MP=MULTIPURPOSE

By Sergeant Matthew P. Ahern and Sergeant Stephen C. Prochniak

When the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine nearly 20 years ago, the world was put on notice. Since then, conflicts between nation-states have only continued to escalate. The Department of Defense has been preparing for a transition to near-peer conflict since the early 2000s; and in late 2039 into 2040, the Military Police Corps was mobilized to support the war effort.

It's 16 July 2040, and 3d Platoon, 972d Military Police Company, a Massachusetts National Guard unit headquartered at Hanscom Air Force Base, Massachusetts, is on the final week of its 9-month rotation in Ukraine. Although still led by a platoon leader and platoon sergeant, more responsibility has shifted to squad leaders during the last decade. Military police squads must be capable of operating independently and dynamically due to the surveillance and reconnaissance capability of America's adversaries. Large forward operating bases are easy targets for enemy fire, so the Soldiers of 3d Platoon spend much of their time operating in smaller elements in austere environments. Though military police officers operated at the squad level during the Global War on Terrorism, enemy intelligence capabilities now make decentralization essential. As a result, staff sergeants make even more tactical decisions than their predecessors did.

"Spot"®

Today, the military police are dismounted in a densely populated town. Though the uniformed enemy military has been forced back dozens of miles from this location, partisan activity is a significant threat in this conflict. These irregular military groups often consist of armed and radical civilians led by members of the enemy intelligence service or enemy officers who were bypassed during the initial phase of the operation. They utilize their knowledge of the region and their ethnic connections to the population to target American assets whenever possible. Their actions have included assaults against supply convoys and depots, destruction of crucial infrastructure and, on rare occasions, direct attacks against rear-area bases.

The densely populated town is now a key logistical hub for American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization forces in-country. Partisan forces have tried and failed twice to disrupt allied operations. 3d Platoon has denied their advance. The roving patrols made up of three-person teams sweep along the fence line surrounding the depot. As they patrol, they politely tell curious civilians (as best they can manage in the local language) to stay back from the fence line. Within the past 5 years, the Army has acquired four-legged robots that are primarily based on the "Spot"® model developed by Boston Dynamics in the 2010s and 2020s. Known as "The Dog" by its 3d Platoon handlers, the robot trots along next to the patrol, using its technology to more accurately translate the messages from the patrol to the local language.

During previous operations, The Dog has enhanced 3d Platoon reconnaissance capabilities by taking advantage of its mobility and using its cameras to check corners, ditches, and rooms before Soldiers are put at risk. The Dog can carry up to 80 pounds and, on one occasion, carried the gear of a 3d Platoon Soldier who was wounded in action.

Advanced technology like The Dog has become a critical asset for 3d Platoon. In the first month of platoon deployment, enemy cyberwarfare divisions attempted a large-scale

cyberattack against American Army rear and frontline elements. 3d Platoon was among the units targeted by the attack. Advanced artificial intelligence (AI), utilizing machine-learning algorithms, has been employed and fielded by the Department of Defense since 2033, and the local copy of AI on the network used by the platoon adapted to the probing attack and redirected the enemy away from critical systems. A simple pop-up message notified the platoon of the cyberattack on its communication systems; but aside from a brief slowdown in electronic systems, the effects of the enemy attack were largely imperceivable and there was little to no impact on the overall mission. Incidents like these would continue throughout the time that 3d Platoon was to spend in-country. The enemy never could gain a technological edge, thanks to the rapidly adaptable AI.

It's now 25 July 2040, and 3d Platoon is on the flight home. A mere 3 days is slated for demobilization. Advancements in technology, based on the lessons learned after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have dramatically shortened the process. The Soldiers of 3d Platoon are excited to return home to their lives and their Families, and their state is eager for the return of law enforcement capabilities to mission support packages.

A short rest and relaxation period precedes the unit's return to a regular drill schedule. The home front comes with a host of responsibilities for the military police. A changed climate has increased the likelihood of severe storms, and the platoon has returned home at the start of hurricane season. However, predictions for the 2040 season indicate that it should be uncharacteristically mild. National Weather Service data shows a low likelihood of natural disasters in the region, so stateside contingency missions, such as hurricane response, are not considered a priority.

The drill schedule allots the unit significant time to train on its mission-essential tasks in preparation for possible redeployment. At the same time, rumors of an upcoming activation require increased focus on training for defense support of civil authorities whenever time allows. This training is driven by the platoon noncommissioned officers, most of whom have experienced these activations in the years leading up to the overseas deployment.

Unfortunately, civil disturbances have been requiring more support from Soldiers like those in 3d Platoon. The Information Age has forever changed the global dynamic; democracies and dictatorships alike have faced increased division among their civilian populations. The United States is no exception; during the late 2020s and 2030s, there were dozens of activations for military police nationwide. Throughout the past 2 decades, military police have achieved a reputation for effectively preserving peace. National Guard military police offer a unique skill set for this mission. Their employment experience outside of the military helps them to seamlessly integrate with civil authorities. These frequent civil support missions prepared 3d Platoon for its recent deployment, where the ability to work with civilian law enforcement personnel and build rapport with the civilian population was essential.

On Monday, 5 November 2040, Soldiers of 3d Platoon are directed to immediately report to the armory. The notification comes via a system that bypasses "do not disturb" and "silenced" settings on their phones to ensure that the messages are delivered. This drastically decreases response time, and leaders spend less time trying to reach Soldiers who did not receive notification. The Soldiers of 3d Platoon arrive at the armory, where the full-time staff has already begun laying out civil-disturbance gear. Their law enforcement ensemble kits are ready. Months of deployment have demonstrated the importance of equipment maintenance, and platoon leaders conduct routine inspections during drill periods in preparation for situations like this. The distribution of the civil-disturbance gear is seamless. The gear is rapidly distributed using electronic rosters, and Soldiers need only type their names into the system, grab their gear, and go.

Three and a half hours after the notification was sent, 3d Platoon is mounting up. Its destination is the state capitol, and the tactical vehicles roar to life. Escorted by local and state police cruisers, the convoy travels down the interstate; the city skyline grows closer. The platoon uses a local network to assist individual vehicle commanders in working with one another to coordinate their positions before arriving at their destinations. Noncommissioned officers coordinate with local law enforcement personnel to determine where their vehicle teams can be best utilized. These leaders rapidly dismount and establish their points with enhanced knowledge of their surrounding assets, rather than blindly arriving at the incident.

Once again, the Soldiers of 3d Platoon find themselves dismounted, providing security in an urban environment. This time, they are there to support the First Amendment Constitutional freedoms of their fellow citizens and to protect state property.

It is said that the best humor is rooted in reality. This holds true for the long-running joke among military police that "MP" stands for "multipurpose." The military police of the Army National Guard know that this is an accurate statement, as they've lived through it before and will undoubtedly live through it again.

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