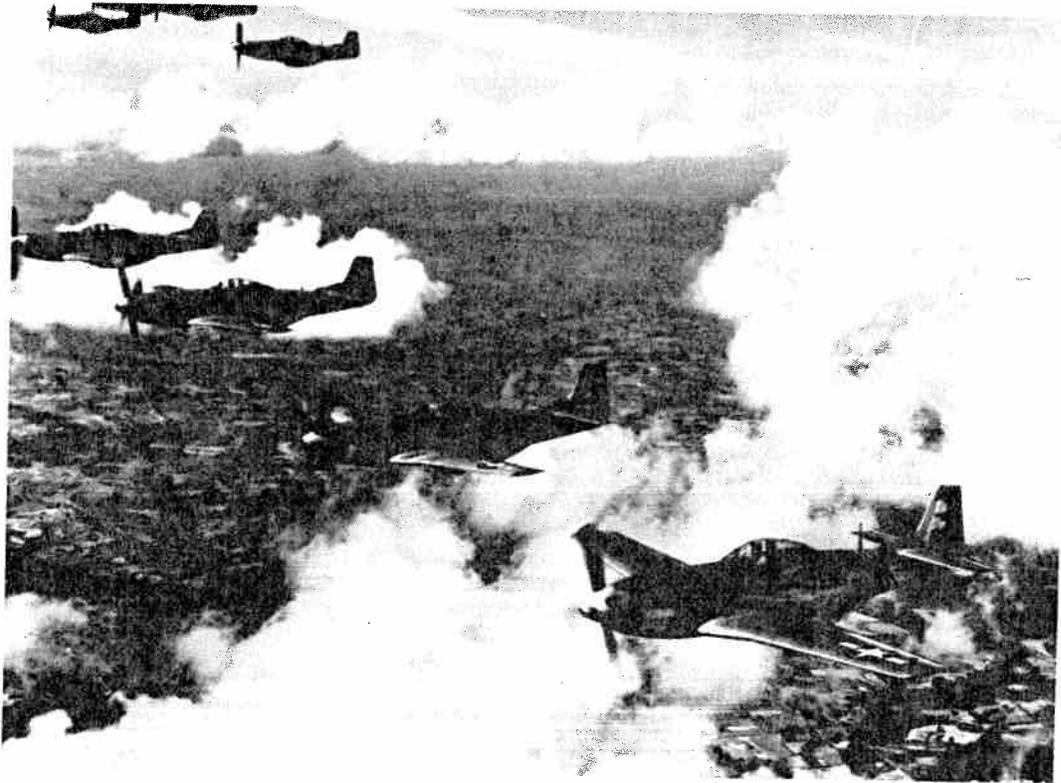


The Birth of the Air National Guard, 1943- 1946: A Case Study in Military Institutional Politics

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During World War II, Army Air Forces planners concluded that the postwar Air Guard should be largely restricted to fighter aircraft configured for air defense. They concluded that such a mission was consistent with the historic role of the Militia and National Guard. More importantly, they doubted that the part-time airmen of the Air Guard would ever be able to maintain and effectively operate complex multi-engine aircraft like transports and fighters. This photo shows a formation of P-51 mustangs from the 155th Fighter Squadron of the Tennessee Air National Guard. (Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.)

TODAY'S Air National Guard enjoys a solid reputation as a valuable reserve component of the U.S. Air Force. It has earned praise for its wartime mobilization performance and peacetime support of the active-duty military force. Although closely allied with Congress and the statehouses of America, the Air National Guard has escaped the taint of partisan politics associated with the National Guard. The air organization has evolved into an important exception to the historic American pattern of neglected and ineffective reserve forces.

