The State Mission of the Guard: “Public Protection” is not non-military

A refreshing and long-overdue change is commencing to appear in the attitudes of Department of Defense officials toward the governors, in their role as point commanders-to-chief of the National Guard. That change has recently been displayed in a greater willingness to accept the legitimate matters affecting the Guard, and to engage in discussions and negotiations with those consultations.

A senior staff member for ROGAR II, second phase of a detailed role and missions study of the Reserve forces, remarked caustically one day that his group probably would not delve into the “non-military” role of the Guard until the final stages of the study, if then. The so-called “State Mission” simply wasn’t considered to be a matter of major significance.

In a round of consultations involving the National Governors Association and representatives of five governors named to assist in the DOD study, that decision was disputed and several points were made.

First, “non-military” role is a misnomer. Augmenting civil authority in major emergencies is an accepted and important role for armies in nearly every modern nation. In this country, it most commonly is performed by the National Guard.

A recent publication lauds good men—missions: (1) The Posse Comitatus Act provides a guaranty of enforcement of active force troops in law enforcement activities; (2) The Guard, with its wide dispersion in every part of every state, can reach a disaster area or other emergency more quickly than someone coming from an Army post two or three days away. (3) Guard units are under the direct control of, and answerable to, the governor, whose senior subordinates can best delineate where low forces can be most effectively used.

A working group representing the governors recommended to DOD officials that “public protection” is a far more accurate description of the state mission. They emphasized further that the Guard fights a war only infrequently but goes through more than 200 mini-mobilizations every year to help civil authorities cope with disaster. Those range from an airplane that crashes into a house and three men every day, a rush to a desperately ill child to a freeway hospital, to turnover of thousands of Guardsmen in the face of natural disaster. Power outages, chemical spills, floods, train derailments, forest fires, plane crashes, women’s strikes, medical evacuations, blizzards, prison security, and civil disorders all have figured in state Guard calls in its public protection role this past year alone.

DoD Considers Governors

The governors (and NGAUS) contend — and DOD now appears to agree — that this is important enough to deserve more than the cursory treatment that was initially contemplated in ROGAR II.

The apparent change of attitude originated last year in a major conference between DoD and the governors over a Reagan administration expansion of active force troops in law enforcement activities. Although this Guard, with its wide dispersion in every part of every state, can reach a disaster area or other emergency more quickly than someone coming from an Army post two or three days away, (3) Guard units are under the direct control of, and answerable to, the governor, whose senior subordinates can best delineate where low forces can be most effectively used.

The resolution cited a section of the U.S. Code that says: “No change in the branch, organization or allotment of a unit located entirely within a state may be made without the approval of its governor.”

Sooner thereafter, the study was shifted to different hands and overall responsibility assigned to Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs Harold W. Chosny. A personnel officer, Chosny is credited with Chosny’s initiative that a true working relationship soon commenced to develop between the governors and DoD. He made a special trip to Indianapolis to discuss the issue with Governor Otis R. Bowen, head of the Governors’ committee that deals with Guard matters. The outcome was an agreement that DoD would consult regularly with a group of five governors, headed by Do. Bowen, or with their designated representatives as the study progressed. Two such consultations have taken place and DoD representatives again will be present when the governors meet in late August in Boston. It is too early to say that a complete transformation has taken place. One aside involving one Pentagon group does not offer that kind of assurance.

But a notable start has been made. Thanks to Deputy Assistant Secretary Chosny, the governors are being allowed halfway to meet the governors, and to Governor Bowen, whose calm determination made it clear from the start that the Guard’s ability to respond to emergencies is not negotiable!

We hope most sincerely that the goodwill already developed by Chosny and the entire staff is permitted to grow, and to spread into those hidden corner offices where responsibility is assigned. We can hardly imagine a more fitting service to the state of the Guard than deciding in complete disregard for state (and taxpayer) needs.

The National Guardman is published monthly by the National Guard Association of the United States, with editorial and advertising offices at 1 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Telephone (202) 789-0031. Second class postage paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. Copyright 1978 by the National Guard Association of the United States. All rights reserved. All members of the NGAUS receive The Guardman. Nonmember subscriptions: $3 per year domestic; $4 per year foreign. Bulk rates for 100 or more copies to the same address: $2.55 each. Single copies $1.00. The Duquessin carries original articles bearing on national defense, with emphasis on the National Guard. Manuscripts and artwork must be accompanied by written permission for responsible republication is assumed for safe handling. Opinions expressed by authors do not necessarily represent the official NGAUS positions or policy. Likewise publication of advertising cannot be deemed an endorsement thereof by this Association or its members.

August 1978