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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS  
OF U.S. ARMY MILITARY POLICE OPERATIONS

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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Military police units have been deployed often in our Army's recent history, frequently serving in situations fraught with political and social consequences. From pre-Operation Just Cause Panama to the hurricane devastated island of St. Croix; from the war torn streets of Panama City to the deserts of Saudi Arabia and Iraq, the Military Police Corps has shouldered its share of the responsibility for America's foreign policy decisions. And, in doing so, these soldiers were frequently involved in situations that have had major political implications. The national and international importance of these deployments are obvious to those involved, but not readily so to the U.S. Government at large. Also not so obvious to those not directly involved is the frequency with which military police forces are employed in these volatile environments. It is even less obvious to the combat arms commanders who, as they achieve levels of strategic leadership, will make the critical decisions regarding force selection for deployment into these politically tense situations. The purpose of this paper is to briefly describe these most recent military police deployments and to outline their political implications.

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## INTRODUCTION

To think that national and/or international implications may exist in the employment of U.S. Army military police (MP) forces may surprise some people. After all, what could military police soldiers possibly do that would warrant that kind of importance? They are only a small combat support branch of the Army that barely rates mention in the Army's capstone manual, FM 100-5, (Operations). A brief review of several events, however, since 1988, may explain that importance: Parama in the months leading up to the invasion; Operation Just Cause; Hurricane Hugo in the U.S. Virgin Islands; and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

In March 1988, a military police brigade consisting of two military police battalions with attachments was deployed to the Republic of Panama as "security enhancement" for the United States Southern Command. In September 1989, a military police brigade was the centerpiece of a joint task force that was deployed to the island of St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands, to restore law and order in the wake of Hurricane Hugo. In December 1989, a military police brigade was deployed to Panama for Operation Just Cause. After the war, the brigade remained in Panama for several months as a major part of the

nation-building effort, restoring law and order, training and reconstituting a police force, and restoring confidence in the Panamanian criminal justice system.

Beginning in August 1990, three military police brigades and a military police group (Criminal Investigation) were deployed to the Persian Gulf area for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, performing scores of politically and culturally sensitive missions in support of the coalition effort allied against Iraq. Later, during Operation Provide Comfort, the military police were again an integral part of the joint task force, providing security and humanitarian aid to the Kurdish refugees in northern Iraq. In each of these aforementioned deployments, the military police were called upon to perform sensitive missions, each of which had political ramifications in more than one governmental capital.

If one were to ask a cross-section of Army commanders from company through brigade level what military police and criminal investigation units do in providing combat support to Army ground forces, most would probably respond by saying something about law enforcement and traffic control, as well as providing guards for certain "critical" facilities. Put that same question to a sister-service commander and the response would be equally unenlightened.<sup>1</sup> Unless they have had recent first-hand experience observing military police forces in action, most combat arms commanders believe that military police units provide the usual law enforcement services that are routinely performed

at a military installation, and little more.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. These combat arms commanders are not familiar with military police capabilities, because they have not been exposed to military police troops in other than a casual or superficial way. The danger is that these commanders will not use the unique capabilities for which these military police soldiers have been trained. Or the commanders will misuse them by employing them as a stationary guard force, which all too frequently occurs.

It has been said that the Military Police Corps is the most versatile ground force that the U.S. Army has today.<sup>2</sup> Used properly, the military police assets available to combat commanders can help meet many difficult challenges both on and off the battlefield. Many of those challenges are politically and socially sensitive, requiring an uncommon degree of maturity, training and professionalism not often found in the average young soldier. For that reason, informed military leaders realize that military police soldiers are often the force of choice in a politically delicate environment.

An example of such use occurred on the island of St. Croix in the wake of Hurricane Hugo in 1989:

Prompted by the breakdown of civilian government there following the disaster and the lawlessness, looting and disorder that ensued, [U.S. forces were sent to the island]... Until recently, it would have been the cavalry - that is, combat forces pressed into riot-control duty. But this time the Army sent... MP Companies. These professionals soon had the situation well in hand.<sup>3</sup>

The national political implications of this example will be explained more clearly later in this paper. The point that is not so obvious is the frequency in which military police forces are deployed into these volatile environments. It is even less obvious to the combat arms commanders who, as they achieve levels of strategic leadership, will make the critical decisions regarding force selection for deployment into these politically tense situations. It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to briefly describe the events since 1988 that have had serious political consequences, into which military police and criminal investigation units have been deployed, and to outline the national/international implications of those deployments. The focus of this paper will generally, but not entirely, be limited to military police operations conducted in support of XVIII Airborne Corps, since that is the author's frame of reference. The use of the term military police is intended to include the criminal investigation units and personnel which normally deploy with their supported command.

Panama: March 1988 - December 1989

A crisis had been building in Panama since 1983, when General Manuel Antonio Noriega gained power. It erupted in the summer of 1987, when Noriega was denounced as a drug trafficker and murderer by his former heir-apparent, Colonel Roberto Diaz Herrera. Popular discontent had been building for some time;

and, when Herrera was relieved of his duties and fired by Noriega, the Panamanian people began public, anti-Noriega demonstrations. Noriega responded by using his Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) to brutally attack and crush the opposition, and by arousing his followers to go into the streets to enflame the anti-U.S. emotions that had been growing for years.

