

A baffling question

WHY, in the face of so much logic to the contrary, does the Department of Defense persist in attempting to reduce National Guard manning and force structure?

That question has puzzled Guardsmen, state officials and members of Congress for two decades, ever since the issue first arose during the Eisenhower Administration. It is even more baffling in this era of Total Force and all-volunteer manning, when the Guard:

- Has been assigned defense missions of greater importance.
- Has attained the most advanced peacetime readiness ever.
- Has conclusively demonstrated its ability to produce and maintain a force of 400,000 Army Guardsmen and 95,000 Air Guardsmen despite such unfavorable factors as termination of the draft, hostile or indifferent public attitudes, debilitating reorganizations, and mobilizations.

The last factor alone, in our view, is important enough to deserve greater consideration than it is being given. In a time when manpower procurement is one of the most difficult problems facing the armed forces, the Guard's ability to attract and retain 500,000 qualified men and women, year after year, is an asset that should not be wasted. It should, in fact, become the starting point of all force structure and force mix planning.

In a replay of last year, the Department of Defense has again submitted a proposal to Congress that would reduce the authorized paid-drill strength of the Army Guard from 400,000 to 379,848, the Air Guard from 95,000 to 89,128, and Air Guard structure from 91 flying units to 86. In the FY 1976 defense budget, however, it requests funds to pay for 400,000 Army Guardsmen and 94,879 Air Guardsmen. Defense spokesmen explain the discrepancy by saying that the lower authorized strengths would provide needed management "flexibility."

The record of the past does not encourage me to believe that Department of Defense will permit the Guard to maintain the higher, funded strengths any longer than Congress requires it to do so.

Other reasons the DoD proposals are so inexplicable include:

- The Guard is the least costly segment of the Armed Forces. The proposed cut of 20,152 in the Army Guard and 5,872 in the Air Guard would produce minimum savings, with maximum harmful effect on force structure.

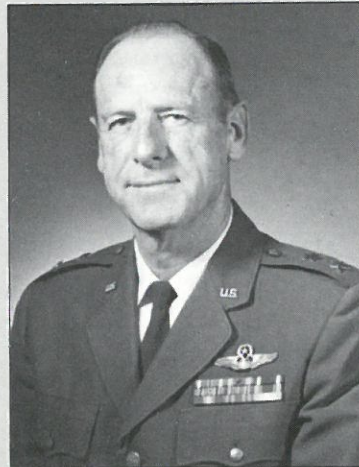
- There are stated requirements for more, not fewer, forces. The service chiefs have testified that the force proposed in the budget is only marginally adequate.

- Any cuts in the Guard would run directly counter to state emergency needs, ignoring the individual and collective urging of the governors that no reductions be made.

We have stated our case to the Subcommittee on Manpower, Senate Armed Services Committee. We will state it again before a comparable subcommittee of the House. We are hopeful that again, as in the past, they will see the merit of our stand and will mandate strengths floors of 400,000 and 95,000.

Let me end this expression of NGAUS views by quoting from a letter one of the states' chief executives recently sent to President Ford. Gov. Meldrim Thomson Jr. of New Hampshire wrote on Feb. 19:

"While I have many concerns about the proposed national budget, I am most deeply disturbed at the proposed reduction of the Army National Guard and Air National Guard. At no time in the history of our country is it more important for us to recognize the wise advice of our first President to always be fully prepared to defend ourselves against aggression. If you must cut some of the services now provided for in the current budget, I do hope you will not do it in the area of the Guard."



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features

WINTER TRAINING

Guardsmen take advantage of cold and snow for challenging winter training ...

... IN VERMONT — THE BIATHLON	2
... IN ALASKA — JACK FROST	6
... AT CAMP RIPLEY — TWO VIEWS	8
... IN WEST VIRGINIA — SPECIAL FORCES	10

THE SPIRIT OF THE MILITIA

A bicentennial salute to the National Guard.

11

IN SUPPORT OF THE GUARD

The NGAUS presents the Guard viewpoint to the Congress.

25

GOVERNORS OPPOSE CUTS

27

WHAT THE SECRETARY REALLY SAID

28

THE SPIRIT OF THE ARMORY

30

WHERE NGAUS STANDS ON MAJOR ISSUES

Inside back cover

departments

WASHINGTON REPORT 12

YOU OUGHT TO KNOW 20

LETTERS 22

PENTAGON PARAGRAPHS 32

POSTING THE GUARD 34

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The spirit of the militia — an NGAUS bicentennial salute to the National Guard (see page 11).

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