

MPTT Supports Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines

By Captain Kelly L. Elwood

For the past eight years, the United States has maintained a relatively subtle military presence on the “other” Operation Enduring Freedom front—that of the Republic of the Philippines. Since 2003, the U.S. military has been partnering with police, local government units, and armed forces throughout the archipelago to advise and assist the Philippines in combating terrorism.

For years, violent extremist organizations have frequently visited and sometimes inhabited Mindanao and the southern Philippine islands, creating a volatile atmosphere and causing safety and security concerns not only for the Philippines, but also for U.S. citizens. Because travel among the Philippine Islands—and to neighboring countries such as Malaysia—is uninhibited, the Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines has been advising and assisting the Republic of the Philippines from a location in Zamboanga City, Mindanao.

In May 2010, the 728th Military Police Battalion, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, deployed a team of twelve Soldiers in support of Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines and the Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines mission. Their primary job was to serve as a military police transition team (MPTT) responsible for conducting subject matter expert exchanges with the Philippine National Police (PNP). They also worked with the PNP Special Action Force (SAF) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, thereby contributing to the greater mission of advising and assisting Philippine security forces across the spectrum.

Although the mission statement was clear, the limits of the transition team were undefined. Therefore, the 728th Military Police Battalion selected noncommissioned officers from maneuver, fires, and effects companies and law enforcement detachments to assemble a team with a wealth of Military Police Corps time and experience. Members of the team had been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and had performed law enforcement functions in garrison. They possessed knowledge and experience in provost marshal’s office, company, and detachment operations.

The team was well prepared. Training included all aspects of military police, law enforcement, and convoy security operations. And noncommissioned officers who had recently redeployed with the 58th and 552d Military

Police Companies provided up-to-date knowledge and experience with regard to MPTTs.

Once the MPTT arrived in country, the team partnered with the U.S. Department of Justice to conduct a follow-on program for the Basic Police Officer Course, which the PNP Directorate had established in Luzon. The MPTT proceeded to build on the basic course curriculum with the Field Officer Training Course. They also certified the PNP to carry the Armament Systems and Procedures, Incorporated (ASP) baton. But because the Department of Justice and military police predecessors already had courses in place, the MPTT focused on the basic, self-sustainable principles most sought by the PNP. The revamped course covered classroom topics such as human rights, ethics and morals, and principles of policing, as well as more hands-on courses such as unarmed self-defense, interviewing and interrogation, and sensitive-site exploitation. The physical aspects of the course (ASP baton certification, RedMan training) were those that were most favored by the PNP officers. The officers were particularly pleased with the drills and exercises that reinforced their knowledge of red zones and improved their timing for the escalation of force.

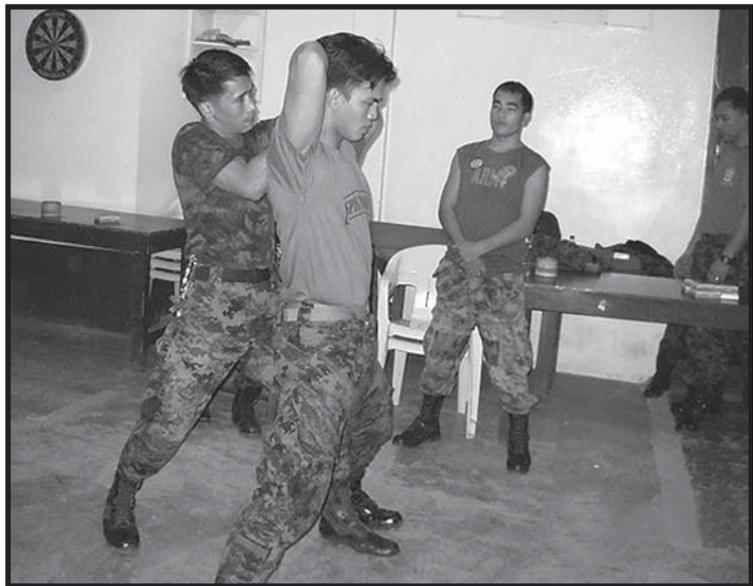
Despite the small size of the island, the PNP is a diverse police force. Some of the PNP officers were raised and educated in Luzon, while others had never left Mindanao. Some spoke Tagalog, while others spoke Tausug; however, all spoke enough English to work through the course. In addition, the MPTT searched for effective ways to overcome language barriers and create “common ground” from which to build cohesion among the police officers. Practical exercises kept the officers out of their seats and working together in teams, striving to mitigate cultural and language barriers while reiterating the importance of a unified police force. The officers were aware that the Philippine citizens lacked confidence in their abilities, and they understood that their improvement as individuals was as important as their improvement as a team.

During culminating exercises, officers were presented with crime scenes to investigate and document. They were required to walk into scenarios, interview victims and subjects, make command decisions, and disarm and apprehend subjects if necessary.

The MPTT also took the opportunity to get acquainted with the most visible security forces in the area—the PNP SAF and the Armed Forces of the Philippines Marines. Despite numerous attempts to improve security across the island, there was a lack of police and Marine presence and most politicians, nongovernment organizations, and local citizens remained apprehensive about traveling in the predominantly rural area. Therefore, the Armed Forces of the Philippines requested assistance from the MPTT, which subsequently conducted several physical security subject matter expert exchanges with the Marines. In addition, between Field Officer Training Courses, the MPTT and PNP SAF companies participated in exchanges on Red-Man training and other topics such as unarmed self-defense and subject apprehension. Although the relationship between U.S. forces and the PNP SAF was already outstanding, further MPTT/PNP SAF interaction significantly increased the involvement of U.S. forces in the local community.

During the MPTT deployment, more than 40 PNP officers graduated from the Field Officer Training Course and subject matter expert exchanges were conducted with more than 100 Armed Forces of the Philippines Marines and 80 PNP SAFs.

While the first group of warfighters reached beyond the PNP, their success is only the beginning for military police training in the Philippines. Additional teams will continue to advise and assist the PNP in building their police force and strengthening their rapport and reputation with the Philippine citizens. For example, another team is currently expanding on the initial PNP mission, while also undertaking additional security missions in support of the Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines



Members of the PNP SAF practice apprehending and handcuffing a subject.



ASP baton training with the RedMan suit

Headquarters. And the 728th Military Police Battalion is now preparing a new team (slated to depart later this year) that will continue to advise and assist with military police and security operations for rotations to come.

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