

# FIRES, FLOODS, RIOTS AND PLAGUES OF FROGS:

## *A Commander's Lessons Learned from Civilian Support Operations*

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While the war on terror rages, active component, Reserve and National Guard forces have found that the public is more than ever expecting them to be ready not only to battle enemies abroad but to also respond to disasters at home. From the Los Angeles riots of 15 years ago to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the San Diego wildfires in 2007, these missions are a reality — and with polls showing that the citizens hold the military as the most respected public institution in American life, our citizens' expectations are only going to increase.

For that reason, all commanders — whether Guard, Reserve or active — must understand just how defense support to

civilian authority (DSCA) missions are different from traditional combat operations — and, equally important, how they are the same. These lessons, learned over multiple operations, can help you, as a commander, meet some of the most common DSCA challenges.

### Planning Considerations

The common denominator of DSCA missions is that there is no common denominator. DSCA missions can be anything. Some are predictable — hurricanes, tornados, floods and wildfires are generally seasonal. Some might provide notice, like a potential civil

disturbance related to the verdict in the latest “trial of the century.” Others are completely unpredictable — an earthquake, a major terrorist attack like 9/11, or even a chemical, biological or nuclear attack. A few National Guard units are tasked with specific DSCA missions, but typically units will be called up out of the blue for short notice missions.

*Soldiers with the California Army National Guard and a San Diego County sheriff's deputy monitor wildfires near Valley Center, California, October 26.*

Staff Sergeant Jim Greenhill





Specialist Michael Amicy

*A California Army National Guard Soldier provides security at Qualcomm Stadium in San Diego October 26. The stadium was used as a shelter for those who had to evacuate due to the wildfires.*

Therefore, unlike in most combat operations, you will have very little planning guidance.

This means that your planning must focus on a few key tasks that are common to any DSCA mission. For example, during its monthly drill just 48 hours before being called up for the San Diego wildfires on October 22, 2007, the 1st Squadron, 18th Cavalry (Reconnaissance, Surveillance and Target Acquisition [RSTA]), including attached rear elements of the deployed 1st Battalion, 160th Infantry, held a long-scheduled DSCA tactical exercise without troops (TEWT). The 1-18 CAV had been previously assigned as the California Army National Guard's Ready Reaction Force (RRF) for Southern California, a mission we had to prepare for in addition to all our other combat training and administrative tasks.

This time constraint on our ability to prepare for DSCA operations, as well as the variable nature of the threat — in the last two decades, California's Guard has mobilized to fight fires and floods, react to earthquakes and to quell riots — made general command guidance with decentralized execution central to our DSCA planning. As the commander, my intent was to give company-level commanders a framework to execute their mission under any scenario, from a permissive environment with largely clear freeways and operating utilities (including cell phones) to a "Wrath of God" event where roads were impassible and communication with higher headquarters was impossible.

Accordingly, our TEWT focused on three key tasks that could be executed by the subordinate cavalry troops and infantry companies without intensive squadron oversight:

- First, mobilize the squadron's companies, which are located from the Los Angeles area south to San Diego in 11 different armories;

- Second, prepare for and execute a movement to the affected area; and

- Third, conduct security operations in conjunction with civilian authorities upon arrival at the affected area.

Thanks to the TEWT, when the wildfire mobilization order came the following Monday, a civilian workday for most of the 1-18th CAV's Guardsmen, subordinate leaders understood the basics of mobilizing their units. The 1-18 CAV was even able to have a unit moving to San Diego in just three hours and 51 minutes from H Hour (1300 hours), when I received notification by my brigade commander via my personal cell phone to mobilize the squadron. The RRF standard is that movement commences at H + 12 hours.

### **Mobilization Issues**

The mobilization step is critical and requires constant attention from the entire chain of command to perform well. Mobilizing is difficult for the citizen-Soldiers of the National Guard and Reserve because their Soldiers are at work, on vacation, or simply out of the house. Active component commanders must also ensure that they can recall their people on short notice. Commanders must update their recall rosters every month, with reserve component leaders doing so at every drill as part their unit tactical standard operating procedures (TSOP).

