



The Flawed Emergency Response to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots (C)

In many respects, it was not surprising that Governor Pete Wilson would offer the services of the California National Guard to help quell the riots that had engulfed South Central Los Angeles. The Guard had played a prominent role in responding to civil disturbances during the 1960s, with more than 13,000 troops deployed during the Watts riots alone. As in other parts of the country, Guard troops had also been mobilized to respond to anti-Vietnam protests and other student demonstrations in the 1960s and early 1970s.

But over the following two decades, federal and state support to fund National Guard preparedness for civil disturbance responses had tailed off as law enforcement agencies' need for military support seemed to lessen. Beginning in 1989, staff officers from the Guard had attended a series of meetings with the state Office of Emergency Services (OES) and other law enforcement groups, in part to discuss the National Guard role in mutual aid. Based on the meetings, some officials at the National Guard headquarters concluded that the state's improved mutual aid system had largely negated the need for Guard troops to respond to civil unrest. As stated in the OES Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Plan, dated October 1991, "Normally, military support will be provided to local jurisdictions only after a request is made by the chief executive of a city or county or sheriff of a county, and only after the disturbance has been determined to be, or to likely become, beyond the capabilities of local law enforcement forces, as supplemented by forces made available under the existing mutual aid agreements." Under the mutual aid plan, therefore, a police department such as the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) would first call on the Sheriff's Department and other local agencies before considering state or federal resources.

Based on these funding and priority changes, Guard forces slated to receive civil disturbance training were cut from 10,000 to only 5,000, and, according to some observers, scant

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attention was paid to whether even that number of troops were trained. As in the city of Los Angeles, most civil emergency preparedness focused on natural disasters, and, in particular, earthquakes. Moreover, other activities took priority, such as military preparedness for overseas operations—including the Gulf War in 1991—and the war on drugs. Nevertheless, notes Richard Andrews, former OES director, although Guard officials may have believed that their future role in civil disturbances would be limited to administrative or logistical support, Guard mission statements still clearly stated the need to maintain readiness for a riot response (see Exhibit A for a list of key players involved in the civil disturbance response). “Nobody would ever have told them there is no chance that this will ever happen again,” Andrews declares.¹

During the trial of the police officers accused of beating Rodney King, the Guard had received signals that there could be serious trouble in Los Angeles. LAPD Commander Bayan Lewis had passed along his unofficial warning of a possible disturbance, for example, and had borrowed more than 300 sets of helmets and flak vests. In addition, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) had called about using the Los Alamitos Armed Forces Reserve Center south of Los Angeles as a possible staging area in case of an outbreak. Still, because of the revised understanding of its role, and the fact that there had been no official request from Los Angeles law enforcement agencies or OES to be on alert, the state National Guard made no special preparations during the trial.

At about 8:30 p.m. on April 29, however, Wilson’s office called the Adjutant General of the California National Guard, Major General Robert Thrasher, to let him know that the governor was considering calling up the Guard (see Exhibit B for a chronology of events during the riots). A half hour later, at Mayor Bradley’s request, the governor authorized the deployment of 2,000 National Guard troops to help restore order in Los Angeles. “As the seriousness of the situation started to become evident, everybody recognized that putting the National Guard on the street would send a very strong message,” says Richard Andrews. Thrasher quickly called Andrews, hoping to learn more details about the Guard’s mission, but Andrews could only promise to check with the LAPD and the Sheriff’s Department for more information.² At 9:15, Thrasher ordered the troop mobilization. No specific time had been set for soldiers to be on the streets, but Thrasher told the governor’s staff that troops would be “in their armories” in about six hours.

At 10:13, Richard Andrews of OES arranged the first in what would be a series of conference calls, usually including the same individuals: Governor Wilson, General Thrasher, Mayor Bradley, Sheriff Sherman Block, Police Chief Daryl Gates, and CHP Commissioner Maurice Hannigan. The riots, according to Gates, had spread to an area of about 45 to 50 square miles, and there were 400 to 500 police in the area. Sheriff Block also reported spreading unrest, and what he

¹ Richard Andrews interview with writer, March 27, 2000. Subsequent comments by Andrews are from the same interview.

² Under the mutual aid system, when a local government requested assistance from the Guard, OES provided the mission assignment.

described as a “Mardi Gras” like atmosphere in the streets in some areas of the county.³ Nevertheless, neither Gates nor Block felt the National Guard was needed, although when pressed by the governor, they endorsed the call-up. Both officials, however, welcomed the CHP’s offer of 1,500 officers, whom they planned to use for tasks such as securing the perimeters of riot-torn areas. “The Highway Patrol was a very highly professional, very disciplined organization,” says Andrews, “and not a territorial threat.”⁴

As it turned out, the CHP—one of whose missions was to assist local law enforcement—was well prepared to take action. According to then Chief Edward Gomez, commander of the CHP’s Southern Division overseeing Los Angeles County, the agency had taken the possibility of a disturbance seriously, and more than a month before the trial ended had drafted a contingency plan, dubbed the Red Plan, that mandated different levels of response depending on the extent of any unrest. A Level One response, for example, would commit as many as 400 of the approximately 1,000 officers in the Southern Division to a disturbance; Level Two would draw in additional officers from neighboring divisions; and Level Three would deploy officers from around the state.

Gomez initiated the Red Plan as soon as the judge in the Rodney King beating trial gave notice that the verdicts would be announced in two hours. Along with his top officers, Gomez watched the verdicts being read, then immediately called a tactical alert, which put officers on 12-hour shifts and alerted them to wear riot gear. “You can’t get in trouble by having too many people ready and available,” Gomez asserts. “You can always de-escalate and send them home if after six hours nothing happens.”⁵ Even before Gates and Block accepted the officers, the Red Plan had moved to Level Three, and the CHP was ready to support local law enforcement in large numbers as needed.

Other than accepting the CHP officers, though, Gates made almost no use of outside law enforcement agencies in the first hours of the riot. During the conference call, Sheriff Block offered Gates 500 deputies, but—reminiscent of the Watts riots experience—Gates refused the offer, preferring not to rely on his rival, and still believing that the LAPD would regain control on its own. After Gates’s negative response, Block, as regional coordinator of the mutual aid plan, turned down several offers of help from other area law enforcement agencies during the tumultuous first night of rioting, assuming that Gates would not be interested. The only local police forces tapped

³ Lt. Gen. William H. Harrison (US Army Ret.), *Assessment of the Performance of the California National Guard During the Civil Disturbances in Los Angeles, April & May 1992*, Report to the Honorable Pete Wilson, Governor, State of California (Sacramento, CA: October 2, 1992), p. A-7.

⁴ The Sheriff’s Department earlier that evening had already asked for 50 CHP officers to help return prisoners who had escaped from an honor farm north of Los Angeles.

⁵ Edward Gomez interview with writer, March 28, 2000. Subsequent comments by Gomez are from the same interview.

by the LAPD were the Rapid Transit District Police and the University of California-Los Angeles Police Department, both forces with which the LAPD had had substantial interactions in the past.

Nor did the LAPD make good use of the CHP that first night. Although some officers were sent to escort firefighters, about 120 CHP officers who had been available in Los Angeles since 9 p.m. watched television at their headquarters all night because they were given nothing to do, and in the midst of the chaos, neither the sheriff's office nor the LAPD could immediately find tasks for the 1,500 officers CHP Commissioner Hannigan had offered. Gates, meanwhile, spent much of the first night touring the streets of Los Angeles with a driver and aide, finally reporting to the city's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at 6:00 a.m. "Daryl was a very dedicated police officer, but if he had two shortcomings, one was what many people would call arrogance, and the other was his absolute unbridled belief that the LAPD could and would handle anything," says former Los Angeles City Fire Chief Donald Manning. "He couldn't come to grips with the fact that his people couldn't and weren't handling the whole thing."

