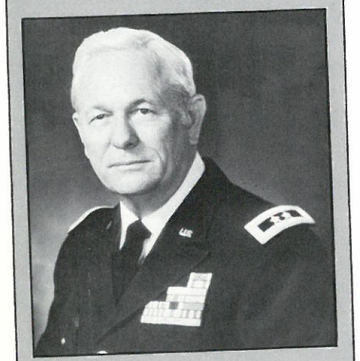

Henry W. McMillan
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"small additional steps that will guarantee success"

OFFICIALS who must make the critical decisions on our defense posture are not in an enviable position. They are confronted on the one hand by burgeoning costs and heavy pressures to reduce defense spending, and on the other by a frightening awareness that America must not be permitted to fall behind Soviet Russia's expanding military power.

But in today's environment, too often the choice becomes not *whether* to further weaken our military forces but merely *where* to make the cuts.

The problem is intensified by the inability of many Americans to understand "why peace costs more than war", as an influential Congressional leader phrased it when the spending tab for the first post-Viet Nam year turned out to be as large as its wartime predecessors.

This seeming paradox can be explained, but the explanations are not readily acceptable to people who expected a "peace bonus" once the shooting stopped. First, inflation has taken its toll in defense as well as personal spending. Defense dollars buy far less than they used to. Second, manpower costs have skyrocketed under the impetus of record pay raises and "all-volunteer" outlays. Third, we must replenish war-depleted stocks of weapons, equipment and ammunition. And fourth, the need to maintain technological superiority demands heavier emphasis on research and development.

Unfortunately, many Americans interpret the so-called "detente" in a far rosier light than actual progress to date justifies, making it even harder for them to understand why defense costs can't be reduced drastically.

In this continuing effort to reduce spending, competition for every defense dollar has become ruthless. In the larger sense, the Guard/Reserve has fared better than the Active Forces. In the past six years, the Guard/Reserve share of the total defense budget has doubled, from 2.5% to about 5%. (In actual dollars, the amount has climbed from $2.20 billion to $4.44 billion).

But in some specific areas, the Guard and Reserve have been denied relatively minor sums for which the return in terms of enhanced readiness would have far exceeded the costs. A case in point is the decision, effective last year, when the recruiting problem was at its peak, that the Army Guard and Army Reserve no longer could put new recruits on the payroll until they had been sent off to REP training. Another example is the Dept. of Defense's reluctance to authorize anything less than a full six years of active drill participation for new enlistees (the so-called "3 x 3" program was tested—three years of active drilling, three years in the Inactive Ready Reserve—but the test ended 31 Dec. and the DoD says the program's cost-effectiveness must be proved before it will consider its renewal).

Perhaps the most striking example of withholding support at a critical juncture is the failure of both the Pentagon and Congress to provide additional low-cost recruiting incentives for the Guard and other reserves.

It was pressures to reduce spending that led to formulation of the Total Force Policy. Guard/Reserve units cost far less to maintain than comparable Active units. It was recognized that, given more equipment and training support, Guard/Reserve units could attain higher readiness levels and thus supplant some of the more expensive Active Forces. But today, ironically, the very pressures that gave rise to Total Force are leading to false economies which jeopardize attainment of the desired readiness levels. Time and energy that should be spent on direct readiness-producing efforts now must be devoted to recruiting.

With millions already expended to make the Guard and Reserve a more responsive, all-volunteer force, we think it's time to take those small, additional steps that will guarantee success. ◈

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The National

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Although she is not a Guardswoman, Army PVT Deborah McKoon of the WAC Band aptly conveys the spirit of women in Army green as she salutes in front of the United States flag. —(Army photo by Sam Casey)

Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States. Published monthly except in August. **Publication office 1 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington D.C. 20001.** Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. *All correspondence and address changes should be addressed to 1 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.* "THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN" welcomes original articles bearing on National defense, with emphasis on the Army and Air National Guard. Manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage, and no responsibility is assumed for their safe handling. Domestic subscriptions for home delivery: $2 per year. A year's subscription is included within NGAUS members' annual dues. Subscriptions to foreign addresses, $3.00 per year. Single copies, 25¢.

FEBRUARY, 1974

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