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**Civics 101**

**Episode 119: THE NATIONAL GUARD**

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:08] What do you know about the National Guard.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:10] I know the National Guard has offices in our city in Concord and they're all across the country. What do you know about the National Guard.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:17] I know why I remember commercials that goes something like at the Army National Guard. You can

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:24] You can what though. I don't know what they do.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:26] I'm not sure what they do. I'm Hannah McCarthy

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:30] And I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:31] And this is Civics 101

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:32] And today we're talking about the Army National Guard. I'm curious what they do and how they train and how they train on weekends.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:39] I'm pretty sure they're called in often for natural disasters like evacuating people for hurricanes or things like that

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:45] Do they like have an air siren that's like hollering the National Guard.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:47] I think I know that it's the kind of thing that can help you pay for school.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:52] I'm also curious as to who authorizes the use. I know the president usually calls in the National Guard.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:57] Yes.

**Nick Capodice:** A lright let's go

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:01:03] My name is Miranda Summers Lowe. I'm a military history curator for the Smithsonian's National Museum of American history and I am also a member of the D.C. Army National Guard. National Guard history is my favorite and no one ever asks.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:22] Ahh, this is perfect

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:01:24] I was so excited when this came down the pipeline.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:26] Oh good we're so excited too. So I guess we can just let's start there go into brass tacks here what is the National Guard

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:01:35] The National Guard is this really unique organization. Most countries worldwide have a military and they have some kind of reserve component. But we are the only country that has this military organization that can be called out by the state and kind of has this state character and state control. And I think there's just there's something very American about it. When our country was founded there were a lot of feelings that if you had this large standing army it would be really expensive and it wouldn't be responsive to communities or representative of communities so that decision that a bunch of people made in the 17th and 18th century like it still survives and it's turned into this pretty incredible organization where people from all over the country kind of get together and they volunteer to do this amazing thing with their time usually on top of whatever other job that they're doing as their full time employment.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:41] What's a reservist

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:02:43] A reservist would be anyone in any of the branches of the service who is not full time. So you call that active duty. So those are people where their job every day is to put the uniform on and show up to their place of duty and do that. And the reservists would be someone who only does that when specifically ordered to.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:05] And so these are the weekends that you have to do or they just to keep you fresh.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:03:11] Sure. So the weekends that you do are to gain that training and then also to get to know the unit that you're in and build that camaraderie and that teamwork.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:22] Does every state have its own National Guard. Or is it just one large organization.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:03:27] Every state has its own National Guard and probably the biggest thing that makes the National Guard different than other reserve components would be the state control under state identity. So there are actually 54 National Guards one for each state and then the District of Columbia Puerto Rico the Virgin Islands

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:46] Guam?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:03:46] Guam, there we go. Thank you.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:48] So can you describe for us a little bit what that whole process is like how you sign up and then once you're in it what you're doing.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:03:57] You sign up most regular recruiting stations can do it. You know you decide which branch of the service you want to be. And in my case I knew I wanted to join the army. And there are specific National Guard recruiters. There are also some multi component recruiters so you talked to one recruiter and they can help figure out if the best fit for you is to go active duty or Army Reserve or National Guard. You go to the same military entrance processing station that anyone joining the military would, you go through a physical one they look at your your test scores you took a test called the ASVAB.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:34] I like that name, ASFAB.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:04:35] It does sound good. I know a lot of people take that in high school. You know I hadn't. So when I went in I had to

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:44] Is it a written test or a physical test?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:04:46] It's a written test like a physical with a doctor. But other than that you don't get a physical test until you get to basic training

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:54] So you don't have to prove that you're physically fit enough to actually sign up for the National Guard.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:05:00] No I think most recruiters will try to get you to do that on your own

