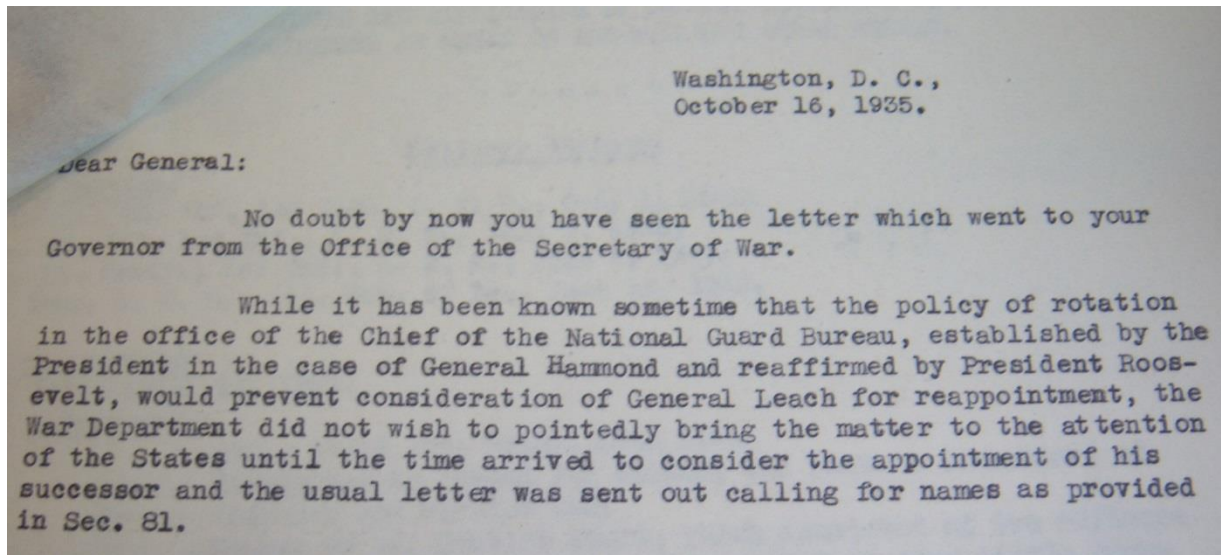


## From the VANG Files: TAG Waller and FDR – Selecting the new Chief of the NGB

The VANG is very lucky that a number of years ago someone had the foresight to pack away and save all of the paper State Headquarters documents from the 1920s to the early 1960s.

For this update, we learn about the 1936 selection of the new Chief of the National Guard Bureau and the 1939 football games to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VMI.

First up: FDR's policy was to change the Chief NGB every four years with no repeats. As a sign of Waller's political clout, he was contacted by the proponents for COL McNeese (Louisiana NG) including COL McNeese himself:




McNeese (a former TAG of Louisiana) asked Waller to support his effort at become the new Chief, NGB. McNeese was a strong proponent of the National Guard and was a very popular choice to be the next Chief of the National Guard Bureau

This letter was followed by a telegram from the current Louisiana TAG also supporting McNeese for the job:

WASHINGTON ADVISE WAR DEPARTMENT LETTER SENT GOVERNORS ADVISING  
POLICY AGAINST REAPPOINTMENT CHIEF NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU AND  
ASKING RECOMMENDATION IF NOT MADE AND IF MADE FOR PRESENT  
INCUMBENT OF NEXT CHOICE STOP RECOMMEND COLONEL OSWALD MCNEESE  
LOUISIANA YOUR CONSIDERATION STOP IF YOU HAVE NO APPLICANT W  
GREATLY APPRECIATE YOUR ASSISTANCE THIS MATTER STOP MCNEESE  
ADDITIONAL MEMBER OF THE GENERAL STAFF IS EMINENTLY QUALIFIED  
FOR POSITION STOP WILL APPRECIATE ADVICE YOUR ACTION=  
RAYMOND H FLEMING THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.

Other TAGs including Texas also contacted Waller to support McNeese. With all of this in mind, Waller decided to support McNeese and even had the Governor of Virginia (Gov Peery) send a letter of support to the Secretary of War.

  
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE  
RICHMOND

PETER SAUNDERS  
SECRETARY TO GOVERNOR  
EMMA HINMAN  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

*Raymond H. Fleming*

Jan. 6, 1936

Hon. S. Gardner Waller,  
Adjutant General,  
Richmond, Va.

