

AS WE SEE IT . . .



THE MILITARY SCENE

Of course you've heard the ancient crack about the doctor who boasted that the operation was a great success in principle—but the patient died.

That's just the kind of operation Secretary of Defense Charles E Wilson is proposing to perform on the National Guard.

The Secretary wants to require every young man who enlists in the Guard to start out with a six-months period of active-duty training.

That's fine in principle—but it will cut enlistments in half.

The National Guard needs basically trained recruits. But under Dr Wilson's prescription the Guard will get too much basic training and therefore not nearly enough recruits. The patient will get the medicine he needs, but he'll get so much of it that he'll starve to death for lack of solid food.

The National Guard, let's remember, is the country's first-line reserve of combat troops. Any time we need more troops than the Regular Army can provide, we have to rely on the National Guard. In the Korean war, for example, it was necessary to call eight National Guard divisions and a large number of supporting units to active duty. There is also an organization called the Army Reserve, but that is largely a reservoir of unorganized individuals—names in a card file.

The National Guard has the combat units that would be essential if we needed citizen soldiers in a hurry. The Army Reserve, with a few exceptions, does not.

The great trouble with the National Guard, as with all reserve organizations of the Armed Services, is that the citizen soldier, or airman, or sailor, or Marine, can afford only a limited amount of time for training. He has to earn a living, and that takes up most of his time and absorbs most of his interest and attention. He has to have time for recreation, and to be with his family if he has one. Or if he's a young man, he needs time to devote to education or job-training. It's to the country's interest that he does these things. Industry, education, and sound family life are the foundations of national strength.

When a young man enlists in the National Guard, therefore, he's making a voluntary gift of time and effort to the defense of his country and he deserves to be commended. If the country needs more time than he's able to give, or more men than are willing to give any time, it is up to the law-makers to apply the draft to get enough men and/or enough time.

Congress has been unwilling to do this for reserve forces, such as the National Guard. The draft applies only to the Regulars.

So the National Guard still depends on voluntary enlistments. It can't keep up the strength of its units without a steady flow of volunteers.

BUT there's no doubt that the training time available—the maximum that can be required on a voluntary

by George Fielding Eliot

basis (one armory drill a week plus six week-end days a year and an annual summer field period of two weeks) is just about enough to keep up unit efficiency provided the original intake of recruits already has had a period of active-duty training.

On this point, almost all experienced officers of the National Guard are agreed. But they don't agree that a blanket demand for six months' training is the answer. So long a period would interfere with educational programs and job prospects. Many a youth who otherwise would join the Guard would shy away from a six-month active-duty hitch.

The compromise suggestion that the Guard officers put forward seems to make sense.

It is this: Require every Guard recruit to take 11 weeks of training. This is enough to get through the hard-core basic training required for all recruits. Then adapt armory, week-end and summer training schedule so as to fill in the other subjects needed to prepare the man for whatever military specialty he may be fitted for. Eleven weeks of training won't scare off many recruits. It can be gotten through in a single summer: it won't interfere with schooling. The Air units of the National Guard already require such a period of basic training and are doing very well with it. The Army units certainly do not need more basic training than those of the Air Force.

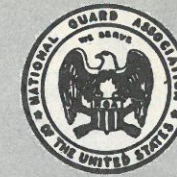
Secretary Wilson gives the erroneous impression that the National Guard is in bad shape today by saying that 83% of its enlisted men have had no prior service. He doesn't point out that 84% of its officers have had prior active service, the vast majority in combat (World War II, Korea or both). Add the 17% of senior noncoms and technicians who have also had such service, and there's an efficient framework of experienced personnel. Also about 15% of the enlisted men either have completed a period of basic training, or a course at an Army service or technical school. But all these—especially the combat-experienced officers and noncoms—are wasting assets. The veterans aren't getting any younger, and each year sees more of them leave the service. Unless the Guard gets a steady flow of recruits, its present highly efficient units (only 7% were rated unsatisfactory by Army inspectors last year) will soon decline in quality.

If the honorable Secretary thinks the National Guard is essential to the defense of the United States, let him either prescribe a reasonable training period which will enable the Guard to obtain enough volunteers, or ask Congress to extend the operation of the draft to include the needs of the Guard as well as the Army.

The six-months scheme—unless backed by the draft—will simply cripple the Guard and leave the United States without any reserve of citizen soldiers worthy of the name.

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dear guardsmen:

A good description of the NGAUS headquarters during the past few weeks might well be, "It looks like Party headquarters on election night."

What with thousands of letters, telegrams, newspaper clippings, phone calls, and teletypewriter messages; reporters, TV lights, cables, cameras, tape recorders and technicians, the offices took on the look of a well-run madhouse.

The staffers found it increasingly difficult to keep their noses above the piles of news releases that surmounted the glass-topped tables of the Council Room. One seldom could find an "outside line" to call home with the announcement, "I'll probably be late."

Each morning's mail looked like a movie fan's.

But each staff member could console himself in the fact that allies came from all quarters. Ex-Guardsmen—who had been out of contact for years—called with moral support. A cabby who drove Guardsmen to a White House conference declined his fare with the remark, "I'm privileged to be selected to drive you gentlemen." Reporters, whose "father used to be in the National Guard," wanted to do background stories about the National Guard.

Like the grim reaper, the deadline for THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN suddenly was upon the three-man editorial staff. Six days before the deadline, not one line of copy had been sent to the printer.

But, as you can see, we managed to get out a March issue, after all.

THE STAFF

contents

As We See It	Inside Front Cover
a DSC for a Deserter	2
Battle to Belong!	8
The Day the Egg Hit the Fan	14
Red Tape Barrier	18
Technical and Tactical	20
Washington Report	21
Pentagon Paragraphs	22
School Bells	31
Posting the Guard	32
Oregon Joins Hundred-Percenter	38
Sound Off	39
Luscious Linda Hoover	40

our cover

Guardsmen from Long Beach, California's combat-seasoned 234 AAA Group, raise a new sign over an old recruiting billboard to draw ironic attention to Secretary of Defense Wilson's remark that some National Guardsmen were Korean War "draft dodgers." (Wide World Photo)