



THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN

The magazine of . . . by . . . and for
National Guardsmen

“OPERATION MUSTER”: A CHALLENGE TO THE GUARD

“HAVE planes—need pilots!”

That's the slogan that catches your eye in a newspaper advertisement designed for Air National Guard use in connection with Muster Day.

Just as timely would have been a similar ad for the Army Guard, bearing the catchline: “Have guns—need soldiers!” For between the two, they would have summed-up in a mere eight words the most difficult problem the Guard faces as it launches into “Operation Muster” this month.

Strength has dropped steadily in both the Army and Air branches of the Guard since Berlin Crisis units were released from active duty last Fall. Intelligently used, “Operation Muster” may well be made to serve as the instrument by which the downward trend can be reversed.

Muster Days got their start more than 1½ centuries ago when the infant Union depended wholly on the Militia for its defense. Neither in the actual events that take place nor the purpose it serves, however, does today's Muster Day resemble those held in the early 1800s. In those days, every able-bodied man between the ages of 18 and 45 was numbered, by law, among the Militia. Muster Day, also required by law, gave local commanders a periodic opportunity to count heads, inspect whatever arms the Militiamen possessed, and conduct some rudimentary drill and marksmanship training.

That kind of Muster Day became, like so much else, a victim of vastly changed times. Effective soldiers and modern military forces cannot be created in one or two sessions of training per year. As war is waged today, even once or twice a week sometimes seems too little.

Muster Day, in the original sense, now comes weekly and monthly, at Armories and Air Bases across the Nation, when Guardsmen gather to learn the complex techniques of 20th Century warfare, to keep their arms and equipment in fighting condition, and to undergo inspection and scrutiny not just annually but almost continuously.

Muster Day as a specific event has been preserved, however, in the observance held each February, on or near the birthday of America's first President and greatest citizen-soldier, George Washington. It's largely ceremonial, but it produces some eminently practical benefits. For one thing, it offers Americans an annual opportunity to learn more about the businesslike military force which their support has helped create. For another, it encourages young men to choose the Guard as their own way of serving the Nation.

This year, the strength story can be told in a few sentences. Army Guard strength is pegged by Congress at 400,000 officers and men; it now numbers fewer than 375,000. The Air Guard is authorized 72,000; today it has fewer than 68,000. Percentage-wise, the shortages are almost identical, 6.2% for each element.

It's impossible to list—or even to determine—all the reasons for the decline, but two or three deserve mention. The Berlin Crisis callup and ensuing events in Cuba undoubtedly are major factors. We in the Guard boast that we're in the Nation's first line of defense, second only to the Active forces. In times of international tension, though, this tradition is translated quickly by potential recruits into “Guardsmen go first.” For the Army Guard, there's little doubt, too, that the long-debated realignment had a dampening effect on recruiting. For the Air Guard, loss of skilled specialists, chiefly pilots, to the Active Air Force in the aftermath of Berlin, threw the structure out of kilter. To each of these problems, though, solutions gradually are being evolved and now it's time to shift the recruiting machinery into high gear.

First, and most important of all, the security of the Nation demands it. Should another emergency arise, (and they seem to come with increasing frequency these days) much can depend on how quickly the Guard can achieve a deployable, combat-ready status—and undermanned units take longer to get ready.

Second, the future of the Guard as a first-line force is jeopardized by any failure to produce units of the promised strength. In the case of the Army Guard specifically, Guard critics would have a field day at appropriations hearings if they could point out that the 400,000 strength figure can't be maintained, therefore should be lowered. In recent years, the Guard has stood firm on 400,000 as the *minimum* force it should maintain in this perilous age. Compared with this Country's Worldwide military commitments, and with the ominous possibilities posed by Berlin, Cuba, Viet Nam, et al, this seems a modest figure indeed. Now, despite whatever handicaps, we have to deliver the goods or risk our hard-won reputation as a first-line element in all respects.

Finally, there's a matter of pride. Newspaper stories said recently that the Guard would open a recruiting drive “to show McNamara.” The phraseology was inappropriate and it stirred-up a minor flap in the Pentagon, but it reflected a spirit of which the Guard need not be ashamed. Defense Secretary McNamara *did* say that he didn't think the Army Guard could reach the strength level assigned it by Congress over his own objections. We're not an organization that lets such a challenge go unanswered.

It would demonstrate an irresponsible and unworthy attitude were we to surmount our manpower problems merely “to show McNamara.” By contrast, it would reflect citizenship and responsibility in the highest degree could we show not just the Secretary but ourselves, our fellow-citizens, and our Communist enemies as well, that we fully intend to live up to our own moral commitments as citizens *and* soldiers in the finest sense of both terms. ♦

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DEAR GUARDSMEN: We get accustomed to seeing old structures fall under the wrecker's “skull-cracker” in Washington, and shining, modernistic structures (or maybe parking lots) replace them.

But for Guardsmen who can remember the National Guard Assn's less prestigious days, it may come as a shock to learn that the NGAUS' one-time “home,” the old Stewart Building at 6th and D Sts, NW—on the edge of the “downtown” shopping district—soon will be no more.

It doesn't seem long since that day in '47 when the NGAUS staff—three girls and one man—moved the organization's entire belongings in a one-ton truck, in one haul, from two rooms and bath in Stoneleigh Court. For a while, we rattled around lonely-like in the third (top) floor of the aging but refurbished brick building. Gradually, as NGAUS functions and activities increased, we found it inadequate, and 10 years ago moved into the fine, brand-new National Assn of Letter Carriers Building on the edge of the Capitol grounds. Now, soon we'll note the fourth anniversary of our move into our beautiful National Guard Memorial, here at 1 Massachusetts Ave. NW. Needless to say, this is much finer; but forgive us if we feel a touch of sentiment for a humbler abode—decrepit as it was. —AGC

OUR COVER: In the Nation's earliest days, when “Muster Day” had its start, combat-readiness was embodied in the ordinary citizen turning-out, musket in hand, with his fellows for some rudimentary drill. Today, readiness involves vastly more, as our cover illustrations show: lightly-armed ground soldiers matching wits with tanks, as they did when Texas' 49th Armd Div staged full-scale maneuvers at Ft Polk last year; and jet fighters such as the F100s of Colorado's 120th Tac Ftr Sq, which can respond in minutes to an urgent call for support from ground troops. Yet the concept for which “Muster Day” stands is today, no less than three centuries ago, that of the citizen trained in the military arts and ready to go whenever the Nation is threatened.