

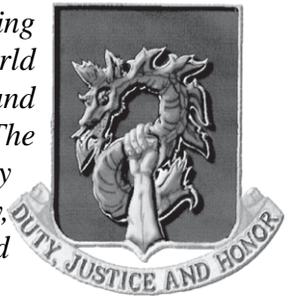


The Long Road to Baghdad...

The 504th Military Police Battalion Secures the Iraqi Theater Main Supply Route

By Major John Voorhees and First Lieutenant Adria Toth

The 504th Military Police Battalion has a rich history of supporting and securing its military brethren during combat operations, as reflected in its support of World War II and Vietnam. Then—after several contingency deployments to Panama and Kosovo—the 504th was battle-tested again during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The task organization of the battalion included the 105th Military Police Company (New York Army National Guard), 300th Military Police Company (Fort Riley, Kansas), 333d Military Police Company (Illinois Army National Guard), and 933d Military Police Company (Illinois Army National Guard).



Initial Operations

The advanced party of the 504th Military Police Battalion arrived in Kuwait in March 2003 and immediately began operations to receive assigned follow-on units. The battalion was assigned to the 220th Military Police Brigade (a U.S. Army Reserve unit from Maryland), as part of the 377th Theater Support Command (TSC). Due to the critical need for military police to support combat operations, the advanced party was tasked to move forward to occupy Convoy Support Center (CSC) Navistar on the Kuwait-Iraq border. Its mission was to coordinate and direct essential troop movement and combat resources across the border into Iraq by the theater Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa. With equipment loaned from

Headquarters Company, 220th Military Police Brigade, and some staff augmentation from the brigade adjutant (S1), intelligence officer (S2), and supply officer (S4), the 504th entered combat operations. With no originally allocated units, the battalion took command and control of L Troop, 3-2 Armored Cavalry Regiment, 302d Military Police Company (Texas Army National Guard), and 2d Platoon, 410th Military Police Company (Fort Hood, Texas) and began securing CSC Navistar. The units worked to protect, stage, and move the convoys in support of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1MEF) and V Corps offensive operations in Iraq.

The small battalion staff worked with the British forces, movement control units, Coalition Forces Land

Component Command (CFLCC) operations (C3) and logistics (C4) personnel and individual convoy commanders to prioritize, stage, and secure all coalition convoys passing through CSC Navistar. By setting up a briefing area in the staging yard, the S2 section ensured that convoys were situationally aware as they readied to cross the border. The operations (S3) section used military police on the ground to ensure the most combat-essential supplies were moved forward quickly. This required establishing hasty holding areas and staging yards to accommodate the increased traffic volume at CSC Navistar, which exceeded the capacity of the initial staging yard. Working with limited resources, the battalion continued planning and conducting security operations.

In April, the 300th Military Police Company arrived at CSC Navistar and soon became the main effort for escorting critical Class III and Class V supply convoys along the extended supply lines to keep IMEF and V Corps forces on the offensive. On 8 April, the remainder of the 504th's headquarters detachment arrived and began to integrate into ongoing operations. At the same time, the battalion's area of responsibility was extended 125 miles north of CSC Navistar to Tallil Air Base at An Nasiriyah, Iraq, as the 18th Military Police Brigade moved forward in support of V Corps. This was a result of the CFLCC directive for the 377th TSC to secure MSR Tampa.

Movement Into Central Iraq

As the 377th TSC assumed responsibility for the security of MSR Tampa (from Kuwait to Baghdad) and support for the forward movement of the 1st Armored Division and 4th Infantry Division, the 220th Military Police Brigade tasked the 504th to secure the newly established CSC Scania, south of Baghdad. On 11 April, elements of the battalion moved 300 miles north of CSC Navistar to Shumali, Iraq, and occupied an abandoned rest stop and gas station adjacent to the MSR to begin supporting the 377th TSC. The same coordination and effort required to make CSC Navistar efficient was implemented at CSC Scania to move crucial supplies and units forward in support of the offensive on Tikrit. Working continuously and gathering resources from wherever possible, the battalion transformed the location into a critical transportation node. Additionally, as soldiers endured the debilitating heat of summer, the battalion continued to expand CSC Scania and make quality-of-life improvements for soldiers living there.

