

In the beginning, the Air Guard got no respect. Then along came Winston Wilson.

Up From “Flying Club”

By Charles J. Gross



Maj. Gen. Winston Wilson (l), chief of the National Guard Bureau, and Brig. Gen. Donald Strait, commander of the 108th Tactical Fighter Wing, in 1964 after inspecting a newly received F-105 at McGuire AFB, N.J.

“**A**t best, the Air National Guard represents aircraft in flyable storage.” So declared Lt. Gen. Ennis C. Whitehead, commander of Continental Air Command, in November 1949. Whitehead was no disinterested kibbitzer; he supervised training of ANG units for their federal role as the Air Force’s primary combat reserve.

Whitehead’s dismissive comments reflected top leaders’ profound skepticism about the Guard’s true capabilities. The deep prejudice did eventually fade away, but the change of heart did not take place for many years.

The first true National Guard aviation unit was set up on Nov. 1, 1915 in New York by Capt. Raynall C. Bolling. However, the Air Guard as we know it today is much newer. It was a product of the politics of interservice rivalry during World War II and in the postwar era.

Leading the charge for a new type of Air Guard was the Army’s Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, who pushed for it during the final war years. Individual Guard aviation units began forming in 1946. Today, the Air Guard considers its official birthday to be Sept. 18, 1947—the same day the Air Force became a separate and independent service.

The leaders who planned and maneu-

vered for a separate postwar Air Force during World War II generally didn’t place much faith in the reserves, especially the state-dominated National Guard. They were determined to build the largest and most modern standing force they could possibly acquire.

Muscles Flexing

The same leadership assumed future wars would be short and highly destructive affairs decided by aerial delivery of massive nuclear firepower on an enemy’s heartland. They were convinced that reserves could not operate complex modern weapons without extensive post-mobilization training.

That set up a huge postwar clash. The National Guard Association of the United States, a civilian organization in Washington, D.C., that represented the interests of the Guard before Congress, had flexed its considerable political muscle during World War II. It was determined that the Air Guard would be included in the postwar US military establishment.

NGAUS in fact compelled officials in the War Department, including those running the Army Air Forces, to seriously ponder the harsh political cost of excluding the Guard from a major role in postwar plans. It did this by threaten-

ing to oppose the creation of a separate postwar Air Force.

As significant was the attitude of Marshall. In the latter war years, the Chief of Staff rejected Army and AAF notions of a huge postwar active duty force. He ordered service planners to prepare for a relatively small postwar standing force backed by universal military training (UMT) and a large reserve contingent—including the Guard.

Bowing to Marshall’s guidance, and determined to avoid a political fight that might weaken support for a separate postwar Air Force, Gen. Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, Commanding General of the Army Air Forces, agreed to create the postwar Air National Guard. It was purely a matter of political expediency.

Once it was apparent that the Guard would play a prominent role as a postwar combat reserve of the Army and the Air Force, NGAUS agreed to endorse UMT and the creation of the Air Force as a separate military service, according to authoritative historical accounts of the period.

Consequently, the Air Force in the late 1940s found itself, against its professional judgment, in possession of a unique dual component reserve system, comprising the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve. The ANG would be manned by some 58,000 personnel. Its primary units would be 84 flying squadrons, mostly fighters, and its principal mission would be air defense of the continental United States.

At this stage, of course, there existed little trust or understanding between the active duty Air Force and the ANG. Some regular Air Force observers ridiculed the Guard units as “state-sponsored flying clubs.” Air Guard units regularly failed operational readiness inspections. The Air Force and the National Guard Bureau spent much of the late 1940s fighting over who was in charge of the Air Guard during those periods when it was not engaged in federal service.

Widespread Air Force frustration with the Air Guard culminated in a January 1950 proposal to strip the Air Guard of its combat missions and relegate it to less demanding tasks. In the same period, the



Maj. Gen. Ennis Whitehead (c), flanked by MSgt. Robert Barlow (l) and Maj. Joel Wise, visits a camp in the World War II Pacific Theater. In 1949, as head of Continental Air Command, Whitehead derided the Air Guard's readiness as "flyable storage."

chief of the NGB, Maj. Gen. Kenneth F. Cramer, an Army Guardsman, precipitated a crisis when he tried to run the Air Guard according to his own policies rather than those of the Air Force.

Tensions with the Air Force reached a boiling point when Cramer unilaterally fired Maj. Gen. George G. Finch, head of the NGB's Air Force Division, because of policy differences and personality conflicts. Finch eventually was restored to his post only through the direct and forceful intervention of Air Force Secretary Stuart Symington.

Those episodes epitomized the turbulent nature of the ANG's early history as the primary combat reserve for the Air Force.

