MUSTER DAY: A TIME FOR STOCK-TAKING

On 22 February, birthday of the Nation’s most revered military hero, the National Guard again will observe its annual Muster Day.

In George Washington’s time, it was a day for “counting heads,” a day set aside by law on which able-bodied men would report to the village green, with musket, for a physical assessment of a locality’s means of defense.

Today, Muster Day is merely a past to return, recently revived as a symbol to focus America’s attention on the Guard’s undiminished importance in the defense of the home.

But today, no less than in the past, Muster Day also offers Guardsmen an appropriate occasion for stock-taking.

Since Korea, Guardsmen have exerted prodigious effort to pull together its war-scattered segments and rebuild them into an even better organization.

The Air Guard has evolved from a serial legion whose ability approaches that of the Air Force itself. Every unit now serves one of the Guard’s four “manned” zones: “manned” at 20 airports across the country, round the day and night to meet an enemy threat. Aircraft Control & Warning Squadrions are on “round-the-clock duty in some key localities and already have earned their keep in rescue operations.

Air defense of Hawaii, one of America’s most vital outposts, is almost entirely in Air Guard hands, and Army Guardsmen will take on a key role there soon when they move onto the AFRS sites on Kauai and the islands.

The Army Guard has schooled itself in the latest nuclear and missile-age tactical concepts and the process of education is still going on. Within a short time, it will have completed its transition to the newest Frontier organizaional structure.

More than 90% of the ARNG’s nearly 400,000 men are now basically trained and qualified in their military specialties and all training is being conducted in the middle of the country. At the same time, the Guard carries a large share of the responsibility for maintaining national security.

Another 24-hour-a-day mission never even ventured to past-time soldiers until after the Korean War. In brief, the ARNG has boosted itself much closer to Active Army professional capabilities than many of its detractors will admit.

The Guard has accomplished all these things despite a discouraging procession of obstacles, and that in itself is added evidence that it never will settle for second-best.

There have been the time-consuming harrasments of demobilization, reactivation recruiting and training, always a deterrent to military proficiency and always an after- math of war for the Guard. There also have been struggles, shared with the Active Forces, to adapt tactical doctrines to new and terrifying weapons and to revolutionary new means of transport. More portable in Guard eyes have been the intra-family harrasments, the never-ending series of attacks by a small but persistent group of Guardsmen within the Pentagon itself. Thus, while laboring to rebuild itself from the ground up, the Guard has been compelled to fight an almost continuous rearguard action against arbitrary strictures, abuse into the anonymity of a huge conglomerate “reserve,” and drastic degrading of effective, self-supporting reserve elements.

It can be another source of pride for Guardsmen, though we have not limited ourselves to a narrow fight for survival but have concurrently fought for long-range policies which would give the reserve components stability and continuity, qualities so sadly lacking in the past. In those debates, in the Pentagon and in the halls of Congress, we frequently have found ourselves opposed to the Regular Services. More often than not, we have won our point and the standard explanation has become a disparaging reference to the Guard’s strong community ties and consequent political power. But time and again, we have shown that we were for the simplest reason of all—because we were right!

Because we were right, the validity of our ideas was obvious to objective minds. Because our views on reserve affairs so often were accepted, America today is better able to resist the encroachments of a hostile ideology.

We must continue to be right. Guardsmen can’t sit in the old like old soldiers and be ‘spared a hard field’—not in this age of $40,000,000,000, 3,000-mph defense. We are entitled to look on our past with pride—but only if that pride strengthens our determination to meet the needs of today.

The current reorganization must be undertaken with the same élan that always marks Guard efforts.

Training methods must be improved still further. By what Gen Bruce Clarke, Commanding General of the “Silly Sketch Book” and “Anti-Armistice” organizations, calls “in- tergrated” and “blended” training, we must cram three hours of combat-tuned leviathan into the hour of training.

Operational and physical records must be met. If and when the whistle blows again, it will be too late to go back to PFT.

We must not let disputes with the Regular Services create barriers of littermates. It takes no clairvoyance to see further opportunities for discord in the immediate future, as Congress, the Administration, the Armed Services and the American people debate defense needs and costs. Indeed, the debate already has started and the Guard cannot hold itself aloof—not if it expects to retain its community ties and the political influence which have contributed so heavily to its effectiveness as a first-line force.

We must speak out with force and clarity and with intelligent understanding of the Country’s total defense requirements. Our words will be heard, and heeded, if we’re right!