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# CROSS-FERTILIZATION: A UNIQUE METHOD FOR ENABLING MILITARY POLICE UNITS IN COMBAT

*By Lieutenant Colonel Chad B. McRee*

*In a time of conflict, Soldiers must rely on those to their right and to their left. Therefore, it is through a demonstrated level of proficiency and competence that mutual respect and confidence is built among combat Soldiers.*

Deployed military police battalions are generally faced with the unique challenge of integrating nonorganic units into a single, homogenous organization—with each Soldier and each unit expected to be competent, courageous, and able to fight and win on the battlefield. However, as a result of the “surge” during Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08, the 759th Military Police Battalion was tasked with the unprecedented challenge of a fifteen-month rotation. The three-month extension took Task Force (TF) Lone Sentinel full circle; the entire TF underwent relief in place during the rotation.

TF Lone Sentinel consisted of eleven Active Army units and six Army National Guard (ARNG) units. There were two “in lieu of” units—one infantry and one artillery; both were tasked with police transition work, but each at a different level of proficiency.

As the units arrived in theater, our ability to measure unit capabilities was generally limited to our operations and training officer (S3) evaluations in Kuwait and our observations during the relief-in-place process. Clearly, not all units were at the level of proficiency needed to effectively serve in combat. The challenges were how to—

- Raise levels of proficiency.
- Provide situational awareness in a hostile environment.
- Succeed without degrading the support to maneuver forces.

Regarding preparedness, the Army has always subscribed to the philosophy that “you train as you fight.” Teams, squads, and platoons are established; and they train, live, and serve together. However, in this dramatically different backdrop of conflict, the old adage must be taken a step further to ensure that all units and Soldiers are trained to a level of proficiency that includes creative thinking,

up-to-date theater awareness, and excellent decision making.

Due to the operational tempo, casualty rates, and mandates (such as rest, relaxation, and other unprogrammed requirements), there were fewer personnel available and there was less continuity among units. Reduced continuity results in unavoidable challenges with regard to the experience and complexities associated with daily combat “outside the wire.” Although turbulence associated with the operational tempo is expected, the requirements for competent combat leaders and soldiering are unrelenting.

To address this issue, TF Lone Sentinel took a dramatic step in readjusting formations. The goal was to create “plug and play” capabilities that relied on mutual respect and confidence among all Soldiers and units. Although this began as an experiment, it became the integration standard within the TF for the duration of Operation Iraqi Freedom 06-08.

A simple formula was adopted. An Active Army team was inserted into an ARNG squad, and the ARNG team being replaced was inserted back into an Active Army squad (see figure, page 37).

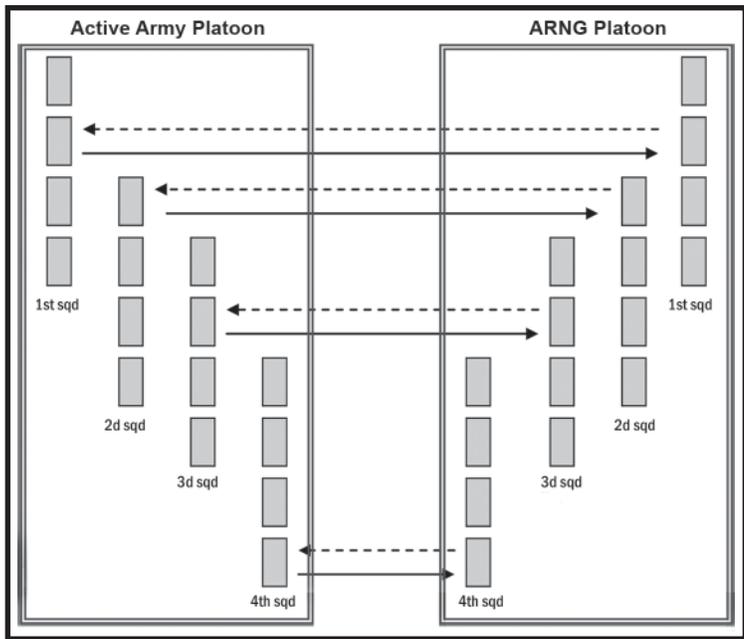
The plan was to ensure that every squad and platoon had a baseline of knowledge and understanding that was initially provided by the full-time Soldier. This exchange provided the opportunity for Soldiers in less trained units to learn what was expected, from mundane to more complex combat operations. Eventually, the exchange became one of experience rather than component.

Admittedly, this plan was not well received by the company commanders—the thought of losing control of their personnel for any length of time did not sit well. However, immersion was essential for

raising the level of proficiency and ensuring that everyone was operating on the “same sheet of music.”

What began as a sixty-day experiment was considered successful within forty-five days. The Soldiers were eventually allowed to return to their old squads, but the result was a cohesive battalion TF. With only one Soldier standard, collective efforts were necessary to achieve success. The Soldiers of the TF gained the mutual trust and confidence that is so vital when fighting. When Soldiers see their commanders working alongside one another, helping and supporting each other, it sets a tone for achieving objectives through teamwork.

As the TF rotated, success depended on seasoned units fertilizing less seasoned units. The experienced unit led and shared experiences with the unit that had yet to prove competence in combat—regardless of the component.



**Cross-fertilization of Active Army and ARNG units**

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