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Requiem for the SRF

THE Selected Reserve Force, or SRF as it is known more familiarly, soon will be a thing of the past. Brought into being in 1965 to meet a critical defense need, it served its purpose more than adequately, and now is being eliminated as a military entity. The units of which it was composed will remain, but without the SRF designation.

It should not be laid to rest, however, without some final comments on

—The nature and importance of the function it performed at a crucial turning point in the Viet Nam conflict.

—The cost it imposed, in terms of diverted equipment and other resources, on other, non-SRF Army Guard and Army Reserve units.

—The exemplary efforts made by men in SRF units to attain unprecedented levels of combat-readiness, and the personal sacrifices entailed in those efforts.

Creation of the SRF, and high Draft calls, were key elements in the Johnson Administration's response to a deteriorating situation in Southeast Asia. Heavier Draft levies provided manpower for the Army buildup in Viet Nam. SRF gave the Army, with minimum lead time, a dependable, well-trained strategic reserve in the continental United States. This made it possible for the Army to divert a larger share of its own attention and resources to the critical struggle in Viet Nam.

An identical function was performed by the similarly earmarked Combat Beef elements of the Air Guard.

Thus, a large share of the responsibility for providing capable combat forces on short notice, to cope with anything that might arise elsewhere while our Active Forces were tied down in Southeast Asia, was placed on the National Guard.

Training assemblies in SRF units were increased from 48 to 72 for all members, and to 96 for Commanders and staffs. Manpower and equipment poured in, most of it from non-SRF units which were virtually stripped to give the SRF a rapid increase in combat capability. (This was the most serious flaw in the program, for it reduced the operational-readiness of a major portion of the Army Guard almost to zero, in order to elevate the readiness of a relatively small portion, the SRF).

Training hours lengthened, pre-mobilization preparations spread to many evenings, as well as weekends, and all this made almost unmanageable inroads into the school, business and personal lives of SRF Guardsmen.

It is to their eternal credit that they so quickly achieved a rapid mobilization and deployment capability, and in such an outstanding manner. They met virtually all of their deadlines, but at a cost to themselves, their families and business associates that cannot be calculated. Guardsmen remaining in non-SRF units likewise pitched in to reorganize, retrain and rebuild their weakened units, oftentimes with the barest minimum of resources and support. Their struggles, too, should not be forgotten as the SRF goes into limbo.

Manpower, equipment and training levels now have been boosted enough, in most Reserve Component units, to permit elimination of a special SRF category. Much still remains to be done, however, before all units attain the capabilities that the security of the Nation requires.

High manning levels must be maintained, even though events in the future diminish the inducement of high Draft calls. Equipment inventories must be lifted, in both quantity and quality, to levels promised by the Army as part and parcel of the Army Guard reorganization. Training must aim at cutting the lead time between mobilization and deployment to the absolute minimum, if we are to meet Army contingency timetables.

SRF showed us the way, if we—Active Army, National Guard and Army Reserve—will but translate its pluses and minuses into guidelines for the future. ♦



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