A Flawed Mobilization

The National Guard deployment began with many questions unanswered. Although the conference call participants had agreed on a target time of 4:00 p.m. the next day for getting troops on the streets, no one had declared which agency would coordinate the Guard's involvement, decided what its missions would be, or estimated how many more troops ultimately might be called. In addition, some of the officials involved, including Sheriff Block and Police Chief Gates, felt the Guard had been called up prematurely. After all, says Sheriff's Lieutenant Dennis Beene, a team leader at the county Emergency Operations Center, "there were about 20,000 police officers and deputies in this county, looking at the LAPD, the deputies, and the other 46 city agencies. Had we managed those resources properly, we would not have needed anybody from outside to deal with what we had."⁶ Nevertheless, with the riot spreading, and no evidence that the LAPD had the situation under control, Mayor Bradley and Governor Wilson pushed forward on the Guard deployment.

The initial mobilization went well. The troops chosen for deployment—members of the 40th Infantry Division (Mechanized) based near Los Angeles—responded quickly, and almost the entire contingent of 2,000 soldiers had reported to about ten armories in the city area by 4:00 a.m. Although the state Guard headquarters apparently had not anticipated the mobilization, many individual soldiers who had been watching television felt it likely that they would be deployed, and one colonel had even placed his brigade on alert.⁷

⁶ Dennis Beene interview with writer, March 29, 2000. Subsequent comments by Beene are from the same interview.

⁷ James D. Delk, *Fires & Furies: The Los Angeles Riots of 1992* (Palm Springs, CA: ETC Publications, 1995), pp. 40-41.

Once the troops reported, however, the Guard's lack of focus on civil disturbance preparedness became evident. Unknown to General Thrasher and the governor's office, for example, most of the troops hadn't had adequate training to respond to a riot. The contingent with the most civil disturbance training—the 49th Military Police Brigade, based in the San Francisco Bay Area—was judged too far away to deploy. As a result, commanders at the armories hastily conducted basic riot training as troops assembled. In addition, all soldiers had to read and sign a copy of the Rules of Engagement that Guard headquarters had hastily prepared (for a copy of the Rules of Engagement, see Exhibit C). The rules were intended to emphasize the importance of restraint, so that soldiers wouldn't leave themselves open to charges, such as those that arose after the Watts riots, of having fired on rioters without adequate cause.

But the real holdup was the fact that there was not enough ammunition or basic equipment, such as flak vests, face shields, and riot batons, for the troops to deploy. Until recently, ammunition had been stored at the local armories—enough to supply the soldiers, at least initially. But earlier that year, as part of a Guard re-evaluation of storage practices, ammunition at scattered sites had been consolidated at Camp Roberts, a National Guard base about 230 miles north of Los Angeles. Alerted to the shortfall, headquarters ordered a helicopter to pick up adequate ammunition from the base and deliver it to the staging area at the Los Alamitos Reserve Center, about 30 miles south of Los Angeles, by 8:00 a.m., April 30. A second helicopter would bring the necessary equipment from Camp San Luis Obispo, located about 50 miles south of Camp Roberts.

A combination of poor communication, inexperience, and bad judgment, however, badly delayed the delivery. To begin with, staff members at Guard headquarters responsible for getting the ammunition to the troops continued to operate under the assumption that having soldiers ready by 4:00 p.m. the second day of the riots—a response time of 19 hours from first alert to mobilization—would be adequate. As a result, instead of having one helicopter take ammunition directly from Camp Roberts to Los Alamitos—allowing those soldiers with adequate equipment to deploy—while a second helicopter traveled to Camp San Luis Obispo, the staff decided to save on aircraft and flight crews and redirected the first helicopter to make the equipment pickup as well.

Other glitches further slowed the drop-off. Because crew members were transporting tear gas grenades, they had to bring gas masks, which took extra time to locate. At Camp Roberts, they had to refuel the helicopter at a point distant from the ammunition. By the time the supplies were trucked to the aircraft, it was already 7:15, just 45 minutes before the helicopter was originally to have delivered its load to Los Alamitos. The crew, which had no experience in loading pallets of ammunition, didn't bring rollers to help transfer the loads, nor did the helicopter winch system work properly, so crew members ultimately loaded the pallets by hand. To make matters worse, the crew learned that some of the tear gas grenades on board were out of date. By the time they had unloaded part of the ammunition, located the bad grenades, found new ones, rebanded the pallets, and reloaded the supplies, the helicopter didn't take off until 9:45 a.m., with the equipment pickup still to come.

At Camp San Luis Obispo, the setbacks continued. The equipment wouldn't fit with what was already loaded, so the crew once again had to remove some of the heavy ammunition in order to fit flak vests, riot batons, and face shields on board. Then they had to wait for the arrival of lock plates, devices required by the federal government in any civil disturbance response to keep the soldiers' M16 rifles from firing on automatic. As a result, the helicopter did not arrive at Los Alamitos until 1:50 p.m., almost six hours later than originally expected. Remarkably, those responsible for delivering the ammunition and equipment also had apparently made no effort to inform officials at Los Alamitos, the adjutant general's office, or the governor's office of the delay.

The Dawning of the Second Day

Had the riots subsided as daylight broke April 30, as most observers still predicted, the slower than expected deployment of the National Guard might not have been an issue. Although Governor Wilson had declared a state of emergency for all of Los Angeles County at 12:05 a.m. on April 30, and Mayor Bradley had declared a dusk-to-dawn curfew for the South Central area at 12:15 a.m., Daryl Gates stated in a television interview about a half hour later that not only was it unlikely that additional National Guard forces would be called, he was not even convinced that the first 2,000 were needed. And although by morning, there had been nine riot-related deaths and more than 150 injuries, the Metropolitan Division (Metro)—the LAPD unit with the most crisis training and experience—had been given a 4:00 report time the second day, in order to give officers a chance to rest before reporting back for duty, and under the assumption that they wouldn't be needed until dark.⁸

But the riots, which had already spread north and west during the night into downtown Los Angeles and Koreatown, continued unabated—particularly in South Central. Rioters, looters, and arsonists didn't follow the pattern of previous incidents of unrest, and seemed to feel no compunction to wait until dark. According to a later study, the uprising was fueled by an estimated 50,000 men in South Central between the ages of 16 and 34 who were out of school, jobless, and had no father at home, and who were therefore free to join in the rioting with few constraints.⁹ In addition, new weapons were flooding the streets. Despite Commander Bayan Lewis's earlier department advisory to guard gun stores, looters took 1,150 firearms from one unprotected store—including more than 600 automatics or semi-automatics—and another 970 firearms from a pawn shop in the first night of the riots alone. "There was nobody to cover them," Lewis declares.¹⁰

⁸ Ultimately, Metro was called back two hours earlier, at 2:00.

⁹ Lou Cannon, *Official Negligence: How Rodney King and the Riots Changed Los Angeles and the LAPD* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), p. 350.

¹⁰ Bayan Lewis interview with writer, March 27, 2000. Subsequent comments by Lewis are from the same interview.

The demographics of those involved in the rioting had also changed by the second day. While the first night was in part a spontaneous expression of the African-American community's rage at the Rodney King verdict—manifested in the attacks of young black males on whites, Latinos, and Asians caught in the middle of the outbreak—by the second day, looting had become an end in itself, and people of all races, ages, and gender were taking part. Indeed, according to later records of those arrested during the disturbance, Latinos— in particular, recent immigrants— outnumbered blacks. Furthermore, law enforcement officials reported seeing a number of wealthy residents coming into the riot area to fill their cars with loot. “We witnessed people who drove down from very affluent neighborhoods in this county with their Mercedes,” notes Sheriff's Lieutenant Dennis Beene.

