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# Regimental Chief Warrant Officer

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## *Chief Warrant Officer Five David Albaugh*

### Military Police Weapons Posture

**A**s our Regiment works hard to place more emphasis on the *P* in *MP*, I ask you to review the security posture and weapons training of military police Soldiers performing law and order operations. This is a controversial topic, and I would like to share my personal and professional view—a view that is shared by some and opposed by others. This is simply a call to consider, discuss, and assess the proper balance across the Regiment. I think there is no better time to broach this subject than now—during the year of the Army Profession of Arms Campaign.

Media coverage of ever-increasing mass shootings in America has created a cultural belief that frustrated people may gain some level of attention, sympathy, or relief by carrying out similar attacks. Violence has spread within our society in recent decades. In 2000 alone, there were 28,663 firearms-related deaths in the United States; of those, 39 percent were reported as homicides and 58 percent as suicides.<sup>1</sup>

Firearms-related homicides are no longer limited to the stereotypical urban muggings or inner city, drive-by shootings. The new millennium has turned places such as schools, malls, business offices, and military installations into live-fire ranges. Some “nontraditional” mass shootings that have taken place throughout the years include<sup>2</sup>—

- 16 people killed and 31 injured by a gunman at the University of Texas in 1966.
- 11 people killed and 11 wounded in two separate mass shootings in the 1970s.
- 36 people killed in two separate mass shootings in the 1980s.
- 75 people killed and 80 wounded in seven separate shootings in the 1990s.
- 112 people killed and 47 injured in 11 separate incidents from January 2000 to April 2009.
- A 20-year-old Alabama man claimed that the video game *Grand Theft Auto* caused him to kill three small-town police officers in 2005.<sup>3</sup>
- 13 people killed and 32 wounded at Fort Hood, Texas, in November 2009.
- 30 people killed in four separate mass shootings from 2010 to 2011.<sup>4</sup>
- Seven fatal shooting incidents on military installations in 2010.
- Four active-shooter incidents on military installations in recent months. (An additional untold number of threats or planned attacks did not reach fruition.)

Although the cause of the increase in mass shooting incidents can be debated, the increase itself cannot be ignored. Consequently, it is essential to reevaluate the security posture, policies, and procedures of the Military Police Corps Regiment at all levels. The decisions that we make directly affect our ability to provide appropriate, adequate, and immediate protection of U.S. forces personnel, including military police Soldiers, and facilities at home and abroad.

I recently conducted a random survey of 21 U.S. Army installations where military police Soldiers perform law and order operations. At 10 of those installations, military police Soldiers carry their duty weapons in *red* status—with a round in the chamber—while 11 installations require them to carry their duty weapons in *amber* status—with no round chambered. On 5 November 2009, Major Nidal Malik Hasan killed 13 people and wounded 32 others at Fort Hood. The after action review and subsequent Department of Defense (DOD) inquiry of the incident identified the red carry status and earlier active-shooter response training as strengths that contributed to the swift neutralization of the threat and prevented additional casualties.



In 2006, the Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted a five-part study entitled “Violent Encounters: A Study of Felonious Assaults on Our Nation’s Law Enforcement Officers.” According to the study, law enforcement officers are at a distinct disadvantage in shooting incidents for several reasons. First, in the vast majority of shootings, the offender fired the first shots without hesitation while law enforcement officers hesitated—verifying their target, ensuring that bystanders were not in harm’s way, and checking for other friendly forces. The second critical finding was that offenders hit their targets far more frequently than did their law enforcement adversaries. In addition, violent offenders carried their weapons more often, practiced more frequently, and were much better than the officers at determining if someone nearby was carrying a concealed firearm. In situations where these disadvantages are compounded by carrying a firearm in amber status, there is a good chance that the officer will not survive the encounter. The most significant training deficiency in the Regiment is a lack of shooting sustainment training.

Military police Soldiers around the world are required to perform duties that include responding to active-shooter situations, domestic assaults, and other dangerous or violent crimes. Although these young military police warriors are first responders, some of them arrive at potentially lethal scenes unprepared, with no round chambered in their weapons. There is likely no law enforcement agency in the Nation—including our sister Services—that requires law enforcement officers to perform their duties without a loaded firearm. However, many military police Soldiers are doing just that, due to local policies and misinformed leadership. If Soldiers were to carry loaded weapons, there would be a risk of an accidental or negligent discharge; but that would be more a failure of leaders to adequately train their Soldiers than a reflection of the Soldiers’ aptitude or maturity level. Instead of properly training military police Soldiers to safely carry a loaded weapon, some leaders choose to put their Soldiers and the general public in harm’s way by removing one risk, only to create another (greater) risk. If the prevailing sentiment is that military police Soldiers lack the maturity necessary to perform their duties as professional law enforcement officers, then perhaps we should reevaluate our recruiting practices.

An aggressive field training officer certification process is needed to supplement the existing annual police law enforcement training and certification program outlined in All Army Activities (ALARACT) Message 025/2010 *HQDA EXORD 089-10 150 Annual Military Police Law Enforcement*.<sup>5</sup> The field training officer certification process should consist of a comprehensive and meaningful training program that teaches military police Soldiers to safely carry a loaded firearm and ensures that they are certified to do so. Leaders from the highest levels should underwrite honest mistakes and use them as training opportunities. Soldiers who cause an accidental discharge should be suspended from duty and receive additional training and certification. Once they are retrained and recertified, they should resume policing duties. If a Soldier accidentally discharges a firearm in a clearing barrel, leaders and students should understand that this is why the barrels exist and why we are so well disciplined in using them. There is a justified concern about accidental discharges as our Soldiers become properly armed, but the number of incidents will drop once the process becomes conditioned. According to a U.S. Army Military District of Washington law enforcement spokesman, since the district implemented a policy of carrying weapons in red status in October 2010, there have been no accidental discharges. Officials found that most military police Soldiers returning from overseas assignments were accustomed to loading and unloading their weapons and actually felt more comfortable and confident in their law and order mission when they had a round chambered in their weapons.

