

Interview with Gen. Curtis E. Lemay, USAF (Ret.), former Air Force Chief of Staff (June 1961-January 1965) by Mr Charles J. Gross in the Pentagon on September 14, 1978 concerning the early history of relationships between the Air Force and the Air National Guard. (Cleared for open publication January 3, 1995, SAF/PAS 94-1216.)

Mr Gross: [What impact did the Air Force's gaining command approach to reserve forces' management have?]

Gen LeMay: [What do you mean?]

Mr Gross: I am referring to the fact that the various major air commands such as TAC or SAC or ADC are responsible for supervising directly the training and the inspection rather than going through CONAC [i.e., the Continental Air Command] with the Air [Force] Reserve and Air National Guard units.

General LeMay: What you mean is it was a tactical unit, TAC [i.e., Tactical Air Command] would be responsible for it.

Mr. Gross: That's correct.

General LeMay: Yes, I think that was a step forward because generally speaking the trouble with the Reserve units was that they were not combat ready like the regular units were mainly because of filled in with the bureaucracy and they just never did get the push and were just behind the times not only in equipment because we have always been short of equipment and the natural trend was to pass on the older equipment to the Reserves and the National Guard before it was phased out as obsolete. It was a step forward to put them right under TAC if they were a tactical unit or under Air

Defense [Command] if they were air defense [units] or whatever they were because they had direct supervision with the unit that would be using them and consequently their training was a little better and more up-to-date.

Mr. Gross: Why did the Air Force go to this concept in 1960 after years of doing it otherwise?

General LeMay: Well, if you are going to have the Reserves and spend money on them, they should be as well-trained as possible so they could be of use when they come in. World War II, for instance, when the National Guard units came in, they were worthless. Not worthless, but they were certainly not ready to carry on any combat functions. First of all, in the National Guard, the Air Corps had not supervised the people that came into it. They were political appointees. So, they were all part of the Army then and, for instance, I only know of one National Guard division commander that ever made it as a commander. He turned out to be a good one. Only one, the rest of them no, they were political appointees, they were not soldiers--made no attempt to be soldiers [laughter]. This is true to a large extent as long as I was around.

As a matter of fact I have always been a firm believer that we need a Reserve and a good one. But, we do not need two, and the administration of the people in the Guard is entirely different than the administration of the people in the Reserve. They operate under different rules and regulations. This is not good. As a matter of fact I had a knock-down, drag-out [fight] with [Maj Gen Winston P.] "Wimpy" Wilson* during that time period at some National

* Director of the Air National Guard (ANG), 1954-1962, and Chief of the National Guard Bureau, 1963-1971.

Guard convention held here in the building [i.e., the Pentagon]. I went in and talked to the people and I gave my ideas at that particular time that we needed a strong Reserve and I did not think we needed two Reserves. Well this put me just like that with the National Guard Bureau and the National Guard political organization and all hell broke loose. I still maintain that they should still [change] it. [Telephone call]. Well, I want to point out here the political aspects of the National Guard which is right and I ran into it then. In other words "Wimpy" Wilson took a dim view of me making a statement like this.

Mr Gross: This was in 1957, I believe. There was quite a stir about it.

General LeMay: It was somewhere along there while I was [Air Force] Vice Chief [of Staff] I think. But I still believed what I said and I still believe it now as I can see no reason for the governors of the states to have an air force. But, the country does need an Air [Force] Reserve and needs a good one and they should be [combat] ready. I think we have made progress in that regard of having our Reserve units ready. As a matter of fact, at the present time, the last time I was out at Norton [AFB, California] on the situation over there, that Reserve outfit there in many ways is better than the regular outfit.

Mr Gross: In what ways, sir?

