
TF Griffin Support to Detainee Operations; OIF 09-11: ***The Four Big Milestones***

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The 89th Military Police Brigade and the many battalions that comprised Task Force (TF) Griffin executed a historic detainee operations mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) 09-11. The process of achieving the milestones that were met by the brigade was challenging and rewarding. The brigade responsibly transitioned two of the largest theater internment facilities (TIFs) and the correctional officer training academy from U.S. control to the Government of Iraq (GoI) Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and set the conditions and standards for the complete transfer of the last remaining TIFs.

Deployment Preparation

In preparation for deployment, the 89th Military Police Brigade, which is based at Fort Hood, Texas, engaged in several training events. In addition to a formal mission rehearsal exercise at Camp McGregor, New Mexico, the events included tours of four civilian prison facilities, a command post exercise, and a formal detainee operations leader symposium.

At Camp McGregor in Spring 2009, the 89th Military Police Brigade had the opportunity to meet and train with three of their future, in-theater subordinate battalions. The 89th built a solid chain of communication, alliance, and cohesion with the 32d Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Wisconsin Army National Guard, which helped tremendously throughout the deployment.

Although National Guard units typically train for deployment at Camp McGregor, this was the first time the facility was opened for detainee operations training for an Active Army unit. The opportunity for off-site training allowed the Soldiers of the 89th to focus on the instruction.

By many accounts, the training was difficult; but it was also very similar to the conditions encountered in theater. The 5/75th Division provided command and control training to brigade level personnel. TF Outlaw (one of four TFs under the Operation Warrior Trainer Program conducted by the 402d Field Artillery Brigade, Division West, First Army) provided direct training to battalion level leaders and Soldiers who were tasked to run the TIF.

Through scenarios involving riots, medical issues, and media engagements, the brigade and battalions learned how to respond to potential incidents. This training allowed Soldiers to fine-tune the tactics, techniques, and procedures necessary to conduct a successful detainee operation mission.

In February 2009, brigade senior leaders began touring civilian prisons to observe the inner workings of correctional facilities. These facilities included the Texas

State Penitentiary at Huntsville; Federal Correctional Complex, Terre Haute, Indiana; U.S. Disciplinary Barracks, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and San Quentin State Prison, California. The tours provided the leaders with a firsthand look at the types of logistical, personnel, and operational resources required to run a detention facility.

Mission

The 89th Military Police Brigade and TF Griffin provided brigade level command and control and tactically executed theater detainee operations in support of U.S. Forces–Iraq. They coordinated, supervised, and conducted counterinsurgency (COIN) operations inside the wire. They also supported the national unity effort, operated and provided force protection for forward operating bases (FOBs) and TIFs, and set conditions for capacity building with the Iraqi Corrections System and MoJ to transfer detainee operations to the MoJ. The purpose was to take insurgents off the battlefield and, at the same time, assist the GoI in providing a humane location for detainees to receive adequate care.

This operation helped the GoI assume control and security of prison systems and maintain the ability to operate as an independent organization. Three key tasks and milestones were completed during the mission. The first involved the transition of detainees from Camp Bucca to TIFs at Camp Cropper (located on Victory Base Complex, Baghdad) and Camp Taji and the closing of the Camp Bucca TIF. The second was the turnover of FOB Future (the location of the Iraqi Corrections Officer Training Academy) to the MoJ, which helped set the conditions necessary for the MoJ to take control of training Iraqi correctional officers (ICOs) and staff. The third and most significant task completed during the operation was the transition of the Taji TIF, which allowed for the establishment of a fully functional, self-sustaining Iraqi corrections prison controlled by the MoJ. A fourth milestone—the turnover of Camp Cropper to the GoI—was initiated, but not completed, by the 89th.