Throughout the past several years, there has been an increase in violent and deadly acts committed by members of the military. According to the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), this violence can be attributed primarily to PTSD caused by exposure to violence in combat operations. Rates of domestic violence tend to be greatest among young adults; and because the average age of Service members is lower than that of the civilian population, those rates are generally higher within the DOD. However, the rates are three times higher among Service members suffering from PTSD than among other Service members. Dr. Casey Taft conducted a DOD PTSD study and reported that “people who are exposed to trauma—and, in particular, those who develop PTSD—are at very high risk for aggressive behavior.”<sup>6</sup> These facts alone should warrant a substantial modification in the security posture on all installations at all times.

There is no way to predict when Soldiers suffering from PTSD might “snap” and act out violently, nor is there any way to anticipate how severe their actions might be. Another reason this should deeply concern Army leaders is that, unlike civilians with PTSD, Soldiers are trained to kill, are familiar and comfortable with firearms, and generally have ready access to them.

The recent increase in military suicides may also be viewed as a testament to the despondency felt by many Service members who suffer from depression or PTSD. It has long been established that suicidal individuals are also potentially

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homicidal. Suicidal people feel that they have nothing to lose and are likely to act violently toward those they hold responsible for their unhappiness or who attempt to foil their suicidal plans. According to Dr. Natalie Staats Reiss and Dr. Mark Dombeck, homicidal feelings may intermingle with suicidal feelings if there is a sense that someone has deliberately caused harm.<sup>7</sup>

This article is not meant to address the psychological state of depressed persons; rather, it is designed to help us recognize current threats and to outline areas where our security posture and crisis response protocols should be reevaluated. With the level and severity of PTSD among Soldiers, the nationwide increase in mass shootings, and the targeting of law enforcement personnel by criminals, we have an obligation to protect our communities and the military police Soldiers charged with keeping them safe.

It would be grossly irresponsible for us to wait until more lives are lost when the potential for catastrophe is so readily apparent. As leaders, we must assume risks; however, they should always be the right risks, taken for the right reason. Risking the lives of Soldiers due to a failure to properly train them or to provide them with the tools they need to be safe is clearly the wrong risk, taken for the wrong reason. Most military police Soldiers have experienced numerous deployments where they were entrusted to carry a loaded weapon. We can capitalize on their experience, on active-shooter or active-threat training scenarios, and on law enforcement certification processes.

I understand that the current policy leaves the decision of amber versus red firearm carrying status in the hands of installation commanders based on the current threat. I argue that the threat is very real and is always lurking. We owe it to our first responders to allow them to protect themselves against deadly behavior without having to take the extra time to chamber a round. How long would it take an officer to engage the threat of a traffic stop ambush with an unloaded weapon? Too long, when the first few seconds in such a situation are critical. When that time must be used to load a weapon instead of firing, the law enforcement officer loses the valuable time needed to survive. Mr. John V. Lease, chief of the Law Enforcement Plans and Exercise Division and manager of the Special Reaction Team Program at Headquarters, Department of the Army, stated, "Not chambering reduces your first-line responders to sacrificial trip wire. Allowing them to chamber is matching modern-day threats to modern-day tactics."

As true police professionals, we need to treat our Soldiers as police professionals. As the Army draws down, we need to refocus our attention on our core competencies of law and order, corrections, and high-end investigative efforts. All Soldiers can soldier. Only military police professionals can conduct our core competency mission skill sets with success. It is up to us to ensure that our Soldiers are trained, disciplined, confident, and professional.

Regardless of your stance, please contact me at <[david.albaugh@us.army.mil](mailto:david.albaugh@us.army.mil)> with your comments or respond to this article with a Letter to the Editor to be considered for publication in a future issue of *Military Police*. Thanks for what you do every day and for your service to our great Nation, the U.S. Army, and the Military Police Corps Regiment. Never forget that our Soldiers are our greatest asset.

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### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Nicole Jackman, "The Brains of Violent Males: The Homicidal and Suicidal Brain," paper for Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, <<http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/bb/neuro/neuro03/web2/njackman.html>>, accessed on 9 January 2012.

<sup>2</sup>"Raw Data: Past Deadly U.S. Mass Shootings," Associated Press, 3 April 2009, <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,512480,00.html>>, accessed on 9 January 2012.

<sup>3</sup>"Blaming Video Game Fails for Murder Defense," Associated Press, 9 August 2005, <[http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8889445/ns/us\\_news-crime\\_and\\_courts/t/blaming-video-game-fails-murder-defense/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8889445/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/blaming-video-game-fails-murder-defense/)>, accessed on 9 January 2012.

<sup>4</sup>"Mass Shootings in the United States: U.S. Gun Deaths Since the Columbine Killings," Associated Press, 2011, <<http://www.krqe.com/generic/news/LIN-Timeline-US-Mass-Shootings>>, accessed on 9 January 2012.

<sup>5</sup>ALARACT 025/2010, *HQDA EXORD 087-10 ISO Annual Military Police Law Enforcement*, 8 February 2010.

<sup>6</sup>"BU Prof to Study Partner Abuse by Vets," *BU Today*, 22 January 2009, <<http://www.bu.edu.bostonia/web/abuse/>>, accessed on 9 January 2012.

<sup>7</sup>"Suicide," Juneau Alliance for Mental Health, Inc., 2011, <[http://jamhi.org/poc/view\\_doc.php?type=doc&id=13735&cn=9](http://jamhi.org/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=13735&cn=9)>, accessed on 9 January 2012.

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