THE GUARD IN THE PERSIAN GULF

What is there to say about the National Guard's performance in the Persian Gulf War? The main thing we would say about the Guard's track record is that the Total Force Policy has been vindicated. Guard units performed superbly. So many good things happened in this mobilization that it is difficult to know where to begin. So let's begin with a commitment about our decision with nothing directly to do with the Guard, but everything to do with the way this war unfolded. That was the Bush administration's decision, learning from military history of the 1960s, to prosecute this war full-bore from Day 1.

An associated aspect was the early decision to mobilize the Guard and Reserve. This began in August 1990 with President George Bush's decision to invoke, for the first time in history, the authority under section 673(b), title 10, to call 200,000 members of the Guard and Reserve for up to 180 days. We hailed this decision at the time, all the while wondering why Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney did not mobilize Army combat units from the call. We are able to note with pride the fact that the Guard units called to report to mobilization stations with little difficulty and high morale. Many of us have heard the assertion from our nonfriends that Guard members would never show up for a mobilization call. We would not call it a nonlegenial truth, as we knew it would. Indeed, the number of nondeployable members was lower than in some active duty units. The call-up of Army Guard combat support and combat units proceeded in a manner that supported the call-up process with few hitches as these units conducted postmobilization training and then deployed to the theater. There, they have performed and are performing admirably by all accounts.

In addition, two field artillery brigades have lent firepower to the deployed Guard's forces. One of the first volleys of fire at the beginning of the Coalition war was by the Oklahoma Army Guard's Multiple Launched Rocket System (MLRS) battalion, one of the first combat arms units mobilized. On the final day of the war, before President Bush declared the unilateral cease-fire, the 48th Infantry Brigade (Mech) was certified as fully ready. This occurred about 90 days after they were reported to mobilization station. We could only observe that if the 48th Brigade and the other two roundout brigades mobilized had been called up on September 1 instead of December 1, they could have been deployed in time to join their parent roundout divisions for combat.

Many in the Guard continue to wonder about the training requirement placed upon these roundout brigades. There is some anecdotal evidence emerging that shows that the active Army divisions deployed early to the Middle East suffered some of the same training shortfalls identified so unfairly in the 48th Brigade. As one division commander in Saudi Arabia noted in February, his division does not have much opportunity in peace-time to maneuver at division level. This was the very point critics made about the Guard's roundout brigades. It seems fair to observe that had the 48th Brigade been called and deployed based on original roundout plans, it would have had the same opportunities to train itself for the Iraqi challenge under the 24th Division's supervision, as did the division's two active duty brigades. It seems unlikely, given known readiness ratings based on the Army's readiness-ratings system, that the 48th Brigade's readiness was significantly different than the day of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait than the other elements of the division. However, it is equally obvious that the mobilization had changed vastly by December 1, when the other parts of the 24th Army Guard were in the desert for four months.

Perhaps the biggest single success story for the Guard, as often is the case, is the Air Guard. The Air Force showed its confidence in the Air Guard from the beginning by calling 12 air National Guard units to active duty. It is the roundout brigade for the 24th (Mech) Infantry Division, which was one of the first to be deployed to the Persian Gulf. By the time the National Training Center (NTC) the Guard members learned new techniques in fighting Saddam Hussein's forces in the desert.

The Army Guard Keeps Score with the 1-R

For the National Guard's 1-R evaluator what the commander must do is to train or gain combat training in order to get a "pass." The 1-R is conducted by the inspector general section of the Army Staff of the War. The 1-R is a supervised test of a unit's readiness for combat.

Expanding Nation Building in Africa

The end of the Cold War and the Middle East crisis, support to the United Nations in the Horn of Africa, and economic development in Africa is sure to suffer. But some significant proportions again with the establishment of the Guard and Reserves. So far, the United States has been only the commitment of grass roots American to those missions.

Taking the Guard Out of Combat

The Guard was regarded by some that the Department of Defense would give up its combat role as well as the Total Force Policy.