GUARDSMEN MUST BE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS

From the snipping on the road to Concord to the battle at Breed's Hill and the fighting in the hedgerows behind the Normandy beaches, citizen-soldiers have responded to our nation's call. In times of peace, our state militias have remained quietly tucked away—out of sight and out of mind—in the far recesses of our states' hills, fields and towns, there to be nearly forgotten until once again called upon to defend liberty and our nation's values. In every historical instance our citizen service was difficult, almost traumatic experience because our men, equipment and training had been allowed to languish in the security of Inner America. Today, this is no longer the case. A retired Guardsman of just five years probably would not recognize the National Guard today. We are being equipped with the most sophisticated and modern weapons systems available and manned by increasing numbers of full-time National Guard units. Guard units are training longer, more often, on mission-oriented tasks at prime training sites around the state and the continental United States (CONUS). The National Guard has become an important part of both the Total Force Policy and, indeed, some Guard units will deploy and fight earlier than their active component counterparts. This commitment to increased readiness has placed unusual demands on our National Guard units as military organizations with specified deployment missions and on National Guard members as private citizens who also must be professional soldiers.

"Professional soldiers?" Absolutely! Even though our neighbors recognize us as the local druggist, farmers, insurance agents, a banker, or computer programmer.

We have occasions, usually unfortu- nate states or local circumstances, when our units or individuals are called upon to display their technical, professional capabilities. This past spring, for example, the North Carolina National Guard responded to an appeal for assistance due to serious injuries and damages caused by a series of devastating tornadoes throughout the eastern portion of that state. The men and women of the units involved performed magnificently, often heroically, in efforts that saved lives and helped minimize property loss and damage. This Guard "involvement" is the kind we're noted for and, quite correctly, we are expected to perform. The evolution of the Total Force Policy, however, and the National Guard's high priority position within that Total Force has caused a dramatic expansion in both the likelihood and the scope of our potential federal missions. Today, if our active Army and Air Force deployment, we have no choice but to be professional soldiers and airmen.

Most professional soldiers, certainly those in the active component, sacrifice their daily involvement in their home communities to meet the mission of providing a perpetual commitment of national military service. In a 20- to 30-year military career, an active soldier or airman may accumulate 10 to 16 years, living overseas as well as throughout America. Although our deployments do travels may sometimes be exciting, even exotic, that professional soldier loses something precious, something very meaningful in all of our lives, something that once lost requires years to regain—he loses a sense of community belonging.

Faced with his new mobility in our society and our Total Force require- ments to be professional soldiers, our states' Guards are in danger of losing that precious commodity—a sense of community belonging—which has been our strength throughout our history. And a strong community relationship has been peculiar to our National Guard for many decades. We must make an extraordinary effort now before too late, to nurture and pre- serve that unique relationship. As Guard units and individual Guards- men, we must emerge from those quiet fields, hills and towns where we have traditionally hidden and been forgotten in peace. We must as- sume a stabilizing role within our ever changing communities and, as both individuals and units, provide the leadership, the rallying point around which our communities revolve.

Continuing our fine, professional assistance to our communities during emergencies or disasters is certainly one way to do that, but it is no longer enough. We must become concerned and involved, officially, formally and effectively, as National Guards and individual Guardsmen. Often you are the only "soldiers" with whom that community has any direct contact.

Let your military professionalism shine before your community mem- bers, and much more than just the professional soldier who may deploy to fight our nation's battles. Be involved as members in your local community activi- ties.

Your unit may be the largest, if not the multitude of your soldiers, or community by officially becoming involved in community functions.

Guard unit commanders and all unit members should seek every opportu- nity to proudly wear their uniforms and speak at community gatherings. Get involved as Guardsmen, with neighbors and community leaders about the military, about our country and about your community.

Because the Guard belongs, you owe "involvement" to yourselves, your National Guard, your country and your community.

Fild per Jeff Schlesinger, on the cover of one of the many National Guard of California, we request to participate in the Los Angeles Olympics; he is the state director. For- simulating, particularly security and evi- dence, were 100 members of the California National Guard, operating in various businesses Los Angeles, design, Arkansas Design Group.

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