NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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THE GUARD AND THE MOBILIZATION OF 1940-41

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When the first increment of National Guard units reported for active duty on September 16, 1940, it launched what was to be the largest mobilization of military power ever conducted by the United States.

There were approximately 63,000 Guardsmen and their officers from 27 States in that first contingent, encompassed in four combat divisions, seven antiaircraft artillery regiments, three coast artillery 155mm gun regiments, eight coast artillery harbor defense regiments, and four observation squadrons from the Guard's small but rapidly growing aviation arm.

By the time the final Guard unit was inducted, 300,034 National Guard members had entered active duty, in 3,717 mobilized units. They had been brought into full-time service in 25 separate increments -- 23 by June 30, 1941, and two small final increments, totalling less than a thousand men, in the first months of the next fiscal year. Those increments ranged from that first large group of more than 63,000 down to the 144 people of Wisconsin's 126th Observation Squadron, who comprised the entire 21st increment on June 2, 1941.

The seven observation squadrons and lone Alaskan infantry battalion whose call to duty came in the final stage after June 30, 1941, hadn't even been in existence when the call up commenced the preceding September. All had been activated after that date, along with the eighth observation squadron -- the Wisconsin unit mentioned above -- which had been squeezed into the call up schedule in June.

Major Component of U.S. Military Strength

Mobilization of the Guard held a great deal of significance at that juncture in world affairs. Not only did it give a clear hint that America's patience was exhausted and its neutral stance soon to be abandoned, but it also virtually doubled the size of the U.S. Army. From 1925 until the brink of World War II, the National Guard had always been appreciably larger than the Regular Army, which was little more than a caretaker force.

In 1925, for example, there were 177,428 Guardsmen and only 134,624 Regulars. In 1930, the ratio was 182,715 in the Guard to 137,645 Regulars. (That was in a nation whose total population was only 134,499,095 as compared with a population of well over 200,000,000 today, by way of comparison). Even as late in the game as June 30, 1940, there were only 291,031 Regulars, compared to an expanded Guard of 242,402 -- in the year of Dunkirk, Hitler's victory jig at Compeigne, and a swastika on the Eiffel Tower!

The United States had finally recongized the danger it faced, however, and finally was starting to build up its military strength for the struggle ahead. Congress appropriated a total of $6 billion for the Army that year, 1940, which was about the total it had received in the preceding 16 years! Planning was under way for a two-ocean Navy, a 2,000,000-man Army (later broadened by a considerable degree), and a warplane output of 5,000 per year (soon increased to a goal of 50,000 planes per year by President Roosevelt.)

The Guard in particular had made substantial improvements in its mobilization capability and its readiness, with much help from the tiny, overextended Regular Army. The Army commenced holding large-scale maneuvers in 1935, rotating them among the four U.S.-based field armies. Large Guard contingents took part in each -- six divisions in both 1935 and 1939, and four divisions in each of the

intervening years. In 1940, in view of the ever-increasing likelihood that the U.S. soon would be involved in the war, all four field armies held 21-day maneuvers and almost the entire Guard took part — 209,129 Guardsmen in all.

Few Guardsmen went off to that last month maneuver, in August, 1940, aware that it was but a prelude to an imminent mobilization.

Japan marched into China in 1937, Germany had annexed Austria in 1938, seized Czechoslovakia in 1939, marched into Poland in September, 1939, and conquered Denmark and Norway in 1940. Our friends, Great Britain and France, had been involved in war with Germany since the Polish incursion, and France and the Low Countries were in German hands. By mid-Summer in 1940, many Americans were commencing to doubt that we could stay clear of the conflagration in Europe and China.

The Guard also had been moving ahead rapidly since 1935 with the motorizing of its large force of horse-drawn field artillery. By the time it was mobilized, it had acquired modern motor vehicles to tow its guns, supplanting the ancient World War I solid-tired trucks, and horses. It accomplished the modernization over Army objections, citing the economics of horse power vs. motor power to bolster its case with Congress. Guard witnesses pointed out that horses "eat their heads off every day" while trucks only need be fueled on training days!

Strength Climbed Steadily

Guard strength climbed considerably in the Thirties, as Congress raised the long-standing 185,000 ceiling, and the climb accelerated in the final months before induction.

