The Army Chief of Staff—
And the Virtues of Saying
What Needs to be Said

"We should have brought Selective Service out of deep freeze for some time ago, in my opinion. We should not hesitate, (and) bringing it out and starting registration just as soon as we can. Once we have become accustomed to registration, then we should (start) to classify just as soon as we can. The next step, in my scenario, is (that) we must draft for the IRS. There is no solution that we have today, either in operation or on the horizon, that will provide us the means to overcome that major deficiency, of the shortfall in the IRS, which means that we do not have a manpower base for mobilization, which is so essential."
—General Bernard K. Rogers
March 13, 1979

understanding, particularly the Army Guard (ARNG) and Army Reserve (USAR). The ARNG has fallen to 228,140, and the USAR to 186,900, a combined total of 165,000 trained people below their wartime requirement of 700,000.

In response to senatorial questions, General Rogers estimated the Army requirement for a major conflict at 700,000 trained individuals. As of the end of 1978, its total strength was 182,001! His estimate of 700,000 was based on the need to flush out understrength Active, Guard and Reserve units serving on M-Day, replace the heavy toll of combat casualties that could be expected in the early weeks of a high-intensity NATO war, and provide a nucleus for new units, to give the Army a capability for combat beyond those early weeks.

With IRS strength now standing at one-fourth of the requirement—and many of the existing number not reachable, or no longer qualified, or not in the needed MOS—there is only one alternative. ARNG and USAR units service the IRS for the time being. For a major mobilization, they'd all be mobilized, but most units would be stripped of trained personnel, to be used as fillers and replacements in other units. That would destroy most Guard and Reserve units, and with them destroy the Army's ability to fight beyond the first few weeks.

Drafting for the IRS would also produce the bonus, as General Rogers told the senators, of influencing young people to enlist voluntarily in units of the Active forces and Guard/Reserves.

Department of Defense officials talk confidently of recalling hundreds of thousands of retired personnel and veterans, but military and Congressional specialists regard that as mere wishful thinking. They might become a military asset later in a conflict, but not in its opening weeks, as DoD contemplates.

That's the story. It explains why General Rogers felt deeply enough to state his views in stark, uncompromising terms, without submerging his warning in the usual Washington euphemisms and equivocations. It's what NGAUS and other organizations of like mind have been saying for some time. We are delighted, and proud, to find ourselves in the company of some General Rogers' integrity and stature.

His concern—and ours—is not unfounded. It is not the jingoistic rhetoric of military hard-liners. We serve units on M-Day, replace the heavy toll of combat casualties that could be expected in the early weeks...