



Major General Edward R. Fry, President, NGAUS

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### HAIL TO THE CHIEF: A GUTTY DECISION

The mini-furor, which came in the wake of the presidential decision to continue Selective Service registration, serves to point up a number of things that merit consideration.

First and perhaps foremost is the fragile nature of our supposed national recovery from "the Vietnam syndrome". Scarcely had the sounds of the White House announcement to the press been made, when "anti-war" protest leaders had their old placards and cliches out of the closets, where they have been gathering cobwebs and waiting for a propitious moment to come to light again. The protest crowd is still there—as irrational, as unyielding and as obnoxious as ever.

Equally important, it must be noted that the president's decision took a certain amount of personal courage since he was on the record, going back to the 1980 presidential campaign, as opposed to a peacetime draft or registration. Many of his domestic advisors were known to be aligned against the continuance of the registration program. Others in the administration had ridiculed registration because it was viewed as a vestige of former President Carter's ineffectual response to the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan. Those who know Ronald Reagan were not surprised that he had the personal integrity and intestinal fortitude to reverse himself in what he viewed as the best interests of the nation.

Lastly, we would note that a number of critics, both inside and outside of government, immediately seized upon this decision to work over the administration and the Pentagon on the issue of the All Volunteer Force. This is a spurious issue, and we mean to get back to it later on in this essay.

It is worth letting Mr. Reagan's own words be repeated to explain his gutty decision:

**We live in a dangerous world. In the event of a future threat to national safety, registration could save the United States as much as six weeks in mobilizing emergency manpower.**

We subscribe to this sentiment, and we

believe that the president's assessment of the situation is correct. Nevertheless, we would be something less than forthright if we pretended, in our approval of this presidential decision, to accept the continuance of registration in itself as anything but one of the major steps toward the solution of the nation's—to use the president's own words—"emergency manpower."

The requirement for emergency manpower is a crucial element in the nation's ability to mobilize, deploy and sustain the military forces which might be needed to defend our national interests in time of crisis. Our Association believes this emergency manpower must include *pre-trained manpower*. This will insure that we can fill-out understrength or even non-existent units on the first day of a future war. Pre-trained manpower will insure that we have a certain number of trained individuals who can be used as battle casualty replacements in the days after a war gets underway.

To be perfectly candid we do not think it is good for the nation or for the National Guard for those individual fillers to come from trained Guard units, every one of which is needed to carry out some wartime unit mission. Therefore, this Association continues to believe that we need, as expressed in legislation proposed by Congressman G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-MS), not merely a registration but a process to examine and classify registrants. Selective Service officials must know early on which men are fit and able to serve, and how they might best serve in the event of a national emergency. We also believe it would be useful—as proposed by Montgomery—to draft and train 200,000 young men annually—picked on a random, lottery basis with no loopholes for exemption—to build up the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) and to keep it at the level required to insure that when the need arises we have a reservoir of *trained* emergency manpower. Right now this is clearly not in the cards.

The president has declared that "the continuance of peacetime registration

does not foreshadow a return to the draft." It is President Reagan's stated conviction that there should be a resort to the draft only in a time of national emergency. He has stated, "No such emergency now exists, and registration is in no way a proxy for conscription."

We are hopeful that sooner or later—and the sooner the better—the president will see that a more intensified Selective Service military program is not a repudiation of the All Volunteer Force (AVF).

The AVF idea works—within certain parameters. It works as a peacetime force. With the mobilization of all of its National Guard and Reserve augmentation, it can handle the needs of the early stages of major combat. By no stretch of the imagination can the array of forces contained in the active segment of the AVF be portrayed as a wartime force.

No nation in the entire history of mankind has ever been able to hire a professional army and send it off to fight the war with no further involvement on the part of the citizenry. Our basic problem, and a very human problem it is, stems from the fact that we would like to avoid the issue of emergency manpower...until we actually need the manpower for the emergency.

We do not believe the times, the technology or the threat allow us to wait until it is convenient to address the problem. It is essential that we take the steps today to provide the trained augmentation we may need tomorrow.

Several crises of recent years have taken us to the very brink of military involvement, an involvement no one wishes but which we must be prepared to cope with should the need arise. We never know which dawn may be the tomorrow on which we will need to face down the enemy determined to crush our way of life. On that terrible dawn, we need to be able to respond with decisiveness and the full knowledge that we have the projectable military power capable of backing up the foreign policy of the president. We need to start now, as soon as possible, to train the emergency manpower, sure to be needed if we are to be strong enough to do the job.

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COVER: Mount McKinley in central Alaska provides the main theme of the National Guard's concentrated efforts to be fully qualified in a winter environment.

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