

LEADING FROM WITHIN

By First Lieutenant Jennifer R. Robinson

As Jack Welch, former chief executive officer of General Electric®, suggests “An organization’s ability to learn, and translate that learning into action rapidly, is the ultimate competitive advantage.”¹ With young lieutenant watch commanders, the Northwestern Joint Regional Correctional Facility, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, forges such a competitive advantage every day. This feat requires a strong team of senior noncommissioned officers who help mold the lieutenants into well-rounded, multifaceted military police officers.

According to Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-37, *Protection*, “Protection is the preservation of the effectiveness and survivability of mission-related military and non-military personnel, equipment, facilities, information, and infrastructure deployed or located within or outside the boundaries of a given operational area.”² A junior military police officer with corrections experience can significantly contribute to mission planning and execution in a warfighter protection capacity.

I am a military police officer currently serving as an operations officer in the newly constructed Northwestern Joint Regional Correctional Facility, which houses incarcerated Department of Defense prisoners from all Services—Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, and Space Force. I serve in the 508th Military Police Battalion (Detention), which has two mission sets: corrections and detentions. The 508th offers junior officers exposure to Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 31Es—Internment/Resettlement Specialists and provides young officers the opportunity to work inside the prison as watch commanders. Serving in this capacity gives us a deeper understanding of corrections, making us well-rounded military police officers.

As a military police officer, I attended the Military Police Basic Officer Leaders Course, U.S. Army Military Police School (USAMPS), Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, as my first professional military education course. The goal of the course is to produce competent and ethical leaders

capable of addressing the unique challenges within the Military Police Corps Regiment. The most important aspect of the lessons taught center around the three military police disciplines of security and mobility support operations, police operations, and detention operations.³ A significant portion of the Military Police Basic Officer Leaders Course is concentrated on elements of maneuver, mobility support, and police operations; detention operations is overlooked in favor of a more tactical knowledge base. However, exposure to the Military Police Corps Regiment in its entirety is crucial to becoming a well-rounded military police officer. Fortunately, I find myself in an assignment that allows me the chance to gain knowledge and experience in several military police disciplines, from combat support to corrections and detentions.

Not long after my arrival at the 508th Military Police Battalion, I assumed the duties and responsibilities of a platoon leader with the 1st Platoon, Northwestern Joint Regional Correctional Facility, marking a significant milestone in my career. This leadership role puts me in direct alignment with the dynamic environment of the correctional facility and its ongoing developments. Serving as a platoon leader has helped me recognize the paramount importance of leading and caring for Soldiers, while also acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the duties and obligations of a corrections/detention specialist.

Detention operations, one of the primary tasks for the protection warfighting function, directly align with security and mobility support operations as an integral component that shapes the battlefield. The military police disciplines—specifically, corrections and detentions—are embedded into the operations and tasks that enable protection during armed conflict and large-scale combat operations. While performing at the strategic level, commanders and their staffs attempt to harmonize all key warfighting functions to produce a clear operating picture. Detention operations are explained and emphasized as playing a vital role in operational planning. Not only do detention operations apply to detainees, but the procedures outlined

for 31Es are also relevant for handling displaced civilians in an urban environment. Consequently, knowledge about corrections and detention operations becomes transformational and transactional across the Army.

Unified land operations require that the Army prepare for detainee operations; someone is going to be expected to develop a plan for providing for the custody and care of detainees during unified land operations. When that time comes, senior leaders shift focus to their military police counterparts. At that moment, the military police officer's knowledge and experience in corrections becomes valuable. The information that proficient military police provide to a maneuver commander allows the maneuver commander to effectively manage the battlefield—meaning that a well-rounded, competent military police officer can strongly influence the planning process, impacting the overall mission.

The battlefield is full of combatants, who are often located around large, dense urban areas—an environment with which the Army has become familiar over the past 20 years. Over the years, the Army has led countless operations under conditions for which the detention of individuals is likely. Therefore, Soldiers and leaders must understand the procedures to be followed upon capture of these combatants.

In conflict zones or areas of instability, the detention of enemy combatants and suspects is essential for gathering intelligence and maintaining security. A junior military police officer who is trained and has experience with corrections can aid in mission planning and execution by providing maneuver commanders with critical intelligence and actionable insights to mitigate threats. For instance, a military police officer who is experienced in corrections can perform thorough, systematic evaluations of facilities within the operational area and can recognize possible susceptibilities, such as blind spots in surveillance coverage or areas prone to breaches. Moreover, such officers are knowledgeable about numerous types of unlawful tactics and stratagems. They can offer insight into how potential adversaries might exploit security weakness or attempt to penetrate military operations. Lastly, equipped with experience in managing and mitigating risks within prisons, a young military police officer can offer support in conducting comprehensive risk assessments for mission planning.