Amidst the spreading disturbance, the city's seven major commercial television stations, which were providing near 24-hour live coverage of the riots, continued to play a surprisingly powerful role. As in the first hours of the unrest, television reports showing a lackluster or passive police presence emboldened potential looters. One African-American woman later told a Washington Post correspondent that watching television convinced her to go steal diapers, cans of food, and produce because she “...didn't know if there were going to be any stores standing.”¹¹ Adds Terrance Manning, Los Angeles City Fire Department battalion commander, “You could almost get a game plan off television, because they would gather concerns from the local officials about where it was happening and what was happening. I think that gave a lot of direction to the rioters.”¹²

In addition, as bad as the rioting was, many observers felt that the media—and particularly television—were exaggerating the extent of the rioting. The constant images of burning buildings and looting gave many viewers the impression that all of South Central was going up in flames, and that vast areas of the city were endangered. “People seeing that around the country and around the world thought that in every intersection in Los Angeles you had people beating other people, you had them looting stores, you had them setting fire to things,” says former Chief Gomez of the CHP. “I don't think that's good.”

Deploying the Guard

By mid-morning April 30, there was still confusion over the exact role of the National Guard, including wildly different expectations about when they could and should deploy. At 10:00 a.m., for example, Mayor Bradley told the City Council that Guard troops would be on the streets by noon. Minutes later, however, a state OES liaison officer, who was unaware of the growing panic within the city, reconfirmed with the Guard Emergency Operations Center the original

¹¹ Ibid., p. 338.

¹² Terrance Manning interview with writer, March 28, 2000. Subsequent comments by Manning are from the same interview.

mobilization target of 4:00 p.m. Around the same time, alarmed Sheriff's Department officials called out for a stronger law enforcement presence on the streets, and General Thrasher—who hadn't been told about the equipment and ammunition delay—phoned Sheriff Sherman Block and told him that 2,000 National Guard troops were already in their armories and waiting to deploy.¹³ Shortly after 11:00, meanwhile, Governor Wilson approved a Los Angeles County request that 2,000 more Guard troops be mobilized, bringing the total to 4,000. Finally, during a noon conference call, Wilson pressed the LAPD and the Sheriff's Department to put Guard troops on the street as soon as possible, and Mayor Bradley called Wilson at 12:30 to complain that soldiers still hadn't been deployed.

As this was occurring, officials at Los Alamitos were still trying to sort out when to mobilize. An OES official stationed at Los Alamitos had pointed out to Brigadier General James Delk, the Guard's military field commander who had arrived at Los Alamitos at 10:30 that morning, that there were still unused local law enforcement resources that could be deployed at once, and Delk had passed that comment on to Guard headquarters in Sacramento, with the implication that such regional mutual aid should be exhausted before calling out the Guard. But when Undersheriff Bob Edmonds heard about Delk's call, he angrily phoned the field commander and said the Sheriff's Department expected the Guard to be on the streets as soon as possible regardless of mutual aid stipulations.¹⁴ Delk agreed to send the 40th Military Police Company out to meet sheriff's escorts, but then discovered the equipment had not yet arrived. After a scramble, ammunition was rounded up from the Guard's nearby drug interdiction force to fill in for the delayed delivery.

Faced with conflicting directions and information, frustrated Guard personnel at Los Alamitos called Thrasher at 1:15 to find out who was in charge—the LAPD or the Sheriff's Department. When Thrasher called Undersheriff Edmonds at about 1:20 to clarify the chain of command, the general learned for the first time that his troops were still waiting for equipment. "Everything that could go wrong did go wrong with the National Guard deployment," says Richard Andrews of OES. "For whatever reason, there was not accurate, consistent information being provided up the chain of command within the National Guard as to what was going on. There were a lot of people, Thrasher in particular, who were blindsided at almost every turn."¹⁵

¹³ At around 10:00 a.m., Chief Gates finally accepted two platoons of about 112 deputies from the Sheriff's Department, and put them to work making arrests in South Central.

¹⁴ Delk later noted that the question about when to deploy did not slow down the actual mobilization.

¹⁵ In part because of misunderstandings caused by the conflicting accounts of the deployment issued by the governor's press office, the Guard public affairs office, and Guard staff at Los Alamitos, the governor's staff finally requested May 4 that all statements and releases about Guard activities be cleared with the governor's press office. In fact, according to Richard Andrews, the problems convinced OES to keep an unusually low press profile. "There was just so much confusion about what was the chain of events from the time they got the order to deploy, and to exactly what occurred with the decisions that were being made in the releases by the National Guard press office, that we made a decision not to add another voice to the confusion," he says.

Delk, meanwhile, got two platoons ready to go by 1:30 p.m., but they didn't leave Los Alamitos until 2:35—mainly because the Sheriff's Department changed their mission. "We had never done anything with the Guard, so the question was, 'What are we going to do with them?'" recalls Sheriff's Lieutenant Dennis Beene, who was helping coordinate operations out of the county EOC. "Our platoon commanders out there had no idea how to make use of these resources coming in. We'd never really trained together, never really talked together. What can they do? It became a problem."

The awkward and delayed deployment of the National Guard exacerbated mounting tensions over how well the mutual aid system was working. During the early afternoon, Governor Wilson and other officials began to call Thrasher, demanding to know why the Guard troops were not yet on the streets. "There was really no excuse for their not moving faster in a time of what appeared to be genuine crisis, particularly in light of what it was that held them up," the former governor asserts. "I mean, the ammunition snafu—to me—was stupidity."¹⁶ During a conference call shortly after 2:00, officials finally agreed that the sheriff's Emergency Operations Center would coordinate National Guard missions, as dictated by the mutual aid plan. The group also agreed that troops should be sent out even if they hadn't installed lock plates on their M16s.¹⁷ The risk of misusing the guns appeared small compared to the danger posed by the growing chaos in South Central.¹⁸

Protecting Firefighters

During Thursday morning, April 30, as officials tried to sort out when and how they could use the National Guard, Fire Chief Donald Manning was struggling with a different problem: obtaining adequate protection for his firefighters. By 10 a.m. that morning, the mutual aid system had brought in a total of 56 fire strike teams, including 11 from the county, 23 from Region I, and 22 from elsewhere in the state. But although the LAPD had finally assigned a contingent of Metro officers and other police to help escort firefighters, there still weren't enough to protect all the firefighting resources needed to bring the wave of arson under control. As a result, some city firefighters and mutual aid companies had been stuck waiting until escorts became available, or had gone out without proper protection. "The night of the 29th going into the 30th was a very frightening night for fire command," former Chief Manning recalls. "We had a lot of people exposed out there, some of them being hurt and others just being real lucky."

¹⁶ Pete Wilson interview with writer, March 29, 2000. Subsequent comments by Wilson are from the same interview.

¹⁷ Although federal regulations clearly stated the need for lock plates in a civil disturbance, most Guard units didn't have them when they reported for duty.

¹⁸ Guard troops without lock plates supposedly were to be given only one bullet each, at the suggestion of Governor Wilson, with more ammunition to be held by their squad leaders. In practice, however, this never happened, since Guard officials believed such an approach would have subjected soldiers to unacceptable risk.

Further compounding the problem, police had not proven to be ideal escorts. According to Terrance Manning, many officers viewed the escort duty as less important than direct engagement with rioters, and in some cases, police deserted the firefighters they were supposed to be protecting when they received a call for help from another officer. There were also scheduling and jurisdictional conflicts. Police officers generally adhered strictly to their 12-hour shifts, Manning says, and would leave at the end, even if that meant abandoning firefighters in the middle of an engagement. Moreover, the police operated within rigid geographical boundaries, while the fire department, by the nature of its operations, moved freely throughout the city as needed. As a result, firefighters often lost their police escorts as they traveled from one area to another, and would have to continue unprotected until police in the new jurisdiction were able to respond.

Unlike the LAPD and the Sheriff's Department, Donald Manning had no qualms about calling in the Guard. In fact, Manning says, he welcomed any and all law enforcement resources that might bring the city back under control so that firefighters could do their jobs safely and effectively. Moreover, during the Watts riots, the Guard had provided fire escorts. Now, Manning wanted a similar guarantee that the Guard or some other agency would take on the escort task.

At 11:00 Thursday morning, Chief Manning called a meeting at fire department headquarters that included representatives from the LAPD, the Sheriff's Department, the National Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the California Highway Patrol. "I was desperate," Manning says. "I would take anything." As he went around the table, Manning recalls, all the representatives turned him down—claiming either a lack of resources or more pressing missions—until he reached CHP Commander Gomez. "Ed just kind of quietly leaned forward and he said, 'Don, what do you need?'" Manning says. "When I told him I needed about 300 officers, he said, 'You got it.'"

