Postal Service First-Class Mail standards range from one to three days.

Retrograde Ballots Processed Using Express Mail

Overseas military absentee ballots received from October 30 through November 12, 2004, were expedited to the local delivery units as Express Mail. As shown below, a judgmental sample of 5,138⁶ retrograde ballots in Express Mail envelopes showed that sending ballots using Express Mail reduced Postal Service processing times by up to three days over First-Class Mail delivery standards. Furthermore, Express Mail expedited 94 percent of these ballots by at least one day over First-Class Mail delivery standards.

Table 2. Overseas Military Absentee Ballot Delivery Performance: Express Mail Compared to First-Class Mail Processing

	Miami	San Francisco	New York	Totals	Percentage
Saved three days	3	44	665	712	14
Saved two days	11	351	1,934	2,296	45
Saved one day	10	195	1,598	1,803	35
Same day	2	60	199	261	5
Delinquent	2	5	59	66	1
Totals	28	655	4,455	5,138	100

Note: Postal Service First-Class Mail standards range from one to three days.

⁵ At our request, the Postal Service applied PLANET Codes to retrograde ballots at each of the three international service centers. This allowed us to assess processing performance for each ballot using scans on automation equipment. See Appendix A for the sample methodology.

⁶ See Appendix A for the sample methodology.

Counting and
Tracking of Ballots

Postal Service controls to accurately count the number of ballots were ineffective. According to the Postal Service's special procedures, military absentee ballots were to be segregated and run under a separate sort plan⁷ on automated processing equipment to generate a separate piece count for military ballots. However, Postal Service counts of military absentee ballots were lower than projected.⁸ Low ballot counts occurred because absentee ballots were processed:

- Before the separate sort plan was implemented.
- Under the incorrect sort plan.
- With regular military mail.

Segregating ballots from the normal mailstream is tedious and time-consuming, and sharing responsibilities with the MPS and local election offices reduced the Postal Service's control over the ballots. Gathering accurate data on ballot counts may not be a realistic goal without a reliable tracking mechanism.

During the November 2000 election, some military and overseas voters expressed frustration about not knowing when they could expect a ballot. Without a reliable tracking mechanism, the Postal Service cannot provide timely feedback or information about ballots.

Recommendation

We recommend the vice president, Network Operations Management:

1. Use the Confirm service to improve the counting and tracking of military absentee ballots.

**Management's
Comments**

Management agreed with our finding and recommendation. They indicated they would use the Confirm service more extensively if a similar collaboration between DOD and the Postal Service takes place during the next presidential election.

**Evaluation of
Management's
Comments**

Management's comments are responsive to the recommendation. Management's planned actions should correct the issues identified in the finding.

⁷ A sort plan or scheme is a computer program that provides automated equipment with instructions.

⁸ Because we were unable to validate Postal Service ballot counts, we did not include these numbers.

Uncollected Postage Revenue

Postal Service management did not charge the military for use of the Express Mail service. As part of the Postal Service's special procedures for processing overseas military absentee ballots, they agreed to provide Express Mail service for absentee ballots mailed from overseas military post offices and ballots received at ISCs.⁹ As a result, the Postal Service lost potential additional revenues of \$121,062 for Express Mail service provided to expedite the processing and delivery of overseas military absentee ballots. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Uncollected Postage Revenue Calculation

Cost to mail Express Mail piece	\$ 13.65
Total number of overseas absentee Express Mail pieces	<u>8,869</u>
Uncollected postage revenue.....	\$ 121,062 =====



Retrograde military absentee ballots being processed for Express Mail by Postal Service employee.

⁹Under the Postal Service's special procedures, ballots received between October 30 and November 12, 2004, were expedited using Express Mail.

Recommendation	We recommend the vice president, Network Operations Management: 2. Request reimbursement from the Department of Defense for \$121,062 for the use of Express Mail service to expedite the processing and delivery of overseas military absentee ballots.
Management's Comments	Management generally agreed with our finding. However, they do not intend to pursue reimbursement from the DOD for use of the Express Mail service. Postal Service management indicated that, during the planning process, they made a conscious decision to absorb the Express Mail expense as part of a collaborative effort with the DOD. Since this intent was communicated to the DOD, they believe it would not be prudent or ethical to request reimbursement.
Evaluation of Management's Comments	Given the rationale provided, we consider management's comments responsive to our recommendation.