General LeMay: Well, the bulk of the pilots are airline pilots with 15,000 hours flying time or more whereas in a regular unit [there] are kids with 1,500 [hours]. And, they are set up now where they actually are flying active duty

missions. In other words, MATS [i.e., the Military Air Transport Service] is using them just like their own crews and they have also got this setup where a lot of their maintenance people and their technical people are civil service people [i.e., full time technicians] I guess but ex-Air Force and they are there and well-trained. And, they stay there so that they can have continuity. So that their maintenance and things of that sort is right up to par. I am not in a position to compare them now with the regular units but I would say they are very good and some of the [sic] Reserve units* that are in the Air Defense Command are pulling regular active duty. Not the full 100 percent like the regular units probably but still they are in much better shape than they were and in a pretty good position to start fighting. Certainly in a better position than we were ready to start fighting with the regular units when we started World War II. So there has been an improvement in that regard. My basic thoughts on the Reserve system is 'yes we need a Reserve and we need a good one and we need a bigger one than we have now. But they have got to be ready to go.' I do not think that, in many cases, the National Guard units could be ready to go.

Mr Gross: Even today?

General LeMay: Because of the different administration and different administrative methods and so forth and the people getting in. The National Guard for instance picks out their own people to send them to flying school. What criteria are they using? Is it a political appointment or do they take the

* Air National Guard fighter units, not Air Force Reserve units, began augmenting ADC's runway alert program on an experimental basis in March 1953.

best available people because it is a flying school, things of that sort?

Mr Gross: Sir, what was your assessment of the capabilities of the Air Guard when you became Vice Chief and then the Chief of Staff?

General LeMay: Well, back in that time period -- it was after the war -- and some of the people that went into the National Guard after the war had been through the war and were good people, good people. But, here again they started up the old political appointee system again and they varied. Some governors of course picked some good people and had some very good units. For instance, I went up [in 1961] and personally took a look at a couple of units in the northeast that went to England. One of the Guard units, I have forgotten which one it was, but it was the first time that they flew overseas.* And, they got over there in very good shape.

Of course they had a few troubles but our own fighters were having a few troubles on flying the Atlantic. But they did pretty well. I was very well satisfied with them. I just happen to know that the brigadier general commanding the outfit up there, a guy named Sweeney,** he was an excellent officer while he was in the military service and they did a pretty good job. But, more to your point here that I was critical of the Reserve programs and prejudiced that the Reservists could not adequately master the complex technology

* Operation Stair Step, the deployment of mobilized Air Guard fighter units to Europe during the Berlin crisis in 1961.

** Brig Gen Charles W. Sweeney, Massachusetts ANG.

and high readiness standards vital to the conduct of aerial warfare. Well, in 1957 I was still in SAC [i.e., the Strategic Air Command]. I had been working for a damn near 10 years then to build the Strategic Air Command into a combat force and we were not doing it on a 40-hour week. Everybody had been subject to 90 hours a week for nearly 10 years and I still was not completely satisfied with the command because it still had room for further improvement and that we did. But, we were pretty good.

Of course, a Reserve unit could never be in good shape like that and we were aiming then towards a nuclear war, if we had a war. Since then I have changed my mind. We have had other wars that have not been nuclear and I modified my thinking a little bit. But, then no one thought that in any sort of war but what we would use nuclear weapons if they were warranted and were the best thing to use. Now I doubt if we would use them if they were warranted or not. But, back in those days, we were thinking along those lines. A Reserve unit did not have the time and the amount of training to put into the training program the effort that was necessary to get proficient. I wanted Reserves assigned to the Strategic Air Command but not in the combat field because you could not have them long enough or there were not enough hours in the week to make them proficient. But, we are always short of people and in case of emergency they can at least come on active duty then they would get the training [when] they came out to the base and we could least use them to answer the telephones, things of that sort [in the] administrative field.

Mr Gross: Use them as individual kinds of replacements?

General LeMay: Yes!