Yet, despite its professional image and accomplishments, the Air National Guard was largely a product of the politics surrounding planning for the post-World War II American military establishment. It was created in 1946 against the strong objections of Army Air Forces (AAF) planners who wanted a single, entirely federal reserve program like the Navy's. The Air National Guard was forced upon them by a set of tacit political bargains between Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), and the AAF's top leadership. These deals created a dual-component air reserve structure consisting of the Air Guard and Air Force Reserve which many professional airmen considered to be anachronistic and ineffective. The circumstances surrounding the birth of the Air Guard provide a case study of how institutional politics can override professional judgment in the formulation of crucial military policies and programs. They also illustrate how influential quasi-official bodies like the

NGAUS can be in that process. Prior to World War II, National Guard aviation had consisted of 19 observation squadrons that were integral parts of the Guard's infantry divisions and 10 additional observation squadrons that were designated as "Corps Aviation Troops."

GENERAL George C. Marshall dominated War Department planning during World War II. He was convinced that, if America wanted to avert a third world war, she could no longer afford virtually to disarm in peacetime. However, his reading of American history, especially World War I, had taught Marshall that Americans would rapidly dismantle the nation's military machine and would not tolerate large standing armed forces once the Axis had been defeated.¹

The answer to Marshall's dilemma had been suggested by his old friend and mentor, Brig. Gen. John McAuley Palmer. Marshall had recalled Palmer to active duty in November 1941 to help develop America's postwar military system. Palmer believed that American citizens could become excellent part-time soldiers if given proper professional training and isolated from the state politics surrounding the National Guard. He wanted this done through a system of universal military training (UMT) conducted by the regular Army for all able-bodied males. UMT would create a large pool of trainees who would be organized into a strictly federal reserve force. Palmer had advocated this idea since he was Gen. John J. Pershing's representative to Congress when it considered America's military policy after World War I.²

Marshall was sympathetic to Palmer's ideas. His experience with the American Expeditionary Force in France during World War I had convinced him of the merits of a citizen army. By the Summer of 1943, Marshall had accepted Palmer's proposal as the

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basis for the War Department's postwar plans. UMT would substitute a massive citizen reserve force for a large peacetime professional Army, minimizing the financial burdens of national defense. Organization and training of the reserve force would be strictly a federal affair. The National Guard, with its divided federal-state loyalties, would play no role in UMT and be stripped of its status as a federal reserve force.³

On 22 July 1943, a Special Planning Division was established to coordinate detailed War Department planning for demobilization and the postwar Army. Palmer served as an advisor to the Planning Division. That same Summer, the AAF also established its own postwar planning offices — the Post-War Division, under Brig. Gen. Laurence S. Kuter, the Assistant Chief of Air Staff, Plans, and the Special Projects Office, under Col. F. Trubee Davison. Wartime service rivalries and the desire to achieve an independent postwar Air Force had encouraged the AAF to launch that activity. The separate War Department and AAF postwar planning staffs worked largely in isolation from each other. They also lacked adequate guidance from either the Joint Chiefs of Staff or civilian officials in the executive branch of government. Predictably, these two staffs, along with their equally isolated Navy counterparts, developed substantially different visions of America's postwar national security needs.⁴

The AAF, although part of the Army, had become a virtually autonomous military service by 1943. The political motivations and military assumptions behind its postwar plans were quite different from those of Marshall, Palmer, and the Special Planning Division's staff. A primary goal of AAF planning was to build the best possible case for an independent postwar Air



Brigadier General John McAuley Palmer was a friend and mentor of General Marshall. The latter recalled him to active duty in 1941 to help formulate the War Department's postwar plans. Palmer's ideas were tremendously influential with Marshall. Although a West Point graduate, Palmer spurned the Uptonian notion of a skeletonized regular Army that could be rapidly expanded in wartime. Instead, he advocated a small active duty Army that could be immediately deployed in wartime while the Nation's citizen soldiers were mobilized. He had advocated these ideas before Congress and the Army's General Staff in 1919-1920 as General Pershing's representative on postwar military policy. During World War II, Palmer argued that the National Guard should not be part of any postwar system of universal military training (UMT) due to the corrupting influence of state politics. However, he changed his position when it became apparent that, without the support of the National Guard Association, the War Department's ambitious postwar UMT plan would be stillborn. (Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.)



