



Kurdish corrections officers conduct riot control training.

BUILDING THE BACKBONE

By Captain Jason L. Moore-Brown

Ask Soldiers about the backbone of the U.S. Army and they will answer before the question is even finished—the Noncommissioned Officer (NCO) Corps. It is unimaginable that our Army could exist without NCOs. The Soldiers of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 508th Military Police Battalion (Internment/Resettlement [I/R]), were introduced to an organization that lacked a true NCO Corps shortly after their arrival in northeastern Iraq on 20 January 2006. The 508th (formerly the 704th) Military Police Battalion supports detention operations at the theater internment facility (TIF) at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Suse and is part of Task Force 26—a task force composed of Army, Navy, and Iraqi units.

The members of the corrections unit augmenting coalition forces at FOB Suse are known as Kurdish corrections officers (KCOs). Their unit and rank structure is based loosely on the British model, which in turn is similar to the U.S. Army's. However, the KCOs did not have many formally recognized NCOs

or middle managers when the 508th arrived. The KCOs were a body without a backbone, and although they performed reasonably well, they were disorganized and fragmented.

Recognizing that the lack of an NCO Corps was an obstacle that could hinder the transition of custody of the TIF from coalition to Iraqi control, Lieutenant Colonel Stephanie Beavers, commander of the 508th Military Police Battalion, directed Captain Jason Moore-Brown, commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, to establish an NCO Corps that was able to manage the host nation (HN) guard force and direct detention operations. Captain Moore-Brown and Master Sergeant Roger Hasty, a corrections specialist with the company, began assembling a team of individuals who would run the first detention operations-specific NCO Academy in Iraq.

The team of four Soldiers, five sailors, and six interpreters adopted the name "Team Cerberus," for the mythical three-headed dog that guards the gates of Hades. The three-headed dog represented the Army,

the Navy, and Iraq. The members of Team Cerberus act as gatekeepers, ensuring that only the best candidates become Iraqi NCOs. The Soldiers and Sailors who make up Team Cerberus were hand-selected from the task force based on merit and their ability to teach HN corrections officers. All the instructors and the interpreters had to go through a one-week certification in which they taught every class that the KCOs would receive. This certification refined each team member's instructing abilities and ensured that they were truly subject matter experts.

The NCO Academy, or Corrections Leaders Course (CLC) as it was officially called, was based on the Warrior Leaders Course and basic NCO course formats. A mission-specific twist was added to refine the program of instruction (POI) and thus was born the first Iraqi NCO Academy. Each class would be divided into three platoons, each supported by two small-group leaders (SGLs) and an interpreter. The POI was based on specific Army doctrine for corrections and detention operations, nonlethal weapons training, and FOB Suse standing operating procedures. Reinforcement of basic detention operations and junior NCO-level tasks was the focus of the course.

Two months after the start of the first course, two classes from the CLC had graduated and the KCOs had warrant officers (the Iraqi equivalent to an NCO) filling the ranks of what is now the first Iraqi corrections battalion. Each of the KCO companies has NCOs in key positions as first sergeant, platoon sergeant, squad leader, and assistant squad leader (a position that is used in the Iraqi task organization). Elements of the Iraqi corrections battalion have

supported six detainee transfers, received laudatory comments from all levels of command (to include the other TIFs at Abu Ghraib and Camps Bucca and Cropper), and are supporting operations in every area of the TIF at FOB Suse. The KCOs serve as SGLs at the CLC and as instructors at a nearby "feeder" program that is similar to the advanced individual training received by U.S. Soldiers. They have developed their own NCO creed and adopted the pushup as a means to modify behavior problems. There is now a corps of leaders where once none existed.

There is still a lot of work to be done before the KCOs will be able to run the TIF independent of a coalition presence. There are strategic issues to hash out, evaluations and retraining to be conducted, and at least one more group of NCOs to be developed, but the Soldiers of the 508th Military Police Battalion continue to move forward with their KCO teammates. As each day passes, the U.S. Soldiers step further back and watch in admiration as their KCO counterparts begin to stand tall, due in no small part to their newly developed NCO Corps—their backbone.

Captain Moore-Brown is the commander of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 508th Military Police Battalion (I/R), from Fort Lewis, Washington. The company is currently deployed to Iraq in support of TIF operations at FOB Suse. Captain Moore-Brown is a recent graduate of the Military Police Captains Career Course and served with the 504th Military Police Battalion early in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Before that, Captain Moore-Brown was a platoon leader with the 571st Military Police Company and deployed with them to the Camp Delta Detention Facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.