



"WHEN THE EARTH SHAKES!"

## Detainee Disturbances in an Internment Facility

By Lieutenant Colonel John F. Hussey  
and Major Robert L. Berry

*Military police forces in the contemporary operating environment are becoming increasingly involved in detainee operations. In addition to military corrections for military service members, an even larger number of military police Soldiers are performing detainee missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and other locations. These detainees are not the compliant prisoners of war found in the European theater of 1944. These extremists want to continue their "Jihad" by any and all means, even while they are detainees. These actions may include passive resistance to facility rules (such as refusing to participate in an accountability formation), escape attempts, and endeavors to use improvised weapons and engage in combat with guard forces. This article will discuss some observations made by the 306th Military Police Battalion during detainee operations at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2005.*

**E**very day, Soldiers in detention operations missions are guaranteed one thing: contact with the enemy. Once captured by coalition forces, detainees do not simply give up their will to fight but, rather, begin a new phase of warfare—insurgency within the wire. As in any prison setting, there are chains of command—formal (known by prison officials) and informal (known by members of the prison population)—that have objectives which are usually contrary to that of the prison administration.

Detainee disturbances can be classified into three broad categories: low-level, nonviolent protests; small-scale, violent disturbances; and full-scale riots. The factors that separate the categories include the number of detainees involved, the number of compounds affected,

and the level of violence emanating from the disturbance. For example, a peaceful demonstration by 200 detainees may be classified as a low-level disturbance, while a marauding group of 50 detainees attempting to take over a compound would be considered a full-scale riot. Some disturbances include detainee protests, group rivalry, diversionary tactics, and insurgency attempts. Detainee protests may stem from a variety of factors, including concern over the cause and/or length of their incarceration, quality-of-life conditions in the facility, perceived treatment by the guard force, and political expression. All of these factors should be examined within a cultural framework. For most detainees, everything was somehow connected to Islam. Suggestions to proactively reduce these protest factors include creating a forum

for detainees to obtain information on their specific cases. For instance, we allowed detainees to complete a form listing inquiries that, in turn, were answered by Multinational Force–Iraq staff judge advocates. Sometimes, the answer wasn't what the detainee wanted to hear; but, for the most part, answers were appreciated.

Military police guard forces who pay particular attention to detainee quality-of-life conditions help prevent many disturbances. Ensuring that detainee meals are appropriate (according to religious, cultural, and dietary requirements) helps to reduce the tension between the guards and the inmates. Soliciting detainee input with the help of host nation government consultation resolves many questions. In addition to food, quality-of-life issues include recreational opportunities, education, and religious expression. As a cautionary note, extremists within the detainee population often attacked these issues to stir up resentment among the other detainees. Additionally, while certain quality-of-life issues may be used as a means of rewarding correct behavior, this practice must be done according to applicable laws and command guidance (for example, denial of food is not an acceptable punishment; however, recreation privileges may be reduced due to rule violations).

All contact between guards and detainees should be monitored. Proactive leader involvement is the best means of preventing problems. Perceived transgressions may include guard handling of religiously sensitive items (such as the Koran), verbal insults or taunts, and unnecessarily rough handling. These concerns should not deter guards from properly performing their jobs and enforcing facility rules, but they should cause us all to consider our actions and assess subsequent effects (such as second- and third-order effects).

Detainees may cause disturbances due to their expression of political will. As mentioned before, culture often plays a primary influence. Giving detainees an outlet to express political views may be a means to reduce tension and, also, inculcate them to democratic values. However, demonstrations must be monitored to ensure that they don't escalate into violent confrontations.

Rivalry between detainee groups may be the cause of some disturbances. At Abu Ghraib, we often maintained a diversified population in the larger compounds. Careful monitoring, population management, and identification of all groups within the detainee population are important. The most obvious groups are religious sects (such as Sunni versus Shiite), but groups may become more detailed and diverse (such as religious extremists or former Baath party members). There may be local nationals and foreign nationals or detainees from the same or rival insurgent groups. Tribal membership may prove to be as important as religious identification. This information must be carefully developed, constantly updated, and frequently disseminated.

