Major General Edward R. Fry, President, NGAUS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

1981...RING IN THE NEW!

The advent of January marks the start of a new year, the annual opportunity to "start off with a clean slate." And in this particular year of 1981, the inauguration of a new President heralds the kick-off of a new national administration in Washington, D.C.

As this was being written, to meet the pressing deadline of the editor, the evidence of the pre-inauguration period were all around us at this edge of Capitol Hill where NGAUS has its national headquarters. A staff member actually encountered the President-Elect, and the Vice President-Elect coming out of a nearby building. And in walking around the block for lunch, it was possible to see the workmen putting up the platforms and grandstands which would be ready for the January 20 celebrations.

It was in this setting that we decided to take another look at the defense section of the winning party's platform. It is not a large element of the platform in terms of words, but in terms of ideas. It is detailed, it is convincingly written, it is a well-articulated statement of a goal ("to preserve world peace by keeping America strong") and a pledge (for a "foreign policy supported by a major upgrading of our military forces.")

Additionally, there is a sober warning that, "If the challenges of the 1980's are not met, we will continue to lose the respect of the world, our honor, and in the long run, our freedom." It expresses the frustration that has frequently but consistently denounced the "uncoordinated leadership in the Pentagon since the days of Robert Frances McNamaras."...the supremacy of systems analysis in the Pentagon (which has) resulted in slowdowns, delays, and cost increases in nine vital Army procurement programs in armor, fire, power, air defense and helicopters.

We recall that last summer a frustrated Army Chief of Staff, General Edward C. Meyer, was driven to a declaration that the United States had a "tallow army" in terms of its manning shortage. The response of the nation seems to be, "well, let's do something about it."

Several weeks after the election, Air Force Secretary Hans M. Mark, in a speech at Sacramento, California, predicted that the President-Elect who ran on a platform which promised to strengthen our national defense...will "make good those promises." This hope is buoyed by Mr. Reagan's own declaration that he would consider himself obliged to—and indeed, wished to—sustain the content of his party's platform.

The Republican platform contained this reference in its commentary on National Guard and Reserve forces: "We must ensure that all Americans take note of the proud and vital role played by the Reserve and National Guard components of the Armed Forces of the United States." We earnestly hope that Mr. Reagan himself will personally share this sentiment. We think, for example, that the fine efforts of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (if it is to truly and effectively carry its message to the U.S. business and industrial community) should be taken out of obscurity in the outer offices of the Secretary of Defense and given official White House status under a presidential special assistant.

This would be, among other things, a major signal to the Department of Defense itself with respect to presidential recognition of the fact that (again quoting the Republican Party platform) "the armed forces of the U.S. are today critically dependent upon our nation's reserve components for both combat arms and combat support.”

In the final analysis, it will all come down to dollars for defense. As former Secretary of Defense, Melvin R. Laird, points out: "Of all the decisions facing the new President, none will be more important than those he makes in connection with the defense budget. Not only do budgetary decisions create defense policy, but they also send signals abroad about American resolve and impatience with economic conditions here at home.”

It goes without saying that the competition for defense dollars and presidential support is going to be immense—and intense.

There will be disappointments to be sure. There isn't enough money in any defense budget to support every program proposed by even the most dedicated and convinced protagonists. Eventually, this new President—like every new President—will have to sift out the recommendations of his many advisers and make decisions which will shape the nation's strategy of the Reagan Administration.

A week or so after the election, there was an editorial in the Kansas City Times which noted that, "There can be little argument that Americans want their military establishment strengthened..." This appears to be a significant part of the mandate which the people have given to the new Commander-In-Chief. We must await not only his response but continuing signals from the public at large that we have the nation will to assume the burdens and to make the sacrifices which may be necessary in other areas, to repair the damage which neglect and indifference have inflicted upon our military establishment.

1878 1981
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Features

8 40 YEARS PEEL AWAY Wisconsin's 5th Infantry Regiment reenacts memories of some days...

13 1980 WINSTON P. WILSON MAKES THE RETROFECT The Guard's best shooters assemble to rack up another top to the mark

15 WILLIAM TELL '80 California Golden Bears claim a victory in aerial contest.

Departments

14 EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

14 1980 WINSTON P. WILSON MAKES THE RETROFECT The Guard's best shooters assemble to rack up another top to the mark

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15 WILLIAM TELL '80 California Golden Bears claim a victory in aerial contest.

6 24 WOMEN AND THE NATIONAL GUARD The battle for equality finally began?

24 INTERVIEW WITH ROSEMARY GNAID Special Assistant for Minority Affairs, National Guard Bureau asks era

25 RAMDEP ON POMCUS Yes, the Army Guard can deploy directly to Europe, and FIGHT!

16 24 WOMEN AND THE NATIONAL GUARD The battle for equality finally began?

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