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:07] And then. So once you're in it. What does that look like. What do you do. Once in the National Guard.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:05:14] So everybody who joins the National Guard starts out by going to the initial entry training for their branch of service and their jobs so for me in the army that was Army basic training and that's the same no matter which component you go to. And then you go into your specialty training. My first job was in supply. So I went to the unit supply school.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:37] We definitely want to hear more about what it's like to be in the National Guard. But I am so curious as to why we have. Is it like the army that stays in the U.S? Is that why it was founded?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:05:49] If you go back to why the National Guard was founded when our country was you know starting to take root Well you know we were building the colonies. There was only a National Guard or militias if you look through really like the first hundred years or so if you look at the roots of the National Guard you have these militias in places like Virginia and Puerto Rico and Florida, long before you have a federalized government. The National Guard says that our founding date is in 1636 even though you know we had how the regular army their founding date is in 1775. So there's this whole heritage of these kind of locally controlled voluntary armies long before we have this kind of larger standing army that stays on active duty.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:06:39] So Hannah and I both in the context of what is the National Guard do we both the first thing we said was calling out the National Guard like it's this thing that happens. So can you tell us who does that and what happens when you're called out.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:06:56] So there are three basic ways. The National Guard can be used. Two of them are state directed. So Title 10 is federalizing National Guard troops. That happens to send them overseas. When you think of you know hearing about maybe a National Guard unit going to Afghanistan

**Nick Capodice:** [00:07:14] And that's when that's extra people are needed. Like we we need more people in a certain place. So we're going to go to this branch which is usually reserved for America and take them to other places.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:07:26] Correct. OK. The other two statuses so state active duty and Title 32. That's when you're under state control. And that is typically used for things like disaster relief.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:39] So that would be like if a town were to be flooded they might send in the National Guard to evacuate people or with the National Guard show up after the you know the evacuation had happened.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:07:52] This is where you know it is kind of confusing. There's a lot going on with all these different statuses. But in the case of a flood like you mentioned the governor of that state might decide to call out their National Guard on state active duty which is entirely within his or her control for two or three days to help with evacuations and filling sandbags and setting up medical care facilities and all these other things. Then after that flood hits it may become a like a federal emergency management area. And at that point the federal government may decide to keep those same people on federal duty and so they would use the Title 32 status for that

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:37] The president can call in the National Guard. The governor can call in the National Guard. Is that the only two positions that can make use of the like the call out.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:08:45] Right.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:46] And when you when the National Guard gets called out you're a reservist. How'd you get contacted like what's what happens when the call is made. Did there used to be pagers or did someone just call everybody?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:08:58] I do remember the days of phone trees. You know I remember once being in college. And that's how far from just for this practice to see how fast they could get a hold of me like the department secretary knocking on the door of my classroom pulling me out.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:09:15] Whoa that's I mean I guess they really got you on this one. Yeah she's in biology class. There's some pretty great automatic system so like I don't know if you've seen this in other areas but where you get those like emergency alert messages on your cell phone. Oh yeah we're kind of like an auto. Right. So within units they can set that up so you get like a robo call a text message and an e-mail all at the same time.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:09:41] I'm wondering about when that buzzer goes off. You know is there like a little thrill of like Whoa something's happening and we're going to jump in and go do it. Like is it.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:09:50] I think everyone has their own personal experience. My time in the National Guard I've always really enjoyed those kinds of disaster response missions. I think that was one of the things that motivated me to go. On the other hand I know for a lot of people you know especially like a serious disaster the responsibility to go report for your National Guard duty means you are probably leaving your family and friends and your home in a rather precarious state. So you're walking away from you know say the tree that is blocking your driveway to go report in and try to help your community and that's a hard situation to be in.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:29] Once you're called out to do some relief work for example, do you stay there until the sort of mission is done. Like you sleep in tents. Is there barracks set up for you folks?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:10:39] Sure it all depends on the situation. I live in Washington D.C. So most of the time we can stay in the D.C. Armory and you'll kind of like set up in kind of like a big gym. In some of these kind of larger scale disaster relief events it becomes kind of routine where people can either get back and forth to their own homes or like I spoke with someone who during Hurricane Katrina they were billeted or like they were living in a fraternity house at Tulane University. That was the arrangement that set up.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:15] So when it comes to the history of the National Guard there's all these moments that are just sort of in my mind the National Guard was called out to do X. And I think the one that's most prevalent for me is Kent State. But I know very little about what actually happened at that time. Is it something you could tell me about?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:11:32] Sure. There's a law passed in 1878 called the Posse Comitatus Act and that basically

