



Traffic Direction

METL Training Material

Virginia Defense Force

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Traffic Direction

Traffic direction is one of the most dangerous duties a Virginia Defense Force soldier can perform. By stepping out into the roadway, in the middle of moving vehicles, we place ourselves in the way of 3000 pound missiles guided by individuals who often have hundreds of other things going on in their lives besides the duty to control the path of their vehicle. When we step out and place ourselves in that environment, we must make sure that we do so with the utmost skill, knowledge, focus on the task, and legal authority. Without such attention to all of these issues, we can create a medical as well as legal nightmare for ourselves and others.

Legal Authority

Virginia Defense Force soldiers must have a legal basis for stepping into the street and directing traffic. Without such legal authority, we place ourselves outside the law, and could be arrested for interfering with traffic.

In the event that we are not authorized to engage in traffic direction, and should we become involved in a situation where someone is injured due to our negligence, the VDF itself would become liable for any damages, and not be covered under the Commonwealth's insurance umbrella. While that might be bad enough, should we become injured or be involved in a situation where someone else was injured, we could be held personally liable for damages and injuries. We would likely not be able to recover damages inflicted upon us, if in fact, we were acting outside our legal authority.

In times of disaster, with such declaration by the Governor, traffic duty would be directed by official documentation. That legal authority giving Virginia Defense Force personnel duties in the street directing traffic would be granted, for the most part, with the same traffic directing authority as the State Police.

Where Virginia Defense Force soldiers need to be particularly careful is in working local events in non-State Active Duty (SAD) status. Those events are not covered by disaster declarations granting authority. Virginia Code section 46.2-1310 does allow a local police chief or sheriff to ***“deputize persons over the age of 18 years of age, for the limited purpose of directing traffic in accordance with 46.2-1309 during periods of heavy traffic or congestion. Such persons shall first receive training as the chief of police or sheriff determines necessary to fully acquaint such persons with techniques of traffic control. THEY SHALL NOT HAVE ARREST POWERS.”*** (Emphasis added.)

Further, ***“Any person who is deputized as provided in the forgoing provisions of this section, shall at all times while engaged in traffic control wear a distinctive uniform, safety vest, or white reflectorized belt, which crosses both chest and back above the waist.”***

Our presence in the street must be authorized by some legal authority. Without such authority, we have no business directing traffic in the street. Many local events have used Virginia Defense Force soldiers for assistance in parking venues such as open fields, and parking lots. While they are not what most consider the streets as we normally associate with 46.2-1309 and 46.2-1310, they are open to the public during these events with which we assist, and we should make sure we use all procedures as outlined in the Code of Virginia, especially 46.2-1309 below.

Virginia Code section 46-2-1309 designates how law enforcement officers and uniformed school crossing guards may direct traffic by signals. It sets out in the code that:

- 1. To stop traffic by hand- Stand with shoulders parallel to moving traffic. Raise arms forty-five degrees above shoulder with hand extended, palm towards moving traffic to be stopped.***
- 2. To move traffic by hand- Stand with shoulders parallel to traffic to be moved. Extend right arm and hand full length at height of shoulders towards such traffic, fingers extended and joined, palm down. Bring hand sharply in direction traffic is to move. Repeat movement with left arm and hand to start traffic from opposite direction.***
- 3. To stop and start traffic by whistle- One blast, moving traffic to stop; two blasts, traffic in opposite direction to move.***
- 4. Emergency stop of traffic by whistle- Three or more, short blasts, all traffic shall immediately clear the intersection and stop.***

Equipment

The Virginia Code sets out some requirements for directing traffic- vests, white belts, and whistles. The white crossed belts are probably an oversight in the Virginia law. While military, school crossing guards, and even student safety patrols used such belts years ago, Federal law now requires much more in the way of a reflectorized safety vests for all personnel working in or around the roadway.

Vest

Regulations require that personnel directing traffic shall wear an ANSI II rated vest. The ANSI II specification ensures that there are a required number of inches of brightly colored and reflectorized material in the vest, thus affording us with the best possible visibility by the motoring public. Old ANSI I or small jogger style vests, with limited surface area should be discarded and replaced with ANSI II vests. There are ANSI II vests made with tear away hook and loop fasteners that allow for a vest to be torn away should it become snagged or entangled in a passing vehicle. There are numerous color configurations and reflectorized material patterns on the market as well. As long as they are ANSI II rated or better, and worn properly, you are conforming with 46-2-1309 and federal regulations.