General George C. Marshall was determined to build the postwar American military system around a huge citizen reserve force that would be created by universal military training (UMT). He agreed to include the National Guard in the War Department's postwar plans when it became apparent that failure to do so would cause National Guard interests to block UMT in Congress until after the war was over. Marshall believed that such a delay would almost certainly kill the universal training proposal. (Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.)

Force. Strategic bombardment was the heart of the AAF's case for independence. Wartime AAF headquarters was dominated by zealous strategic bombing advocates. They firmly believed that future wars would be brief and highly destructive affairs quickly decided by the superior application of air power against an opponent's homeland. Proponents of a wider view of air power had little influence.⁵

The AAF's "Initial Plan for the Post-War Air Force," completed in February 1944, reflected this strategic air-power dogma. It described a huge (approximately one million) peacetime active-duty Air Force structured to carry the burden of postwar security with little Army or Navy support. The cutting edge of this force would be 105 combat air groups. The plan omitted UMT, an organized federal reserve force, and the National Guard. Marshall rejected this approach. He directed that subsequent AAF plans include UMT, a federal reserve, and a reduced active-duty force. However, AAF leaders and planners did not abandon their quest for a large standing Air Force built around the strategic bombardment mission. They remained cool to UMT and constantly stressed that forces-in-being, not re-

erves, were the key to modern defense. They were confident that the public and Congress would eventually accept their vision of America's postwar national security requirements.

MEANWHILE, the National Guard had become alarmed by the Army's wartime treatment of it. Army public-relations coverage of the mobilization, reorganization, and training performance of Guard divisions had been extremely poor. The press had printed numerous stories about the shortcomings of Guard units after they had been called into federal service in 1940. Guard officers believed that they had been made scapegoats for the inadequacies of prewar Army plans, organization, facilities, and equipment. Personnel controversies further inflamed the situation. Pressure had been placed on Guard units for men to fill the Army's rapidly-expanding officer candidate schools. At the same time, the War Department's decision to create a relatively youthful officer corps limited eligibility for active duty in each rank to certain prescribed age brackets. The Army sought to use this policy to create a more energetic and aggressive field leadership. However laudable its intent, it disqualified numerous Guard officers from active duty assignments. Guardsmen believed that its real purpose was to eliminate senior Guard leaders, creating promotion opportunities for younger regular Army officers.⁷

Compounding the Guard's anxieties, its formal participation in the War Department's planning process virtually disappeared by mid-1943. The National Defense Act of 1920 required the War Department to consider the views of National Guard and Reserve officers when formulating plans and policies concerning

their reserve components. The prescribed mechanisms for this advice were War Department committees on National Guard and Reserve policy. On 2 May 1942, the Secretary of War had suspended their operation for the war's duration. Guard leaders were also alarmed by the removal of the National Guard Bureau from the War Department's Special Staff in April 1941. The Bureau was then placed in an obscure and powerless position under the Commanding General, Army Service Forces. The suspicions of guardsmen were increased by rumors that the War Department's secret plans for the postwar Army excluded the National Guard altogether. The absence of Guard participation in the planning process, General Palmer's public advocacy of an entirely federal military reserve system, and, what leading Guard officers felt was the shabby treatment of the National Guard during the war fueled fears that the Army was determined to destroy the Guard.⁸

Senior Guard officers turned to their powerful political lobby, the National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), to insure that the Guard emerged from the war in its accustomed place as the Army's primary reserve force. Maj. Gen. Ellard A. Walsh of Minnesota, president of the National Guard Association and the Adjutant Generals' Association, was given the responsibility of saving the Guard's federal role. Walsh established a permanent Washington headquarters for the association and prepared to defend the Guard's interests.⁹

The Guard was one of the most effective pressure groups in American politics. It enjoyed four crucial advantages as an organized lobby. First, the Guard was a public institution sanctioned by the Constitution's militia clause. This gave it a patriotic claim on public resources unmatched by interest groups outside the government. Second, the Guard was a nationwide institution with units deeply rooted in communities in nearly every congressional district. Third, the Guard profited from its close connections with state governments and political party organizations. Each state Guard organization was administered by an adjutant general, usually a political appointee of the governor. Many Guard officers were active in partisan politics. Their political activism enhanced their relationship with governors and congressmen. Finally, the National Guard Association of the United States was a tightly-disciplined organization with clear and readily-communicated basic goals.¹⁰

