

Counterinsurgency Within Internment Facilities: Safeguarding Soldiers and Detainees

By Captain Andrew B. Stipp

The 108th Military Police Company (Airborne) (Air Assault), Fort Bragg, North Carolina, recently concluded one of the toughest missions within the spectrum of military police operations—detainee operations (DETOPS). Furthermore, the mission was carried out while the unit was deployed to Camp Cropper, Iraq, from April 2010 to March 2011. There are two key components to the DETOPS mission in a deployed environment—mental challenge and strategic-level visibility.

The Soldiers and leaders of the 108th did not originally plan or train for a DETOPS mission. However, a series of significant changes (including the retention of positive control over high-value detainees in April 2010, a reduction of forces from May to July 2010, and the onset of Operation New Dawn on 1 September 2010) resulted in their assumption of the mission, which—to briefly summarize—was to provide care, custody, and control to high-value detainees while maintaining dignity and respect for human rights.

Many 108th Soldiers were veterans of a 15-month tour to Baghdad that took place during the 2007–2008 surge. These Soldiers recounted a tough year in which they endured numerous attacks and the tragic loss of Soldiers to enemy fire. And during my own most recent deployment to Iraq (March 2008–March 2009), my younger brother was injured by a suicide, vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack in Mosul. The detainee population held at Camp Cropper represented the root of al-Qaida in Iraq. One government agency described the detainees as “global jihadists”—terrorists capable of planning, resourcing, and conducting attacks around the world. It was certainly possible—if not probable—that one or more of these detainees had coordinated attacks against the veterans of the 108th. It was just as probable that one or more of them was directly involved in coordinating the suicide, vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack that crippled my brother. The DETOPS mission was a mentally challenging experience that required strict adherence to the Army values to execute tasks professionally.

The 108th faced a particularly challenging situation when four Iraqi detainees escaped from the Camp Cropper Theater Internment Facility (TIF) on 8 September 2010—just a week after the United States had transferred

authority of the prison to Iraqi officials. The attention that was brought on by the aftermath of the well-coordinated, well-rehearsed escape effort prompted procedural changes (including additional detainee restraints and a reduction in recreation time to the 2-hour minimum required by the Geneva Conventions), facilitated an increase in available Soldiers, and resulted in more than \$4 million in physical-security upgrades. Thus, the ability of the 108th to execute the DETOPS mission improved. However, while the increases in manpower and improvements in physical security were a tremendous help, they did not eliminate the relentless DETOPS challenges inherent in the requirement to provide care, custody, and control to [former] terrorists. From 9 September to 15 October 2010, tensions within the TIF were high; and on 16 October 2010, a disturbance broke out. Although the disruption was quelled within an hour and no Soldiers or detainees were injured, leaders reevaluated the situation. It became clear that, while physical security upgrades and security procedure improvements were taking place, the growing tension between detainees and the guard force needed to be alleviated; otherwise, detainees and Soldiers might be injured or killed. The leaders decided to implement a counterinsurgency (COIN) initiative inside the TIF. The intent of the initiative was to regain general detainee compliance, ultimately reducing the threat of harm against the Soldiers who made up the guard force and the detainees for whom they were responsible.

COIN doctrine is addressed primarily in Field Manual (FM) 3-24 and FM 3-24.2. Although COIN is not a new military concept, the training and preparation of Soldiers with regard to COIN doctrine is a challenge due to the following critical tenets:

- “The military forces that successfully defeat insurgencies are usually those able to overcome their institutional inclination to wage conventional war against insurgents.”¹ Although the Army does an exceptional job of training Soldiers to engage and destroy U.S. enemies in close combat, this is not the primary means of defeating an insurgency.
- “Long-term success in COIN depends on the people taking charge of their own affairs and consenting to the government’s rule.”²
- “An operation that kills five insurgents is counter-productive if collateral damage leads to the recruitment

of fifty more insurgents.”²³ Because antagonistic methods of force can often be counterproductive, the use of appropriate levels of force is important in promoting COIN strategy. In the case of the Camp Cropper TIF, the postescape tension was driven by an action/reaction paradigm: The insurgents acted, and the guard force reacted—and vice versa. The 108th needed to proactively work toward attaining a generally docile climate.

These three broad tenets were used to shape efforts to regain compliance from detainees of the Camp Cropper TIF. Under the leadership of the 105th Military Police Battalion (Internment/Resettlement) and the U.S. Forces–Iraq Provost Marshal General, a plan for an incentive-based approach to reducing disciplinary infractions was developed. The plan allowed for certain sections of the detainee population (the “chiefs” or select detainees who represented the internal leadership) to receive additional quality-of-life privileges if there were no disciplinary infractions during a specified period of time. In this way, detainee chiefs were engaged and empowered to “control” their section of the population. Members of other detainee population sections witnessed the endowment of privileges and subsequently become more compliant in an attempt to earn the same privileges. This approach closely followed the precepts described in FM 3-24.

The plan seemed simple enough; but juxtaposed with the mental challenges of DETOPS and the recent escape, it was initially a jagged pill for Soldiers of all ranks to swallow. After all, why should these terrorists receive anything but the bare necessities? However, through discussions with leaders and key advisors, it became clear that—by meeting the intent of the COIN initiative—compliance would be regained and Soldiers would be protected—which, in turn, also meant that detainees would be protected.