While getting physical addresses and e-mail addresses is useful, emergency contact is usually going to be by phone. Most Soldiers have personal cell phones, but young Soldiers tend to change cell numbers frequently. A commander is only going to have a reasonably reliable recall roster if he or she constantly updates it. Besides telephonic recall tests — which units should run at least quarterly — another solid way for reserve leaders to validate unit recall rosters is to require that first-line leaders make *direct* contact with each of their subordinates during the week prior to drill. Leaving a voicemail does not meet the intent — they need to talk. This SOP also gives junior leaders a chance to make sure their Soldiers are prepared to train and have all the information they need before they show up at drill.

Of course, Soldiers will tend to lean forward — in the hours before the wildfire mobilization, the 1-18 CAV was bombarded with calls from Soldiers wanting to know if the squadron was being called up. But simply watching the news is not enough. Every Soldier should have a ready bag for emergencies containing basic necessities, such as uniforms, undergarments, boots, socks and toiletries, sufficient for a week and ready to go on short notice. Make sure your packing list, which should be part of your TSOP, includes extra Velcro nametapes and insignia as well as a soft cap. Most junior reserve component Soldiers keep their battle gear secured at their armories, but some senior leaders take theirs home. They need to keep that gear packed and ready. Some who commute always keep a ready bag in their cars' trunks with at least a uniform and some basic gear so they are ready if an event happens nearby.

**Personnel Accountability Considerations**

When a mobilization begins, immediately start a duty log and establish a command and control (C2) cell at the unit’s headquarters with access to phones and computers. It is a good idea to have a television set turned to a news station as well to get the big picture. The C2 cell needs to begin gathering vehicle, weapon, ammunition and perhaps even chemical-biological-radiological (CBR) equipment status. Track significant events and post them on butcher paper.

Most importantly, this C2 cell will serve to track the unit’s strength as it mobilizes and to pass critical information until senior leaders arrive. It is best to develop a report SOP with higher headquarters beforehand, but regardless, your higher headquarters will probably want to know the following:

- Number of personnel assigned,
- Number of personnel present - *i.e.*, “boots on the ground,”
- Number of personnel contacted and inbound,
- Number of personnel *not* contacted, and
- Number of personnel expected to mobilize.

The number of personnel expected to mobilize is tricky — you will have to count how many personnel are at military schools, serving full time on other missions, or simply out of town. Reserve component units must also exclude those who have not yet completed basic training and therefore will not be mobilized. Keep one other fact in mind — in a big enough disaster, some of your own Soldiers will be personally affected and unable to deploy immediately.

**Time Frames For Mobilization**

Mobilizing takes time. For active units and for geographically tight-knit Guard and Reserve units, it may go very quickly because most everyone lives relatively close by. But in an urban environment, the story is very different — it took the author nearly two hours to cross the Los Angeles basin during daytime traffic to reach his armory when mobilized for the wildfires. For a surprise reserve component mobilization in an urban area



Staff Sergeant Jim Greenhill

*A Soldier with the California Army National Guard patrols a neighborhood where buildings and vehicles were destroyed in wildfires in Valley Center, California, October 25.*

on a weekday, expect a bell curve of arrivals: By H+3, you will likely see about 25 percent of expected personnel arrive. From H+3 to H+6, you will rise to about 75 percent of the expected personnel on the ground. The remaining 25 percent will trickle in over the next few hours. Some will even arrive the next day — several 1-18 CAV troopers cut out-of-state trips short and flew back to Southern California to rejoin their units.

**Preparing for Deployment**

If your unit is not on a secure military post, like most reserve component armories, consider what type of security you will need. It may be simple access control, or it may be something more. For example, during the Los Angeles riots, the 3rd Battalion, 160th Infantry headquarters was located within sight of looting and fires, and armed Soldiers patrolled the perimeter.

Once they are mobilized, unit leaders need to begin intensive mission analysis and planning while Soldiers should be focused on the same tasks they would prior to a combat mission — inspections of vehicles, load out, and drawing personal gear and equipment. Your TSOP should contain vehicle load plans. At a minimum, all vehicles should have at least three days’ supply of meals ready-to-eat (MREs) on board as well as either several cases of bottled water or water cans. The implied task here is to make

sure these are stockpiled at your unit *before* the emergency.