Drawing upon its distinctive advantages as an organized political pressure group, the NGAUS employed several techniques to promote its basic goals and protect its interests with Congress, the primary focus of its attention. Essentially, the Association relied upon communications between congressmen and individual guardsmen in their districts. Sometimes it used grassroots letter-and-telegram campaigns to alert congressmen to the Guard's position on issues. The organization could also stimulate messages from home-state friends of key congressmen when attempting to influence their votes. Usually, however, it relied upon selective pressure applied to a few congressmen who had direct authority over Guard matters because of their committee assignments.¹¹

Another important source of the Guard's influence was its ability to provide Congress with useful and reliable information on reserve affairs. The Association drew upon the expertise of its own staff as well as the National Guard Bureau and the state adjutants-general to keep Congress informed about matters affecting the Guard. Since the Association was not controlled by the Executive Branch of the federal government, it could provide independent information which Congress could use to challenge existing reserve-forces policies. Congress prized this independent expertise.¹²

The National Guard Bureau was the other major instrument of the Guard's influence. Because of its role as administrator and chief adviser on Guard affairs within the War Department plus the fact that its chief was a Guard officer, the Bureau was strongly committed to defending the Guard's interests. It was well placed to provide early warning of official proposals that



General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, head of the Army Air Forces, was determined that the Army air arm would become a separate military service after World War II. He was willing to support the creation of the Air National Guard primarily to cultivate the political support of the National Guard Association of the United States. There is little evidence that he saw any military justification for a dual component reserve system consisting of the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. (Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.)



Major General Ellard A. Walsh, during the National Guard Association's annual conference in San Diego, California, 1953. General Walsh, president of the association, led the fight to ensure that the National Guard retained its historic role as the War Department's premier reserve force after the Axis powers were defeated in World War II. (Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.)

might impinge on the Guard's status. The Bureau's requests and policy positions were backed by the NGAUS's political influence. Since it ultimately depended upon the association's power, the Bureau was obligated to defer to its wishes.¹³

GENERAL Walsh was determined to use these formidable political resources to protect the Guard's interests. In meetings with Army postwar planners early in 1944, Walsh and his colleagues made it clear that they would accept nothing less than a guarantee that the National Guard would participate in the postwar planning process, maintain its position as the Army's first-line civilian reserve component, and retain its dual state-federal status.¹⁴

Palmer, reversing his previous position, sided with the guardsmen. He convinced Tompkins and Marshall that the National Guard's prewar status must be retained in the postwar Army. His reasons were primarily political. Palmer had realized that any effort to eliminate the Guard's status by merger into a purely federal reserve would stimulate a terrific political battle in Congress. He feared that such a fight would weaken and perhaps fatally delay Congressional enactment of postwar universal military training until after the Axis were defeated. The price of National Guard support for universal military training was assurance that the Guard would remain a major element in the postwar Army. General Marshall, who believed that an adequate system for postwar universal military training had to be enacted before wartime enthusiasm for military service waned, accepted this political argument.¹⁵

Meanwhile, General Walsh mounted more pressure on the War Department by publicly threatening to stall postwar military

legislation in Congress. In a bitter letter to the House Select Committee on Postwar Military Policy, he blasted the Army's treatment of the National Guard. Rejecting the argument that legislation molding the postwar military establishment should be enacted quickly to avoid any postwar backlash, Walsh argued that this would destroy public support. NGAUS was willing to support UMT if trainees were given the option of joining the National Guard afterwards. But it wanted the final resolution of those matters deferred until after the war.¹⁶

This political pressure paid off. On the recommendation of General Tompkins, the Secretary of War approved formation of a General Staff Committee on the postwar National Guard composed of Army and Guard officers. The committee, which served from August 1944 to September 1945, studied policies affecting the postwar National Guard. In May 1945, the Guard Bureau was removed from the Army Service Forces and reestablished within the War Department.¹⁷