By 6:30 p.m., the CHP had deployed 300 officers as escorts—100 at the 54th and Arlington command, and 200 dispersed among four of the additional seven staging areas that Deputy Chief Donald Anthony had just established throughout the city. The CHP escorts typically included three cars, with eight or nine officers and a sergeant, Manning says, and the officers were not held to strict shift limitations, nor were they limited by geographical boundaries. "That was a turning point for the fire service to be supported and protected to carry out their mission," Manning says. "And it seemed that the number of CHP officers was limitless, whatever was needed." Terrance Manning, who says the visual impact of the unchecked fires that first night drove rioters and looters to new extremes, adds: "I strongly feel if we had had that same escort commitment in the first 24 hours, we could have shortened this riot by a day-and-a-half."

The Sheriff's Department and the LAPD, which had become more organized during the second day of the riots, had also found other jobs for the CHP, in particular, perimeter control, and providing escorts for fuel trucks, utility vehicles, county firefighters, and other city and county

vehicles. By the evening of the 30th, there were some 2,500 CHP officers deployed in Los Angeles County.

Chaos Continued

Meanwhile, as the first Guard platoons finally began to deploy shortly after 2:30 that afternoon, Sheriff Block, CHP Commissioner Hannigan, Chief Gates, and Guard Field Commander General James Delk, met to divide up the duties of the various forces. With the Highway Patrol escorting firefighters and providing key perimeter control, the group agreed that the National Guard would be responsible for most other missions required by the Sheriff's Department and the LAPD, including securing retail stores after police had established control, manning traffic control points, and conducting area patrols. Since the Sheriff's Department was to coordinate the mutual aid response, all law enforcement organizations agreed to station representatives at the county EOC, already filled beyond capacity with some 80 city and county representatives. Together, the LAPD and Sheriff's Department began to prioritize the flood of incoming requests from utilities, departments, and agencies for protective gear and protection of key facilities.

As the situation on the street worsened, Governor Wilson announced at 4:00 p.m. that he would personally fly to Los Angeles to make sure the Guard deployment moved forward quickly. At about the same time, Mayor Bradley extended the dusk-to-dawn curfew from South Central to the entire city, as Gates had originally wished. The curfew probably didn't carry as much weight as it might have, however, since Bradley—apparently concerned about inconveniencing the city's business community—worded the announcement in such a way that the curfew sounded voluntary. "I have agreed to impose this curfew citywide," Bradley announced at an afternoon press conference, "and I'm calling upon business people of this city to cooperate, asking that if you don't have to be on the streets of Los Angeles tonight after dark, please don't go."¹⁹ Some television stations duly reported the curfew as voluntary, and it took hours for the mayor's office to clear up the confusion.

Although the sheriff was supposed to be the top law enforcement official overseeing the mutual aid response, this protocol was often ignored as the riots raged on. Mayor Bradley, furious over the Guard's deployment delay, continued to go straight to Governor Wilson with criticisms and requests. Similarly, the LAPD often gave mission requests directly to Guard officials, rather than processing them through the county EOC. Finally, some police officers phoned individual friends in departments and agencies elsewhere in the state, asking them for help. "Our captains and staff didn't know how to do mutual aid," exclaims Bayan Lewis. "We'd never done it before. So people were calling friends in Bakersfield, saying, 'Hey, get your people down here!'"

¹⁹ William H. Webster and Hubert Williams, *The City in Crisis (2 Volumes): A Report by the Special Advisor to the Board of Police Commissioners on the Civil Disorder in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles, CA: October 21, 1992), Volume 1, p. 129.

The lack of a coordinated response made it significantly harder for EOC personnel to know who was available for missions, what areas of the city and county were covered, and what new sources of aid could still be tapped. One hundred police officers reported from San Diego the second day of the riots after receiving a call from someone in the city, for example, but because the request hadn't been routed through the EOC, the center couldn't track down the source of the appeal or figure out where to place the officers, and they eventually returned home. "I remember getting a phone call from the law branch at the state OES during the riots, and they said, 'Hey, we've got 150 officers from Northern California on a C-130 from Travis Air Force Base, wheels up, headed your way. Where do you want them?'" recalls Lieutenant Beene of the county EOC. "Everybody was just sending resources in here to help, but we were thinking, 'Wait a minute, we can't even straighten out the resources that we have, and you keep sending more in there.'"

The eagerly awaited deployment of the National Guard also got off to a patchy start. Troops typically were sent to the specific law enforcement agency that had asked for them, and a Guard unit commander, if present, would confer with the senior police official or sheriff's deputy from that jurisdiction to decide what the soldiers should do. According to General Delk, he and his officers had decided the troops would have the most impact if deployed in small groups, rather than platoon-size units—a risky, but conscious strategy. "What we first did was had a show of force," Delk explains, "and then we left soldiers behind two by two."²⁰

The troops were not only expected to help law enforcement officials hold on to the gains they had made, they were meant to be a visible symbol of the return of law and order to the streets of Los Angeles. Out of the first battalion deployed, one company was sent to east Los Angeles, a second company was spread out among the pillaged malls and streets in Compton and areas of South Central, a third was concentrated on the downtown government complex, including the jail, and a final group went to a county prison outside of the city where inmates were rioting.²¹

Due to the piecemeal fashion in which soldiers were deployed, though, the 40th Infantry Division didn't always know where all its troops were, and had no easy way to contact them. In addition, although the mayor and governor had faulted the Guard for a slow mobilization, many of those soldiers finally equipped sat idle because the Sheriff's Department and the LAPD didn't know where to put them. "We never had less than a battalion standing around," recalls Delk. "Never less, normally more."²²

²⁰ While stationed in pairs, troops typically were in sight of other soldiers, and had access to a radio, a cell phone, or a pay phone. James Delk interview with writer, April 5, 2000. Subsequent comments by Delk are from the same interview.

²¹ William W. Mendel, "Combat in Cities: The LA Riots and Operation Rio," Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, July 1996.

²² A Guard battalion can range from about 350 troops to more than 1,000.

Also troubling, some law enforcement officials say, was the fact that a few newscasters not only had reported that the Guard initially lacked ammunition, they had mistakenly announced that soldiers on the street were still unarmed. "We never sent a soldier out without ammunition," insists Delk, "and normally it was 30 rounds."²³ As a result of the misinformation, Delk says, looters and gang members were often brazen and aggressive, taunting the soldiers with their presumed inability to fire back. "Why in the world would we tell the other side, he can't shoot you?" asks former Fire Chief Donald Manning. "If we're going to have them out there, arm them and give them the right instructions, and don't tell the public they're out there and can't do anything. That's stupid."

The National Guard, from Thatcher to the troops waiting to deploy, had also become frustrated by and defensive about television and newspaper coverage of the initial mobilization. Journalists not only criticized the Guard for not responding fast enough, but also for having provided misleading and conflicting information about when they would deploy and about why they had been delayed. Efforts to explain these misunderstandings, Delk says, stole valuable time away from the task of stopping the riots.

Contemplating a Federal Role

On the first afternoon of the Guard deployment, the number of troops on patrol was still so small that their effectiveness was largely untested. At 4:30 on April 30, Warren Christopher, who had headed up the earlier assessment of the LAPD, and who viewed the slow Guard deployment with real concern, asked Mayor Bradley's staff whether the mayor was considering requesting federal troops.

In fact, both Bradley and Wilson were alarmed by the fact that the Guard had been unable to move in swiftly to quash the disturbance, and feared that if the riots were not stopped by the weekend, they would likely spread and intensify. As it was, the impact had already been profound. By mid-day, authorities had reported at least 20 deaths in the disturbance and more than 500 people injured, and hundreds of fires still burned. The Southern California Rapid Transit District had cancelled all bus service, schools in Los Angeles and Compton had closed, and many businesses had sent workers home Thursday for an extended weekend, even in areas away from the rioting. Both because of heavy smoke, and the possibility of gunfire striking an aircraft, Los Angeles International Airport had begun redirecting arriving and departing flights over the Pacific Ocean, reducing activity to less than a quarter the normal rate, and creating gridlock up and down the West Coast.