In February 1988, when Noriega was indicted in a federal court in Florida on drug-related charges, Panamanian President Eric Devalle attempted to remove Noriega as Commander-in-Chief of the Panamanian Armed Forces.<sup>4</sup> Noriega refused to resign; instead, he forced Devalle to resign his office and seek political refuge in the United States. On 15 March 1988, an unsuccessful attempt was made to overthrow Noriega by a group of dissident military officers. When the attempted coup d'etat failed, the crisis worsened, increasing dramatically the danger to U.S. citizens in the republic of Panama.

Shortly after the coup attempt, the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne) from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was deployed to Panama. The two battalions that made up the military police brigade -- the 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne) from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and the 519th Military Police Battalion from Fort Meade, Maryland -- were to augment the military police forces organic to the U.S. Southern Command. They had three basic missions: provide security, make a show of force and conduct peace-keeping operations.



In April 1988, these military police forces were joined by a U.S. Marine Corps Rifle Company and an aviation task force from the 7th Infantry Division (Light). All of these forces were incorporated into the newly formed Joint Task Force (JTF)-Panama. The JTF was charged with protecting American lives and property, providing command and control of the deployed forces, conducting joint training and exercises, providing tactical management of the crisis, and contingency-planning.<sup>5</sup>

During the next several months, the situation became increasingly dangerous. The PDF continued to provoke incidents with U.S. citizens and to violate the Panama Canal treaties. The PDF conducted armed intrusions onto U.S. installations at Rodman Naval Station and a fuel depot known as the Arraijan Petroleum Tank Farm. These acts were presumably to keep pressure on the U.S. Government and to gain tactical experience.

Colonel Arnie Rossi, the JTF-Panama Chief of Staff used the term 'twilight zone' to describe the situation in which the U.S. military found itself in Panama. The United States was not at war with Panama, yet the situation could hardly be defined as peace. Panamanian and U.S. troops were actively engaged in a war of nerves, mind games and an occasional exchange of fire.<sup>6</sup>

The military police troops in Panama, more than any others, were in the center of the crisis and bore heavy demands for tact and skill. Their duties required them to work closely with the PDF, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with them on many of the gates and at internal guard posts on jointly occupied installations. The MPs and the PDF frequently stood their posts in a silence imposed by their respective commanders. Often, the PDF guards

would insult the military police soldiers or the U.S. Government in an attempt to provoke the MP into an embarrassing response. When the PDF apprehended U.S. troops or their family members on some fabricated charge, it was usually a military police soldier who intervened to either prevent the apprehension or negotiate their release.

This perilous situation continued, worsened, and eventually led the President of the United States to topple Noriega and eliminate the criminal-infested PDF. On 16 December 1989, a Marine lieutenant was shot and killed at a PDF roadblock. Shortly thereafter, a Navy lieutenant and his wife, who had witnessed the shooting of the Marine officer, were taken hostage by the PDF. The lieutenant was beaten severely, and his wife was mistreated and threatened with sexual assault. Both were later released to U.S. forces. A while later, two military police soldiers were taken into custody by the PDF, where they were assaulted and their weapons were taken. It was at this point that the President ordered the execution of Operation Just Cause.

Throughout the difficult months leading up to Operation Just Cause, the military police soldiers performed with uncommon maturity and professionalism in a situation that was perplexing, and difficult even for senior officers and diplomats to understand or control. The political implications are clear.

The situation in Panama was extremely complex, An unfortunate act of violence by U.S. troops might not only trigger a confrontation unwanted by Washington but also might concede Noriega the 'moral high ground' in the crisis. ... One brigade commander noted that, given the realities of the crisis, ...he would gladly

have traded one of his rifle companies for an MP company 'well trained in peacetime ROE.' ... his [MP] flexibility and his ability to adapt to confusing and uncertain conditions contributed to keeping the crisis from spilling over into hostilities through unintentional action.<sup>7</sup>

Had the young military police soldiers made an error in judgment in their daily encounters with the PDF, the consequences would have reverberated through Washington. Granting the moral high ground to Noriega at that time could have had significant ramifications throughout the Americas.

#### ST. CROIX, U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

OPERATION HAWKEYE: 20 September - 17 November 1989

On 17 September 1989, Hurricane Hugo, one of the most destructive weather systems ever recorded by the National Weather Service, struck the island of St. Croix in the United States Virgin Islands. The hurricane destroyed nearly all of the life support systems available to a population of over 50,000, and left the island in absolute chaos. Losses included the fresh water supply, the island's electrical generation capability, and the fuel supply. Food on the island was limited to that which was in stores and warehouses, and much of that food was either damaged or destroyed in the storm. What food remained undamaged was completely plundered by looters. All telephone lines were down, and there was virtually no communication with the outside world. "Published reports said Hugo left 90 to 97 percent of the island's buildings destroyed or damaged..."<sup>8</sup> Every hospital

and medical clinic was either severely damaged or completely destroyed. Major hotels and condominiums were seriously damaged. Every structure that was constructed of wood or metal, to include the homes of many of the island's poor, were destroyed. Major fuel spills at the Hess Oil Refinery -- the second largest oil refinery in the world -- created hazardous environmental conditions. The major industry of the island, tourism, was also gravely damaged. Much of the sand on the island's beaches was blown away by the 150-knot winds or was contaminated by the massive oil spills. Most of the large pleasure boats were seriously damaged, being either sunk or cast upon the ground.

