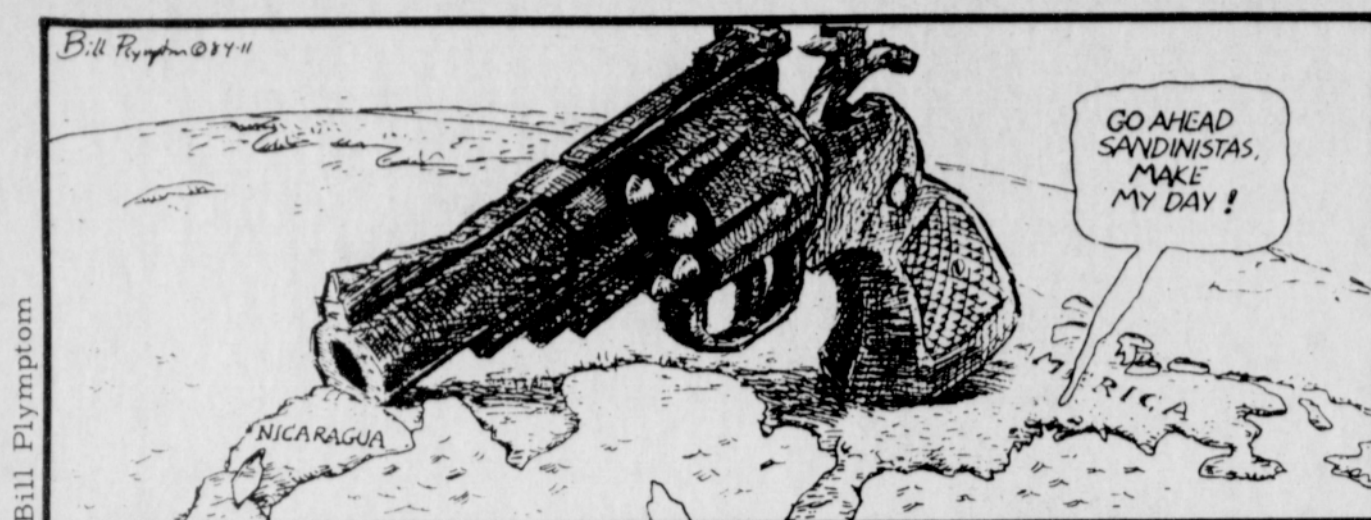


KEEP THE BOYS HOME



by John O'Brien

The fact that the four thousand men of the 41st Brigade, Oregon National Guard can be active in Central America within a week is not only true but should concern Oregonians.

In March 1976, after an agreement between then-Governor Bob Straub and the Army, the 41st Brigade became attached to the 7th Infantry Division based at Fort Ord, California. Part of the agreement stipulated that if the division were ordered anywhere, the 41st Brigade would immediately go on active duty and go with it, and that this mobilization could occur on as little as twenty-four hours' notice.

The attachment to the 7th Infantry, part of a program called "Round Out," was seen to benefit the state's militia by offering training and close association with an active army division. New equipment, some of it better than some active army units had, was made available to the 41st Brigade and other Oregon units.

The 41st made a mock invasion of Spain, elements of it began to train overseas and, less than two years ago, the 41st Brigade mobilized with the 7th Infantry in the largest Oregon National Guard mobilization since World War II.

But all this came at a price. The 41st became operationally controlled by the Army, receiving daily orders from Fort Ord by phone and wire, and personal orders from some one hundred and sixty army personnel assigned to train the 41st.

Straub was himself embarrassingly ignorant of the extent of that control until the summer of 1976, when the 7th Infantry had scheduled a fifteen day training camp for the brigade over Memorial Day. After complaints from brigade members and families, Straub notified the 7th Infantry that as governor he would not allow the 41st to take part that weekend. The 7th Infantry replied that it was not the governor's decision. The 41st went, as scheduled.

The policy that has changed the character of the Oregon National Guard 41st Brigade from a community-oriented state militia to a combat trained branch of the armed forces on twenty-four hour alert availability is called the "total force policy." It was described by retired Colonel A. R. Scholin in the official National Guard Magazine, February 1983. In an article titled, "The National Guard and the Rapid Deployment Force," Scholin writes "It is a basic premise of the Total Force Policy that the Army and Air Guard should provide not only a substantial share of U.S. combat power, but also a major portion of combat support facilities that are seldom needed on permanent posts and bases with established facilities but are essential to a combat force moving into a 'bare base' operation."

An invasion of Nicaragua would be such a bare base operation.

Scholin quotes the commander of the Rapid Deployment Force, Lieutenant General John Kingston, who states his organization can't go to war without utilizing most of the one hundred thousand guardsmen available under twenty-four hour callup, including the Oregon 41st Brigade.

From the Army point of view, it is much cheaper to field guardsmen than active soldiers. From the guardsman's point of view it is maybe more than he bargained for: For his eight-year enlistment in the 41st he must be available for instant mobilization.

Elements of the 41st within the past five years have completed the Jungle Training School in Panama; others have trained in house-to-house urban combat.

And over the last year, every woman in the 41st has been ordered to transfer out or resign from the Guard; guardsmen say this is because women by law are not allowed to be in combat units.

From the point of view of some longtime guardsmen, these programs — and their costs — are inappropriate to the role of our state militia.

The arrangement has also not worked out very well. Understandably, frictions between the Army trainers and the citizen soldiers of the 41st have led to hostility over the last nine years.

This month the 41st is officially disengaging from the "Round Out" program, and thus from the 7th Infantry Division. But this does not change the 41st's status as a twenty-four hour callup unit.

And the brigade may be jumping from the frying pan into the fire. Negotiations are in process with I Army Corps at Fort Lewis to include the 41st Brigade as a unit of the Rapid Deployment Force, now renamed the U.S. Central Command.

