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Fiction —and Fact

WITH some kind of accommodation, or settlement, looming in Viet Nam, it appears likely that the Reserve Forces structure will be subjected to another examination, official and otherwise.

Men responsible for the Nation's defense can be expected to study, with some concern, the *availability* of the Guard and Reserves in time of crisis, recalling that President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara turned down a mobilization of Reserve Forces units to support the initial buildup in Viet Nam. At that time, the Active Forces were compelled to create new units from scratch, utilizing the Draft, while units of the desired types already existed at a relatively high state of training in the National Guard and Reserves. Indeed, military planners have been pursuing such an inquiry, quietly and informally, for two years or more.

Professional military leaders also have expressed impatience with the widely-publicized complaints that arose after reservists finally were mobilized, in the wake of the "U.S.S. PUEBLO" seizure. These too, therefore, can influence the judgments that are rendered.

Other elements may well start asking, as one newsman recently did, whether the present Reserve Forces structure is "in tune with the political and social climate of the times, and with foreseeable military needs." The latter point quite likely will be appended as an afterthought by the many who believe that top priority should be given to the Nation's domestic problems.

Realities frequently are distorted or ignored, hearsay takes on the character of fact, and pre-conceived opinion subtly becomes truth, when such controversial subjects are explored. It may serve a useful purpose, therefore, to set down some of the realities now, as they apply to the National Guard. In doing so, we can expose some of the fallacies that may be heard later in the guise of fact.

First, the National Guard has adapted to social change more readily than many of its critics are willing to concede. Its program for attaining a better racial balance in its membership has made steady progress and will tend to accelerate with the additional Federal support that soon may be forthcoming.

Second, the Guard was among the first to recognize the vastly altered nature of American civil disorders, and to adapt its own attitudes, training and techniques to the new requirements. Restraint became its watchword, and use of minimum force its creed, long before such concepts won full acceptance in civil law enforcement circles. After the initial shock of Detroit and Newark, the Guard moved rapidly to develop greater effectiveness in dealing with such disorders, as it demonstrated so well during the greater disaster of April, 1968.

Third, National Guard units in Viet Nam and Korea, Army and Air, have been praised almost universally by senior officers of the Active Forces for their military effectiveness and highly professional performance. This should satisfy any remaining doubters that the Guard is, in truth, the most capable and proficient Reserve Force this Nation ever has produced.

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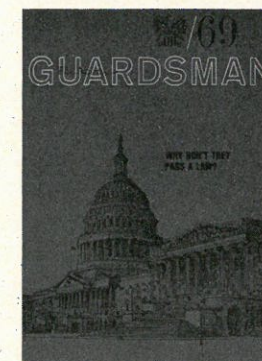
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