Mr Gross: In those days, 1957-1961, the Air Guard was quite heavily involved in the air defense business. Some of their units were actually pulling 14 and later 24 hour alert duty with several aircrews per squadron augmenting the Air Defense Command in those days. Were you at all involved in taking a look at their performance once you became Vice Chief of Staff?

General LeMay: Well, on the general principle I think all of us believed that we needed a Reserve and it had to be a good Reserve, well, looking at what they were doing, they all sort of felt like they were sort of a step-children and were not really in the program and so forth which put them in a position of not trying very hard to do anything. Well, to look back at my own days when I graduated from ROTC [i.e., Reserve Officers Training Corps] and became a Reserve officer in the field artillery, I got an assignment in the Reserves to an active duty division and it just sparked me [to] no end. And, I was not in a Reserve pool with no love or ties to me or anything of that sort. I was in a division and that made me feel pretty good because I went to flying school right away so I never really got down [to] participating but I know I would have worked like hell as a part of a regular division to really become an officer in that division and be of some use. Whereas, if I had just gone into a Reserve unit of some sort that would have been a different thing entirely.

So, along these lines, you tried to get these people to feel that they belonged to a part of an organization that was going as an organization in case they were called up. I think that was a probably a big help and we gradually worked into

the program now where some of these Reserve units are in fairly good shape now. Whether you were going into combat now, I do not know. I noticed one of your questions, 'why you did not call up the National Guard outfits during the Cuban [missile] crisis?'

Mr Gross: Cuban crisis, yes sir!

General LeMay: They were not ready to fight and that operation, if there had been an operation there, called for a really precision operation and a short one. We were not going to have a long war so we felt that what we had an active duty [force that] were better trained to do the job and could do the job whereas the Reserve units could not and we just did not need them. So, we were using the best we had and we were all set to do it.

Mr Gross: Looking at that period, the previous year in the fall of 1961, I believe a number of Guardsmen and Reservists were called up in conjunction with the Berlin crisis and eventually a number of Air Guard fighter squadrons fighters flew, island-hopped across the Atlantic and were stationed in Germany and France and I believe a couple were in Spain. What was your assessment . . .

General LeMay: You mean the Berlin crisis? I do not remember that. I was commanding [the Air Force] over in Europe and I do not remember any fighter outfits coming over there.

Mr Gross: Yes, they had several hundred fighters in what they called Operation Stair Step.

General LeMay: During the Berlin crisis?

Mr Gross: In 1961.

General LeMay: Oh, in 1961.

Mr Gross: 1961 not the one in 1948. They came back the next year.

General LeMay: Oh, I remember it was in 1961 I became Chief of Staff. Well, I remember that move. We took [Air] National Guard fighters and flew them overseas. I remember going up personally and looking at the operation. And, they got over there in fairly decent shape. But, here again, they were not like a regular unit. We just had not gotten them trained to that point. And, under the system, they never would make it.

Mr Gross: What was your assessment of their capabilities? What could they have done at that time over there?

General LeMay: Well, they flew their airplanes over there and they could get some airplanes up in the air. How well they would have fought them is something else again. They were better than nothing. They were better than the unit which I took overseas during the war [i.e., World War II] which was a complete rabble. But, it was not the kind of an outfit that you should have [had] in the Reserve at that point. They were not ready.

Mr Gross: Was it a matter of training, equipment or both?

General LeMay: Well, they had equipment. It was old equipment that had gone down hill and it was awfully easy to say `well I can not get that part therefore this airplane is not combat

ready,' that sort of thing. It would fly but whether it could do its job in combat or not is something else again. If the bomb racks won't work or their guns won't shoot, why it's no good. But, in the Reserve program it flies so they fly it. Well, you fly airplanes not as a private flying club but to carry out a combat mission and, if you are not fully combat equipped and if your crews are not fully combat trained, you have not got a combat tool. That is what I am talking about and they just were not what I would call combat ready.

Mr Gross: Has the Air Force since changed their approach to training and equipping those units so more of them [are combat ready]?