The success of the initiative depended on the following fundamentals:

- **Leadership.** Leadership was vital in ensuring that Soldiers understood why detainees received privileges. Engaged leaders and senior noncommissioned officers were needed to teach, coach, and mentor Soldiers and junior noncommissioned officers about the importance of COIN and how it reduces the threat of harm.
- **Synchronization.** Synchronization was crucial in enabling key battalion staff sections and civilian advisors to stay in tune with the guard force. Weekly meetings were scheduled between the battalion intelligence staff officer (S-2), COIN advisors, and TIF leaders to discuss COIN observations and objectives. The success of the initiative was due to a team effort, with all members focused on achieving the basic intent.
- **Communication.** Communication, which was the key to leadership influence, was important not only

for synchronization meetings, but also to the dynamic between the guard force and detainee chiefs. Soldiers of the guard force needed to respectfully address the chiefs who, in turn, served as the overall voice of their sections. Because the chiefs were empowered with this responsibility, they were held accountable for the actions of their sections.

The COIN initiative was successful in many ways. Detainees noticed a change in the way they were addressed by the Soldiers of the guard force—with basic human respect, rather than an antagonistic tone. They also began to take notice of the “incentives for compliance” plan. Detainees from one section observed detainees from another section receiving additional privileges and began asking questions of the COIN advisors. Because the COIN advisors were in synchronization with the overall plan, they candidly informed the detainees that they, too, could receive additional privileges if they demonstrated improved compliance with guard force rules. After a few weeks, most of the population began to conform and multiple sections earned extra privileges by improving compliance, as demonstrated by a decrease in disciplinary infractions.

Guard force Soldiers who interacted directly with the detainees began reporting positive encounters with the chiefs. Although there was no exchange of “well wishes,” interactions between the two groups evolved into simple, basic, and generally respectful communications. In September 2010, detainees were submitting only 2 or 3 positive guard force reports per month, while the average number of negative reports was 13. However, by mid-November 2010, the average number of positive reports from the detainees had increased to 4 or 5 and the average number of negative reports remained at 2 or 3. The general pattern of more positive reports than negative was maintained through mid-January 2011. Leaders were stunned at the success that was achieved; the level of compliance was unprecedented.

COIN is a complicated, esoteric doctrine of warfare with a focus on building host nation legitimacy and enabling countries to solve their own problems. The importance of COIN in DETOPS cannot be overstated, which is why the topic has now been incorporated into FM 3-39.40. The extrapolation of the tenets to the Camp Cropper TIF situation resulted in a level of compliance that could not have been realistically predicted. The success of the COIN initiative was further fueled by strong leadership, synchronization, and constant communication. The advancements and compliance realized through the COIN initiative led to the desired end state—the protection of Soldiers and, ultimately, the protection of detainees.

The Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers of the 108th Military Police Company demonstrated utmost professionalism in making the COIN initiative a success while conducting DETOPS at the Camp

Cropper TIF. The “fight” that they endured did not provide a framework for acts and awards of uncommon valor; rather, it was a mental game—requiring maturity, self-control, and professionalism—played on a strategic level. The 108th did the job right by providing care, custody, and control with dignity and respect to some of the United States’ most militant enemies. Any tour with such a conclusion is a good one.

Endnotes:

¹FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 15 December 2006, p. ix.

²Ibid, p. 1-1.

³Ibid, p. 1-25.

References:

FM 3-24.2, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*, 21 April 2009.

FM 3-39.40, *Internment and Resettlement Operations*, 12 February 2010.

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Fort Leavenworth Corrections Unit Named Best in Army

By Ms. Rebecca Steed

A military police company that deployed to Iraq to operate a detention facility has been named the best military police unit in the Army. Among its top achievements, the Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), 705th Military Police Battalion, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, trained more than 2,200 Iraqi correctional officers, cut violence within the detention facility by 300 percent, and thwarted a dozen vehicle-borne improvised explosive device bombings through detection.

HHC, 705th Military Police Battalion, received the Brigadier General J.P. Holland Award on 25 April 2011. The award is named after a former (1953–1955) U.S. Army Europe provost marshal who, after his retirement in 1969, sponsored the award to promote esprit de corps and professionalism in military police units throughout the Regular Army. Brigadier General Colleen L. McGuire, Provost Marshal General of the Army and commander of the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, presented the award.

According to the Army Corrections Command, unit achievements that played a key role in the selection for the award included—

- HHC, 705th Military Police Battalion, superbly performed their primary function of providing mission command for the Theater Internment Facility and Reconciliation Center at Camp Taji and, subsequently, the Theater Internment Facility at Camp Cropper. The unit was instrumental in training more than 2,200 Iraqi correctional officers and coordinating and executing the transfer of the Camp Taji Theater Internment Facility and Reconciliation Center and the Camp Cropper Theater Internment Facility to the government of Iraq—both pivotal actions in the restoration of Iraq’s corrections system.
- The HHC deployed independently of its subordinate companies, but performed a strategically important and challenging mission exceedingly well. During a U.S. Army Central detainee operations inspection of the Taji Theater Internment Facility and Reconciliation Center, the unit received a 100 percent pass rate and was lauded for their counterinsurgency program, which yielded a 300 percent reduction in facility violence.
- The Intelligence Section, HHC, 705th Military Police Battalion, received four impact Army Achievement Medals and one impact Army Commendation Medal for accurately identifying U.S. Forces–Iraq targets who were visiting the Taji Theater Internment Facility and Reconciliation Center and for subsequently discovering twelve vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices.

For the second year in a row, HHC, 705th Military Police Battalion, also received the Brigadier General Thomas F. Barr Award, which recognizes the best military police company within the Army Corrections Command. In addition, General Raymond Odierno, the U.S. Forces–Iraq commander, awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation award to the unit for their actions during Operation Iraqi Freedom (2009–2010).

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