THE MILITARY SCENE

Of course you've heard the ancient crack about the doctor who was convinced his patient was crazy in principle—but the patient died. That's just the opinion of Operations Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson in reacting to a telegraph:

"I am acquainted with a young man who is in the Guard to start out with a six-months period of active-duty training. That's fine in principle—but it will cut enlistments in half.

"The National Guard needs basically trained recruits. But under Dr Wilson's prescription the Guard will get too much basic training and therefore not nearly enough recruits. The patient will get the medicine he needs, but he'll get so much of it that he'll starve to death for lack of solid food.

"The National Guard, let's remember, is the country's first-line reserve of combat troops. Any time we need more troops than the Regular Army can provide, we have to rely on the National Guard. In the Korean war, for example, it was necessary to call up eight National Guard divisions and a large number of supporting units to active duty. There is also an organization called the Army Reserve, but that is a reserve of unorganized individuals—names in a card file.

"The National Guard has the combat units that would be essential if we needed citizen-soldiers in a hurry. The Army Reserve, with a few exceptions, does not.

"So the arguments against the National Guard, as with all reserve organizations of the Armed Services, is that the citizen soldier, or airman, or sailor, or Marine, can afford only a limited amount of time for training. He has to earn a living, and that takes up most of his time and he doesn't have the time and interest to devote to education or job-training. It's in the country's interest that he does these things. Industry, education, and family life are the foundations of national strength.

"When a young man enlists in the National Guard, there is no transfer of funds, no gift of time and effort to the defense of his country and he deserves to be commended. If the compulsory service bill was passed, he'd have to give his time (than he's able to, or give it as much as men are willing to give). It is up to the law-makers to apply the draft to get enough men and enough time. Congress has been unwilling to do this for reserve forces, such as the National Guard. The draft applies only to the active forces.

"So the National Guard still depends on voluntary enlistments. It is a force of strength of its units without a steady flow of volunteers.

"But there's no doubt that the training time available—the maximum that can be required on a voluntary basis (one armory drill a week plus six-week end during the year and an annual training period of two weeks) is just about enough to keep up unit efficiency provided the original intake of recruits already has had a period of active-duty training.

"On this point, almost all experienced officers of the National Guard are agreed. But they don't agree that a blanket demand for six months' training is the answer. So long a period would interfere with educational programs and job prospects. Many a youth who otherwise would join the Guard would shy away from a six-month active-duty hitch.

"The compromise suggestion that the Guard officers put forward seems to make sense. It is this: Require every Guard recruit to take 11 weeks of training. This is enough to get through the hard-core basic training required for all recruits. Then adapt armory, week-end and summer training schedule so as to fit in the other subjects needed for the man whether military specialty he may be fitted for. Eleven weeks of training won't scare off many recruits. It can be gotten through in a single summer; it won't interfere with schooling. The Air units of the National Guard already require such a period of basic training and are doing very well with it. The Army units certainly don't need more basic training than those of the Air Force.

"Secretary Wilson gives the erroneous impression that the National Guard is in bad shape today by saying that 83% of its officers have had no prior service. He doesn't point out that 84% of its officers have had prior active service, the vast majority in World War II, Korea or both. The 17% of senior noncoms and technicians who have also had such service, and there's an efficient force of combat-experienced personnel. Also about 15% of the enlisted men either have completed a period of basic training, or is a course at an Army service or technical school. But all these—especially the combat-experienced officers and noncoms—are wasting assets. The recruiting any younger, and each year sees more of them leave the service. Unless the Guard gets a steady flow of recruits, its present highly efficient volunteer force (only 7% were rated unsatisfactory by Army inspectors last year) will soon decline in quality.

"If the honorable Secretary thinks the National Guard is essential to the defense of the United States, let him either subscribe a reasonable training period which will enable the Guard to obtain enough volunteers, or ask Congress to extend the operation of the draft to include the National Guard or the needs of the Guard.

"The six-months period—unless backed by the draft—will simply cripple the Guard and leave the United States without any reserve of citizen soldiers worthy of the name.

by George Fielding Eliot