

An unfair report

A recent report from the General Accounting Office, watchdog over federal spending, severely criticizes several aspects of National Guard and reserve training.

It is highly critical, for example, of time spent on activities other than mission-oriented job training. It says that Guardsmen and reservists spend, on the average, 22 per cent of their drill time and 16 per cent of annual training time in idleness. Another 28 per cent of drill time and 23 per cent of annual training time goes to "other jobs and general military activities."

As examples of the latter, it mentions the diversion of individuals from mission training to satisfy excessive administrative requirements imposed by higher headquarters. To support that view, it notes the heavy emphasis placed on purely administrative functions in most inspections.

Other weaknesses perceived by GAO include:

- Misuse, or unproductive use, of training time, aggravated by lack of supervision over individuals to insure full participation.
- Unavailability of adequate training facilities near home stations.
- Equipment shortages, inoperability or obsolescence.

Authors of the report also see a need for better coordination between active and reserve forces, perhaps through expansion of existing mutual support and affiliation programs. This would make the active services' equipment, facilities, training expertise and administrative support available to more Guard/reserve units to enhance their training.

There is much that is valid in the GAO report, but its value is greatly reduced by several major flaws.

It brushes aside as "inadequate" an array of on-going programs to improve mission training, with no mention of progress attained.

It indicates no consideration of the Guard's state mission.

It views "other jobs and general military activities" as bad, per se, failing to recognize that much more goes into the creation and maintenance of an effective military unit than mission training alone.

It displays the defect that so often characterizes a report of this kind, of grasping at quick-and-easy sure-cures when such obvious answers already have been examined and rejected by those more familiar with the problems.


Example No. 1: When adequate training areas and modern equipment are not available near home stations, relocate units to the proximity of active posts, where such assets are available. Such a solution ignores the need to place units where manpower lives and works. It likewise ignores the continuing effort the services have made to accomplish just what GAO proposes, to the greatest *feasible* extent.

Example No. 2: As its major recommendation, it urges DoD to breach the 48-drill barrier, particularly for the National Guard, on the assumption that many units, and many individuals within units, can satisfy mission training requirements with fewer drills. In this proposal, GAO dismisses as inconsequential such factors as: (1) The extent to which easier-to-train units and individuals are used to support the mission training of others, after their own training requirements have been met; (2) The variety of other military chores that must be performed if a unit is to maintain a capability for going operational on short notice to meet both state emergency and national defense requirements; (3) The adverse effect on manpower retention if a cut-back in drills reduces both pay and retirement credit.

The Guard is the first to agree that we must continue and expand our effort to utilize training time more efficiently, and to eliminate such wasteful deficiencies as idleness. But GAO's insistence on such solutions as cutting back the 48 drills, and its unwillingness to recognize the progress already made, does the Guard a disservice.



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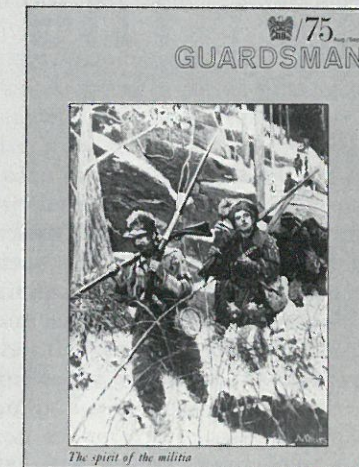
features

THE REFUGEES ARRIVE <i>Guard aid is a natural when thousands of Vietnamese turn to the U.S. for help.</i>	2
THE TOTAL FORCE TEAM <i>That's what it was, in practice, during two JCS exercises.</i>	6
MARCH ON QUEBEC <i>The spirit of the militia - 1775.</i>	10
SOLID SUPPORT OF THE GUARD <i>National Governors' Conference report has historical flavor.</i>	12
WHERE MATTERS STAND <i>A status report on 1974 resolutions.</i>	26
SEATTLE OFFERS 'SPECTACULAR'	34
STEADFAST AFTER TWO YEARS	36
THE "MARCH FOR LUNCH BUNCH"	40
HERITAGE GALLERY ARTIFACTS ARRIVING	48

departments

WASHINGTON REPORT	16
YOU OUGHT TO KNOW	24
PEOPLE IN THE NEWS	38
POSTING THE GUARD	42
PENTAGON PARAGRAPHS	46

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Capt Daniel Morgan and his Virginia Riflemen embody the spirit of the militia as they led the march on Quebec (see page 10).

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