General LeMay: Well, I have been retired since 1965. I do not know what the situation is now. I have not visited an [Air] National Guard outfit. But, I have been exposed a little bit and I know that we have better technicians assigned now, things of that sort. I know the Reserve units some of them are pretty darn good and I understand some of the [Air] National Guard units are flying some air defense sorties. How many, I do not know. But, I doubt if the [Air] National Guard is as good as some of the Reserve units that I have looked at. But, I have looked at the [Air Forcr] Reserve. I have not looked at the [Air] National Guard. But, there again you run into trouble. How do you pick your people? How do you promote them? Who are they? Is there some political hack or not? They always have been in the past.

Mr Gross: Did the Air Force have any influence at all through federal recognition on assignments and promotions [of Air Guard officers]?

General LeMay: They look at them, yes. But, we need a Reserve. If you look at them and suppose they are a bunch of political hacks not worth a damn, are you going to say 'no we won't federally recognize you or not?' I have my suspicions that a lot of them are passed up and they are not really very good. That is my personal opinion. I have not looked.

Mr Gross: Are you suggesting that it might not be politically expedient for the Air Force to question qualifications of those folks?

General LeMay: No, I am not suggesting that. But there are so damn many other things to do. You try to get this changed. You say 'ok, we do not need an Air National Guard, we want a Reserve.' You are going to have a hell of a political play on your hands. You have got other political fights to do to try to get your equipment, your people, and your budget through and things of that sort. Getting this change is a kind of a low priority.

Mr Gross: Was there any serious effort at all during your tenure as Vice Chief over that sort of thing?

General LeMay: No.

Mr Gross: I know there had been a big fight in 1948 and, I believe, 1949 to eliminate the dual-component reserve system. It was stymied in Congress. Did the Air Force seriously try to do it again?

General LeMay: [Inaudible] as a matter of fact as far as I know I am the only one who ever went out on a limb far enough to say 'we need one reserve instead of two.'

Mr Gross: What drove you to make that comment?

General LeMay: That was at a meeting of the National Guard officers here in the Pentagon and I just told them what I thought. We were letting our hair down. That was what the explosion was all about. And, I still feel that way. I am not criticizing the good [Air] National Guard officers or the good units that we have. The situation has proved that some of them are pretty good now I am sure. I am not criticizing that. I am criticizing the system. Christ, we have got enough air forces in this country! We have got the Air Force, we have got the Army air force, we have got a Navy air force, we have got a National Guard air force, a Coast Guard air force, and its about time we got some of it together.

Mr Gross: What lessons did you and the Air Staff learn from the Berlin mobilization [of 1961] as far as your Reserve forces? Were there any changes made? Was there any alteration in planning as a consequence of that experience?

General LeMay: Well, I am sure we learned things from it. I am sure there were changes made but that was a long time ago and I do not remember the details. I had other headaches that were more important than that at the time. I am sure we learned a lot from it when we cranked it into the program. As a matter of fact, I was pretty happy about the whole affair. It was a lot better than I expected them to do.

Mr Gross: They got a lot of praise from yourself, the President [i.e., John F. Kennedy], and the Secretary of Defense [i.e., Robert S. McNamara] during that period.

General LeMay: Well Christ, that is politics and, if anything came out of the President, we passed it to them and the services!

Mr Gross: Looking back at that period of time, to what extent did changes or the direction of the Reserve programs come from the Secretary of Defense? What interest did Mr McNamara have in Reserve programs?

General LeMay: Well, I do not think I can answer that question. I do not know. I just do not remember the details.

Mr Gross: During your period of service as Vice Chief then later as Chief of Staff, [Maj Gen] Winston P. Wilson was head of the [National] Guard Bureau. What was your assessment of his performance in his capacity as . . .

General LeMay: His performance of what?

Mr Gross: . . . of General Wilson in the Guard Bureau during your period as Vice Chief and Chief of Staff?

