

MOBILIZATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD
1940-41

SUGGESTED SPEECH OUTLINE

Those who lived through the tense days of 1939 and 1940 can never forget.

The Japanese controlled much of China by force of arms. Chamberlain had come back from Munich with peace in our time, as he called it, then watched Nazi German subdue Czechoslovakia, whose freedom he had tried to preserve. Germany also had annexed Austria. Then, it had sent its panzers into Poland, finally provoking France and Great Britain to declare war. One by one, the Nazi yoke settled on the nations of Western Europe -- France, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway. Great Britain fought on and Russia belatedly cancelled its alliance with Germany to join the fray.

Meanwhile, the United States maintained its neutrality, but it was a neutrality that, as time passed, was slanted ever more heavily in favor of our traditional Allies. President Roosevelt probably described the attitude of most Americans in a fireside chat on September 3, 1939, soon after the invasion of Poland. He said: "This nation will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well." and most didn't. Tiny Great Britain depended more and more on American help for its survival. We could provide supplies and equipment, and thus enable them to hold out, even though we ourselves were little better than a fifth rate power in the military sense.

Today, we are more inclined to remember the huge military machine we built, and the awesome power we generated, during World War II. So it is worth noting that in 1939, the year Hitler invaded Poland, the U.S. Army contained only 188,565 members, making it 17th in military strength among the nations of the world.

A series of modest increases in military strength and military appropriations were approved by Congress. Another year would pass and we would see Hitler dancing his victory jig in the French railway car at Compiègne, however, before we would launch a significant buildup of U.S. military power.

It was on August 27, 1940 -- a full year less three days after German tanks rolled into Poland -- that Congress finally authorized President Roosevelt to mobilize the National Guard as the first major step. The call up was limited by Congress to a year, for training purposes, and it was clearly stated that Guard units could not be sent out of this hemisphere except to U.S. possessions.

Four days later, on August 31, the President used his new authority by ordering the Guard's mobilization to start on September 16. So it was that in the early morning hours of September 16, 1940 -- just 40 years ago -- the first mobilization increment reported to their armories for a year of fulltime service. There were more than 63,000 Guardsmen in that first group, from 27 States.

It was a pivotal and far-reaching event in our relationships with what we came to know as the Free World. For the Guard, it was one of those cataclysmic events from which everything thereafter would date. It paved

the way for an all-out mobilization of U.S. military power. It was a critical turning point in what was soon to become the greatest and most terrible war in history. It gave heart to our friends, and signalled Hitler and his Axis partners that our patience was strained.

Most of us think of the Guard's mobilization as something that happened overnight -- like Presto! and the whole Guard goes off to camp. But that wasn't the way it happened. Only a few training camps had been kept in operation after World War I, and most were in a bad state of repair. There was tentage enough to house most the Guardsmen that would be mobilized, but tents in the wintertime are no bargain in the northern part of the country.

So the Guard was mobilized in 25 increments, extending over a full 13 months from that first September 16 call up. By the time it was completed, some 300,034 Guardsmen had been ordered to duty, in 3,717 mobilized units. They included 18 combat divisions, the element by which combat power is measured. By comparison, as late at 1939, the Regular Army had only nine divisions in its troop structure, and only three of the nine were actually organized in the division format.

(TELL ABOUT MOBILIZATION OF GUARD UNITS IN YOUR STATE OR UNIT).

On the same day the first Guard units were called to duty, another significant event took place. It was on the same day that President Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act, launching another important phase of our military buildup.

I could recite a great deal more of the detail -- the minutae -- of that never-to-be-forgotten mobilization but it isn't the fine detail

that has relevance to today. What is meaningful today is that

-- The Guard is still here, better and more effective than ever.

-- The Guard is still an indispensable element of our military power, containing about one-half the combat power of the total U.S. Army, and almost as large a proportion of the U.S. Air Force's deployable forces.

-- The ability of the Guard to mobilize quickly and fight effectively is every bit as important today as it was in 1940, as regular reading of your daily newspapers will quickly tell you.

(BRIEFLY MENTION DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN, AFGHANISTAN, OR WHERE EVER THE LATEST CRISIS HAS TAKEN PLACE RELATING TO U.S. SECURITY).

One further point needs to be noted. The desire of American political leaders to put the Vietnam fiasco behind us, and to reduce American military expenses, led them to substantially reduce our active armed forces in the early Seventies. They justified the reductions by assigning more missions -- and more important missions -- to the Guard and Reserves. This compelled them to redesign the structure of the Army and Air Force. The result is that neither the Army nor the Air Force today can fight a war of any size without their Guard and Reserve elements. A good many Guard and Reserve units must mobilize and deploy to a combat zone with a few days of the outbreak of war -- or weeks at most.

(IF THE NATURE OF THE AUDIENCE, OR THE OCCASION, SUGGESTS IT, INSERT SOME COMMENTS ON HOW THE LOCAL GUARD WILL OBSERVE THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY, AND HOW MEMBERS OF YOUR AUDIENCE CAN ASSIST OR PARTICIPATE).

(CLOSING AMENITIES)