

Major General Edward R. Fry, President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

1981...RING IN THE NEW!

The advent of January marks the start of a new year, the annual opportunity to "start off with a clean slate". And in this particular year of 1981, the inauguration of a new President heralds the kick-off of a new national administration in Washington, D.C.

As this was being written, to meet the pressing deadline of the editor, the evidences of the pre-inauguration period were all around us at this edge of Capitol Hill where NGAUS has its national headquarters. A staff member actually encountered the President-Elect, and the Vice President-Elect coming out of a nearby building. And in walking down the block for lunch, it was possible to see the workmen putting up the platforms and grandstands which would be ready for the January 20 celebrants.

It was in this setting that we decided to take another look at the defense section of the winning party's platform. It is not only a large element of the platform in terms of words, but in terms of ideas. It is detailed, it is convincingly written, it is a well-articulated statement of a path to be followed in the cause of increased U.S. security in support of U.S. national interests.

It also contains much of the promise of a New Year's resolution. For instance, it is highlighted by the statement of a goal ("to preserve world peace by keeping America strong") and a pledge (for "a foreign policy supported by a major upgrading of our military forces").

Additionally, there is a sober warning that, "... if the challenges of the 1980's are not met, we will continue to lose the respect of the world, our honor, and in the end, our freedom."

It expresses the frustration that has frequently but consistently daunted the uniformed leadership in the Pentagon since the days of Robert Strange McNamara: "...the supremacy of systems

analysis in the Pentagon [which has] resulted in slowdowns, deferrals and cost increases in nine vitally needed Army procurement programs in armor, firepower, air defense and helicopters."

We recall that last summer a frustrated Army Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, was driven to a declaration that the U.S. had "a hollow army" in terms of its manifold shortages. The response of the nation seems to be, "well, let's do something about it."

Several weeks after the election, Air Force Secretary Hans M. Mark, in a speech at Sacramento, California, predicted that the President-Elect "who ran on a platform which promised to strengthen our national defense... will... make good those promises."

This hope is buoyed by Mr. Reagan's own declaration that he would consider himself obliged to—and indeed, wished to—sustain the content of his party's platform.

The Republican platform contained this reference in its commentary on National Guard and Reserve forces:

"We must ensure that all Americans take note of the proud and vital role played by the Reserve and National Guard components of the Armed Forces of the United States."

We earnestly hope that Mr. Reagan himself will personally embrace this sentiment. We think, for example, that the fine efforts of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (if it is to truly and effectively carry its message to the U.S. business and industrial community) should be taken out of its obscurity in the outer offices of the Secretary of Defense and given official White House status under a presidential special assistant.

This would be, among other things, a major signal to the Department of Defense itself with respect to presidential recognition of the fact that (again

quoting the Republican Party platform) "the armed forces of the U.S. are today critically dependent upon our nation's reserve components for both combat arms and combat support."

In the final analysis, it will all come down to dollars for defense. As former Secretary of Defense, Melvin R. Laird, points out: "Of all the decisions facing the new President, none will be more important than those he makes in connection with the defense budget. Not only do budgetary decisions create defense policy, but they also send signals abroad about American resolve and impact heavily upon economic conditions here at home."

It goes without saying that the competition for defense dollars and presidential support is going to be immense—and intense.

There will be disappointments to be sure. There isn't enough money in any defense budget to support every program proposed by even the most dedicated and convinced protagonists. Eventually, this new President—like every new President—will have to sift out the recommendations of his many advisers and make decisions which will shape the national strategy of the Reagan Administration.

A week or so after the election, there was an editorial in the *Kansas City Times* which noted that, "There can be little argument that Americans want their military establishment strengthened..."

This appears to be a significant part of the mandate which the people have given to the new Commander-in-Chief. We must await not only his response but continuing signals from the public at large that we have the *national will* to assume the burdens and to make the sacrifices which may be necessary in other areas, to repair the damage which neglect and indifference have inflicted upon our military establishment.

1878



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JANUARY 1981

NATIONAL GUARD

Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States

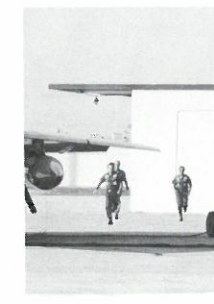
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COVER: The "Top Gun" in WILLIAM TELL '80 is the F-101 "Voodoo" crew from the Texas Air Guard's 147th Fighter Interceptor Group which won top honors. Cover photo by USAF.

NATIONAL GUARD, January 1981. The NATIONAL GUARD Magazine (ISSN 0163-3945) is published monthly, by the National Guard Association of the United States, with editorial and advertising offices at One Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Telephone (202) 789-0031. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices, Copyright 1980 by the National Guard Association of the U.S. All rights reserved. All members of the NGAUS receive NATIONAL GUARD. Nonmember subscriptions: \$4 per year domestic; \$5 per year foreign. Bulk rate for 100 or more copies to the same address: 25¢ each. Single copies 50¢. The Editor welcomes original articles bearing on national defense, with emphasis on application to or implications for the National Guard. Manuscripts and artwork must be accompanied by return postage; no responsibility is assumed for safe handling. Opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily represent official NGAUS positions or policy. Likewise, publication of advertising cannot be deemed an endorsement thereof by this Association or its members.