



Crew members prepare UH-60 Black Hawks for takeoff in preparation for Operation Marauder Harvest.

Operation Marauder Harvest: Reserve Military Police Company Ends Mission in Iraq With Full-Scale Air Assault

By Sergeant First Class Kevin Doheny

Although military police in Iraq routinely conduct police transition team duties while assisting Iraqis with the policing of their communities, they rarely have the opportunity to conduct full-scale air assaults. However, on the hazy morning of 12 April 2008, a group of Army Reserve Soldiers from the 56th Military Police Company did something they never thought they would get the chance to do—conduct a “Screaming Eagle” air assault.

The 56th Military Police Company had spent eleven months patrolling streets, training police, and conducting combat operations in Tikrit when they got the opportunity to conduct a joint air assault with the Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). Along with their Iraqi police counterparts, Soldiers of the 56th crammed into UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47 Chinook helicopters and prepared to hunt down the enemy as part of Operation Marauder Harvest. What was waiting for them was something their commander would later describe as “controlled chaos.”

As they completed the insertion and jumped from the helicopters, they understood how the Soldiers of

the 101st had earned their reputation. The surprise arrival of coalition and Iraqi forces by air left the targeted al-Qaida with no choice but to “squirt” from the objective. A firefight ensued as the enemy fled to awaiting trucks. “Supporting attack helicopters informed us that a group of men were moving to trucks located near a house,” said the commander. “The men in these trucks were armed with machine guns and assault rifles. They fired on us multiple times as they tried to flee our location, but we eliminated the enemy threat.”

After clearing numerous houses and other buildings, the mission was complete. The Soldiers reboarded the helicopters and returned to the base.

According to one noncommissioned officer, the purpose of the air assault was to take the fight to the insurgents and deny them safe haven and refuge. “Denying [insurgents] the safety and security to plan and execute their missions is a major component to the overall security mission in Iraq. It’s not just an important mission; it’s **the** mission,” he said.

The recognized proficiency of the 56th Military Police Company led to its selection for an operation of this magnitude—something usually set aside for infantry Soldiers attached to a battalion. According to the battalion executive officer, the battalion commander selected the 56th for the air assault because the company had exceeded all expectations throughout its unique mission in Iraq. “The 56th MP [Military Police] Company has done an incredible amount of work for us. This was a great opportunity for them to conduct an air assault with their IP [Iraqi police], to kind of end their deployment

with a successful mission,” he said. “The battalion commander picked them because they aren’t your normal MP company.”

One noncommissioned officer also indicated that the Iraqi special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team deserves much of the credit for the overall success of the mission.

According to the commander of the 56th, the company’s final mission in Iraq was as unique as the support duties they conducted during the previous seven months. “If you look back throughout military history, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to find a United States Army Reserve military police combat support company to be chosen to lead a joint coalition/Iraqi police air assault mission from start to finish,” he said. “This also shows how joint Active Army and Army Reserve relationships have matured over the years and the confidence our battalion and brigade [have] in our company.”

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A group of Iraqi SWAT members watch as a CH-47 Chinook takes off during Operation Marauder Harvest.