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Merger, Mobilization, Equipment

AS we close out another field training season, three questions are uppermost in the minds of most National Guardsmen.

Will we be merged with the Reserves and, in the case of the Army National Guard, realigned, despite the setback which the merger/re-alignment plan suffered in the Congress?

Will portions of the Guard have to be mobilized, as part of the United States' response to events in Viet Nam?

Will Reinforcing Reserve units of the Army Guard be able to survive the threatened withdrawals of equipment and of REP training spaces?

Ultimate and final answers must await the making of major policy decisions. These decisions relate, not just to the National Guard, but to such unpredictable events as the progress of the conflict in Southeast Asia and the reaction of Communist China to the India-Pakistan dispute. They are influenced, also, by the strain which has developed in relationships between the Armed Services Committees of the Congress and the Department of Defense.

On the merger, however, Congress made one thing clear through language inserted in the Defense Appropriations Bill: there'll be no merger or realignment this year, nor until Congress itself gives a green light to any changes through appropriate legislation.

Sub-committees of both Armed Services Committees held lengthy hearings, then refused to endorse the plan in its present form. The Chairmen of both Sub-committees expressed apprehension lest realignment at this critical period cause a dangerous loss of combat-readiness. They suggested that the Department of Defense restudy the whole plan, then bring it back to the Sub-committees early in the next Congressional session (which convenes in January) for further discussion. Defense leaders have continued to press their case, averring that events in Viet Nam demand speedy implementation, not delay, for a realignment and merger. Any expectation that the issue could be settled quickly was ruled out, however, by the ban against change which went into the Appropriations Bill.

On mobilization, too, decisions must await events. The President has made it plain that units of the Reserve Components would be ordered to active duty only if international events made such action absolutely necessary. Initially, he decided, America would respond to the expanded threat in Viet Nam by organizing several new combat organizations in the Active Army, increasing the Draft calls, and increasing the mobilization-readiness of selected Reserve Component units through intensified training, and full strength authorizations. On the Army side, units selected for this "peaking-up" process would receive, moreover, additional drills.

Air Guard units already have been launched into this effort; ARNG/USAR units still are awaiting details of the additional training and identification of the selected units.

Likewise, no details yet have been released on the quantities and types of equipment which must be withdrawn from non-priority units for redistribution to new Army units and selected high-priority ARNG-USAR units. From the standpoint of the affected units, any withdrawal will be too much, if they are to retain an acceptable level of readiness, for their equipment status already rests at or near the level below which effective training cannot be presented. We have pointed this out to the appropriate Committees of Congress and to the Department of Defense, and have urged strongly that, if the low-priority units are to be retained in the force, they should be adequately supported.

In the meantime, while we wait for the decisions that will end our doubts and frustrations, we must, as always, give our best to the job of producing the highest attainable level of readiness in all our units.



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