The ensuing chaos and total breakdown of law and order resulted in widespread looting of the island's businesses and shopping centers, and general lawlessness throughout the island. The police department was in complete disarray in the days following the storm. Additionally, ... there were reports stating that anywhere from 200 to 600 prisoners had escaped, possibly armed, from the island's only territorial prison.<sup>9</sup>

The St. Croix Police Department had, in fact, ceased to exist. All but a handful of the police officers chose to stay at home with their families, even after the hurricane had passed. The Virgin Island National Guard, which had been called out in anticipation of the storm, remained in their headquarters, failing to respond to the emergency. There were even several reports and photographs of National Guard troops participating in the looting that took place after the hurricane. In short, the life support systems, law and order, and the fundamentals of civilization on the Island of St. Croix were curtailed by

Hurricane Hugo.

Finally, on 20 September 1989, the Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands requested federal assistance. President George Bush responded by ordering federal forces to St. Croix to suppress the violence, protect private and public property, and restore law and order. Elements of the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard, along with a contingent from the U.S. Marshals Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) responded, forming Joint Task Force (JTF)-140. The mission was called Operation Hawkeye.

Although the Army element of JTF-140 included medical, engineer and other support personnel, its major element was the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne). The brigade consisted of two military police battalions -- one from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and another from Fort Hood, Texas. Only seven hours passed from the time the 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne) was alerted at Fort Bragg until the first of thirteen C-141 aircraft carrying the battalion was enroute to the devastated island.

Immediately upon arrival in St. Croix, the 503d Military Police Battalion Commander deployed the battalion's three-man MP teams into the island's two major cities, Christiansted and Fredricksted. The looting and other disturbances ceased immediately. Within 24 hours, the 503d -- by then, joined by the 720th Military Police Battalion from Fort Hood, Texas -- was enforcing a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Law and order had been

restored.

For the next two months, the military police patrolled the island, establishing a level of police protection never before seen by the residents. They provided security for key installations, such as power and water sources, and secured the vital food resupplies that were finally reaching the island. They conducted joint operations with the FBI and the U.S. Marshals that resulted in the apprehension of all of the escaped prisoners and the interception of air-dropped bundles of cocaine valued at over \$50 million. They conducted extensive training for members of the Virgin Island National Guard and they conducted joint patrols with the St. Croix Police Department once it was reestablished.

Until the military police forces redeployed to their home stations at the end of November 1989, they were at the center of a political skirmish among the citizens of St. Croix, the governor in St. Thomas, some political leaders in Washington, and the Pentagon. Approximately one month after the arrival of the military police forces on the island, the law and order duties were ready to be turned back over to the local police authorities. The local population were strident in their disagreement, however. They had long been dissatisfied with the performance of their local police and had enjoyed the responsiveness and professionalism of the U.S. Army military police. They waged a campaign locally, and on the mainland of the U.S., in the press to keep the federal forces there for at

least a year, if not indefinitely (Appendix I).<sup>10/11</sup> There being numerous wealthy business people who reside in St. Croix, several of whom had powerful political connections in Washington, an attempt was made to use those political connections to keep the military police in St. Croix.<sup>12</sup> Those attempts ultimately failed, and the military police forces were redeployed to their home stations in mid-November 1989.

The political implications of this deployment were significant. First, the Posse Comitatus Act, an 1878 law (as amended), governs the use of regular military forces and severely limits their use in law enforcement, "except in cases and under circumstances expressly authorized by the Constitution or Act of Congress."<sup>13</sup> Restoring law and order without violating the Posse Comitatus Act required maturity, training and sound judgment -- a great deal to expect of several hundred military police soldiers, most of whom were under age 21.

Local politics were another area of concern. Poverty and perceived racism -- and the gap between the haves and the have-nots -- are persistent problems in the Virgin Islands. Most of the wealth is in the hands of the whites, and most of the poor people are of African ancestry. Local politics reflected this interminable problem, and the military police soldiers tasked with restoring law and order had to consider this situation in their behavior towards the people they were sent to assist. Frequently, a young MP found himself or herself mediating a dispute between complainants of different races, a difficult task

that relies more on good judgment than training.

The unique capability of MPs to respond to civil disorders formed the basis for their deployment to St. Croix after the devastation of Hurricane Hugo in September 1989. The hurricane had traumatic effects on the National Guard, police, medical services, and other governmental agencies on the island. Riots and looting threatened the safety of residents, businesses and property. A force was needed capable of imposing firm order on a civilian populace while observing stringent rules-of-engagement safeguards.<sup>14</sup>

That force was the United States Army Military Police.

PANAMA: 20 December - 29 December 1989

#### OPERATION JUST CAUSE

Less than a month after returning to Fort Bragg from St. Croix, the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne) Headquarters and the 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne) were deployed to Panama for a second time in two years. This time they were part of the invasion force of Operation Just Cause.

During the invasion, the Brigade performed three of its four battlefield missions, including area security, battlefield circulation control and enemy prisoner of war (EPW) operations. Its fourth battlefield missions -- law and order operations -- was performed after the combat campaign was completed and stability operations were initiated. Shortly after arriving in Panama, the 519th Military Police Battalion from Fort Meade, Maryland, with its five military police companies, and the 92d Military Police Battalion (Provisional), organic to U.S. Army South (USARSO), with its two military police companies, were



attached to the Brigade.

By far the most complex and politically sensitive mission was the enemy prisoner of war (EPW) operation. Nearly 4,400 enemy personnel -- both male and female -- were detained at the EPW Camp. Most detainees were either PDF or members of Dignity Battalions. The facility was visited daily by members of the Geneva, Switzerland based International Committee of the Red Cross, who checked the physical condition of the prisoners as well as their treatment in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. The facility was also visited by several different U.S. and international human rights organizations who scrutinized the operation for possible human rights violations. None were found.