As before any operation, first-line leaders need to inspect and identify shortfalls in their Soldiers’ personal equipment — remember, the Soldiers likely grabbed their gear quickly before coming in. Cold weather and sleeping gear are critical — just because it is a DSCA mission does not mean that Soldiers will not be working and sleeping exposed to the elements (The author slept outside 10 out of 14 days during the San Diego wildfires). Check canteens and Camelbacks for water. Ensure Soldiers are issued anything they are missing, and make sure that everything going out of the supply room is properly signed for by the Soldier receiving it. Emergencies end, and property will have to be accounted for.

**Weapon, Ammunition, and Use of Force Issues**

Issue weapons and ammunition as needed. You will be told what weapons are authorized — usually it will be the M16/M4 and M9 families of weapons. National Guard regulations require “locking plates,” which physically prevent M16/M4s from being set to “burst” or “auto” on each weapon deployed for DSCA. Active component forces may find themselves with the same requirement — fortunately, this is an operator-level process requiring only a screwdriver and about five minutes of

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time. Finally, because troops are carrying both weapons and ammunition, you must institute proper weapon clearing procedures. This is basic sergeants' business — they know what is required from their combat tours, so empower them to enforce the standard.

Keep in mind that you might not have ammunition stored on site. You may need to go get it, so identify your ammo handlers and the ammo vehicle in advance. Also, make sure your subordinates understand that ammunition will be collected and accounted for *to the bullet* after the operation ends. Make sure they understand to keep the dunnage for turn-in as well. Finally, conduct a shakedown for privately owned weapons and commercial ammunition. For example, while California's civilian law (like that of other states) allows an activated Soldier to carry a weapon to the armory, you cannot have your Soldiers bringing their own weapons or rounds on their missions.

Before deploying, it is absolutely vital that *all* Soldiers review the applicable rules of the use of force (RUF) for the mission. The RUF must be in writing and given to each Soldier. The 1-18 CAV SOP is that every Soldier carries a written copy in the left breast pocket. This is critical — a majority of Soldiers today have operated in combat zones and the rules of engagement (ROE) in battle are often *very* different from DSCA RUF. There are enormous legal ramifications of the use of force and of detention in DSCA scenarios. Make sure your Soldiers know what is expected of them and what their boundaries are — and if you, as the commander, are at all unclear, your duty is to seek clarification *before* you deploy your Soldiers. Naturally, the best way to avoid confusion is to obtain the RUF long before an emergency and train on it.

As a commander, you may have some discretion as to the “arming order.” The arming order describes whether the weapon is carried unloaded, loaded, or locked and loaded. In security operations, a loaded weapon is preferable. Experience has shown that an M16/M4 with a magazine in the well is quite intimidating, and therefore, most problems are solved before they arise. When things calm down, unloaded weapons are best; when things really calm down, collect and secure weapons and ammunition unless they are specifically required for a particular mission. Understand that much of DSCA is designed to calm the populace. Heavily armed Soldiers can give the citizenry confidence during an emergency, but after the emergency ends, heavily armed Soldiers send the wrong message. Our primary mission in DSCA is to allow the civilian authorities to reassert control — for that reason, we need to be prepared to step back when we are able to do so.

This also applies to battle gear. Our training SOP has us in our body armor and helmets most of the time, but in the wildfires operation this gave way to load-bearing gear and soft caps with weapons. Again, decentralized leadership is important. There is a time for going in heavy — in the 1992 Los Angeles riots, gang members referred to our heavily armed, flak vest-wearing infantrymen as “Ninja Turtles” but largely behaved in our presence. But in San Diego, civilian law enforcement asked us not to wear the body armor, and our own assessment of the threat supported that request. The best person to determine the uniform is the leader on the ground. Decentralize those decisions to the extent you can.

## **Movement and Maps**

Movement to the affected area is always a challenge. In a permissive environment, use the freeways. If possible, check with the Highway Patrol or State Police to see what roads are closed. Usually, you would expect to use military maps with grid locations. However, you will probably not have military maps of the area. While the Global Positioning System (GPS) will give you grid coordinates, civilian maps are better. During the wildfire mobilization, some troopers brought and used their civilian GPS navigation devices to find their way around San Diego County.

