



# EARTHQUAKE '94: Operations Other Than War

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At 0431 on 17 January 1994, the greater Los Angeles area experienced an earthquake that registered 6.8 on the Richter scale. In a few hours, the 3d Battalion, 160th Infantry (Mechanized), California Army National Guard, was mobilized to help civilian law enforcement agencies protect citizens and property during the rescue and recovery period, and in an area that spanned 350 square miles.

Mobilization for emergencies was nothing new for the 3d Battalion. This was the fourth time in less than two years that it had been mobilized to deal with state emergencies:

In April 1992, when the most costly and deadly civil disturbance in U.S. history broke out in Los Angeles, it was the first tactical battalion called to duty, the first to deploy to the

streets, and the last to demobilize almost a month later. (See Colonel Wenger's article, "The Los Angeles Riots: A Battalion Commander's Perspective," in *INFANTRY*, January-February 1994, pages 13-16.)

After intensive training following these operations, the battalion was mobilized in February 1993 as the task force headquarters to test the revitalized concepts and procedures that had been incorporated into new contingency operation plans. This highly publicized mobilization demonstrated to the citizens of Los Angeles and of California as a whole that the National Guard had successfully addressed the procedural problems noted during the riots and was now well prepared to execute any future civil disturbance contingency mission.

In April 1993 the governor again mobilized the battalion as the Guard task force headquarters in anticipation of a disturbance resulting from a highly publicized civil rights trial. As always, the battalion's 12 companies spread over the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, and the soldiers consistently performed above standard.

Now, in a shaken, blacked-out, and frightened Los Angeles, the call went out once again, and by 0830, I was ordered to mobilize the battalion. By that time, some of the junior leaders were already involved in offering assistance to the public. About 0600 a platoon leader had notified me that 100 to 200 people displaced from their homes by the earthquake were seeking sanctuary in the armory in Glendale. At about the same time, a staff sergeant of the communications platoon had begun organizing the homeless, who are sheltered each winter in the battalion's armories, as they are in other Guard facilities. Other soldiers, anticipating the mobilization, had begun arriving on their own initiative between 0700 and 0800.

Contacting the battalion's soldiers, who live in a 250-mile radius from headquarters, was difficult because of damaged communications. The telephone systems in the Los Angeles basin were only marginally operational. (The 911 system was

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completely out.) Cellular units and paging systems were working but were jammed with calls. As a result, more than 30 percent of the soldiers in each company simply could not be reached by telephone. Others were delayed in getting to their armories, some of them for as much as a week, because of damaged road networks (14 major roads and freeways were closed).

Despite these difficulties, the battalion mobilized more than 250 soldiers within six hours and more than 400 within 12 hours. The success of the battalion in mobilizing so rapidly was directly attributable to the emphasis that had been placed on accurate, workable telephone trees, and monthly practice alerts, along with the initiative and dedication of the individual soldiers.

#### **Preparations to Deploy**

Within the first 30 minutes of mobilization at the Inglewood armory, the battalion tactical operations center (TOC) had set up maps and communications and was gathering intelligence on earthquake damaged areas.

At first the only information came from news reports or word of mouth. Our priority intelligence requirements were to determine the most seriously affected areas, the nature and

extent of the damage, and which routes were open. For operational planning we had to find out where and in what strength our soldiers would be needed, the missions we were most likely to receive from law enforcement, and the routes we would be able to use to get to our mission sites.

The battalion's intensive and detailed training during the previous 18 months certainly helped it respond to this mission. The armory security procedures—the logging in of personnel and the preparation of vehicles and equipment, including platoon and company deployment equipment packages as well as contingency armory security and communication plans—were immediately implemented in accordance with tactical standing operating procedures (SOPs).

At approximately 1100, we received a warning order from 1st Brigade to be prepared to deploy on order with full field gear, weapons, 40 rounds of 5.56mm per M16, 14 rounds of ammunition per .45 caliber pistol, and riot control equipment (gas masks, batons, flack vests, and face shields). This equipment—dubbed “L.A. Gear” by the soldiers—was to be issued to them only upon receipt of the order to execute.

