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STAFF

EDITOR / COL Allan G. Crist

ASSOCIATE EDITOR / CPT Luther L. Walker

ADVERTISING & CIRCULATION / MAJ John Bibb

No Time for Complacency

THE National Guard has been posting steady manpower gains in recent months, recovering most of its FY 1972 losses. As of 1 Nov., the Army Guard stood at 390,707—only 9,297 or 2.4% below its traditional 400,000. The Air Guard numbered 91,192, a mere 1,099 or 1.2% below its authorized 92,291.

The two branches unfortunately are alone among the six Reserve Components. All the others have been showing small but steady losses for many months. The mobilization objective for all six combined is 971,066. At the end of September, they were 68,643 people, or 7%, below that level.

Guardsmen have a right to be proud of their accomplishment. Successful recruiting in today's no-Draft environment takes good planning, aggressive leadership and much hard work. We have combined those elements with experience, State support and strong motivation.

However, we've barely started on the long road toward a self-sustaining all-volunteer Guard, and some of the worst pitfalls still lie ahead. We can completely and quickly erase the small successes we have had if we ease up.

Such a pitfall already looms. An "Army Times" writer was merely repeating what has been said with increasing frequency in some Pentagon offices when he wrote recently that the Guard "may be its own worst enemy" if, by its recruiting performance, it persuades Congress that proposed new membership incentives are not in fact needed.

We simply won't believe that the Armed Services Committees cannot perceive the very real and unsolved problems that still confront the Reserve Components in their efforts to attract and retain adequate numbers of qualified men and women.

Like camels crossing the proverbial desert, the Guard and Reserves have been living largely on water and fat stored-up from earlier consumption. We have been drawing a very large share of our new recruits from men with prior service. This has been fruitful because it has reduced our training costs by giving us experienced men, many with Viet Nam combat service. But that source is dwindling and soon will slow to a trickle as Active Force strength stabilizes at lower levels. (To illustrate: the Army's pool of Inactive Ready Reservists, from which many of our new members have been coming, stands today at 705,009, of whom 635,712 are enlisted men; with no Draft and a shrinking Active Force, that pool is expected to drop to 217,600 (with only 161,000 enlisted men) a scant four years from now.)

Even the Guard, with its encouraging recruiting performance, has not yet been able to attract enough young, non-prior service recruits—the group that must fill our future strength gaps. For the first three months of FY '74, the Army Guard enlisted only 5,323 non-prior service recruits, or 57% of the 9,275 it needed. For all Reserve Components combined, the rate was 45%.

These statistics convince me that two courses of action are not just desirable but essential, if we are to produce a long-term solution to our manpower problems:

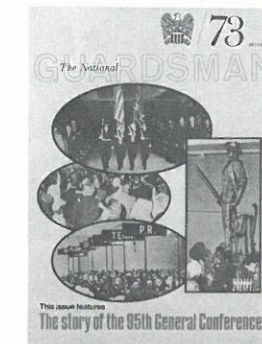
First, the Guard and Reserve must redouble their efforts to create the kind of challenge today's young men and women can't resist—to make training interesting, to make the importance of our defense role clearly apparent, and to "sell" the Guard and Reserve more effectively and more vigorously to young Americans. In this, we must have the sincere and wholehearted assistance of the Active Services.

Second, the Department of Defense and Congress must recognize that we need more help, mostly in the form of a relative few new financial incentives to strengthen our recruiting effort.

The Nation and its Armed Forces already have invested a prodigious quantity of thought, time, money and sweat in the zero-Draft, all-volunteer proposition. For the Reserve Forces, success may be almost within reach. It would be unforgivable if we let it slip away for want of some comparatively small additional expenditures and just a little more effort. ♦



Henry W. McMillan
Major General, FLARNG
President
National Guard
Association of
The United States



Most monumental of the onlookers at the NGAUS "OKC" Conference was the larger-than-life Minute Man of old, towering over his Jet Age descendants.

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