



CPT Daniel Black Miles Jr.

# RETURN FIRE

## THE OTHER SIDE OF REPORTING ON TRAINING IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Like MG Bruce Jacobs (ret.), publisher of NATIONAL GUARD, said in his excellent article entitled "Honduras Is Not The Issue!" I've been somewhat irritated at some national coverage of mission-oriented training activities by National Guard elements in Central America.

As a Missouri National Guard public affairs officer and copublisher of five newspapers, primarily located in west central Missouri, I recognize there isn't much we can do about adverse reporting. Rather, we should examine the reason why so much attention has been focused on mission-oriented training in Central America.

My view on "Honduras Is Not The Issue!" is whether all of us, as National Guard members, recognize that for better or worse a spirited, often critical print and broadcast media are a fact of life. Maintaining that spirit of a free press is included in that oath we took upon entering the military in pledging to uphold and protect the Constitution of the United States.

The real root of the question is whether all of us, not just overextended 13-person public affairs detachments, are really working to keep print and broadcast outlets truly informed about the National Guard. Yes, there seems to be an ongoing effort to provide the national media with information. However, are we overlooking our small-market hometown newspapers, television stations and radio stations?

As a small group newspaper publisher, I often attend regional, state and some national newspaper conventions and conferences. There are the "big fellows" present at these events too. If percentages were totaled, though, on the basis of media markets and circulation, most are small-town publishers just like myself.

Since I'm very proud to be a member of the National Guard, sometimes

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out of sheer interest I ask the smaller media markets represented if they have a National Guard unit in their community or county. The answer is often affirmative, but is usually followed with an observation, such as: "Yes, we have one. But I don't know much about it. Never hear anything from them."

Are all of us truly keeping the hometown media informed about our activities and the National Guard story? I think not.

Unlike USA TODAY, a small market editor or broadcast outlet manager can't spend a week in his hometown without seeing a sizable portion of the citizenry—either while drinking coffee at a local restaurant, church or grocery store and even on the town square. As an end result, they're often more accurate than the national media. Since many National Guard units deploying overseas for training are from small towns and cities, a real opportunity exists to tell the good news about the National Guard.

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Perhaps the real reason we're being the focus of questions is because we haven't adequately worked to see that OCONUS training is publicized, before and after the fact.

In Winner, South Dakota, they know about National Guard units training overseas because someone in the 110-member 730th Medical Company went to the trouble of inviting an Advocate staff member to cover unit participation in REFORGER. While the newspaper underwrote the cost of the reporter's airfare and lodging, the unit saw that Advocate news editor Dan Bechtold was met at an airport in Stuttgart, West Germany. From that point, Bechtold lived and trained with the 730th Medical Company. Upon returning, the Advocate published a 12-page tabloid detailing training by the unit during REFORGER.

Coverage by the Advocate, located in a town of 4,500, was considered unusual enough that a sizable story on the special tabloid appeared in the April 7, 1986, edition of the Publisher's Auxiliary, a national weekly newspaper geared to the newspaper industry. And all because the 730th Medical Company, South Dakota Army Guard, went to the trouble of encouraging their local newspaper to take part.

No, this isn't the complete answer to countering adverse and sometimes critical coverage of National Guard activities. Yet, the effect by the 730th Medical Company can be duplicated in varying degrees by units everywhere. And perhaps, the accurate story of Total Force participation stateside and on foreign soil can be better explained. After all, we value the support of our hometown friends and neighbors much more than the opinions of national journalists.

Yes, we must train hard—all of us, together, the active Army, National Guard and Reserve. We've been doing this since the Dick Act of 1903. The system does work—but let all of us work a little harder at keeping our small market hometown news media and citizenry up-to-date on our training and accomplishments.

National Guard

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## FEATURES

**Training in Honduras for the Keystoneers 16**  
Two batteries of Pennsylvania Army National Guard artillerymen spent their two-week annual training on Honduran soil. The exercise, known as a deployment for training, was designed to boost the readiness of top-ranked Guard units. The exercise was a "total" experience for the Guardsmen.



**National Guard Training in Central America 21**  
Guard units from throughout the United States deployed to Central American countries for joint exercises during their annual training. Each unit had its share of rewarding experiences, military and cultural.



**A Vacation in El Salvador. No Kidding! 24**  
Until recently it was referred to by many as a little paradise, now it is in the center of international controversy. Joe McRoberts and his wife, Eunice, a native Salvadoran, return after 10 years to a changed El Salvador.



**What Price for Democracy 28**  
Lt Cdr Kenneth B. Sherman gives a personal account of experiences and beliefs concerning the cost for maintaining a democracy. He discusses the important role the military plays in protecting and continuing democracy.



**Legal Implications in Central America 32**  
Alyn H. Denham, a Mississippi researcher, lawyer, discusses the international legality of Cuban and Nicaraguan actions in Central America and the reactions of the United States.



## COVER:

With pencil and sketch pad, PV2 Dana Hackett, left, with the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, and a Honduran soldier overcome the language barrier during training exercises in Honduras. Photo, CPT John Maietta. Cover, Johnson Design Group.



## DEPARTMENTS

Return Fire	2
Washington Tie-Line	4
Views from the Field	6
Capital Focus	9
Newsbreaks	10
Pentagon Paragraphs	34
People	36
Posting the Guard	40
Publisher's Notebook	46

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