There had been 195,211 men on the rolls in 1935, but that figure had climbed to 241,612 by June 30, 1940, ten weeks before the mobilization. By the time the final Guardsmen went to active duty, the number had reached 300,034! What makes those figures even more striking is that there were losses of some 96,043 in the final weeks before mobilization -- 1,773 officers, 43 warrant officers, and 94,227 enlisted men. Of the total number discharged, most were privates, corporals and sergeants turned loose because they had dependents. Congress had not yet made provisions for family allotments, so the low-paid grades were simply discharged, although many were brought back into service after the rules were eased. Others discharged were those under 18, enlisted without parental consent, who had served less than six months, some with physical defects, and some in essential occupations.

(It should be noted that long after induction, near the end of the Guard's first year of training, another contingent was sent home -- another group of more than 19,000 with dependents, missed in the pre-mobilization weeding-out, and more than 19,000 who were more than 28 years of age. Many of the latter also were brought back after Pearl Harbor.)

Guardsmen Scattered by Reorganizations

A massive series of reorganizations also commenced for the Guard in 1940, not all of them wisely conceived or intelligently carried out, in the eyes of Guard leaders. The Guard's four cavalry divisions -- pronounced essential by Army leaders only a few months earlier -- were abruptly perceived as unneeded and broken up. Their component elements were converted to field artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, mechanized cavalry, antitank and military police. Even the eight historic infantry regiments in those divisions were wiped out, while brand new infantry regiments were being organized elsewhere in the Army!

The same general order that eliminated the cavalry divisions, dated November 1, 1940, also brought about the withdrawal of 18 divisional tank companies from the Guard infantry divisions and their subsequent merger into four so-called "GHQ" tank battalions.

From those hasty reorganizations emerged several organizations destined to deploy early, months before the outbreak of war, in fact -- and to go down in history as the first Guard units to meet the enemy in WW II combat.

They included New Mexico's 200th Coast Artillery (formerly the 111th Cavalry!), in an antiaircraft role, and two of the four GHQ tank battalions, the 192d and the 194th. The call up of the tank battalions was phased, probably to coincide with the Army's ability to equip them. The 192d by the time it reached the Philippines in 1941, was made up of the companies from Minnesota, California and Kentucky. The 194th consisted of companies from Illinois, Wisconsin and Ohio. The National Guard tankers, like the cavalrymen-turned antiaircraft gunners, fought stubbornly and won considerable praise for their heroic performance in the defense of Bataan. Those who survived the campaign went off to the Japanese prison camps. Many died aboard enemy prison ships. Only a handful came home to savor the fruits of victory after the war.

Causing the greatest wrench, however, was the "triangularization" of the 18 Guard infantry divisions. The Regulars already were in the process of converting from the massive World War I type divisions -- with as many as 25,000 men, four infantry regiments and four artillery regiments in two brigades -- to the slim triangular division of three regiments, four artillery battalions, no brigade headquarters, and far thinned-out support elements. Guard leaders had pushed to reorganize the 18 Guard divisions starting early in 1940. The Army finally ordered it done after Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.

That reorganization set adrift a huge array of Guard organizations -- 54 brigade headquarters, infantry or artillery; 54 field artillery regiments, 18 medical regiments, 18 quartermaster regiments, 18 engineer regiments, and their numerous headquarters. A few of the historic infantry regiments were salvaged for special task forces or for use in such assignments as school troops at Fort Benning. Three were grouped into the almost all-Guard Americal Division, activated in New Caledonia early in 1942 for South Pacific fighting. But most were simply disbanded and their personnel absorbed into brand new units. That, too, was the fate of most of the service elements, scattering Guardsmen individually throughout the rapidly expanding Army, and fuelling resentment in the Guard that simmered for years.

In addition to the 21-day period of field training in the Summer of 1940, Guard units also were directed to step up the pace of armory drills, from 48 per year to 60. An extensive array of staff training programs and schools also were organized. Early in 1940, for example, commanders of the Guard's 18 infantry and four cavalry divisions were assembled in the southern maneuver area to observe Regular Army large units in operation and watch their staff counterparts in action. At one point, they stepped into the shoes of their Regular Army mentors for three days to get a taste of large-unit operations first hand.

