

Training Brings a Tearful Experience to the 323d Military Police Company

By Captain Timothy Casteel

A riot situation is developing and military police Soldiers are called in to assist with crowd control. However, the presence of the Soldiers only provokes the crowd and soon a scuffle breaks out. For situations like this, military police carry a can of oleoresin capsicum pepper spray. In a flash, the can will discharge a stream of the highly potent chemical. The full face shot is effective and the burning sensation is meant to incapacitate the target.

However, in this case, the military police Soldier was the one getting sprayed. How military police themselves react to pepper spray is crucial in maintaining crowd control, so it was the focus of training for Soldiers in the Ohio Army National Guard's 323d Military Police Company (Combat Support) recently. The unit was designated as Ohio's first quick-reaction force in October 2004, and the chance of encountering this scenario is very real. Each Soldier participated in several hours of classroom instruction that covered the different types of sprays, spraying techniques, and the proper employment of pepper spray. Afterwards, the Soldiers were required to experience the effects firsthand and demonstrate that they could still carry on their police mission. One by one, each Soldier received a face full of pepper spray.

"It's like having boiling water thrown into your face," said one senior noncommissioned officer (NCO). "Adrenaline kicks in and you have to think that in a real struggle, your own life is on the line. You have to block out the pain until you know you are safe and then you can worry about yourself."

Once contaminated with the pepper spray, Soldiers had to go through five stations, performing various tasks successfully before the spray could be removed. "Safeties" guided each Soldier through the round of stations to reduce the chaos caused by the pepper spray. At one of the stations, unarmed military police Soldiers had to ward off aggressors who were wielding padded shields. Then the military

police had to repeat the task, this time armed with padded police batons. Another station required the Soldiers to administer offensive baton strikes to the offender and gain control over him.

After completing the scenarios on the unit armory's drill floor, Soldiers decontaminated themselves at an eye-washing station and at tubs of warm, soapy water in the adjacent motor pool. Trained staff members ensured that all traces of the pepper spray were removed from the Soldiers' faces and eyes. Soldiers who were police or corrections officers in civilian life shared other remedies to counteract the effects of the pepper spray, including specific commercial wipes designed to remove the spray and mixtures of liquid antacids diluted with water. Soldiers participating in the exercise were



A National Guard Soldier fights off the effects of pepper spray as she subdues an aggressor.



After completing the training, the Soldiers were carefully decontaminated.

closely monitored for residual reactions before being released at the end of the day. The decontamination process was monitored by more safeties, combat medics, and a registered nurse.

“The training was very realistic,” said the NCO. “It was the best we have received so far on the law and order side. It gave our Soldiers a new perspective on the choice and use of nonlethal weapons.”

The purpose of the contamination-and-fight drills was to help Soldiers better understand the effects of the pepper spray and to teach them how to react in case they are accidentally contaminated. Such contamination is common, since the spray readily spreads to military police Soldiers who have to subdue, restrain, and transport suspects who have the substance on them. Realistic training allows Soldiers to perform their mission successfully. As a quick-reaction force, the 323d Military Police Company must be ready and able to respond to incidents such as riots, terrorist attacks, and other disasters. Should the need arise, these military police Soldiers are now confident they can respond quickly as a highly effective team.

Captain Casteel joined the Army as an administrative specialist in 1990. He won a four-year scholarship in the Army's Green to Gold program in 1995 and attended the officer basic course in September 2001. He deployed with the 324th Military Police Company as a platoon leader and as the adjutant for the 304th Military Police Battalion during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is the commander of the Ohio Army National Guard's 323d Military Police Company and serves on active duty as adjutant for the Ohio Joint Operations Center. He has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.