



U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class David Dodds

Army Spc. Christopher M. Rasmussen works with civilian volunteers near the El Zagal Shrine and Masonic Temple in Fargo, N.D. Rasmussen and other North Dakota National Guard soldiers and airmen have been integrated with the civilian populace as they work together to fight the flood.

The Guard Takes Command

The National Guard increases presence in key command roles at U.S. Northern Command.

By Jennifer G. Williams

THE National Guard has greatly expanded its role in domestic and overseas operations over the past few years — a role that comes naturally to the community-based force.

So it was only natural to expand National Guard presence and importance at USNORTHCOM, established in 2002 to provide command and control of homeland defense efforts and coordinate defense support of civil authorities.

Reserve-component service members fill roughly 10 percent of USNORTHCOM's total full-time positions. Most are in the Guard, said Air Force Gen. Victor E. Renuart, commander of USNORTHCOM and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

"That's the highest percentage of any of the combatant commands," he said while visiting Washington, D.C. for the National

Guard's 2009 Domestic Operations Workshop.

Guard members account for eight of Renuart's 16 flag officers, including USNORTHCOM's deputy commander, Army Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum, who previously served as chief of the National Guard Bureau.

"I would like to add another 100-plus full-time National Guard positions in my headquarters," Renuart said.

In fact, the 2008 Commission on the National Guard and Reserves report recommended to Congress that USNORTHCOM "should better integrate reserve components into its planning/operations."

Colonel Wes McClellan, NORAD and USNORTHCOM National Guard Integrator, said National Guard service members represent approximately 70 percent of USNORTHCOM's operational force. The missions tasked to the Guard make it an essential

part of our national homeland defense, he added.

"The National Guard plays an integral role in the mission sets of NORAD and USNORTHCOM," said McClellan.

For example, the National Guard is responsible for not only the majority of our nation's ground-based missile defense sites, but also for most of the nation's air sovereignty missions.

"The air defense mission that flies over the National Capitol region is routinely performed by Guard personnel," said McClellan.

But even with increased frequency and duration of deployments and other missions given to the Guard, recruitment and retention numbers remain high, said McClellan. He attributes this to the all-volunteer force's sense of "doing something worthwhile."

But with the overseas mission in Iraq winding down and funding expected to follow, he said he expects that the numbers seen today likely will drop as well.

But the Guard has positioned itself — whether accidentally or on purpose — to be a key player in the nation's future defenses.

The Guard Advantage

The Guard has a big advantage in protecting the homeland over its active duty comrades: pervasiveness. Guard units are already forward-deployed in various communities across the U.S. — already positioned to quickly respond to domestic emergencies. In fact, the National Guard is spread over approximately 3,200 sites in 54 states and territories, while the U.S. Army is in roughly 60 locations in 27 states and the U.S. Air Force is in about 70 locations in 34 states.

The National Guard includes about 350,000 members — larger than the armies of most countries, said McClellan. More than a quarter of the total force is currently on alert — mostly for OCONUS missions — with more ready if called by our nation's governors or the president. The National Guard makes up more than 50 percent of our nation's total reserve component, which includes the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine and Coast Guard reserves.

And the Guard is uniquely situated to take on more and more responsibilities,

says McClellan. "There are skill sets that are easier to sustain in the reserve component — such as civil affairs," he said. "City planners, water management — those occupations and their expertise transfer well to the civil affairs units and their missions. It's simply logical for those missions to reside in the reserve component."

Flexibility is a consequence of the Guard's unique dual role as a shared state and federal military force. When operating in a federal role on active duty, the Guard utilizes the same legal authority as the rest of the U.S. Armed Forces. But unlike the rest of the U.S. Armed Forces, the Guard can also operate under the control of the states in its state role.

Guard missions now include counter-drug operations, airport security, national special security events, border security, critical infrastructure protection — all of the domestic aspects of which are overseen by USNORTHCOM.

And the Guard has traditionally taken on the less-glamorous responsibilities of the military — jobs that the active component did not want to sustain as part of the active force. Taking on those jobs has given the Guard its own job security for the future, once combat operations overseas wane, say officials.

"If there's a new need or requirement, if no one else wants it, it basically funnels down to the Guard," said LTC Paul Ebbhardt, Plans, Programs and Policy Advisor (ARNG) at USNORTHCOM. "That's how we end up with such a variety of missions."

Becoming One

In the past, reserve component forces were seen as the forgotten stepchildren of the military — called on only if absolutely necessary. These days, however, the National Guard has become integrated into the nation's total military force, with the Chief of the National Guard Bureau now a four-star general like the other service chiefs, and the influx of Guard leadership at USNORTHCOM, as well as in combat operations overseas.

