URING the fiery tragedies of Detroit and Newark, it became obvious to those engaged in the restoration of order that the methods on which we always have relied to cope with civil disturbances, no longer are adequate. It isn’t that the system and methods are wrong for the job they were designed to accomplis; but simply that the nature of the problem has been altered drastically.

Detroit, Newark, and much earlier, Watts, added a whole new dimension to the difficult problem of coping with the turmoil in American cities.

Defiance of the law, and violence, took on so massive a scale in Detroit and Newark, that their intensity and extent could hardly have been imagined, much less anticipated. Some degree oforganization, or manipulation, was discernible, even if rudimentary and spur-of-the-moment. Mass arson and looting surpassed anything in the previous experience of civil and military authorities alike. Most serious from the standpoint of the difficulties which had to be overcome, persistent sniper fire hampered law enforcement and fire-fighting operations. This gave both the Detroit and Newark operations the character of urban guerrilla warfare rather than mere riot control. Finally, thousands of otherwise uninvolved persons succumbed to the general hysteria and became participants to some degree in the degrading spectacle, even as they simultaneously became the major victims of their own destructive acts.

All this confronts the Nation with an urgent need to prevent such catastrophic outbreaks in the future, and to contain them quickly, before they can grow to such uncontrollable dimensions, if they erupt despite our best efforts.

The National Guard, as a military extension of both the State and Federal authority, should not concern itself with the sociological aspects of the problem except as these overlap our enforcement function. But we must take a direct and prominent hand in devising more effective methods for bringing such disorders under control in the shortest possible time with the least harm to innocent persons.

This involves such areas as psychological deterrence, improved inter-agency coordination at State and municipal level, better command and control techniques, more comprehensive planning and preparation, updated tactical doctrines tailored to such use, expanded training at every level based on lessons learned in the recent disastrous eruptions, and a host of lesser improvements.

The first steps in this direction have been taken. In the immediate aftermath of Detroit and Newark, I made some general recommendations to the Secretary of Army along the lines enumerated above. Acting on information obtained from a variety of sources, the Secretary directed the Continental Army Command to evaluate forthwith the Army program for the training and employment of troops in support of civil authority, and to produce a training program aimed at correcting any deficiencies.

No one can say that it won’t happen again but, on the basis of the important steps which already have been taken, all of us—Active Army, National Guard and State authorities—will have better means at hand for bringing outbreaks like these to an end before they assume such massive, near-anarchistic proportions.

One final point needs to be made. Guardsmen need not be ashamed, despite the drumfire of widely-publicized criticism, of the performance of their fellow-Guardsmen in Newark and Detroit. Faced with the utter chaos of whole cities seemingly gone mad, they responded courageously and well.

In the gunfire and flames of Detroit and Newark, mistakes inevitably were made—mistakes in both judgment and methods. But the mistakes and supposed deficiencies were not nearly as prevalent as some news accounts would suggest. What we must set our minds to now is of greater importance than attempting to prove or disprove each off-the-cuff, heat-of-the-moment accusation.

First, we must use every means at our disposal to counteract any harmful impact that the criticism may have on public confidence in the Guard. Second, even more critical, the Guard and the Army must restore the whole problem of applying military force in civil disorders. Then, we must quickly adapt our training and our methods to the needs which Detroit and Newark have imposed on us. Whatever else remains unclear, that much is plain.

From the Flames

JAMES F. CANTWELL
President
National Guard Association of the United States

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