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A Salute to the "Lost" Divisions

REORGANIZATION, long debated and repeatedly altered to accommodate conflicting views, at last is in progress. By Spring, the entire Army National Guard will have switched to its new format.

National Guardsmen have launched themselves into the complex task of reorganizing with their usual determination to get the job done quickly and efficiently. If they have not displayed real enthusiasm, it is because reorganization, in this case, means that 15 fine combat Divisions and hundreds of other organizations will cease to exist.

We should not let these ill-fated organizations pass into history without notice, for they are more than mere numbers and shoulder patches. They had become a part of their States and communities, as their communities were a part of them. Each of them likewise was a body of men with shared experiences and common ideals, joined in a cause to which they willingly contributed loyalty and love as well as thought and energy.

True, the officers and men who were assigned to the units soon to be deactivated will not be lost to the Guard. They are being shifted into other organizations, where their skills and experience can continue to serve the Guard, the Nation and the States.

Nevertheless, the loss is great. Men who never have experienced the satisfaction of serving their Country in a proud and historic old Division, cannot understand why we mourn their passing so intensely. To them, the number by which a Division is known is only that—a number—and the patch which is its trademark is no more than a convenient means of identification.

But Guardsmen know better.

A Division, or a lesser organization, is much more than just a collection of men and Military Occupational Specialties and military hardware, although each of these elements goes into its making. It is the sum of all its component parts plus a great deal more. It is a living, breathing, ever-changing organism with an existence and a vitality and a style all its own. It is composed not just of the men, aspirations and activities that currently mark its existence, but additionally, of the courage, the accomplishments and the devotion that were bestowed upon it by every man who ever passed through its ranks.

More than that, even, it is a defense asset that literally is unique and irreplaceable. It has developed its own distinctive operating pattern over the years, in which each member has learned how his own individual talents and efforts can contribute best to the objectives of the whole. It has become a finely-honed fighting machine that performs its job almost instinctively because it has become a team in the truest sense.

The Guard has said all this and more to the men in the Congress and at the Pentagon who are responsible for formulating force structure. Even while agreeing with much that we said, they ruled against us.

So be it. The decision has been made. Our task, as always, is to take the structure assigned to us and transform it into the best fighting force that citizen-soldiers can produce. We will give the best that's in us to this difficult task.

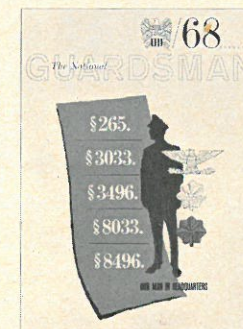
But we will not soon forget the splendid organizations that fell by the wayside nor forswear our right (in the case of the lost Divisions and non-Divisional organizations) to look on them still as National Guard units. That much, at least, was earned times over, in three wars, by the heroic Guardsmen who carried their colors into combat. ♦

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