Then came a critical turning point—the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. Some 45,000 Air Guardsmen—80 percent of the force—were mobilized for the crisis. That call-up exposed the glaring weaknesses of the US military, including its reserve components.

It soon became clear that Air Guard units and individual Guardsmen lacked specific wartime missions. Their equipment, especially aircraft, was generally obsolete. Their training was usually deplorable. Once mobilized, they proved to be almost totally unprepared for combat. Air Guard units were assigned almost at random to active duty, regardless of their previous training and equipment.

Many Air Guardsmen, especially veteran World War II combat pilots, were stripped away from their units and used as fillers elsewhere in the Air Force. It took months for ANG units to become combat ready. Some units never did reach that stage.

Eventually, the mess was sorted out. The initial mobilization fiasco forced Air Force leaders to reach a workable accommodation with the Air Guard and to begin revamping its entire reserve system.

Proof in Korea

In the Korean War, the Air Guard's greatest strength was the experience of its personnel.

"When we first got to Korea, we had lots of youngsters, Air Force types that had been put through [pilot] training rather rapidly, and [we] were losing quite a few," recalled Brig. Gen. Paul E. Hoover, Ohio's assistant adjutant general for air, years later. "Then, as the Reservists and the Air Guard got there, the average age climbed quite a bit. With the experience of these individuals, our loss rate decreased rapidly."

Hoover added, "Many of us that got over there came from that World War II experience and we applied some of that experience in Korea. It reduced our losses considerably."

In Korea, Air Guardsmen flew 39,530 combat sorties. They destroyed 39 enemy aircraft—all but four of them by individual ANG pilots assigned to active duty Air Force fighter units. Air Guardsmen dropped 44,000 bombs, fired more than 16 million rounds of machine gun ammunition, and launched 31,000 rockets in combat.

Four Air Guardsmen became aces, and 101 ANG personnel were either killed or reported missing in action. The recalled Air Guardsmen clearly contributed much to the air war in Korea and the Air Force's global buildup for the expected military confrontation with the Soviet Union.

Because of the severe problems associ-

ated with the Korean War mobilizations, the Air Force and its reserve components revamped reserve training and management. Politically savvy leaders such as Maj. Gen. Winston P. Wilson in the National Guard Bureau, augmented by a strong political base in the individual states, helped ANG trade some of its autonomy as a state-federal force for closer integration with the active duty Air Force.

Wilson became arguably the single most important officer in the ANG's history. Mobilized from Arkansas in 1950 for Korean War duty, Wilson expected to be in Washington, D.C., for 21 months. Instead, he remained for 21 years.

Wilson served as head of ANG from 1954 to 1962. Then, in 1963, he became the first Air Guardsman to serve as chief of the National Guard Bureau, a position he held until 1971. Wilson was described by one former subordinate as "a one-man gang. ... He never delegated authority, and chains of command were meaningless."

Wilson recognized that the Air Guard faced a dim future unless it acquired definite wartime missions, integrated into Air Force operations on a daily basis, and met the same tough training standards as the active duty force. The Air Guard also needed additional full-time manning, because it had to be ready to go into combat the moment it was called into federal service. Finally, Wilson and others fought hard to acquire modern aircraft and facilities while expanding the Air Guard's mission portfolio to include airlift, air refueling, and other

ANG in Brief

FORCE STRUCTURE

One numbered air force: **1st**, Tyndall AFB, Fla.
88 wings
Seven squadrons

PERSONNEL

(as of Sept. 30, 2007)

Total ANG military*		106,256
Officers	14,025	
Enlisted	92,231	
Civilian		179
Total		106,435

*Includes ANG personnel assigned to MAJCOMS, FOAs, and DRUs.

EQUIPMENT

(PAI as of Sept. 30, 2007)

Fighter/Attack	609
Helicopter	15
Recon/BM/C3I	15
SOF	4
Tanker	179
Transport	214

key missions performed by the active force.

Wilson's central insight was that, because of the high experience level of its personnel and their longevity in individual units, the Air National Guard could maintain high levels of military proficiency with far less training time than was needed by their active duty counterparts, so long as key programs were implemented. He was able to sell these concepts to the Air Guard, the Air Force, Congress, and the states. Under his leadership, ANG was transformed from a flying club to a valued reserve component.

Then, pushed by its reserve components and their political supporters, the Air Force adopted several management and training innovations after the Korean War that created combat-ready reserve forces.

The four most significant policy innovations were:

- Incorporation of the reserve forces in war plans. Starting in 1951, the Air Force established specific mobilization requirements for the Air Guard in its war plans for the first time. The ANG would begin training against those requirements and plans.