Dear General Waller:

I am in receipt of your letter of the 2nd suggesting that I recommend Colonel Oswald W. McNeese for appointment as Chief of the National Guard Bureau.

I enclose you copy of the recommendation I am forwarding to the Secretary of War.

With the compliments of the season, I am

Cordially yours,

*Raymond H. Fleming*

And then it was time to wait for FDR's decision—it took so long that there were even two interim officers sitting in the Chief's chair waiting on FDR's choice—when the decision was made, it was a surprise: MG Albert H. Blanding from Florida.



MG Albert H. Blanding

Not one to miss a chance Waller immediately wrote Blanding a congratulatory letter and quickly received this response:



THIRTY-FIRST DIVISION

Bartow, Florida  
January 29, 1936

Brigadier General S. Gardner Waller,  
The Adjutant General,  
Richmond, Virginia

My dear General Waller:

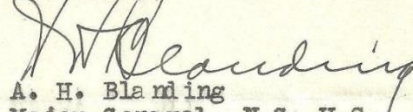
I want to assure you that I greatly appreciate the message of congratulations and support which you sent me from yourself and the Officers and Men of the Virginia National Guard.

I fully realize that it only with the support of all concerned in the welfare of the Guard that it will be possible for me to make my administration a success.

I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you personally in the not far distant future.

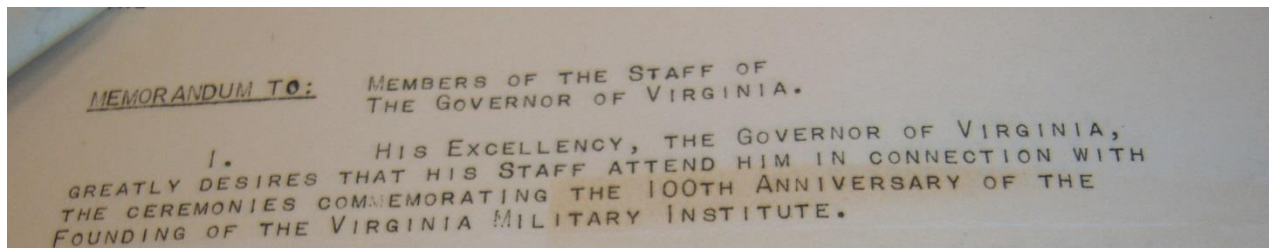
With kindest regards, I am

Sincerely,

  
A. H. Blanning  
Major General, N.G. U.S.

The second item of interest is about the ceremonial events for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VMI.

To honor the occasion, the following order was published in the VANG:



And to add to the excitement it was announced that there would be a football game on Friday 10 November between Washington & Lee and the University of Virginia and the next day VMI would play Duke—ratcheting up the stress and fun-level, it was also announced that the



President of the United States would arrive at 1030 Saturday for the festivities.

2. THE WASHINGTON AND LEE-UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA FOOTBALL GAME WILL BE PLAYED ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10TH, AT 2:30 P.M. THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IS EXPECTED TO ARRIVE AT 10:30 A.M. ON NOVEMBER 11TH. THE FOOTBALL GAME BETWEEN THE VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE AND DUKE WILL BE PLAYED AT 2:30 P.M. THAT AFTERNOON.

All of this set off a firestorm of taskings for hotels, restaurants, seatings, transportation etc. it reached the point that the Commandant of VMI was overwhelmed finding lodging and accommodations for the hundreds of VIPs as well as the thousands of other guests and townfolks. He wrote to Waller in distress:

Will you please look over the staff and let me know of any number not a state official, or a member of the assembly, or a school or college president, you think the Governor would be likely to bring with him or who should be provided with a reserved seat.

This occasion is getting to be something of a nightmare. We should have the stadium and accommodations of a great city and unlimited funds to handle it right.

Sincerely,  
*C. E. Kilbourne*  
C. E. Kilbourne  
Superintendent

CEK/dh

Unfortunately we haven't found a copy of Waller's response. Chances are it was along the lines of "I hear you but not much I can do to help." We also have not found out if FDR actually attended the game.

Till next time when we will walk again through the history of the Virginia National Guard; one event or one document at a time.

Alexander F. Barnes  
CW4 (ret), VaARNG  
VANG Command Historian