Although the battalion headquarters was located at CSC Scania, the headquarters detachment had to overcome the challenge of supporting four military police companies in three locations on the battlefield:

Tallil Air Base, CSC Scania, and CSC Scania's Forward Operating Base (FOB) Kalsu (positioned in Iskandariyah, Iraq, north of Scania and south of Baghdad). Maximizing its ground movement assets, the headquarters detachment conducted sustainment operations from three support nodes: CSC Scania; Logistics Base Seitz, near Baghdad International Airport; and a small cell in Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. Conducting weekly logistics runs from Kuwait to the company locations, the headquarters detachment was able to assist the battalion in overcoming a critical shortage of Class II, Class IV, and Class IX supplies. Though the headquarters detachment was not resourced to conduct extensive split operations, it afforded exceptional logistical support to the battalion.

When the 504th moved to CSC Scania, it assumed responsibility for convoy and route security along MSR Tampa from Tallil Air Base to CSC Scania. The main effort for the battalion in these operations included the 300th, 333d, and 933d Military Police Companies. The battalion directed air and ground medical response operations for major traffic accidents and enemy engagements, saving the lives of many coalition soldiers as units from the 1st Armored Division and 4th Infantry Division pushed into Iraq. The battalion conducted convoy security that focused on logistical convoys, including contracted "sustainer" pushes. In addition to maintaining a coalition presence as an enemy deterrent, the battalion conducted MSR combat patrols that targeted enemy ambushes and snipers, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and problem areas along the route.

Extended Battlespace in the Sunni Triangle

In May, the 220th Military Police Brigade directed the 504th to expand its area of responsibility north along MSR Tampa, from CSC Scania to the intersection of MSR Tampa and Alternate Supply



Soldiers from the 333d Military Police Company secure MSR Tampa in front of CSC Scania to facilitate a medical evacuation.

Route Jackson, south of Baghdad. The extended area, which was later known as the true start of the Sunni Triangle, was the most problematic area of the battalion's area of responsibility. In an effort to stop enemy activity and continue to provide a secure MSR for troop movement, the battalion established FOB Kalsu, which was transformed from a bombed and abandoned former regime military anti-aircraft radar station to a U.S. military base whose sphere of influence extended well beyond the battalion's original expectations.

Humanitarian Fuel Convoys

One of the most significant missions of the battalion has been humanitarian assistance. With Iraq's oil and fuel production and transportation completely in ruins, the 504th was called upon to escort badly needed fuel (kerosene, gasoline, and diesel) for the Iraqi civilian population. The fuel convoys originated in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and traveled to Tallil Air Base and CSC Scania, where they were sent on to major fuel distribution points. The battalion safely transported millions of gallons of fuel in an effort to bring about a stable and secure environment for the Iraqi people. Much of the responsibility for this mission fell on the shoulders of the 333d Military Police Company, operating from CSC Scania, and the 933d Military Police Company, operating from Tallil Air Base. Experiencing attacks from IEDs and attacks by hijackers in the desolate sections of the MSR in the south, the battalion did everything possible to keep the convoys operational. While supporting the fuel escort mission, the 333d encountered seven IEDs

The Ultimate Sacrifice

By creating CSC Scania and FOB Kalsu to launch security operations and maintain the communication relay system, the 504th successfully secured the coalition's logistical lifeline into Baghdad. The battalion worked tirelessly to maintain security and stability on its watch—at a cost of 3 soldiers killed in action and 6 wounded. The battalion's dedicated efforts to keep MSR Tampa safe prevented additional loss of life.

Significant Accomplishments

In addition to security operations, the units in the 504th executed multiple combat operations with 1MEF, Polish forces, and Special Forces, bringing the combined arms concept to the small-unit level. The battalion completed more than 20 cordon-and-search operations, 10 raids, and hundreds of hasty and deliberate vehicle checkpoints, leading to the detention of more than 200 people suspected of anticoalition or criminal activity. The battalion placed special emphasis on protecting Iraqi infrastructure within and adjacent

to MSR Tampa, to include oil pipelines, power lines, power substations, and fuel holding tanks. Iraqis that were found looting or stealing from these critical sites were apprehended, which drastically reduced the number of incidents within the battalion's area of responsibility.

From May through early August, the 504th provided relief operations for 1MEF to secure the bridge crossing the Euphrates River on MSR Tampa north of An Nasiriyah. Additionally, the battalion provided security from June through September to support the 724th Engineer Battalion as it worked to improve the unpaved and dangerous 60-mile stretch of the route.