General LeMay: I did not have any criticism of Wilson's performance of his job. I am sure that in the technical aspects he did very well. But, he irked me a little bit when he jumped on me like a ton of bricks and threatened me with political reprisal and all that sort of stuff for just making a simple statement that I thought we needed one Reserve and that was not the National Guard, it was the Air [Force] Reserve. He spreads it throughout all the political community that I was against the National Guard, things of that sort. From that standpoint, I did not think much of his ethics or

his method of cooperation. However, from a technical standpoint, he did very well.

Mr Gross: In looking at the National Guard, one thing that is fairly unique about it is this political network of people that they have, the governors, the congressmen, whatever, throughout the states and here in Washington. To what extent does this sort of autonomous network of political support - to what extent does that inhibit their responsiveness to the operational requirements and the training requirements of the Air Force?

General LeMay: Well, that is a pretty hard question to answer because I am sure that the answer varies from state to state. But, it is a political-oriented organization starting right from the adjutant general of the state, a political appointee. These people can be good, bad, and indifferent depending on the type of man the governor appoints. I have personally known some adjutant generals of states who have been retired generals that have gone into that job as political appointees and have done very well. I have had all the confidence in the world in them. A lot of others I do not know and I can not assess properly but I know some of them have done very well as political appointees. So just from that standpoint alone that is not very good to have part of our military strength organized in that way. There is bound to be built in some headaches and problems and it does not lend itself to a sound military organization.

Mr Gross: Why did the Air Force, then the Army Air Forces in those days after World War II, accept or were they forced to accept the creation of the Air National Guard? There really was not anything like that except for aviation units.

General LeMay: We have always had an Air National Guard.

Mr Gross: We had observation units that were part of the Army National Guard divisions [and corps-level aviation before World War II.]

General LeMay: All of the National Guard units prior to the war [i.e., World War II] were observation units?

Mr Gross: Right.

General LeMay: Because each state had a division* and each division had their own observation unit attached to it. This was part of the old [sic] Army Air Forces. So every National Guard unit was an observation outfit.

Mr Gross: I have had a difficult time understanding all this. I know that there was a great deal of feeling [in the Army] against the continuation of this system during World War II and in the postwar planning and the period immediately thereafter. They were never - the [Army] Air Force - was never able to eliminate it. I just wondered why that situation existed because there had consistently been a feeling against a dual-component Reserve system.

General LeMay: Well you have to go back to the atmosphere of the times. We had the National Guard before we had anything

* There were only 18 National Guard divisions established during the period between World War I and World War II. National Guard aviation in that era consisted of 29 observation squadrons, 18 units assigned to those divisions with the rest assigned to Army corps-level aviation.

else. Going back to colonial times, you had the militia under each of the colonies and then they were states. All we had was the National Guard. Then we maintained a so-called professional Army afterwards which was a laugh after the [American] Revolution. But, the National Guard really started out with our country. And, to try to get that changed was quite a chore. So we lined up with the National Guard and we still got a National Guard. Now, I do not know if the governors need a National Guard any more or not. In this day of modern communications and so forth, if they need troops or something of that sort, I think the federal government should respond as quickly as the governor could respond. There is some question as to whether we need a ground National Guard or not but there is no question as to whether we need a Reserve or not.

I have got 15 more minutes before the National Guard guy is going to come.

Mr Gross: Oh, ok!