Many Virginia Defense Force soldiers are deployed to the field or streets with load bearing vests (LBV) or equipment (LBE) with all of their needed rain gear, first aid kits, and required necessities. When working traffic control, the traffic vest should not be worn under the LBV or LBE. To do so takes away from the amount of visible and reflectorized material that could be seen by the motoring public. To wear something, even a belt over the top of the vest would lower its rating, and place the soldier out of compliance with Federal regulations, providing for a possible defense should a driver claim she/he did not see the soldier directing traffic. Of course, during cold or rainy weather, the traffic vest must be worn over the field jacket, poncho, or parka. **It must be the outer most garment worn.** If the LBE or LBV needs to be taken off to accommodate this outermost wear, so be it. We must make every effort to ensure that drivers see and hear us as we direct their movements.

Whistle

There is nothing magic about a whistle, and for the most part, in this day and age when vehicles have air conditioning and CD players, most drivers will not even hear our required whistle blasts. BUT, use the whistle we must, because it is required by Virginia Code.

Most soldiers will find that a plastic referee type whistle attached to a breakaway lanyard will work best. Metal whistles have the tendency to sometimes freeze to your lips or tongue in extremely cold weather. The whistle must be capable of providing a sharp loud blast. Whistle work sometimes takes a bit of practice to get the different distinct number of blasts to come out clearly. Many folks new to directing traffic have found that practicing before a mirror, coordinating hand and arm movements with the whistle blasts, has helped with overcoming the awkwardness of the process.

Motorists will stop in the middle of the intersection and ask for directions, while both of our hands are holding traffic. Talking with a whistle in our mouth is sometimes difficult, and we won't want to drop the whistle. The whistle should be attached to a breakaway lanyard to keep from dropping it in a puddle, or having it damaged by a vehicle running over it. Some soldiers will run the lanyard through a button hole on the uniform, but it should not be placed around the neck unless there is a breakaway feature on the lanyard. A lanyard snagged by a passing motor vehicle can be hazardous even when it rips out the button hole, but one wrapped around our neck can be life changing.

Flashlight with Traffic Cone

Not all traffic direction is going to take place during the hours of daylight. Once the sun begins to fade, a flashlight with a traffic cone should be deployed. There are any number of configurations of both the flashlight and the cones. There are even traffic direction wands that offer strobe and blinking effects. The key here is to use the light device to enhance our visibility. Don't forget fresh and extra batteries and spare bulbs. It seems too, that many of the batteries sold today corrode more frequently. We may be well served to store the batteries in a couple of

layers of plastic bags in our pouches, rather than in the flashlight itself. Once these batteries corrode, it often times permanently damages the flashlight.

Flares/Fusees

Flares or fusees are sometimes used to enhance the visibility of personnel working traffic control. They are usually used during the hours of darkness and especially if there is no ambient lighting such as street, parking, or store lighting. During post disaster traffic direction when all the power is out, would be a typical time to deploy flares to give traffic control points more visibility. They are sometimes used during the daytime as well, to enhance notice of the traffic control point.

Flares should be used with caution. Flares use combustible materials that must be lighted using a striker that usually is part of the self-contained cap. Caution must be exercised when striking the flare with the cap. The end that is to be activated should be pointed away, and held away from the body. As the flare begins to burn, it produces sparks, extreme heat, and molten dripping material. All of these effects can cause severe burns. If activated during heavy rain, the falling water can hit the flare flame, and cause popping of hot molten material that can burn holes in footwear. Hold well away from your face and body.

Many flares have caps or anti rolling devices that prevent the flare from rolling. A flare that rolls into grass, trash, or other debris will create an additional problem at the traffic control point. Ensure that the flare is placed so that it will not roll. Use the attached anti roll device or place a couple of rocks or pile of gravel beside it to prevent the roll.

If there is a smell of natural gas in the area, it would be wise not to use flares. In the vicinity of a vehicle crash, there may be leaking gasoline or other flammable fluids. If such are detected, flares should not be used.

In addition to the fire hazard, flares put off noxious odor or fumes. Care should be taken when setting up a pattern of flares. In some instances, personnel may set up a ring of flares around the soldier directing traffic. While establishing a focal point for drivers, it may place the soldier in a position to breathe in fumes that may activate asthma or other respiratory ailments. We need to avoid being such a location. Extra breaks should be scheduled for soldiers that for some reason are needed to work in such a flare pattern. Even when flares are spread out, the smoke and fumes are often carried toward the TCP.

Once the traffic assignment is completed, if flares have been deployed, the flare will need to be extinguished, especially if the traffic control point is demobilized and personnel intend to depart the area. Care should be taken when putting out the flare. If enough of the flare is still unburned, so that it can be picked up from the non-burning end, it can be picked up, lightly tapping the burning end on the pavement, causing the unburned material inside to fall out. As the material falls out, the flame will begin to go out. Once all flames are out, the flare can be left in the street.

It is still hot and should not be placed in a trash container, thrown in a ditch, or placed in a vehicle.

Most flares have a burn time of between 15-30 minutes. If the traffic post is still manned but not active, and time allows, the flare could be left in place to burn out. It must not be left unattended.