The realms of correctional missions and detention operations are intricately intertwined, sharing common objectives. The use of Soldiers with combat MOSs in correctional roles within the Army presents challenges that accentuate the need for employing 31Es. While combat Soldiers undoubtedly possess skills and training relevant to certain military operations, they are not subject matter experts in the area of corrections and detention operations. Combat training stresses tactics, the use of force, and rapid decision making in high-stress environments. In general, Soldiers with combat MOSs do not possess the temperament or employ the approach required for corrections work and they may disproportionately apply the use of force—a cornerstone of combat training—to correctional contexts. They may

struggle to adhere to the principles of the Geneva Convention,⁴ undermining the integrity of the correctional system. Military police officers, on the other hand, are trained and equipped with interpersonal communication skills and are subject matter experts in the art of diffusing difficult situations. Therefore, seasoned military police officers enable the thoughtful decision-making aspect of detention operations.

Junior military police officers are exposed to law enforcement operations, where the focus is on deterring crime and holding society accountable. Junior military police officers exposed to corrections and detention operations are introduced to the care, custody, and control of U.S. prisoners and the humane and legal treatment of detainees. The introduction of corrections and detention procedures broadens the skill set of a military police officer. Lieutenants performing the duties and responsibilities of a watch commander bear the responsibility for the overall health, safety, and welfare of the prisoners and Soldiers in their charge. When these lieutenants are placed into brigade combat teams, such experiences prove to be transformational.

Knowledge about correct and legal means of confinement is indispensable when operating at the strategic level. Senior military leaders expect military police officers to articulate the art and doctrine of corrections to help the leaders plan and make decisions. Corrections experience provides young military police officers with the aptitude to speak articulately about detention operations and to properly practice and execute care, custody, and control on the battlefield. Performing work inside a correctional facility lays the groundwork for learning how to set up and operate a detention holding area or theater internment facility. Experience gained by interacting with prisoners translates to interactions with detainees on the battlefield.

Working alongside corrections/detention specialists has proven to be a distinctive and rewarding experience for me thus far. Exposure to the specialized world of 31Es has expanded my understanding of the Military Police Corps Regiment and deepened my appreciation for the diverse roles within our ranks. I encourage all junior military police officers to explore the world of corrections, embracing all that encompass the Military Police Corps Regiment. Brigadier General Sara K. Albrycht, former Commandant of USAMPS, has addressed how the Army is transitioning and the Military Police Corps Regiment must align its warfighting policing tasks with the changes to come.⁵ A well-rounded military police officer proves to be a greater asset to the Army and enables maneuver commanders on the battlefield.

Conclusion

I strongly encourage junior military police officers to seize the chance to enhance their effectiveness in the military police field by considering a position as a corrections platoon leader and watch commander. Serving as a platoon leader in a detention battalion (with duties as a watch commander as well as other broadening duties, such as military police duty officer) has provided me with a comprehensive view of military law enforcement and corrections. The

wealth of knowledge acquired during my tenure in this role has molded me into a well-rounded military police officer. While the learning curve has been steep, the experience has been invaluable in refining my leadership and communication skills and cultivating a profound understanding of the correctional landscape, empowering me to fulfill the capabilities expected of a warfighter.



Endnotes:

¹Greg Barnett, "Building a Learning Organization From the Ground Up," *The Predictive Index*, 25 January 2016, <<https://www.predictiveindex.com/blog/building-a-learning-organization-from-the-ground-up/>>, accessed on 15 July 2024.

²ADP 3-37, *Protection*, 10 January 2024.

³Field Manual (FM) 3-39, *Military Police Operations*, 9 April 2019.

⁴"The Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949," United Nations, 12 August 1949, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.33_GC-IV-EN.pdf>, accessed on 10 July 2024.

⁵Duane R. Miller, "Journey of Gratitude: Farewell Letter from Army's Top MP," U.S. Army, 20 June 2024, <https://www.army.mil/article/277392/journey_of_gratitude_farewell_letter_from_armys_top_mp>, accessed on 15 July 2024.

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