



Major General William J. McCaddin, President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

35th Anniversary of Normandy D-Day a Reminder of Service to the Nation

June 6, 1944. On that date, the United States, Great Britain, and Canada sent the mightiest armada the world had ever seen across the English Channel to commence the liberation of western Europe.

The most powerful invasion force in history fought its way ashore on the beaches of Normandy, suffering heavy casualties in the process.

The Guard, and Guardsmen, constituted some of the most critical elements in that force. The 29th Infantry Division of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia, was one of the two divisions in the initial assault element. New Jersey's 102d Armored Cavalry Regiment was a part of a follow-up wave, that afternoon. Beyond that, hundreds of Guardsmen were scattered, as individuals, through the entire force, taken from their own units after mobilization to cadre new units or attend officer training or service schools.

It was my privilege to serve as spokesman for a delegation representing NGAUS in France early in June, at ceremonies commemorating the 35th anniversary of D-Day.

Two events were of particular interest to Guard delegations. The first was an observance at Vierville on Omaha Beach, at the monument which this Association erected ten years ago. The massive granite monument stands on an old German pillbox, from which a German 88 took a terrible toll on Virginia's 116th Infantry on D-Day. There, sizable contingents from both the 29th Infantry Division Association and the 28th Division Association joined with the NGAUS in a solemn ceremony of rededication to the principles for which those WWII Guardsmen fought.

It was a moving experience, looking down on the scene where personal heroism was the rule rather

than the exception, and where so many Guardsmen gained so large a degree of immortality! There on the beach and further inland, men and women still live who remember specific soldiers, and specific incidents, where Guardsmen and their fellow fighting men risked all to capture a strong-point, or to protect a French child, or to shield their squad.

The inscriptions on the monument at Vierville offer factual recitations of accomplishments of which present day Guardsmen can be proud. On one face, the inscription reads:

World War II

"In the greatest war in history, citizen-soldiers of the National Guard fought in every action in which the United States Army engaged, compiling brilliant combat records in every corner of the world. Some 300,034 National Guardsmen were mobilized in 1940-41, as America made ready for a conflict that was to engulf much of the civilized world, and thus added 18 combat divisions and hundreds of smaller units to America's military forces. National Guardsmen took part in 34 major campaigns and seven assault landings, including the historic assault which took place on the beaches below this site on June 6, 1944. Thousands became casualties within view of this site, many of them cut down by fire from the battered enemy pillbox upon which this monument was erected."

A similar message reciting the Guard's First World War performance adorns another face of the monument:

World War I

"More than 400,000 National Guardsmen answered the call to arms when the United States mobilized its forces in 1918, and virtually every Guardsman served in France with the historic American Expedi-

tionary Force. Approximately every fifth soldier in the A.E.F. was a citizen-soldier of the National Guard, as were 18 of the 42 combat divisions that served on French soil. National Guardsmen fought in every battle in which American troops were engaged, and of the 48,909 American battle deaths, 18,238—or four out of every ten—were Guardsmen who gave their lives that the people of France, Belgium and Holland might live, once again, in freedom and peace."

Since those world-encompassing conflicts, Guardsmen have been called to duty, and have served effectively, even heroically, during the Korean War, the Berlin Crisis of the early Sixties, and the Vietnam War.

As I read those inscriptions, thoughts of those later callups flashed through my mind, and how many lives were disrupted on each occasion when Guardsmen and Reservists were summoned, still another time, to drop their civilian pursuits and devote as long as two years to the service of the nation.

A deep anger also moved me as I recalled an official report only two weeks earlier, in which at least two members of Congress declared gratuitously in opposing resumption of draft registration: "Consider now that we did not use the Reserves or Guard in Korea, and we did not use them in Vietnam. Where, then, is the evidence suggesting we will ever use them?" For them, we can only suggest a re-reading of military history, and—some soul searching.

In the meantime, let today's Guardsmen hold their heads high. Your predecessors earned and re-earned a place of honor in America's pantheon of heroes. You can be proud of the uniform you wear, and the banner you carry.

1878



1979

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THE NATIONAL GUARD MAGAZINE (ISSN 0163-3945) is published monthly, by the National Guard Association of the United States, with editorial and advertising offices at One Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Telephone (202) 789-0031. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 1979 by the National Guard Association of the U.S. All rights reserved. All members of the NGAUS receive NATIONAL GUARD. Nonmember subscriptions: \$3 per year domestic; \$4 per year foreign. Bulk rate for 100 or more copies to the same address: \$2.50 each. Single copies 50¢. The Editor welcomes original articles bearing on national defense, with emphasis on application to or implications for the National Guard. Manuscripts and artwork must be accompanied by return postage; no responsibility is assumed for safe handling. Opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily represent official NGAUS positions or policy. Likewise, publication of advertising cannot be deemed an endorsement thereof by this Association or its members.

August 1979

NATIONAL GUARD

Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States (Formerly THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN MAGAZINE)
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COVER: Duty by Alabama Army National Guardsmen during the trucking crisis depicted in cover design by Tom Powers of Bill Duffy Associates. News photo from United Press International.

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