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NGAUS and the Ground Swell

AS recently as March, I described the National Guard's prospects of avoiding severe force cuts and obtaining some long-needed recruiting incentives as "bleak." Since then, things have taken a decided turn for the better, reconfirming and strengthening my belief in the critical role this association plays in the Guard's well-being.

Look at what has happened in recent weeks:

- A strong ground swell of opposition to the Department of Defense's force reduction proposals led the Congress to demand retention of 92 Air Guard flying units, and to make some harsh observations about plans to reduce the Army Guard.
- The National Governors' Conference spoke out forcefully from Seattle in June, condemning proposals to make cuts in the Guard.
- Servicemen's Group Life Insurance for Guardsmen and reservists was enacted by Congress, along with burial flag legislation.
- Congressional pressure induced the Defense Dept. to rescind the ban on paying Army Guardsmen and reservists while awaiting basic training, and to modify the six-year enlistment policy, which had hampered recruiting.
- Both Congress and the Pentagon discarded the artificially low strengths authorized for the Army Guard and Air Guard, and raised the authorizations to a level in closer alignment with recruiting performance.
- At the urging of Defense, the Congress approved more favorable post/base exchange privileges for Guardsmen and reservists.

There is more to be done before we possess all the resources we need to strengthen and improve the National Guard. But we have made a great deal of progress in these past few months, and I reiterate that none of these worthwhile gains would have been made without the continual effort exerted by this association, supported by the complementary efforts made by Guardsmen all across the United States. It was not mere hyperbole when the Guard's revered elder statesman, Maj Gen Ellard Walsh, said more than a score of years ago that "no matter how strong the National Guard of the states may become, it will cease to exist if this association does not exist, or becomes moribund."

Even a cursory review of the National Guard's struggles to survive over the past century should convince the most hard-nosed skeptic that the National Guard would quickly become submerged and lost in the federal military bureaucracy without the powerful voice it is given in Washington by the National Guard Association of the U.S.

And it is easy to forget that many assets we take for granted today likewise came to pass as a result of this association's determined efforts, such as:

- Retired pay, death and disability benefits.
- Federal funding of armory and air base facilities.
- Full parity with the active forces in pay scales.
- A fair and effective career progression system for officers.
- Establishing the Guard's federal mission in law, accompanied by federal funding and equipment.
- Federal status, pay and retirement benefits for technicians.

These are only a few among the hundreds of progressive policies that have been adopted down through the years as a result of NGAUS' efforts.

A discerning Marine officer once told a Congressional committee that the National Guard system, with a dual mission and dual existence, state and federal, is peculiarly suited to "the genius of the American people." It is uniquely adapted to our national needs, just as other nations and other societies have developed systems adapted to their own needs. This has been the underlying theme in all that the NGAUS has said and done for nearly a century to perpetuate and strengthen our state-oriented militia system. Likewise, this is why the NGAUS, its vigilance and its close ties with the Guard in every state, must never slacken.

If we weaken, or relax our efforts, there will be little hope for the National Guard—because there no longer will be a National Guard. ♦

GUARDSMAN

The National



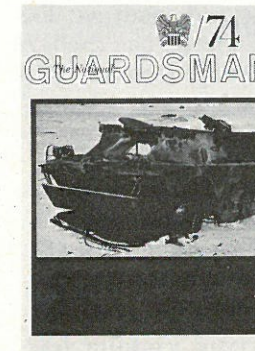
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Official publication of the National Guard Association of the United States. Published monthly except in August. Publication office 1 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington D.C. 20001. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. All correspondence and address changes should be addressed to 1 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. "THE NATIONAL GUARDSMAN" welcomes original articles bearing on National defense, with emphasis on the Army and Air National Guard. Manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage, and no responsibility is assumed for their safe handling. Domestic subscriptions for home delivery: \$2 per year. A year's subscription is included within NGAUS members' annual dues. Subscriptions to foreign addresses, \$3.00 per year. Single copies, 25¢. Copyright, 1974, National Guard Assn. of the U.S. All rights reserved.

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