



A Force Within

NGAUS was able to thwart War Department plans to cut the Guard after World War II, thanks to some inside help

By Charles J. Gross

NGAUS GETS A lot of credit—and deservedly so—for preventing attempts by the Army General Staff and Army Air Forces headquarters during World War II to exclude the National Guard from its hard-earned role as a federal reserve force.

After all, it was retired Maj. Gen. Ellard A. Walsh who was the face of the Guard fight with the War Department after he became association president in 1943. His threats in the press to seek legislative remedies were instrumental in keeping the Guard from being written out of plans for both the postwar Army and a new military flying service.

But Walsh didn't go it alone. A few influential officials, including Gen. George C. Marshall, the Army chief of staff, also favored a continued role for the Guard. He also had a critical ally in Maj. Gen. John F. Williams, the National Guard Bureau's wartime chief, who was a key figure in the effort, albeit mostly out of public view.

Williams helped funnel to NGAUS details of War Department plans to reduce the Guard to a state constabulary force. The Missouri Guardsman also played a role in the political campaign to save the Guard from that humiliating fate and in formulating requirements for a postwar Guard that would grow to more than 650,000 troops, or three

times the size of its prewar predecessor.

He and the Guard triumphed despite NGB being small (by today's standards) and something of a bureaucratic vagabond for much of the early war years.

The reorganization of the Army and War Department under the first War Powers Act initially designated the Guard Bureau as part of the Adjutant General's Office in the War Department. This occurred on March 2, 1942.

Less than two months later, new orders moved it under the chief of administrative services in Headquarters, Services of Supply. NGAUS and Congress protested those moves, but to no avail. NGB was then moved to the commanding general of Army Service Forces on Nov. 11, 1943, and designated as a War Department special staff activity.

Each bureaucratic move also necessitated a physical move around Washington, D.C., until July 5, 1943, when the bureau officially opened for business at the newly constructed Pentagon, just across the Potomac River in Northern Virginia.

Williams began serving on the Guard Bureau staff as a colonel in 1936. In December 1939, Marshall recommended him to replace Maj. Gen. Albert Blanding of Florida when the latter's tour of active duty ended.

WAR CHIEF Williams lobbied officials inside the War Department to include the National Guard in plans for the postwar Army and a new military flying service, the U.S. Air Force.

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Williams, who became NGB chief on Jan. 31, 1940, had been heavily involved in the Army's postwar planning process, which began well before the United States officially entered the conflict.

On April 1, 1941, he wrote a confidential letter to Walsh, a Minnesota Guardsman who then commanded the 34th Division, sharing Army plans for the Guard if it was released from federal service following the 12-month, full mobilization Congress authorized on Aug. 27, 1940.

The chief informed Walsh that the bureau was "deeply involved in the subject of the future of the National Guard. ... We are operating under instructions to assume that the strength of the Guard will be 250,000 men and 18,500 officers."

In November 1941, Williams informed the War Department General Staff that he agreed with the overall objectives of the Army's draft long-range plan.

However, he warned that he could not "too strongly emphasize the necessity of retaining the full cooperation of each and every state, as perhaps the first essential for the continued maintenance of an effective and first line reserve of the Army of the United States. ... The States should be considered as active partners in the organization, training and administration of the National Guard."

Shortly after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, the Army temporarily halted its preliminary postwar planning activities.

On July 22, 1943, Marshall formed the Special Planning Division (SPD) in the War Department to reinvigorate postwar Army planning.

In the meantime, Guard officers met informally in the Library of Congress office of Brig. Gen. John McAuley Palmer, who had been brought out of retirement by Marshall to advise him on postwar plans for the entire Army, including its reserve components.

On Feb. 28 and 29, 1944, Williams and Brig. Gen. William F. Tompkins, the SPD director, convened a key conference in the chief's

office to discuss the Guard's postwar future.

In addition to Williams and Tompkins, the meeting included Palmer, Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Martin, a longtime Guardsman, Walsh, and three influential adjutants general, Reginald B. Delacour of Connecticut, Hugh A. Drum of New York and Charles H. Grahl of Iowa.

The Guard representatives argued that the War Department already possessed enough legal authority to shape the state soldiery into an effective federal reserve component, but had been unwilling to use it all.

