

Stryker Brigade Combat Team Memoirs

By Major Robert Arnold

The primary intent of this article is to share military police experiences and lessons learned during combat operations in northern Iraq. The secondary intent is to show other brigade combat team (BCT) provost marshals (PMs) that their job is not simply relegated to managing post force protection, tracking DA Forms 4833 (*Commander's Report of Disciplinary or Administrative Action*), briefing others on the DA Form 3997 (*Military Police Desk Blotter*), and the usual myriad of additional duties. When you deploy with a unit to combat, your special expertise as a military police leader is invaluable. There will be more work and more responsibility than you can fathom. The first lesson to be learned by BCT PMs is that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

In the 172d Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), the mission priorities were—

- Detainee operations.
- Iraqi police operations, (managing police transition teams [PTTs] and partnering with and mentoring the provincial director of police [PDOP]).
- Planning the employment of military police assets and military working dog (MWD) operations.
- Force protection.
- Customs operations.

The bottom line was that I was in charge of anything that “sounded, smelled, or tasted” like military police or law enforcement activities. That was a good thing because it showed that the SBCT understood the value that military police play in supporting combat operations. I conducted the following military police functions while deployed to Iraq:

- Internment/resettlement operations.
- Law and order operations.
- Police intelligence operations.
- Area security operations.

The 172d SBCT's mission priorities were to train and transition battlespace to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISFs) and neutralize the anti-Iraqi forces (AIFs). Partnering with and training the Iraqi police were integral parts of putting the ISF in the lead. An

effective Iraqi police force is the key to establishing a truly normal society in Iraq. The Iraqi Army (IA) cannot secure the Iraqi society in the long term—the police must. Obviously, detainee operations are a part of neutralizing the AIF and will attract international scrutiny if done incorrectly. I spent most of my time focusing on detainee operations and Iraqi police operations since they were both SBCT mission priorities. The Iraqi police in the area had steadily increased their capabilities since August 2005. They conducted six joint and combined complex cordon and search operations with the IA and coalition forces (CF) in two major cities in 2006. Part of my partnering with the PDOP was guiding the Iraqi police military decision-making process and recommending which neighborhoods to search. The PDOP was also very savvy with information operations (IO). He effectively used the media to positively influence the local populace.

Military police assets were focused almost exclusively on PTT missions at the Iraqi police provincial, district, and station levels. The only exception was a military police platoon that conducted detainee operations at the brigade internment facility, called the Mosul Detention Facility (MDF). Operating the MDF became the responsibility of the 172d SBCT in January 2006. From August 2005 to January 2006, the SBCT operated five battalion holding areas. The military police platoon leader managed the MDF and worked directly for me. The remainder of the Soldiers working in the MDF came from our maneuver battalions. When the military police battalion headquarters departed the area of operations (AO), the military police units came under the tactical control (TACON) of our maneuver battalions to conduct PTT missions. As the SBCT PM, I had oversight of the PTT and monitored it to ensure that military police Soldiers were being properly employed. The provincial PTT reported directly to me since it was TACON to the 172d SBCT. The district PTT and station PTT (in essence, the military police companies) and the Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron detachment at the Mosul Public Service Academy (the Iraqi police basic training academy) were TACON to the maneuver battalions to conduct PTT missions.

The following are some additional lessons learned during combat in Iraq. There is no reason for

a maneuver support cell (MSC) to exist as a section within an SBCT. First, there is no common MSC task and purpose. The MSC is composed of topographic engineers, combat engineers, and military police Soldiers. Combat engineers and military police Soldiers have very distinct missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom so there is no reason to lump them together with the topographic engineers, especially when the majority of the MSC personnel are engineers. Second, who is in charge of the MSC? There are an engineer major and a military police major. My recommendation is to discontinue the MSC since it does not work. All three SBCTs that have operated in combat treat the PM and engineer cells as separate and distinct sections with separate and distinct missions. That is the way it works best.

It is absolutely critical that the BCT PM be a major, not a captain. That is the case in the SBCT but not in infantry BCTs and heavy BCTs. Having a field grade officer as a PM demands a greater level of respect and will automatically put the PM on equal footing with the rest of the BCT staff, where he belongs.

There also needs to be a law and order detachment (with additional customs duties) in each BCT

AO. Each BCT needs the capability to investigate crimes in the BCT AO. I recommend a small law and order detachment that would assist the unit in properly policing the Soldier population. Additionally, I recommend resourcing this detachment from the U.S. Navy or U.S. Air Force to allow U.S. Army military police Soldiers to conduct PTT missions.

I hope this article has provided an accurate picture of the task and purpose assigned to the PM in combat and also shed some light on changes required to improve military police support for combat operations. Although several issues have been identified that require improvement, having military police elements assigned to the BCT is extremely beneficial to the Military Police Corps and to the individual military police Soldiers filling those positions. Above all else, the Military Police Corps needs to continue its representation within the Army Transformation movement. That means keeping military police Soldiers in the building block of Army Transformation—the BCT. If the Military Police Corps chooses to disengage from involvement with the BCT, military police Soldiers may become irrelevant in our future Army and that would be a tragic loss.



The Ninewa provincial director of police is interviewed by the Iraqi media during a search operation.