

JOIN!

NCO Leadership in a Multicomponent/Joint Services Military Police Brigade

By Command Sergeant Major Edgar W. Dahl

One of the best ways to find out who makes up a military unit is to stand at the entrance of the dining facility and watch the customers as they filter in. At one dining facility entrance, in particular, khaki-clad civilian guards contracted from Uganda check the identification (ID) of those entering the busy facility. The guards take the ID cards, scan them, and compare the photographs with the faces of their owners before returning them. The U.S. Army seal appears on some of the cards. On others, it is the U.S. Navy or U.S. Air Force seal that is right there on the front. Another is affixed with the eagle, globe, and anchor of the U.S. Marine Corps. Personnel wearing civilian clothing also trek through the door; their ID cards contain a variety of print. The tan-colored patterns of desert camouflage uniforms mix with digital camouflage patterns; and jeans and polo shirts are just as common as the blue, yellow, and gray military physical training uniforms. English blends with a half dozen other languages as people of many nations grab a bite to eat. This is the entrance to the Camp Bucca, Iraq, dining facility—a place that is busy, colorful, and frequented by all kinds of people.

Camp Bucca is located in the southeast corner of Iraq, about 800 meters north of the Kuwaiti border and slightly over 800 meters from the Iraqi port town of Umm Qasr. Its location is not a coincidence. It is here—in the area bumped up against the ocean and the Kuwaiti border—that, when planning the 2003 Iraqi invasion, coalition forces envisioned their “rear area.” The rear area is where captured enemy combatants and other detained personnel were kept—at least according to what is now outdated doctrine. However, due to the asymmetric nature of the warfare in Iraq, there is no defined rear area. So while Camp Bucca is very close to Kuwait, it is nonetheless subject to attacks and insurgent activity.

Camp Bucca, which is operated by Task Force Military Police South, is home to the largest detention facility in the U.S. military. Each of the four U.S. military services is represented here. The basic mission of the task force

(referred to as Task Force Bucca) is to provide quality and professional care and custody for detained personnel. To accomplish this mission, the task force employs a large contingent of nonmilitary police, non-active-duty Army, and non-Army U.S. military personnel and civilians. This is because the length of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused military police units across the Army (Active Army, Reserve, and National Guard) to be deployed to the limits of their numbers.

The stretching of personnel resources has meant that the Military Police Corps Regiment has required help to accomplish its many missions in these wars. The supplementation of Army military police has been the norm for the duration of the War on Terrorism. Missions for the supplemental Soldiers have included security, law enforcement, route clearance, convoy escort, and participation on police transition teams. Some supplemental Soldiers have even performed detention operations at Camp Bucca.

Military Police Regiment officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) have become accustomed to leading nonmilitary police units from the three Army components and military police units and troops from sister services. Even with the complement of infantry, artillery, chemical, air defense, and other units, military police still find themselves with more missions than assets.

With a few rare exceptions, the senior NCOs of Task Force Bucca had not worked with, worked for, or been in charge of Soldiers from other Army components or members of other services. For the most part, those on active duty were familiar with active-duty leaders and subordinates, while those in the Reserve or National Guard were accustomed to Reserve or National Guard personnel. Interaction across services (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps) was even less common. So, how do you function in an environment where the dynamics and demographics are totally new?

First, you must understand that the command climate need not consist of a “melting pot” of Active Army, Reserve, National Guard, and sister service units. Each component and service should be allowed to retain its own identity and standards—except where uniform standards are necessary to effect operations. Encourage units to preserve their core values and celebrate their service traditions. Think of this situation as a salad in which each individual ingredient adds to the flavor and variety without changing the overall appearance of the salad itself. And let a tomato be a tomato. Unless you are involved in a joint operation and you are the lead, do not impose your traditions on other units. Rather, let them conduct their service boards; birthday celebrations; and promotion, transfer-of-authority, change-of-command, and award ceremonies. And attend these events when you are invited; the gesture will be appreciated, and units will be proud to show you how they do things.

Second, assure the units that they are part of the team. Post their service seals in areas where joint operations or meetings are held, such as brigade headquarters and conference rooms. Ensure that unit symbols, documents, newsletters, certificates, and coins have a joint “flavor.” For example, the front page of the Task Force Bucca newsletter contains the four service seals. The sister service seals—rather than the 42d Military Police Brigade unit insignia—also appear on the back of the Task Force Bucca coin. Soldiers may not admit that they check for “their” symbol when they see the others; but believe me, they do. They want to be a part of the team, and your recognition of their symbol plays a role in that team building.

Next, keep units together as much as possible. Avoid splitting them up and parceling members, including NCOs, out to other units. Try to maintain a unity of command for each service component. This might not be possible as task organizations are adapted to fit the mission. If units must be split, explain the reasons for the split to the leaders. Ensure adequate service NCO leadership with each slice, and encourage leaders of sliced elements to maintain contact with their service headquarters to make sure that troops are administratively covered as they work for other services.

Use NCO leaders of different services to get things done. Resist the temptation to directly address strategic or operational issues with the actual “doers.” If a Sailor, Airman, or Marine needs guidance, have a Naval petty officer (PO) or Air Force or Marine NCO provide it. This reinforces their authority and appropriately assigns the responsibility. For occasional, time-sensitive safety or disciplinary issues, make on-the-spot corrections and then notify the senior NCO or PO service leader if warranted. This approach works especially well for Reserve and

National Guard units, whose members sometimes view active duty NCOs as “heavy handed.”