An adjudication council was established to determine the repatriation eligibility of the detainees (as they were now called). The Council representatives included members of the new Panamanian government, U.S. Marshals, and U.S. Southern Command intelligence personnel. Most of the detainees pledged allegiance to the new government and were released from the facility. Less than one hundred were transferred to Panamanian prisons for crimes committed prior to the invasion.

Of those repatriated, many were former PDF, who hours before may have been shooting at our U.S. forces. Oddly enough, our former enemies would take an oath and then become our new police partners on the streets of Panama City.<sup>15</sup>

By nightfall of 21 December 1989, the major combat operations had been completed. Resistance after that consisted

mainly of Dignity Battalion members conducting drive-by shooting incidents and mop-up operations of the remaining PDF units. Since eliminating the PDF also meant the removal of the Panamanian police -- they were one in the same -- the emerging threat became the absence of law and order. Looting and the destruction of private property had begun on a massive scale.

The political implications of the military police employment in Operation Just Cause involve three areas. First was the lawlessness that followed the combat operations and its after effects. If the lawlessness was not allowed to get out of control, the suffering of the Panamanian people could have been drastically reduced. The positive impact that an early restoration of law and order could have had on the Panamanian economy is enormous. Sustained public order also would have eliminated one of the major criticisms of the United States in the post war analysis of Operation Just Cause: the failure to plan for the contingency of lawlessness.

Second, when Manuel Noreiga was given temporary refuge in the Vatican Embassy, the U.S. Army military police were responsible for one of the security rings surrounding the compound. Thousands of angry Panamanians gathered daily, demanding that Noriega be released to them to be brought to justice. Had this security mission not been accomplished professionally, the unstable crowds could have caused serious problems for the fragile Panamanian Government, and further embarrassed the United States Government which was already being

criticized in connection with the looting.

The other military police mission with international implications was the enemy prisoner of war operation. The camp was visited daily by the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), the international press, human rights groups and numerous Panamanian elected officials. The success of this EPW operation is confirmed by a letter sent to the military police commander by the ICRC. (Appendix II)

PANAMA: 29 January 1989 - 5 April 1990

#### Operation Promote Liberty

After combat operations ceased, Operation Promote Liberty, the nation-building phase of the Panama campaign, began. On 29 December 1989, the 503d Military Police Battalion assumed responsibility for the first of its three areas of responsibility, called precincts, in the southern two-thirds of Panama City, charged with restoring law and order and reestablishing vital police services. The 519th Military Police Battalion would later establish three other precincts in northern Panama City and the adjacent suburbs. Also essential to the nation-building efforts were Special Forces advisors, civil affairs and psychological operations units, as well as other combat support and combat service support personnel.

The restoration of law and order in Panama City was difficult. Having American soldiers enforce civil laws in a

foreign country is laden with political, social and physical danger. The task was made even more difficult by the military police soldiers' unfamiliarity with the Panamanian criminal activity and law, and their lack of knowledge about the areas where they would be policing. The young military police soldiers were unaccustomed to the high incidence of serious crime and the physical brutality they encountered. Most of their previous law enforcement experience had been gained at U.S. Army installations, where serious crime is rare. Moreover, few were able to speak the Spanish language.

In two of the precincts, El Chorillo in southern Panama City and San Miguelito in the north, the serious criminal activity was particularly high. Several murders, aggravated assaults and robberies commonly occurred daily. Shooting incidents were frequent, as were reports of PDF and Dignity Battalion members hiding in the area. Responding to these events and dealing with criminal subjects, victims, hysterical family members and witnesses -- most of whom did not speak English -- was a challenge for 18-to-24 year old soldiers, few of whom spoke Spanish.

Another danger was the unstable political situation. As the new Panamanian Government developed, political rivalries emerged, frequently placing a young MP in a sensitive position. Only the discipline, training and good judgment of these soldiers prevented any number of international incidents.

Most difficult of all was organizing and working with the

new Panamanian police force. The new Fuerzas Publica de Panama (FPP), was manned entirely by former PDF troops who had by then sworn allegiance to the new Panamanian government. Ironically, the vast majority of these "new" police officers were the same individuals who had been detained just weeks before as prisoners at the EPW facility by the same American military police troops with whom they were now "partners." The task was to recast the most powerful and corrupt institution in Panama from a military organization that held its power through intimidation and illegal activities, into a civil police force that held power through the will of the people. Recasting the police required a delicate balancing of the continuum of power:

We had two things to do: ensure the police force had adequate power to establish and maintain law and order ...to protect the good people from the bad; and ... ensure that the police force we created would never have sufficient power to challenge the Panamanian civilian leadership.<sup>16</sup>

Building this new police force was a monumental task. All of the police stations had been seriously damaged during Operation Just Cause, and nearly all of the patrol vehicles had been destroyed. Those turned out to be relatively minor problems that would be resolved with time and money.

Infinitely more difficult was training these former PDF soldiers in the alien concept of providing police services in a democratic society. For example, when the "new" police officers reported for their first day on the job, most brought the lead-filled rubber hose or cattle-prod that they had routinely used on the Panamanian citizens in the past. They were quite surprised

when they were relieved of their former "tools of the trade."