Within the available time, the unit's noncommissioned officers conducted refresher training on the use of deadly force. The soldiers received briefings and handouts on arming order levels, rules of engagement, and news media relations. They also received precommitment legal briefs for their mission. (*INFANTRY will send the contents of these handouts to anyone who requests them. The address is P.O. Box 52005, Fort Benning, GA 31995-2005.*)

At this point, no one outside the highest levels of command, either military or law enforcement, had been informed of possible missions. By mid-morning, however, it was obvious that most of the hardest hit areas were in the San Fernando Valley. To narrow the focus of our planning to the areas most likely to require assistance, I dispatched an unorthodox but appropriate reconnaissance and liaison team of two senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) to make contact with police divisions and stations in the badly damaged West Valley areas. Both of these NCOs had worked extensively with law enforcement personnel in preparing for civil disturbances.

At approximately 1900, an order was issued. The 3d Battalion, 160th Infantry, would go to task force status with company-sized attachments of forces from one other infantry battalion, two artillery battalions, and one forward support battalion, for a total force of 800. These forces would be the on-the-street contingent of the 1,500 soldiers required for the division's overall operation. This order permitted the task force to issue riot control equipment, weapons, and ammunition, as of 1840. At 2124 I received orders to execute the plan, along with a specific deployment area and a Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) point of contact.

At 2145 I led the first units to deploy to Laurel Plaza shopping center in North Hollywood. (The San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys—usually a blanket of city lights—were now almost entirely blacked out.) After a convoy of a little over 20 miles, we arrived in our area of operations and coordinated

with the West Hollywood Division of the LAPD. Within an hour, a company (plus) of soldiers was deployed over an area of 15 square miles to guard shattered malls, stores, and shopping structures. That night, the task force established its unit maintenance collection point (UMCP) and tactical command post (TAC) at the shopping center.

### Missions

Under the direction of the LAPD, the missions of the task force included guarding apartment complexes; preventing looting in residences, shopping centers, and commercial buildings; and preventing residents from entering until authorities could inspect the damage and, in some cases, permit them limited, escorted entry to recover vital personal possessions.

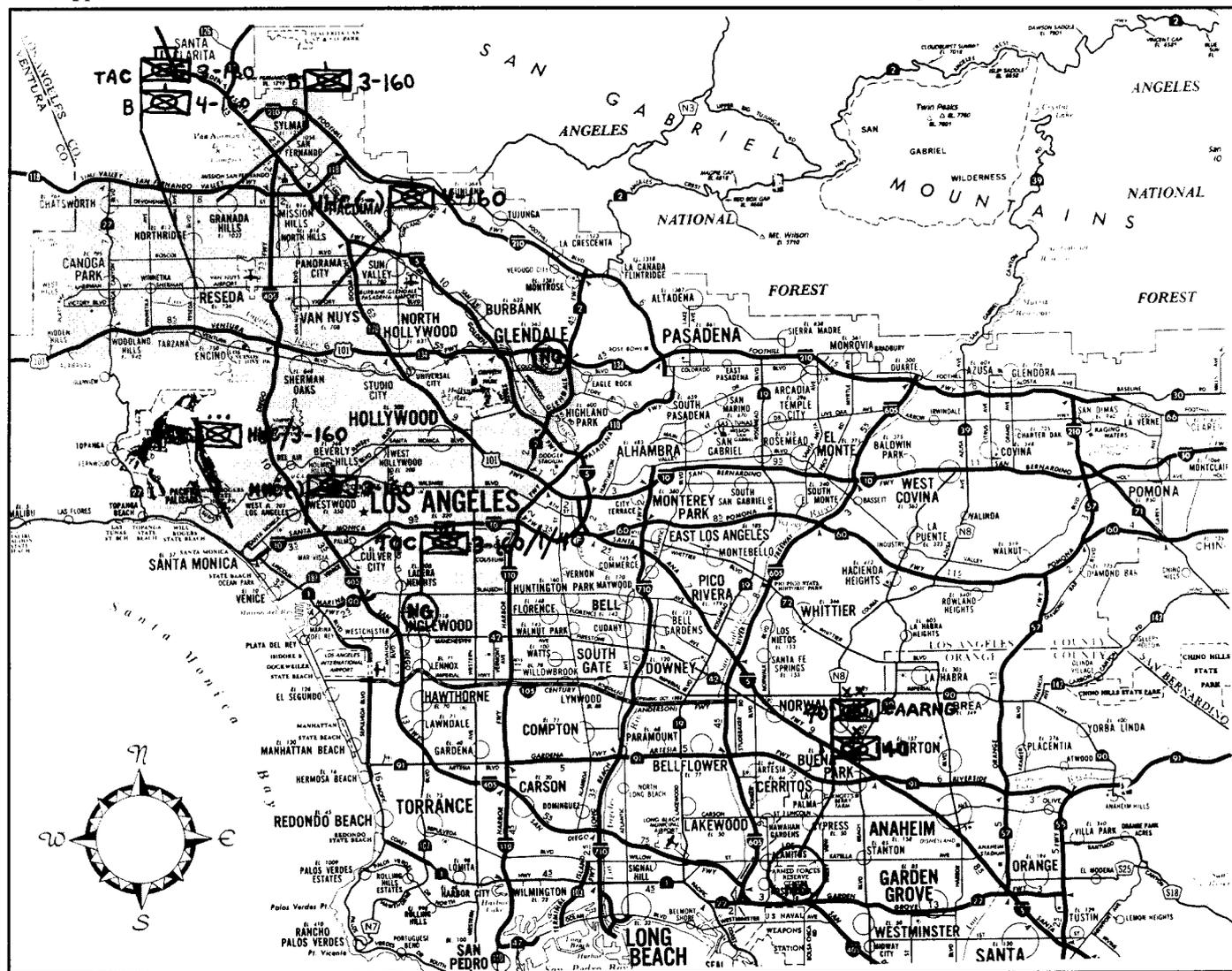
Other missions included directing traffic, controlling crowds at distribution points, patrolling many city parks (where 30,000 people had camped), guarding the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster MASH (mobile army surgical hospital) site, and patrolling various relief application centers and distribution sites. Later, the task

