

# **Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 716th Military Police Battalion— Redefining the Mission**

*By Captain Sandy Bucher and Captain Ranjini Danaraj*

*The Soldiers of the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 716th Military Police Battalion, exemplified the old adage that “MP means multipurpose” during their deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The unit, which commanded Task Force (TF) Peacekeeper, did everything from conducting split operations between Baghran Airfield (BAF) and Shindand Airfield (SHAF), to operating as a maneuver element in support of Regional Component (RC) West, to commanding all of the force protection assets at BAF in support of RC East (a conglomeration that included air defense, field artillery, and infantry units). Competent, confident leaders and Soldiers, willing and able to adapt to the ever-changing mission set, made the year a success. Along the way, they redefined the concept of flexibility.*

It was an indication of things to come when the detachment received three mission changes within months of deployment. These changes included conducting customs operations in Kuwait, supervising detention operations in Afghanistan, and providing command and control (C2) to all combat support military police Soldiers in the Afghan Combined Joint Area of Operations (CJOA). The detachment’s first challenge was to define a role in which they could best support the war effort. Shortly after arriving at BAF in January 2005, a short-notice order came down for TF Peacekeeper to split operations and support both RC East and RC West, with the primary effort at SHAF as part of TF Longhorn. Within days, TF Peacekeeper compiled a force package that was capable of conducting a thorough relief in place with the 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division at SHAF to become the only maneuver element in RC West. The TF was responsible for conducting base operations, a daunting task that included the supervision and execution of all logistical and tactical support.

While at SHAF, the TF conducted joint operations with a special forces detachment, a provincial reconstruction team (PRT), and an Afghanistan National Army (ANA) battalion. These missions included—

- More than 175 area security patrols.
- 100 village patrols.
- 110 route reconnaissance jobs.
- 25 Afghan national police (ANP) assessments.

- 21 humanitarian assistance drops.
- 22 cache collection and destruction operations.

When the decision was made to turn over RC West to the International Security Forces, the TF was responsible for closing SHAF, returning all consolidated equipment to BAF, and handling the first base handover between coalition and ANA forces. During this process, the TF planned, coordinated, and tracked the air and ground movement of numerous military demountable containers and hundreds of personnel to various locations across the CJOA.

Simultaneously, combat support operations in RC East continued. The number of Soldiers in the TF continued to grow; as two units redeployed back to the United States, four military police companies arrived. These units had Soldiers spread across the CJOA and the TF tracked and supported them as they provided military police expertise to police technical assistance teams at PRT sites; served as personal security detachments; and conducted joint operations center (JOC) security, law and order operations, provost marshal operations, area security, convoy escorts, and mobile reaction operations. In June, the TF again received an order for a change of mission; this time it was to assume responsibility for force protection of BAF, with its large population of U.S. and coalition military and civilian personnel.

As the task organization changed again, the TF took on four new units that included military police, air defense, field artillery, and infantry Soldiers. The TF assessed the force protection posture at BAF and

developed a comprehensive, layered security plan. With C2 centralized at the base defense operations center, the TF synchronized—

- Law enforcement operations.
- JOC security.
- Access control.
- Badging.
- Perimeter fence tower monitoring.
- High-tech surveillance systems.
- Combat patrols within the BAF security zone (an area extending in every direction around the airfield).

During a five-month period, the TF conducted more than 800 mounted and dismounted patrols and 70 joint vehicle checkpoints. The effectiveness of these efforts was demonstrated by the local population turning in or reporting more than 70 weapons caches and a marked decrease in rocket attacks against BAF.

Although the BAF force protection mission took a great amount of time and effort, the TF also contributed greatly to ensuring safe and secure National Assembly and Provincial Council elections. In order to develop a viable plan, the TF established liaison with the United Nation’s Joint Electoral Management Body and its contracted security representatives. This partnership was critical to ensuring that the TF maintained an effective, integrated security plan that did not infringe upon that of the Afghan security forces but set the conditions for a secure and stable environment for the elections.

