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A Simple Matter of Equity

IF we can characterize the long-term officers and non-commissioned officers of the National Guard as the indispensable skeleton from which the entire structure is suspended, then it is equally accurate to describe its corps of full-time Technicians as the vital internal organs which keep life and health flowing through its veins on a 24-hour, day-in, day-out basis. They are the crucially important people who think and plan and function on a daily basis, giving cohesion and continuity to the weekend surges of effort exerted by part-time Guardsmen.

There are nearly 40,000 individuals in this force of full-timers. They range from the "AST" (Administrative & Supply Technician) who keeps the records and maintains the supplies of a Company or Squadron, up through the highly-skilled mechanic who keeps a diverse array of military equipment in peak operating condition, to the Division Staff Assistants and Base Detachment Commanders, who are responsible for a broad range of managerial activities involving large military organizations.

To a greater extent than many realize, the National Guard's present unparalleled level of combat-readiness reflects the professional competence and dedication of this corps of career Guardsmen. Without detracting in the slightest degree from the sacrifices and exceptional accomplishments of the part-time people in our force, we can grant our full-timers much of the credit for creating and maintaining the unprecedented effectiveness which the Guard enjoys today.

Thus, it seems particularly unjust and ungenerous that such men as these, who are expected to display the loyalty and responsibility which career status implies, should be deprived of many of the emoluments which other Government careerists take for granted. I refer, of course, to the absence of a Federally-supported, universal retirement program for Army and Air Guard Technicians, and such related omissions as group insurance, health coverage and career security.

It sometimes seems that Technicians, like saints, are expected to draw sustenance and nobility from the very austerity which is imposed on them.

In an earlier era, this may have been an acceptable philosophy. In their initial incarnation, following World War I, the only full-timers authorized for the Guard were the "Caretakers" who tended the horses of the Artillery and Cavalry. Not long thereafter it became necessary to provide full-time mechanics for the burgeoning crop of aviation units, followed in due order by the artificers and armorers who saw to the repair and maintenance of unit weapons.

Since World War II, however, the whole picture has changed, for the full-timers and their responsibilities no less than for the rest of the Guard. Today's Technician is of an entirely different breed than his predecessor, as he has had to be. He operates supply systems of unprecedented complexity, and uses extensive computer and automatic data processing networks. He keeps all of the intricate sub-systems of a fleet of jet fighters in tip-top operating condition, repairs radar consoles, rebuilds 50-ton tanks and overhauls helicopters. He pilots huge, four-engine airplanes to Viet Nam, hauling vital cargo to our combat forces, and wins countless trophies for the proficiency with which he operates a multi-phased NIKE-HERCULES complex for the North American Air Defense Command. And he is the "Answer Man" for everyone's questions about Regulations and paperwork.

He is, in brief, a true professional, in the sense that he must master a range of complicated techniques and skills which his Caretaker

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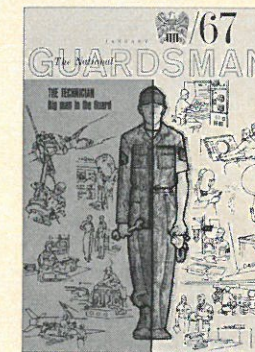


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