Traffic Control Planning

Traffic control is more than the physical aspect of directing people where to go, it is also thinking and planning. When we are assigned to control traffic at some location, we begin to collect information on that location. What will be going on there? Will it be a parking area for spectators, vendors, or permanent residents? Are there parking passes or credentials to check? Are we just pointing people in a general direction or are we directing them into a particular spot. Are there special lanes or access for emergency vehicles or do we need to be ready to create such a lane. Is our TCP a major route for traffic, or an adjacent route that allows local residents to “escape” the event traffic? What are the parking regulations in and around our TCP? Who do we call for back up if needed? When we enter the intersection, which street is the major route and which is of a more minor use? Are there pedestrians that will need to be directed as well as motor vehicle traffic? Where do we fit into the overall scheme of the traffic control plan?

Traffic Control Point Size Up

When we arrive at the traffic control point (TCP) we need to do a size up of our area of operation. What are likely to be our “issues”? How are we going to handle them? If we are working a large four lane highway, our duties will be different than if we are handling a single T intersection. We will need more personnel and will likely have more traffic volume. We will likely fatigue more quickly on a busy complicated intersection.

Traffic at some intersections will normally be controlled by stop signs, yield signs, or the right of way rules in law. Some are controlled by traffic signals. Only in extreme cases should we ever enter the street at intersections where the traffic signals are still working. VDF soldiers attempting to direct traffic with or against the normal cycling of the signals will no doubt cause confusion. Upon approaching an intersection with working traffic signals, we need to call for public works or the police to place the lights on flash prior to entering the intersection.

Once we do a size up, we begin to prepare to enter the intersection or TCP. All of our equipment-vest, whistle, traffic cone and light, are readied and put into proper service.

Entering the Street

Remember that safety is the whole reason that we are assigned to a TCP. If we enter the street and become a casualty, we have failed at our job, and now someone else will need to straighten out the mess that we created. Always enter the street with caution. Even if there is an on-going

emergency already occurring in the street, we need to ensure that we don't enter too hastily and make it worse.

For the most part, that emergency will not already exist, and we can take methodical approach to entering. We need to stand on the side of the road or corner and consider how we will take control of the intersection. We observe the traffic and watch for a safe gap in traffic. Many times when motorists see a uniformed, traffic vested person on the corner, they will begin to slow down with anticipation of our entering to take control. We must however remember that there are those who run yellow lights to avoid being caught by the red. Those types of folks will speed up when they see us to avoid having to wait. Use caution.

We may see a slower moving vehicle that has created a gap for our entry. Take advantage of that natural gap. What we don't want to do is just step right out in the lane of traffic without any warning. At the very least, someone will be surprised, slam on brakes and be really perturbed. At the most, we would have caused a rear end collision and more work for ourselves.

If no safe gap exists for our entry, we will have to create one. While standing on the side of the road or curb, we look at the closest oncoming vehicle on our side of the road, and while continuing to stand on the side of the road, we hold up our left hand as to notify the driver to stop the vehicle. We do this in a place of safety from the side of the road. We do not pick the vehicle that is already at a point of not being able to stop, but one that is perhaps a car back. We may have to wave the closest vehicle on past so as not to create a rear end collision. We need to look at the drivers that we direct. Make eye contact and then direct them in a fashion that clearly lets them know what we want them to do. We will point to the driver that we want to stop, getting her/his attention, and then display the stop signal.

Once we have created our own gap by getting one lane to stop, we begin to enter the street and work our way out into the roadway. We begin to turn our attention to the next lane. It may be traffic going in the same direction as the first lane we stopped on a multi-lane highway, or it may be the far side lane going in the opposite direction. As we enter the street, much of the traffic, if the drivers are paying attention, will begin to slow and stop. BUT, remember, some drivers are not always paying attention; some are conducting illegal activities such as texting; and some may be fatigued or intoxicated. Create that gap, move slowly, and methodically deeper into the traffic control point. There is no rush. It must be done safely, with our own, as well as the rest of the public's safety in mind.

After stopping all travel lanes, we can now begin our operation as we have planned. We should know which street will be given the most attention, or is carrying the most traffic. With a heavily traveled intersection, we should have plan or sequence that will govern our rotation of travel lanes. We must not forget, that we may have pedestrians that need to be controlled as well.

If at some point, and after a long tiring day in the street, we miss a lane of traffic in the rotation, and the horns begin to blow, it's no major deal. What we must not show is confusion or uncertainty. It may look like we made a mistake, but outwardly, we are still in control.

Confidence

Once we take control of the intersection we must continue to show confidence, stay calm, and act within our plan. Horns will blow, the public may yell, and suggest impossible things, but we are placed at the TCP to maintain control and safety. Confidence can be shown in our approach to the task. An upright stance, clear concise hand movements, clear blasts on the whistle all depict confidence. We may be rattled inside by a vehicle that just ran our stop signal, but we maintain our composure. Our stance and movements not only show that we are in control, it shows the public in a clear and concise way what they must do.