Equally challenging was the task of transforming their public image from the heavy-handed, authoritarian persona they had cultivated for 25 years, to one of public service and professionalism. The Panamanian people had no trust or confidence in the old regime, and building faith in the new government would begin in the streets with their police force.

U.S. Army Engineer, Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs units aided significantly in the image building effort. The police stations were repaired and freshly painted, this time eliminating the intimidating symbolism that characterized the old PDF police stations. New police vehicles were acquired, as were new uniforms, neither of which resembled the old equipment. Radio and television announcements were developed by the Psychological Operations specialists and directed at the Panamanian people to encourage their confidence. Most important, a mandatory 40-hour training program was implemented in basic, advanced and specialized police operations that included large doses of instruction in public service and community relations.

The U.S. Army military police had a major role in transforming the FPP police force into a trained, trusted and respected organization. They worked together 24 hours a day for nearly four months on combined walking patrols, fixed posts and mobile patrols. They were shown how to develop neighborhood crime prevention and "Officer Friendly" programs, and how to interact with the public when responding to an emergency. At the

precinct station, the FPP were trained in the proper treatment of prisoners, record keeping and the preservation of physical evidence for later use in court. The public was invited to an open house at each precinct to build community relations -- something that had never been done before in Panama. The Panamanian people had to be convinced that the days of the rubber hose and cattle prod had ended.

For the first sixty days, the U.S. Army military police were in command of the precincts, taking the lead and responsibility for all police operations. After that initial period, the operations were slowly turned over to the Panamanian police, allowing them to lead, make decisions and take charge. The U.S. Army military police became observers and advisers, maintaining a presence in every precinct and on most patrols, but lowering their profile with the Panamanian public.

The original military police units that deployed to Operation Just Cause and later established the FPP redeployed to the United States in April 1990. They were replaced by another military police battalion, the 759th from Fort Carson, Colorado, who carried on the process of continued presence, but slowly withdrew from day-to-day operations. To this day, there are U.S. Army military police advisers serving with the Panamanian Police Department.

The national and international implications of these military police operations are profound. The world was watching, waiting to see how the Americans would rebuild the institutions

of a nation they had just dismantled. Particularly in the United States and Latin America, every U.S. action was scrutinized by politicians, the press, and the ubiquitous political pundit, all looking for mistakes to highlight and broadcast to the world. And into this bright spotlight were thrust hundreds of young military police soldiers who were expected to perform their tasks flawlessly.

Success in this endeavor points to the inherent capabilities of the military police. Few of the tasks these military police units performed were found on their Mission Essential Task Lists, their master list of training requirements. Few anticipated the requirement of rebuilding the criminal justice institutions in a foreign country from the ground up. But that is exactly what they did, and all in the international public eye. Had the military police soldiers been less professional or ethical, and had they violated the spirit of the agreement between Presidents Bush and Endara, the result could have been a significant international embarrassment.

SAUDI ARABIA: 24 August 1990 - 16 January 1991

#### OPERATION DESERT SHIELD

Scarcely four months after Operation Promote Liberty was generally concluded, U.S. Army military police units faced a new, even larger challenge that would require them to perform all four of their battlefield missions in one of the world's most harsh



environments. On 2 August 1990, Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait. By 6 August, United States military forces -- including MPs from the 82d Airborne Division -- were deploying to Saudi Arabia. On 12 August, the 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne) sent one of its companies to assist the 82d Airborne Division in providing security for several critical facilities. By 27 August 1990, the remainder of the 503d had closed in Saudi Arabia along with the headquarters of the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne). By the time Operation Desert Storm began, there would be three military police brigades and one military police group (Criminal Investigation) operating in Saudi Arabia.

Military police involvement in the Gulf War encompassed all four of our battlefield support missions: EPW, area security, battlefield circulation control and law enforcement. ... We also maintained law and order with sensitivity for the potential friction between American mores and Moslem religious practices.<sup>17</sup>

Within 12 hours of its arrival in Saudi Arabia, the first military police battalion to arrive in-country was tasked with providing security for the rapidly expanding ammunition supply point (ASP), which ultimately grew to cover an area of approximately ten square kilometers. They were also tasked with securing the port of Ad Dammam, one of the world's largest and most modern seaports.

During the months that followed, the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne), which by November 1990 included the 160th MP Battalion from Tallahassee, Florida; the 503d MP Battalion (Airborne) from Fort Bragg, North Carolina; the 519th MP

Battalion from Fort Meade, Maryland; and the 759th MP Battalion from Fort Carson, Colorado, conducted the following operations: area Security of the XVIII Airborne Corps rear area, to include the cities of Dhahran, Al Khobar and Ad Dammam; reconnaissance of thousands of miles of main supply routes (MSR); security of the XVIII Airborne Corps main and tactical command posts; and battlefield circulation control for the combat units that arrived in-country and required an escort to their tactical assembly areas.

Politically, the most important mission conducted by the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne) was the combined Saudi/U.S. law enforcement operation established in the cities of Al Khobar, Dhahran and Ad Dammam. This was a first for both the Saudis and the U.S. Army military police, and was the first combined police operation to be established in Saudi Arabia, serving as the standard by which all subsequent combined police operations would be measured. Considering the cultural, social, religious and language differences that were to be encountered, the probability of a political misunderstanding occurring was enormous.