Persuaded by Walsh's threats to go to Capitol Hill, Tompkins finally concluded that any attempt to change the Guard's postwar role would provoke a showdown with Congress. As a result, the conference in Williams' office set the stage for much of what followed within the War Department on the Guard's future in the postwar U.S. military establishment.

BOLD THREAT

Williams also lobbied senior Army Air Forces officers to change their original postwar plans, which initially excluded the Guard. During the spring of 1944, he convinced Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Giles, an Army Air Corps officer who had headed the bureau's aviation division from June 1939 to June 1941, to pass pro-Guard "propaganda" to his twin brother Barney, the head of Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold's Headquarters Army Air Forces' staff.

He later wrote that he urged Giles to also pass the information to several other highly placed airmen and "to impress upon them that if they attempted to make any



LONG WALK Members of the Indiana Guard's 38th Division train in Louisiana in 1941. Under Williams, the National Guard Bureau helped orchestrate a full mobilization of the National Guard more than a year before the official U.S. entry into World War II.



GUARD ROOTS: MAJ. GEN. JOHN F. WILLIAMS



TREACHEROUS TERRAIN Some War Department officials sought to write the National Guard out of postwar plans even as Guard outfits such as the 35th Division slogged through places like St. Lo, France.

plans for a future Air Corps [sic, Army Air Forces], omitting the National Guard and the States, they would run up against a blitz that would make one of their forays over Berlin seem like child's play.”

Officers assigned to the bureau's wartime staff then began holding meetings with their regular Army counterparts to discuss various aspects of the evolving plans for the postwar Army.

With the full support of Williams, a committee of three regular Army and three Guard officers was established by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson on Aug. 1, 1944, to study and make recommendations about the Guard's role in the postwar military establishment.

WISDOM PREVAILS

In August 1944, the SPD published War Department Circular No. 347. Written by Palmer and issued under Marshall's signature, it laid down the basic principles that would shape the postwar Army.

The circular rejected a large peacetime standing force long favored by many in the War Department and stressed the key role which citizen-soldiers would play.

Subsequently, the SPD began developing a detailed blueprint for the postwar Army.

Meanwhile, Williams had not been satisfied with maintaining the Guard's prewar troop level of approximately 242,000 personnel. After the bureau polled approximately 200 Guard commanders on active duty in the various operational theaters around the world, Williams pressed for a substantial increase in the postwar Guard troop allotment.

By the spring of 1945, it was apparent that senior War

Department officials had decided that the Guard should retain its dual federal and state role after World War II.

President Harry S. Truman, a Missouri Guardsman in World War I, had taken the oath of office after President Franklin D. Roosevelt suddenly died on April 12, 1945. Marshall wrote the new chief executive in May 1945 stressing that the Guard would be retained as a first-line reserve of the postwar Army and that the bureau would essentially retain its prewar functions.

In addition, he indicated that “the need of the states for forces within their borders will mean that sufficient units of a type useful to a state must be provided.”

On June 15, 1945, Tompkins told the House Select Committee on Postwar Military Policy that the War Department “contemplates retention of our two reserve components of the Army—the National Guard and the Organized Reserves ... [with the former as] our first line

of reserve in an emergency.”

He added that the Guard would continue to perform its dual function for the states and the federal government.

To hammer out the final details of postwar reserve-component plans, Marshall formed a consolidated group from the members of the separate Guard and Reserve committees. Williams played an active role in reviewing drafts developed by the committee and offering written suggestions on how to improve provisions affecting the Guard.

The final recommendations of the consolidated committee, titled “War Department Policies Relating to Postwar National Guard,” were approved by Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson on Oct. 13, 1945.

Among other provisions, it committed the Army to maintain the Guard as its primary combat reserve force while preserving its dual state and federal role.

“With the publication of this policy, coupled with Circular 347,” historian John Mahon noted in his 1982 work, *History of the Military and National Guard*, “any threat to the Guard similar to that which occurred after World War I faded away.”

He observed that NGB “naturally approved of the firm position assigned to the Guard in the postwar world, but it acknowledged that the Guard would require very strong federal support to live up to it.”

Williams and his staff had played key roles in preserving the Guard from its wartime detractors and planning its postwar future as a federal reserve force. 

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