Hand and Arm Movements

The Virginia Code 46.2-1309 again gives us guidance in how we are to use our hand and arm movements to direct traffic. *“fingers extended and joined”* depicts authority and control. Hand movements should be crisp and done with authority. Hand movements with bent wrists, and waving fingers show unsureness and lack of confidence. Stopping movements with palms out and up, with arms at shoulder height, show confidence. When we wave vehicles through, we don't use just our fingers or fancy dance moves like we see on TV commercials, we use the concise knife edge movements indicative a military soldier. Pointing moves to indicate selection of a vehicle to move or turn is also done with precision.

Hand/Flashlight Movement

During the times of low light or darkness when we use a flashlight, we will have to change our movements just a bit to accommodate the use of the flashlight, but the deliberate precision must prevail. When using a flashlight and cone to stop a vehicle, the flashlight can be held horizontally in the stopping hand, and moved up and down to create a moving light. The opposite hand can be used show the stop signal if not already being used to hold traffic in the opposite direction, or the hand holding the flashlight can be held at a steady level to signal the stop. The moving flashlight catches the attention, and a steady hold signals the stop.

When using the flashlight to signal movement, such as straight through or turning, the flashlight is used as an extension of the hand. It is used with the same precise direction and movement across the chest as would the arm and hand without the flashlight.

Placement in the Intersection

We need to see and be seen when we are in the intersection. We need to see oncoming traffic, pedestrians attempting to cross the road, and anything else that may impact our operation. When we step out into the intersection we do so with caution and so that drivers can see our approach.

We do so as well so that we can see the traffic that is closest to us, and for the moment the most dangerous. As we move father out into the roadway, we have to position ourselves so that we can see as much of the traffic environment as we can.

We should never get the idea that once we get into the intersection we can then just stay there in one place. Depending on the size of the intersection, we may have to move to avoid turning vehicles, or move to see and be visible to multiple lanes of traffic. In a four lane highway intersection that we may have to work by ourselves, we would have to stop the first two lanes, make sure the two stopped lanes understand that they need to remain stopped, move to a position where the next two lanes can see us, stop them, and then move again where we can activate the next movement. Of course, direction of traffic in this type of intersection by a single individual, is not the best situation, it may happen from time to time, and extra caution must be exercised.

Night Operations

Hours of darkness bring forth even more caution for the TCP operator. Not only do drivers have more difficulty in seeing the soldier directing traffic, it presents visual difficulty for the soldier as well. We can be blinded by oncoming headlights. Spotlights from outside the TCP on store properties or signs can create shadows and hot spots that affect our ability to see clearly. Bright light and smoke from flares can create blind spots for the soldier and drivers. We need to stand and move so that we can see and be seen.

We need allow for additional time and stopping distances for drivers during the hours of darkness. What we might take for granted in the daylight hours becomes lost at night. We can use flares, and flashlights with traffic cones during the darkness, but they are no guarantee that drivers will react the same as during daylight. In some cases, the event organizers may provide generator light packages to illuminate the TCP. Those lights may have to be repositioned after the hours of darkness if they are pointed in directions that blind the oncoming traffic or create shadows that make seeing the TCP more difficult.

Inclement Weather

Rain, fog, snow, cold, or hot weather all present challenges for the TCP operator. Rain, fog and snow present vision challenges. Falling weather on the windshields cause problems for drivers. Pedestrians are likely to be more impatient during such inclement times. And falling weather will create distractions for the soldier directing traffic as well. Rain dripping down our shirt collars, or running in our eyes will distract and hamper operations.

Any moisture on the pavement will make stopping more difficult, especially if done abruptly. We must take extra precautions to ensure that drivers are given adequate time to see our signals, and that we place ourselves in positions in the roadway that provide an avenue of escape if a driver does not stop in time.

Clear, sunny, hot and cold days also present some of the same distraction for both traffic and the soldier. Impatient pedestrians and drivers that are hot or cold, will not react in the same way that folks react when they are comfortable. We will also be affected by cold or heat. Fatigue may set in more quickly. Anxiousness over being extremely cold, hypothermia or heat exhaustion will cause us to lose our focus on the task. We must guard against any lack of focus, and ensure that adequate relief is present.

Two or More Person TCP

On large more complicated intersections, more than one person may be needed to control the intersection safely. On those types of intersections, we need to place ourselves in the intersection in such a manner so as to allow for a balanced and logical approach. In a 4-way, 4-lane, north-south, east-west highway configuration, the two person traffic control team could position themselves as one, controlling the southbound and west bound lanes, and the other, controlling the eastbound and north bound lanes. Their positions would be diagonally across the intersection from one another. This approach would allow for each soldier to be closest to and in more direct sight of the lanes that each is controlling. In whatever configuration a team finds that works for them, someone needs to “call the shots.”

