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## Waiting for the Other Shoe

**I**N early February, the Department of Defense dropped the first shoe: elimination of the entire Army National Guard NIKE-HERCULES air defense structure and inactivation of six Air National Guard flying units, some of them also associated with the continental air defense mission.

Hints aplenty had been given in the preceding months, so by the time the announcement was made, it no longer was a question of *whether* but only of *when*. Moreover, it's an open secret that the cuts already directed are merely a first installment in what very well *could* become a decimation of the National Guard and Reserves.

Through slips of the tongue on television and elsewhere, Defense leaders already have let a number of cats out of the bag—that an additional eight Air Guard flying Squadrons are due to get the ax in FY 1976, and that a first-increment slash of units encompassing 48,000 "structure spaces" and 20,000 paid drill spaces is imminent for the Army Guard and Army Reserve.

Not mentioned publicly though it's widely known in Guard/Reserve circles is that a range of options is under consideration in the Pentagon which would slice even more deeply into the Army's Reserve Components in follow-up inactivations in FY 1976 and beyond. Now we must wait for the other shoe to drop.

The justification offered for air defense reductions is that, since the U.S. already has waived most of its anti-ballistic missile defense as a concession to the SALT I agreement, it benefits us little to continue maintaining a defense against bombers and air-breathing missiles. As to the other reductions, in the Army Guard and Reserve, Defense contends that it only seeks to eliminate units which no longer figure in war plans or will not be required in the early weeks of any future conflict.

That the Army and Air Force are uneasy about making further reductions in force structure is made amply clear by recent events. The Air Force appealed the decision to eliminate Guard jet Interceptor Squadrons but was overruled by Defense. Army Secretary Howard H. Callaway pointedly called attention to "the growing disparity in manpower levels between our forces and those of our potential enemies, and the correspondingly increased reliance placed upon the Reserve Components" in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee. Just as emphatically, GEN Creighton W. Abrams, Army Chief of Staff, reminded the Committee that "we can make no plans to fight in a major conflict without considering (the Reserve Components) mobilization and deployment," and called the combined Active-Guard-Reserve array of combat forces marginal, leaving "virtually no room for error."

It is conceded that some units currently exist whose mission has been made questionable by changing requirements. Undoubtedly, these should be converted to types for which a present need *does* exist. This kind of modernization takes place continually. But with the Active Army and Air Force at their lowest strength since before the Korean War, to contemplate making reductions in the size of the Reserve Forces is, as a respected member of the Appropriations Committee, Rep. Robert L.F. Sikes, recently termed it, "incredible" and "sheer folly."

Each inactivation represents a loss of all the experience, leadership, dedication, individual skills and teamwork so laboriously built through years of effort and massive outlays of public funds. Each inactivation reduces the Guard's broad recruiting base at a time when recruiting is Problem No. 1. Inactivations of Guard units ignore our unique accomplishment in regaining and/or exceeding pre-Viet Nam strength levels in the face of a difficult recruiting performance. This is a feat in which we stand alone among all Reserve Components.

We say again as we have said many times since word of the impending force cuts commenced to trickle out: America's military force structure has been pared to the very bone. Convert outmoded units to new and essential missions. Help them elevate their combat-readiness to the levels required today. Divert more support elements to combat roles. But don't expose the Nation to even graver risks by lopping-off more men and units. ♦



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*The impact of the recent Middle East war and other World developments on the future of the U.S. is explored in this month's feature article.*

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