

# MARYLAND'S FINEST PROTECTION FORCE



*By Lieutenant Colonel John P. Rodriguez*

**F**or the Army National Guard, a crisis can come in many forms, from natural disasters to near-peer threats to our national interests. The 115th Military Police Battalion (part of the Maryland Army National Guard), Salisbury, Maryland, is a unique organization with diverse capabilities suited to enabling protection for the state, our Nation, and the joint force across the spectrum of threats during a domestic or international crisis. The 115th consists of a military police headquarters detachment; two military police companies (the 29th and the 200th); the 231st Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Company (Hazard Response), Camp Fretterd, Maryland; and the 244th Engineer Vertical-Construction Company, Hagerstown Armory, Hagerstown, Maryland. With this potent combination of assets, the 115th has enabled protection by assisting with disaster response, protecting democracy, and defending the joint force throughout multiple crises.

## **Assisting With Disaster Response**

The 115th Military Police Battalion has responded to numerous natural disasters and assisted local and state authorities in mitigating the threat to the populace. The 115th can be mobilized for state active duty under the authority of the governor of Maryland during natural disasters. Under “Title 32” authorities, if the President of the United States declares an emergency, the 115th can be activated to conduct federally funded operations that are under state control.<sup>1</sup>

Given the diverse climate of Maryland, the 115th Military Police Battalion has responded to hurricanes, floods, and snowstorms. The unit assists local and state authorities by providing vehicles and drivers capable of operating under degraded road conditions. It can evacuate civilians endangered by floodwaters or traverse snow-covered roads to deliver paramedics to individuals in need of medical attention or to move patients in medical crises to a cleared road or further transport by ambulance. The unit can also support police efforts to block roads to protect motorists from entering areas with environmental hazards such as flooded roadways.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the 115th Military Police Battalion was mobilized multiple times under Title 32 orders to assist the Maryland Department of Health with addressing the federal disaster; the battalion

remained under state control but was federally funded. Soldiers from the 115th ran testing and vaccination sites to provide health protection to the people of Maryland. They ensured the smooth flow of traffic and the efficient registration of patients to maximize the capability of the civilian nurses who were administering the tests and vaccinations.

## **Protecting Democracy**

Domestic crises can result from manufactured as well as natural causes. The 115th Military Police Battalion has responded to multiple civil disturbances—including protests after the death of Freddie C. Gray while he was in police custody in 2015 in Baltimore, marches in reaction to the death of George P. Floyd Jr. at the hands of Minneapolis police in 2020, and the 6 January 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol—under either state active duty or Title 32 status. In these cases, the 115th has conducted area security, police operations, and populace control as well as protected the First Amendment rights of citizens to protest, while also safeguarding critical infrastructure and maintaining law and order. For example, military vehicles have been used as improvised roadblocks at large demonstrations to prevent ramming or explosive vehicular-borne threats, which have been advocated and even attempted by domestic and foreign extremist organizations.<sup>2</sup> Through training on civil disturbance tactics and techniques and with the extensive nonlethal capabilities of the 29th and 200th Military Police Companies, the 115th can also effectively support law enforcement responses to civil disturbances if protests escalate toward violence.

The presence of National Guard Soldiers on the frontlines during protests can be especially effective for deescalating tension while allowing free speech. During the Freddie C. Gray protests, Maryland Army National Guard personnel provided critical site security at Baltimore police stations where protestors had gathered. While protestors were upset at police, their outrage was not directed toward the Soldiers manning the shield wall. The protests did not escalate into violence; protestors did not attack Soldiers, and Soldiers did not respond to protestors’ taunts with violence, as had been the case with other protests directed against police.<sup>3</sup> Other Army National Guard units replicated this successful deescalation of tensions during the 2020 George P. Floyd Jr. mass demonstrations.<sup>4</sup>

## Defending the Joint Force


During an international crisis, the 115th Military Police Battalion is capable of enabling protection throughout the force protection process, from fort to port—through reception, staging, onward movement, and integration. The protection provided by the 115th enables efficient deployment of the joint force and allows the force to focus on preparing for large-scale combat operations.