force helped the division support command and the Air Force National Guardsmen erect and protect tent cities that would ultimately shelter more than 6,000 people.

### Areas of Operations

The task force's various areas of operations were separated by distances of 40 to 60 miles. Units were spread over a radius of more than 25 miles from the TAC and 45 miles from the TOC. During the first days, when communications were limited, this dispersion caused considerable difficulty in command and control. The map shows a typical mission deployment and the scope of the area of operations.

Our operations began to take on a pattern that became better organized and more coherent over the next few days. For the first week, missions that originated as requests from the police divisions (in the form of 20-man military unit, or platoon, packages) were sent to the regional state office of emergency services, where they were prioritized and sent to the county emergency operations center. There, the county sheriff, with the aid of military liaison personnel, prioritized the missions, which were then passed to the division headquarter



Basic map used by permission of the Automobile Club of Southern California

or three hours of sleep. The rotation therefore became more like standard guard post operations. In this manner, the mortar section, for example, was able to man a series of posts in West Los Angeles for more than 72 hours.

After the first week, it was unclear whether this mobilization would end in a few days or continue for more than 90 days, as in the call-up for Hurricane Andrew relief. A decision was therefore made to leave the task force headquarters in place and call in 525 volunteers from six battalions, primarily from outside the earthquake-affected areas.

A relief-in-place was planned and executed on the night of 24 January, under considerable political and media scrutiny. The relief went so smoothly that many law enforcement officers were unaware that new troops had replaced their severely fatigued comrades, a superb operational and logistical achievement.

Three days later, with equal precision, the task force coiled itself up at the West Valley Division station, accounted for its personnel and equipment, checked and dispatched, and headed for their home armories spread over half the state.

### **Arming Orders**

The arming orders used during this deployment were more realistic than those used during the 1992 riots, and they allowed the local commander more discretion.

During the riots, Arming Order 1 had required soldiers to patrol many dangerous areas with the ammunition consolidated under the control of the NCOs in charge, often hundreds of meters away from them. This level could be escalated only with approval from commanders at division level or higher. The revised arming orders required each soldier with an M16 or M203 to deploy with 40 rounds in two magazines and each soldier carrying a .45 pistol to have 14 rounds in two magazines. This ammunition was to be carried in their respective ammunition pouches. Local commanders could increase these levels under certain pre-designated conditions and with the knowledge of the chain of command.

As it turned out, however, there was generally little requirement for our soldiers to use immediate deadly force. The original response of the police and the Guardsmen, combined with the mayor's immediate imposition of a dusk-to-dawn curfew for the first three days, significantly reduced the potential for civil disturbance. After a risk assessment, and with the concurrence of the brigade commander, I therefore reduced the arming order level to the old AO-1, with the NCOIC keeping the consolidated ammunition.