General LeMay: Well, anyway after the war we were so busy with other things. One thing we wanted was a separate Air Force. We were fighting that battle rather than to eliminate the National Guard as having a higher priority. Well, it was not a unanimous opinion as to whether we should eliminate the National Guard or not. I am not anti-National Guard either. As a matter of fact, I used to be in the National Guard. But to give you an example of what I am talking about, my goal was to be a distinguished graduate of ROTC [i.e., Reserve Officers Training Corps] and get commissioned in the Army and then go to flying school as a commissioned officer. Well, I was no whiz as a student but I was a distinguished graduate

from ROTC at Ohio State [University] in 1928. But, there were no vacancies with the regular Army, the Air Corps, for distinguished graduates. I still wanted to go to flying school so I applied as a flying cadet. Well 1928 is the one year after 1927 when [Charles A.] Lindbergh flew the Atlantic and there were some 3,500 eligible people on the list to go to flying school for about 350 positions that year. So looking at the list, first there was the regular Army and then the National Guard and the Reserve and then civilians. Well, I just had a Reserve commission, graduated from ROTC in the field artillery. Now we just had just officiated General Bush, the National Guard brigadier general of the field artillery of the 37th Division, the [Ohio] National Guard division, into Scabbard and Blade. So I hightailed it down to his office and said `look, I want to go to flying school and I'd like to enlist in one of your National Guard units, field artillery, to get up in second position on the list.' He recognized me and said `didn't you get a commission this year?' And, I said `yes, I just graduated from ROTC and I have a reserve commission in field artillery. That's the reason I want to enlist in your field artillery unit.' And, he said, `well, I have got a vacancy on my staff. How about that?' I said `that will be fine. Just so I keep my National Guard [status].' So I became a 2d lieutenant on his staff. He closed the roll top desk and we went across the street from his office to the state house.

Well, before I could accept the commission in the National Guard, I had to send a telegram to the Adjutant General of the Army in Washington and resign my reserve commission, which I did. Now I am commissioned a 2d lieutenant in the National Guard. Then, after that paper work, I am recommissioned as a reserve officer in the Army

again, that being customary to commission National Guard officers who came into the National Guard system into the Reserve. But, that was the kind of thing that was going on. Then, I went even further than that. Old General Bush said 'look, the attrition rate is pretty damn high here in the air force flying school. You'll probably be back in two months. There is no use of you resigning your National Guard commission when you go to the flying school. I'll put you on leave for three months which I can do and, if you are still there, well, I will renew your leave.' So I went through the flying school as a flying cadet, regular Army on leave from the National Guard. I do not know if this is actually legal or not but that is what I did.

Mr Gross: It was complicated at least.

General LeMay: And, I got renewed every three months and then, low and behold, I graduated. The list comes out for assignments for active duty with the Army, all except for sad old LeMay who is not on the list. So I get over to the orderly room and find out about that I am a National Guard officer but not going to the flying school as a National Guard officer, I am going to flying school as a flying cadet. But, being a National Guard officer, they can not put me on active duty until I resign my National Guard commission. So, I resign my National Guard commission. I am then recommissioned as a 2d lieutenant Air Corps Reserve and then assigned to active duty. Now this is part of the troubles you have with National Guard and having a Reserve. This is my personal problem.

Mr Gross: That is quite a rigmarole to go through! In looking and comparing the Air Force and the Army, the Air Force,

despite the difficulties you were talking about, seems to have done much more with its Reserve program. They seem to have achieved a higher degree of operational readiness with their units. They seem to have integrated their people, their Reservists, better with the everyday work of the Air Force. They seem to have developed a fairly harmonious kind of relationship with the Reserve and National Guard people over the years. And, contrasting that with the Army which still seems to have enormous problems as far as operational readiness, particularly of the Reserve and Guard units, what accounts for the difference in your view?

General LeMay: Well, one thing is that the mere fact that it is an Air National Guard outfit and the flying people particularly, somebody [who] wants to fly is a little more adventurous and a cut above the average political hack that wants to get a uniform or get some extra pay or something. So, I think the quality of the people are a little bit higher and that itself raises the standard a little bit above the boundaries you were talking about.

Mr Gross: Is there anything just intrinsic in the nature of the task, I mean flying as opposed to pushing a rifle around? Is it easier to organize a flying program - [to find] someplace where you can go to do this or that?