If the 41st is attached officially to the central command, it furthers the likelihood that the Oregon unit would be among the first units after an invasion to see action in Central America.

Only a concerted effort by Oregonians to regain control over their state militia can change this policy.

At present it is legally and logistically possible for the 41st Brigade to be sent to Central America in a week, even over the objections of the governor. President Reagan can call to active duty within twenty-four hours one hundred thousand select guardsmen (including the 41st) without either consulting with Congress or even declaring a national emergency.

The 41st has a supply of equipment sufficient to operate for three months now sitting on ready-to-load pallets in a warehouse at Camp Withycombe near Portland. This equipment could be loaded and airborne in less than a day.

The 41st's officers and men are required to present themselves at their assembly points within twenty-four hours; each of these assembly points is located close to Interstate 5, and is thus only hours from either Kingsley Field or Portland International Airport.

Allowing two full days to assemble at either airfield, another day to arrange flights, two days to load supplies and men and a day to fly to Honduras, a time schedule of a week is not unlikely.

Do Oregonians really want or need a combat-ready U.S. Army unit as our state militia?

A U.S. war upon poor people is again being conducted, this time in Central America, and we who acquiesce to the Vietnamization of our state militia will deserve the personal heart-break that participation in such federally sponsored terrorism would surely bring to us.

John O'Brien lives in Portland. He is a musician and a former ROTC student.

A LAST WORD ABOUT AUGUST



August is a month of memories. To select from a tightly subjective list, the nuclear age got its start forty years ago with the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan. That same August, Viet Nam declared independence from the return of French dominance that followed Japan's surrender and the end of World War II, which culminated in a generation of wars against two western powers. In August 1964 an incident that involved two American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin led to a virtual declaration of war by the United States a few days later (the Tonkin Resolution, August 17), which began ten years of disaster for both countries. A year later, in August 1965, U.S. Marines fought the first large battle against the Viet Cong (Operation Starlight), and at the same time, twenty years ago this month, what is known as the Watts Riot occurred in Los Angeles. In 1970, a quarter of a century after Viet Nam declared its independence, as part of a growing disenchantment with American involvement in Viet Nam, a coalition of anti-war groups from the Pacific Northwest challenged the American Legion at its national convention, which began in Portland, August 28.

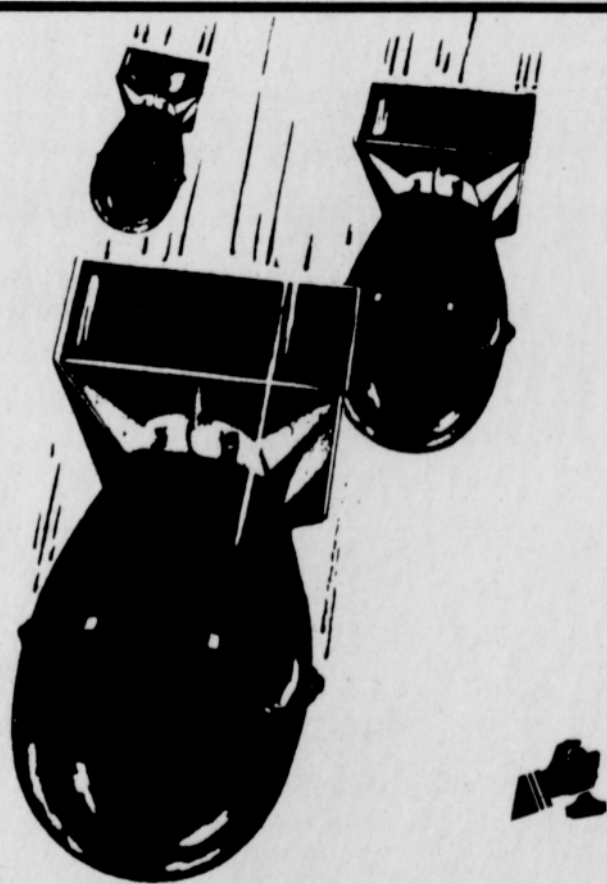
The coalition called itself the People's Army Jamboree in recognition of the theatrical nature of political demonstrations, and was spearheaded by the Viet Nam Veterans Against the War. Although the Oregon National Guard and almost every policeman in the state was mustered against the demonstrators, there was no violence. Governor Tom McCall claimed major credit for the aversion of violence. He had taken the unprecedented step of sponsoring a rock concert which was intended to draw young people away from the protest. The rock concert was well attended, but not by political activists; there was a tendency in those days for authorities to link all wings of what was called the counter culture.

The press acted disappointed about the lack of violence and accused the coalition of being lightweights because it did not leave its blood in the streets. One columnist proclaimed that The People's Army Jamboree was a lot like the Loch Ness Monster. Everyone talked about it, but no one ever saw it.

For the veterans who opposed the Viet Nam War, the confrontation against their older counterparts was the start of a journey to the nation's capitol where the following spring more than one thousand of them hurled their war medals at Congress. It was the second time in the twentieth century that war veterans took their grievances to Washington: both got their start in Portland. The latter visit was spared the bloody rout of the first, although the war continued for four more years, and has actually never ended.

The VVAW was the only veterans group formed during the Viet Nam War. Unlike the other veterans groups, which have acted as rubber stamps for the Pentagon, it opposed war. More than ever such an opposition by war veterans is necessary to counter the war fever that presently grips this nation and the world. It is owed to the dead they left behind and those who will die. It is an obligation, a duty for having survived.

— MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER



NUCLEAR WAR BALLOT

YES ☐ Let's have a nuclear war.
I'm sick of waiting.

NO ☐ I'd rather wait a little longer.

You only have one vote.

Please mark ballot and send to:

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