Later, however, at the parks and tent cities where 30,000 displaced persons sought refuge, crowds with known gang members became rowdy and tense over areas of park "turf." Twice, the company commanders responsible for keeping order in the parks requested and received permission to return to the new AO-1 levels for specific periods. During Phase II of the operation, 1st Brigade ordered that all soldiers in the task force deploy at the new AO-1 level, in possession of their own ammunition.

The deployment of armed soldiers on the streets of our cities requires thorough training on arming orders, rules of engagement, and fire discipline. It also demands frequent risk assessment and adjustment by the local commander as circumstances change. Our troops again proved that well-trained, disciplined soldiers are perfectly capable of accepting these responsibilities.

### **Communications**

As during the riots, communication was initially weak in this operation. Cellular phones and pagers were the primary means for the first three days of this mobilization. Tactical FM radios are useful in widely dispersed urban operations only with well-employed retransmission support. In the built-

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up urban mission areas, the limited number of AN/PRC 77s in a mechanized battalion are only marginally useful in the local two-mile to four-mile radius.

As soon as it was determined that the probable area of most serious damage and likely deployment was the area around Northridge, Reseda, and Woodland Hills, I directed that a retransmission team be dispatched to find a position in the Santa Monica Mountains. After considerable effort and testing of five or six widely separated locations, the team set up at the Stephen Wise Temple. For the next week, this team maintained an FM link between the battalion TOC in Inglewood and the TAC in the Valley, as well as our armory in Glendale, over distances of 25 to 50 miles.

Cellular phones were made available from higher headquarters faster than they had been in the riots but still not in sufficient numbers. After the first 72 hours, county FM radios (Ericsson G.E., FM M-PA16, 25-frequency, FCC ID No. AXA TR-188-A2) were provided to all levels of command down to and including deployed platoons. These excellent hand-held radios permitted the battalion's soldiers to talk on a dedicated battalion frequency to anyone in the greater Los Angeles basin. They also had an emergency 911 frequency that linked all law enforcement and fire agencies. When necessary, a radio could be tuned to a frequency designated for other deployed units. Local law enforcement also issued a few LAPD "Rover" FM radios (Motorola MX350, eight-frequency, plus "officer down" button). These were naturally in short supply but were given to soldiers in platoons and squads as a link to local police and stations as circumstances permitted.



This cartoon by Dick Wallmeyer appeared in the January 19, 1994 issue of the Long Beach Independent Press Telegram (used by permission).

Although communications were definitely better during this deployment, there is still room for improvement. While the Ericsson radios were great when they worked, the ones issued to the National Guardsmen had a major drawback. The powerpack, a cumbersome clamshell arrangement requiring 12 AA batteries that is supposed to last two days, often lasted as little as 15 minutes, depending on the frequency and duration of use. A nickel-cadmium rechargeable battery, or single disposable batteries, would be a distinct improvement.

Pre-positioned push packages of cellular phones, Ericsson radios, and Rover radios should be purchased in sufficient quantities to provide adequate communications for a 1,500-man force. These packages should include at least a seven-day supply of batteries in company-sized (100-man) units. These could be sent to the using units immediately upon mobilization. Adequate maintenance support for these communication devices should be provided by the signal battalion and pre-arranged civilian contractors under the direction of signal battalion soldiers attached to the deployed units. The mobilization of at least a portion of the division signal battalion for retransmission and support to the tasked units would help solve these communications problems. An airborne retransmission station of the Air National Guard would also be a feasible augmentation. As of the summer of 1994, the 40th Infantry Division (Mechanized) was equipped with Mobile Subscriber Equipment (MSE). This system is useful, but only if signal battalion reserves are mobilized to support it; the system will take some time to set up.

Future military disaster relief operations must include designated National Guard cellular phones for emergency use only. The cellular phone companies are planning a system

that parallels conventional phone service in which all but selected pre-arranged phone numbers will be blocked in emergencies. If we plan ahead, this will greatly facilitate emergency communications, including the military.

An evolving avenue on the information super highway may also facilitate military aid to civil authorities in emergencies. The California State Office of Emergency Services has established a network called the Emergency Digital Information Service (EDIS), also known in Los Angeles as the Emergency News Network. This is a radio and modem-linked system that communicates a wide variety of emergency data. Current users of this network include news agencies, FEMA, the State Office of Emergency Services, the U.S. Health Department, and the California Institute of Technology Seismological Center. FEMA is interested in expanding this network nationally, perhaps with satellite linkage.

