

MILITARY POLICE SUPPORT TO BRIGADE COMBAT TEAMS

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SGM Martin Traylor

United States Army Sergeants Major Academy

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SWO E.T. Lim

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Abstract

This paper discusses the use of Military Police forces, at the Brigade Combat Team (BCT) level, within our Army today. BCT Staff, often even commanders, do not understand how to effectively use their Military Police (MP) assets. From the BCT level down to the Battalion and Separate Company Command, and Operations levels there is a lack of understanding by these combat leaders of what Military Police bring to the fight. When leaders across the BCT begin to understand their Military Police element's capabilities, and start integrating and synchronizing those capabilities into the plans and orders within the BCT, they will see significant increases in the effectiveness of their forces and security within their battle space.

Military Police Support to the Brigade Combat Team

Since the inception of the modern Military Police (MP) Corp during the First World War, the army has recognized the need for military police forces as having strategic impact on modern battlefields. As recent as the invasion and occupation of Iraq, how to plan for, utilize and control MP assets has been a topic of command discussion. In Michael Gordon and General Trainor's (2006) recent novel, *Cobra II*, describing the planning of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, the authors in fact quoted Robert Perito (p. 565) as saying "police are trained to deal with civilians, to preserve and protect and to use only the amount of force necessary to control the situation". This statement, by a senior leader, about the specific need for MP forces in a commander's area of operation, underscores why commanders at all levels need to become comfortable with their MP forces.

Traditionally established command and control of these forces though, has been retained at the Division level. Today, the focus of the army has shifted from Divisions as the smallest level of self supporting force to the Brigade Combat Team (BCT). With this shift in staff levels managing MP assets though, the army has to date, not done a very good job of preparing BCT leaders with the experience and training levels they will need to effectively fight their MP forces. The first step required for BCT leaders therefore, is to understand what MP capabilities are.

What Military Police Forces Bring to the BCT Fight

Military Police forces, doctrinally, are formed around a three Soldier team concept. A Military Police team is the heaviest armed team on the battlefield, in our Army (FM3.19-4). Each three Soldier team is equipped with: three M9; one M249, one M203, two M4, and one M2, MK19 or M249 based on squad needs when three or more teams are combined. The weapons platforms are further supplemented with AT4, demolitions and other weapons systems such as

precision fire, shotgun, non-lethal and air defense weapons as missions require. Each team is mounted on a M114 Up-Armored HMMPWV, and is equipped with a full communications and COMSEC packet. In addition to the basic load of ammunition required for each of the teams weapons systems, each team is further required to carry all supplies and logistical needs required to be totally self-supporting, without refit, for three days at a time. Only Military Police Companies at the Corps level are equipped to date with the Armored Security Vehicles (ASV).

The standard BCT of our heavy brigades today (both armor and infantry) are equipped with a 42 Soldier platoon of military police that provide the combat work force. This equates to a Platoon Headquarters consisting of a Platoon Leader, Platoon Sergeant, two drivers, and two gunners, as well as 12 teams of 3 MP. For the areas of Iraq and Afghanistan this equates to three, four truck elements that can be used for three missions at a time.

Each BCT is further assigned a seasoned Military Police CPT and SFC, skilled in military police employment, to serve as the advisors to the Brigade Commander on all military police matters and in the capacity of BCT Provost Marshal and Provost Sergeant as needed.

Military Police Functions in the BCT Area of Operations

MP support to the BCT is fluid. Traditional influences, such as offensive and defensive considerations impact how we support a force, but not to the level that these factors influence combat arms forces. Maximizing our contribution to the BCT fight requires freedom of movement, a staff that is open to the input of the two MP leaders on the staff, and a willingness to capitalize on the unique, specialized skills we bring the table. When properly tasked, allowed to maneuver unrestricted, and synchronized with civil affairs, psychological operations and other maneuver commanders, MP forces give the BCT commander a flexible, adaptive and proactive force, within the area of operation (AO) that can significantly improve the development of the

BCT's picture of battle space and support more secure freedom of maneuver on the supply routes for the BCT's forces.

Military Police on the battlefield perform five traditional functions in support of the BCT. These five functions are: Area Security; Maneuver and Mobility Support; Enemy Prisoner of War (EPW)/Detainee Operations; Law and Order and Military Police Intelligence Operations. The BCT MP staff are experts in incorporating these missions into the BCT Order if engaged early in the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP).

Each of these functions is interdependent. Executing one function can quickly lead to missions requiring multiple functions be combined. For example: a routine interview of a local criminal source may reveal an attack on a convoy is eminent. This would lead MPs to combine forces and coordinate to execute a hasty attack or cordon and search operation on a target. During the execution of this mission though, persons may be detained or evidence seized of criminal or terrorist activities. That individual will then be transferred to the custody of other MP performing Detainee Operations at the BCT Detention Facility.