²³ Lieutenant Sid Heal of the Sheriff's Department, however, says a Guard Military Police Company deployed directly from Northern California was sent to him to hold a key intersection but arrived with no ammunition. He ended up giving the Guard ammunition hastily procured from a sheriff's armory.

In addition, with the riots still spreading, the feeling had grown throughout Los Angeles that no area was safe, and that even wealthy communities previously untouched by urban unrest faced the possibility of violence and destruction. According to former Governor Wilson, his office was being inundated by calls from politicians and business people. "There was a concern that there could be a highly lawless element who, encouraged by the initial default, would just take full advantage of it," says Wilson, "and there were a number of people within the community who were panicking."

Bradley took Warren Christopher's suggestion seriously. That evening, he authorized a request for federal troops, asking Christopher to contact federal authorities and to initiate the process of procuring federal forces. Much to Bradley's horror, as of 8 p.m., there were still only 1,000 Guard troops deployed. At another meeting of top officials a few hours later, Bradley insisted that he needed more Guard forces, and that he would call in federal troops the following morning if there still weren't enough soldiers on the streets. Just before midnight, meanwhile, Gates and Block requested another 2,000 Guard troops. Clearly, however, there was still a critical disconnect between the need on the streets and the ability of the Sheriff's Department and the LAPD to put troops to work. At Los Alamitos, Guard officials questioned the need to call up more troops, since more than 4,000 were already present or reporting soon, and since many units still had no missions and were waiting in armories with nothing to do.

By midnight, the riots' toll had mounted. According to official estimates, there had been 31 riot-related deaths in all, and more than 1,000 injuries. The three hospitals closest to the rioting—Martin Luther King, Jr., General Hospital, Daniel Freeman Memorial Hospital, and the St. Francis Medical Center—had been inundated with patients, and the county EOC had directed ambulances to go to less crowded hospitals nearby.²⁴ Meanwhile, the record number of emergency 9-1-1 calls on Thursday—62,749, up from 35,558 the previous day—had overwhelmed the ability of dispatchers to handle them.²⁵ Although fire personnel were feeling more secure with their CHP escorts, Thursday evening had been significantly worse than the first night of the riots. At 11 p.m., a total of 950 firefighters and paramedics were on the streets, including firefighters from 48 different mutual aid agencies, and during the 24-hour period of April 30, firefighters received reports of almost 3,250 structure fires, compared to 32 calls on an average day.²⁶

²⁴ As an emergency room filled up, it notified the county, which then alerted paramedics to divert to the next closest hospital. None of the hospitals, however, turned away the many patients who came on their own.

²⁵ Webster and Williams, Volume 1, p. 110. Normal volume was 6,500 calls for the LAPD, and 900 for the fire department.

²⁶ While still sobering, the number of structures actually damaged or destroyed by fire during the riots was less than 1,150. Timothy V. Manning, Terrance J. Manning, and Christopher S. Kawai, *Los Angeles City Fire Department Historical Overview: Los Angeles Civil Disturbance, April 29, 1992* (Los Angeles, CA: October 1992), pp. 8, 42, and 144.

Shortly after 1 a.m., Governor Wilson put in a formal request to President George Bush for federal troops, and by 3:30 a.m., 3,500 troops were on their way to Los Angeles for possible deployment.²⁷ In addition, after discussing the issue with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin Powell, Wilson had decided that if federal troops deployed, he would federalize the National Guard, which would remove the Guard from state control and put them instead under a federal chain of command. "If there were going to be federal troops involved," Wilson says, "it simply made sense from the standpoint of command and control that there be a single command." But Richard Andrews, formerly of OES, says it was more than that. "Wilson was so fed up with the information that he was getting, and the information that he wasn't getting, and the mixed signals, that he had basically lost confidence in the command structure of the Guard."

Putting the Guard to Work

Despite the devastation of the previous night, by Friday morning, May 1, many emergency personnel in Los Angeles began to feel a sense of hope. Due in part to the curfew and the gradually increasing presence of National Guard troops and law enforcement officers on the street, both looting and new incidents of arson had fallen off sharply after midnight. According to Battalion Commander Terrance Manning, after a thirty-six hour period that had demanded the largest commitment of resources in the history of the fire department, firefighters had begun to consider the arson situation largely under control.²⁸ "The first night was a wild ride," says Manning. "And the next 24 hours was a lot of fire activity, a lot of looting, but we felt that we were now prepared to respond to it in an appropriate fashion."

Many within the LAPD also felt the worst was over. "We had half the department out that second night, and we had what I felt was good blanket coverage," recalls Bayan Lewis. "We were making arrests, we were not allowing ourselves to be driven by the news media – which happened the first night – and people realized very quickly that if they were out on the street, they went to jail. By two in the morning, the streets were empty."²⁹ Lieutenant Dennis Beene of the Sheriff's Department offers a slightly different perspective. The looters and arsonists began to withdraw, he says, because "a lot of them were just tired."

The Guard roll-out hadn't made great strides overnight. As of 6:00 a.m., there were still only 1,555 Guard soldiers on the street, with another 2,743 waiting for missions, and more arriving in the armories. But by early afternoon, the LAPD and the Sheriff's Department finally began to deploy the Guard in large numbers. The LAPD, in particular, requested thousands of additional troops, staging many as an instantly available reserve force at the Sports Arena/Coliseum

²⁷ A decision on whether to actually use the troops would not be made until later that day.

²⁸ During that initial 36 hours, the dispatch center had created 6,529 emergency incidents, including fires and related violence, and 862 structures had been burned within the city.

²⁹ According to Lewis, there were some 10,000 riot-related arrests in the first 36 hours of the disturbance.

complex – toward the north edge of South Central by the University of Southern California. By 2:47 p.m., there were more than 3,000 Guard troops performing missions, with 2,300 available and waiting. Three hours later, another 1,385 were on their way to specific missions.³⁰

The sight of the uniformed soldiers, who finally began to appear in force the third day of the riots, had a significant impact, LAPD officers say. Gang members and looters generally took the presence of troops more seriously than that of regular law enforcement officers, despite questions over whether all soldiers had ammunition. “We needed that psychological, mental impact that the army is in the streets, and government is back in control,” Bayan Lewis says. “The Guard clearly gave us that.”

In addition, Lewis and other officers say, Guard soldiers distinguished themselves by being highly responsive to the needs of the police and the Sheriff’s Department, taking on almost all tasks asked of them. Typical Guard missions included managing traffic control points, patrolling shopping centers to prevent looting, riding along in police cars to provide extra law enforcement power, guarding emergency work crews, and protecting sensitive sites, such as utility buildings or fire departments. “I was very proud of them,” says former governor Wilson. “I thought they did an excellent job...notwithstanding my unhappiness with the command.”

Even as the situation on the streets began to improve, however, the planned mobilization of federal troops moved forward. “We are going to see to it that the people of this city are protected,” Governor Wilson declared at a 1:00 p.m. press conference. “The public safety is the paramount concern, the immediate concern, and however long it takes, however much it takes, we are going to see to it that it is achieved.” At 6:00 p.m., President Bush announced on television that the decision had been made to deploy federal troops into the streets of Los Angeles, and that the Guard would be federalized. In addition, the government had begun to send in more than 1,700 federal agents with special riot training from such agencies as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Border Patrol, and the Federal Marshals office. “The presence of the CHP and the Guard had had a very desirable effect of checking the concern that there was going to be total pandemonium and that there was no one in the streets to prevent it,” recounts Wilson. “The further word that federal troops were coming indicated that however much people had been free to raise hell and set things afire on the first night, that time was over.”

