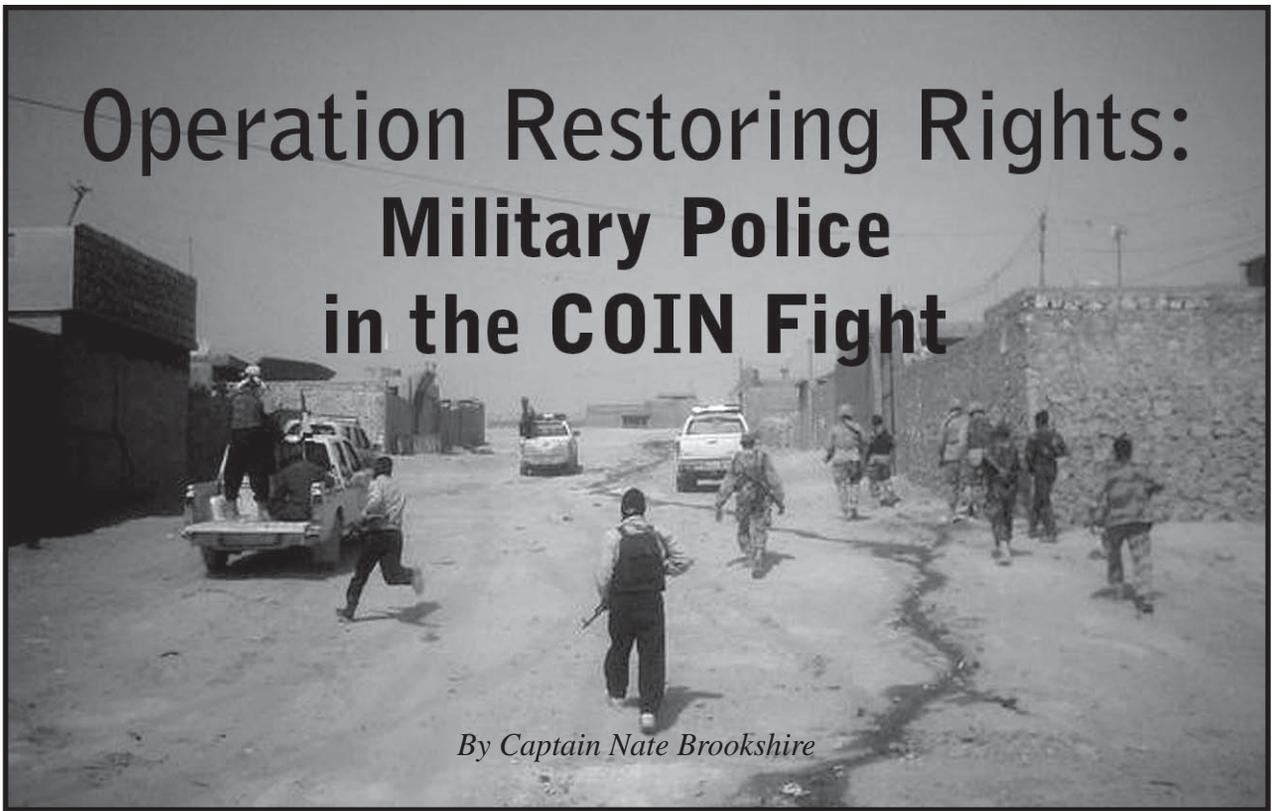


# Operation Restoring Rights: Military Police in the COIN Fight



*By Captain Nate Brookshire*

*The reduction of coalition forces in Tal Afar, Iraq, since 2004 set the conditions for terrorists to return to this key piece of terrain, which is located near the Syrian border; and by the spring of 2005, it was commonly referred to as “al-Qaida’s town.” In April 2005, the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) assumed control of the area of operations (AO) that included the city of Tal Afar. This article discusses the use of military police in a counterinsurgency (COIN) operation supporting the 3d ACR and 2d Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment (2-325) (known as the “White Falcons”), 82d Airborne Division. This specific operation has been heralded as a model of the “clear, hold, and build” methodology, which was later documented in Field Manual (FM) 3-24.*

