

# 720th Military Police Battalion



## Honored With Valorous Unit Award

*By Captain Wendy Cook*

The years since the 11 September 2001 attacks have been rough and the 720th Military Police Battalion has been on the go constantly. The battalion's members—Soldiers of the Gauntlet—have been all over the globe to support Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Missions have taken them to Afghanistan; Turkey; Qatar; Kuwait; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. On 20 March 2006, the battalion was recognized for its efforts during the earliest part of OIF with a valorous unit award in a ceremony at Fort Hood, Texas.

The Soldiers of the 720th were deployed to Iraq from March 2003 to March 2004, where they operated mainly in Tikrit and Samarra in support of the 4th Infantry Division. They performed many military police missions, including area security, convoy escort, and detainee operations. They also started a program of joint operations with the Iraqi police. It was a program the Soldiers would pick up again when they deployed to Iraq for the second time.

"It's an awesome honor to be identified as a unit contributing significantly to an ongoing operation," said Sergeant Major Nathan E. Wilson, the operations sergeant major for the battalion through both deployments. "It means a lot to a Soldier that their efforts didn't go unrecognized. We accomplished something that is part of history."

"We stood apart from other units in the intensity and amount of effort we put into our missions. We also had the advantage of working with Iraqi police and exploiting intelligence from them instead of using interpreters," said Wilson. The battalion conducted area security, convoy escort, and security operations for V Corps and the 4th Infantry Division in support of combat operations in the Sunni Triangle. The unit's Soldiers fought through direct fire, enemy contact, and ambushes with improvised explosive devices.

In his remarks during the awards ceremony, Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Taradash, battalion commander, spoke directly to the Soldiers of the battalion. "Today we honor these Soldiers for their sacrifice and for their courage under fire. You are truly the best of our nation's youth and your willingness to serve the country voluntarily during a time of war provides a glimpse into the making of our newest, greatest generation . . . As with all medals and ribbons, these have little material value but the sacrifice, service, and valor that they represent are the most valued form of recognition among Soldiers. As we depart the field this morning and begin the transition to other assignments and other professions, I want you to carry with you the spirit of the Gauntlet family that has been burned into you during two years of hard combat. You are taking with you qualities that few in this society have but many cherish."

Immediately following the award presentation, the Soldiers, their families, and members of the 720th Military Police Battalion Reunion Association moved to the front of the battalion area for the rededication of the Gauntlet Memorial and the unveiling of an additional marker. The memorial was originally dedicated on 19 January 2002, honoring the battalion's participation in World War II; the Vietnam war; and expeditions in Panama, Somalia, and Bosnia. An additional granite slab was added for OIF and OEF. The memorial slab offered a chance to reflect back on the sacrifices made by the eight soldiers of the Gauntlet who gave their lives in support of those two operations.

The entire 720th Military Police Battalion had not been gathered together since October 2002. The high operational tempo has kept one or all of the battalion's organic companies constantly deployed in support of OIF or OEF, with most Soldiers of the battalion having deployed at least twice. For example, the ceremonies on 20 March marked only the second time in four years

that the 410th Military Police Company has been able to participate in a battalion function. The fast pace has worn a few Soldiers thin, and they are enjoying their time back in the United States. However, others are eager to go right back to the desert.

“I’d go back in a heartbeat,” said Sergeant Heather Phillips, a team leader in the 401st Military Police Company. Sergeant Phillips has two year-long deployments under her belt with only eight months in between, yet she still keeps volunteering to go back again.

“I believe in what we’re doing over there. I see progress in the Iraqi police force. Over there, I feel like I’m accomplishing something, I don’t quite get that feeling back here working the road. I know what we do here on Fort Hood is important but it’s just not as fulfilling. Some people may think I’m crazy for wanting to be back over there, but deployments aren’t

all that bad and it’s my duty. That’s why I’m in the Army and the [Military Police] Corps. That’s where I need to be,” said Sergeant Phillips.

For now, the main body of the battalion will carry on with the Fort Hood force protection and law enforcement mission, while always training for the inevitable trip back to Iraq.

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*Captain Cook has been a platoon leader for the 64th Military Police Company and the 401st Military Police Company and the supply officer for the 720th Military Police Battalion. She has deployed for Operation Joint Guard/Endeavor from January to August 1997 and for OIF from March 2003 to March 2004 and from December 2004 to November 2005. She is currently attending the Military Police Captains Career Course at the U.S. Army Military Police School at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. She has a bachelor’s degree in history from the University of Hawaii.*