

AS WE SEE IT . . .



POINT OF DIMINISHING RETURN

THERE'S a famous recipe for making rabbit stew, that begins: "First, catch a rabbit."

Every National Guard Unit Commander knows his mission is to build and train an outfit ready to take its place in the Active Army upon mobilization.

But he knows—or soon learns—that before he can train, he has to persuade enough men to join, voluntarily; and then keep on recruiting enough men not only to cover attrition but steadily swell the ranks.

Meantime, he has to push at them all the training they'll take—as many weeknight hours, as many week-ends, as many days of field training, as much Service schooling, as he can coax out of them.

All the time, he realizes that there's no law compelling anyone to line-up with the Guard, and if he makes too many demands on his men's time, "the word" will get around and recruiting—tough enough at best—will become almost impossible.

For years after World War II, the National Guard has had thrown at it, time and again, the criticism that its units were below war strength; that, upon entry into active service, they couldn't go into action until they received and trained raw draftees.

More recently, acknowledging the Guard's recruiting achievements, those critics had been patting us on the back. Ought to feel right good about it, we should.

But now there's other fault to be found. Deprived of their former focal point of criticism, the same people have begun sniping at our state of training.

Maybe there's some significance in the fact that this sniping began to be increased at about the time the National Reserve Plan first was being talked-up, and has intensified since the Reserve Forces Act was enacted; even more so since that Act and the most intensive military publicity drive in peacetime history have failed to produce anywhere near the numbers of six-months trainees for either the USAR or the Guard, that its optimistic advocates maintained it would produce to make something out of the Army Reserve in particular.

Based on the Guard's years of hard experience, its representatives were factually skeptical about the attractiveness of six-months voluntary active duty for training. But since the program has been established, the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, the President of the National Guard Assn, Adjutants General, Division and subordinate Commanders, have tried sincerely to push maximum participation by the Guard. There have been scattered excellent results, but by and large, it's been an extremely hard program to sell. Even when young Guardsmen have been sold on the program to the point of signing-up for it, parents have put their foot down. Heart of the opposition appears to lie in the fact that six months is too long a stretch—it overlaps the start of a new high school year and chops a whole semester out of a youth's start in college.

Now, the Dept of Defense is thinking about asking

Congress to authorize drafting young men directly into the Reserve Components in order to beef-up the program. Congress resoundingly turned down that proposal when it enacted RFA. Moreover, there seems to be growing sentiment for abolishing the Draft into the Active Forces at the earliest possible date. If that were to happen, the rug would be pulled out from under the whole RFA program.

At the same time, more and more pressure is being applied to make the Guard participate more fully in the six-months program. First step is a DoD directive that to maintain a strength of 412,000 in this Fiscal Year, the Guard must see to it that one of every four new men either has had prior service, or agrees to "take 6;" that if and when strength passes 412,000 every new man must fit one of those prerequisites.

We understand fully the professional soldier's desire that every man who is, or some time might be, in the Active Army, be fully trained—whatever that might be. We, who would have to lead our troops in combat, share that desire.

The difference is that we are more acutely aware of the limits to the amount of time we can demand of men who also are trying to complete their education or start working for a living, besides following a military sideline.

We know that a very sizeable chunk of training can be crammed into a young man in such a program as the voluntary eight-weeks plan the Army Guard itself was running with considerable success until the Army insisted on phasing-out that plan because it had to give the six-months program priority.

Eight weeks or so lay a solid foundation on which the young citizen-soldier can build through weekly drills and Summer field training. Those in a position to do so could stay right on for their advanced technical or specialized phases; others could return for that training in a second increment the following Summer, or take it in the form of Service School attendance as tens of thousands have done and are doing every year.

A "split" program along the lines recommended by the Adjutants General Assn last Spring should remove the basic reason for parents' and educators' objections which appear to have been a major element in the "straight" six-months program's distinctly limited success.

The question arises: which does the Pentagon want: an unpalatable program which demonstrably will produce relatively few trained men without substantially building unit strength, or an attractive program that would produce many trained men and boost unit strength? It can't have both, and certainly it appears evident that attempts to force that not only won't provide the numbers of trained reservists the Pentagon wants, but pass the point of diminishing return and gradually whittle-down unit strength as well.

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dear guardsmen:

Maybe it's because the Guard is growing all the time; maybe it's because more outfits are becoming NATIONAL GUARDSMAN-conscious—at any rate, we've been virtually snowed-under with pix of field training this season, and especially in the past month.

Good pictures they've been, too, for the most part. That's what's made it so hard to have to lay aside several hundred that we'd like to have published.

Lest you, who may be wondering how come we passed-up your prize gems, should think it's done by tossing a pile of glossies into the air and choosing those that stick to the ceiling, here's an insight into what goes into the selections:

Subject matter; scenes that are typical of the average Guardsman's Summer camp experience.

Action—preferably shots snapped while the men had their minds on what they were doing, as opposed to being curious about and watching the cameraman.

Variety—some shots—a few of each—FA firing, AAA crews intent on their guns, Engineers at typical tasks, Infantry in the field, reviews, awards presentations, vehicles servicing, mess preparation; the great variety of training and administrative tasks that all add up to field training.

What happens to the "rejects"? They go into the "morgue" to await future use for article illustration for our own magazine as well as for use with feature stories appearing in newspapers and magazines all over the world, that come to us when looking for that kind of picture.

They're all worth-while, and we thank you, one and all.

THE STAFF

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our cover

Riding to "war" in up-to-date style, a squad of California's 223 Armd Inf Bn piles out of an M59 armored personnel carrier. The amphibious M59 (see "Armored Mobility for the Doughboy," THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN, Mar & Apr 56) takes troops up to where the smallarms-range shooting begins.