One person needs to be the lead person in designating when traffic is to flow and in which direction it will flow. Without a lead, both soldiers may decide that it’s time for their traffic to flow. Where that particularly gets complicated and dangerous is when turning movements are allowed. Traffic must be coordinated. Verbal commands should always be used between the traffic direction team. Hand movements between VDF soldiers could be viewed and followed by pedestrians or drivers and be counterproductive.

Pedestrians

In addition to motor vehicular traffic at the TCP, in most community events there are likely to be many pedestrians. Pedestrians will come from many different directions. Some will try to cross the street correctly at the street corners near our TCP, and others will attempt to cross illegally far enough from us that we will not be able to control them. We must however be aware of their presence and the hazards that they present to our safe direction of traffic. A large group of pedestrians walking or crossing the street 30 yards down range from us will create a tie up in our intersection as traffic slows or stops to avoid them. We can stop traffic flow at our intersection, to prevent clogging up the road until the pedestrians clear, and allow traffic to flow in another direction. Many pedestrians will wait patiently on the corner if told that we will get them across soon. Many will not, and will take the road in their own hands. We can use hand commands for stopping pedestrians, but need to use verbal commands to release them for crossing.

Many of our community support missions involve event venues that serve alcoholic beverages. While most vendors ensure that they do not violate Virginia law by serving intoxicated patrons, some event goers arrive or leave intoxicated. They may not hear or want to hear and follow our

directions whether driving or walking. We must be ready for their out of the ordinary actions and reactions by these folks, especially when they are standing on the corner waiting to cross the street. They may stumble and fall into our intersection, or cross when not directed.

Handicapped individuals may take longer to cross the street than other folks. Their assistance devices may or may not work well along curbs and streets without ramps. They may have to travel a short distance away from the corner or crossing in order to get back up onto a side walk because of their particular handicap. We need to be ready to hold traffic for additional time or accommodate the additional steps necessary to get them across safely.

Young children often dart out from the side of the street when they drop something or see some shiny object that catches their eye. When crossing, they often run ahead of parents or take short cuts.

All traffic needs to be stopped when we are crossing pedestrians. This allows for the often erratic behavior described above. It ensures that even with erratic behavior, there is no moving traffic.

Grid Locking Intersections

In large events, there are often too many cars for too little concrete. Even with the best traffic control in the vicinity of the event, traffic eventually gets to a location where the traffic is being controlled by the regular traffic control devices such as stop signs and lights. In some cases this will have a domino effect all the way back to our intersection.

What we need to avoid is the grid locking of our intersection. For example, if we have an east/west, north/south intersection and we allow our northbound traffic to stop in our intersection because the north bound lane is stopped 2 miles up the road, now we can't even run east and west bound traffic because we have cars stopped blocking the east/west lanes. Not only do we limit our ability to run the east/west traffic, we limit our ability to get an emergency vehicle into the area if needed. To ensure that the intersection is not grid locked, we need to look for natural breaks in the traffic flow to stop clear of the intersection. Watching and anticipating the backup will allow us to stop the flow in the backed up direction before it stops. We may also have to divert a couple of cars in order to clear the grid lock. We will need to work with our adjoining TCPs to give major run time to the road when they are sending vehicles in our direction, and running cross traffic when the other TCPs are running theirs.

Safety and Awareness

Traffic Direction is more than waving our arms and allowing or not allowing vehicles and pedestrians to go in some designated direction. Traffic direction is access control. We allow vehicles and or pedestrians access to streets or segments of our area of operation. In addition to the physical aspects of properly stopping and directing vehicle operations and /or pedestrian movements, using the correct hand signals, whistle blasts, wearing the proper traffic vest, a TCP

operator must maintain situational awareness of everything going on around the TCP. The operator must conduct operations in a safe and effective manner, and avoid distractions that will cloud a clear vision of the assigned tasks.

Our three general orders have strong applicability to our duties and functions at a TCP:

1. I will guard everything within the limits of my TCP and quit my post only when properly relieved.
2. I will obey my special orders and perform all my duties in a professional military manner.
3. I will report violations of my special orders, emergencies, and anything not in my instructions to the commander of the relief.

Situational Awareness

“Situational awareness” is being aware of everything that is happening around us. Not only must we as TCP operators be aware of the traffic-vehicular and pedestrian- right in front of us, we must also look beyond what is going on right in front of us. It is often the traffic or pedestrians a block away that will dictate how long the traffic must run at the TCP, or in what direction it must run. A large group of pedestrians a block away, moving in our direction will eventually create extra work and hazardous conditions at our TCP as they arrive in mass and spill into our intersection. The alert TCP operator will recognize the impending arrival and will prepare to stop vehicular traffic allowing him or her to expedite the dispersion of that pedestrian traffic. By looking beyond the immediate vicinity of the TCP, the operator recognizes the looming arrival and prepares to deal with it methodically, rather than having to react at the last minute.

