



O

from AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare

T

THE UNITED STATES ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

E

An Interview with CSM Larry D. Pence,
the Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard

S

AUSA: What has been your greatest satisfaction serving as the highest enlisted representative of the United States Army National Guard?

PENCE: Seeing the quality of our soldiers as I travel across the United States and around the world. During the last three years every place that America's Army has participated — Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia — members of the Army National Guard have been there, too. And one of the greatest indicators of our quality came during the Sinai mission. We had a composite battalion of 72 percent Guard, eight percent Army Reserve and 20 percent active. And both the officer and noncommissioned officer leadership [were] completely integrated. A great success story that really highlighted the great quality of the young men and women that serve in the Guard today.

AUSA: What has been your greatest challenge?

PENCE: The greatest challenge that we've had across America's Army — and specifically with the Army National Guard — is creating public awareness of the quality of our soldiers and the dedication that they put forth. Creating awareness of the dedication of our soldiers, to their employers

as well as to the American people, is quite a task, but one that we really need to pursue for the Army National Guard to continue having the support of the American people.

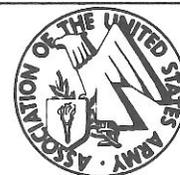
AUSA: Have increased deployments resulted in problems recruiting and retaining Guardsmen?

PENCE: No, actually, our objective attrition rate this year was 18 percent. And it looks like we will hit someplace between 18 and 19 percent. Recruiting has been very successful, too. We have been able to offer some enlistment and reenlistment bonuses that have helped both recruiting and retention. We will end the year with somewhere around 368,000 soldiers.

AUSA: What do you tell young men and women when they ask you why they should enlist in the Army National Guard?

PENCE: I tell them what a great opportunity it is to acquire some skills, but just as importantly, to serve their country. And to do it in an environment that is not completely alien to you. You're going to be able to go to basic training and AIT and come back to your community. The

NCO Notes is published by the AUSA Institute of Land Warfare. This program is an outlet for short pieces written by NCOs for NCOs. Topics can range from leadership techniques to those unwritten "how-to" ideas and procedures that make the Army work. The content represents the personal opinions of the author and not necessarily the position of the Association of the United States Army or its members. Essays of 1,000 words or less may be submitted for consideration Association of the United States Army. Attn: MSG George E. Ehling, Editor, NCO Update, PO Box 1560, Arlington, Virginia 22201.



citizen soldier concept of our nation implies the citizen soldier is that soldier who grows up in that community, goes to school there, goes into business there, and is also serving the community, the state and the nation. And of course the leadership and additional training that they receive pays dividends back to the community and to the local employer.

AUSA: As they return to the community, do you see these young people having an influence on their peers?

PENCE: Absolutely. In 18 states we've got the Guard participating in the Youth Challenge Program, where we take nonhigh school graduates and put them into a five-month resident program that's designed to help them become productive citizens. And in most of the communities throughout the United States many of our young men and women are involved in drug demand reduction programs and community awareness programs. So I think they are having a very positive impact on their peers when they get back to their communities.

AUSA: Is there resistance from employers when Guard members volunteer for operations such as the Sinai?

PENCE: In the majority of instances we have great support from employers. We have a National Committee for Support of the Guard and Reserve which is very active. Both the employers and the soldiers can take advantage of the committee's assistance. Traditionally small businesses have the greatest problem. If a business has only ten employees and three or four of them are members of the Guard in the same unit, and that unit is mobilized, that puts a real burden on that employer. So we work with those employers and give commanders at the local level some latitude when forming their units, so that we don't take away all the talent from that employer. So far it's been very successful. Soldiers today in the Army National Guard understand what they enlist for; they understand what their training is for. That it's not just for their personal advantage but it's also to serve the community, the state and the nation. And they are, in fact,

very eager for those opportunities. There's a desire on the part of those soldiers to go out and do their patriotic duty; go out and do the things that they need to do to take care of their country.

AUSA: How are all these deployments affecting your state mission?

PENCE: One of the things that we try to do with our objective force structure is to maintain within each state the types of units that will be necessary to assist that state or to assist the governor when he calls the state's National Guard. We try to provide them the equipment, the personnel, the skills that they need to assist the state in recovering from whatever disaster or event. We've been able to maintain that force structure and to not take too many units from one state when the Army calls.

AUSA: Are there any grade restrictions on accessions coming from prior active duty?

PENCE: Because of the National Guard Combat Reform Act of 1992, we have a requirement to have 55 percent of the enlisted force with some prior service, and I'm happy to tell you right now I think we are at about 62 percent. So we don't have any restrictions other than we want to bring them into a position where they are MOS qualified and where they meet the standards and grade structure of that unit.

AUSA: What can Congress do to help the Guard attract and retain quality soldiers?

