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Military Police Operations in Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07

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Abstract

At the time of our deployment to Iraq, I had 20 years of service in the Military Police Corps. My experience consisted of 18 years as a noncommissioned officer in positions ranging from team leader to first sergeant. I have five operational deployments and one previous combat deployment to Somalia in 1993. While assigned to 519th MP Battalion, Fort Polk, LA, I deployed to Kosovo in support of peace keeping operations as a company operations NCO and as a First Sergeant I deployed my company to Taszar, Hungary in support of Training Task Force Warrior. After my tenure as a First Sergeant I performed duties as the Battalion S3 Operations Sergeant Major for approximately nine months and Battalion Command Sergeant Major for approximately three. Prior to our deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom 05-07, I assumed duties as the Intelligence noncommissioned officer for Task Force 519th MP.

Since September 11, 2001, the 519th MP Battalion was fully engaged in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Immediately following the attacks of 911 our subordinate units deployed in support of Operation "Noble Eagle", providing increased force protection at the Pentagon and other installations in the Virginia area. The Battalion Headquarters subsequently deployed in support of Operation "Enduring Freedom" (OEF) 1, Kandahar, Afghanistan, January 2002 through July 2002 and Operation "Iraqi Freedom" (OIF) 1, Baghdad, Iraq, March 2003 through March 2004.

Early in 2004, just after the 519th MP battalion returned from block leave, we were notified of our return to Iraq in October 2005. The staff immediately went to work developing milestones and a long range training calendar. Once our calendar was set, FORSCOM tasked the 519th MP battalion to assist with mobilization and training of two newly formed National Guard MP Companies from New Mexico and Arizona in support of OIF 04-06. Planning quickly overwhelmed our abilities, we partnered with the installation Mobilization Assistance Team (MAT) and developed a training support plan. The MAT team developed a training package for individual training tasks, individual and crew served weapons ranges and a convoy live fire exercise. We developed the Military Police specific collective training package focusing on a series of high pay-off team and squad level tasks. Our challenge was to train our subordinate unit leaders simultaneously with these two companies because we were also sourced to deploy and our training time was also limited. We formed a team to develop a training plan, this team was made up primarily of noncommissioned officers; they developed team certification tasks and squad level lane training events. The certification plan culminated with a three day platoon level EXEVAL for both companies.

In early March 2005, the battalion finalized our pre-deployment training requirements and began initial dialogue with our higher headquarters, the 49th MP Brigade, California National Guard. We received our mission and had a good idea what our task organization would look like, at least initially. We would deploy with two organic companies from Fort Polk and command and control an additional five companies; four National Guard Field Artillery Batteries and one additional active duty combat support MP Company.

As the S2 NCOIC, I had the responsibility to train an entirely new section while supporting and participating in pre-deployment training. Our training consisted of multiple convoy live fire exercises, squad/section MOUT lane training operations, a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation with the 172nd Stryker Brigade, V Corps MRX in Germany, and the JRTC Leader Training Program. One of our major challenges was maintaining the personal security program; ensuring all security clearances were current or at least initiated. We processed all ISOPREP forms and updated the security clearance access rosters (SCAR) for our deploying units. I conducted direct coordination with our deployed S2 counter-parts to determine equipment requirements both stay-behind and our deployed equipment list. We also determined our map requirements and placed them on order.

In early September 2005, we were in our final preparation phase for deployment when hurricane Rita devastated Central Louisiana and Fort Polk. The 519th activated its emergency operations center and began to support hurricane relief operations for Fort Polk and the surrounding community. We provided additional law enforcement support on post as well as clean-up efforts on-post and in the local community. Our participation in relief operations was curtailed due to our deployment in early October.

HHD, 519th Military Police battalion deployed from Ft Polk, on October 9, 2005, and arrived at Camp Beuhring, Kuwait, on October 10, 2005. While at Camp Beuhring, we conducted additional deployment training for 12 days focusing on ranges, close quarters combat, and convoy live fire exercises. HHD, 519th MP battalion moved into Iraq in mid October and conducted our right seat left seat ride with TF 720th MP. After 14 days of intensive training and area orientation, we conducted the transition of

authority ceremony and assumed responsibility for seven police districts in East Baghdad in early November 2005.

As the S2 NCOIC, I had the initial challenge of training my section on all the enemy groups operating in and around Baghdad. It was an extremely steep learning curve, however I was fortunate to have great NCOs and soldiers, who were eager to learn. Not only was it essential that we learn the enemy, but we also had to learn reporting requirements and preparation of a number of different intelligence reports that we published every day. Because our area of operation encompassed five maneuver battalion areas, we had the unique opportunity to tap into their intelligence gathering capabilities.

Immediately following our transition of authority, we focused on our participation in the December National Election. We nested our efforts with the maneuver units we supported. Our companies deployed TACs at each of the seven police district headquarters in east Baghdad; this allowed us to reduce our response times and provide more responsive support to our Iraqi Police counter-parts. The Iraqi police and Iraqi Army units did a great job and the elections went off with out any major incidents.

