A crucial role

In worthwhile, periodically, to renew our dedication and sense of purpose by reminding ourselves of the crucial role our Association has played in creating today’s modern, professional, well-supported National Guard.

It wasn’t always this way. President Harry S Truman used to delight in reminding young Guardsmen that he received no drill pay when he belonged to a Missouri artillery unit before World War II. In fact, he paid a small sum for the privilege of drilling each week, with the contributions going for the care of the horses and the armory. Guardsmen today tend to take for granted the far-reaching federal support they receive. They forget that the vast sum of money appropriated for the Guard each year, the huge inventories of equipment, the modern armories and facilities, the skilled technicians, and the substantial financial rewards that individual Guardsmen receive for their services, have all come to us in the past few decades. It is no exaggeration to say, also, that most of those resources came to us only after long and often-bitter battles waged by the NGAUS in Washington, supported by the states.

The Guard is unique, with features (like state control in peacetime) that do not permit it to fit precisely into the conventional patterns so cherished by the active military establishment. Consequently, it has found it necessary to conduct an almost ceaseless struggle since the early 1900s:
- To firmly establish itself as a first-line component of the federal military establishment.
- To preserve its identity and cherished state affiliation.
- To obtain the support so essential to an effective military force.
- To obtain the same financial rewards and benefits for its members, proportionately, that are granted to the active services.

The NGAUS has served both as the spearhead and the unifying force in this long struggle, developing a consensus from the often-disparate views of Guardsmen in the states, and conveying the consensus to Washington officials. The results of that century of struggle are worth recalling:


Almost as numerous are NGAUS successes in averting undesirable actions. Several stand out: establishment of an Army Guard strength “floor” of 400,000 in 1969 that has held firm for 17 years against Pentagon assaults; defeat of attempts to reduce Air Guard strength and eliminate flying units; elimination of many of the most harmful features of several major Army Guard reorganizations; rejection of Administration proposals to reduce $181 million in FY 1975 ARNG/ANG funding.

The NGAUS has been successful in its endeavors because of the wide support it has always been given by the National Guard officer corps. In FY 1975, to illustrate, 98 percent of the Army Guard’s and Air Guard’s active officers were paying members of the NGAUS. Our goal in FY 1976 will be the other 2 percent.