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:40] That's a great name.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:11:41] It's amazing. So I go I actually just looked that up and yes there is a Latin root to Posse Comitatus it basically means to like bring your strength together.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:52] Like you get a posse.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:11:55] Exactly. That's where it comes from. And so within the Posse Comitatus Act it basically says that federal troops cannot be used for law enforcement. However State troops can be used for law enforcement.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:12:10] There it is.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:12:12] Right. So during the 1960s the National Guard was used quite a bit for civil unrest. You see a lot of National Guard call ups around 1968 at the death of Dr. Martin Luther King specifically here in D.C. and Vietnam protests so the Kent State event, that is an instance of state National Guard the Ohio National Guard being called out in kind of a law enforcement function supporting local law enforcement during a protest. That protest turned violent and is one of those moments where I think the National Guard as an organization kind of stepped back afterwards and looked at our relationship with the communities that we serve. Now the National Guard is still used in that role. You know as recently as this year we have had National Guard troops at the women's march or at the March for our lives.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:13:11] And most of the time people appreciate having the National Guard there we tend to be something a presence there where you know you can kind of feel like there's more security there. But you know these are people from your own community.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:26] So aside from the Posse Comitatus Act what, what has happened that has changed the way that the National Guard can operate.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:13:36] There's always kind of been this evolution of the National Guard before between how much state control you have and how much federal control you have. Until about 1903 state National Guards were funded either through the state or personally, so specifically officers would come in and they'd pay dues. They would raise the regiment. You might have vastly different uniforms or equipment from the unit one town over or especially across states. So the constitution kind of outlines as far as you know having a militia that the state can train it. However it wants to go and select their own officers but it has to be to a certain standard. And so that all really changes in 1903 with the Dick Act. It was named after Major General Charles Dick who was a congressman and a member of the Ohio National Guard. That's kind of the first time that this tradeoff happens where the federal government comes in and says you know we want more oversight of what is happening in the National Guard and then in exchange they pay for more. It isn't until 1903 that the federal government starts paying for some equipment. And at that point you got five paid training days a year.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:14:56] How many now.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:14:58] So now the typical National Guard commitment is 38 days per year.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:02] We were both talking earlier about Little Rock in after the desegregation laws were passed. Can you tell us about that?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:15:09] That's another kind of interesting moment in National Guard history. National Guard troops were used all over the country as part of desegregation efforts. Now in Little Rock it happened to be this rare occasion where the governor of that state had actually called up their national guard to keep the African-American students from going to school. It is very rare to be able to use federal troops for law enforcement. And if you look at the pictures that is the case where then the president called in 100 First Airborne to escort those students in. So if you look at the pictures from Little Rock there's state National Guard troops and federal troops there

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:51] Oh wow. Title 10 is invoked can a governor say no Mr. President my National Guard will not be doing that?

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:15:58] In no way am I like any kind of constitutional scholar. But essentially the president does get to call out the National Guard and that does outweigh the governor's objection. But that is a question that is constantly in flux. Probably one of the more recent moments where that came up was during Hurricane Katrina. Know we had hundreds of thousands of National Guard soldiers mobilized in Iraq and Afghanistan. So there was kind of a big shortage of National Guard troops for hurricane relief. At that point some of these governors started stepping up and particularly with things like aviation resources like helicopters which are hugely important to disaster relief saying like you know we want more of a discussion when our helicopters leave the state especially in states that are you know say like in the hurricane belt.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:16:56] Is there anything that you want America to know about the National Guard.

**Miranda Summers Lowe:** [00:17:00] I think one of the things I find really interesting about the National Guard is how diverse it is over time particularly since 1970 and you know we became a country that doesn't use a draft or conscription anymore. We tend to have these communities that are very military friendly and everyone joins the military and largely those communities are in the Midwest and the south. But then we have the National Guard and that is an organization that by design is spread out equally across all the states and it brings in all kinds of interesting people and because it's not a full time commitment, you bring in all of these people who have other things going on in their life there are teachers, there are doctors, there are lawyers, there are police officers and they kind of come together to do this thing to serve their communities one weekend a month. But you get this huge array of like life experience.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:18:01] That was Miranda Summers Lowe, military historian for the Smithsonian at the National Museum of American history and a member of the Army National Guard.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:09] This episode of Civics 101 was produced by Ben Henry. Our executive producer is Erika Janik and our staff includes Taylor Quimby Jimmy Gutierrez and Justine Paradis. Music in this episode from Jahzzar.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:18:21] And if you have any civics questions that you'd like Hannah and I to get to the bottom of just drop us a line at civics101podcast.org.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:28] Civics 101 is a production of New Hampshire Public Radio.