Other Matters

In addition to the report findings, we identified other issues that warranted management's attention. The Postal Service and the MPS did a commendable job in ensuring that military absentee ballots were postmarked. However, the Postal Service still has some challenges in:

- Gaining compliance from local election offices on time frames for delivering ballots.
- Educating local election offices on postage exemptions for overseas military absentee ballots.

Effective Postmark Controls

Military post offices are required to postmark all absentee ballots at the time of mailing. During the 2000 election, some military absentee ballots were disqualified on the grounds they lacked postmarks. Postmarks indicate when a ballot was mailed and whether it is eligible to be counted. For the 2004 election, the MPS implemented procedures to ensure they gave each completed ballot a proper, legible postmark at the time of mailing. In cases where a ballot lacked a postmark, Postal Service employees were instructed to provide a postmark. Our observations of retrograde military absentee ballots showed either MPS clerks or Postal Service employees postmarked all of the military absentee ballots. In cases where the ballot did not have a postmark, we observed Postal Service employees affixing a postmark to the ballot.

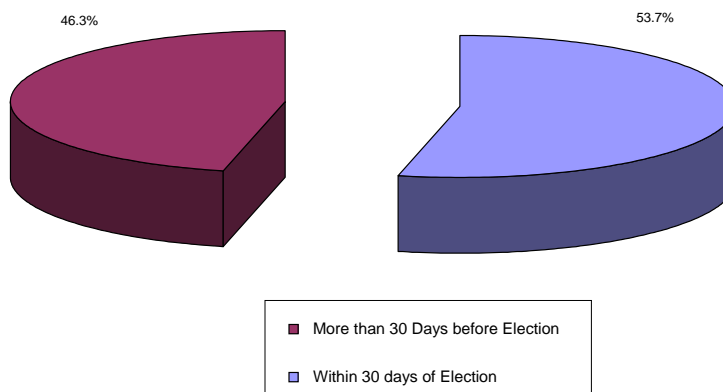


Postmarked military absentee ballots.

Tight Time Frames for
Prograde Ballots

Over 50 percent of the prograde military absentee ballots processed by the Postal Service between September 20 and November 2, 2004, were received and sent overseas within 30 days of the election. Because round-trip transit time for mail sent to the armed forces in support of overseas military operations can take up to 30 days, the Postal Service and the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) recommended local election offices mail ballots 45 days before the election. This would allow sufficient time for the ballots to be delivered, processed, and returned to local election offices before the election. Some reasons the ballots were mailed within 30 days of the election included late requests for a ballot by the military absentee voters, and delays resulting from legal decisions concerning the eligibility of third-party candidates. As a result, military absentee ballots mailed within 30 days of the election were at risk of not being counted.

**Chart 3. Prograde Military Overseas Absentee Ballots Processed
Between September 20 and November 2, 2004**



Unnecessary Payment
of Postage

Some local election offices affixed postage to military absentee ballots. According to Postal Service policies, mail from election offices and from members of the armed forces, their spouses, and dependents is exempt from payment of postage for ballot materials. Envelopes containing ballot materials should include the label "Official Absentee Balloting Material—First-Class Mail," "No Postage Necessary in the U.S. Mail." Some local election officials were unfamiliar with this policy.

As a result, the Postal Service incorrectly collected postage on military absentee ballots.



Postage affixed on upper ballot and MPO postmark on lower ballot.

Suggestions

We suggest the vice president, Network Operations Management, instruct Postal Service election coordinators to:

3. Provide feedback to local election officials, the Military Postal Service, and military service members on the importance of adhering to time frames for requesting and mailing absentee ballots.
4. Inform local election officials of the military postage exemption for balloting materials.

