



Major General William J. McCaddin, President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

DRAFT REGISTRATION: A TEST WE CAN'T AFFORD TO FAIL

Now it is going to be up to the American people—all of us, not just the young men of 19 and 20—to determine whether the Selective Service registration this summer will send a message of national resolve to our friends, our foes and the uncommitted.

The legislation to provide the funds to conduct the registration and to upgrade the dormant status of the Selective Service System came six full months after the initial Presidential request. The legislative process started at the height of the nation's frustration over the holding of the U.S. hostages in Iran and at the time of a great wave of national indignation over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The call for registration was not warmly received by all those who normally stand four-square for strong national security. There were questions as to why the administration, which adamantly opposed registration in the summer and fall of 1979, was unexpectedly in favor of the move in January, 1980. A viewpoint was even expressed that there was no correlation with the success or failure of the all-volunteer force concept and that, the only purpose of registration was to provide a signal of our determination to be ready to defend U.S. national interests, if need be.

A debate ensued in which the principal issue seemed to be whether registration now would, or would not, substantially improve the Selective Service System's ability to speed up the time needed to identify and mobilize those needed for military service in a time of national crisis.

Whether we like it or not, the entire process has taken on the feared symbolic effect and, indeed, a message is being formulated. This makes it all the more important that registration be accomplished cleanly, quickly—and quietly. This is not a matter in which

the 19 and 20 year old registrants hold all of the cards that will determine just how the registration will proceed and what message it will convey to the world as to our "resolve."

True, there is going to be pressure on these young men to follow in the footsteps of those who helped to turn our Vietnam era effort into a shambles and who shattered families, communities and the nation itself. For example, a *Washington Post* columnist, named William Greider, said he hoped that U.S. youth would "hesitate, if not resist, at the Post Office door."

But those who are opposed to registration are capable of far more than pressure on the 19 and 20 year olds. They are capable of exerting pressure on all of us. What makes the whole affair so tawdry is their unwillingness to see the potential, ultimate disaster in dividing this nation once again as we enter what has been widely described as "a most dangerous decade" for the United States and its traditional interests.

The ink was scarcely dry on the new registration law when the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) announced it would take the issue to the courts. Some of the distinguished civil libertarians see a requirement for military service as "indentured servitude" and they prefer to "let John do it." But the main thrust of the ACLU case in 1980 appears to be the fact that Congress did not make any provision for the registration and potential drafting of women.

Never mind that the wartime Army requirement for women is not large enough to warrant a draft of the ladies—what we now have (says ACLU) is reverse discrimination against men! What we now have is a Catch 22 situation which could, conceivably, delay the scheduled July 21–August 2 summertime registration and defer it to the

fall. This would, in all likelihood make it both a campus and a partisan election issue. One can only speculate upon the spectacle which might then take place, artfully engineered, in the glaring light of the television camera lens.

We truly cannot afford to be diverted by a public debate on the side issues. We have got to move ahead with this serious resolve. The Kremlin is undoubtedly following this U.S. issue with great interest. How it comes out will be of greater significance to the movers and shakers in Moscow than the counting of Olympic gold medals.

For those of us in the National Guard, there is great significance to the way in which our nation plans—or fails to plan—for the possibility of a rapid transition from peacetime to wartime forces.

We understand, as do the opponents of registration, that having young Americans register now will not add one, single trained soldier or airman to the force which is going to meet the first enemy thrusts should it someday come to an armed showdown between the two super powers.

Registration in itself will not put any new manpower into the volunteer force of the National Guard. But we are persuaded that, given the appropriate and necessary support by the Defense Department, we can provide Army and Air National Guard units ready to take their places alongside active forces in a wartime structure. We feel it would be a terrible thing if, under the pressure of responding to a wartime environment, we would then have to scramble around to divert the manpower that would be needed to conduct registration—and all that goes with it in wartime—under the gun, so to speak.

Registration has been, for several years, one of the goals of this Association. We also stand for the screening

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NATIONAL GUARD, August 1980. 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 1980 by the National Guard Association of the U.S. All rights reserved. All members of the NGAUS receive NATIONAL GUARD. Nonmember subscriptions: \$4 per year domestic; \$5 per year foreign. Bulk rate for 100 or more copies to the same address: 25¢ 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.

NATIONAL GUARD

Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States

AUGUST 1980

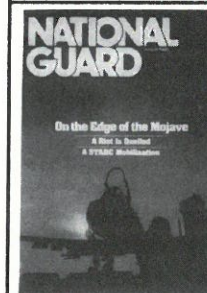
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COVER: An A-10 prepares for a sortie at sunset during RDF-RED FLAG. See story page 14. Photo by 1361st AVS, USAF and design by Tom Powers of Bill Duffy Associates.

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