General LeMay: No! It is not easier, it is more difficult. It is more difficult but the people that want to fly are a different breed of people with different motivations with a higher degree of motivation than the doughboys. They have different aims in life and are cut above the normal individual that you would find in the ground forces.

Mr Gross: So as far as you are concerned that is the key, the kind of people [and] the motivations that they have?

General LeMay: You have to make more of an effort.

Mr Gross: During your period as Chief of Staff and during the early years of the buildup for the war in Southeast Asia, was there any significant support within the Air Staff or in your own mind for the idea of mobilizing a large portion of the Air Force's reserve [components] in conjunction with that buildup for Vietnam?

General LeMay: Well, here again, I am a little vague on that. Generally speaking we had Reserve units but I do not think anyone thought that any of them were in shape to bring them on active duty and send them out on a combat mission. By the way, if they were brought on active duty they were brought on active duty to replace a unit that we had sent out and then we would get them brought up to shape and put some different people in or release the more experienced people who could have infiltrated in and bring the unit up to combat readiness then use it if necessary. However, a large number of Reserve officers came on active duty and worked as fillers in the regular units most of which were understrength and so forth. That went on. There is no doubt that the Reserve played a big part in these trying times. But, just forget about the idea of taking a Reserve unit and sending it to combat, bang just like that. No!

Mr Gross: Was there any feeling that maybe they should be brought up and trained for maybe a half a year or a year or so and then sent wherever the Air Force needed them as you were building up the active force?

General LeMay: Well, certainly that was the only thought, that they had to be trained up. But, you can take a Reserve officer for instance and put him in a regular unit and they go into combat and he is a big help to them. Maybe he can not jump into the cockpit and go off on a combat mission, bang, just like that! But, there are a lot of other things he can do until you get him trained up to do that. So, they were a big help in that regard. The units that came on active duty, you would fill them up and change a few key people around and put them in other units and so forth and get them trained up and that would be a short period of time.

Mr Gross: In looking back on your services as Vice Chief and then later Chief of Staff, what do you consider were the most significant developments in the Air Force Reserve programs during that period of time from 1957 through 1965?

General LeMay: Well, the biggest thing that was done lately was to tie the Reserves in with some of the regular missions like this thing down in MATS now. I wonder if this was done while I was there or later on, I have forgotten. But that has been a very significant contribution to the program.

Mr Gross: In what mission areas do you feel that Reserve units are best suited to help the Air Force?

General LeMay: As units, I think they are best suited in things like MATS and other support missions that do not require the fine edge that being combat ready does and does not require a max of technical knowledge where you have to have special training handling atomic weapons and things of that sort.

Mr Gross: There is one question that has kind of intrigued me since I have been doing my research on the Air National Guard. I have never been able to pin it down with the documents but sometimes it appears that the kind of force structure that they had particularly for the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve as well for their flying units, it seemed that at times it grew more out of the availability of surplus or obsolescent aircraft than it did out of well-thought-out military requirements. I just wondered what your response to that comment would be? You know, you had a bunch of fighter planes, well ok, we will go with that [to the Air Guard and Air Force Reserve].

General LeMay: It could well be. I do not know of any specific incidents but no use saying 'well, we need another B-52 squadron. So let's form a B-52 Reserve unit' when there is no equipment for them and no sign that we are ever going to have any equipment. But, you do have some excess F-4s for instance. Let's equip them F-4s. At least we will have a squadron. They will fly something. I am sure there were occasions when that occurred. I can not recall any specific occasion but there was no doubt that you have to use the tools that you have. There is a hell of a lot of difference between having a military requirement and getting it fulfilled through budgets in Congress and so forth if you actually get the people and resources to do it.

Mr Gross: Would you contrast the Air Force Reserve program that you had during your tenure in the Pentagon with the Air National Guard. What relative shapes were they in? What kind of program was it compared to the Air Guard in those days?

