THE NATIONAL GUARD IN 1984

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The support of a strong national defense has taken an even higher priority as a result of recent events around the world. Probably the most dramatic was the destruction of the Korean Air Lines Boeing 747 by the Soviets. This event has riveted the attention of the American people to national defense issues. No single event has shown without the cover of pretense or protective rhetoric, the true nature of our adversaries. This is true no matter what interpretation of the Korean Air Lines event one chooses: intentional act or tragic mistake.

The threat to peace continues in other areas, too. The Soviet presence in Afghanistan continues, the war between Iran and Iraq near the strategic oil is a permanent danger. In Europe, Soviet aggression grows. Though America is at peace, the great danger that one or more of these situations could become something much more serious remains. As I head into the second year of my presidency of our Association, I can report some progress in improving the condition of national defense through improvements in the combat readiness of the Army and Air National Guard.

Looking back, 1983 was a good year for the Guard, as NATIONAL GUARD magazine has reported on several occasions. The defense authorization bill signed into law by President Reagan in late September contained several provisions vital to the well-being of the Guard. One was an amendment that guarantees state control of the Guard in peacetime. This provision is the very embodiment of the militia clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Another important provision of the authorization bill was enactment of one of the VGAUS's long-time priorities: portal-to-portal medical protection for Guardsmen traveling to and from training or other inactive duty training.

The year 1983 also saw improvement in the personnel strength of the National Guard, Army and Air. The greatest numerical gains came in the Army Guard, which reached an end strength of 417,000. The Air Guard is at wartime strength of 102,000, although shortages of personnel in critical skills remain.

It is, however, in the area of recruiting and retention that defines the future of the Guard. Perhaps the most important event of 1983 besides the continued procurement of modern, deployable equipment. The year 1983 saw the end of the most serious economic recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. That recession, we must all admit, created a favorable recruiting and retention climate—for economic reasons—but one we hope will not be repeated. Therefore, I believe our highest non-budget priority for 1984 must be to see again for those same reasons. Therefore, I believe our highest non-budget priority for 1984 must be to see again for those same reasons. Therefore, I believe our highest non-budget priority for 1984 must be to see again for those same reasons.

1983 was a good year for the National Guard, and my expectations for the coming year are high. As we enter the second year of my term as the VGAUS president, I am hopeful it will be a year of continued legislative support and equipment modernization. Since these areas are largely out of our hands, "hopeful" is as descriptive as I can be. I am also expecting improvements in our training and combat readiness, and the Guard meets its responsibilities.