In August 2005, the 194th Military Police Company, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, was conducting general support to the 11th ACR in Mosul, Iraq; maintaining the Division Internment Facility; transporting detainees to Abu Ghraib; and conducting the Police Partnership Program, when they were assigned as direct support to the 3d ACR for Operation Restoring Rights. The 194th Military Police Company had conducted an intense predeployment training cycle that included density ranges, live fire, and situation training exercise lanes set in an urban environment—a training methodology that was later used as a model to train Iraqi police and Iraqi Army (IA) military police using a condensed training package. The 2d platoon, 194th Military Police Company (2/194), was selected to execute the mission in Tal Afar, and they deployed in August to prepare for the assignment.

Upon arrival at Forward Operating Base Sykes, on the outskirts of Tal Afar, the platoon was task-organized under the Support Squadron, 3d ACR. The squadron, also

known as the “Muleskinners,” was preparing to operate a displaced civilian processing center, checkpoints, and several blocking positions south of the city. The 3d ACR emplaced a berm around the city to control access and egress, and residents were instructed to evacuate by moving through a screening area south of the city. Anyone left in the city after 72 hours was to be considered hostile. Key tasks assigned to the military police platoon included the training of maintenance troop Soldiers on internment/resettlement operations and the preparation of a divisional IA military police platoon for combat operations during Operation Restoring Rights.

An initial meeting with the 3d IA Division provost marshal revealed significant challenges involved in employing Iraqi military police in the fight. The Iraqi soldiers had completed a condensed basic training cycle and had each received one uniform. The soldiers and their leaders understood that the mission of division military police was to be a garrison function, focusing on discipline

and law enforcement. After several more meetings with the 3d IA Division provost marshal, assistant 3d IA Division commander, and military transition teams, the military police soldiers were released for training to support the operation.

The Joint Logistics Command at Al-Kasik Military Base provided additional organizational clothing and individual equipment, weapons, vehicles, and ammunition, meeting all of the IA platoon requirements. During an intensive, 10-day training exercise that focused on “shoot, move, and communicate,” members of the IA platoon gained the basic skills necessary to survive in combat operations. They received combat lifesaver training and individual aid kits. And the hardened vehicles, improved marksmanship skills, and basic medical knowledge helped instill confidence. Their outstanding performance as a cohesive unit during the operation was a phenomenal accomplishment, considering that the platoon was comprised of Kurds, Shi’as, Sunnis, and Yezidis.

Upon returning to Forward Operating Base Sykes, the 2/194 established a processing center (where military-aged males were escorted for screening) in the village of Sheik Ibraheem—a confirmed al-Qaida bedroom community with a population of about 3,000. The Muleskinners used “Quick Strike” (a quick-reaction force), 2/194, and a chemical platoon to execute the mission. Quick Strike, supported by a heavy platoon (Abrams) from the 2d Squadron, 3d ACR (known as the “Sabre”), secured the outskirts of and main routes into the village. The 2/194 received an attachment of Mosul emergency police, who secured a village schoolhouse for use as a base of operations for the screenings. The platoon also processed numerous military-aged males and helped identify twelve anti-Iraqi forces (AIF). During the evacuation, more than fifty detainee family members rioted. IA and Iraqi military police conducted outer-cordon security, which helped quell the riot; and the detainees were moved back to the Regimental Internment Facility without incident.

On 26 August 2005, Operation Restoring Rights commenced with the evacuation of the remaining populace of Tal Afar, which numbered more than 3,000. On 5 September, kinetic operations began with a volley of artillery that included the Guided, Multiple-Rocket Launch System—a system that had never before been used for this type of clearing operation. The 2/194 occupied two checkpoints south of Tal Afar and a blocking position to the east and funneled most of the populace, consisting of mainly women and children, to the processing center operated by the Muleskinners. The initial plan, which called for the displaced civilians to walk 2 miles to the processing center, was replaced by a plan which specified that truck shuttles be provided by the attached Iraqi military police. This change presented an opportunity for the platoon medic to treat the sick and wounded that had been identified during the initial screening. The confidence

of the IA was bolstered each day; and before the operation ended, the platoon was operating independently.

