



Major General William E. Ingram (Ret.), President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIME TO EMPHASIZE EMPLOYER SUPPORT

From 1973 until about two years ago, we in the National Guard paid the price in our personnel strengths for our failure during the decade of the 1960s to pay any attention to recruiting. We got out of the habit of recruiting because the Selective Service did all our recruiting for us by motivating bright and qualified young people to stream through our doors seeking enlistment.

The National Guard has gone a long way toward solving that. It is one of the success stories of the Total Force Policy. Now, however, having manned our force with volunteers with men and women who want to be in our units, we face another problem too many of us haven't tended in an even longer time: employer support. This growing problem recently has bobbed to the surface in several ways. Two of them appeared in recent issues of this magazine.

One was highlighted in the October and February issues in connection with the description of the training effort required of the 1st Battalion, 108th Armor, 48th Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), Georgia Army Guard, in preparing itself for a rotation through the National Training Center at Fort Irwin. Another was the speech at our Association's Conference in Indianapolis by Dick Ellis, executive director of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR).

It is ironic that the very progress in solving our personnel problems (in large part, in most states) creates this new worry of employer support. It is our very success that tends to aggravate this. Here's why, and Georgia's 48th Brigade case is a good example.

The impending solution to our readiness problems through maintenance of required personnel strengths and through procurement and issue of adequate stocks of equipment has made our units more combat ready. Since we are more combat ready, and are increasingly perceived so by the regular

establishment and by civilian officials at the Pentagon, we are getting increasingly important missions. With those roles and missions come greater attention to combat readiness and greater pressure from the active Air Force and Army that we train more. When we train more, we run into employer and job-conflict problems.

Take the Georgia case. That tank battalion's rotation through the National Training Center required three-day drill weekends (MUTA-6s) for six months. That requires employer support. It also required a three-week annual training, something that is becoming more common in other spheres. Since federal reemployment laws only require an employer to give two weeks of military leave, that also required employer support. But the kicker is this. Since the 1-108th is a part of a round-out unit, it will be expected to rotate through the National Training Center every three years. So even though the Georgia tankers managed to pull off all this extra training in 1983, that doesn't mean the end of it. There is a repeat performance required in 1986. It may be more difficult to garner easy and willing cooperation for this additional training so soon after the first go-round.

There are several approaches to this problem, some easier than others. For example, in my state of North Carolina, we invited a large group of Guardsmen's employers to the ceremony at Fort Bragg last summer when we rolled out our new M-1 tanks. We thought it vital to demonstrate to these employers the importance of what we are doing, the high-priority nature of our tank battalion's mission and to persuade them of the necessity of the additional training that is being required of those tankers to train to combat standards on this new, sophisticated piece of equipment.

Similarly, in Georgia when the scope of the training of the 1-108th became obvious, employers who didn't immediately agree to let their employees

off for the additional training received letters from the battalion and brigade commanders and in some cases from U.S. Senator Sam Nunn (D-Georgia) urging support of the training. Only one employer out of 550 men in the battalion absolutely refused to relent on the third week of AT.

However, as mentioned above, for this high-priority unit, it doesn't end here. Actually, it just begins here. Major General Joseph W. Griffin, 48th brigade commander at the time of the 1-108th's rotation and now adjutant general of Georgia, put it another way. Now this job-conflict problem "is getting down to the troop level."

There are many leaders in the active Army and Air Force who believe Guard units should train more. However, we must caution against making National Guard training so burdensome that we defeat the very purpose of the Guard to begin with. If additional training is merited, and it may be, then we have to both educate employers to this fact as well as make sure our Guardsmen are protected legally. If three-week ATs are to become common, then the law guaranteeing reemployment rights after such training must cover a three-week period, not the current two.

If a three-day drill weekend is to become common, we must both convince employers this is essential to national defense and protect our Guardsmen from retaliation by those minority of employers who don't or won't understand.

Our regular colleagues in the active Army and Air Force sometimes don't understand how we in the Guard can hope to be combat ready with only 39 days of training a year. Even we must admit this is a big challenge. However, requiring much more than this number of days is a big problem, but a problem we should begin addressing on the national level. We must not relegate it to units like the 1-108th in Georgia or the 2-252d armor in North Carolina to solve locally without the necessary resources.

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COVER: Molland Williams, 2½, a resident of the Queen Elizabeth Home for Children in Grenada, clutches his toy after receiving it as a result of OPERATION TOYLIFT to Grenada just before Christmas. Design: Johnson Design Group.

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