Train young NCOs to use tact and patience when correcting or addressing Reserve, National Guard, or sister service troops. In general, these troops do not respond well to the “in your face” corrective measures that Active Army NCOs frequently use on their subordinates. While a young, active duty NCO may think nothing of calling one of his troops a “knucklehead” and ordering him do twenty push-ups for a loose shirttail, a Reservist, Guardsman, Sailor, or Airman on the receiving end of the correction might take issue. In fact, using push-ups or other exercises as a corrective measure might actually be in violation of regulations in some cases. The problem is exacerbated when a Sailor or Airman rightfully refuses to execute an unauthorized order. However, there is no need to coddle these troops or overlook behavior deserving of correction; Active Army NCOs just need to use some common sense and more effective, traditionally accepted methods of addressing infractions. And again, when possible, component or service unit NCOs or POs should be responsible for correcting unacceptable behavior among their troops. The point will be made, and the problem will be fixed.

Because Task Force Bucca is operated by the Army, many of the programs are conducted according to Army standards. While you may expect members of sister services to perform everyday tasks the same way that Army Soldiers perform them, they may be unfamiliar with Army procedures. For example, maintenance procedures at Camp Bucca are performed according to Army standards. But, do not simply put a Department of the Army (DA) Form 5988-E, *Equipment Inspection Maintenance Worksheet*, and a -10 manual¹ in front of a Sailor, Airman, or Marine and expect him to execute preventive maintenance checks and services like an Army Soldier would. That is not going to happen. Rather, take the time to train the troops on Army procedures. You might even explain the reasoning behind those procedures, as that can help alleviate the chafing that sometimes occurs when units are confronted with new and different standards and equipment. You will find that most assigned troops are willing to meet the Camp Bucca standard. All it takes is a little patience to teach, coach, and mentor them as they overcome inevitable growing pains. Then, let the troops perform.

Learn the ranks and responsibilities of NCOs and POs from the other services. Address them appropriately, and learn what is expected of them as they go through the ranks. Should you expect the same thing from a second-class PO, an Air Force staff sergeant, or a Marine sergeant that you do from an Army sergeant? After all, they are all E-5s. Ask senior NCOs and POs to brief you on their leadership roles, and do not consider them the same as Army NCOs



merely because they are at the same pay grade. They have different responsibilities, expectations, and professional experience as they rise through their ranks.

When functioning in a multicomponent/joint service environment, I would also recommend that you—

- Recognize and award each unit equally; do not favor any one. Be aware that Army awards—even something as simple as a certificate—are coveted by sister service troops. If possible, liberally dispense these awards when they are deserved.
- Use joint color guards for higher-headquarters functions—especially when the entire command is receiving recognition.
- Attach other component and service members to the brigade headquarters, and use their expertise to make improvements. If used as liaisons, these troops will reinforce the team mind-set.
- Counsel anyone who makes disparaging remarks about the status or service of your units. Such remarks create friction and undermine team-building efforts.
- Hold weekly business meetings with the senior enlisted leadership. (Our meetings include about twelve E-9 command slot leaders.)
- Make use of the unique skills of Reserve, National Guard, and sister service troops. A private first class with welding experience, for example, might be more valuable as a welder than he would be guarding detainees.
- Conduct a development program for NCOs and POs two levels down. (Our meetings, which take place every two months, include company level leadership E-8s and equivalents.) These meetings give participants the opportunity to receive information firsthand.
- Combine operations for efficiency. The maintenance operation at Camp Bucca is one such example. There, mechanics from all units are employed in one location to ease training, parts ordering, and work order management. This is especially crucial at Camp Bucca, where all units use Army equipment rather than their own.
- Initiate and maintain professional relationships with the higher headquarters for component and sister services. Encourage visits from their

leadership, and allow the leaders to roam freely when they come to see their troops.

- Flood incoming leaders with the documents and knowledge needed to enforce standards—especially uniform and behavior standards. The sooner they start training their troops, the better. If possible, provide them with this information while they are still in the continental United States so that they can prepare in advance.
- Brief all incoming personnel within forty-eight hours of their arrival. Personally welcome them, and quickly get them started off on the right foot.
- Encourage participation in sports programs that focus on friendly competition between the services. At Camp Bucca, we eagerly anticipate our Army-Navy game! And, it is not unusual to see Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel on the same intramural sports teams here at Camp Bucca.
- Allow sister service units to “decorate” their headquarters and work areas with their service emblems and other service-centric items. For example, Camp Bucca Navy troops painted their buildings gray. They also installed a crow’s nest—complete with semaphores—at one of their compounds. The cement barriers at Camp Bucca also contain some sister service artwork.

The Army is stretched thin, and a protracted conflict such as the War on Terrorism requires the skills and services of every component and service. The 42d Military Police Brigade tries hard to embrace, properly use, and significantly benefit from the valuable assets of the various Army components and sister services.

Endnote:

¹“-10” represents the last two digits of Army technical manuals describing operator responsibilities for checking and maintaining specific military equipment.

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