



Major General William J. McCaddin, President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MERGER? PUT THE EVIL GENIE BACK IN THE BOTTLE!

Merger, that perennial breeder of controversy, has reared its much-battered head again.

A major battle was precipitated in 1965 when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara naively attempted to merge the Army Reserve into the Army National Guard by administrative fiat. That action brought the wrath of Congress down on his head, provoking an ugly two-year fight.

A shorter, milder replay was provoked in 1974 when Senator Barry Goldwater asked Department of Defense to look into the implications of merging the Air National Guard into the Air Force Reserve. That proposal brought a response from Air Force that the potential advantages were more than outweighed by the many disadvantages of such a merger.

Now, the General Accounting Office (GAO), Congressional watchdog over the management practices of federal agencies, is preparing to recommend that SecDef Brown consider both mergers again. Drafts of their bulky review and package of recommendations were sent to the Secretary earlier this year, as well as to several former defense officials now back in private life.

Associations like NGAUS have been aware for some time that GAO was wandering around in the merger jungle as part of a study of how to improve the Guard/Reserve management structure. Everything about the study has been "close hold," however, making intelligent comment next to impossible. In recent weeks, details have started to trickle out, providing some clues to its contents.

A letter from a senior GAO official accompanying one of the drafts, for instance, pointed out that none of the past merger proposals had called for *simultaneously* carrying out the two mergers—Air National Guard

into the Air Force Reserve, and Army Reserve into the Army National Guard. The writer obviously attaches some significance to this that escapes us. Does he thus impute that a simultaneous merger offers a new and innovative proposition? Does this cause him to believe that this ill-considered proposition will somehow be less objectionable?

Let's not keep GAO in the dark any longer. The proposal is just as objectionable now as it was in 1965 and in 1974! It still promises far more in improvements and efficiencies than it can ever produce. It still lures those who have a superficial understanding of how military organizations function. The potential savings of merger were frequently over-stated in past disputes, and its potential for harm vastly understated.

In 1974, for instance, the Air Force staff estimated that merging the Air National Guard into the Air Force Reserve would save a minuscule \$3.08 million in personnel costs while precipitating personnel turbulence, loss of State financial support and beneficial State influence, loss of skilled technician personnel, and loss of readiness. It would meet with "unalterable opposition by affected individuals, government officials and legislators." All those disadvantages "are as true today as in the past," declares the Air Force response to GAO's current proposal.

Commenting on what obviously must be GAO criticism of the Air Guard for insisting on "ownership" of its own aircraft and consequent refusal to participate in the so-called "Associate Unit" program, the Air Force makes the point that there must be additional airframes as well as additional trained personnel to accommodate a wartime "surge" requirement. We would add another

reason for the Air Guard's insistence on having aircraft in their own possession. It isn't just a parochial desire to "own" aircraft. The Air Guard wants—insists on—complete units, manned and equipped with aircraft under their own control because that's what produces the greatest combat capability. GAO's criticism appears to ignore the Guard's combat role, giving too much emphasis to the mere training role.

We are certain the GAO also understands the unquestioned importance of Guardsmen and Reservists being able to identify with their own Guard/Reserve units, commanded by Guard/Reserve leaders, performing clearly identifiable missions.

There are equally valid objections to merger of Army Reserve into Army Guard. By tradition, the States are assigned that part of the required Army force structure that will meet real wartime requirements and currently satisfy States needs for emergency forces. For that, they bear a substantial share of the overall support costs. They could not afford, nor would it be fair to impose on them, the responsibilities and added costs of the much larger force of a combined Guard/Reserve.

Undoubtedly, there is some command layering that can be reduced through a serious cooperative effort by Active, Guard and Reserve components of the Army. There may be duplicative functions that can be combined, although past claims that large savings could be made by melding the maintenance structures of the three components into one were over-simplified.

In short, merger is a bad idea. It was bad when it first surfaced, and it has not improved with age. Why doesn't someone put this evil Genie back into the bottle—for keeps?

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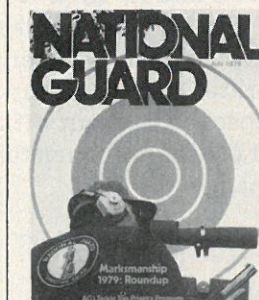
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