

Major General William E. Ingram, President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

THE GI BILL AND THE RECRUITING CAP

In the past several years, the recruiting of manpower has not been as large a concern to the National Guard or to the active components as it was in the middle and late 1970s. That is one reason why Congress, during its 1981-82 session, after an initial rush of support, backed away from serious consideration of reenactment of a GI Bill of educational benefits as an inducement for servicemen.

That bill and a proposal to significantly increase the authorized paid strength of the Army National Guard are again before Congress in the current session. Again, both are getting some favorable attention. Now would be a good time to enact both.

However, the Department of Defense and service personnel chiefs have held back their full support... particularly of the GI Bill (H.R.1400). Congress is going slow because of the obvious lack of a "right-this-minute" justification for it. The lack of immediacy is linked to the fact that both the active services and the Guard and Reserve are meeting their current fiscal year recruiting quotas with high quality personnel and have done so for several years. But that fact does not lessen the requirement for this legislation nor measurably affect the advisability of recruiting full-bore right now rather than waiting several years (in the case of the GI Bill) or clapping another recruiting cap on the Army Guard and active services (in the case of paid-strength ceilings).

Under the Department of Defense budget proposal as endorsed by the Reagan Administration, the Army Guard's end strength will be a maximum of 417,019 on September 30 this year. However, Lieutenant General Emmett H. Walker, Jr., chief of the National Guard Bureau, noted recently that drill strength as of the end of March this year already was more than 416,000, presaging another recruiting freeze like the one that occurred in 1982 unless this cap is lifted.

He further stated that he foresees no money in the Army budget to alleviate the problem this fiscal year.

But what is worse, the defense budget sets the end strength of the Army Guard at just 421,000 for FY84, a gain of only 4,000 new recruits over FY83. Recruiters say that in the current climate, they could easily far exceed that.

In fact, that restrictive ceiling seriously will hamper Army Guard recruiting efforts because it will barely allow individual recruiters to recruit anyone during part of the year. The long-term adverse effect, however, of restricting end strength is that it hampers the Army Guard from reaching its currently programmed wartime strength of 450,000 or the estimated 1986 wartime strength of 460,000. It certainly isn't that the Army Guard recruiting force couldn't vastly increase its production of new recruits. The fact is that even if we eschewed accepting most Category IV personnel (lowest mental level permitted), we could still reach about 424,000 in end strength this year and far more than that in FY84.

That is why it is good news that the House Armed Services Committee has approved a provision setting Army Guard end strength at 433,000 for FY84. Such a figure will permit active, aggressive recruiting of high-quality personnel for the Army Guard in a time when recruiting is most productive. We certainly don't want to wish economic bad luck on anyone, Guardsmen in particular. However, the fact is that until the economy is fully recovered, recruiting for all services will continue to be good—and this is the time when we should capitalize on our ability to attract the best young men and women to the Guard.

There is a similarly convincing argument for the GI Bill. True, no GI Bill is required as an inducement to lure young people into the service, active, Guard or Reserve, today. However, that may not be true by the end of the 1980s for two reasons. The first

is that we assume the economy will be better than it has been for the last three or four years. But even more certain is the fact that the pool of 18- to 24-year-old youths will shrink during this time period. That will mean that while the economy is picking up (presumably), the number of young men and women available both to work in the private sector and to enlist in the military will be smaller, making the competition for those people even more keen. Keener yet will be the competition for the most highly qualified and intelligent of those people. The military discovered in the late 1970s what it is like to be recruiting primarily from the economic lower edge of society. It was not a happy experience as the Army had to try to train and motivate young men whose only loyalty to the military was their desperate need for a job—or any job.

Advocates of a GI Bill agree that such a bill would be a major motivator for youths of all backgrounds. H.R.1400 as introduced by Congressman G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-Mississippi) and Congresswoman Marjorie Holt (R-Maryland) also would provide that educational benefit to Guardsmen and Reservists as a reward and motivation for military service.

Under the "squeaky wheel" theory, Congress too many times in the past has shied away from enacting laudable programs like the GI Bill because the need for them was not a current emergency. All too often in these instances, the emergency eventually occurred anyway and an even-more-expensive remedial action had to be taken after the fact.

If Congress will enact a GI Bill this year and get the program moving, while also permitting aggressive recruiting to continue in the Army Guard so wartime strengths can be reached sooner, that emergency may never occur. That's the best reason yet for Congress to act now.

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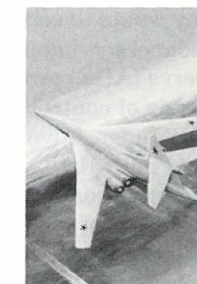
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