

42d Military Police Brigade Law Enforcement Liaison Program



By Captain Matthew S. West

The provost marshal at Fort Lewis, Washington, identified a need for a military police Law Enforcement Liaison Program (LELP) to assist police departments in local communities. There are two purposes for the program. First, under the mentorship of local police, military police assist the agencies with any Soldier-related issues that might be encountered. Second, military police leaders gain the opportunity to observe firsthand how civilian agencies are established and how they function. This experience assists them with their role on police transition teams—a critical mission while deployed.

In some cases, when a Soldier is involved in an incident requiring the attention of civilian law enforcement, it can take weeks for his or her chain of command to be notified. However, when a Soldier is detained in the Lakewood or Tacoma Police Departments, the chain of command now receives almost instant notification. An LELP representative in the police department calls the military police station. The desk sergeant at the military police station then calls the appropriate personnel in the Soldier's chain of command and notifies them of the detainment. If the Soldier is officially charged by the local agency, he or she is taken to the appropriate booking facility, the chain of command is notified, a journal entry is recorded, and no further action is taken by the LELP or military police. If the police officer believes that the Soldier has simply made a mistake or that the offense is negligible enough, the Soldier is not charged and he or she is turned over to the LELP. LELP personnel record a journal entry and notify the military police desk, which notifies appropriate personnel in the Soldier's chain of command. A patrol is dispatched to the Soldier's location, and the Soldier is transported back to the Fort Lewis military police station, where he or she is turned over to the chain of command. According to the Fort Lewis provost marshal, this program keeps commanders informed about what their Soldiers are getting involved with off the installation. It could even indicate what discipline problems exist and what serious issues are being faced by troubled Soldiers.

To get the LELP started, the Fort Lewis provost marshal met with police officers from the Lakewood and Tacoma Police Departments several times to discuss what needed to be done to make the program successful. After the initial meetings, two Soldiers went to the stations for four weeks. Their mission was to get the program up and running for the rest of the Soldiers who would participate. These two Soldiers met with personnel from every section in the stations, discussing the intent of the program and obtaining feedback on how officers from all agencies could help improve the program. These discussions ensured that every police officer understood the Soldier's role in the station.

Each police department has set aside a Soldier workstation consisting of a desk, computer (with limited internet access and limited connection to the departmental network) for reporting purposes, and a telephone. The liaisons have consolidated in-boxes that enable police officers to send messages to a single, generic e-mail account for each liaison so that the e-mail address does not need to be changed every time Soldiers rotate.

Local police departments have already realized some benefits of the program. One evening, a disorderly, drunken Soldier was brought into one of the stations. He yelled at police officers and failed to cooperate. But when the LELP representative confronted the Soldier and told him that his chain of command was being notified, the Soldier immediately calmed down and began to cooperate. According to Lieutenant Steve Mauer of the Lakewood Police Department, "The program is very beneficial to both the police department and the surrounding community." And Lieutenant Bart Hayes of the Tacoma Police Department stated that "[The LELP] gets the Soldier off the street and back to Fort Lewis quickly, resulting in minimal to no run-ins with that Soldier again."

The commander of the 504th Military Police Battalion recognized the training value of locating squad and platoon leaders at the police stations. From the outset of

Operation Iraqi Freedom, military police companies have been tasked with establishing Iraqi police stations and training Iraqi police. The experience gained by spending time in a civilian law enforcement agency provides LELP participants with a better understanding of how a police station is organized and how it operates. The battalion commander indicated that the program “helps provide insight into how civilian agencies are established and how they run day-to-day operations.” This is valuable insight to have before deployment.

The LELP ideally consists of a three- to four-week rotation. This gives Soldiers the time necessary to completely familiarize themselves with the station and their coworkers. They work in the station three days each week (0900 to 1700). That time is spent rotating through various sections within the station. The Soldiers also spend Friday and Saturday nights at the station, ready to take charge of any Soldier that police officers apprehend during those two busiest nights of the week. The constant switching from days to nights is very taxing, and it is the reason that the rotation should last no longer than four weeks. A sample schedule for a three-week rotation is outlined below. However, the schedule changes for each rotation due to the extreme unpredictability of the police officers’ jobs and the time that they have available to meet with the Soldiers.

Week One

During the first week of LELP rotation, Soldiers spend time with the police chief, the assistant chief, and internal affairs personnel. They learn about various responsibilities within the station, and they have the opportunity to see how leaders run the station and how they interact with the local community. Soldiers are also required to read the department’s manual of standards during the week.

Week Two

During the second week of rotation, Soldiers spend time with the administrative unit. They spend half a day with the lieutenant in charge of the unit and the rest of the week rotating through the three sections of the unit—the administrative support, property room/identification, and professional standards sections.

Week Three

Soldiers spend the third week of their rotation learning about the criminal investigations unit, which is comprised of special operations, special assault, persons crimes, and property crimes sections. They have the opportunity to see how the different sections receive and investigate cases.

Summary

Military relations with the local communities have improved significantly through the LELP. There are now military police Soldiers stationed in two of the busiest police departments in the area, ensuring excellent lines of communication between the local departments and the Fort Lewis provost marshal. Police officers and local citizens are often able to get military-related questions answered very quickly, eliminating the need to locate a point of contact at Fort Lewis. In addition, junior military police leaders receive quality police transition team training in preparation for upcoming deployments.

One of the goals of the 504th Military Police Battalion is for every platoon and squad leader to complete the LELP before deploying. All junior leaders should participate in the program. It will provide them with a better understanding of civilian policing, which will better enable them to establish civilian police stations while deployed.

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