

“They Roll When We Do”

by Staff Sgt. Raymond Drumsta, 138th MPAD, New York National Guard

NEW YORK CITY--New York Army National Guardsmen are providing the extra eyes and ears needed in this time of crisis, police sources say.

From Brooklyn Bridge to Grand Central Station, New York Army National Guardsmen, clad in camouflage and patrol caps, are on station—working with New York City Police to boost security at the Big Apple’s major transit hubs.

Called presence patrolling by the military, the Metro Transit Authority (MTA) police, whose beat is subways, tunnels and bridges, see the soldiers as an intelligence asset.

“They help us decipher whether calls or complaints are serious or not,” said Police Officer Edgar Burgos.

The recent crisis has increased the amount of what Burgos called “crazy complaints”—thereby increasing the need for guardsmen to help filter them.

In the break room at the MTA Police District 5 Station, the police officers are a relaxed crowd, joking over coffee about Jerry Springer playing on the break room TV.

But they are attuned to two-way radio traffic—conversing while keeping an ear bent to incoming calls. Talk sometimes pauses as they listen to the radio, other times it stops altogether as police and soldiers charge out the door—as was the case yesterday when a 10-85 call came in.

The code, along with 10-13, are police radio jargon for “officer needs assistance” and “request additional unit”, respectively—“drop everything” calls, Burgos said. The 10-85 call turned out to be just a fight, but it when came over the radio, everyone—police and soldiers—went running to the scene.

“They roll when we do,” Burgos said of the soldiers.

Burgos said the soldiers provide extra sets of eyes and ears—an additional measure of security needed in subways, where crowds can make ordinary police calls dangerous.

“Suspects or potential suspects can hide in crowds,” Burgos said. “They know who you are, but you don’t know who they are, so people in uniforms can become targets....and a crowd can panic and stampede, and that’s dangerous.”

Burgos said soldiers can help police arriving on the scene tell “who’s who”—identifying suspects or victims and giving situation reports, thus saving police time and helping to get dangerous situations under control.

Burgos said he hopes the soldiers will be issued radios so they can better work with the police. They would need to learn police codes in addition to 10-85 and 10-13, he added.



From station to street, New York Army National Guardsmen Pfc. Jon Dornbush, 230th Signal Battalion, left, and Staff Sgt. Edward Hickman, 230th Signal Battalion, right, are the extra eyes and ears for New York City Metro Transit Authority police, both inside and outside Grand Central Station.

The soldiers need weapons, said New York City Resident Luis Bergara.

“I think the National Guard [here] should be armed,” Bergara said.

Armed or not, Bergara said the soldiers have increased his sense of security.

“There’s not enough police around,” he said. “There’s not enough forces on the street with everything going on. Now, with the National Guard, we have more forces patrolling the street.”

In the majestic white marble passages of Grand Central Station, the guardsmen are posted with police officers. Like the police, the soldiers seem to have a born crowd rapport, as commuters stop and ask for directions, or more often than not, thank them for being there.

“I’ve been checking the [guard] posts,” said 1st Sgt. Carl Dornbush, C Company, 230th Signal Battalion, “and at every one of them, someone has come up and said something like, ‘glad to see you’ or glad you’re here’.”

The soldiers’ main contribution in this time of crisis seems to be reassurance, Dornbush added, a sentiment echoed by commuter Karen Lutzker.

“I feel much better that the National Guard is here,” said Lutzker, who hadn’t taken the subway since September 11.

“If I hadn’t seen the National Guard at Grand Central Station, I might not have taken the subway,” she said.

Lutzker said she would like a sustained National Guard presence in New York City.

“I don’t feel safe anymore,” she said.

Staff Sgt. Edward Hickman, 230th Signal Battalion, said working at Grand Central Station is not a difficult job.

“We’re hoping nothing will happen,” he said.

Posted on the street outside Grand Central Station, Hickman said he sometimes feels more like greeter than a guard, because of the warm response the commuters and pedestrians give him.

“It gives me a greater sense of purpose,” he said, “because we are reassuring them. We’re their eyes and ears.”