

Need Less Talk, More Incentives

IF the National Guard and Reserves are to maintain the combat capability that Administration officials and defense leaders proclaim as necessary, then it's time (long past time, in our view) for the Department of Defense, the White House Office of Management and Budget, and the Congress to start treating our manning problems with the urgency they deserve.

It's time to bring to a halt the interminable talk-study-analyze-restore-report-more-talk cycle and take some positive action. It's time, in short, to provide the Guard and Reserves with the resources needed to put all-volunteer manning on a firm and lasting foundation. Unless that is done, and soon, the problem of recovery and restoration will have become almost insuperable. Guard and Reserve manning will have dropped to a point that the desired levels can be restored only by a costly crash program extending over a lengthy period of time.

In the initial years of all-volunteer manning, only the National Guard among the Reserve Components was able to maintain pre-Vietnam strength levels. This probably stemmed from a variety of factors, including a long tradition of community support for historic units in many localities, and lengthy hometown recruiting experience. Unquestionably, though, the major element in those early recruiting/retention successes was nothing more complex than laborious, time-consuming effort at the community level, and a great deal of command emphasis.

More recently, however, manpower has been sagging in the Guard as well as in the other Reserve Components. The Army Guard's assigned strength dropped from 410,682 to 375,005 between June 1974 and August 1976. In the same period in the Air Guard, strength slipped from 95,209 to 91,360.

It was recognized from the outset that a volunteer force would cost more than a conscripted force. It likewise was recognized that a large part of the higher price tag would be the higher financial rewards we would have to offer to attract volunteers.

At that time, Department of Defense officials made a conscious decision to concentrate most of their limited all-volunteer assets, initially, on the Vietnam-weakened Active services. We in the Guard and Reserve understood and accepted the necessity of restoring our crucial full-time forces to an acceptable readiness level in minimum time. We were assured on numerous occasions that our turn would come, but several years have come and gone and we still are waiting, not so patiently anymore.

Here's the way the Defense Manpower Commission described the situation in its April, 1976, report:

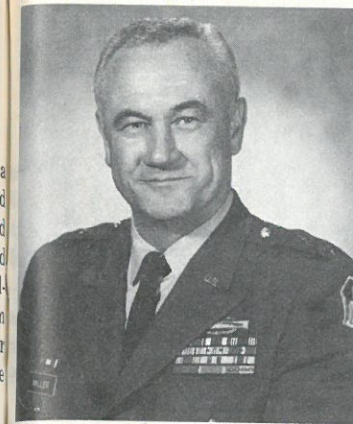
"Funds, staffing, emphasis and priorities have been necessarily been focused upon the active forces and the maintenance of the active force level with quality accessions. There has not been a corollary emphasis for recruitment programs for the National Guard and Reserves... A full commitment to the Total Force policy will require additional funds, new policies and priorities, and high-level attention."

Guardsmen and reservists benefited from the substantial pay increases granted all military personnel. They also were authorized full-time coverage under Servicemen's Group Life Insurance, and a couple of small concessions were made on PX shopping. No other significant new membership incentives were authorized for the Guard and Reserves.

In the same period, it needs pointing out that something over two dozen incentives were available to the Active forces that were not authorized for the Guard and Reserve.

In the past, when Guard/Reserve strength temporarily sagged, it was standard practice in both the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill to reduce funding, thus taking away the resources that would make it possible to recover that lost manpower. Today, such a practice is unthinkable. It's unthinkable because —

1. The nation's war plans today are predicated on the ability of the Guard and Reserves to mobilize and deploy



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rapidly, and fight effectively. That's the basis on which the Active forces were severely reduced several years ago. That's what Total Force is all about.

2. High manning is a critical function of readiness. Recent manpower losses pose a direct and serious threat to Guard/Reserve combat readiness.

3. Even if it were possible to enlist an individual to fill every existing opening in the Guard/Reserve tomorrow, it would be a year or longer (with today's shrunken training base), before those enlistees all could be trained and assimilated into their units.

New membership incentives are essential if Guard/Reserve manpower levels are to be restored. A variety of incentives have been "under study" in the Department of Defense (or under "evaluation" in OMB) for four or five years! Not months—years! These include tuition assistance, enlistment/re-enlistment bonuses, survivor benefits, reduced age for retired pay, enhanced medical/death benefits, lifting the 60-point retirement ceiling and others.

Now's the time to bring an incentive package out into the light of day and give it serious, speedy consideration. Now is the time to put the Guard and Reserves back into the Total Force, back into a competitive recruiting stance vis-a-vis the Active forces.

Now is the time, at long long last, to dispense with any more verbose studies and windy discussions, and take some positive forward steps.

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Cover: The British delivered a near-fatal blow to the spirit of the militia when they captured Ft Washington and New York City. Cover art from an oil on canvas by Dominic Serres, courtesy U.S. Naval Academy Museum.

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