The combined police operation was established at the Saudi Criminal Police Headquarters in Dhahran. The Saudi police officers were professional, eager to assist the Americans and courteous to a fault. Language differences were not a significant impediment, since most of the Saudi officers in the grade of lieutenant and above spoke English. In fact, a Saudi

police captain was assigned the full-time duty of liaison officer to the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne). He had attended college at the University of Portland, Oregon; spoke nearly perfect English; and was quite familiar with American society and culture.

The first cultural crisis the military police encountered was actually based on Saudi religious custom, and involved the female military police soldiers. In Saudi Arabia, women do not drive motor vehicles and, with few exceptions, do not work outside the home. Saudi women are not even permitted to be seen in public by a male who is not a member of the immediate family. Hence, they dress from head-to-toe in a black garment, called an abaya, that covers everything to include their faces. At the Saudi police headquarters, a female had never before set foot on the compound. In the U.S. Army, of course, female soldiers are expected to perform the same duties as male soldiers in those specialties which are open to women. For military police soldiers, this includes driving military police vehicles, interacting with the public, and arresting male soldiers who have committed a crime, all of which were previously unheard of in Saudi society. Clearly, some adjustments were necessary on both sides of this sensitive issue.

After lengthy discussions that allegedly included key members of the Saudi royal family, a compromise on the female issue was reached. The American military police commander was told by the Saudi captain that female soldiers would be permitted

to perform their military police duties and also to operate out of the Combined Law Enforcement Center. It had been determined that they were to be considered as "honorary men." This artificial status allowed them to perform the same military tasks as the male soldiers, even though the term, "honorary men," was not used in any official documents. The only restrictions placed on the female MPs were that their uniform sleeves had to be rolled down to cover their arms completely, and they could drive only military vehicles. Later, after the Saudis became accustomed to seeing the relatively large numbers of American female soldiers who eventually deployed to the area, those restrictions were relaxed. After ensuring that the culturally-sensitive Saudis would continue to cooperate with the American MPs, there was even a female captain placed in command of the military police company that was headquartered at the Saudi Police station.

The different approaches to criminal activity also had to be resolved. The Saudis enforce the most strict and traditional form of Islam practiced outside of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the penalty for some crimes is severe. Murder is punished by beheading, and repeated theft is punished by the severing of a hand.

The great differences in the Saudi and American reactions to crime were highlighted in October 1990, when a shooting incident was reported over the American tactical radio. The report stated that an American soldier had witnessed an Arab male shoot two

other Arab males. A grid coordinate location was given, and a combined U.S.-Saudi police patrol responded. At the police station a great deal of excitement ensued among the Saudi police officers, and the most senior police officer on duty was called in. When the police patrol failed to locate the reported shooting victims, something akin to panic occurred. The Saudi captain called the Eastern Province criminal police commander, a Saudi general, who immediately called a member of the Saudi royal family. The importance that the Saudis gave to this incident seemed to the Americans to be greatly out of proportion to the situation. Later, it was discovered that although there had been a shooting, the wounds received were minor, and the victims had driven themselves to the hospital. The Saudi police captain was asked why so much excitement had been displayed over such a relatively minor incident. When he explained that in all of Saudi Arabia there had been only three murders in the previous year, the Americans understood.

Although tense at first, the relationship between the American and Saudi police forces matured into friendship and great professional respect. While it is certain that they never completely understood each other, both sides realized that success required compromise. Accommodations were made, as necessary, to satisfy each situation.

SAUDI ARABIA/IRAQ: 16 January - 28 February 1991

OPERATION DESERT STORM

During Operation Desert Storm, the military police continued to perform most of the same duties as during Operation Desert Shield. Two significant missions were added. These missions were the movement of the XVIII Airborne Corps and VII Corps over hundreds of miles of civilian highways, and the enemy prisoner of war operations that placed over 70,000 Iraqi prisoners in predominantly American military police hands. Both were difficult and sensitive, requiring professionalism and diplomatic skill on the part of the young military police soldiers.

The repositioning of the major combat forces began in early January 1991, just days prior to the commencement of the air war. The military police role in this movement was probably their most significant contribution made to the war effort to that point.

All in all, the average vehicle in XVIII Airborne Corps moved 880 kilometers, ... with over 27,000 vehicles moving along 1,300 miles of main supply route, Battlefield Circulation Control became a major concern and critical task for the military police.<sup>18</sup>

There were only two routes that could be used to move the combat units to their final tactical assembly areas. Both routes were heavily used by Saudi travelers and Kuwaiti refugees, and inserting two Corps' worth of vehicles onto these two roads was not a simple task. It required detailed timetables, disciplined traffic regulation, and energetic command and control. All of

this had to be accomplished in 21 days, with as little disruption to the Arab nationals as possible. Much of this responsibility fell to the military police who, with minimal assistance from the Saudi authorities, made the move possible. They kept the traffic moving in the right direction, and on time. They dealt with irate Saudis on numerous occasions, soothing frayed nerves while keeping the traffic flow moving. The largest overland movement of a combat force since World War II was accomplished, according to the Deputy Commanding General of XVIII Airborne Corps, largely because of the professionalism and expertise of the military police units that supported it.<sup>19</sup>

The other mission conducted by the military police that had international implications was the enemy prisoner of war operation. Over 70,000 Iraqi enemy prisoners were taken by coalition forces during Operation Desert Storm -- most of them by American military units. Detaining, processing and caring for large numbers of Islamic prisoners presented many unusual challenges for the military police planners and commanders.