PENCE: We just this past year were fortunate enough to get a mobilization insurance program through Congress. Both the mobilization insurance and the recent dental benefits incentives will help us sustain our readiness at the degree that we need to. We'd also like to see them enact an employer tax incentive that would help those small business employers who have several Guardsmen working for them. If their employees are called up they would get a tax break that might allow them to hire a temporary backfill for the Guardsman or be used in some other way to reinvigorate their organization. So a tax incentive for employers, I think, along with health and dental benefits, would be the things we would like to see Congress look to.

AUSA: What incentives can the states offer?

PENCE: States need to revisit their state active duty pay schedules. When Guardsmen are called to state active duty they are not receiving federal pay and benefits, so the state has to pay for that call-up. And there is no standard state active duty pay. Sometimes it's very low and, depending on the state, may go up to what their active duty pay would be. Ordinarily when our soldiers are called up for disasters, or other events within the state, they are receiving less than their active duty pay.

AUSA: How is morale among Guard members? Is there fear that even greater change is coming?

PENCE: Morale of the Guardsmen today is marvelous, probably the best that it's been in my period in the Guard. And morale is good because they realize that they are, in fact, quality soldiers. To coin a phrase that a friend of ours used, "They are proud of who they are, what they are, what they do and how well they do it." They understand that they are going to be mobilized to assist America's Army. I don't believe there's a fear about more changes. I believe there's a realization that there's going to be continuous force structure change for the next several years. But I don't think that adversely affects the morale of our soldiers.

AUSA: How well integrated are the active Army and the Guard today?

PENCE: I think we're probable better integrated today than at any time in the 25 years of the Total Force policy. Again, one of the positive outcomes of the Sinai operation was the comprehension by everyone involved that those Guardsmen — officers, noncommissioned officers and soldiers — that they served with can do the job as well as anybody else. The training that they've had is to the same standard as active Army training. They are required to do the same things that every other soldier does.

AUSA: How is the requirement to pass a physical fitness test before enrolling in NCOES affecting the Guard?

PENCE: I'm very happy that General Reimer retained that policy. I believe that's the right policy for America's Army. Is it causing some

pain? Absolutely! It probably pains across America's Army. When the policy was first established, we had some pretty high failure rates. Some of the schools saw failure rates that were in the 25 percent range. We are about 15 months into that policy now, and across the board we are seeing percentages back down to 10 and 12 percent. And I think that will continue to get better, just as it is across the rest of America's Army. I think there will always be the challenge to our soldiers and to our leaders because of the environment our Guardsmen live in, which is normally drilling two days a month and 15 days for annual training. Leaders across the board have to encourage not just the physical fitness program but a health and wellness program for all members of the Army National Guard. And we have to utilize Master Fitness Trainers to help establish programs for those soldiers. There has to be a continuing analysis done by first-line leaders to ensure that soldiers meet those physical fitness standards. So it's an excellent policy. I believe in it and I think it's the right policy because now when our soldiers are mobilized and go on the line right beside active Army units, everybody understands, everybody's met the same standards.

AUSA: How does the Guard's state mission mesh with their federal mission?

PENCE: When there's a national disaster or some other reason that the governor calls the Guard to state active duty, most of the units called are performing the same functions that they would if called up for a federal mission. Certainly if an infantry or artillery unit is called to state active duty they are not going to be performing in their primary MOS. But in most cases that I've observed over the years, even when combat arms units are called up, small unit leadership is taking place. In the Midwest floods of 1993, in Illinois we had over 7,000 Guardsmen called out for over four weeks the full length of the state of Illinois, up and down the Mississippi River. What I saw was squad leaders and team leaders doing their jobs taking care of soldiers and making sure that the missions were accomplished. And platoon sergeants doing their jobs in leadership, and in logistics to take care of soldiers. So the state mission, of course, is one of our primary missions, but it really does not

adversely impact the capabilities of any Guard units. It is one of our reasons for being.

AUSA: Is there anything you want to say on the occasion of your departure?

PENCE: Sure. The key to success has to be maintaining standards, and for noncommissioned officers to always train, lead and care for soldiers and their families. Noncommissioned officers represent the key word **PRIDE**:

- Professionalism, because NCOs are professional in all that we do;

- Readiness, because NCOs are directly responsible for the individual readiness of soldiers and influencing the collective readiness of our units;

- Integrity, because without integrity an NCO has nothing;

- Dedication, because NCOs are symbolic of the dedication to community, state and nation; and

- Enthusiasm because it is always great to be enthusiastic about being an NCO in America's Army.

(CSM **Larry D. Pence** was appointed Command Sergeant Major of the Army National Guard on Jan. 3, 1994. Prior to his retirement in December 1996, he was interviewed by the **NCO Update** editorial staff. This is the complete version of that interview. An abbreviated version appeared in the August 1996 edition of **NCO Update**.)

###