In a similar fashion the alert TCP operator listens for approaching sirens and monitors his or her radio for traffic that provides situational awareness about emergency vehicles that may be entering the area. Emergency vehicles will have to be expedited through the post, and we will have to be aware of such vehicles to be able to clear the intersection in a timely fashion.

One of the first things we should do after being assigned as a TCP operator is to orient ourselves in the overall operation of things so that we can be aware of how we may be affected by breaking situations throughout the event. When we hear a situation breaking on the radio, our awareness of where we are, allows us to determine our needed actions. We should understand our basic location and in what directions the traffic at our intersection is running-north, south, east, and west. If we need to evacuate, in what direction do we need to travel for safety. If an evacuation is directed, where are our designated rally points? We should look for any available cover that may be needed for severe weather events, or other needs. We cannot wait until something happens to “hunt” for a place to go. We need to be proactive before the rotating wind generating device is struck with pre-consumed food products. We need to understand that our TCP fits into the overall traffic flow pattern of the event, and how our traffic pattern at our TCP supports that plan.

Radio Monitoring

By listening to our radio and maintaining awareness of what is going on around us, we have a better understanding of how we fit into the overall operation of the event. We may be isolated and miles from the central event, but rest assured, each TCP fits into the actual event in a crucial way. One rogue TCP operator who goes outside his or her special orders on her or his own volition, and decides to alter the designated special orders without clearing through the chain of command, just because at the time it seemed like the right thing to do, can cause catastrophic failure of the whole traffic plan. Often what is being reported on the radio miles away can have significant impact on our TCP. Ex. A traffic crash occurring several blocks away, closing an intersection. The TCP operator may have to divert traffic through another available route or risk grid lock of the whole system. The other TCP may gain approval through command to divert the traffic to our TCP thus increasing congestion in our area. Monitoring the radio helps us anticipate potential problems and plan for implementing changes. We may be ordered to change operations at our TCP. We may be ordered to open a street, move a barricade, or redirect traffic because of an emergency situation, but we do not change the operations or abandon our post without prior notification by command.

Weather

Weather conditions are also important in our awareness requirements while working a TCP. Radio reports of approaching bad weather events or even our own observations of increasing winds, approaching clouds, temperature drops, thunder and lightning, etc. alerts us to a situation that is likely to impact us at our TCP. Not only do we need to prepare our own gear (remember that our ANSI II traffic vest must be worn as the outer most garment- over the poncho or rain jacket), and or to take shelter, we certainly need to prepare for fast exiting spectators as they run for cars and shelter. Those spectators often run haphazardly and without regard for moving traffic or our directions. They many times drape trash bags and other objects over their heads and faces eliminating good vision of hazards. They will converge on our TCP in mass and will need to be cleared of the intersection quickly and efficiently. When an alert TCP operator learns of approaching weather or crowds, he or she can anticipate the arrival, stop traffic, and allow the “dumping” of the mass quickly, and then return the vehicular traffic back to its normal flow.

Crowds

Another area of concern for the TCP operator is the crowd and the crowd behind the crowd. Spectators along a parade route or other cordoned off area can create hazardous conditions for the TCP operator. At many events, even the most compliant of event goers can get out of hand. Many want front row seats and will start out on the curb where they are supposed to stay, but as the crowd grows, they begin to swell into the restricted area. Feet, chairs, blankets, and bodies creep ever so steadily into the street creating a constant requirement for the TCP operator to remind them to move back. Crowd encroachment into the restricted areas creates dangers for all

event goers- pedestrian, vehicle drivers, and TCP operators. A friendly reminder to the crowds of the danger, and directions as to how they are to comply, should suffice. Lack of attention on our part will only allow “squatters” to remain and become even more recalcitrant when they are finally addressed. If we can address the issues before the spectators “set up camp”, we will probably be more successful in gaining compliance. Our presence at such an event is largely successful when we gain voluntary compliance with our professional uniformed presence. We carry no arrest powers, even if we are sworn in to direct traffic. The swearing in gives us powers to direct traffic in accordance with Virginia law. It gives us the authority to be in the street for traffic direction duties- nothing else. If a driver or pedestrian fails to obey our directions, we must call through our radio net, to get civilian law enforcement personnel to address the situation. We basically are the eyes and ears of the civilian law enforcement personnel in reporting conditions that need their attention.

