

Intense competition

THERE'S a very human tendency to see today's problems — particularly those with which we ourselves must cope — as being far more critical and serious than those with which we struggled yesterday, or those that will confront us in some distant future. Even so, those of us with responsibilities for national defense may be forgiven if we view prospects for 1976 with misgiving and concern.

In recent years, we have seen the United States invest less and less in national defense, in real terms, while our implacable and powerful adversary, the Soviet Union, has steadily expanded its military power. All the while, critics of the military establishment were dining their own message into the public consciousness — that defense expenditures were continually growing, consuming assets badly needed to solve the nation's social ills, that we were wasting America's resources on unnecessary defense measures.

What underlies the controversy is the intense competition for resources among an endless array of claimants — like health, education, welfare, transportation, housing and national security. In one important sense, the intensity of the competition grows out of the same dilemma that faced a handful of American leaders 200 years ago as they struggled to bring a new nation into existence — how to parcel out limited resources to meet a variety of needs.

For today, as in 1776, there is a finite limit to our national resources. Equally to the point, there also is a limit to how much progress can be made toward solution of many national problems through the mere application of more and more money. Americans at large are commencing to recognize those limits, even if that recognition is coming less quickly to their elected spokesmen in Washington.

There are ample signs that the battle for resources will reach a new peak of intensity in the current Congressional session. What is at stake is not just inanimate "programs" or "appropriations" but the whole thrust of our national endeavor, for to borrow from Aaron Wildavsky: "Budgeting deals with the purposes of men."

National Guardsmen possess a unique ability to influence the outcome of the forthcoming struggle. As Senator Stennis told a group of Guardsmen recently: "The most consistent Congressional strength and influence the military has comes from you gentlemen back home." Moreover, Guardsmen can be an effective conduit to millions of Americans for information on the state of our defenses, and the needs of our defense establishment. What's needed is for Guardsmen to keep themselves informed on such matters, then make their views known to community leaders and members of Congress.

For a start, I urge you to read some highly informative articles in this issue. Military analyst Ed Prina's article, for example, lays to rest some misconceptions about U. S. defense spending. A description of the FY 1977 defense budget relates the specifics around which this year's battle will swirl, as does the "View from the Hill." And an article on the new NGAUS statement of positions discusses the issues that relate most directly to Guard.


When John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as our President, he uttered some words that moved Americans everywhere. They constituted a pledge with which most Americans were in agreement:

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we will pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Isn't it time that we revived the spirit that motivated such a pledge? And while we continue the "quest for peace" to which Kennedy also referred, shouldn't we pay heed to his other injunction, that "We dare not tempt them (our adversaries) with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed."



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features

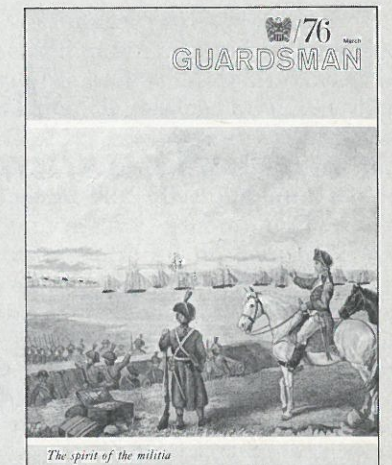
THE EVACUATION OF BOSTON	2
<i>Washington won his first encounter with the British by outmaneuvering them.</i>	
THE PRICE OF FREEDOM	8
<i>Military analyst Ed Prina bares some misconceptions about defense spending.</i>	
HERITAGE GALLERY MAKING PROGRESS	20
<i>Fund drive passes 70 per cent mark.</i>	
INCOME TAX TIME	24
<i>A former Guardsman/CPA offers hints on saving dollars at tax time.</i>	
STENNIS RECEIVES TRUMAN AWARD	30
<i>NGAUS honors Senator.</i>	
ISSUES & POSITIONS	31
<i>A condensation of NGAUS positions on key issues, as adopted by its Executive Council.</i>	
FISCAL	39
AIR COMMANDERS' CONFERENCE	44
<i>Unionization, E-9 demotions and the defense budget were key topics.</i>	
AGs MEET 'EYEBALL-TO-EYEBALL'	49

departments

WASHINGTON REPORT	14
NGAUS TRAVEL SERVICE	23
YOU OUGHT TO KNOW	28
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	42
PEOPLE IN THE NEWS	50
RECRUITING NEWSMAKERS	52
POSTING THE GUARD	54
PENTAGON PARAGRAPHS	56

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The spirit of the militia was boosted when the British evacuated Boston in March 1776, as observed by General Washington in this period sketch. — (Courtesy Library of Congress)

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