A great option is for American Automobile Association (AAA) members to simply go to a local AAA center and request maps. AAA will give you as many as you want, and the maps are excellent. Also, Google Earth and other mapping and imagery assets on the Internet (assuming it is functioning) can be extremely helpful. Naturally, use your TSOP to prepare for and conduct the movement — give briefings and conduct rehearsals as with any combat zone movement.

## **Communications**

Communications is one area where military procedures are simply unsatisfactory. In most environments, you should simply forgo military radios for long distance communications. They are good for short distance coordination, but cell phones are so superior that attempting to use military radios to control operations over a large area is a waste. Many tactical radios simply will not work in an urban environment even with a signal unit in support. Civilian radios, particularly law enforcement radios systems using permanent repeater stations are extremely useful, but there will probably not be enough of these radios to go around. But usually just about everyone will have a cell phone, even if it is privately owned.

Using cell phones is not doctrine, and they cost money. You may experience considerable pressure to try and make tactical radios the key communications method. However, there simply is no comparison in terms of efficiency, range, quality, and speed. The wildfire mission was conducted almost entirely by cell phones, with the only problems being most of them were privately-owned until the National Guard issued several hundred a few days into the operation.

Cell phones do have vulnerabilities. The system can become overtaxed by users or even physically destroyed in a major catastrophe. Cell phones are also not secure. Still, bring your radios, but plan on using cell phones if possible. Of course, remember to bring both car and plug-in power rechargers.

## **Vehicle Support**

Repair, maintenance, and refueling operations should be by doctrine with a few twists. Mobilizations tend to start out being mostly “tooth” — you may find it takes some time for someone to remember that the teeth need their tail and mobilize support elements as well. Push contact teams to the subordinate units early and try to set up maintenance operations in a favorable location close to major roads. Ideally, you can locate in a Guard or Reserve maintenance center and use those facilities. Civilian agency facilities may also offer you space — you might find

yourself fixing HMMWVs next to sheriff's mechanics fixing squad cars. Even civilian companies might offer you the use of their facilities — just make sure you do not end up obligating the government to pay for their services.

Fuel is a key issue. Start by always having your vehicles topped off before they go into your motor pool. If you have a fueler, make sure it is kept full — and make sure you have certified fuel handlers. Bring your environmental equipment as well — emergencies end and you do not want to have to answer for an unattended spill. Fuel is also available from civilian sources if you have fuel credit cards. Be sure to call the finance people to ensure they remove any routine spending ceiling on your cards while operations are underway. Civilian agencies may also let you take fuel from their motor pools. Of course, in a serious emergency, or one when the power is out, expect not to be able to pump fuel from underground tanks.

**Command and Control**

Command and control in a DSCA operation is always a challenge. Remember, your higher headquarters is mobilizing just like you are and they are experiencing the same challenges you are facing, so expect some element of chaos and a certain lack of clear guidance. The best solution is, of course, preparation. At a minimum, the entire chain of command should be using compatible TSOPs, and TEWTs are a proven method of validating DSCA procedures. Establish the proper battle rhythm before H hour and stick to it.

At the company level, focus on mobilizing, moving and preparing for operations. At the battalion level, focus on preparing a very general DSCA operations order (OPORD) and then using fragmentary orders (FRAGOs) to provide details and specific guidance. During the wildfires, the 1-18 CAV used a basic DSCA OPOrd and then used FRAGOs throughout. Most of them were vocal and were captured in the duty log at the main command post (CP).

The command post structure should generally be by doctrine as modified by the situation. During the wildfire mission, 1-18 CAV was assigned an area of responsibility (AOR) in northeastern San Diego County and operated a field trains command post (FTCP) collocated with the joint task force headquarters at the 40th Infantry Brigade Combat Team's (IBCT) home armory in central San Diego. This allowed for our FTCP to also act as a liaison to our higher headquarters.

Our main CP was collocated with our combat trains command post (CTCP) 35 miles north in Escondido at B Troop's home armory, which was central to the squadron's forces for most of the operation. The tactical CP (TAC), consisting of the commander, the command sergeant major and representatives of the squadron S3 cell, was a government van that traveled from unit to unit interfacing with company commanders and civilian authorities while keeping in contact using cell phones.

The CPs all used AAA maps with military operational terms and graphics overlays. The battle boards were almost identical to those the squadron used in a

recent warfighter exercise. The mobile TAC further allowed the command team to operate with eyes on the objective and give clear guidance to subordinate commanders while passing information to and receiving information from the main CP — just like in combat.