During a crisis, protection starts in the homeland since near-peer and even nonstate adversaries could launch terrorist attacks against the joint force as it mobilizes. Protesters, potentially inspired by adversary propaganda, could also interfere with deployment operations through nonviolent but disruptive demonstrations.<sup>5</sup> In addition, technological advances like the weaponization of commercial unmanned aerial systems may pose potential threats to military installations.<sup>6</sup> Army National Guard military police companies can conduct law enforcement operations at domestic military bases to supplement or replace Regular Army units deploying forward. Such companies can also conduct area security of aerial or seaports of embarkation in the continental United States, similar to the manner in which these types of units conducted area and critical-site security after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Deep local knowledge and connections that Army National Guard companies have with local and state law enforcement officials may increase the effectiveness of security operations off-post, as Regular Army units likely lack this familiarity. Furthermore, the 231st CBRN Company can respond to any CBRN threat within the continental United States; for example, it can mitigate the contamination of seaports of embarkation subjected to CBRN attacks to protect personnel and ensure the continuation of deployment operations. The 231st demonstrated this ability while serving as command and control CBRN Response Element B in the continental United States mass casualty CBRN response enterprise.

The 115th Military Police Battalion can also be forward-deployed to protect the joint force, with military police companies conducting area security missions at aerial or seaports of debarkation in the joint operations area. These area security missions can protect against adversary intelligence collection or sabotage from terrorists. And area security encompasses convoy security. Military police companies can also perform site security for base camps, just as the 29th Military Police Company provided security to Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. In addition, the 231st CBRN Company can mitigate CBRN hazards by deploying forward to provide decontamination capabilities for area security missions at aerial or seaports of debarkation or at reception, staging, onward movement, and integration locations. With the M1135 Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Reconnaissance Vehicles in its reconnaissance and surveillance platoon, the 231st can also detect CBRN threats. Finally, the 244th Engineer Vertical-Construction Company can improve survivability by constructing protective positions or hardening infrastructure and protect the force from environmental hazards

by building shelters and barracks for deploying troops, which might be especially important when deploying to austere environments.

## Conclusion

Through a combination of its military police, chemical, and engineer units, the 115th Military Police Battalion can respond to various threats and hazards across a broad spectrum by protecting the force from hostile action, responding to civil disturbances, and mitigating environmental hazards. These capabilities allow the battalion to prevent or minimize risks and threat effects; preserve combat power; and enable freedom of action for our local, state, federal, and joint force partners. With this flexible set of capabilities and mission sets, the 115th Military Police Battalion—the finest protection force in Maryland—embodies the Army National Guard motto of *Always Ready, Always There*. 

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup>Jim Absher, “What’s the Difference Between Title 10 and Title 32 Mobilization Orders?” *Military.com*, 27 January 2022, <<https://www.military.com/benefits/reserve-and-guard-benefits/whats-difference-between-title-10-and-title-32-mobilization-orders.html>>, accessed on 8 July 2024.

<sup>2</sup>“Vehicle-Borne Attacks: Tactics and Mitigation,” *First Responders Toolbox*, Joint Counterterrorism Assessment Team, 18 December 2020, <[https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/jcat/firstresponderstoolbox/NCTC-FBI-DHS\\_Vehicle-Borne\\_Attacks-Tactics\\_and\\_Mitigation-survey.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/jcat/firstresponderstoolbox/NCTC-FBI-DHS_Vehicle-Borne_Attacks-Tactics_and_Mitigation-survey.pdf)>, accessed on 25 June 2024.

<sup>3</sup>Shaila Dewan and Mike Baker, “Facing Protests Over Use of Force, Police Respond With More Force,” *New York Times*, 2 June 2020, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/police-tactics-floyd-protests.html>>, accessed on 25 June 2024.

<sup>4</sup>Gary Sheftick, “Guardsmen Defuse Tensions With Atlanta Protesters,” *National Guard*, 9 June 2020, <<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/2212394/guardsmen-defuse-tensions-with-atlanta-protesters/>>, accessed on 25 June 2024.

<sup>5</sup>Carlos Castaneda, “Pro-Palestinian Protesters Delay Military Supply Ship From Departing Port of Oakland,” *CBS News*, 3 November 2023, <<https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/pro-palestinian-protesters-block-military-supply-ship-at-the-port-of-oakland/>>, accessed on 25 June 2024.

<sup>6</sup>Elivira N. Loreda et al., “The End of Sanctuary: Protecting the Army’s Installations From Emerging Threats,” RAND, 10 November 2020, <[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA107-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA107-1.html)>, accessed on 25 June 2024.

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