The battalion also became involved in cultivating civil-military relationships with the Iraqi people from Ash Shumali, Al Imam, Al Mashru, Al Nile, Az Zubyar, Sumar, Tunis, and Latifiyah—towns adjacent to MSR Tampa and within the battalion's area of responsibility. The battalion participated in restoration and reconstruction projects for schools, medical clinics, and police stations and allowed local families to establish a market. The positive civil-military connection was fully felt when enemy activity around CSC Scania significantly decreased.

Base Camp Construction

At CSC Scania, the battalion focused on making the CSC fully operational and secure to support the heavy flow of convoys, while simultaneously upgrading the quality of life for soldiers living there, culminating in the construction of a multimillion dollar life support area with a dining facility. Efforts were set in motion to construct a Force Provider logistics support area. Contracting for the real estate began in July. Working with the support services contractor, Kellogg, Brown and Root, the battalion played a lead role in planning, designing, and constructing the area and making



Soldiers from the 300th Military Police Company establish a communications relay point near CSC Scania.

improvements to existing on-site structures, including the current tactical operations center and medical treatment facility. The construction began in August, and the battalion worked with the contractor on a daily basis to ensure that all project objectives were met. On 1 November, Camp Nakamura officially opened to house CSC Scania's tenant units; in December, the CSC was fully operational to support the convoy movement of Coalition Joint Task Force-7.

Iraqi Highway Patrol

In September, the battalion began to turn over highway security to the Iraqis by establishing the Iraqi Highway Patrol in Babil Province. Working with the regional Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the battalion received funding for the construction of the first highway patrol station in one of the most active enemy areas, south of Baghdad and west of Iskandariyah. In November, the battalion opened the station, providing 24-hour operations. The military police in the battalion contributed to the training and resourcing of the highway patrol, making it a true success that has paid dividends in protection for the coalition forces and the Iraqi people. The highway patrol has grown from a concept to a reality and, through the efforts of the battalion, has expanded to include additional existing police stations. In February 2004, the battalion assumed resourcing and training responsibility for two additional highway patrol stations along MSR Tampa—all part of a program designed to build on the highway patrol system that will eventually be handed off to the Iraqis.

Civil Affairs Efforts

The 504th widened its scope of responsibility and assumed civil affairs projects within the battalion area. The battalion initially solicited donations from family support groups back home to provide needed supplies for local schools in and around the area. Getting more involved in the civil affairs efforts, the battalion created a civil affairs staff "out of hide." In addition, the battalion teamed up with the Philippine Civil Affairs Battalion to leverage a needs assessment for the areas in and around MSR Tampa. Obtaining funding from the commander's Emergency Relief Program, the CPA, and the Multinational Division-Central South, the battalion acquired almost half a million dollars.

Projects included refurbishing 4 water treatment systems, restoring 2 medical facilities and 4 schools, and resourcing 5 police stations. Additionally, the 504th played a critical role in the reactivation of the Baza irrigation system, which provided water to thousands of farms south of Baghdad, and the Shumali water pumping system, which prevented hundreds of families from being flooded out of their homes during the winter rains. The battalion was recognized by the CPA as one of the most effective military units working civil affairs projects in the region.

Operational Summary

In January, the battalion became a part of the 16th Military Police Brigade (Airborne), where it will continue to operate until relieved of its mission. The operations of the 504th Military Police Battalion in Iraq have included more than 70 armed engagements with the enemy. While conducting more than 4,000 combat patrols on more than 300 miles of MSR Tampa, the battalion confiscated more than 1,200 weapons and detained numerous Iraqis suspected of anticoalition activities. Further, the battalion was responsible for the apprehension of hundreds of Iraqis caught damaging or destroying critical Iraqi infrastructure. Working to protect coalition forces, the battalion ensured the safe detonation of 30 IEDs and is working closely with the newly formed Iraqi Highway Patrol to continue locating IEDs before additional damage occurs. Finally, the battalion has secured more than 8,000 convoys and ensured the safe passage of more than 25,000 convoys moving troops and resources across the MSR.

Conclusion

One of the biggest morale boosts for the battalion was the extensive support of the 504th Military Police Battalion Association. Many World War II and Vietnam veterans from the battalion wrote letters and sent packages to the deployed Dragon Fighters. The sense of camaraderie from these great Americans, who knew firsthand the sacrifices and the challenges the battalion endured, gave many an inner motivation. These veterans had a special way of saying "thanks" that encouraged soldiers to give their best every day, no matter how difficult the mission, adding chapters to the honorable history of a great and proud organization—the Dragon Fighters!