
There's a New Sheriff in Town: The "Fighting Deuce" Takes Over for the "Punishers"

By Private Alyxandra McChesney

On 2 February 2011, the "Punishers" of the 512th Military Police Company, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, introduced their U.S. forces replacements—the "Fighting Deuce" Soldiers of the 272d Military Police Company, Fort Polk, Louisiana—to the police chiefs of Kirkuk, Iraq. Then the Punishers said their goodbyes.

During their 12-month deployment to Kirkuk, the 512th built a new law enforcement program called the Kirkuk Provincial Organized Crime Unit (KPOC-U). "KPOC-U is a program we came up with to advise and assist the investigating officers of Kirkuk to enhance their capabilities to collect evidence to help the Iraqi police in convicting criminals," said Sergeant First Class Robert Cannon, platoon sergeant, 512th Military Police Company.

Before creating the new unit, U.S. Army military police, civilian police advisers, a criminal investigator from each of the eight Kirkuk districts, and two criminal investigators from the Kirkuk Anticrime Unit attended a 30-day, Iraqi-led class intended to help U.S. forces understand Iraqi police procedures conducted during criminal investigations. Class topics included Iraqi law, crime scene security and integrity, forensic evidence identification, and DNA collection.

KPOC-U was created by combining a wide range of preexisting Kirkuk police force resources. Personnel and assets were consolidated under one command to fight an increasingly organized criminal enterprise within the province.

On 15 June 2010—just two days after class graduation—the new KPOC-U began operation and undertook their first mission. Much of the unit's experience was derived from on-the-job-training.

Upon receipt of a crime report, Soldiers of the 512th Military Police Company accompanied Iraqi police units to the scene of the crime, where they advised, assisted, and mentored their Iraqi counterparts in building the prosecution's case by collecting evidence and taking fingerprints. Establishing the KPOC-U enabled Kirkuk police teams to find and collect evidence, capture suspects, and convict criminals under the Iraqi rule of law.

According to Sergeant First Class Cannon, the crime rate in the city of Kirkuk has been successfully reduced through the KPOC-U program. "When we first started the program, we were going out on two missions or crime scenes a day to collect criminal evidence. Now we go on very few crime scene missions—only a few per week," he said. "I believe our mission here is complete on our end," he added. "It feels great to hand over the task to another unit to finish what we started."

A platoon sergeant with the 272d Military Police Company observed a marked improvement in security since his first tours in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. "We are excited to be here, and we want to continue with the KPOC-U program," he said, "But most of all, we want to keep the relationship [that the] 512th has built."

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