MG James F. Cantwell
President

National Guard Association of the United States

"approaching crisis proportions"

SINCE zero-Draft planning commenced in earnest, in 1969, top Defense officials repeatedly have conveyed two messages to the National Guard and other Reserves.

First, the Reserve Components would have to do all they could, on their own, to maintain strength before they could expect significant new resources from Federal sources.

Second, as badly as new Federal recruiting/retention incentives were needed to keep strength levels high, the Guard/Reserves would have to wait until FY 1973 because the Active Services come first.

So what has happened? The National Guard has thrown its full energies and ingenuity into the recruiting/retention effort. It built an extensive recruiting organization, launched a full-scale training program for recruiters, multiplied its community relations activities, initiated vigorous recruitment of men leaving active duty, and intensified its efforts to attract minority elements.

Even 'though it believed, and told Defense officials and Congress, that without some new Federal incentives, it would sustain serious strength shortfalls in FY 1972, the Guard accepted the official explanation that first call on new resources would have to go to the Active Services until FY 1973, which now has started.

Just as Guard spokesmen had predicted, total Guard/Reserve strength fell about 55,000 below authorized levels in the first half of FY '72 of which the Army Guard accounted for nearly 22,000.

In recent months, the Guard has made a mild recovery. The losses have been halted and some small gains posted. Similar recoveries have not yet manifested themselves in the other Reserve Components. While the Guard's recent gains are gratifying, they have tended to mislead some in Washington into thinking that new incentives may not be needed.

Guardsmen close to the problem know that this is not the case. Far from being solved, our problem very likely will become more, rather than less, acute as FY 1973 unfolds. Our recent small gains were due primarily to the cyclical nature of enlistment expirations, with recent months constituting a low point in the cycle, and to gains from the one-time early-out program by which several thousand soldiers and airmen accepted a year of service in the Guard or Reserves in exchange for an early release from active duty. When those one-year enlistments start to expire next January, we'll find that we merely postponed our problem for a year.

In the meantime, one can detect little sense of the urgency in Congress except in one small element—a Special Subcommittee on Recruiting and Retention of Military Personnel chaired by Rep. W.C. "Dan" Daniel. After extensive hearings, the Subcommittee reported to its parent Armed Services Committee in May that "the manpower situation facing the National Guard and Reserve forces is approaching crisis proportions."

But the Subcommittee apparently is alone in its deep concern, for such incentive proposals as enlistment/reenlistment bonuses, survivor benefits and improved retirement still lie dormant in Committee. It is disappointing that the Department of Defense waited so long before submitting a legislative proposal for enlistment and reenlistment bonuses. Even 'though the Department at least a year ago had a fairly firm grasp on the need for, and the nature of, the incentives required, it did not make its legislative proposals until April—less than three months ago. Now there is need for the DoD to impress the Congress with the critical nature of the problem.

The Guard has given its best effort to the zero-Draft proposition and will continue to do so. But it needs help, and that help can come only from the Administration and Congress. ◈

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