Reminiscent of the earlier delays in the LAPD and National Guard responses, however, federal troops did not appear on the streets of Los Angeles as quickly as either Mayor Bradley or Governor Wilson had expected. “There was a reluctance on the part of the military to come in,” Wilson says. “They don’t like the idea of being called in to be a substitute for the police department in a domestic setting. At least that is clearly the impression that I got at the time.”

³⁰ A full brigade of Guard troops from Northern California – ordered to head south around midnight the previous night – was also on its way, despite assertions by Major General Daniel Hernandez, commander of the 40th Infantry Division, that by the time they arrived, they would not be needed.

The Pentagon had appointed Major General Marvin Covault, commander of the US Army's 7th Infantry Division at Fort Ord, California, to be Joint Task Force Commander of the 2,023 Army and 1,508 US Marine troops assembling at staging areas south of Los Angeles during the day.³¹ In a conversation with Wilson late afternoon Friday, General Covault informed the governor that federal forces wouldn't be ready to deploy until the following day after all the soldiers had arrived and had had a chance to train. There was no need for federal troops to rush in without adequate preparation, Covault told Wilson, particularly since the crisis was no longer as acute, and there were still Guard troops who had not been given specific missions.³²

At 10 p.m., General Covault met with Gates and Block to discuss how federal troops would be deployed. The police chief and the sheriff were already dubious about the federal deployment, in part because they felt that the worst of the riots were over, and that National Guard troops were all they needed to restore order. The discussion with Covault, however, only worsened their fears. Gates and Block had hoped to use federal troops much as they had used the Guard, not only posting them in volatile areas, but also assigning them to specific law enforcement missions. Covault, however, had apparently concluded that the Guard had already restored law and order, and that federal troops—and the federalized National Guard—should only be used to maintain control, rather than to perform the sort of routine law enforcement duties that Guard troops had previously undertaken.

According to some observers, Covault's decision to limit the role of the troops was based on a mistaken application of the federal *Posse Comitatus* Act, legislation dating from the end of Reconstruction that was designed to keep military forces out of domestic police activities, and that prohibited soldiers from performing law enforcement duties. The act did not apply however, when a president called in troops to respond to a civil disturbance under federal statute, such as had occurred in Los Angeles. Others, though, insisted that Covault was fully aware he was not restricted by *Posse Comitatus*, but had decided that keeping the mission of troops narrow was both in line with Bush's executive order and was the appropriate use of federal forces. "It was not the military's mission to solve Los Angeles's crime problem, nor were we trained to do so," Covault later said in response to criticisms of the federal troop role.³³ Adds Brigadier General Edward Buckley, then a colonel and commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 7th Infantry Division, "We weren't going to try to do police work. We were there to provide stability, to provide a force

³¹ Army troops were members of the 7th Infantry Division at Fort Ord, mobile troops designed to respond quickly to urban warfare situations, while the Marines were a battalion from the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, based at Camp Pendleton, California.

³² Delk, p. 116. Although the LAPD had requested all available Guard troops by the time it got dark, many were simply posted at central locations such as the Hollywood Bowl and Dodger Stadium, and some units sent to the Coliseum waited more than 24 hours before receiving a mission.

³³ Ibid., p. 320.

presence to essentially take back control of the crisis.”³⁴ In any event, Gates and Block viewed the upcoming change in the Guard’s role with disappointment and alarm.

An Uneasy Collaboration

Emergency personnel pointed to Friday night as the turning point in the riots, but the third day and night of the disturbance were still violent and destructive. By Saturday morning, May 2, there had been 12 more deaths, and 1,172 more structural fires. Nevertheless, the tide had begun to turn. Things were finally running smoothly at the city’s Emergency Operations Center, according to Shirley Mattingly, coordinator of the city’s Emergency Operations Organization, and members of both the Emergency Operations Board and the Emergency Management Committee were meeting to coordinate agency responses. Emergency 9-1-1 calls on Friday had dropped to below the level of the first day of the riots, and by 11 a.m. Saturday, there were more than 6,000 Guard troops engaged, more than 1,000 waiting for deployment, and another 1,856 getting ready to deploy. With troops and Humvees on the streets and helicopters overhead, most law enforcement officials no longer felt South Central was out of control. While some buildings were still smoldering, volunteers in parts of the community had begun to rally to clean up the residue of rioting and looting. A few businesses in riot-torn areas even began to re-open.

Against this backdrop, the first federal troops—the Marine battalion—finally deployed Saturday afternoon to the Compton and Long Beach areas, and soon after, the contingent of 2,500 Army troops was stationed around Watts and nearby Huntington Park. According to General Edward Buckley, the Guard had been effective, but the federal soldiers still had work to do. “As an initial response force, they did a wonderful job, and they got there at the most critical time of the riot,” Buckley says. “But the crisis wasn’t over. The problem was we were still having incidents occur, and I think Governor Wilson wanted to end this as quickly as possible.”

But according to many observers, particularly within the LAPD and the Sheriff’s Department, the more structured command and control inherent in a federal military response—in particular, the rules governing mission tasking and troop strength—eliminated most of the flexibility and responsiveness that had characterized the initial Guard response, and immediately reduced the usefulness of military troops to local law enforcement. As Sheriff’s Lieutenant Sid Heal complains, “Just when we were getting to where we thought the Guard was really being effective, they federalized them.”³⁵

When the Guard was under state control, a Guard officer stationed at the county EOC had approved virtually all the requests that local law enforcement officials submitted, and Guard

³⁴ Edward Buckley interview with writer, April 5, 2000. Subsequent comments by Buckley are from the same interview.

³⁵ Sid Heal interview with writer, March 29, 2000.

troops had been able to move fluidly from one task to another. But the federal mission approval process was more convoluted. First, Joint Task Force representatives based at the county EOC had to prioritize incoming requests from the LAPD and the rest of the county. Once done, they submitted the requests to the task force headquarters at Los Alamitos for review by General Covault, the operations officer, and the Senior Civilian Representative of the Attorney General, representing the US Department of Justice.³⁶

The new review process was not only far more time consuming, often taking six to eight hours, most requests were refused. With the riots largely under control, many remaining tasks—such as police officer ride alongs, manning traffic control points, or providing area patrols—could easily be classified as law enforcement related, and were therefore judged inappropriate for federal troops and the federalized Guard. Indeed, under the new review process, the Guard only accepted about 20 percent of law enforcement requests. In addition, the Joint Task Force often insisted on detailed mission descriptions. If troops were to move to a new location nearby, they first needed approval for a mission change. “The first night the Guard deployed, I would turn to the battalion commander and say, ‘I need you to take troops to this location, we need to seal this, we need a barricade on this road, we need so and so,’ and they did it,” recalls Bayan Lewis, who had been named one of four district commanders overseeing riot control operations in the south central part of the city. “By the time it was federalized, I couldn’t do that any longer because the missions were lost.”

In addition, rather than sending out small squads of soldiers on demand, an approach that Guard Field Commander Delk had acknowledged as risky but effective, the Joint Task Force directed troops to deploy in platoon strength—or in groups of about 40 soldiers—under the command of a commissioned officer. According to General Buckley, those 40 soldiers might disperse over an area of a couple of blocks, but would still be close enough to respond to each other if a larger force was needed. While General Covault didn’t insist that all Guard missions immediately comply with that order, new missions were expected to follow the new protocol. While many local law enforcement officers saw the order as unnecessarily restrictive, most military personnel believed it was essential for the safety of soldiers and citizens alike that the troops report as a unit, as their training had prepared them to do.

One additional change, while less significant from the standpoint of the police, was particularly frustrating for Guard officers and troops, according to Delk. Instead of allowing troops latitude in deciding whether to have ammunition in their guns, and at what degree of readiness to keep their weapons, the Joint Task Force issued a new arming order prohibiting troops from having ammunition in their weapons without special approval from headquarters.³⁷ Although Joint Task Force officials told Delk that the order was intended as a guideline and need not be

³⁶ When the military was involved in a domestic civil disturbance, the lead agency was typically the Justice Department.