Once the town was evacuated, clearing operations began in earnest. The platoon of IA military police and one squad with an attachment of Iraqi emergency police conducted a cordon-and-knock operation in the southern portion of the Sarai neighborhood and throughout 9 kilometers of Muleskinners battlespace to the south of the city. More than 150 houses were searched, resulting in the identification and detention of nine AIF and two caches. The 4th Squadron, 3d ACR (“Longknife”) provided air support during all route movements and stayed in contact with 2/194 during the cordon-and-knock operation.

More than 1,000 Iraqi police were trained at Al Kisic and were sent to Tal Afar to help secure the city. Initially, there were just more than 100 Iraqi police forces in the city. The task of building and occupying police stations began, in coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as soon as the city was cleared. The 2/194 escorted a contractor, who was responsible for building the police stations, into each of the districts. Over a period of several months, the stations were built in close proximity to the populace and to a level of protection that provided standoff from direct-weapons threats and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices.

The city was divided between the 3d ACR and the 2-325. The 2/194 maneuvered with three squads; the headquarters team was attached to the 3d Squad, resulting in a total of twelve platforms of combat power. The 1st Squad was responsible for the 3d ACR AO police stations, and the 2d Squad covered the Sarai neighborhood in the 82d AO. The 3d Squad covered the headquarters, located at the castle in the center of Tal Afar, and conducted convoy security missions and force protection assessments of all the stations in Tal Afar and surrounding villages. The division of labor and the trust placed in the squad leaders to execute high-level missions were key elements of military police success in Tal Afar. Mr. David Kilcullen, author of “Twenty Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Counterinsurgency,” states that leaders should “Train the squad leaders—then trust them.” He further adds, “Counterinsurgency is a squad and platoon leader’s war, and often a private Soldier’s war.”<sup>1</sup>

The 3d ACR was quick to begin rebuilding Tal Afar. They initiated a fund distribution program to reimburse residents for property that had been damaged during the clearing operation. By winning the trust of the populace through improvement programs and partnerships with city officials, the 3d ACR set the foundation for holding the terrain. With their participation in securing fund distribution, conducting elections, and investigating a mass grave in the Sarai neighborhood, the credibility of the Iraqi police forces increased daily. North of the city, a Special Forces detachment worked to secure the town of Avgani, using the 2/194th to obtain the logistics necessary

for the police force. Several follow-on missions that were conducted to secure surrounding villages resulted in the identification of AIF and allowed the 3d ACR to deliver much-needed humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian missions became a daily activity during stabilization operations. The local Iraqi police identified pockets within the city that did not have running water or access to fresh food. In coordination with the Muleskinners, several tons of water and meals were delivered to the elders of the community for distribution. This action, along with the respectful cordon-and-knock operation led by Iraqi police, resulted in the cooperation of Tal Afar citizens in a short period of time.

In conclusion, military police participation in Operation Restoring Rights demonstrated their versatility in the COIN fight. The military police trained, equipped, and employed an IA military police platoon and an intelligence (G-2) cell. With command and control of more than 100 emergency police and more than 100 local Tal Afar police, the 2/194 conducted cordon-and-knock operations, resulting in the capture of AIF and the identification of caches. The skill set developed during predeployment training enabled the platoon to conduct combat operations and train Iraqi forces to conduct the operations themselves, thus putting an Iraqi face on the fight. Military police

have proven their worth in COIN operations and created a lasting impression on the Soldiers of the Cavalry and Airborne Infantry Regiments.

Following Operation Restoring Rights, members of the 2/194 were inducted into the coveted Order of the Combat Spur,<sup>2</sup> and the White Falcons authorized the platoon to wear the 82d All-American Patch to signify their attachment during several key stability operations.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company Level Counterinsurgency," Edition 1, March 2006, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/28articles.pdf>>, accessed on 28 January 2010.

<sup>2</sup>The Order of the Combat Spur consists of a certificate and spurs awarded to cavalry troopers deployed to Iraq.

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