**Management's
Comments**

Management generally agreed with our suggestions. However, they indicated the FVAP office—not the Postal Service—is the preferred organization to address the suggestions.

**Evaluation of
Management's
Comments**

Given the rationale provided, we consider management's comments responsive to our suggestions.

APPENDIX A. SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

Summary of Methodology for First-Class Mail Pieces

For the retrograde military ballots mailed as First-Class Mail, Postal Service applied “as many PLANET Codes as they could” each day for one week, without regard to the destination of the mailpiece. For purposes of this review, we consider the application to be essentially random within each ISC because military ballot mail for all destinations was mixed together daily rather than sorted at the point where the codes were applied, and auditor observations indicate the assumption of a destination mix is reasonable. We also have no information to suggest the mix was different in character from one day to another. Unreliable universe data does suggest, however, that there may have been significant differences in the volumes of military ballot mail by ISC, and also suggest that the proportions of mailpieces coded at each ISC are not at all similar. Therefore, we considered the total coded mail in the week in aggregate for each ISC independently, and we reported the on-time percentage by ISC. Because we have no reliable data on the universe of military ballot mail at each ISC, we cannot determine appropriate weighting factors to combine the three ISC results into an overall projection.

Summary of Methodology for Express Mail Pieces

For the retrograde military ballots mailed as Express Mail, the Postal Service provided a database of the acceptance scan and delivery scan information for a total of 5,138 mailpieces having an acceptance scan at one of the three ISCs. For each of these mailpieces, the delivery time was compared to the First-Class Mail delivery standard corresponding to the ISC and destination combination for that mailpiece. The summary results include all 5,138 pieces.

APPENDIX B. MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

PALL VOGEL
Vice President, Network Operations Management



February 28, 2005

MS. DEMORY

SUBJECT: Processing of Overseas Military Absentee Ballots
(Report Number NO-AR-05-DRAFT)

In response to the recommendations contained in the subject report, U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Network Operations Management agrees with the recommendation to use Confirm service to improve the counting and tracking of military absentee ballots, but disagrees with the recommendation to request reimbursement from the Department of Defense (DOD) for \$121,062 for the use of Express Mail service in expediting the processing and delivery of overseas military absentee ballots. Comments supporting our position are contained in our response to each respective recommendation below.

However, before addressing each recommendation, I would first like to thank the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for conducting this audit of the USPS's efforts to expedite the delivery of absentee ballots to and from military post offices overseas for the November 2004 national election. Our goal was to assist the Military Postal Service in speeding up the handling of this mail so that all absentee ballots from military service members overseas were counted in this national election, an improvement to four years ago when there were highly publicized reports of delayed and uncounted military absentee ballot mail. To ensure that ballots were received in time to be counted, the USPS designed a special handling procedure to expedite delivery and return of the absentee ballots from overseas Army/Air Force Post Offices and Fleet Post Offices.

In our opinion, the OIG audit of our procedures was conducted in a professional and objective manner by all participating evaluators and auditors. The genuine interest in the overall objective of the USPS process was evident in all evaluators and auditors participating in the audit. The critique and discussion during the review were instrumental in improving at least one process along the way. At the OIG request, the USPS applied PLANET Codes to retrograde ballots at each of the three international service centers. This enabled the assessment of processing performance for each ballot using scans on automation equipment. This recommendation provided valuable information. We thank the OIG for this recommendation during the audit process.

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Our comments to each of the specific audit report recommendations are provided below.

Recommendation 1:

We recommend the Vice President, Network Operations Management, to use the Confirm service to improve the counting and tracking of military absentee ballots.

Response:

Management agrees with this recommendation to use Confirm service more extensively to improve the counting and tracking of military absentee ballots. Although Confirm service was used to a limited extent for retrograde absentee ballots, we agree that the use of Confirm service should also extend to prograde absentee ballots. Use of the Confirm service during this presidential election was limited in scope as a result of insufficient time to plan and implement more extensive use of the service for the prograde ballots. Although we do not know at this time the extent of support that DOD will request from the USPS for the 2008 presidential election, we would definitely want to use Confirm service more extensively if a similar collaboration between DOD and the USPS takes place for the next presidential general election. In order to provide adequate time for planning the scope of operations for the 2008 election, Network Operations Management will begin its planning efforts no later than September 2007.

