

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

POLITICS AND THE NATIONAL GUARD

by

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ABSTRACT

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The National Guard has its roots in the colonial militia system and as such has deep ties to the politics of their states. As the Army transform s so must the Guard, in many cases this includes force reductions and/or reorganization. This can become a highly political issue, just as base closings, Active Army downsizing and any reduction would that may affect local economies. Further complicating the issue is the deep tradition Army Guard units have in their local communities. Many units trace their lineage to the Revolutionary War; this can stir high emotions when faced with a loss of a unit. Army and National Guard Bureau planners must consider the ramifications to communities and states as we transform the Army National Guard. As we look to the future with the multiple roles for the National Guard of state missions, home land security and federal missions the force structure requirements have become more complex. Including the states in the planning process upfront will make possible a smooth transformation to a relevant force for the states and the nation. The political proclivity of the Guard must be considered in all interactions with the Guard and its entities.

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POLITICS AND THE NATIONAL GUARD

The Guard was a sort of a scandal during the Korean War, a draft-dodging business. A boy 17 to 18 ½ could enlist in the National Guard and not be drafted too fight in Korea.”

—Charles E. Wilson
Secretary of Defense
28 January 1957

INTRODUCTION

Secretary Wilson’s observation illustrates the major reasons National Guard leaders and proponents stay involved in politics to counter act this perception of the National Guard. Throughout our history political awareness has been necessary for the Guard’s survival. This SRP examines the Guard’s political connections, the impact of politics on Guard activities and the role of the National Guard Bureau (NGB), The National Guard Association and The Adjutants General Association. It concludes with recommendations for improvement in the relations among the National Guard, NGB and active forces. Much of the debate infers and the Guard participating in politics is somehow evil and devious, the theses of this paper is that it is just part of the democratic process.

The National Guard is the oldest part of our nation’s military. It was originally called the Militia and based in the communities of the colonies since 1636. Due to the fact that it is still a locally based force in communities, states and territories around the country today, National Guard units are connected politically to those communities, states and territories.

SHORT HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

The National Guard is the United States’ oldest fighting force, celebrating its 367th birthday in 2003. In 1636 the first militia units of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were formed. This militia system endured for many years after our nation was formed. It remained a fighting force through the Civil War. The formation of the nation’s first professional standing army occurred on June 14, 1775, thus began the duality of the American fighting force of citizen soldiers and a professional standing army. The militia system continued after the Civil War but declined. Today militia units exist as ceremonial units only. ¹

The Enrolled Militia. Based on the English militia system of the Middle Ages, the New World adopted an enrolled militia with conscripted male adults for the defense of the community and the colony. On December 13, 1636, the first official militia units were formed in Massachusetts: three communities enrolled thirteen companies to form three regiments,

enrolling a total of 1500 men. The militia units expanded to all of the colonies. These units fought for the colonies in every major campaign before, during, and after the Revolutionary War. So much a part of the nation's way of life was the militia that its role is included in the Constitution of the United States.

After each major conflict the active forces of the nation have been reduced in size, leaving defense of the nation to the Militia. From 1792 through the War of 1812, the enrolled militia formed the bulk of fighting forces; however after the War of 1812 the enrolled militia began to give way to the volunteer militia. This new militia was not conscripted but rather recruited voluntarily. This represented a major change in the militia system and was a forerunner to the all volunteer force of today.²

The Militia Evolves into the National Guard. The evolving changes in the militia system culminated with the formation of the first National Guard Units during the Civil War. In 1861 the militiamen of the 7th New York State Militia became the first to adopt the title National Guard. Militia units still existed but this was a turning point that signaled the beginning of the end for the Militia system as it gave way to the National Guard. Many problems persisted with the militia and the regular forces. This antagonistic relationship culminated after the Civil War with the writings of General Emory Upton, who suggested a series of reforms to reduce the nation's dependence on citizen-soldiers and to expand the regular army. This debate rages even today, so much so that the term Uptonian was coined by Guardsmen to identify those who advocate the reduction of the reserve forces and expansion of the active force. The prevailing theme of Uptonians is that war and the defense of the nation should be left to professionals.³