The successful execution of COIN operations inside the wire enabled the successful transition of the Taji TIF. COIN agents and situationally aware Service members constantly collected critical detainee information for assessment through the intelligence and behavioral vetting processes. This allowed for the segregation of moderate and radical detainees, which helped with the maintenance of detainee custody and control, and ensured a safe, secure environment for detainees and guard force personnel. The brigade's efforts were focused along the following lines of effort:

- **Care.** Treat detainees with dignity and respect.
- **Custody.** Produce actionable intelligence and evidence, and transition the legacy detainee population to GoI.
- **Control.** Ensure that detainees and others are safe and secure. Balance risk by synchronizing the detainee drawdown with available forces.
- **Communication.** Conduct effective information operation campaigns inside and outside the wire.
- **Education.** Oversee Theater Internment Facility Reconciliation Center operations.
- **Reconciliation.** Reintegrate detainees back into Iraqi society.
- **Facility/Logistics.** Transition the facility, buildings, and equipment.

Task Organization

The 89th Military Police Brigade took over a two-brigade mission set on 5 May 2009. However, the commander of Joint Task Force [JTF] 134 had decided in March 2009 to draw down to a one-brigade mission set as the detainee population decreased due to the approved releases of detainees and transfers of detainees to MoJ facilities according to the Iraq-U.S. Security Agreement¹ and in coordination with the GoI. The control of the 89th spanned three geographically separated TIFs, more than 10,000 Service members, and more than 12,000 detainees. The brigade was also responsible for the construction and operation of the Correctional Training Center (CTC). The 89th relieved the 42d Military Police Brigade at Camp Bucca and the 11th Military Police Brigade at Camps Cropper and Taji. Several Active Army and Reserve Component units supported the 89th during its tenure.

The First Milestone

At its peak operation, Camp Bucca (the largest TIF in Iraq) held about 26,000 detainees. The movement of Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and ICOs was constant. Anytime, day or night, the facility was flooded with personnel who were carrying out their duties. In its prime, the Camp Bucca TIF resembled a small city. However, the greatest population at the Camp Bucca TIF during the tenure of the 89th Military Police Brigade was 7,000—the number of detainees housed at the TIF in early May 2009.

The TIF was comprised of three interior facilities—Titan, operated by the 168th Military Police Battalion; Centurion, operated by the 306th Military Police Battalion; and Defender, operated by the 320th Military Police Battalion. In addition, the 3d Battalion, 13th Field Artillery Brigade, provided support for reconciliation services at the Camp Bucca TIF.

Before beginning operations at Camp Bucca, command and control needed to be established. A tactical command post (TAC) was deployed to Camp Bucca. The TAC, which was comprised of ten personnel from the brigade headquarters, provided brigade level management and oversight for the four assigned battalions. The 168th Military Police Battalion served as the TAC support battalion when the Titan facility was closed.

The closure of the Camp Bucca TIF demonstrated that U.S. forces were working closely with the GoI to move forward and make changes in detainee operations in compliance with the Iraq-U.S. Security Agreement that was implemented in January 2009. Under that security agreement, every detainee in the custody of U.S. forces is to be released at the request of the GoI or transferred to an MoJ prison.

The first step in closing Iraq's largest detention facility was the relocation of the detainees. This involved an intensive screening of individual legal requirements to determine the relocation timeframe for each detainee. At the appropriate time, detainees were out-processed and moved by bus convoy to a pickup point for a flight to Camp Cropper or Camp Taji.

Detainee air transfers (DATs) were vast movements that required detailed organization and planning. The difficulty of this demanding task was compounded by security issues, extreme heat and, at times, mission-inhibiting mortar fire and improvised explosive devices that handicapped escort vehicles during convoys to the airfield. DATs originating from Camp Bucca were led exclusively by the 306th, which served as the guard force unit while on convoy and in planes. The 2d Battalion, 127th Infantry Regiment, provided convoy security escorts from Camp Bucca to the airfield at Basra.

From 21 May to 12 September 2009, the 89th Military Police Brigade relocated more than 7,000 detainees from Camp Bucca. Following these relocations, the next step was the disassembly of the TIF. This colossal task was performed by Service members who were relieved of their guard force duties. They quickly began dismantling the compounds, where they had once guarded detainees, and relocating the resources and equipment to Camps Cropper and Taji. But with the imminent closure of Camp Bucca, the guard force was drawn down as fast as the detainee population; consequently, the task of disassembling the TIF and relocating the resources and equipment was much more demanding for the remaining personnel. The well-coordinated, five-month process officially ended on 17 September 2009—in concert with the Ramadan holiday.