Renuart has said that Americans don't care what uniform anyone is wearing — they want teamwork from the people who protect them and respond to natural and manmade crises.

"We've built a collaborative effort between NORTHCOM and the National Guard Bureau that I'm proud to say is kind of boring," Renuart said in March. "We won't always be able to approach a problem the same way, but we will always approach a problem together."


That includes properly equipping and training the Guard.

In the past, the Guard was skipped over for training at places including NTC, and was given the cast-off equipment the active forces did not need.

These days, the Guard is being recognized and prepared for its roles both here and overseas, with updated equipment they can use in both mission sets and training that prepares them for their call-to-duty at a moment's notice.

"If you think about it, the Guard can use those vehicles and aircraft for both their overseas and domestic missions — it adds up to a huge cost savings for the American taxpayer," said McClellan.

Maintaining the National Guard after equipping and training its members only



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U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill

Army Maj. Gen. Frank Grass, director of operations for USNORTHCOM, tells a Senate subcommittee that the National Guard and U.S. Northern Command stand ready to support civil authorities in the 2009 hurricane season.

costs the federal government about 28 percent of what it costs to maintain an active force of same size — especially in peacetime, said McClellan.

“Duty status is often a topic of debate among military leaders,” he said. “But the key is developing the appropriate supporting and supported relationships as opposed to debating authorities and duty status.”

The Road Ahead

The role of the National Guard at USNORTHCOM and in the wide variety of domestic and overseas operations is not expected to diminish anytime soon,

officials say, as the Guard’s usefulness and cost effectiveness have firmly established the reserve component as an integral part of the nation’s total force structure.

Planning, coordination and teamwork have resulted in successful responses to crises, said Renuart.

“We’re finding new and better ways to continue to integrate,” he said. “No arguments out there about who’s in charge, no arguments about what needs to be done.”

ANG Maj. Gen. Frank Grass, USNORTHCOM’s director of operations, testified this summer before an ad hoc disaster-response subcommittee of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. The National Guard members are “the first responders in support of [civil authorities] and the governor, so they’re going to be there [for domestic emergencies] first,” Grass told the subcommittee. “It behooves us at NORTHCOM to understand their capability and look at their response times, because if they’re successful at the local level, that’s fewer federal assets we have to put forward.”

“NORTHCOM has matured,” he said. “The Guard has matured in their relationships with the states and with Northern Command. Just the fact that today there are five reserve component general officers serving full time at Northern Command and there are three traditional Army Reserve and Air Guard and Army Guard generals serving at Northern Command — we have a much closer relationship than we have ever had.” **AF**



Photo by Sgt. Jack W. Carlson

Defense Secretary Robert Gates examines a Silo Interface Fault to view an operational ground-based interceptor during a visit to the Missile Defense Complex on Fort Greely, Alaska.

Guard Roles

The National Guard now controls a wide variety of missions across the globe:

- Air Force Brig. Gen. Guy Walsh, a Maryland Air National Guardsman from the 175th Airlift Wing in Baltimore, recently took over one of the largest and most diverse wings in the Air Force: the 451st Air Expeditionary Wing at Kandahar Airfield, a NATO base in Afghanistan. The wing is a tenant unit, which, along with three airframes, also provides intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability with about 50 unmanned aerial systems.

- ANG Brigadier General Steven P. Huber, commands Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix VIII, an Illinois Army National Guard-led task force composed of soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Illinois Army National Guard, as well as Navy, Air Force, Marines, coalition forces, and DoD civilians and contract employees. Huber leads nearly 8,000 personnel at Camp Phoenix in its mission to train and mentor Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP).

- NATO’s Kosovo Force in the Balkans has 1,525 U.S. soldiers – mostly from the Army National Guard.

- In the National Guard, the DoD has developed, trained, equipped, and certified 55 Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Support Teams (WMD-CSTs) — at least one in each state and territory — and 17 CBRNE Enhanced Response Force Packages (CERFPs) located throughout the United States. CBRNE stands for the various threats the special force package is specially trained to meet: chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive. There is at least one CERFP in each Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) region. Both the WMD-CSTs and the CERFPs operate under the command and control of the state governors with federal funding.

- The Alaska Army National Guard’s 49th Missile Defense Battalion, based at Fort Greely, Alaska, serves as the epicenter of the United States’ Ground-based Midcourse Defense program. Alaska ANG Maj. Joe Miley, the unit’s operations officer, recently noted the National Guard is perfectly suited to perform such an important mission. “The National Guard has traditionally done homeland defense,” he said, citing National Guard history dating back 370 years to the Minutemen in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. “And this is the epitome of homeland defense.”