

## Congressional Quarterly

Oct. 10, 2003.

### Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum commands a changing National Guard

By Caitlin Harrington, CQ Staff

Surrounded by pictures of **National Guard** units in action - storming the beaches at Normandy and conducting air rescue missions in Iraq - Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum settles down in his Pentagon office to talk about the **Guard's** expanding role in homeland security.

Blum, a compact, 56-year-old Maryland native, is the most senior uniformed officer in the **Guard**. He's been in charge for just six months, but the changes he's putting in place are designed to change the service for ever.

"The Guard today is ground zero for homeland security," Blum said, bouncing his knee and leaning back and forth in his chair. "There's no question there's an increased emphasis in it."

Traditionally, the National Guard has focused on its warfighting mission. It comprises eight combat divisions and 15 enhanced brigades - mostly infantry and tank units - plus a variety of specialists, from tank operators to military police.

But Guardsmen also were among the first to arrive at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11, 2001, and the Guard's training and equipment will come in handy during any response to terrorist attacks and natural disasters on U.S. soil, Blum said.

And although the Sept. 11 attacks reinforced the importance of the Guard's domestic role, they also revealed the need for a sweeping reorganization to meet that mission. "We weren't organized, we weren't equipped, we weren't resourced to optimize our response for homeland security," Blum said.

"We had moved away from our Minuteman concept to be lulled into complacency," he added, referring to the irregular forces of the American Revolution who organized at a moment's notice to defend the colonies from British attack.

#### *Call to duty*

Blum was finishing out a one-year stint as chief of staff at the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) - the nation's first domestic military command, created to provide military backup to civil authorities during a terrorist attack - when President Bush nominated him to take the helm of the National Guard.

Since taking up his post as commander of the 460,000-strong Air and Army Guard last April, he has worked both to raise the profile of the Guard's homeland security role and to prepare his troops.

#### *His approach: a top-to-bottom reorganization.*

On Oct. 1, the 162 Army and Air National Guard state headquarters were cut by more than half, to 52.

And the Air and Army commands were consolidated into joint commands to mirror the organization of the Northern Command, which would coordinate with the Guard during an attack that overwhelmed civilian authorities.

"We have changed more in the last six months than we did in the previous 100 years," Blum said.

Consolidating the Army and Air National Guard will allow NORTHCOM and the Guard to communicate more easily during emergencies, explained Dan Donohue, National Guard chief of public affairs and a special assistant to Blum.

"Northern Command is a joint command, and therefore the National Guard must know how to operate inside a joint operation," he said.

But persuading each state organization to agree to a joint command has been the biggest challenge of his tenure so far, Blum said.

"You have to understand, **I don't command any of these people**, so we have to manage this process through leadership and education. Basically I've got to convince [them] - show the need to states - to make this change, to get them to willingly come along with us."

Blum also is focusing on the 32 National Guard weapons of mass destruction civil support teams scattered across the country. The teams are trained to respond to terrorist attacks involving chemical, biological or radiological agents.

Blum has put 10 regional National Guard units on notice that they may be called on to augment the weapons of mass destruction teams. They include combat-ready medical units and infantry units with search and rescue capabilities.

#### *Dual missions*

The weapons of mass destruction teams are the only Guard units specifically created for homeland security purposes, but that could change, Blum said.

"We will be looking at every opportunity in there to make sure our joint task force headquarters have the kind of units they're going to need to be optimized for homeland defense," he said.

But he stressed that the new emphasis on homeland security doesn't mean that role will eclipse the Guard's combat readiness.

**The Guard's domestic missions at home will have to be carried out "without - and this is big time; underline it," Blum said, pointing a finger for emphasis - "without walking away, or giving up, or compromising our ability to be relevant in the warfight overseas.."**

But the importance Pentagon officials - and politicians - now place on the National Guard's roles domestically and abroad has a price, said Rep. John M. McHugh, R-N.Y., chairman of the House *Armed Services Total Force Subcommittee*.

"The Congress and the administration have to do an even better job in resourcing the Guard to meet those challenges," he said. "Frankly, that's true in both their overseas deployments and their new homeland security role.

"You can't expect these troops and the commanding officers to successfully pursue those missions if they're not given the necessary material and equipment and numbers of personnel to meet those challenges," McHugh said.

But despite the inevitable strains arising from the Guard's dual mission, McHugh said Blum is doing a good job.

"I think he's done all that can reasonably be asked of him, and he's looking ahead and trying to plan and position, and that's what a good leader does,"

*The back story*

Blum was born and raised in Baltimore, Md. In 1968, at age 20, shortly after graduating from the University of Baltimore with a bachelor's degree in history, Blum joined the Guard as a part-timer.

Almost immediately, his unit was called out to help quell the riots that had erupted in major cities across the nation after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. He said he heard more shots fired in the weeks he worked downtown Baltimore's streets than during any of his other deployments - at home or abroad.

Blum was commissioned as a second lieutenant in August 1971 after graduating with honors from the Maryland Army Guard's Officers Candidate School.

He rose through the ranks to become commander of the Maryland Army Guard's 20th Special Forces division in November 1977. Since then, he has commanded Guard units at every level.

"When you think about it, it's quite a feat what he's done, to go from enlisted man to three-star general and to go the way he went. He's not a West Point graduate," said Curtis Vickery, president of the Baltimore Roundtable of American Military History and a lifelong friend of Blum's.

Blum received his master's degree in social science in 1973 from Morgan State College in Maryland.

He taught U.S. history at Pimlico Junior High School before an opportunity to join the Guard full-time opened up in 1971.

Blum has received numerous commendations, including the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit (with two bronze oak-leaf clusters) and the Army Meritorious Service Medal (also with two bronze oak-leaf clusters).

When the late historian Stephen Ambrose was writing his last book, "To America," he stopped by to visit Blum, who was then commanding a multinational division in Bosnia.

The historian had high praise for Blum.

"At 55, he has had made 1,500 air drops," Ambrose wrote in the book. "He has had open-heart surgery. He talks so well and thinks so swiftly and knows so much that he reminds me of Eisenhower in 1945, when Ike was fifty-five years old."

And a visitor can't help but notice that, with his bald head, ruddy face and light green National Guard uniform, he bears a physical resemblance to Eisenhower, as well.

*Caitlin Harrington can be reached via [charrington@cq.com](mailto:charrington@cq.com)*