



Maj Gen Duane L. Corning  
(S.D. Air National Guard)  
President,  
National Guard Association  
of the United States

# Our No. 1 problem

**D**URING the extended Congressional debate over the defense authorization bills, it became very apparent that many members of Congress did not understand the direct and crucial relationship between equipment purchases for the Armed Forces in general, and the equipment posture of the National Guard.

Several knowledgeable members of Congress who do understand the issues at stake had difficulty making it clear to colleagues.

The essence of the matter is this:

All procurement of weapons and equipment stems from a sole statutory source, the annual authorization act. This includes equipment for active, Guard and reserve elements. The Guard "inherits" virtually all of its equipment from the active Army and Air Force, with the amounts and types dependent in the main on the status of the overall inventory in a given year. If equipment is in short supply in the active inventory, it restricts the amount that can be passed on to the Guard and reserve, for priority normally goes to the active forces.

Today, both the active forces and the Guard, Army and Air, suffer from severe shortages of many critical items. The shortages were exacerbated last year when massive quantities of many items were shipped to foreign friends.

In its budget request, the Department of Defense sought authority to fill some of the most serious equipment gaps, though it would not have satisfied the total requirement by a wide margin. The Senate and House Armed Services Committees reviewed the request and made sizeable reductions on a line item basis, in deference to pressures to reduce defense spending. Then, when the bills went to the floor for a vote, individuals in both House and Senate introduced "ceiling amendments" that would have made large additional reductions in the amounts sought for research, development and procurement of equipment.

Those aptly-described "meat-ax cuts" inevitably would have reduced equipment purchases drastically, and that would have had an equally drastic impact on how much could be passed along to the Army Guard and Air Guard.

In part, the problem is rooted in the higher state of combat readiness which the Guard is expected to attain. As an outgrowth of the Total Force philosophy, the active forces have been reduced in size, and higher priority has been assigned to making the less-costly Guard and reserve ready for short-notice mobilization and deployment. The required readiness cannot be attained unless adequate quantities of modern, combat-serviceable equipment is in Guard hands or available for immediate issue upon mobilization.

There's no other way. If equipment isn't available, the necessary readiness does not exist. If the required readiness does not exist, Guard units cannot perform as expected, and the security of the nation rests more heavily today than ever before on the Guard's ability to mobilize rapidly and perform effectively.

There are other sections of the Military Authorization Act that have an important and more readily recognizable impact on the Guard. These include the section which sets authorized strengths for the Army Guard and Air Guard. The House took the traditional route of expressing authorized strength as an average for the year while the Senate accepted a DoD proposal to express it as end strength, which leaves the Guard vulnerable to manipulated shortfalls in strength. The difference must be negotiated by a House-Senate conference committee, and we most certainly hope that the House approach will prevail.

But this year, equipment shortages are the Guard's No. 1 problem and that's why the procurement authorization is of such critical, though less obvious, importance. (See added details, page 13).

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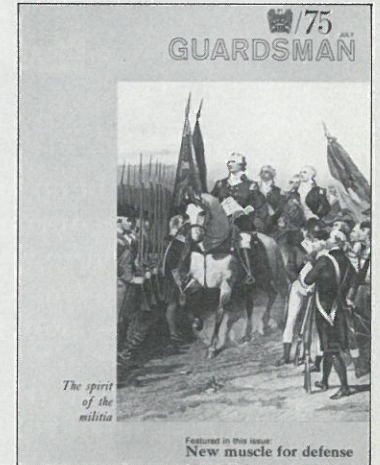
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The spirit of the militia — embodied in this rendition by Alonzo Chappel of George Washington reviewing some of his men after taking command of the Continental Army, July 3, 1775 (see page 31).

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