³⁷ The order again raised speculation about Guard troops being sent out without ammunition.

applied to all situations, that distinction was never made official. As a result, some units felt compelled to follow the order, other units ignored it, and others began sending out only those soldiers who volunteered for duty, since officers believed the order subjected soldiers to unnecessary and unacceptable risk. "What we had was selective indiscipline," Delk recalls, "and that's always bothersome to senior officers."

Finally, local law enforcement officials were having trouble accommodating the large and varied contingent of federal officers, numbering more than 1,700, that had been sent in as part of the federal response, many without vehicles. Police officers and sheriff's deputies who had been riding four to a car found themselves having to eject their own experienced personnel in order to include some of these federal officers. "I had Border Patrol and Bureau of Prisons with me Saturday night, and there was nothing happening—it was dead," recalls Bayan Lewis. "They had flown in with a laundry bag, that was all. It was wasted resources, but it was a federal effort to try to do something." He adds: "The place was absolutely dead, nothing happening, and all of a sudden we had all of these resources."

While the local, state, and federal collaboration was not always smooth, however, the assembled law enforcement presence was impressive. By Sunday, a force of 13,000 was deployed in and around Los Angeles, including some 7,000 Guard troops, the 3,500 federal troops, and an amalgam of officers from local, state, and federal agencies. "It's better to be too strong and to reduce the strength than to create a vacuum in which violence can take place and escalate," says Wilson. That night, there were only a few new fatalities, and the accumulated efforts of some 2,000 firefighters drawn in through the fire department's mutual aid system had finally extinguished most of the fires that had been burning in Los Angeles since the night of April 29.

The Effort to Disengage

The Los Angeles riots were considered officially over when Mayor Bradley lifted the curfew Monday evening, May 4, five days after the violence had begun. The following day, most federal agents were released, but civilian officials argued against letting go of the federal and National Guard troops. Bradley, in particular, wanted to make sure that Los Angeles had returned to normal before the soldiers departed, and had been visiting churches, civic groups, and other organizations, both to impart a sense of calm and to try to gauge the mood in South Central and other parts of the city. "This was a very traumatic event for the city, for Bradley, for everybody," says former OES Director Richard Andrews. "They didn't want to say it's all over and send these guys home, and bam, the whole thing erupts again."

Even Daryl Gates was arguing to keep the military presence in place, particularly at night, in order to maintain control and to provide additional backup so that officers could rest. In addition, there were widespread rumors that gangs would target police officers once the soldiers had departed. "Wilson said to be careful about any public statements regarding deployment,"

Andrews recounts. “We were to say we were going to continue keeping the troops there, we had no intention of withdrawing, and there should be no talk about downsizing”

General Covault, however, believed federal and Guard troops should leave as soon as possible. Although the rioting had stopped, gang and criminal activity in South Central and other areas of Los Angeles was still rampant, and National Guard and federal troops continued to find themselves in explosive situations. On Sunday night, for example, Guard troops had shot and killed a man, later identified as Victor Rivas, a former Salvadoran policeman, after he made two attempts to run down Guard soldiers with his car.³⁸ A second incident that same night had also alarmed officials. Police and Marines were responding to a disturbance in Compton, which turned out to be a domestic dispute, when two shotgun rounds were fired through the door. One of the police officers shouted, “Cover me,” meaning that the Marines should have their weapons ready to respond if necessary. But the Marines, understanding “cover me” to mean providing cover by using firepower, shot off what was later estimated to have been more than 200 rounds. Remarkably, neither the man who fired the original shots from inside, nor the woman and children who turned out to be in the apartment, were hit by the bullets.³⁹

Perhaps in response to the Rivas shooting, as well as in recognition of the problems that could result from using soldiers in non-riot incidents, the Joint Task Force had issued a new Operations Order at 7:00 Monday morning, declaring that troops would no longer patrol the streets during the day, and that the role of military forces was to be “one of less visible backup and reinforcement capabilities.” By Tuesday, Covault believed it was time for federal forces to go. “At this point,” Covault wrote in a report to Fort Ord, “the military is providing 10,000 targets for the type of activity going on in the streets (i.e. pure lawlessness versus civil disturbance). The potential downside to continue in the law enforcement mode is enormous (not trained and ready to do so.)”⁴⁰ Over the next few days, Covault began canceling military missions—often without consulting with local law enforcement agencies—disengaging federal troops, and letting the Guard take their place. “We were under a lot of pressure from Covault,” Andrews recalls. “All that week he wanted to pull out.”

On Saturday, May 9, federal troops finally began to depart, and the National Guard reverted to state status.⁴¹ With defederalization, the Guard once again accepted a broader range of assignments, including controlling traffic and accompanying police officers and deputies on patrols. Just five days later, though, the National Guard also began to disengage, although Delk

³⁸ Rivas was to be the single Guard-inflicted fatality of the riots.

³⁹ Delk, p. 221.

⁴⁰ Delk, p. 235.

⁴¹ In fact, Covault and his troops began to leave before an official announcement had been made. Richard Andrews, alerted to the soldiers’ imminent departure, quickly scheduled a press conference at which Governor Wilson could thank the federal forces for their role and bid them farewell. “We didn’t want the impression that these guys were totally independent agents,” Andrews recalls.

says the transition wasn't easy. "Nobody wanted to let us go," he says. "When a mother stands there with tears coming down her face, saying, 'It's the first time I've ever felt safe going to the market,' and others were coming out with pies to our soldiers, saying, 'Please stay, please stay,' boy, that grabs at the heart strings." On Wednesday, May 27, the last soldiers headed home.

The Aftermath

The riots had left Los Angeles in disarray. An area of 105 square miles within the city had been affected, and South Central and other areas of the city and county had been devastated, with some 1,148 structures damaged or destroyed. Even before federal troops left the area, Mayor Bradley had created a non-profit task force, dubbed Rebuild L.A., whose mission it would be to reconstruct the damaged inner city of Los Angeles.

As the city launched into the reconstruction effort, though, it soon became clear that the riots had altered not just the physical landscape of the city, but the political landscape, as well. On May 11, the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners initiated an investigation of the flawed LAPD response, and Governor Wilson ordered an informal report assessing the performance of the state National Guard. The following month, Los Angeles voters passed Amendment F, which Police Chief Gates had strongly opposed.⁴² Under the amendment, future police chiefs could serve only two five-year terms, as earlier recommended by the Christopher Commission, and officers who broke rules, such as those prohibiting excessive force, could more easily be disciplined. On June 26, Gates finally stepped down, making way for his successor, former Philadelphia Police Commissioner Willie L. Williams. General Thrasher, adjutant general of the National Guard, left in what Wilson describes as a "mutual decision." In September, meanwhile, Mayor Bradley announced he would not seek a sixth term in 1993, a decision that some observers linked to the fallout from the riots.

In the aftermath of the disturbance, the city's Emergency Operations Organization and the region's emergency response organizations—from the LAPD, to the Sheriff's Department, to the National Guard—also began to retool their civil disturbance training and preparedness, and vowed not to be caught unawares again. But despite such good intentions, keeping law enforcement and other emergency personnel properly prepared for an event as unexpected, unpredictable, and unlikely as a riot would prove a tremendous challenge, warns Bayan Lewis, especially since the tendency of emergency planners was to focus on the last emergency they had experienced. When he thinks about riot preparedness, Lewis says, he imagines himself about 20 years in the future, sitting on the porch of a Nevada rest home. "Somebody will open the *Los Angeles Times* for me," he says, "and it will say, 'Major Riot 27 Years Later: LAPD Unprepared.'"

⁴² Defeating the amendment was the focus of the fundraiser that Gates had attended as the riots were first breaking out.