The Guard during the World Wars. The National Guard deployed eight divisions during World War I and suffered 103,731 casualties. The National Guard deployed 19 Divisions during World War II, and over 300,000 Guard soldiers fought in both major theaters of operation. Although National Guard participation was welcomed by the active Army, Guard leadership was not. In fact only one Guard division commander remained in command for the entire war.⁴

The Guard and Vietnam. The paradigm of an active and reserve force prosecuting the nation's war was broken with the Vietnam War. President Lyndon B. Johnson decided against activating reserve forces to serve in Vietnam. Despite repeated Department of Defense requests, the President refused to employ reserve forces. Although a few units and personnel participated in operations in theater, there were no major deployments of the Guard or the Reserve. Many have asserted that this non-involvement of reserve forces contributed to the nation's lack of support for the war.⁵

The Guard Today. Citizen-soldiers have been involved in every major combat operation, in peacekeeping and in humanitarian operations this country has been involved with during our 227-year history. The National Guard today provide a ready reserve for the active services (Air Force and Army) and vital services to the states (50 states, 3 territories and the District of Columbia) during natural disasters, civil disturbances and in the new and vital mission of homeland security. Reporting to the state governor during peace and, when federalized, reporting to the National Command Authority during times of national crisis and need, the Guard assumes its dual state and federal missions. ⁶The National Guard's presence in over 2,800 communities gives it a unique connection between the military and the citizenry. This connection provides a vital link as the military attempts to address homeland security, national defense, and the global war on terror. Often National Guard involvement in a mission sustains the national will to conduct an operation. As a ready reserve for active forces, the Guard contributes materially to the nation's security. As a vital link to the nation's citizenry, the Guard contributes psychologically to the national will to defend itself. ⁷

THE FUTURE OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

The Secretary of Defense has recently ordered the National Guard to transform, along with its active duty counterparts. The Guard must effectively match its capabilities with the nations needs in order to continue to meet commitments at home and around the world.

The Guard faces some unique challenges in transformation. No other military component has the Guard's political and emotional ties between units and the communities they reside in.

The National Guard has its roots in the colonial militia system, so it necessarily has deep ties to the politics of states. The National Guard currently consists of fifty-four entities: units in fifty states, three territories and the District of Columbia. ⁸

As the Guard transforms, force reductions and reorganizations are at times mandated. These mandates can become highly politicized, just as base closings, active Army downsizing and any other reduction that may affect local economies. Further complicating the issue is the strong connection that Army Guard units enjoy in their local communities. Many units trace their lineage to the Revolutionary War; this rich history can stir powerful emotions, especially in cases calling for eliminating a unit. Department of Defense and National Guard Bureau planners must consider the ramifications to communities and states as the National Guard transforms. ⁹

THE NATURAL CONNECTION OF POLITICIANS TO THE NATIONAL GUARD

There is a natural connection between politicians and their local National Guard organizations. The Guard represents a constituency. With local elected officials as well as the

congressional delegations of each state and territory, the Guard has a powerful voice. When this political power is mobilized, it is very influential. The Guard's influence in the states and local communities is tremendous. For example, the Rhode Island Air Guard was slated to receive C130-J models (the latest in C130 lift aircraft) in the distant future, but through the work of its congressional delegation, the state received the first two C130-J s in the entire Air Force. Another example of congressional influence was recently reported in the media: a senator held up the promotions of all Air Force officers (requiring Senate approval) until a particular aircraft was delivered to his state as promised. This is not the preferred method to get systems into the National Guard; however it illustrates the political influence of the Guard.

This large constituent power the Guard possesses has been a source of tension between the Guard and its active counterparts. This tension is caused because active soldiers are not rooted in their communities as the Guard is so active soldiers do not have the same constituency power base. Active duty service members are transitory, moving frequently from community to community. Guard soldiers and airmen are local, so they have grassroots political power.