The Iraqi prisoners were generally subdued when they were captured by the American forces. They expressed a wide range of emotions, from embarrassment for what their government had done to their Arab brothers in Kuwait, to relief that the ordeal for them was finally over, to fear of what would happen to them as prisoners of the Americans. They had been told by their leaders that, if captured by the Americans, they would be tortured and then murdered. In fact, when they arrived at the EPW holding

areas, the terror on their faces was shocking to the young American MPs.

At the XVIII Airborne Corps EPW collection point, when the prisoners were told to get off of the vehicles that had brought them to the camp and to get into a single line so they could be searched and medically evaluated, they thought they were being lined-up before a firing squad. Surrounded by unsmiling Americans who were armed with automatic weapons, it was clear that the Iraqis thought that they were at an execution camp, a fear which they stated to an American interpreter. When they were told, in Arabic, that they would not be harmed by their American captors, their disbelief was quite evident and they expected the worst.

After being processed, given food and water, provided clothing if needed, looked after medically, and provided with sanitary facilities -- the first they had seen in two months -- they soon realized that they would not be harmed or mistreated by the Americans. Interestingly, by the time the Iraqi prisoners were moved to the Theater EPW camp at Hafar Al Batin -- usually within 24 to 36 hours -- they could be heard chanting "USA, USA" or "George Bush, George Bush" as they departed the Corps camp.

While a few of the Iraqi officers spoke English, most of the Iraqi soldiers spoke only Arabic. Based on the lessons learned in handling EPWs in Panama, the military police fabricated information signs, in both English and Arabic, in preparation for the mission. This practice helped put the Iraqi



prisoners a bit more at ease and aided the American military police in efficiently controlling the large mass of prisoners.

Dealing with a large number of enemy prisoners whose religion is primarily Islam presented several interesting challenges to the military police soldiers. Planning for the religious needs of the prisoners took place long before the first EPW was captured. The Iraqi prisoners were freely permitted to practice their faith and were even provided with prayer rugs that had been locally purchased for that purpose. Food was another obstacle, but their dietary restrictions were also honored.

Arabic meals [actually Saudi Army field rations] were purchased before the outbreak of the war to feed EPWs. They were fed pork-free meals at the Corps EPW facility and, in some cases, at the Division central collection points. Units feeding Meals Ready to Eat [MRE] to EPWs were instructed to remove pork products prior to issuing them to eat.<sup>20</sup>

Another interesting aspect of the enemy prisoner of war operation involved the French component of the coalition. The French Government was very sensitive to allegations that the French Army had mistreated prisoners during their war in Algeria that ended in the early 1960s. Recognizing that American military forces had recent prisoner of war experience in Panama, the French requested U.S. assistance in organizing and operating their EPW facility. Just days before the air war began, the U.S. 503d Military Police Battalion (Airborne) was attached (less operational control) to the French 6th Light Armored Division, to assist them in the establishment of their EPW operation.

The alliance of these two military units could not have

progressed better. The Americans assisted the French in selecting a suitable site and ultimately established adjoining French and U.S. XVIII Airborne Corps EPW camps near the Iraqi border in the French sector. The American MPs also established a training program for the French forces that took them completely through the handling of enemy prisoners from capture, processing, detention, care, and Geneva Convention requirements, to repatriation. The close working relationship between the American and French forces engendered a friendship and professional respect that will endure.

At the conclusion of Operation Desert Storm, the military police units performed what they wrongly thought would be their two final missions. These were traffic control of units, as they moved back to staging areas in eastern Saudi Arabia for redeployment to their home stations, and customs inspections at the air and sea ports. Meanwhile, the political situation in Iraq was deteriorating, setting the stage for more MP operations.

The Kurdish people in northern Iraq, and the Shi'ite population in the western region perceived an opportunity to overthrow Saddam Hussein and perhaps gain autonomy. As Saddam Hussein brutally unleashed his remaining military forces on them, the American and other coalition members stepped into the middle of the crisis in a peace-making operation called Provide Comfort. Once again the military police were called on to play a major role in the operation, and to care for the thousands of Kurdish and Shi'ite refugees. It would be months before the last

American military unit departed Iraqi soil.

The international implications of several military police operations conducted during the Persian Gulf War were significant. The combined Saudi/American law enforcement operations in the Eastern Province were established within several days of the first American units' arrival in Saudi Arabia and continued through the end of Operation Desert Storm. The operation was alien to both the Saudis and the Americans; both sides were initially apprehensive and somewhat suspicious of the other. It was vitally important to future Saudi-U.S. operations that this effort result in success; because, later, during Operation Desert Storm, there were other delicate issues to handle.

Third MP Group played a significant role during the restoration of Kuwait phase of the operation. ... Activities of the [CID agents] included the conduct of a sensitive investigation of the murder of an Iraqi EPW by a Kuwaiti military officer.<sup>21</sup>

The professionalism of all concerned, and the personal relationships that were established, allowed this mission to be a success. This success, and others like it, opened the door for similar operations throughout Saudi Arabia, and the importance of these operations cannot be overstated. They opened a channel into the very strict and conservative institutions of a nearly closed society. Dozens of American and other Western law violators were quickly turned over to American military police for corrective action to be taken in the military member's unit, rather than in an Islamic court. Such a practice was unheard of

prior to the establishment of the combined police operation.