The National Guard, with a modest investment in planning and adaptation of existing systems, could monitor the network for critical data as it became available during emergencies. Also with proper access coordination, the Guard could enter data in the system by modem to coordinate with the news media for assistance in mobilizing units when other communications systems are inadequate, and for coordinating with other disaster relief agencies. This and other emerging technological aids, such as emergency TV cable data links, should be examined and included in military planning wherever appropriate.

### Logistics

One frustrating situation for all levels of the task force was the catered Class I arrangement. Our caterer, who had

worked closely with the battalion during the mobilization in April 1993, provided great food and worked long hours. During the first week, however, when the missions were received so late, getting food to the widely dispersed soldiers was very complex, and it was often delayed. This problem, especially during the first four days, was made worse by inadequate communications.

The problem was soon solved, however, by feeding between 0400 and 0600 and again between 1800 and 2000, so all soldiers could either eat before the deployment or upon returning to the staging area. This rescheduling was improved by our decision to co-locate the TAC and the bivouac area for the entire task force at West Valley Park, beside the West Valley Division of LAPD where most of the battalion was deployed on 17 January. Before this time, we were unsure of the threat level on the streets and were operating out of secured armories as we had during the riots.

Until the last days of the mobilization, our medics did not have enough medical supplies (Class VIII) to cope with the heavy demands of the displaced persons. About 23 January, medical resupply became available through both military and FEMA support channels.

Class III resupply—POL (petroleum, oils, and lubricants)—was no problem. Adequate stocks of DF2 at the undamaged state maintenance facilities, combined with government credit cards for purchasing POL and relatively safe conditions for its transit (compared to conditions during the riots), allowed efficient and timely resupply. A more severe natural disaster, or one involving civil disturbance (such as loss of electrical pumping power) would significantly alter this picture. Proper logistical support, of course, is a critical component of thoughtful and thorough contingency planning.

### Maps

As during the riots, a hodge-podge of maps was used. The lack of standardized maps of uniform scale and detail throughout the mobilized forces was a problem. One of our best maps for planning for the entire affected areas was a series of maps that had been stored at our headquarters since the 1965 Watts riots.

Later in the operation, we relied on a combination of maps that the Southern California Automobile Club generously supplied in abundance, and the reporting district maps of the LAPD and Fire Department. These are standard letter size (8.5x11), large-scale, easy-to-use maps with numerically designated small reporting areas. Such maps are common in most metropolitan areas.

### Training

The training focus for the Army's reserve components is currently squad and platoon proficiency. But I have had the unusual experience of deploying and maneuvering an entire armed battalion task force across greater Los Angeles twice in less than two years, and the improved command and control and logistics proficiency that resulted will be included in

### *"One Riot, One Hummer"*

*The story is told of one day in Dallas, Texas, during the last century, when a prize fight had been scheduled to take place, an event that was illegal at the time. The town was strongly divided on whether or not the fight would take place, and the governor was asked to send in Texas Rangers to forestall possible violence.*

*On the day of the event, the mayor went down to the train station to greet the expected Rangers and was surprised when a sole Ranger, the legendary Captain W.J. (Bill) McDonald, stepped off the train. Asked where the other Rangers were, McDonald is said to have replied, "Hell, you've only got one prize fight, haven't you?" Since then, a motto of the Texas Rangers has been "One riot, one Ranger!"*

*A similar episode took place on 21 January 1994, when the 3d Battalion, 160th Infantry NCO on duty at the Central Valley Emergency Response Center of the LAPD was called upon to dispatch soldiers to a food stamp distribution center. Distraught citizens at the site were becoming unruly, and the local government officials had requested National Guard protection.*

*Since all of the available Guardsmen in the area were committed on other missions, the NCO on duty decided to go himself, with the concurrence of the division police watch commander. Leaving the police emergency command post in his assigned HMMWV, the duty NCO drove to the food stamp distribution center, where a large crowd had gathered and was getting restless. He parked across the street from the center, dismounted, and walked over to meet with the local officials responsible for the center's operation. As soon as the crowd saw the military vehicle and the NCO, their tension and hostility visibly diminished, and a sense of calm and order was soon restored. Local officials were amazed at the effect that his arrival had on what could have become a dangerous situation.*

*The unofficial motto of the 1st Brigade is now becoming "One riot, one Hummer!"*

my annual Training Management Assessment. I strongly advise that units that have been deployed on such operations be evaluated on the skills they have developed, based on their respective METLs (mission essential task lists). Active Army training brigades should also be activated to observe and evaluate the mobilized units.

