

The 143d Military Police Detachment in Iraq

By Specialist Cory Welch

Law and Order at Victory Base Complex

As the sun begins to set at Victory Base Complex (VBC), Baghdad, Iraq, the sound of helicopters taking off can be heard in the background. The night shift from the 143d Military Police Detachment (a unit from the Montana National Guard) prepares to provide a law and order presence at the several bases that make up the VBC. The shift supervisor calls the members of his patrol units to attention. He assigns area responsibilities and patrol vehicles, and a quick prepatrol training class begins. Members of the previous shift make their way to the provost marshal's office to finish paperwork, turn in equipment, and hand over vehicles to their replacements; the law and order mission of the 143d is a 24/7 operation.

Although VBC is primarily a U.S. military installation, other national military members, foreign contractors, local nationals (Iraqi citizens), and third-country nationals (citizens of any other nation) also work there. In addition to the large military presence, thousands of nonmilitary personnel provide support services for the troops; they, too, live and work at VBC. The mission of the 143d, which has jurisdiction over the VBC population of several thousand, includes traffic enforcement and accident investigation, criminal investigation, area protection, and other duties common to a municipal police department. Patrols are tasked with specific responsibilities that range from walk-throughs of common areas to the coordination of mayor cell elements¹ and random antiterrorist measures.

The members of the night shift prepare their vehicles and move to their patrol areas. The patrol supervisor keeps in touch with the various elements, roving through each area to check on personnel as they perform traffic stops and respond to vehicle accidents and various types of criminal activities.

The military police keep very busy. Some of the challenges they face include light discipline, the scarcity of cell phones (since most local and third-country nationals are not allowed to have cell phones on VBC), and the variety of languages spoken by the people of VBC. The job of the 143d Military Police can be daunting.

To enforce standards, military police must exceed those standards. Military police have a great deal of power



in enforcing laws and regulations. But that power must be balanced with the responsibility to do the job right, document incidents in depth, and maintain transparency of actions. As with any police work, the paperwork is constant and never-ending. Reports documenting each call and incident must be thorough and complete. Several pages of documentation can be generated, even with the simplest of incidents.

As the night shift winds down, the sun begins to rise over Baghdad. Members of the night shift patrols return to the provost marshal's office to finish paperwork, turn in equipment, and hand over vehicles to their replacements. The sound of helicopters taking off can still be heard in the background as the day shift prepares to continue providing a law and order presence. Another day at VBC is about to begin.

Endnote:

¹Mayor cell elements are individual camp leadership units that act as a mayor's office, serving in public works and safety leadership roles.

143d Military Police Detachment Provides Security and Escort Operations for Presidential Visit

On 7 April 2009, President Barack Obama made an unannounced visit to VBC. While hundreds of Soldiers attended a ceremony held in Al Faw Palace, the 143d Military Police Detachment provided an open traffic route for the presidential motorcade and denied all other vehicles access to the palace area.

Security is a top priority wherever the President of the United States travels, and Iraq is no exception. Until President Obama's visit was publicly announced, few people had any knowledge of it. But by the time word had spread, leaders of the 143d were in the final phases of briefing their Soldiers about their responsibilities.

With time constraints to meet, action plans to brief, and a large area to cover, the 143d responded quickly and executed their tasks professionally. Although the Soldiers of the 143d were but a small part of the more than 1,200 personnel who worked to ensure that the presidential visit was safe and smooth, they provided a clear route and served as an escort to quickly move the presidential motorcade

from Baghdad International Airport to the Al Faw Palace. And President Obama was not the only dignitary to use the route secured by the 143d Military Police; Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, General Ray Odierno, and other Iraqi distinguished visitors were also in attendance and traveled the same route.

Despite the challenges of seamlessly integrating several “moving parts” with other Soldiers who had their own missions, the 143d Military Police successfully established traffic control points and provided a safe, expedient route for travel. The 143d also served as the police escort for the visit, leading the presidential motorcade through the streets of Baghdad to the Al Faw Palace, where President Obama addressed Soldiers who were fortunate enough to make it inside before the palace

reached capacity. Very few problems surfaced; and when they did, the 143d reacted to the changing elements and made the necessary adjustments.

Although most of 143d Military Police Soldiers missed the rare opportunity to see the Commander in Chief while in Iraq, they gained a sense of pride in knowing that they played a vital role in forming one of several rings of security surrounding the Al Faw Palace and in quickly and safely transporting the President of the United States through Baghdad.

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