In the War Department, planning for the future of the National Guard was part of a continuing struggle between aviators and ground force officers over the size and composition of the postwar Army. In May 1944, General Tompkins solicited recommendations on the postwar Army from various General Staff divisions and major commands including the Army Air Forces. The only concrete guidance that accompanied this request was an arbitrary troop level ceiling of 1.5 million men for the Army developed in 1943. The airmen and the ground forces had already staked rival claims to postwar strengths that threatened this troop ceiling. The AAF's 105-group plan had called for a million-man Air Force while the Army ground forces were asking for 780,000 men including 400,000 UMT trainees. A compromise plan in August 1944 called for a total Army strength of 1,093,050 professionals and 630,217 trainees annually. Under it, the AAF was designated as the primary M-Day (Mobilization Day) force with 74 air groups and a strength of 430,000 professionals. Seventy-five groups did not satisfy the airmen. They still insisted on 105.¹⁸

In November 1944, General Marshall shattered the postwar planners' design for a large standing Army. Marshall wanted a small professional force backed by universal military training. A new plan was formulated projecting a total Army of 1,015,000 men. The ground forces would consist of 100,000 regulars and



On May 20, 1947 General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower presented a second cluster to the Distinguished Service Medal of Major General Milton A. Reckord for his service as a Provost Marshal General in the European Theater of Operations during World War II. General Reckord, Adjutant General for the State of Maryland and a former President of the National Guard Association, was sent to Washington, D.C. in July 1945 by General Marshall to strengthen the War Department's postwar service components' planning groups. (Photo courtesy U.S. Air Force.)

320,000 trainees. The Army Air Forces would be limited to 120,000 regulars and 200,000 trainees. Its operational air strength would shrink to 16 groups. General Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General, AAF, violently disagreed with this plan. He argued that domestic politics and budgetary considerations should not be elevated above national-defense needs.¹⁹

After rejecting the idea of a postwar National Guard air reserve force in its initial plans, the AAF was forced by General Tompkins to reconsider the subject. The resulting Air Staff "Study of the Air Component of the Post-War National Guard," approved in October 1944, assumed that state-controlled armed forces with federal status would survive the war. It predicted that they would include an autonomous air component corresponding to the projected postwar independent Air Force. However, the AAF was reluctant to assign important missions to the Guard. It recommended that approximately 90 percent of the Guard's air component should consist of anti-aircraft artillery troops. The balance would be allotted to flying and possibly aircraft control and warning units.²⁰

Despite the AAF's deep reluctance, the National Guard, including its air component, had assured its postwar existence as a federally-supported reserve force. General Tompkins told the House Select Committee on Postwar Military Policy in June 1945, that the War Department "contemplates retention of our two reserve components of the Army . . . the National Guard and the Organized Reserves . . ." with the former "our first line of reserve in an emergency."²¹ The Guard would continue to perform its dual function as an instrument of internal security for the individual states in peace and an instrument of national security in war. The War Department recommended that "In time of war, when called into national service, the National Guard should be able to defend the critical areas of the United States from land, sea, or air attacks."²² In return, the National Guard reversed itself, supporting universal training in testimony before the committee.

Meanwhile, many regular Army officers continued to oppose the concept of the postwar regular Army as a small training and organizational cadre for hordes of untrained youths shunted through universal military training. To complicate matters further, the Navy loomed as an even more formidable challenger for what probably would be extremely limited postwar military budgets. Amid that uncertain situation, Army planners continued to struggle with questions relevant to postwar policies for the National Guard.²³

General Marshall, faced with growing opposition to his postwar plans within the War Department, sought to strengthen the hand of the reserve component planners. In July 1945, the Special Planning Division's committee on National Guard policy was strengthened by four additional officers drawn from both the Guard and the regular Army. The most politically prominent of the new members was Maj. Gen. Milton J. Reckord of Maryland — a former president of the National Guard Association and the current chairman of its legislative committee. Marshall recalled Reckord from his active duty assignment in Europe to chair both the expanded National Guard policy committee and an overall "Joint Staff Committee on Postwar Planning for the National Guard and Reserve."²⁴