Special courses were organized for Guard artillery officers, to accommodate leaders of the newly-converted units. Adjutants schools, inspector general schools, Air Corps supply officer schools, company and battery officers schools, cooks and bakers schools, infantry schools, even some Air Corps schools for pursuit pilots also were quickly organized! Some 1,541 officers and 746 enlisted Guardsmen were sent off to one of the service schools or the special courses, to acquire new skills in almost every branch. In addition, some 12,013 officers and 15,897 enlisted men were enrolled in extension courses in that final year of preparation for the greatest war in history.

The Timetable of Mobilization

The mobilization itself was almost a relief after all the preparatory turmoil. The news had to be broken to employers, families and girl friends. Civilian connections had to be severed. Relatives and friends had to be found who could store away personal belongings. Movement preparations had to be initiated, packing and crating of equipment started, men in certain categories discharged.

The first call up was ordered for September 16 by President Roosevelt's Executive Order No. 8530 of August 31, 1940. It was based on a measure passed only a few days earlier by the Congress -- Public Resolution No. 96, signed by the President on August 27.

September 16, the day the first troop contingents reported to their armories in the early morning hours to commence 12 months of training duty, also was notable for another important action. It was the day President Roosevelt signed the first Selective Service Act since World War I, assuring a supply of raw manpower to flesh out the Guard divisions and to create the huge Army of 8,226,373 men and women eventually built.

Congress limited the call up to no more than 12 months, and decreed that those so inducted "may not be employed beyond the limits of the Western Hemisphere except in the territories and possessions of the United States, including the Phillipine Islands."

An Army's combat power is measured in fighting divisions, and there were four in the first group of inducted Guard units. They were:

---30th Infantry Division -- the "Workhorse of the Western Front," from North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia.

---41st Infantry Division -- soon to earn their spurs as the "Jungleers" of Pacific fame, from Oregon, Washington, Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

---44th Infantry Division, from New York and New Jersey, which won notice later by capturing Werner von Braun and his team of German rocket experts.

---45th Infantry Division, also brought into existence after World War I but which would become one of the best -- and best-known -- of War II, from Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona.

Non-divisional elements in the first increment came from Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia. That brought the number of States represented to 27.

Four other increments were ordered to duty before the year ended, putting another 85,954 in Federal service, or a total of approximately 149,600 Guardsmen by the time 1940 came to a close.

Confusion the Order of the Day

National Guard armories became places of night-and-day activity and vast confusion. There weren't enough uniforms to go around -- nor enough of almost anything else used by fully operational units. Many Guard units were still in the process of ridding themselves of World War II wool "wrap leggings," the flat steel helmets of the same era, and lace-up breeches. Modern trucks and "command cars" were just coming into the inventory -- the latter being half-ton open-topped vehicles called "jeeps" by some until the real quarter-ton jeeps appeared. Garand (M-1) rifles had commenced to make their appearance in the Guard not long before but not yet in the needed numbers.

There wasn't enough gear to set up fully operating kitchens so for most units, meals were taken in cafes near armories. Most units stayed at home town armories for one to two weeks before entraining, or entrucking, for their training stations, and the worst assignment that could be handed out was OD or CQ -- officer-of-the-day for commissioned officers and charge-of-quarters for non-commissioned officers -- which kept the selected individuals on tap at the armory all night while the rest of the unit was out kissing the girls good-bye. Space to bed down an entire unit was not available in many armories so Guardsmen went home each night.

An avalanche of directives and orders descended on every unit, many of them confusing or contradictory. Packing and crating materials became precious. Ancient railway coaches from the early part of the century were shoved into local sidings to await their passengers.

Few Guardsmen looked forward to the months ahead. Winter was at hand, many of the training camps still were not provided with permanent quarters, there weren't enough tents for the mobilized force, and there weren't enough winter coats to go around, to recount only a few of the hundreds of problems and deficiencies.

Conditions in most of the mobilization camps were terrible. Many of the World War I camps had been dismantled; others were still in existence but were virtually uninhabitable due to lack of upkeep in the 20 years since they had been thriving War I cantonments.

Respiratory ailments soon laid a very sizable part of the first inductees low, as they adjusted to living in tents in damp winter weather, and wading daily through the swamps of Arkansas, Louisiana, or Georgia. Overflowing post hospitals had coughing bed patients filling corridors as well as wards, and the well were pressed into service to help tend the sick.