As a result of the mobilization, with input from the company commanders, I was able to rate my METL (mission essential task list) and battle tasks (as stated in the battalion's training plan for Training Year 1994) as "T" for trained in virtually all staff, combat support, and command and control functions.

## Public Relations

Law enforcement agencies credited the Guard's rapid deployment with the 90 percent reduction in average daily arrests during the first five days following the earthquake. The community at large said the rapid deployment of the National Guard had a remarkable calming effect.

Citizens were often distraught, angry, and frustrated at being denied opportunities to recover personal possessions from their shattered homes and businesses. A severely damaged six-story office building that threatened to collapse into a major thoroughfare housed the offices of physicians, psychologists, and other professionals who were desperate to retrieve valuable records. And many homeowners had to be barred repeatedly from entering their homes to retrieve items valuable to them. Public relations, tact, and the firm-but-fair application of authority were important parts of this mission.

## Future Operations

There is no doubt that the National Guard will again be mobilized to help civilian authorities deal with natural disasters somewhere in the country. If we are to provide effective forces for these missions, our planning and training must be improved and the necessary resources must be allocated.

A critical lesson the soldiers of our battalion had learned during the riots was strongly reinforced during the mobilization for the earthquake: Deviations from Army standards and trained military procedures—no matter how creative or well

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intentioned—are recipes for decreased effectiveness and even mission failure. We must stick to the basics of our Army SOPs, no matter how unorthodox the circumstances, while remaining flexible within this customary and uniformly understood framework.

The ideal plan for urban emergency assistance to civilian authorities by the National Guard is a flexible contingency plan that designates a task force of about 1,500 soldiers under a single commander. This task force should include about 1,000 soldiers for actual deployment on the streets with the rest being a proper mix of command, control, communications, intelligence, and support. Enough combat service support elements must be allocated to permit sustained operations. Communications support must include maintenance and retransmission capabilities. Medical support must include one or more doctors of medicine and physicians' assistants, along with enough ambulances and Class VIII supplies for at least seven days of operation.

With the availability of significant quantities of materiel resulting from the drawdown, officials should consider using pre-positioned, variously configured, pre-palletized push

packages of equipment and supplies. These packages could be planned at state, Army area, or national level. They could be mixed and matched according to the type, complexity, and projected duration of the contingency mission.

Maps used for emergency responses should be standardized, updated, and stocked in quantities for all relief agencies, including military. In the case of cities, I recommend the adoption of the police reporting district maps, which are available in Los Angeles in both small hand-held size and larger consolidated wall maps of LAPD division areas.

Training should be geared to the dedication of a properly configured task force or battalion to a specific police jurisdiction, or series of interlocking jurisdictions, to forge habitual training and operational understanding. During the riots we were often required to work with overlapping city and county jurisdictions within the same military area of operations. Military areas of operation should mirror police jurisdictions.

Properly configured, these Guard units would be assigned to a specific area on alert status for disaster relief and civil disturbance operations. This duty could then be rotated once or twice a year. A unit that is assigned a civilian support role should dedicate a larger portion of its training time and resources to that effort, while a unit not assigned to such a role could emphasize the more conventional warfighting skills.

The National Guard can expect to be called upon to provide assistance to civil authorities more frequently in the future. This trend is certainly prevalent in California, where 47 percent of the responses to national emergencies occurred from 1987 to 1992. Comprehensive and detailed planning on a state and national contingency basis, down to and including company and platoon levels, must be improved.

A sobering consideration for future planning is the fact that this earthquake, which occurred at 0431 on a holiday, still caused vast destruction, many injuries and deaths, communication problems, traffic jams, and major complications in emergency response. If it had occurred instead at 1631 on a workday, all of these problems would have been greatly magnified.

It is critically important that the lessons learned from the recent experiences in Los Angeles—as well as those learned in other areas after hurricanes Iniki and Andrew and the floods in the Midwest and the South—be evaluated and distilled into coherent, workable plans to respond to our inevitable future emergencies.

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