Guard & Reserves in the spotlight at hearings

The Guard and Reserve are not yet getting full of the support they require, but they are getting attention. I'm optimistic enough to believe that additional support will follow the attention.

Guard and Reserve readiness, or lack thereof, has been a dominant theme in the posture hearings of the second session of the 98th Congress. Last year, the National Guard Association and the coalition of military associations which worked for recruiting and retention incentives, were about the only people or groups who were insisting that readiness of Guard/Reserve units depended first of all on having an adequate number of trained personnel on board. Strength was slipping fast, and all other factors of the readiness equation seemed to fade in importance.

This year, members of the key Congressional committees have demonstrated their concern by their statements and questions. We are pleased that Department of Defense witnesses seem to be unanimous in believing that some incentives are needed.

On the day that this editorial is written, the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee has voted to include funds in the FY 1979 appropriations to expand the reenlistment bonus test to a full fledged reenlistment bonus/educational assistance package. We hope their intent becomes law.

Perhaps of even greater importance than the proposed legislation itself is the determination of this key subcommittee that the Guard and Reserves must be given additional help. There is an underlying belief by the overwhelming majority of those members of Congress that our national defense needs can only be met, and afforded, if in fact the Guard and Reserve can perform their wartime missions, when a strong Guard and Reserve officer who are struggling with recruiting, retention, administration, and training.

The willingness of this subcommittee to support the people of the Guard was also demonstrated by their recommending that an additional $60 million be added to the ARNG budget for FY 1979.

A second dominant theme in this year's round of hearings has been Congressional concern for training. Many members have expressed their concern about the need for additional training support. Our Association has emphasized the need for additional full-time training personnel. We believe the FY 1979 Authorization and Appropriations Acts will provide more training support that was requested in the FY 1979 defense budget.

Many of the factors in the readiness equation are beyond control of the local Guard commander. However, the local commander is key to improved training.

Members of Congress and some defense witnesses are prone to refer to a lack of meaningful training in units. These comments are most often pointed at ARNG/USAR units. Some of this criticism is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of ground combat training, some on serious shortages in equipment and training areas, and some on inadequate planning and poorly conducted training. Only commanders can do something about the last named deficiency. On the other, the solution must come from a higher level.

While Congress is providing additional support to the Guard and Reserve, we as members must justify their belief in us by insuring that we produce the best possible training with the support given us.

The Guard and Reserves are still the best national defense buy for the money, but we need to keep proving it by working so that our training is meaningful and effective.

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How Guardsman in 21 States responded when three successive blizzards struck.

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1979 Guard Battalion

Maj Gen Richard A. Miller, Oregon

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Cover: North Dakota Army Guardsman Staff Sergeant Gary Gulker and his bulldozer plow their way to a downed power line during the three-phased blizzard of January and February to tidy the Guard response to storm emergencies in 21 States.

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