On occasion, there are those who attend events such as those we are called on to support, who have consumed substances that turn every day, normal, compliant citizens into instant, non-compliant, non-thinking, angry or violent individuals. We must also be ready for that bizarre behavior while working our TCP. Some behavior may be the result of severe intoxication. Some may be the result of a mean and angry mindset. An alert TCP operator will pay attention to all activities within the area to monitor the mindset and behavior of the crowd, and alert law enforcement in a timely manner perhaps before the situation gets out hand. Ex. While open display of alcoholic beverages may be acceptable in some venues, and notification of law enforcement may not be necessary for normal operation, a TCP operator who observes an angry and intoxicated tone in a segment of the crowd, will want to notify law enforcement to handle the situation, before violence or an abusive situation erupts. Most event goers may enjoy a beverage or two, and engage each other in a boisterous and celebratory manner, but when the tone turns angry, that goes beyond the scope of acceptable behavior. The TCP operator is on the front line for observing these changes from celebratory to unacceptable.

The Crowd Behind the Crowd

Sometimes the crowd behind the crowd is more of a problem than those encroaching on the front lines of the event. Those on the front line are usually there for the event. Many times those behind the crowd have other agendas. Criminals sometimes mingle with the crowd and slip away with cameras, wallets, cell phones and other valuables. Assaults take place as groups will surround a victim. A lone intoxicated person becomes a sitting duck for victimization. Keeping an eye out for things that seem out of place will alert the TCP operator to potential problems that need to be reported to law enforcement. Ex. The TCP operator noticed a fellow on the corner collecting money for a veterans’ group. A hundred yards away, a group of teenagers was watching the fellow intently. Every couple of minutes a teen would ride his bicycle by, peer into the collection bucket, and return to the group. They would discuss the recon and then another would ride by. After noticing the events, the TCP operator alerted the solicitor of the possible danger, and alerted law enforcement.

When watching the crowd, the “anomalies” or things that “seem out of place” or just “don’t look right” should scream out to us. Sure we have our hands full with directing traffic, listening to the radio, and watching the crowd, but we must somehow take it all in and process it in a timely fashion to remain alert to potential situations. When we see everyone in the crowd watching the parade, and one individual sets down a backpack or cooler, and runs away, that should at least gain our attention. The news is full of stories, after the fact, about how something just didn’t seem right. The cab driver in Brussels, reported after the bombing, that two males were wearing one glove each, pushing heavier than ordinary luggage, and resisted assistance with it. We must force ourselves to keep our heads on a swivel and pay attention to EVERYTHING around us. It takes focus. We will become tired, bored, and complacent. We are primarily responsible for directing traffic, but we must also be vigilant and aware of our surroundings, for our own safety, and to act as the front line eyes and ears of law enforcement supporting the public safety.

Reporting

We do not search people or belongings. We do not focus on people just because of their race, color, creed, gender, or political motivations. What we can do is focus on observing behavior and how that behavior is the same or different from that which is taking place in the crowd at large. A group of folks carrying protest signs may be perfectly legal and standing peacefully along a parade route. While their behavior may be a bit different from the rest of the spectator behavior, what might get our attention is a group of loud angry anti-protestors quickly surrounding them. Both situations likely should be reported to law enforcement for follow up.

A dark skinned male wearing a long overcoat on a 90 degree day may be the object of reporting, not because of his skin color, but because of the unusual wearing of the coat on such a hot day. There may be mental illness, health, or terrorism concerns.

Once we see conditions, behaviors, or concerns that we feel are reportable, we need to ensure that the information we relay to our command or law enforcement is complete. We need to report the behavior that caught our attention. While most of us have those “gut feelings” (and we should trust those feelings) we need to provide to law enforcement with articulable reasons and descriptions of the behaviors that support those gut feelings. We also need to describe the individuals involved with as many details as we can- height, weight, race, gender, hair color, facial hair, clothing descriptions, physical build, physical disabilities. We may need to describe equipment and vehicles they were using, direction of travel, or what was said. We must look beyond just stereotypes and making assumptions based solely on appearance, but we must be able to provide those details with our descriptions of their suspicious or out of the ordinary behaviors.

To report these situations, we will many times need to use our assigned handheld radio. HT’s, walkie-talkies, or handhelds come in so many sizes and configurations that it would be impossible to enter into a discussion here on how to properly set up one. There are multi band

VHF/UHF radios, multi-channel radios, and even cheap GMRS/FRS radios. Suffice it to say, before we venture out to a TCP with a radio, we need to make sure that we know how to turn the radio on; how to change the bands and or channels if necessary; how to change the battery; and how to adjust the volume and squelch. All of those issues need to be part of a pre deployment briefing which would cover the assigned band and frequency as well. We need to have those channel or frequency designations written down in case we accidentally change a channel while trying to adjust the volume in the middle of an intersection. We need to be comfortable with the equipment we are using before we enter the street. We will not have time to “explore” our radio while we are standing in the rain, on a dark street, with traffic all around us, trying to report an emergency. We cannot wait until we are in the street to learn proper radio usage protocol either. Some skills need to be learned and practiced prior to deployment, and really much before even thinking about working an assignment.