Exhibit A
Key Players in the 1992 Los Angeles Riots

Los Angeles Police Department

Daryl Gates – Chief of the LAPD
Robert Vernon – Assistant Chief and director of the Office of Operations
Bayan Lewis – Commander of the LAPD's Uniformed Services Group
Michael Hillmann – Lieutenant and interim commander of the Metropolitan Division

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Sherman Block – Sheriff
Dennis Beene – Lieutenant and team leader at the county Emergency Operations Center
Sid Heal – Lieutenant

Los Angeles City Fire Department

Donald Manning – Chief
Terrance Manning – Battalion commander
Donald Anthony – Deputy Chief and commander of the Bureau of Fire Suppression and Rescue

City of Los Angeles

Tom Bradley – Mayor
Warren Christopher – Los Angeles attorney and chairman of the so-called Christopher Commission, the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department

California Office of Emergency Services

Richard Andrews – Director

State of California

Pete Wilson – Governor

California National Guard

Robert Thrasher – Major General and Adjutant General of the California National Guard
James Delk – Brigadier General and the National Guard's military field commander for the riots

California Highway Patrol

Maurice Hannigan – Commissioner
Edward Gomez – Chief and commander of the CHP's Southern Division

United States Army

Marvin Covault – Major General, commander of the 7th Infantry Division, and Joint Task Force commander
Edward Buckley – Colonel and commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 7th Infantry Division

Exhibit B
The 1992 Los Angeles Riots:
Chronology of Events

1992

Wednesday, April 29

9:00 p.m.

Governor Pete Wilson authorizes the deployment of the California National Guard to assist in controlling the Los Angeles riots.

9:15 p.m.

Major General Robert Thrasher, Adjutant General of the California National Guard, orders the mobilization of 2,000 National Guard troops.

10:13 p.m.

During a conference call of top officials, including Mayor Tom Bradley and Governor Wilson, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Chief Daryl Gates and Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block both express doubt over the need for National Guard troops, but welcome the assistance of the California Highway Patrol. Gates turns down Block's offer of 500 sheriff's deputies.

Thursday, April 30

12:05 a.m.

Governor Wilson declares a state of emergency for Los Angeles County.

12:15 a.m.

Mayor Bradley declares a dusk-to-dawn curfew for South Central Los Angeles.

4:00 a.m.

Most of the 2,000 National Guard troops called up by the governor have reported to Los Angeles armories, where they await supplies and ammunition.

6:00 a.m.

Police Chief Gates arrives at the city's Emergency Operations Center after a night spent viewing the riot areas.

10:00 a.m.

Mayor Bradley informs the City Council that National Guard troops will be on the streets within two hours.

10:07 a.m.

A state Office of Emergency Services liaison officer tells the National Guard Emergency Operations Center in Sacramento that Guard troops probably won't need to deploy until 4:00 p.m.

General Thrasher of the National Guard tells Sheriff Block that the 2,000 Guard troops in the armories are ready to deploy.

11:00 a.m.

Governor Wilson approves the mobilization of 2,000 additional Guard soldiers.

Fire Department Chief Donald Manning convenes a meeting at which the California Highway Patrol offers to provide firefighter escorts.

11:30 a.m.

In a conference call, Governor Wilson urges Chief Gates and Sheriff Block to deploy Guard troops.

12:30 p.m.

Mayor Bradley phones Governor Wilson to complain about the delayed deployment of National Guard soldiers.

1:20 p.m.

General Thrasher learns from the Sheriff's Department that the National Guard troops are still waiting for supplies in order to deploy.

1:30 p.m.

Brigadier General James Delk, the National Guard's military field commander, informs the Sheriff's Department that two Guard platoons with borrowed ammunition are ready to deploy.

1:50 p.m.

A helicopter carrying ammunition and supplies for National Guard troops lands at Los Alamitos, about six hours later than many officials had expected.

2:35 p.m.

The two waiting Guard platoons finally deploy with Sheriff's Department escorts.

Law enforcement officials agree that the National Guard will be responsible for most Sheriff's Department and LAPD missions, other than escort duty and perimeter control, which are being handled primarily by the California Highway Patrol. Missions are to be coordinated out of the Sheriff's Emergency Operations Center.

4:00 p.m.

Mayor Bradley extends the dusk-to-dawn curfew to all of Los Angeles.

4:30 p.m.

Warren Christopher suggests to the mayor's office the possibility of calling in federal troops.

6:30 p.m.

The California Highway Patrol provides some 300 firefighter escorts, allowing the Fire Department to operate more effectively in riot areas.

7:30 p.m.

Mayor Bradley asks Warren Christopher to initiate a request for federal troops.

11:56 p.m.

The LAPD and the Sheriff's Department ask for an additional 2,000 National Guard troops, although hundreds of soldiers were still waiting in armories for missions.

Friday, May 1

1 a.m.

Governor Wilson submits a formal request to President George Bush for federal troops.

7:30 a.m.

After 36 hours, the Los Angeles Fire Department declares the worst of the fires in the riot areas under control.

2:47 p.m.

More than 3,000 National Guard troops are on the streets performing missions.

6:00 p.m.

President Bush announces the planned deployment of federal troops and the federalization of the National Guard.

10:00 p.m.

Joint Task Force Commander Major General Marvin Covault tells Chief Gates and Sheriff Block that the mission of federal troops and the National Guard will be to help maintain control, not to perform law enforcement duties.

Saturday, May 2

11:00 a.m.

More than 6,000 National Guard troops are on the streets.

Afternoon

Federal troops deploy to Compton, Long Beach, Watts, and Huntington Park.

Sunday, May 3

Morning

A combined force of more than 13,000 National Guard troops, federal soldiers, and federal officers are deployed in and around Los Angeles.

Monday, May 4

7:00 a.m.

General Covault ends day patrols on the part of state and federal troops, relegating them to a "less visible" backup role.

5:15 p.m.

Mayor Bradley lifts the dusk-to-dawn curfew, signaling the official end of the riots.

Tuesday, May 5 to Friday, May 8

General Covault continues the disengagement of state and federal troops.

Saturday, May 9

Federal troops depart and the federalization of the National Guard ends.

Wednesday, May 13

The first National Guard troops begin to withdraw.

Wednesday, May 27

The last National Guard soldiers depart Los Angeles.

Exhibit C⁴³
Rules of Engagement

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT
(29 April - 1 May 1992)

I understand that I may be deployed to perform law enforcement support missions including crowd control, traffic control, perimeter security, protection of public safety employees such as firefighters, area security or roving patrols. I understand the following rules on the use of deadly and non-deadly force:

NON-DEADLY FORCE

1. Non-deadly force involves the use of physical contact, restraint, baton, M16A1/2 with bayonet or chemicals such as tear gas or MACE.
2. Non-deadly force will always be the minimum necessary to protect yourself, a team member, or a law enforcement officer or citizen from serious bodily injury.
3. Non-deadly force should only be used at the discretion of a superior officer or noncommissioned officer, a law enforcement officer, or in emergency situations.

USE OF DEADLY FORCE

1. Deadly force refers to the use of any type of physical force in a manner that could reasonably be expected to result in death whether or not death is the intent.
2. The use of deadly force is authorized only where all three of the following circumstances are present:
 - a. All other means have been exhausted or are not readily available.

⁴³ Source: James D. Delk, *Fires & Furies: The Los Angeles Riots of 1992* (Palm Springs, CA: ETC Publications, 1995), pp. 341-2.

Exhibit C
Rules of Engagement (cont.)

b. The risk of death or serious bodily harm to innocent persons is not significantly increased by its use.

c. The purpose of its use is one or more of the following:

(1) Self-defense to avoid death or serious bodily harm (threat of harm is not restricted to firearms, but may include assault with bricks, pipes or other heavy missiles, incendiary and explosive devices, or any other material which could cause death or serious bodily harm).

(2) Prevention of a crime which involves a substantial risk of death or serious bodily harm.

(3) Defense of others where there is substantial risk of death or serious bodily harm.

(4) Detention or prevention of the escape of persons against whom the use of deadly force is authorized in subparagraphs (1), (2) and (3) above.

CIVIL DISTURBANCE TRAINING

I acknowledge that I have received basic civil disturbance training prior to my actual deployment in support of law enforcement.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE USE OF DEADLY FORCE.

Signed/date