The Military Police task organization in Iraq consisted of two MP Brigades, 49th MP Brigade, California National Guard and 43rd MP Brigade, Rhode Island National Guard. Each Brigade C2'd three to five battalions. MP operations were split into two broad categories, confinement and police partnership. Our task force task organization consisted of seven companies, three active duty Combat Support Military Police companies and four National Guard Field Artillery Batteries. Our task force provided police partnership in east Baghdad, Tier One Protective Services Detail in the Green Zone, and force protection on FOB Rustamiyah.

Task force 519th MP's deployment was phased over three months with our last unit arriving in theater in early January. In January 2006, Corps directed a change in Iraqi Police Service support. We transitioned from Police Partnership to Police transition teams (PTT) and under-went an expansion of our area of operation, picking up three additional cities south of Baghdad.

TF 519th MP broke new ground in the way police training and mentorship was conducted in Iraq. Support was now broken down into a three tier system: provincial, district and station level. We reconfigured our subordinate units to support two district headquarters and between 7-10 individual police stations. Our companies were now responsible for supporting police stations spread out over multiple maneuver battle spaces. Our TF tactical operation center (TOC) worked extremely hard inculcating the importance of calling battle space and coordinating closely with friendly elements on the ground in order to mutually support each other for QRF and MEDEVAC response. We accomplished this by providing our movement control matrixes to the maneuver unit's TOCs at least 12 hours prior to any planned movements.

Another challenge we had to overcome was dealing with the multitude of police agencies that operated in Baghdad. Police support falls into five basic categories: Station police, Patrol police, Traffic police, Major Crime Unit, and Checkpoint police. Each of these police agencies provided a very limited scope of support. Because there was no unified chain of command providing a coherent police effort in East Baghdad proved to be very difficult.

Standing up the Iraqi Army has taken nearly two years and during that time very little emphasis was placed on the Iraqi police service. 2006 was named, "The Year of the Police", and the coalition focus shifted to training, funding, and equipping the Iraqi

Police Service. Challenges exist within the Iraqi Police Service including: training proficiency, personnel and equipment shortages, corruption, and logistical support systems shortfalls. Corruption is probably the most difficult challenge to deal with; corruption exists within most of the police districts to some extent and this is due to various militia groups operating in Baghdad. The Militias exercise a great deal of influence in many areas of Iraq, especially in the Tharwa (Sadr City) district of east Baghdad. This district is predominately a Shia enclave with deep religious ties to Muqtada Al Sadr. Sadr City is one of the most populated districts in Baghdad with over 2 million people in a relatively small area. Sadr city experiences a relatively low crime rate, which we attribute to mahdi militia enforcement and punishment committees.

Our first step in determining the level of support required for each of the police districts was conducting an extensive training evaluation program. The proficiency levels in each district varied greatly. The second step was interpreting the results and formulating a plan that would allow us to individualize the support required for each of the stations.

My S2 section supported these operations by publishing a graphic intelligence summary and the daily patrol de-brief roll-up report each morning. Our task force standard operating procedure required each patrol leader to read the daily INTSUM and report to the TOC prior to each mission in order to receive an intell brief. Our briefings consisted of the most current intelligence, route status (recent attack locations), route closures, weather (military aspects of weather), friendly operations, and current enemy TTPs.

By far, the biggest challenge we encountered in Baghdad was freedom of movement on the main MSRs. Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and Vehicle Borne

IEDs proved to be extremely difficult to deal with and limited our abilities to support our Iraqi police stations. Our patrols were forced to travel on ASRs and mahallah (neighborhood) roads when ever possible. Traveling these routes increased travel times significantly, which caused second and third order effects in the amount of stations we could visit each day and the amount of time spent training. Because of the security posture in Baghdad our patrols were forced to provide their own force protection at the Iraqi police stations further limiting their ability to train. Even with all these challenges our junior noncommissioned officers and soldiers rose to the challenge and provided outstanding support to the fledgling Iraqi Police Service.

I am extremely proud of our Soldiers. Most military police operations are executed at squad level; we rely heavily on our junior noncommissioned officers ability to think on their feet. They are expected to be able to think on their feet and react appropriately to what ever situation they may find themselves in. They planned each mission, determined their routes, ensured PCIs were conducted to standard every time with out fail, and dogmatically enforced uniform standards. I had the opportunity to travel with a number of squads within the task force, when I visited Iraqi police stations, and with out fail they were always motivated and thoroughly prepared for each patrol. These Soldiers were extremely resilient; I found it remarkable that even after they lost comrades in catastrophic IED strikes, they still believed in their mission. They went outside the wire every single day knowing full well that they could be next. Every one of these Soldiers is a great American and should take pride in their service, they are all HEROES!