

The Importance of Spirit

THE foundation of a nation's defense is in the spirit of its people. That's a simple statement worth some thought in an age when a nation's defense—especially that of a super power—is anything but simple.

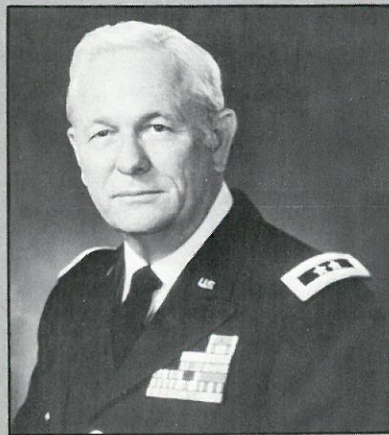
If a country is to have a strong, disciplined and effective defense force, it must be—at least in a democracy—strongly supported by its citizens. It must have not only material support, but the kind of spiritual support that derives from a determination of a people to defend their beliefs, their way of life and their country. All of this takes on added significance at a time when we are attempting to maintain a strong Active and Reserve military force on a volunteer basis.

The Army and Air National Guard have succeeded in retaining and recruiting sufficient men and women to maintain and even exceed authorized strength levels. Members of Congress and Defense leaders frequently ask why it is the Guard is succeeding while other components are failing to meet strength objectives. There are several reasons: command and management in the States and communities, leadership, strong community support, tradition. With a dual Federal-State mission, a three-century history of service in war and peace, the National Guard, with units in more than 2,600 communities, is the military force closest to the people. Community support, tradition and spirit aren't elements that can be fed into a computer. There is no yardstick. It either is there or it isn't.


Unfortunately, most defense leaders, policy makers and planners these days are computer-oriented and computer-dependent. Many of them can't understand or accept the importance of, or even the need for, the kind of support I am speaking about. But the Congress understands it. Its members know how important community support is and they understand why the Guard today is stronger and better trained than it was during the recent war years when it was filled to overflowing with draft-motivated enlistees.

Presently, the Congress is pondering proposals by the Department of Defense to impose sizable cuts on the ARNG and ANG. Congress is resisting. One reason it is resisting is because it is reluctant to reduce the base line Guard force. Many members feel that in the years since the end of the Korean War the Guard structure has been cut to a force minimum. To reduce further would be to eliminate units in one-unit communities—leaving less or no opportunity for young men and women in many areas to participate in reserve military training. Reduction of the force structure reduces the recruiting base. Congress, wisely, is unwilling to do that at a time when strength quotas in several components are unfilled.

Defense, as I noted at the outset, is not a simple business. What I have been talking about—the importance of spirit and citizen support—is a small but not unimportant basic element. Like most foundations, it is not especially obvious, but, obviously, it is there. ♦



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The United States



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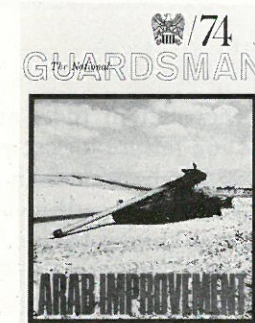
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Iraqi "Hunter" fighter bombers knocked out a whole Battery of these U.S.-made 175mm guns minutes after the October war began. It was one of many evidences of the improved prowess of Israel's enemies since the Six-Day War.

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