The Second Milestone

With the transfer of additional detainee facilities to the MoJ looming on the horizon, the need to develop an abundant, well-trained Iraqi guard force was identified. Following the closure of Camp Bucca, the 89th partnered with the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program and began to focus on the construction, operation, and transfer of the Iraqi CTC—a facility where various Iraqi correctional training programs (including the Iraqi Corrections Officer Training Academy) would be consolidated in one location with one standard for excellence—at FOB Future, Victory Base Complex. Just months later, ground was broken on the CTC.

The 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry Regiment, was tasked to construct the CTC. Unlike most of the brigade's units, which took over established missions, the 1st Battalion was responsible for the academy from the groundbreaking ceremony to its final transfer to the MoJ.

The CTC was built to closely resemble a correctional facility. It includes housing for students, several modern classrooms, four computer labs, a dining facility, a mock correctional facility, and a nonlethal firing range.

The 89th knew that, to operate a correctional facility, it would be necessary to train more than the guard force. In conjunction with the JTF 134 staff, they would also need to develop programs of instruction for training wardens, engineers, midlevel supervisors, and administrators. The CTC provides a training venue that accommodates all of those requirements and also allows for the development of first-rate correctional officers. ICOs receive on-the-job training that is specific to the real-life scenarios they are likely to encounter while performing their duties. For example, ICOs learn to conduct head counts, move detainees to appointments, process detainees, and implement emergency action plans. At any given time, about 1,000 students are enrolled in training at the CTC. Following graduation, they go on to work in MoJ prisons or the U.S. detention facilities at Camp Cropper or Camp Taji, where they continue to receive on-the-job updates to ensure that their skills remain current.

U.S. authorities transferred control of the CTC from Multinational Forces–Iraq to the MoJ on 15 December 2009, marking another milestone in cooperative efforts between the United States and GoI. The MoJ now operates the CTC, with the United States serving a small advisory role with regard to the operation of the training academy.

The Third Milestone

When the 89th Military Police Brigade arrived, the Camp Taji TIF—which has a capacity of 5,600 prisoners—was in its infancy, housing fewer than 300 detainees. As part of the Iraq-U.S. Security Agreement, American forces were transferring detainees from U.S.-operated detention facilities to Iraqi authorities, who then decided whether to hold or release them. The staffing, operation, and transfer of the TIF proved to be a major undertaking for the 89th.

The transfer of the Camp Taji TIF was the most historic project completed by the brigade.

The TIF was under the control of the 508th Military Police Battalion, one of the primary driving forces behind using the K-Span concept for TIF operations—a concept not previously used in the Iraqi theater of operations. On 3 September 2009, the 508th transferred authority of the Camp Taji TIF to the 705th Military Police Battalion, which was assigned the primary responsibility for care and custody of the detainees.

The 89th also placed an element at Camp Taji to prepare for the imminent transfer. The Taji TIF Transition Team was formed to plan, coordinate, and execute the strategic-level aspects of transferring the Camp Taji TIF to the GoI.

Due to the closure of Camp Bucca, the Camp Taji TIF detainee population grew from 300 to 4,700 in three short months. The U.S. guard force—alongside their Iraqi partners from Camps Bucca, Cropper, and Taji—worked in concert, day and night, to get the Camp Taji TIF into full operation. Care and custody with dignity and respect remained at the forefront of operations.

The 211th Military Police Battalion joined the brigade and the 705th in mid-September 2009, assuming all of the supporting functions of the TIF (DATs, detainee movements, vocational services) and performing mayoral duties for the northern portion of Camp Taji.

The transfer of the Camp Taji facility to the GoI was initially scheduled for 15 January 2010; however, due to the lack of an adequate Iraqi correctional guard force to properly staff the facility, the transfer was delayed until 31 March 2010. The delay allowed the brigade to better prepare and train the ICOs and administrative staff for the mission that they were to assume.

The arduous task of transferring individual detainees and their personal property to the GoI began in early March 2010. Over the course of about three weeks, the brigade transferred 2,600 detainees and the facility itself over to the GoI. This was the first time in history that the United States had transferred a facility and its detainees to a host nation government.