To support the Afghan security forces, the TF distributed weapons and ammunition. These resources helped bring confidence and credibility to the Afghan security forces and enabled them to properly conduct election security. Additionally, the TF supported missions that included—

- Village assessments to identify threats to the election process and gauge public sentiment.

- Reconnaissance of more than 100 polling sites and both local counting sites to prepare for crisis response.
- Logistical support and C2 of operations in the Tagab Valley (a location near BAF where enemy activities posed a great threat to both BAF and Kabul).

To disrupt enemy activity in Tagab, the TF forward-deployed a battalion tactical action center responsible for managing combat operations. During combat operations in Tagab, the TF had three enemy contacts, to include a strike by an improvised explosive device and two separate direct-fire attacks. The TF’s efforts in this area significantly disrupted enemy activity and prevented the enemy from conducting coordinated attacks to discredit the government of Afghanistan and the elections process. TF medics also supported humanitarian aid and medical support



**Top: ANP line up to receive new weapons.**

**Bottom: ANP practice loading their new weapons.**

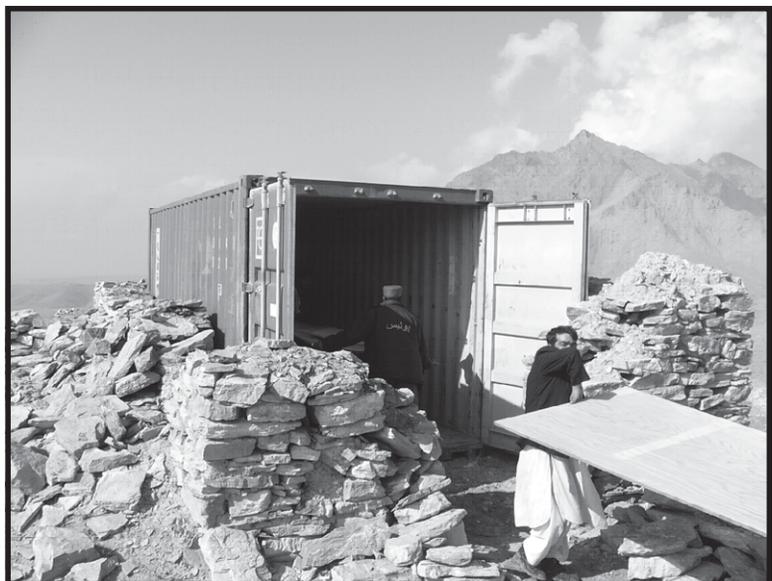
missions aimed at providing villagers with much-needed medical services and supplies. These missions allowed many local people to be seen by a physician and receive treatment. Ultimately, the TF's efforts resulted in an incident-free elections process in the Kapisa, Parwan, and Panjshir provinces.

After this success, it would have been easy for the TF to settle into steady-state operations. Instead, the TF took the initiative and developed missions to continue assisting the Afghan people and their fledgling security forces. Some of the issues the TF faced were a more pressing threat to police forces in Iraq (which limited the resources coming into Afghanistan) and international political decisions that made it difficult to define who could provide training to the Afghan security forces. The TF knew that it did not have the resources to mount a continued offensive campaign against insurgents and anticoalition militia, so it developed an innovative multitiered plan to disrupt the enemy and win the hearts and minds of the local population.

One tier of the plan was to build the capacity of the security forces, to include the ANP and Afghan highway police (AHP) around BAF, so they could more effectively perform their missions. As winter approached, the productivity of the ANP and AHP was bound to decline as the elements forced them to seek shelter away from critical checkpoints. The TF provided an innovative solution to this problem by providing unserviceable container express (CONEX) containers from which the ANP and AHP could base checkpoint operations. The TF conducted a campaign to bring CONEX containers and humanitarian aid to checkpoints critical to BAF to improve ANP and AHP productivity and encourage cooperation with coalition forces. In a two-month period, the TF delivered more than 20 CONEX containers to areas within the security zone, fostering a positive relationship with the Afghan security forces. Additionally, the TF delivered more weapons and ammunition to enable the ANP and AHP to perform their security mission.