Radio Use

Sometimes a radio will come equipped with an external microphone and speaker that will allow us to keep the radio on our belt and put the speaker/mic on our shoulder close to our ear to facilitate better monitoring of the radio traffic and to ease access to the mic. Sometimes there is no external speaker/mic and we will have to find a good accessible location for the radio. Perhaps that location will be on a loop of our traffic vest or in a pocket of a jacket. The last thing we want is to have to do is struggle to get to the radio. We will have our hands full with directing traffic and have to remember that our radio use will be secondary to performing that duty.

Our radios are used to support our stated mission. While operating our TCP, we may need to call for law enforcement to take care of a problem; call EMS or fire services for a medical or emergency call; seek clarification for our special orders; or to pass on important event related information to our command or another TCP operator. It should not be used for frivolous or non-essential traffic. Non-essential radio traffic clouds our abilities to focus on our tasks, drains radio batteries, and presents an un-professional image.

Before we reach for the radio, we MUST ensure that we have safely stopped traffic, or that we have an established a flow that will allow us to use the radio without jeopardizing the public safety.

We must not become so pre occupied with using the radio that we lose sight of all the other duties and responsibilities before us.

Using a HT is simple enough:

1. Make sure the radio is turned on, and the correct band and or channel for the assignment is selected. The radio should remain in that condition unless there is some need for the radio to be off.

Many a TCP operator has deployed to the TCP only to have the sector supervisor come by later and say, “we have been trying to reach you by radio, is it turned on?”

2. Before transmitting, give some thought to what you want to say. Be brief but clear in what you want to say.

3. Before pressing the push to talk (PTT) button, monitor radio traffic so as not to interrupt other transmissions.

4. When transmitting and receiving, the antenna should be held vertically. All radios on the same net should be used with antennas held in a like manner to maximize antenna polarization.

5. Hold the radio 6-8 inches from your mouth. Press the PTT button. Pause momentarily before speaking, and begin by identifying your intended net control and giving your assigned call sign. Speak slowly and clearly.

6. Release the PTT and listen for a response from net control or intended party.

7. Use pro-words, phonetic alphabet, and proper protocol when appropriate.

8. When finished with the transmission, sign off of the communication with the proper terminology.

Review VDF communications SOP’s for proper radio usage and procedures.

Manning a TCP should not be our first time on the radio or learning the proper procedures.

In-attentional Blindness

Daniel J. Simmons, at the University of Illinois, Visual Cognition Lab defines In-attentional blindness as “the failure to notice a fully-visible but unexpected object because attention was engaged on another task, event, or object.” Our TCP duties require our constant full time attention, which can be difficult in even the best of conditions. We must ensure that we are as distraction free as we can.

We need to maintain perspective of our primary function of directing traffic. We must maintain awareness of traffic and its proper function. If we must get on the radio to report a situation, or to respond to a radio call, we MUST ensure that our traffic control is stable- either we have it under absolute control, or we stop it completely! We must not get distracted by listening or talking on the radio. We use the radio as another tool for completing our TCP duties safely and efficiently.

While monitoring radio traffic and occasionally transmitting on it, is distracting enough, trying to listen to more than one radio is inviting disaster. Occasionally several TCP operators have been known to bring an extra radio (usually a GMRS or FRS or scanner) to an operation. They used the extra radio for “talk arounds” with other soldiers in the same area or listen to other radio frequencies. Most of the traffic on these “extra” radios is just “social stuff” and distracts TCP operators from the normal required radio traffic and TCP duties. Most operations prohibit these “extra” radios as both distracting and counter-productive to sharing of important information with the rest of the net. Radio traffic on the net should be kept to the minimum required to accomplish the mission. Extra traffic on other radios does not allow for shared information that may be important for the overall mission.

Other distractions that could lead to In-attentional blindness are texting, cellphones, eating, drinking, conversations, or focusing too much on any one person or event. Ex. In a pre-deployment briefing for a presidential motorcade assignment, TCP operators were advised to refrain from facing or looking at the motorcade. TCP operators were to focus on the crowd and traffic. Watching the motorcade or catching a glimpse of the POTUS was a distraction and could have impacted the safety and security of the assignment.

It is easy to become caught up and distracted by a parade or event “performances”.

Summary

Traffic control is an important aspect of Virginia Defense Force capabilities. It places us as individuals in an extremely visible position to represent well the agency, or to cause criticism. In addition it is a dangerous operation. To engage in traffic direction we must be prepared psychologically, physically, legally, and with all skill and equipment required. To engage in it without proper training and preparation invites disaster.

Proper authority is authorized by Virginia law. It sets the standards by which we must work. It sets out the proper form and equipment with which we must work. And, through it our training and preparation are guided.