



NORTH DAKOTA MILITARY POLICE COMPANY SUPPORTS FLOOD OPERATIONS

By Captain Kristopher P. Elijah

During the spring and summer of 2011, vast flooding took place across a large portion of North Dakota. The flooding of four major river systems—comprised of the Red, Sheyenne, Missouri, and Souris Rivers—affected numerous towns and cities, including Bismarck, Fargo, and Minot. The situation required a robust National Guard response. As a result, the 191st Military Police Company, Fargo, North Dakota, conducted several operations in domestic support of civil authorities across the state of North Dakota. This article details the missions conducted and lessons learned during these operations.

Under the standing operating procedure for North Dakota National Guard domestic operations, the state is divided into regional response platforms. A battalion or higher headquarters is responsible for each regional response platform area of operations during an initial response in support of the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services. Once the capabilities of the regional response platform surpass headquarters capabilities, a task force or joint task force is activated and placed in command. The size and scope of the task force depend on the operational mission requirements.

In April 2011, two platoons from the 191st Military Police Company were activated for flood operations. One of the platoons was under the operational control of Joint Task Force—East, and the other was under the operational control of Joint Task Force—West. The company was spread over three counties and four towns. The platoons conducted traffic control point (TCP), quick-reaction force, and levee patrol missions.

In most cases, communities required a detailed description of military police missions and an explanation of the capabilities and limitations of the military police. However, unit liaison

communications with local community members and law enforcement personnel in Lisbon were made quicker and easier since the Ransom County sheriff is a Soldier with the 191st. The fight against the early spring flood in the eastern area of North Dakota was expected, conducted as planned, and concluded in the early part of May 2011.

The 191st Military Police Company was activated for a second time in late May 2011. The spring snow melt in neighboring Montana filled the Missouri River and threatened the cities and counties along its banks, including the metropolitan areas of Bismarck (the state capital, with a population of more than 100,000) and Mandan. The primary company mission was to conduct TCP operations.

Following an incident on the first night of flood operations in Bismarck, the 191st established major safety upgrades—including extra light sets, improved hand wands, and a new style of road guard vests (adopted from the North Dakota Department of Transportation)—at each TCP. The color of the new road guard vest was neon green, which greatly improved visibility for daytime and nighttime operations. However,

reflective neon gloves were not available for operations in Bismarck. In addition, the company supply and maintenance sergeants purchased detachable light bars and designed mounting brackets for the vehicles at each TCP. The light bars were mounted onto several company Humvees®, resulting in their visibility for several miles. No major accidents occurred after the TCP upgrades were implemented.

The 191st was designated as “Team Safety” and was responsible for all TCPs in Bismarck and portions of the surrounding Burleigh County. At the peak of operations, this consisted of 28 TCPs. At least two personnel and a Humvee were assigned to each TCP. More Soldiers were added at particularly dangerous or busy intersections.

The most vital TCPs were the ones located on the Bismarck Expressway, which is a four-lane highway that divides the city of Bismarck in half. Thirteen TCPs were established along the route to ensure that trucks hauling clay for the construction of emergency levees throughout the city were allowed to freely flow east and west without stopping. Traffic was allowed to pass north and south once a military police Soldier had determined that it was safe for the vehicles to move. Thousands of vehicles passed by the military police, and TCP duty was considered hazardous. However, TCPs were essential for moving thousands of tons of clay so that emergency levees could be built before most of the cities were flooded.

In the early stages of flood operations, senior leaders of the 191st established an effective working relationship with the Bismarck Police Department; this relationship proved vital, as tensions among the civilian population were high at times.

Most citizens in the affected areas treated the Soldiers with high regard, offering them bottles of water, food items, and their heartfelt thanks; however, there were occasional problems. For example, one individual who was driving through a TCP nearly hit a military police Soldier who was attempting to stop the vehicle. The incident was quickly reported to law enforcement officials, who promptly responded and arrested the individual for disorderly conduct.

North Dakota National Guard response during this time frame ensured that most of Bismarck and Mandan were saved from the flooding Missouri River. In early June, the 191st was deactivated and the National Guard Soldiers returned to their civilian employment for about 10 days before receiving their third activation notice in less than 3 months. In the middle of June, the Souris River threatened the city of Minot for the second time in 2011. This time, the flows from snow melt in Canada were too great to control and the city of Minot and the surrounding communities had to be evacuated.

The 191st Military Police Company advance party arrived in Minot and established relief-in-place operations for five other units. The mission sets included TCPs, quick-reaction forces, levee patrols, presence patrols, and evacuation assistance for four local communities.

A number of National Guard units activated for the Minot flood were unable to bring their senior leaders or operations sections. Because the standard military police company operations section is very robust, the 191st was designated as “Team County” and four other companies were placed under their operational control. Team County was responsible for opera-



A military police Soldier directs traffic at a TCP.



Modified mounting bracket and detachable light bar on a Humvee

tions in the towns of Burlington, Minot, and Sawyer (in Ward County) and Velva (in McHenry County).

More than 12,000 Ward County residents were evacuated. Military police worked with the Ward County Sheriff's Department not only to ensure that the evacuations took place as rapidly as possible, but also to ensure the protection of evacuated residences.

Some military police Soldiers were from the local area, so they were designated as sergeant-of-the-guard drivers. These drivers were familiar with the quickest route to the scene and could be on site and responding within minutes. In one instance, the sergeant of the guard was able to rapidly respond to a car accident that occurred near one of the county TCPs.

Due to personal hardships, the 191st was never at full strength during flood operations; Soldiers from other companies were assigned to backfill the gaps. Working within that constraint, one trained military police officer was paired with the newly assigned Soldiers.

As the water receded, the difficult transition from response to recovery began. Homeowners wanted to return to their homes to assess the damage; however, they were not allowed to enter flooded areas until those areas had been cleared by several agencies. The homeowners' frustration resulted in heated exchanges at TCPs that had been established to keep people out of the area for safety reasons. Cool heads and professionalism were needed to keep the peace until the areas were cleared. The 191st spent more than 2 weeks in Minot before being deactivated, ending flood operations for 2011.

The major lessons learned by the 191st Military Police Company during the 2011 flood operations are as follows:

- Be prepared to be called early and often for support of domestic operations.
- Establish early coordination with local law enforcement agencies. (This pays dividends later.)
- Use city or county tourist maps. (They work well and are frequently available at local gas stations.)
- Use government cell phones for communication.
- Use neon green road guard vests. (They are more visible than orange vests.)
- Use reflective gloves so that drivers can see hand signals clearly.
- Ensure adequate lighting for nighttime operations. (Personnel can never be too visible.)
- Use local Soldiers as drivers whenever possible.
- Cross-train company Soldiers of other military occupational specialties. (They may be needed at a TCP.)
- Place seasoned military police Soldiers at points where upset citizens are most likely to be encountered.



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