Another tier of the plan was medical and humanitarian assistance missions to help prepare local villages for winter. Previously, the medical support missions were conducted by U.S. military personnel alone. However, the missions coordinated and conducted by the TF were unique in that several coalition partners assisted by sending medical providers. During these operations, the coalition partners provided medical service to local citizens, helping legitimize the coalition partners' presence in Afghanistan to their home governments. These operations also included large humanitarian deliveries of school supplies, teacher kits, cold-weather items, and food, which were greatly appreciated by the local population.

The final tier of the plan was the BAF security program, which can best be compared to the



**Top: Air assault Soldiers hook up a CONEX for delivery.**

**Bottom: A CONEX is fortified.**

“neighborhood watch” program. Like Americans, Afghans are very aware of unfamiliar people in their neighborhoods, so it only made sense to leverage this curiosity. The BAF security program involved hiring local nationals around the airfield to perform jobs critical to security. The work assigned to the locals would seem menial to many people, but at \$10 a week they were prized jobs to the Afghans. The locally hired workers were asked to do everything from cleaning a creek to prevent on-post flooding to patrolling the perimeter on the lookout for suspicious activity. This neighborhood watch program not only infused local communities with jobs, it provided an incentive to keep unwanted persons away from the perimeter and provided another layer of defense for BAF. Additionally, the program provided actionable intelligence resulting in the recovery of stolen military equipment and weapons caches.

Although this article details the many accomplishments of the Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 716th Military Police Battalion, the lessons learned were the most critical gains for the Soldiers and leaders. First, military police Soldiers will always be called upon, regardless of the mission. It was clear that the TF was the unit of choice for difficult missions in Afghanistan. At the division level, leaders recognized the ability of military police Soldiers to complete all missions, regardless of their familiarity or level of training in regards to the mission at hand.

When assigned a non-doctrinal mission, the first way to prepare is to bring to the table a staff that is well versed in all aspects of the Army’s military decision-making process, as well as troop-to-task management. Being able to realistically resource missions is imperative so that military police Soldiers will be used to their maximum potential in the many missions they are expected to complete simultaneously.

The second way to prepare is to use imagination. A CONEX container with two cots, a stove, coal or wood to fuel it, and some blankets might be insignificant to a U.S. Soldier, but to an ANP, these ingredients combine to provide a well-fortified checkpoint for manning. In Afghanistan, a little bit goes a long way. Securing hearts and minds can be

accomplished by conducting medical and humanitarian aid missions in strategic locations where locals who appreciate the jobs and humanitarian aid that coalition forces provide will question strangers and report their activities. An example of this effect was seen at BAF by comparing the threat level and number of attacks before and after TF Peacekeeper assumed responsibility for the BAF security zone and the layered defense of BAF. From January to May 2005, there were five rocket attacks and frequent incidents of enemy activity. From June to December 2005, there were no rocket attacks, there were 50 caches recovered as a result of local reporting, and there was a marked decrease in enemy activity in the BAF security zone.

The final lesson is to remain flexible. TF Peacekeeper’s mission changed five times during the 12-month deployment. Part of that was the unit trying to carve out a sizeable contribution to the Global War on Terrorism. Another part was the effort by higher authorities to determine how to best employ versatile, intelligent warfighters. In the end, flexibility and a keen ability to adapt to change allowed the unit to manage more than 900 Soldiers who completed missions throughout the CJOA and to find a better fit for what they could contribute to OEF as a headquarters element.

Headquarters elements usually get very little respect for what they contribute to the war effort. The Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 716th Military Police Battalion, spent a year in Afghanistan redefining the mission of a military police headquarters, to include a multitude of tasks critical to the Global War on Terrorism.

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