



Major General Edward R. Fry, President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

THE CASE FOR CONTINUING REGISTRATION—AND BEYOND

The world does not appear to be any safer for democracy than it was a year ago, but we think the "life signs" are good. The air in Washington seems to reflect a sense of optimism, coupled with determination. Obviously, those who "work the Hill" will be monitoring the events of the first 100 days of the new administration to gauge emerging signals which might indicate the direction to be taken over the next four years by our new President.

Even before Inauguration Day, the new administration was being felt in different places and in different ways. There was a rampant rumor, for example, that in deference to Mr. Reagan's stated opposition to peacetime registration, the registration of 18 year olds on January 5, 1981, would not take place—and that this would set the stage for discontinuance of future registration.

Indeed, Senator Mark Hatfield (Oregon) quickly asked Mr. Reagan to cancel the registration program. During December, 83 members of Congress—two Senators and 81 Representatives—signed a letter urging the President-elect to continue the draft registration program. Following the January 5 registration (which involves all men who turned 18 during 1980), future 18-year-old men will be required to register when they reach 18, unless the new administration does, indeed, cancel the program.

We are among those who believe that the peacetime registration system which the Carter administration sired just about one year ago, in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, is a half-way measure which fails to address the full range of manpower problems of the active Army, the Guard or the Reserve. Nevertheless, it augurs better than the period when the Selective Service System was in "deep freeze" status.

We are, of course, pleased to learn

that Congressman G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery of Mississippi is going to reintroduce, in the 97th Congress, the Selective Service proposal which he unveiled in 1980 during the second session of the 96th Congress. The Montgomery bill goes a good deal further than simply advocating the registration of U.S. males. It calls for examination and classification. And it calls for the drafting of 200,000 young men each year; for their initial-entry and advanced individual training; and, finally, for their assignment as members of the individual ready reserve (IRR).



Considering the trauma and the extended Congressional debate during the winter and spring of 1980—just to get approval of registration—we find it hard to believe that the 97th Congress will be moved to take the step beyond registration. Nevertheless, we support Congressman Montgomery's bill feeling that he is right. We just do not feel that the full reality of the situation is yet apparent throughout the nation. Consequently, we do not feel that—short of some traumatic occurrence—there will be any resumption of the draft, for short-term or long-term service, in the near future.

We are pleased that the January 5 registration was permitted to proceed as scheduled.

We believe that taking the draft machinery out of "deep freeze" has already reduced very dramatically the time that would be needed to start up inductions if a national emergency was to occur and the draft was to be reinstated.

We hope—at the very least—that the new administration will continue peacetime registration and will not permit the machinery that has just cranked up to be dismantled. We hope that the side-issue of the "male only" draft will not be allowed to invalidate this much-needed first step that has been taken. We hope that mature consideration will be given to the Montgomery proposal, because the potential tasks which face the armed forces of this nation as we head down the road into the decade of the 1980's creates a potential heavy demand for large numbers of trained people.

All of the measures which have been taken by the Defense Department to improve the quantitative aspects of the IRR are good, but they are scarcely sufficient. We have been going to the first-aid kit too often and are running out of band-aids. We are capable of creative, long-term solutions, but we instinctively sense that they are costly either in terms of cash or commitment.

It is all part and parcel of the business of being serious about the nation's defense. We think the new administration is serious and we think the American people are serious. We do not believe this serious intent would be furthered by scrapping the present registration system as the new President might well do after January 20. We would hope—at the very least—that he will permit the peacetime registration to proceed and allow the stage to be set for the debate which is certain to be aroused by the Montgomery proposals.

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8 16 20 22

Features

8 "THE TIME FOR READINESS IS NOW"

Army Guard Management Conferences address "getting ready to go."

10 THE AIR GUARD IS READY

Senior Commanders Conference looks forward to the '80s and back on a good year.

12 THE ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

An introduction to your new staff.

16 MARKSMANSHIP

Guardsmen are right on target.

20 ALASKAN SCOUTS

Can the value of human life be calculated?

22 NETHERLANDS

Overseas deployment training proves to be double "Dutch treat".

26 96TH CONGRESS AND THE OUTCOME

Wrapup of 1980 Guard legislation.

28 GUARD HEALTH CARE PLANS

Your questions answered.

Departments

President's Message	Inside Front Cover
From Washington	2
Newsbreaks	4
View From the Hill	15
People in the News	32
Posting the Guard	36
Memo for the Record	40



COVER: Members of the 207th Infantry Group (Scout) evaluate a downed aircraft's predicament. Photo by LTC William M. Mack (ret.), AKNP PAO. Cover design by Tom Powers of Bill Duffy Associates.

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