The ultimate cause of a disturbance may be the desire of the most extreme insurgent detainees to continue their Jihad fight by engaging in direct combat with military police guards. Detainees will often use improvised weapons ranging from clubs, edged instruments, stabbing instruments (such as shanks), slingshots, and just about anything else they can think of and get their hands on. For these extremists, addressing quality-of-life issues will not matter. These insurgents are only interested in combat (and base their success on how many Soldiers they can injure and how much disruption they can cause). The best means of dealing with these problem detainees is identifying them and then separating them from the general population.

The best means to combat disturbances is to understand the root cause (if possible) and proactively address the problem. Reducing tension will decrease the severity and number of incidents; however, no actions will prevent all detainee disturbances.

Soldiers who have experienced traditional contact with enemy detainees understand the phenomena and complete adrenaline rush of the situation—a situation in which the instinct to survive takes over. Contact with the enemy during a detainee uprising is not contact in the traditional sense of a military engagement but is, nevertheless, frightening. If you can imagine 3,000 detainees chanting “Allah Akbar” while burning tents, throwing rocks, and massing into formations—you can visualize the conditions for a long and charged engagement. Military personnel will tell you that you can literally feel the ground shake—resulting, obviously, in physiological effects on Soldiers.

There are usually telltale signs when detainees are planning disturbances. When the identification of involved personnel is confirmed, all guards are told to be particularly observant of those detainees. Additionally, if a disturbance is suspected, the intelligence officer (S-2) tracks the activity of the suspect detainees. When the 306th Military Police Battalion confronted disturbances at Abu Ghraib, we practiced the following basic tenets:

- Facility rules are nonnegotiable.
- Violence will not be tolerated.
- Violators of facility rules will be disciplined according to facility standing operating procedures (SOPs).
- Verbal persuasion will be used first to gain compliance.
- The use of force by military police guards will be appropriate to the situation.
- Disturbances will be contained as well as possible.
- We control this facility!

While we were always willing to speak with the detainees, we were cautious to never allow them to

believe that they could coerce us into changing the rules. While giving in to a simple demand to halt a disturbance and prevent further violence may seem reasonable, the detainees will not stop there and may feel emboldened to push the situation further in future incidents.

One of the most important things that must be done is capturing disturbances on video. Videos offer numerous advantages to military police and should be considered an assigned task for specified Soldiers. With video footage, enemy leaders can be identified (likely as the individuals encouraging other detainees to riot).

We always made it clear that violence, whether against fellow detainees or against Soldiers, would not be tolerated under any circumstances. Violators were dealt with according to the facility discipline SOP. We made every effort to make this system transparent so that every detainee could understand it. This practice also reinforced the democratic concept for the rules of law.

As we expected detainees to follow the rules, it was just as critical that military police forces follow the established rules regarding the use of force. Guards who act like lone rangers can cause disturbances and may make detainees more violent than necessary.

Preventing disturbances from growing and impacting other parts of the facility was key to our tactics for dealing with disturbances. We trained our leaders to—

- Immediately report disturbances.
- Take steps to isolate disturbances (keep them from moving).
- Contain disturbances (keep them from growing).
- Continuously gather and report information.
- Assess the threat of disturbances (think of the big picture and the impact of a facility-wide disturbance).
- Recommend and select appropriate courses of action and contingency plans.
- Provide overwatch security.
- Gather needed resources.
- Implement action plans.
- Reassess and monitor results.
- Maintain accountability of personnel and key equipment.
- Document and report all incidents.

After experiencing many disturbances, we discovered several issues that future military police guards should consider. Command, control, and communications are extremely difficult during disturbances. The sounds of conflict make voice and radio communications nearly impossible. Leadership and widely understood contingency

plans can ease some of these issues. Logistics support during and after a disturbance can be a challenge. Operations in stockpiling, rationing, and emergency resupply missions should be planned and rehearsed.

As mentioned before, it is important to limit disturbances to a small area and a few detainees if possible. We found that disturbances had a tendency to cascade to other compounds. Other detainees may have had no idea how the incident started, but they jumped in at the first opportunity to riot. This is why it is important to consider the second- and third-order effects in every action you take with detainees. There may be occasions when it is better to “not make a mountain out of a molehill”; therefore, do not respond to a detainee provocation.