Recommendation 2:

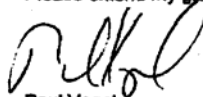
We recommend the Vice President, Network Operations Management, request reimbursement from the DOD for \$121,062 for the use of Express Mail service to expedite the processing and delivery of overseas military absentee ballots.

Response:

Although management agrees that the expense is valid, it does not agree that the USPS should request reimbursement from the DOD. During the planning process for expediting the military absentee ballots, USPS management made a conscientious decision to use Express Mail at its own expense. In essence, USPS management decided that the Express Mail expense would be absorbed as one element of USPS's contribution to the overall collaborative effort with the DOD. Since our intent of using Express Mail service at our own expense was communicated to DOD during the collaborative planning process, we believe it would not be prudent or ethical to request reimbursement after the fact. Therefore, management does not intend to request reimbursement for this expense from the DOD.

We do not believe that any of the information contained in the report is proprietary in nature requiring exemption from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

Please extend my gratitude to all who participated in this review.


Paul Vogel

PAUL VOGEL
VICE PRESIDENT, NETWORK OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT



March 11, 2005

MS. DEMORY

SUBJECT: Processing of Overseas Military Absentee Ballots (Addendum)
(Report Number NO-AR-05-DRAFT)

This is an addendum to our previous response of February 28 to the recommendations contained in the subject report. This addendum provides Network Operations Management's (NOM) response to the two suggestions regarding communications with local election officials concerning military absentee ballots. Although NOM agrees with the intention of the suggestions, it believes that the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) office is the preferred organization to fulfill the suggestions. Our comments to each of the specific audit report suggestions are provided below.

Suggestion 3:

We suggest the Vice President, Network Operations Management, instruct Postal Service election coordinators to provide feedback to local election officials, the Military Postal Service, and military service members on the importance of adhering to time frames for requesting and mailing absentee ballots.

Response:

Management disagrees that the USPS should assume the primary responsibility of communicating the importance of adhering to time frames for requesting and mailing absentee ballots. We believe that this communication is the primary responsibility of the FVAP office. The FVAP administers the federal responsibilities of the Presidential designee (Secretary of Defense), under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) of 1986. Specific goals of the FVAP include: (1) to inform and educate U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote; and (2) to enhance the electoral process at the federal, state, and local levels. In addition, the FVAP mission includes providing information and services to: (1) military Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs); (2) state election officials; and, (3) nearly 13,000 local government election officials. Thus, we believe that the FVAP not only has the responsibility but also is better positioned to provide feedback to local election officials, the Military Postal Service, and military service members on the importance of adhering to time frames for requesting and mailing absentee ballots.

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Suggestion 4:

We suggest the Vice President, Network Operations Management, instruct Postal Service election coordinators to inform local election officials of the military postage exemption for balloting materials.

Response:

NOM disagrees that the USPS should assume the primary responsibility of informing local election officials of the military postage exemption for balloting materials. Again, we believe that such communication is the primary responsibility of the FVAP office. The FVAP administers the federal responsibilities of the Presidential designee (Secretary of Defense), under the UOCAVA of 1986. A specific goal of the FVAP is to enhance the electoral process at the federal, state, and local levels. In executing this goal, FVAP has an extensive program of communicating all aspects of UOCAVA including the military postage exemption for balloting materials. The FVAP has several vehicles for communicating directly with nearly 13,000 local government election officials. Thus, we believe that the FVAP not only has the responsibility but also is better positioned to inform local election officials of the military postage exemption for balloting materials.

We do not believe that any of the information contained in the report or in this response is proprietary in nature requiring exemption from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

Finally, I would like to thank the Office of Inspector General for conducting this audit of the USPS' efforts to expedite the delivery of absentee ballots to and from military post offices overseas for the November 2004 national election. Please extend my gratitude to all who participated in this review.


Paul Vogel