The lesson here is that military C2 procedures, with a few minor tweaks, work in DSCA operations — *do not try to reinvent the wheel in the middle of a crisis.*

**Working with Civilian Authorities**

Interface with civilian authorities is generally supposed to come at very senior levels, but it actually occurs at every level. Whether it is a fire team leader being asked for help by a deputy sheriff or a senior Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) official asking a National Guard general for assistance, you need to be ready to work with the civilian authorities. Understanding the challenges of working with civilian authorities is the first step to overcoming them.

Missions coming to you from higher often suffer from the “telephone game” effect — much like in that children's game,



Department of Defense photo

*Paratroopers with the 3rd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, return from a search and rescue mission September 13, 2005, in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.*



Staff Sergeant Jim Greenhill

*California Army National Guard Soldiers load up water and relief supplies for residents around Valley Center who were hard hit by the recent wildfires.*

the request for assistance that reaches you might be very different from the request that was made before it passed up and down five or six layers of civilian and military authority. We began “validating” our missions as part of our SOP — when we received a tasking, we immediately sent out a leader’s recon to the site not only to determine the usual route and support information but also to meet one-on-one with the originating requestor to find out what he or she *really* wanted. Almost inevitably, what the requestor on the scene wanted from the military was very much different than what we had been told to provide — either it was much less than requested or the support was no longer needed at all.

Keep in mind that civilian authorities often do not understand military terms and procedures any better than we understand theirs. Often, they will ask for *numbers* of Soldiers — “I need two Soldiers to guard a post office” — but not understand that this is really a task that takes more personnel, as two Soldiers cannot work indefinitely without relief, support, or leadership. They might also use similar terms that mean entirely different things. For example, a police “squad” is not nine Soldiers — it is two police officers in a squad car. The solution is the push for requests by *task* with *specific time periods* — “I need the post office guarded for 48 hours.” This makes it much simpler for military leaders to properly analyze the mission and assign resources.

Do not hesitate to advise civilian authorities on military capabilities and limitations, especially in security situations. Keep in mind that while the police are a paramilitary organization, they are very different from Soldiers in terms of training, tactics, equipment and, most critically, outlook. With the exception of military police, who receive special training and gear, Soldiers are trained to destroy the enemy. They carry high-powered rifles, not the pistols, batons, handcuffs, tasers and pepper sprays of a police officer. While the RUF may require shooting to wound, Soldiers’ *training* — often honed in high intensity combat — is to shoot center mass, *i.e.* to kill. Critically, as 1-18 CAV’s S3, Major James Westerfield, observed

during the wildfire mobilization, police officers are trained to *de-escalate* violence in order to prevail, while Soldiers are trained to *escalate* violence to defeat the threat. This is not to say Soldiers cannot perform security missions in a DSCA context; it is to say that you must use care in employing them to do so. Also, be prepared to consult with a Judge Advocate General (JAG) officer if requested to do a purely law enforcement mission. The *Posse Comitatus* Act prohibits federal military forces from performing law enforcement functions except in certain circumstances.

Many of these challenges can be overcome with prior coordination between military and civilian authorities. However, this pre-emergency contact is often limited to either strategic interface involving very senior military personnel or tactical interface with specialized units, like the civil support teams (CSTs). Unfortunately, this means that the first time most Army leaders work with civilian officials — and *vice versa* — is when the emergency is already underway. The Army should support DSCA collective training involving civilian authorities, including

TEWTs, field exercises and command post exercises, at unit level — at least for units most likely to be deployed. While it is difficult for already overburdened active and reserve component units to add DSCA training to their already long list of required training, the alternative is even worse.

## Conclusion

DSCA missions are here to stay. American citizens respect and honor their military and those who serve in it, and they are increasingly looking to their service members to protect them at home when disaster strikes. It was not the performance of the military after Hurricane Katrina that caused the political outcry that followed — it was the perception that the military was not sent in early enough. Our Nation is counting on us, whether active, Reserve or National Guard, to be ready to respond when the next disaster strikes. By using the doctrine we have validated at war, as modified by our experiences here at home and by common sense, we can be ready to answer that call the next time it comes. And the one thing that we know for certain is that it *will* come.

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