- Bringing ANG forces into participation in the air defense runway alert

Leaders Through The Years

Col. William A. R. Robertson	Nov. 28, 1945	October 1948
Maj. Gen. George G. Finch	October 1948	Sept. 25, 1950
Maj. Gen. Earl T. Ricks	Oct. 13, 1950	Jan. 4, 1954
Maj. Gen. Winston P. Wilson	Jan. 26, 1954	Aug. 5, 1962
Maj. Gen. I. G. Brown	Aug. 6, 1962	April 19, 1974
Maj. Gen. John J. Pesch	April 20, 1974	Jan. 31, 1977
Maj. Gen. John T. Guice	Feb. 1, 1977	April 1, 1981
Maj. Gen. John B. Conaway	April 1, 1981	Nov. 1, 1988
Maj. Gen. Philip G. Killey	Nov. 1, 1988	Jan. 28, 1994
Maj. Gen. Donald W. Shepperd	Jan. 28, 1994	Jan. 28, 1998
Maj. Gen. Paul A. Weaver Jr.	Jan. 28, 1998	Dec. 3, 2001
Brig. Gen. David A. Brubaker (acting)	Dec. 3, 2001	June 3, 2002
Lt. Gen. Daniel James III	June 3, 2002	May 20, 2006
Gen. Craig R. McKinley	May 20, 2006	Nov. 17, 2008
Maj. Gen. Emmett R. Titshaw (acting)	Nov. 17, 2008	

program. ANG leaders proposed the air defense runway alert program as a way to combine realistic training and support of a significant combat mission in peacetime. The program began, on an experimental basis, in 1953 with inclusion of two fighter squadrons at Hayward, Calif., and Hancock Field, N.Y. Despite Air Staff doubts, the experiment was a success. By 1961, it had expanded into a permanent, round-the-clock program that included 25 ANG fighter squadrons.

The runway alert program was the first broad effort to integrate reserve units into the regular peacetime operating structure of the American armed forces on a continuing basis. It was the precursor to the Air Force's Total Force approach to reserve component training and utilization.

- Establishing the "gaining command" concept of reserve force management. This meant that the major air command responsible for using a Guard or Reserve unit in wartime would actually train it during peacetime. ANG leaders had pressed for that arrangement for years. However, the active duty Air Force had strongly resisted the change. The concept was grudgingly adopted in 1960 because of budget cuts and public criticism of the air reserve programs by Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, then Air Force vice chief of staff. It improved the effectiveness of ANG units by giving Air Force commanders direct personal incentives for improving the performance of those reserve organizations.

MAJCOM oversight also established firm precedents for the Total Force policy by integrating the air reserve components into the daily operations of the active force.

- Creation of the Selected Reserve Force program. This fourth major policy

innovation reflected Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's determination to build an elite force of highly capable reserve units to back President John F. Kennedy's flexible response policy. He wanted America's military forces, including its reserve components, prepared to respond immediately across the spectrum of conflict, including guerrilla and limited conventional war. McNamara created a Selected Reserve Force in each of the military services. They had priority access to equipment, could recruit to full wartime strength, and were allowed to conduct additional training each year.

That Selected Reserve Force, including 13 ANG flying units, would provide most of the nation's strategic military reserve in the United States while a growing share of the active force was engaged in the Vietnam War. Their key objective was to be able to deploy overseas within 24 hours of being mobilized.

The improvements generated by those four innovations were demonstrated in 1968 when four Air Guard fighter squadrons were mobilized and sent to South Vietnam after senior officials finally figured out how to employ them. The units proved capable of rapid global deployment, and they sustained highly effective combat operations almost immediately upon their arrival in theater. Their performance helped to pave the way for Total Force policy in the 1970s.

With increased funding in the 1980s and strong USAF determination to repair the post-Vietnam "hollow force," the Air Guard soon became a highly capable force across the board. Indeed, for many years, top leaders in war zones have remarked that Guardsmen and Guard units are almost indistinguishable from their active duty counterparts.

Ennis Whitehead would be amazed. ■

Aircraft Fleet

(As of Sept. 30, 2007)

Type	TAI	PAI
Fighter/Attack		
A-10	78	78
OA-10A	28	18
F-15A-D	145	91
F-16	495	422
Total	746	609
Helicopter		
HH-60	18	15
Reconnaissance/BM/C3I		
E-8	18	12
EC-130	7	3
WC-130	3	0
Total	28	15
Special Ops Forces		
MC-130	4	4
Tanker		
HC-130	9	7
KC-135	226	172
Total	235	179
Transport		
C-5	30	27
C-17	8	8
C-21	19	2
C-26	11	0
C-32	2	0
C-38	2	2
C-40	3	0
C-130	173	165
LC-130	10	10
Total	258	214
Total ANG	1,289	1,036

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