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Pluses And Minuses

IT is ironic that 1967 should be a year of so much solid accomplishment for the Army and Air National Guard, yet qualify as a year of disappointment, setback and harsh criticism. Yet that is the position in which the Guard finds itself as the year closes.

Week after week, reports flowed in of new readiness plateaus attained, new missions assumed in support of the Active Forces, old tasks performed with unprecedented skill, disasters countered and their victims succored.

Guardsmen flew supplies to Southeast Asia, evacuated Viet Nam wounded, dismantled communications gear in Europe, took part in NATO exercises in Turkey, hauled flood victims out of stricken Fairbanks, Alaska; rushed vaccine to hurricane areas, and manned air defense missiles and jets fulltime in Continental defense. They ferried aircraft to and from the war zone, trained Army Reservists in water-borne operations, sand-bagged levees along the Rio Grande, battled forest fires, flew medical supplies to Venezuela, gave medical assistance to primitive Indians in Panamanian jungles, broke up a Mississippi River ice jam, and filled-in for the over-committed Regulars in numerous training exercises.

Guardsmen turned out in force on more than 50 occasions to suppress or forestall civil disorders.

Through all this, the Guard continued to maintain a potent Army-Air striking force at peak readiness for emergency mobilization and rapid deployment, and superimposed on a vigorous program of combat training an intensive course in riot control operations.

By any reasonable appraisal, it has been a busy, productive year in which the Guard and its members can feel satisfaction and pride.

Yet what were its most obvious results?

Widespread criticism from one segment of the press . . . a reorganization plan stripped of most of the provisions that would have helped counterbalance the heavy loss of units . . . and the deferment, once again, of a long-sought program to give nearly 40,000 fulltime Guardsmen a measure of equity in the conditions of their employment!

The question is: Where do we go from here?

The answer probably must be prefaced by admonition that we needn't—and mustn't—succumb to the feeling that the Guard is unappreciated, its contributions unrecognized. This is not the case.

We still have our most important asset working for us and it can be described in very few words: The Guard, and the system it represents, produce results! Guardsmen know this, State authorities appreciate our worth; and to an increasing degree, Defense officials are coming around to a recognition of our unique importance as the sole Reserve Force with a dual capability and dual responsibility.

The press criticism we received was largely unjustified, frequently exaggerated, highly superficial and occasionally biased. It can—and will—be countered with facts, performance, and an extra effort at every level to acquaint Americans with our achievements.

On Technician career status, we'll get a new day in court early in 1968 and hopefully, our cause will prevail, because it is just.

The Guard has had some bad innings but the game has hardly commenced!

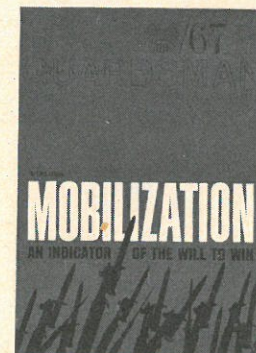
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