The political tension between the active force and the National Guard goes beyond local politics. Active duty officers often have shown disappointment in the National Guard's performance in training and operations. At times, they have expressed outright disdain for the Guard as a combat force and questioned the competence of Guard leaders. In most cases, however, Guard leaders have shown that shortfalls in National Guard training and readiness can be traced to inadequate re-sourcing or a mismatch between capabilities and missions. This professional tension has forced the Guard to become a political force on the national level to survive.¹⁰

LOCAL POLITICS AND THE GUARD

It was Speaker of the House Tip O'Neal who declared, "All politics is local". He even wrote a book to expand on his point. Throughout the Guard's history, nothing could be closer to the truth. Located in 2800 communities with 3288 facilities around the country, the Guard has an ideal local political base.¹¹

The tradition of electing its officers has also contributed to the Guard's political heritage. On February 17, 1621, the election of Captain Miles Standish of the Plymouth Colony began a long history of the militia electing its leaders.¹² Consider these elected Guard leaders: the election of Harry S. Truman as commander of his artillery battery for WWI and Major General

Martha T. Rainville current adjutant general of Vermont who was elected by the state legislature.

STATE POLITICS

Governors during the Civil War were responsible for raising their militias in response to a call from the president to put down the rebellion in the south. Some resisted the call, while other governors responded in defense of the capital in Washington. This diverse response reveals the political nature of the system¹³

The Adjutant General (TAG) is the primary military advisor to the Governor of each state and territory. As such he or she presides over all National Guard units in the state or territory, Army and Air. In many states, the TAG also serves as the leader of the State Emergency Management Department. Although the states may fill and administer the position in different ways, this individual has great political power. Consider Major General William B. Lynch, the current TAG of Pennsylvania. This powerful individual was appointed by then Governor Tom Ridge. General Lynch has announced his retirement to “pursue other public service opportunities”. It is reported that General Lynch is considering running for Congress. This is merely an illustration of the political power the Guard and its leaders can possess. Many Guard senior leaders have become governors and members of Congress. They have held a variety of other public offices upon their retirement or honorable discharge.¹⁴

NATIONAL POLITICS

The high operational tempo has had many effects on the National Guard. As of May 2003 approximately 147,000 Army and Air Guard personnel were deployed to 44 countries around the world. As the deployments continue politicians feel the pressure to bring loved ones home and to rectify the issues causing the rollover deployments of units. Although Guard involvement in the nation’s wars lends grass roots support, it can also backfire if deployments go on for too long or if casualties become too high.¹⁵

This topic of long deployments and casualties has been reported in the media to be a volatile topic in the upcoming 2004 presidential election. As the Guard is now a large part of the armed forces and operational tempo requires their use, political leaders must develop policies to address the concerns of constituents. This demonstrates yet another example of the connection between the Guard and politics at all levels.

National Guard officers stay involved in national politics through the National Guard Association and The Adjutants General Association because of the tensions between the Guard

and active Army. Although the situation has improved dramatically in the past ten years, the tension and at times lack of trust still exist today. The tension and distrust is rooted in history.

This tension dates back to the Revolution and the militia system. It has reached several peaks in our history. One of the most notable opponents to a citizen soldier force was Fredrick K. Huidekoper, who questioned the value of the Guard as a force after commanding a division in WWI. General Emory Upton, a Civil War hero, advocated an end to reliance on the militia for all but repelling invasion of the continental U.S. or putting down insurrection within our borders. Homer Lea was a prolific writer consumed by military tactics and strategy, in the early 1900s he predicted the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. In "The Valor of Ignorance" Lea reveals his disdain for the Guard "...War is a game of poker, there is a call for a show of hands- the very time in the game when the I.O.U. will not have the value of the coin". In his writings Lea implies that the Guard has no worth and is a waste of taxpayer's money. ¹⁶

During WWII, 18 National Guard infantry divisions were deployed; however, only two of the pre-war division commanders led their divisions into combat. The major critic of the Guard during WWII was Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, commander of Army Ground Forces. During the mobilization for war he sanctioned a scathing letter sent to every Guard division commander. He characterized the Guard leadership and troops as "the blind leading the blind". The replacement of its senior leaders was viewed as a purge by most National Guard officers, and their replacement by active officers as a way to promote active duty officers over Guard officers. ¹⁷