The first of these five functions: area security relies on active patrolling in and around the BCT's area of operation in an effort to deter attacks, report enemy activity and respond quickly to events that affect the BCT's entire force and the supply routes within its area. Some of the Tasks MP execute in performing this mission are cordon and searches, raids, attacks, screening patrols and base ground defense.

Maneuver and Mobility Support is the MP mission undertaken to secure the Main Supply Routes (MSR) within the BCT area. Missions the MP executes in pursuit of this task include: high-risk convoy security; route signing operations; MSR security screening patrols and checkpoint operations.

Detainee operations are the third mission MP forces support BCTs with. MP Soldiers give the BCT a trained force with which to execute the day to day security and operation of a Brigade Detention Facility. By empowering the MP Chain of Command, Brigade commanders can significantly reduce the chances of detainee abuse events occurring within their facility.

Law and order operations, though not as common on the battlefield, are another capability the BCT has at their disposal with MP forces. MP assets can be used in this role in a number of ways ranging from criminal investigations, to traffic enforcement on BCT bases, to the skilled and professional training of indigenous police forces within a democracy where the rule of law is and equal treatment of all is expected.

The final mission MP forces perform is Police Intelligence Operations (PIO). This mission gives the BCT the ability to discover what is going on in the area from a criminal perspective. Crime is often linked to terrorism and the financing of anti-US forces within an area. By working through the BCT military police forces, and allowing them to build networks and relationships with the local police, the BCT can have an additional source of information to augment data being provided by the BCT S2 section for an even clearer view of the battlefield.

How MP Forces Prepare for BCT Operations

Military Police are in a never ending cycle of training for our combat mission. Our mission on the battlefield is the same as our community policing mission in garrison. The only thing that changes is our equipment (sedan and road gear v/s M1114 and crew serve and weapons) and the level of threat we face. For instance, the use of local police connections, interviewing techniques and the development of sources in learning about crime on and installation are the same methods we use to learn about threats in an asymmetric environment. When we establish a weapons or DUI checkpoints on an installation, we face upset, inconvenienced local people, with whom we

often have to use our inter-personal communication skills to de-escalate the tension. These are the same skills that are critical to our success on the field. The standards we perform to are therefore the same; we only change the conditions when we train in preparation for deployments (tactical environment, OPFOR, ect.)

What BCT Must Understand About MP Force Tasking

To be effective in our missions, as with all MP missions though, MP forces must have unrestricted freedom of movement in the entire Brigade AO. MPs in garrison, have unrestricted freedom of movement within the boundary of the entire installation. In order for MPs to be effective in a BCT conducting combat operations, they must have the same freedom of maneuver. This is the toughest concept to get commander at all levels within a BCT to understand. Combat arms forces think in terms of being a land owner. To a Combat Arms commander, nothing moves in his piece of real-estate without his approval and coordination. Restricting MP movement in the BCT AO though, will have the same effect that it would have if applied to a garrison environment that is it limits the speed at which the MP elements can move from area to area to develop information. It is for this reason that MP elements were traditionally retained at the Division level.

How BCT Should Employ Their MP Forces

When BCT staffs plan for using their MP forces in the future it is critical that they involve the MP officer and NCO on their staff, and ensure the coordination for the MP elements movements in and around sector is synchronized at the BDE level in advance of the Relief in Place (RIP). This will allow for freedom of movement. This is not to say that MPs need to be allowed to ignore ground commanders, but far too often, MP forces under BDE control, meet opposition

from those BN and Company Commands they are trying to gather information for. Clear guidance in the base operations order is the key to success in this effort.

During the MDMP process, the BCT MP staff will be working to ensure that the Brigade is using its MPs in a manner so as to “get the most bang” from them. Traditionally this will consist of splitting the force between the BCT Detention Facilities need (requires augmentation forces) and the critical convoy escort, area security and local police relationship missions. The key to success in this is the BCT MP staff properly conducting mission analysis to determine the brigade’s needs and then the BCT staff directing adjustments as the commander requires.

Summary

In summary, I think I have shown that maximizing MP support within a BCT requires three elements: understanding the force capabilities; ensuring the BCT MP staff is synchronized to the BCT staff through out the MDMP process as described in FM 101-5 (Staff Organization and Operations), and ensuring that the MP forces freedom of maneuver in the AO is protected. Military Police are not unique, and their freedom is not something a commander should fear.

Conclusion

The Brigade Combat Team at large must learn to utilize the Military Police experts within the ranks in order to make maximum use of the special skills MP forces bring to the fight. By looking beyond just the combat arms forces, and synchronizing the operations of all the brigades’ forces, the brigades will greatly increase their effectiveness and make greater strides towards a better economy of their forces and security within their area of operations.

References

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