The joint staff committee developed policy proposals for the postwar reserve system that were approved by Secretary Stimson in October 1945. Officially titled "War Department Policies Relating to the Post-War National Guard and Organized Reserve Corps, 13 October 1945," these proposals clearly committed the War Department to the creation of dual component reserve systems for both the Army and the Army Air Forces. The National Guard retained its prewar position as the Army's first-line combat reserve force. Individuals needed to bring organized units up to fully-authorized strength and to replace combat losses, as well as those units which neither the active Army nor the National Guard could provide, would be supplied by the U.S. Army Reserve. The proposal also added a new reserve organization to

augment the postwar AAF — the Air National Guard. The Air Guard, like the National Guard, was intended to be the primary source of organized combat-ready units. It was envisaged as an M-Day organization capable of rapid expansion to wartime manning levels and full operational readiness. Individuals and air units that neither the Army Air Forces nor the Air Guard could supply would be provided by a strictly federal AAF reserve program paralleling the Army's. Despite the lack of a clear state-related mission, the Air Guard would share with the National Guard a dual state-federal status.²⁵

These plans, commonly known as *Approved Policies 1945*, established the official basis for Army Air Forces planning of its postwar reserve programs. The AAF implemented them through separate plans for the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve. The Air Staff plan for the Air Guard emphasized the air-defense mission. It called for twelve wing headquarters commanding twenty-four fighter groups, twelve aircraft control and warning organizations, fourteen anti-aircraft artillery brigades, and three light bomb groups.²⁶

Although some Air Staff officers realized the wisdom of any plan that would increase public support for the AAF, they were generally skeptical of the Air Guard's ability to fulfill an M-Day role. They were especially dubious of the Guard's ability to operate and to maintain highly technical equipment.²⁷

THE Air Guard was a creature of the politics of postwar military planning. It was foisted upon an unenthusiastic AAF because of General Marshall's desire to minimize postwar defense spending and to create popular support for a peacetime military system based on universal military training. To avoid a time-consuming and politically damaging fight with the National Guard, Marshall had reluctantly agreed to preserve the Guard's established position as the Army's first-line reserve force. The Air Staff had taken a different view of America's postwar defense needs. Determined to build the best possible case for an independent Air Force, its planners had stressed the necessity for a large Air Force-in-being built around the strategic bombardment mission. They were convinced that an active-duty Air Force, held in instant readiness for combat, would be decisive in future wars. Air planners doubted the ability of any amateur force of citizen airmen, especially the state-controlled National Guard, to master the sophisticated technology of modern aerial warfare. They preferred an entirely federal Air Force Reserve which would have played a distinctly auxiliary role to the active-duty establishment. Nevertheless, the Army Air Forces leadership bowed to Marshall's pressure to minimize the political problems it faced in achieving its long-cherished goal of independence from the Army. Against their professional judgment, they acquiesced in the creation of a dual-component reserve system featuring the Air National Guard.

The origins of the Air Guard illustrate the importance of bureaucratic politics in shaping the military structure which the United States still relies upon to meet its defense requirements. The institutional needs of the various major bureaucratic political players in that process, rather than either professional military judgment or clear policy direction from the top civilian officials of the national government, dominated the outcome. Although the Air Guard subsequently emerged as a strong component of the U.S. Air Force closely integrated with that service's active-duty establishment, it took years of struggle, an enormous expenditure of resources, and some difficult political bargains to accomplish that result. Current debates over the reform of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and creation of a unified military command for space suggest the persistence of that pattern of institutional politics so vividly illustrated by the creation of the Air Guard. In this era of growing national security challenges and enormous demands on the defense budget, can the United States afford additional replays of the long and costly process which occurred before the Air Guard emerged as a first-rate reserve program in the 1960s?

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