On 31 March 2010, the 89th closed a significant chapter in its mission and in history. The GoI had taken control of the Camp Taji TIF, including the 5,600-capacity detention facility; a 2,600-capacity, state-of-the-art ICO housing complex; a modern medical facility to be staffed and operated by the Iraqi Ministry of Health; and various vocational resources such as a brick-making factory, agricultural grounds, and carpentry and masonry assets. The 211th remained at Camp Taji after the TIF transition to provide operational and maintenance oversight to the Iraqis during the infancy of what is now a fully operational MoJ prison.

The Fourth Milestone

Camp Cropper served as the center of operations for the 89th Military Police Brigade and as the location where U.S. forces detainee operations would eventually end. All detainees under the control of the 89th were, at one time or another, processed through Camp Cropper. In addition to its role as the hub of activity, Camp Cropper also housed the high-value detainees (HVDs) that fell under U.S. control, including former members of Saddam Hussein's regime who were some of Iraq's most infamous war criminals, including former Iraqi Minister of Defense, Ali Hassan ("Chemical Ali"), and former Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz. The headquarters of the 89th arrived at Camp Cropper at the height of its operation.

The 89th was faced with many challenges at Camp Cropper. The day-to-day operations were not typical of the detainee operations experienced in the Camps Bucca and Taji TIFs. The brigade not only provided care and custody of the detainees, but also facilitated movements that allowed detainees to attend visitations, medical appointments, and scheduled court dates in the heart of Baghdad's International Zone, formerly referred to as the "Green Zone." And the HVD compound often received international attention, which served to remind the brigade of the strategic impacts of the mission.

Despite the unique challenges and unsolicited attention from outside entities such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and international media agencies, the brigade continued to focus primarily on the care and custody of detainees with dignity and respect. This paid dividends when the detainee population attempted to interfere with facility operations by demonstrating or causing disturbances.

The task of providing an adequate guard force for such a large detainee population was daunting in itself. The 89th was supported by several battalions within the year. Most of the units assigned to conduct detainee operations were not military police or even Army units—they were referred to as "in lieu of" units. More than 10,000 Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen provided guard force and support personnel to the brigade. And they all worked toward the common goal of care and custody with dignity and respect.

Camp Cropper continued to serve as the epicenter for detainee releases and transfers to the GoI. During the brigade's tenure, more than 5,000 detainees were released to their points of capture. These releases were essential

for promoting national unity and building U.S.-GoI partnerships. Some of the releases were conducted under conditions set by the U.S. Forces-Iraq Provost Marshal's Office and Force Strategic Engagement Cell. More than 9,000 detainees, who were not eligible for release, were transferred to GoI prisons. The transfer process was a continuous challenge for the brigade due to the general lack of suitable infrastructure for detainment in Iraqi prisons.

To further assist in the transition of detainees to GoI prisons, the brigade (under the direction of JTF 134 and in close coordination with the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program) formed corrections assistance transition teams that traveled to prison facilities throughout Iraq to train the Iraqi guard force and help facilities meet acceptable humane detainment standards. Their efforts resulted in the ability of the Iraqi prisons to accept additional transfers.

After the closure of the Camp Bucca TIF and the transfer of the CTC at FOB Future, the brigade was left with the final milestone of setting the conditions for Camp Cropper to be turned over to the GoI—leaving only the HVD compound under the control of U.S. forces. The task involved splitting Camp Cropper so that the portion containing the detention facility could be transferred to the GoI, while the other portion remained under the control of U.S. forces. Because Camp Cropper comprised only a portion of the overall Victory Base Complex footprint, the transition plan and security issues needed to be thoughtfully considered and clearly defined. Although the 89th Military Police Brigade did not witness the final turnover of the Camp Cropper TIF/FOB, the planning and preparation they had done provided the foundation for success.

Conclusion

The 89th Military Police Brigade successfully completed their OIF 09-11 mission on 24 April 2010. The Soldiers, Sailors, and Airmen who contributed to the success of the brigade will always be a part of its history. The 89th was relieved by the 49th Military Police Brigade TAC, marking the second time during the tenure of the 89th that a TAC was used to replace a brigade. The staff was provided by the 705th from Camp Taji. Detainee operations at an organic brigade command level in Iraq were over.

Endnote:

¹Iraq-U.S. Security Agreement, 1 December 2008.

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