
McPherson and Gillem Police Offer “Lessons Learned” in Transition

By Ms. Annette Fournier

The Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson (Georgia) police departments could sum up their military-to-civilian transition in two words: “lessons learned.” That’s according to officials with the Fort McPherson and Fort Gillem police departments and the Directorate of Emergency Services (DES).

“The War on [Terrorism] put a greater demand on MP [military police] units that were needed in theater,” said Lieutenant Colonel Logan Jenkins, U.S. Army Garrison director of DES. “Once the war started, the MPs’ emphasis changed. The priority was the war.”

In March of 2005, the Department of the Army (DA) directed certain installations to convert at least half of their military police positions to DA civilian positions.

Fort McPherson and Fort Gillem were told to convert 90 percent of their positions. The goal was to free up military police for deployments, and the Soldiers started receiving orders within weeks.

However, the civilian hiring process is not completed within weeks and small installations like these did not have enough civilian officers to fill all the police slots, according to Jonathan Brown, deputy director of DES. “It didn’t impact the bigger installations like Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Knox, Kentucky; or Fort Benning, Georgia; the way it affected us,” Brown said. “They have MP units stationed there that could help support the civilian force until more police could be hired. For us, it was like, ‘There’s nobody left.’ We really had to scramble.”

Military police leaders weren’t sure where to begin. Neither they nor the post personnel office had



A DA civilian police officer talks to a driver he has stopped on Fort McPherson. The police officer, a former staff sergeant and military police officer, came to Fort McPherson as part of the military-to-civilian conversion program.

ever hired civilian police officers before. The process and requirements are unique and follow different regulations than most civilian hires.

The DES leaders approached the Veterans Administration (VA), which has had civilian police officers for several years. They were able to tailor the VA job descriptions and training programs to meet the installations’ needs, according to Jeff Butler, DES investigations chief.

The DES leadership did not have guidance from above for what qualified an officer to become a DA police officer. At that time, there was no standard. The DES military police decided that state level academy training or a military police certification within the past two years could qualify officers. Now, improvements are coming in the form of regional schools to train DA civilian officers to meet the needs of military installations.

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The pay for DA civilian officers was not competitive for the Atlanta area. DES leaders were eventually able to secure a salary exception to make the positions more competitive.

Once they were able to hire more officers, another problem cropped up. The garrison received authorization to hire police officers (all the same grade), but not to hire supervisors. The conversion was supposed to be one to one—one military police Soldier to one DA civilian officer—but there was no standard for how to convert those positions.

“With MPs, I had a company commander, a first sergeant, and a platoon leader. How do I take all those positions and make them all the same grade civilian positions? So everyone hiring civilians was doing it differently,” Brown said.

While management was trying to get authorization to hire supervisors, military police who had never supervised civilians were thrust into that position. Civilians who had never been employed by the military came from a different police culture, which caused challenges. Military police also had other duties, such as being honor and gate guards and participating in ceremonies. “So people would need some guys for an honor guard, and we’d say, ‘we need those same guys to work the desk,’” Brown said.

All of these changes made it difficult to keep new hires. “If you hire someone and then they refuse the job, you have to start back at square one and wait months more to fill the job,” Brown said. “For a while, we had one MP on during each shift who had to cover both installations. It was chaos until we got civilian leadership.”

Things are finally running pretty smoothly. Both Butler and Brown retired from active duty and stayed on as civilian leaders. Other leaders have also been hired.

Now, some larger posts are approaching deadlines for the military-to-civilian transition. That’s where Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson have stepped in. They’ve also joined a growing dialogue between installations on how to strengthen the force across the Army. “We have other posts approaching us for help,” Jenkins said. “We’re sending out hiring packets and rewritten job descriptions [and] sharing lessons learned about working with personnel and ways to hire and keep good officers.”

“It hasn’t been easy, especially transitioning in the middle of a war,” Butler said. “But now, at least, we’re able to share our lessons learned to make that transition easier for others across the Army.”

Ms. Fournier is the former assistant editor of the Fort McPherson and Fort Gillem Sentinel.

Winners of the Warrior Police Challenge

1st place: Team 21, 503d Military Police Battalion, Fort Bragg, North Carolina

2d place: Team 15, 720th Military Police Battalion, Fort Hood, Texas

3d place: Team 14, 289th Military Police Company, Fort Myer, Virginia