

A staggering blow

PRESIDENTIAL proposals to chop \$503.1 million out of Department of Defense spending authority during the remaining months of Fiscal Year 1975 will deal a staggering blow to the National Guard if they are permitted to occur.

Under the Administration plan, a massively disproportionate \$161.3 million, or 32 per cent of the entire Defense total, would be lopped directly off National Guard programs. An additional \$156.6 million would be taken from Army and Air Force aircraft procurement, with its inevitable adverse impact on further Guard modernization programs.

Something less than \$20 million would be taken from the other five Reserve Components, mostly from the Army Reserve and Naval Reserve.

The proposed reductions are both inequitable and illogical. They make a mockery of the Total Force doctrine, which was designed to take full advantage of the Guard and reserves' greater cost effectiveness.

The National Guard, Army and Air, provides 17 per cent of all of this country's organized military forces, including 46 per cent of all Army Combat forces. It does this with a mere 2.5 per cent of the over-all defense budget, and maintains a readiness for deployment and combat far in excess, proportionately, of its funding. Yet, it has been tabbed to absorb one-third of the spending cutbacks for the entire defense establishment!

The proposals were part of a bulky Administration package, aimed at slashing Federal spending by \$4.6 billion by next June 30th. They are seen by the President and his advisors as a weapon in the fight to curb inflation.

Guardsmen are no less aware than other Americans that unchecked inflation has become one of our most urgent national problems. We recognize that the economic stability of the nation is in jeopardy, and that drastic counter-measures are absolutely essential. Reduced government spending is recognized as a valid and useful tool for dampening inflationary fires.

There is little logic, however, in singling out the least costly, least inflationary of our military forces to take the lion's share of the reductions. The error is compounded by insistence that a reduction in Guard manning be a major part of the money-saving effort. The Guard provides the most economical segment of our military manpower. Logic therefore suggests that the Guard be tasked to perform the largest range of defense missions of which it is capable, if Administration leaders are serious in their avowed intent to provide the most defense for the least cost.


An article elsewhere in this issue describes the proposals and their implications for the National Guard in detail. I will only point out here that they call for reducing the Army Guard's authorized average strength from 400,000 to 379,848, and the Air Guard from 95,000 to 89,128. They also would reduce the number of Air Guard flying units mandated by Congress from 91 to 86. And they would cancel the \$104.9 million funding for 24 new A-7D fighters for the Air Guard. Accompanying the reductions in authorized strength would be cuts in personnel funding — \$52 million from the Army Guard and \$2.5 million from the Air Guard.

If we are compelled to attain Fiscal Year averages of 379,848 and 89,128 by 30 June, actual strengths would have to be hammered down to as low as 341,000 and 70,000 for the Army Guard and Air Guard respectively. This would destroy in a few short months all of the recruiting momentum, sense of purpose and readiness it has taken us years to build.

Under the Federal Impoundment Act, the funding reductions must have Congressional approval. I feel confident that Congress will never accede to so inequitable and destructive a plan as it relates to the Guard. However, the Administration apparently believes it may start withholding funds before Congress acts. If that occurs, it may become necessary to halt recruiting, and only with much effort and time could the lost momentum be regained, even though the funding was later restored by Congressional action. ♦



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XXIX

1

features

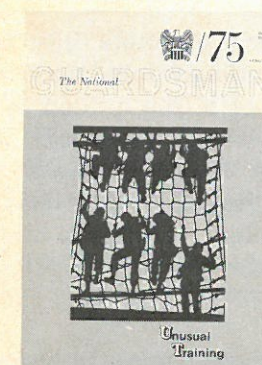
INFLATION FIGHT THREATENS GUARD <i>Administration's attempt to curb inflation deals the Guard "a staggering blow."</i>	2
UNUSUAL TRAINING ... ON THE BEACHES	4
... ON THE STREETS	6
... IN THE AIR	8
CONVERSIONS MARK END OF ERA	16
GREETINGS, MR. PRESIDENT <i>Presidential visit brings excitement to Air Guard Base.</i>	18
CONTINENTAL CONGRESS RECONVENES	28
KNOW YOUR PUBLICATIONS	30
ALMOST UP A CREEK	32
TEC TACKLES TRAINING	33

departments

WASHINGTON REPORT	10
YOU OUGHT TO KNOW	20
POSTING THE GUARD	34
PENTAGON PARAGRAPHS	44

staff

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Dry net training is prelude to Virginia Army Guardsmen assaulting a beachhead for some out-of-the-ordinary training. Cover photo by CW2 Amir M. Pishdad, who also has a prize-winning photo on the back cover of this issue.

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JANUARY, 1975

1