General LeMay: Well, I would say that our Reserve program was in better shape than the Air Guard. Neither one of them were anywhere close to what we had in the regular establishment. But, I would say that the Reserves were probably in better shape. That is my personal opinion.

Mr Gross: Can you cite any specific reasons that led you to that assessment?

General LeMay: Well, we have talked about the general shortcomings of the two systems. The Air National Guard operates under an entirely different system with not much control by the Air Force. They sometimes have better equipment than the Reserves.

Mr Gross: Yes! I have noted that.

General LeMay: But, that does not make them a better outfit.

Mr Gross: I think those were the basic kinds of questions that I had. Well, one more though. It seems that in our discussion here that one central difficulty that you have hinted at, not only hinted at but been very explicit about, is that basically you do not seem to believe that Air Force commanders have adequate control over what the Air National Guard does or who mans it to give them the kind of Reserve force that they need. Would that be a fair assessment?

General LeMay: Yes! Here again I am not criticizing the performance of the [Air] National Guard in a blanket criticism. I am not doing that at all because there have been cases where they have done very well. But, you have got 50 states and you have got 50 air forces that are under the

governors and they are supposedly using the same system, but they are not. Each individual governor does the job a little bit different. They have got different ideas of how it should be used or not be used. And, some of them just want that airplane to fly around the state in and take their people to different places and so forth. So, it just is not the control by a central authority that I think is necessary to get the uniform continuity of training and you [have] just got a conglomeration of state [air forces].

Mr Gross: How common was this kind of assessment that you have about the central problem, how common was this among the top uniformed leadership in the Air Force? Did a lot of people think that way or you just really can not comment about that?

General LeMay: Well, I have not made a poll to find out. But I think that probably most people thought about as I did because they had run up against some of the administrative problems of dealing with the National Guard and so forth. But, there again back then we were so short of people and trying to get people to enlist and come into the military establishment that a body was a body and we tried to get our hands on anyone that was even halfway qualified that we could train them up to snuff.

Mr Gross: Well, those are about [all] the questions that I have unless there are any comments or issues that you would like to raise at this point.

General LeMay: The only comment that I have that is in this day of reduced budgets and things of that sort that well, in any day - we are not a military country and I do not think

that I ever want to see that happen. We are talking about having a professional army and so forth which is fine. But, it is never enough. When the day comes where the good citizen thinks he can hire somebody to do his fighting for him, we are down the drain. So I firmly believe that in a democracy that every citizen must be concerned with the defense of his country and should be participating. Therefore, from that standpoint, we need a Reserve and a good one. And that has nothing to do with the military forces you need to augment your regular force. That is just for the good of your country. I firmly believe we need a strong Reserve, a real good one. And, it should be well trained. But, I still believe that we should only have one Reserve. I think the [Air Force] Reserve is the one we need because I just can not see that the governor needs an air force in this modern day and age. Even if you can make a case for the ground forces to handle riots and so forth, I think the ideal solution would be to abolish the whole business and have one Reserve. But, there again, you run into states' rights and a lot of people will firmly believe that the federal government was getting too big. And, I am one of those who believe it is getting too big. But, I think 1 military establishment for the country is all that is necessary, not 51.

Mr Gross: Just on a slightly different topic taking off on something you said a moment ago about citizens' responsibility for being concerned about the defense of the country and not paying somebody else to do it, are you critical of the all-volunteer force concept and the elimination of conscription?

General LeMay: Yes, to some extent. I think we should have a conscription law on the books. [interruption] Whether you

have to use them or not is something else again. I think you ought to have a pay system and a recognition system so that you have [not] given up voluntary enlistments to keep your regular force going. I feel you should have a draft to back it up in case you need it. So, within the context of what they are calling a voluntary force now that we will never need a draft system, no you can not have that. You can not hire enough people especially when the lead starts flying around. You are not going to get them.

Mr. Gross: Well thank you very much. I will just turn this thing off then. [end of interview]