The first-mobilized 45th Division was due to move to Camp Barkley, Texas, for instance, but workmen had nowhere near finished building enough mess halls, supply buildings, or frames on which to spread squad tents. So the division went instead to nearby Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where it trained until Camp Barkley was habitable. Other divisions, like the 35th from Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri, went on to their assigned camp -- Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Arkansas -- and helped workers put on the finishing touches. Sergeants swung picks, corporals dug and scrapped out roadside ditches, and everyone from privates to tech sergeants helped build gravel walkways.

The officers ranks in mobilized units were swelled by more than 3,000 new additions on M-Day. They were the enlisted Guardsmen who had completed the "ten-series" courses qualifying them as second lieutenants, and their hip-pocket commissions were activated simultaneously with the national emergency mobilization. It wasn't an unmixed blessing, however, because the overnight ascension of so many officer's rank emptied an identical number of NCO jobs.

"I'll Be Back In A Year, Little Darling" echoed from every juke box and every radio. Canteens (The term "post exchange" still had not been created) were jammed nightly with customers for soft drinks and shaving gear but there was no beer to be had -- temperance-minded citizens were still powerful enough to keep 3.2 beer out of military canteens though it didn't seem to keep it out of the hands of the troops!

The original intent had been to mobilize the Guard in a few large increments, completing the job in three or four months at most. That's the way it had been accomplished in 1917. The 1917 call up took place in the Summertime, however, while the 1940 version was not to commence until September 16, with Winter approaching, bringing a need for permanent housing. Also the troops in 1917 were shipped over to Europe soon after mobilization, eliminating any need for large permanent training posts.

The induction schedule therefore was spaced out to conform both to the rate at which facilities could be built and to the rate at which adequate equipment could be provided to mobilized units.

Guard Earned Its Place in History

All Guardsmen and all Guard units finally were inducted and for most, it was for "the duration and six months." The rest is history. Guardsmen and Guard units fought in every theater, in 34 separate campaigns, on almost every battlefield and in seven assault landings.

Nine Guard divisions fought in the Pacific region and nine in Western Europe, including one of the assault divisions on Omaha Beach on D-Day -- the 29th "Blue and Gray" Infantry Division of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. Hundreds of smaller Guard units distinguished themselves all around the world.

Guardsmen made temporary stops in places with such mundane names as Camp Livingston, Camp Barkley, Camp Patrick Henry, Fort Oglethorpe, Camp Rucker, and Camp Williston, then moved on to overseas combat arenas with names more exotic to American ears -- Papua, New Caledonia, Guadalcanal, Sicily, Tunisia, Attu, St. Lo and Bastogne, to take only a few from the top of an endless list.

Many lost their lives or were seriously wounded. Others brought home an impressive array of honors -- 14 Medals of Honor, 50 Distinguished Service Crosses, 48 Distinguished Flying Crosses, more than 500 Silver Stars for valor, and no one knows how many Bronze Stars, Distinguished Unit Citations and all the other symbols of superb performance. At least 75,000 became commissioned officers by the time it all ended, five years later -- one-fourth of the entire mobilized force.

Although World War II brought the last call up of the entire National Guard, there have been three national emergencies since that time requiring Guardsmen in sizable numbers for Federal active duty. For the Korean conflict, 120,000 Army Guardsmen and 85 percent of the Air Guard -- 55 units -- served two years on active duty, many on the Korean battlefront. Again for the Berlin Crisis, in 1961, over 65,000 Guardsmen were called to duty, tens of thousands of them serving in Europe although it was, as President Kennedy described it, "to prevent a war, not to fight one." Finally, there was a small but significant call up of Army and Air Guardsmen for the Vietnam War, 12,922 from the Army Guard and 10,511 Air Guardsmen, of whom well over half served in the Vietnam battle area while others were sent to U.S. outposts all over the globe.

It is this record of service in time of danger, more than anything else, that gives meaning to a provision written into law as part of the World War II Selective Service Act and re-enacted in other parts of the U.S. code several times since. It says:

> "The Congress further declares, in accordance with our traditional military policy as expressed in the National Defense Act of 1916, as amended, that it is essential that the strength and organization of the National Guard, both Army and Air, as an integral part of the first line defense of the nation, be at all times maintained and assured.....To this end, it is the intent of Congress that whenever Congress shall determine that units and organizations are needed for the national security in excess of those of the Active components of the Army and Air Force, the National Guard of the United States, both Army and Air, or such

part thereof as may be necessary, together with such units of the Reserve components as are necessary for a balanced force, shall be ordered to active Federal duty and continued therein so long as such necessity exists."