

# GUARDSMAN

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AMERICANS gave a mixed reception to the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, and it hardly could have been otherwise, considering the controversial nature of the subject matter.

Personal concern over last Summer's urban violence has reached into every community and every home. As individuals, National Guardsmen, no less than other Americans, have opinions about the major issues of the day, and their views on the racial crisis undoubtedly will cover as wide a spectrum as those of other citizens.

But as Guardsmen, their responsibility is clear. They are one element of the police power of the State. When called upon, they must restore order, enforce the law, and help guarantee the stability of our society, under the direction of constituted civil authority. In their official capacity, their creed must be objectivity, coupled with compassion and restraint.

Thus, there can be no official National Guard response, nor even a consensus, toward the basic issues covered in the report by Governor Kerner and his fellow Commissioners.

Toward two aspects of the report, however, I believe the National Guard properly can respond.

One of these is the general tenor of the report in respect to the effectiveness of the Guard's performance in disorders of the past year.

Emphasis aplenty is laid on instances where Guardsmen were accused (often unjustifiably, as it turned out) of overreaching their authority or of displaying hostility toward participants in the disorder. Nowhere, however, does one read that Guardsmen, faced with screaming, cursing, hate-filled mobs, were taunted, spat upon, shoved, stoned, fired at, injured and killed. The wonder is that so few lost their composure and objectivity in the face of such provocation.

The report lays great stress on harsh, repressive measures of control, on indiscriminate firing of weapons, on examples of poor judgment and ineptness by Guardsmen. It does not even attempt to say that for every such discrepancy or failure, there were hundreds of instances where the Guard, and Guardsmen, performed their unpleasant chore with effectiveness, competence and mature judgment.

The second aspect on which the Guard can express itself is encompassed in some of the Commission's comments on preparations for future riots. Guard commanders do need to know more about the civil police forces in their communities, as the report suggests, and they are taking steps in every State to fill this gap in their knowledge. Likewise, they need to conduct joint training with police, and to plan jointly for emergency operations. Here, too, much already had been done before the Kerner report was issued.

Similarly, we can agree with the Commission that our objective should be to halt disorders and restore peace, not kill people. The Guard position was best expressed, perhaps, by an Adjutant General who told the Commission that he didn't intend to kill someone over a 25¢ can of beer or a television set.

The report also contains useful discussions and recommendations relating to such matters as the use of chemical agents and the shortage of communication equipment, to mention but two. They deserve our careful attention and consideration.

It is unfortunate, then, from the Guard's point of view, that the constructive, useful portions of the report, as it related to the Guard, were weakened by its failure to present a balanced, accurate, objective picture of the Guard's performance in civil disorders. ♦



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## The Kerner Commission's Report

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