The tensions continued into the 1990s. *The Washington Post* quoted a Pentagon briefer as stating "While the combat capability of the Republican Guards is highly rated, US military and intelligence officials say much of the rest of the regular Iraqi army is roughly equal in combat readiness to US National Guard troops". This offhanded remark highlighted to many the true feelings of the active Army leadership, belying the rhetoric of the "one army concept". ¹⁸

Although many Guard units have recently been deployed in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, most units are company size and below. A quote attributed to some senior Guard officers is "They take our Joe's but not our O's" (Os meaning Officers). However, the Guard role has been praised in Operations Other Than War, such as the Kosovo and Bosnia operations. Guard divisions have taken the lead in these operations. But Guard combat operations still seem to be restricted to company size elements in rare occasions, to battalions.

This reluctance to allow senior Guard officers to command combat operations will, rightly or wrongly, continue to be one of the sources of tension between the active and Guard forces. ¹⁹

Deployments to Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Recent deployments have stretched all military organizations to the limits of endurance. But the deployment of reserve components has drawn the most attention. In the Guard, prolonged deployments have caused much anxiety among family members, employers and communities. Guard soldiers are currently deployed for at least a year. Further combat and non-combat losses and injuries have increased the families' anxieties.

Increased Homeland Security Requirements. Along with the increased deployments outside the borders of the United States has come an increased need to deploy units for homeland security missions. After the attacks of 9-11, National Guard units were deployed to secure airports, bridges, and other facilities identified as potential targets.

Disparity of Deploying Units. Military Police, Transportation and Medical units in the Army and communications units in the Air Guard have been heavily deployed for recent operations. Many returning units are already in the rotation to be deployed again. If this operational tempo continues, the Guard and the National Command Authority must consider re-configuration to meet the needs of deployments. Some of this is happening: some artillery units are being converted to provisional Military Police units. These conversions are helping relieve some but not all of the stress. More must be done. Recruiting and retention rates in the Guard are anticipated to fall off in light of recent deployments. To continue to operate as we are may run the risk of reduced recruiting and retention and operational effectiveness. Time will soon tell.

Transformation and Politics. The newly appointed Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lieutenant General Steven Blum, has taken the lead in Guard transformation by ordering the transformation of NGB Headquarters. At a news conference on May 16, 2003, he announced NGB's transformation to a Joint Headquarters. Since the Guard includes both Air and Army Guard components General Blum felt there were many redundancies and excessive bureaucracies that could be streamlined within the Bureau structure. Previously there were three headquarters at NGB and in each state and territory: one Army, one Air and one overall. General Blum's plan calls for establishment of single joint staff for the Army and Air Force to manage the Bureau, as well as in each State and Territory. This consolidation effectively eliminates 108 headquarters. This is indeed a bold step in transforming command and control of the National Guard. ²⁰

In order to maintain the Guard as a ready reserve for federal missions, state missions and homeland security, transform and constant change are inevitable. Enactment of Lieutenant General Blum's bold swift transform will serve as a model for other transform s within the National Guard.

The fallout from the change in the state staffs has been predictable. For many years states and territories have operated separate Army and Air Force area headquarters, so combining them is as difficult as making the Pentagon joint. Some administrative problems persist, but the consolidated headquarters are accommodating them. The Army Guard Chief of Staff Colonel James Nuttal stated emphatically that it makes the Guard more joint oriented, configures Guard staffs much more like active counterparts and improves the assignment experience of Guard staff officers and NCO's²¹

Force Structure Gains and Losses. Many transformation plans call for reduced force structure. Rhode Island, for example has already lost an artillery battalion, an engineer battalion headquarters and other smaller units. The political implications of such losses are incredible: some of these units trace their lineage to the Revolution and before. Further regular deployments may require other kinds of transformation, but not, the loss of force structure. Concern about the loss of National Guard organizations with long legacies become political issues when the unit members bring pressure on politicians. Congressional delegations get involved in the acquisition of force structure and systems. This congressional involvement reflects local interests; often it does not support the national strategy of the Guard. Additionally, like base closings for active units the economic impact of reducing the force can be tremendous. For example, the total economic impact on the state of Texas from the Army Guard is \$ 472 million a year. Indeed transformation has economic implications.²²

High Profile Systems. High profile systems such as aircraft, artillery and armor units attract special attention when adding, changing or deleting systems from the force structure. Acquisition of new expensive systems gets much media attention. Communities of units receiving new systems often benefit economically because of extensive maintenance and contracting. Congressional delegations are much more likely to get involved in these types of changes. Often governors and other local politicians will ask that their congressional delegation intervene to assess a system or prevent its loss.

