

An argument for action

WE finally are engaged, as a nation, in the debate that should have taken place five years ago, before the decision was made to experiment with an All-Volunteer Force.

National leaders might have reached the same conclusions had the debate occurred then, but the nation would have comprehended far better the hazards, problems and potential costs of abandoning the draft. It is widely conceded today that the momentous decision to terminate the draft and rely instead on volunteers was based on the most superficial of evaluations. It was largely a product of anti-Vietnam war hysteria. Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Armed Services Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel, aptly expressed it while opening hearings on the issue recently: "In my opinion, the draft card burnings, campus riots, draft evaders, and sit-ins of that era had more to do with the decision to end the draft than did any careful analysis of the merits of the AVF."

Even the Gates Commission study, which was presented to the nation as an objective, exhaustively researched analysis, was seriously flawed by wishful thinking and overly-optimistic "guesstimates." Many of its most basic assumptions turned out, in retrospect, to be invalid. Two examples among many:

— The Commission findings were based on a perceived need for 265,000 new enlisted accessions each year for armed forces of 2.1 million. The annual turnover has been far greater, and the actual requirement has turned out to be between 400,000 and 470,000 annually, more than 50 per cent higher.

— The study also assumed continued existence of an "effective standby draft" through which the Armed Forces could quickly commence an emergency expansion. In actuality, the Selective Service machinery has been driven so deeply into "deep standby" that it would take *seven months* following some future D-Day to produce the first increment of 100,000 trained individuals for the Armed Forces.

Now, it is quite apparent even to the uninformed that the AVF is in trouble. The Active Services — particularly the Army — are experiencing difficulty in attracting a

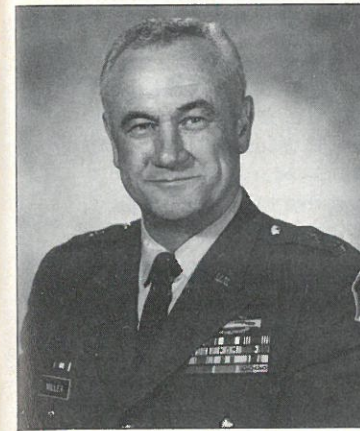
sufficient *number* of volunteers. Moreover, there has been a small but indicative downturn in the *mental level* of those volunteering. The National Guard and Reserves, which play a far more critical defense role today than they did a few years back, are hard hit by both manpower losses and a sharp decline in the mental levels of their recruits.

The Selected Reserves dropped from 910,770 down to 832,529 in just two years, a loss of 78,241! The Army Guard and Army Reserves, hardest hit, now stand at about 560,000, as contrasted with a peacetime requirement of 640,000 and a wartime "structure strength" of 706,000. They can't rely on the IRR (Individual Ready Reserve) for M-Day fillers to fill that huge gap as contemplated, either, for the IRR is plunging rapidly downward to extinction! The Army estimates its IRR will be short an estimated 380,000 trained individuals by 1982 unless drastic action is taken soon.

The rapidly-increasing cost of military personnel likewise helped prompt the long-deferred AVF debate. Personnel-related costs consumed nearly 60 per cent of the defense budget last year and will drop only slightly, percentage-wise, in FY 1978. Many political leaders believe some form of compulsory service would be less costly than the AVF, though we must concede in all honesty that actual savings probably would fall considerably short of perceptions.

However, if it were necessary to expand our Armed Forces significantly to cope with a major emergency, the cost might very quickly become unbearable. Even the Gates Commission estimated the cost of a three-million-member force in the 1977-79 timeframe would be \$6 billion more than our present 2.1-million force. More recent estimates (and probably more accurate as well) place the cost for such a force at an added \$29 billion! That's only for armed forces comparable to those we maintained during the Vietnam War. Think how much more would be required for even a small-scale NATO emergency!

It's time to review the AVF experience, as these and numerous other factors clearly suggest, and Senator Nunn should be commended for initiating such a review. It's time to ask if the volunteer system is working and if



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not, why not? We need to examine alternatives to AVF. Should we revert to straight conscription? Would some form of national service better serve our needs? Or can AVF be made to fill our requirements with some carefully-designed alterations?

In the meantime, the Guard and Reserve cannot wait for the long and careful consideration such a review implies. We need help *now* to restore our manning levels. This Association — along with others representing the entire Guard/Reserve community — strongly urges Congress to provide recruiting/retention incentives. Our recommendation: educational assistance to attract non-prior service enlistees, and a cash re-enlistment bonus to encourage retention. If incentives are not provided *quickly*, Reserve Component strength very likely will drop to a point from which recovery will be impossible without a costly and time-consuming "crash" effort. Until Guard/Reserve strength is restored, our national ability to defend ourselves is weakened.

If the AVF review produces a decision to stick with the volunteer system, such incentives unquestionably will be required for the long haul. If that review produces a decision to adopt some form of compulsory or national service, use of the incentives can be discontinued.

Push on with your review, Senator! It's long overdue! But in the meantime . . .

The Guard and Reserves need help now!

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COVER: Ohio Army and Air Guardsmen team up to rescue a snowbound Springfield resident during the Freeze of '77. The Air Guardswoman is a member of the 178th Tac Ftr Gp; the Army Guardsman is assigned to D Troop, 1/238th Air Cavalry. (Photo by Capt Steve Stone, 196th PID).

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