Detainees spend a great deal of time watching the actions of guard forces, both before and during incidents. Just as detainees will sometimes use disturbances as distractions from other actions (such as escape attempts), we can use distractions to combat disturbances. Considering the capabilities of counter-disturbance resources is crucial to success. At the 306th, we maintained levels of response forces to combat disturbances. The first-level response was several pre-designated military police guards within each facility area that could rapidly move to reinforce areas encountering a disturbance. The second-level response was a full-time, squad-size, dedicated response force or immediate response force (IRF). Members assigned to the IRF lived and trained together 24 hours a day. They were specially trained and equipped to deal with a full range of detainee disturbances and could respond to any part of the facility within 10 minutes. The vehicles dedicated for use by the IRF were equipped with a variety of less-than-lethal (LTL) force options and tools. There is an abundance of LTL options available to military police guards. And additional options are constantly being introduced. It is critical to employ them in concert with one another and not in isolation.

For full-scale riots, we activated our third-level response plan to alert, mobilize, and deploy every Soldier in the battalion. Upon alert, all off-duty and on-duty, nonguard Soldiers reported to their company assembly areas. Each company maintained pre-positioned vehicles, supplies, and equipment. Leaders mobilized their Soldiers and deployed them to designated rally points.

Some of the LTL systems we employed included oleoresin capsicum (OC) pepper spray, X26 Tasers, 12-gauge shotguns, FN303 rifles, 40-millimeter M203 rounds, flash-bang grenades, sting ball grenades, long-range acoustical devices (LRADs), modular crowd control munitions (claymore mines), and fire hoses. Military police guard forces were involved in an arms race with the detainees because, as new LTL weapons were introduced, detainees developed methods to counter them. For instance, detainees quickly realized the range limitations of our LTL shotgun rounds. They would simply hover

just outside their range and use hand-thrown projectiles or slingshots to strike our Soldiers. We countered this with the introduction of the FN303, which greatly out-ranged the shotguns. An effective combination was the FN303 to engage detainees in the open and then sting ball grenades to clear combatant detainees from areas the FN303 could not engage. We used the LRAD to move large groups of combating detainees. We experimented with the use of modular crowd control munitions by mounting them on vehicles to produce rapid deployment and detonation, resulting in increased surprise and effect for the detainees. The important factor was thinking in terms of the effect and range of individual weapons and how to best employ them in concert.

The challenge of detainee operations is growing and will continue to be an essential part of military police missions in the foreseeable future. In order for military police guard forces to maintain proper care, custody, and control of detainees, we must be prepared to deal with detainee disturbances—an absolute fact in the War on Terrorism! Leaders must be prepared to deal with disturbances through realistic planning. This can be done by examining past disturbances, after-action reviews (AARs), Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 investigations, command inquiries, and discussions with transitioning units. Leaders must have a plan in place to react to events. A large-scale detainee disturbance may be one of the most difficult leadership challenges that an officer or senior noncommissioned officer will encounter in his career. Remember the following:

- Stay calm!
- Videotape the disturbance.
- Include leadership presence in the camp.
- Develop a sleep plan.

- Maintain fire discipline.
- Engage detainee leadership.
- Reduce tension in the camp, and restore the camp to normal activity as quickly as possible.
- Hold instigators accountable (detainees and Soldiers).
- Conduct AARs.
- Review tactics, techniques, and procedures (for detainees and Soldiers).

The success of the 306th Military Police Battalion was largely due to the tireless efforts and dedication of its Soldiers. This article is dedicated to them!

#### Reference:

AR 15-6, *Procedures for Investigating Officers and Boards of Officers*, 2 October 2006.

**Note:** Due to security concerns, this article was modified before publication in *Military Police*. Individuals with access to Army Knowledge Online may view the article in its entirety in that forum.



*Lieutenant Colonel Hussey is the assistant plans officer for the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-5 (Civil Affairs), 353d Civil Affairs Command. He is currently attending the U.S. Army War College. Major Berry is the commander of Detachment 1, 11-80th Regiment, 84th Training Command. He is a graduate of the Command and General Staff College. Lieutenant Colonel Hussey and Major Berry served in 2005 as the commander and operations and training officer, respectively, of the 306th Military Police Battalion at Abu Ghraib prison.*

This article is reprinted from *Military Police*, The Professional Bulletin of the Military Police Corps, Spring 2008.