The sensitive issue of American female soldiers working closely with Saudi police officers was potentially explosive. If not handled correctly by the commanders involved, and also by the female soldiers, the situation could have poisoned the vital relationship that had to be established between the Saudis and the Americans. U.S. Army military police units arrived in Saudi Arabia early in the Gulf War and brought the first female soldiers who would work outside of a compound. With a member of the Royal Family only a phone call away, the Saudi reaction to the female MPs was crucial. One misstep could have generated a phone call from Riyadh to Washington and possibly damaged the embryonic coalition.

Even without the gender issue, relations would have been touchy. Military police soldiers were the first American military personnel openly to associate in relatively large numbers with the Saudi public. The Saudis were wary of the Americans as they were of nearly all Westerners. The cities in which there were heavy concentrations of American troops were constantly patrolled by the military police to ensure that incidents between Saudis and Americans were minimized and quickly resolved. The Saudi King only reluctantly allowed U.S. military forces in his country during the initial stages of the Gulf crisis. As custodian of Islam's two Holy Mosques, he was open to grave embarrassment, had the American soldiers acted inappropriately toward the civilian populace. With Iraqi

propaganda proclaiming a holy war and denouncing the Saudis for allowing "infidels" to occupy sacred soil, the King could have changed his decision, with disastrous results for the United Nations effort to restore Kuwait. At the very least, misconduct resulting in strained relations with Riyadh would have embarrassed the United States. While overcoming these suspicions was not achievable in the short term, it would have been easy to make the situation worse through soldier misconduct in public. The American soldiers were quite aware that their every move was being scrutinized, and they generally reacted with an extraordinary degree of professionalism and courtesy.

The movement of two Corps' worth of troops and vehicles over Saudi roadways had to be handled with prudence and due consideration to the Arab traffic. Military police teams were positioned along the entire 1300 mile road network in an effort to keep VII Corps and XVIII Airborne Corps convoys safely separated from Saudi and third country national traffic, which at times was quite heavy. Every convoy was given a safety briefing by its organic unit commander, and then monitored -- and in many cases escorted -- along the route by the military police. It required nearly three battalions of military police to accomplish the mission, but it was accomplished on time and with minimal disruption to Saudi traffic and comparatively low casualties from vehicular accidents, given the driver-miles and traffic densities involved.

The enemy prisoner of war operation had the most political

significance of any other military police mission during the Desert Storm phase of the Gulf war. The world was watching because the world press had placed disproportionate prominence on the EPW problem. Both the French and the American forces responsible for EPW operations were quite sensitive to the importance of the mission, realizing that errors in applying the provisions of the Geneva Conventions would be instantly flashed around the world. The political damage, not to mention the embarrassment, could have been significant for the Americans, the other coalition members, and particularly the Saudis, considering that the Iraqi prisoners were "brother Arabs and Moslems." That this did not occur is a tribute to the professionalism and training of the U.S. Army military police.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND EPILOGUE

From pre-Operation Just Cause Panama, to the hurricane-devastated island of St Croix; from the war torn streets of Panama City to the deserts of Saudi Arabia and Iraq -- military police soldiers and their counterparts from the Criminal Investigation Command have played a key role in implementing America's foreign policy decisions. In doing so, these soldiers were frequently involved in situations that had major diplomatic implications.

Recent history has shown that military police units are a versatile force, capable of being successfully deployed into

dangerous, potentially-sensitive situations. Military police activities in the months leading up to the invasion of Panama show how MPs can perform professionally in a tense but non-conflict setting. Operation Just Cause highlighted MP abilities to handle extremely sensitive issues with great international attention and underscores the potentially high costs of failing to use the full range of MP capabilities. After the battles were over, MPs demonstrated their ability to conduct nation-building activities under difficult political and diplomatic conditions. Their success in these endeavors makes MPs a key element in promoting democratic government while enhancing U.S. prestige. Operation Hawkeye in the U.S. Virgin Islands following Hurricane Hugo showed the ability of the military police to restore public order and essential services following a natural disaster, to train local law enforcement personnel to improve services, and to operate in a complex cultural and political setting. And Operation Desert Shield/Storm showed the full range of both battlefield and other roles of MPs, operating in an exceptionally complex and sensitive cultural and diplomatic context.

These capabilities should be obvious to our senior commanders and is becoming more recognized as these commanders become familiar with military police successes. If anything, the evolving post-Cold War politico-military environment seems to be increasing the value of military police units. For the United States government, it is often less politically dangerous to deploy a military police brigade to a threat area -- calling the

deployment a "security enhancement" -- than it is to deploy a combat brigade from the 82d Airborne Division. That is true even though the military police unit has more firepower, vehicular mobility and communications capability than a comparable infantry unit. The press barely takes notice. Even as this paper is being written, the military police have once again been deployed into a politically sensitive situation in Cuba. There, MPs are providing security and humanitarian assistance to Haitian refugees awaiting the U.S. Government's final decision concerning their eligibility for political asylum. The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Forces Command, has acknowledged this role in a recent report to the Secretary of Defense. Speaking of the Haitian operation, he noted that, "Security in the camp is carried out predominantly by our Military Police units, which are becoming critically important assets in the contemporary political-military environment."<sup>22</sup>

It is important that military police soldiers and those senior Army leaders who deploy these soldiers, understand the national and international importance of these military operations, and the sensitive circumstances in which they place very young soldiers. This is not to say that military police forces are more important than other forces, because they are not. This paper is merely intended to show that military police forces are more capable than many are aware, and contribute greatly to our nation's security and prestige. In the new strategic environment of the post-Cold War era, MP capabilities



are likely to increase in significance.

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