The process used to make transformational decisions at NGB. The process at this point is not clearly defined. On October 21, 2003, National Guard Bureau headquarters Future Force Structure Division conducted an offsite meeting in an attempt to specify a process. The Guard is facing cuts in its end-strength from 388,000 to 350,000 in the coming years. Past processes were somewhat ad-hoc and focused on warfighting structure. Impending reductions will cut across warfighting and non-warfighting organizations. Some states will lose units that are at 100% strength, well-trained and ready to deploy. In some cases reduced force structure will be transferred to other states harder hit by cuts. The NGB is aware that the process needs

to be clearly defined. Further, this process must support a national strategy to meet state, federal and homeland security needs.²³

NGB responds to state political opposition to transformation. In an effort to ease opposition to transformation NGB invited many senior representatives and force structure experts from the states and territories to a conference on force structure, transformation and procedures to implement change. This group failed to produce an acceptable process for change in the force structure.²⁴ On the other hand Colonel Ken Gareau State, Aviation Officer for Rhode Island, was on the Army Aviation transformation staff which was very successful in coming to consensus on force structure in Army Aviation, Army wide. The process was successful because it was Army wide Aviation transformation, not restricted to the Guard.²⁵ Since the Guard is by design a fragmented organization, opposition to NGB plans and policies will continue to be a risk.

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION AND THE ADJUTANTS GENERAL ASSOCIATION

National Guard Association (NGA). This organization (later called the National Guard Association of the United States or NGAUS) epitomizes the Guard's involvement in politics born out of a need for national militia reform. The militia's performance in the railroad strikes of 1877 served as a transforming moment. Its generally poor performance led to legislation being proposed for militia reform. The militia leaders were in no position to lobby for a bill of their own. Many states had their own associations but no national lobby group existed. Under the leadership of Dabney H. Maury (an ex-Confederate Major General) militia leaders met for the first time in Richmond in 1878. The NGA soon had its first conference in St Louis in October 1879. To promote "military efficiency" for the militia the NGA developed national legislation for the reform of the militia. Throughout its history the NGA has been the lobby of the National Guard.²⁶

The modern Association NGAUS was fathered by Senator Charles W. F. Dick., who sponsored the Militia Act of 1903, later called the Dick Act. Dick was a Spanish American War veteran, congressman, senator and Adjutant General of his home state of Ohio. He was elected the first President of NGAUS and held the post for seven years. The 1903 bill was pushed by Dick (with support and mentoring of Secretary of War Elihu Root) with heavy lobbying by the NGA. On January 21, 1903, the bill became law, increasing pay and equipment resources for the National Guard. Dick, Secretary Root and the NGA proved what could be accomplished by mobilizing the incredible political power of the Guard, when it was fused into one voice. During this time the Guard leadership realized that its best future was as a ready reserve for the active

Army. The State needs would still be served but the Dick Act solidified the relationship between the Guard and the federal government. ²⁷

This sometimes powerful group has shaped the National Guard and the military in general. NGAUS promoted reforms that made the militia and later the Guard a better resource and a more effective fighting force. ²⁸

