

Emory Upton and the “active duty force.”

One lasting lesson that has to be drawn from the Gulf Coast's misery is that from now on, the National Guard must be treated as America's most essential homeland security force, not as some kind of military piggy bank for the Pentagon to raid for long-term overseas missions. America clearly needs a larger active-duty Army. It just as clearly needs a homeland-based National Guard that's fully prepared and ready for any domestic emergency.

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Since the 1880s the US Army has been attempting to re-define the National Guard of the United States. The Army understandably wants the Guard to be first and foremost a reserve component of the Army and not primarily a state militia under the command of state government and focused on state missions and needs.

That might seem implausible since the Army has a reserve component which belongs to it and to no one else. This is the Army Reserve, as distinct from the National Guard. The Army Reserve is a federal force which can be called into federal service at any time without any problem.

So, why is the Army so concerned with the National Guard? Well, almost all of the combat forces of the reserve components are in the National Guard. The infantry, armor, artillery of the reserve components are in the National Guard. The Army Reserve is largely made up of logistical, medical, transportation, Civil Affairs and similar administrative and support units.

Why is that? It is because the National Guard and the states want it that way and they have the political power to make their desires determinative. They want it that way because:

- They are unwilling to surrender all armed power to the federal government.
- Some states have military traditions involving particular traditions that they are not willing to give up. As an example, the “Washington Artillery of

New Orleans” lives on as the 1st Battalion, 141st Artillery Regiment of the Louisiana National Guard. (They may be in Iraq at present.)

-Combat Units are usually larger structures than support units and the part time employment is important to the economy in some states.

-The manpower available in large combat units is needed by the states in coping with natural and other disaster.

Emory Upton.

In the 1870s a very young Major General of that name was sent to Europe and around the world to study other people’s armies. Upton had graduated from West Point in 1861 and had been a Major General by war’s end. A brilliant man and a great battlefield leader, Upton was a restless man in a peace time environment in which he could never be promoted again. The army was just too small for that to be possible.

During his trip he decided that the Prussian/German Army had the right idea and wrote a book on his return, “The Military Policy of the United States” that was an instant sensation. What he advocated for the US was the German system of an “expansible army, based on a “regular” force of professionals who were essentially a cadre and training base for a vast reserve structure manned by conscription and led in its higher commands by professionals assigned for a term to the reserve establishment. The whole force, Regulars and Reserves were one army with no structural or legal problems dividing it. I won’t go into his thoughts on a General Staff in this essay.

The Army, by and large, embraced this set of ideas and started agitating for implementation. What they found was that the American people and the Congress wanted no part of it. The general opinion was that such a system was too foreign, too militaristic, too big, and too expensive. DOA.

End of story? No. As George Schultz once said, “Nothing ever dies in Washington.” Too true.

No. The Army looked around and realized that there already was an existing reserve structure for ground forces in the United States. It was the militia of the states, some of which had begun to call themselves the “National Guard”

in homage to the citizen forces raised in France by Lafayette after the revolution. Ah! Ha!

Solution – Make the National Guard into the functional equivalent of the German reserve structure by acquiring control of the state militias.

Method – Offer the states federal money, equipment and recognition of the ranks of their militia officers in return for an ever growing dedication of these forces to the role of an Army reserve. To make this “go down” better create a staff bureau in Washington to “represent” the Guard. All this required a lot of politicking in the state capitals, with successive administrations and with the Congress. This process has been ongoing for 120 odd years now, but has only partially succeeded.

Problem – The states still think that they own the portion of their militia that is allocated to the National Guard and which is in units mutually agreed upon between state and Department of Defense. They believe that the primary purpose of these units is to protect their state from natural and manmade disaster. They think that “their” Guard units, especially GROUND units should not be sent overseas to fight except in a true national emergency. They have persisted in this view over the whole period of the struggle of the Army to integrate the National Guard into “One Army.”

The Regular Army aka “the active forces.” - the stubbornness of the militia in resisting integration has been a mightily irritating thing to Army planners forever trying to make the money and personnel spaces made available to them by Congress stretch into force capabilities needed to meet the responsibilities assigned to them by what is now called “Defense Planning Guidance.”

The perceived need to persuade the National Guard to think of itself as primarily an Army reserve force has led in our time to one of the oddest semantic distortions ever to disgrace military usage of the English Language.

The standing, professional Army of the United States has always been known as the “Regular Army.” No more! Now it is official Army policy to refer to the regulars as “active duty soldiers.” This results in the kind of muddled expression in which a soldier says “I spent four years in the active force but now I am in the National Guard.” You notice in this quotation that the National Guard has a name but the Regulars do not. That is because the

leadership of the Army in pursuing Upton's ghostly vision has been willing to surrender the collective identity of the professional Army in the hope of gaining the acquiescence of the states in the identity of the National Guard as merely "the reserve forces." It would appear that when the guard is in federal service it, too would be merely, the "active duty forces."

Is this important? YES IT IS. Why? Because the relentless drive of the Army to absorb the National Guard leads to use of these forces to support expeditionary operations overseas depriving the states of forces they need for emergencies at home. We see this now in Iraq and Afghanistan. The "Washington Artillery of New Orleans" should be home now. I hope they are.

Pat Lang