

All-Vol due for rethinking

FORMER Congressman F. Edward Hébert, while chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, liked to tell All-Volunteer Force advocates: "If this nation wants All-Volunteer forces, it will have to draft 'em!"

In less pungent language, Senator John C. Stennis, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, says the same thing: "Like it or not, we're going to have to go back to the Selective Service System for obtaining some of our men. The quicker we realize that and get it to the people the better."

And Senator Sam Nunn, whose influence on military affairs is expanding rapidly, says: "The All-Volunteer Force is now operating on the ragged edge of viability, with mushrooming recruiting costs, unacceptable rates of attrition, severe shortages of skills (especially those of doctors), shortages in qualified recruits, and dangerously under-manned, lower-quality reserve forces."

On the other side of the issue, administration officials and pro-AVF members of Congress have been using every available forum to proclaim the All-Volunteer Force as a huge success. Their effort to sell AVF to the American public has been so intense that it often has drowned out the voices of critics.

Senator Edward W. Brooke, for example, says: "The AVF is clearly serving its intended purpose of providing the military manpower necessary for national security in a manner compatible with national traditions at acceptable cost."

And Maj Gen Eugene P. Forrester, commander of the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, avers: "With four years' experience, we are making the Active All-Volunteer Army work; we have been able to meet our quotas constantly."

What Senator Brooke and General Forrester say is not as crucial to the debate as what they omit or gloss over. In the general's statement, the term "Active" should be thrice under-scored. As far as meeting the

needs of the Reserve forces is concerned, the All-Volunteer Force has been an utter disaster — and any system that does not provide adequately for the Guard and Reserves as well as for the Active forces is *not a success and not acceptable!*

Senator Nunn points out in a recent paper that any intelligent discussion of the AVF must recognize that "the AVF is to a large extent a political child of the draft card burnings, campus riots, and violent protest demonstrations of the late 1960s and early 1970s."

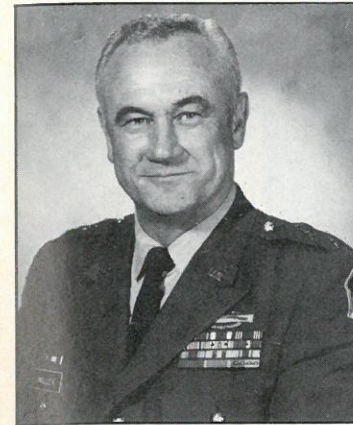
It was indeed and, while that alone does not make it "devoid of merit," as the senator points out, it does suggest that a reassessment in these less tumultuous times is warranted.

Moreover, General Forrester's last comment should have a small but important qualifier: "... we have been able to meet our quotas constantly *up to this point!*"

In the search for quality, quantity has started to fall off in Active recruiting. Guard and Reserve recruiting has fallen far behind in *both* quantity and quality. Attrition is shockingly great. Forty percent of those who enlist in the Active services quit before they complete their first hitch. That's 160,000 out of a total year's crop of 400,000. In the Army Guard, 45.8 percent currently are dropping out before ending their first term. Those attrition rates represent an appalling loss in money and time, by commanders, recruiters, and trainers.

What often is glossed over by AVF proponents is that the idea was born, and the concept nursed through its first five years, in a highly favorable environment — high unemployment, ample numbers of eligible males in the population, a rapidly shrinking Active military establishment, and escalating military pay scales. Look only a short way into the future, however, and the prospects for a volunteer military grow bleak.

The number of 17- to 21-year-old males will drop rapidly in the next decade, from 2.15 million down to 1.7 million in the 1980s. Competition for manpower will in-



Maj Gen Richard A. Miller (Oregon Army Guard), President, National Guard Association of the United States

tenify and the *cost* will rise with demand. Unemployment is slowly easing. The military establishment has levelled off in size. Public pressures make it unlikely that military pay scales will do more than keep pace with civilian levels and perhaps not even that.

These points and many others are dwelt on in articles elsewhere in this issue. One article reviews the performance of the AVF concept and its prospects for the future. Another article reports on the manpower predicament in which the Guard and Reserve find themselves at the AVF's five-year mark. And two Wisconsin company commanders discuss recruiting-retention problems in a third article.

Those of a pragmatic turn of mind will say that it is no longer politically feasible to return to the draft system of old. Perhaps they are right. Some form of mandatory national service, with the military as one option, often has been suggested, then ruled out as too complex or too costly. Perhaps the idea deserves a closer examination. Most certainly, the AVF in its current format is not the answer.

A thorough rethinking of how we're to provide for the nation's military manpower — and womanpower — requirements is badly needed.

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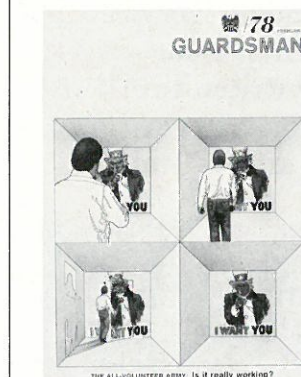
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Cover: Feeding the manpower appetite of the nation's military establishment — especially on an all-volunteer basis — is the subject of this month's cover story. Cover design by Bill Duffy.

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