Adjutants General Association of the United States. The Adjutants General Association (AGAUS) has emerged as an important complementary organization of NGAUS. Formed in 1912 to improve drill pay for soldiers, AGAUS helped shape policy for the Guard and worked closely with NGAUS. As a recent example of the power of AGAUS in 1997 senior Army leaders briefed at the annual meeting of AGAUS that the Guard would be cut 67,000 troops. The AGs objected to the cuts in the strongest possible terms. The active Army leaders advised them to “use the chain of command”. Upon returning to the states the AGs reported to their civilian leaders. A week later a letter signed by many of the Governors went to President Clinton protesting the cuts. The letter advised that the Defense Department had not analyzed the cuts sufficiently and had made the decisions without Guard input. The letter led to an off-site meeting between the Army and Guard leadership. As a result of the meeting the Guard agreed to 17,000 soldier cuts; these cuts resulted in no major force structure losses and were spread across the states and territories. This example illustrates the ability of NAGUS and AGAUS to use its political power leverage to protect the interests of the Guard. Most Guard officers and leaders admit in public or in private that the political clout is necessary. In the current zero sum defense budget environment any additional funding in one area requires a cut in another (a “bill payer”). The Guard associations prevent the active services from using the Guard as a “bill payer” or to unfairly cut Guard resources when budgets get tight. ²⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of NGB as a Coalition Builder. The NGB must be a coalition builder. It must enable the states and their congressional delegations to coordinate their planning early. This early coordination is a key to success in any change to the Guard. Local leaders are the best informed to identify the needs for state missions and local homeland security requirements. Much of this kind of consideration is currently accomplished, but it can be done with much more cohesion.

Rotating leaders from the field into NGB provides a critical link to the states, and should be done more often. NGB forums to plan changes, consulting with state experts to formulate strategy will keep NGB directly in touch with the states. NGB should learn to better harness the

power of the states and territories to achieve the political clout needed to promote programs and legislation.

NGB is not a higher headquarters, so its authority is limited. NGB's primary purpose is to distribute federal funds to the state and provide national policy that maintains the Guard's interface with the active services. The power of the governors and their control over the Guard is rooted in the concept of states' rights, a notion as old as the Constitution. The Bureau's greatest strength is in coalition building to mobilize the states in support of a national strategy for the Guard. The bottom line that is the states and the National Guard Bureau must work in close concert to achieve optimized results in order to evolve, to meet the changing needs of the states and the nation.

CONCLUSION

Politics is inevitable in any human endeavor. The National Guard is ultimately a human endeavor made up of people who have great passion for the organization, for the citizen soldier concept, and for the defense of the United States of America. These very passionate members of the organization have their own views about what it should be and what it should look like. Politics need not be vilified. Rather politics should be understood and utilized for the greater good of the organization and the country it serves. Leaders at all levels must recognize and wield the political power of the Guard to sustain and improve the Guard as a force for the defense of a great nation through an amalgamation of its state and federal missions. Politics is not only part of the process; it is a valuable part of the process.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Michael D. Doubler, *Civilian in Peace Soldier in War The Army National Guard 1636-2000* (University Press of Kansas 2003 chapter 1, page3, chapter 2 page 102, 178

² *Ibid.*, 1, 17-33,02,178

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid.*,181

⁵ *Ibid.*,257

⁶ Capitol Hill Hearing, FY2004: Testimony By *Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum* Federal Document Clearing House Inc 7 May 2003 (20987 words) [database on-line]; available from Lexis-Nexis accessed 18 September 2003. Opening remarks

⁷ Army National Guard Web Page <http://www.arng.army.mil> Economic impact of the guard

⁸ Blum on Capitol Hill 7 May 2003

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¹⁰ *Ibid.*,87-90

¹¹ National Guard Web Page

¹² Doubler., 14

¹³ *Ibid.*,101-103

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 257

¹⁵ News Briefing: *Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum Holds Defense Department News Briefing On The National Guard* Federal Document Clearing House Inc. 16 May 2003 (6097 words) [database on-line]; available from Lexis-Nexis accessed 18 September 2003.

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¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Blum News Briefing

²¹ Colonel James Nuttall, National Guard Bureau, Army Chief of Staff, Interview live interview 13 December 2003

²² Guard Web page

²³ Lieutenant Colonel Rick Beltran, National Guard Bureau, Future Force Structure Division Chief, interview by the author by phone 15 October 2003

²⁴ Colonel Kenneth Gareau State Aviation Officer Rhode Island Army National Guard interview conducted by the author over a series of meetings in 2002 and 2003

²⁵ Doubler pages 15, 17-33, 61

²⁶ Ibid., 113-115

²⁷ Ibid., 141-143

²⁸ Ibid., 138, 155, 363

²⁹ Ibid.

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