

A case against military unions

AN attempt has been launched to unionize the nation's armed forces — active, National Guard and reserve. Unlike the poorly coordinated effort of a few radicals to form "servicemen's unions" at the height of the Vietnam War, this one is the work of several prosperous, well-established labor organizations which will spare no effort or expense to attain their goal.

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and the National Maritime Union (NMU) both revealed several months ago that they were considering such a plan. Soon thereafter, the Association of Civilian Technicians (ACT) publicly announced that it would create a new offshoot called the "Association of Guard and Reserve" to start a membership drive in the reserve components. The Teamsters also are reported to be eying the armed forces as a new source of members.

The AFGE has said it will seek approval from its membership and from its parent federation, the AFL-CIO, later this year. The unionizing effort appears to be further advanced than such cautious language would indicate, however. Union representatives have appeared at several locations, including Guard installations, to test the waters.

Anyone who believes that "it can't happen here," as some have been quoted as saying, is being unrealistic. It is happening. Department of Defense and the Services have reiterated their directive, that commanders are not authorized to recognize or negotiate with military unions. A few senior Pentagon officials have made public statements in opposition to a unionized military, but the official reaction in general has been cautious and low-key.

A counter-move has been launched on Capitol Hill. Senator Strom Thurmond (S.C.) and 30 other senators have introduced a bill (S.3079) which would outlaw military unions. Similar measures (H.R.12526 and H.R.12691) have been introduced in the House by Reps. Floyd Spence (S.C.) and G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery (Miss.).

In addition, most veterans organizations and military associations have taken strong stands against unionization, spearheaded by the Fleet Reserve Association with its sizeable membership of Navy enlisted personnel.

Let there be no mistake about the attitude of the National Guard Association of the United States. The idea of military unions is abhorrent to us. We believe their introduction into the armed forces would inevitably lead to practices that would be the very antithesis of good discipline and effective military performance. We believe, as Senator Pete V. Domenici (N.M.) recently declared:

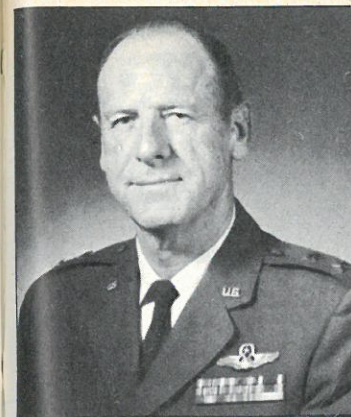
"We cannot have command decisions, especially in war time, subject to collective bargaining, negotiations or grievance procedures."

And we believe that the only way to halt current moves to organize military unions is to prohibit them in law.

The NGAUS Executive Council made its opposition very clear when it adopted an in-house policy statement last January which reads:

"The NGAUS will make every effort to reinforce the present prohibition against recognition for 'servicemen's unions,' collective bargaining, pay negotiations, grievance procedures, or related labor practices, for any and all components of the Armed Forces. (It will) combat any effort to unionize Army National Guardsmen and Air National Guardsmen in their military capacity."

The final phrase was emphasized because we most assuredly do not oppose unions per se. Thousands of Army and Air Guardsmen belong to unions related to their civilian employment. These include National Guard technicians, who are employees of the federal government working fulltime for the National Guard and concurrently are military members of the Guard. Their union affiliation relates to their federal employee status, however, and *not* to their military role.



Maj Gen Duane L. Corning
(S.D.) Air National Guard
President,
National Guard Association
of the United States

Service in the Armed Forces is *not* like a civilian occupation, no matter how much union proponents may argue otherwise. Military service demands a willingness to accept danger, discomfort, family separation, highly unpleasant working conditions and, sometimes, arbitrary authority. It demands that its members be willing to give the national well-being priority over personal concerns.

Union spokesmen say they'll only concern themselves with such "appropriate" matters as pay, retirement, health care and the like. But they have conceded that it isn't always possible to control the actions of individual members. In less euphemistic terms, this means that such actions as wildcat protests against military discipline, even strikes, may occur once unions get in.

The nation already has seen firemen refuse to fight fires, policemen leave their communities at the mercy of criminal elements, and garbage men subject whole cities to extreme health hazards by letting garbage pile up in the streets, even when their actions were clearly illegal. The nation could not survive a military establishment whose members took exception to "working conditions" or a fancied "health hazard" and refused to fight.

We believe that unionization of the military would seriously, perhaps fatally, reduce the combat effectiveness of the Armed Forces — active, Guard or reserve. We are adamantly opposed to military unions and will spare no effort to prevent them getting a toehold in our own military establishment.

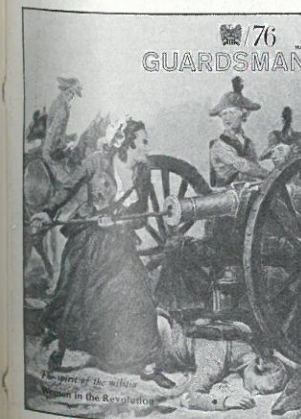
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Today the cinder block; tomorrow the Great Sphinx.

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Moll Pitcher replaces her fallen husband on a gun crew in this period painting by Alonzo Chappel. She epitomized the contribution of women to the spirit of the militia during the Revolutionary War.
— (Library of Congress)

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