

Employment of MP Companies by the IBCT

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The Infantry and Military Police (MP) have historically had a sometimes unfriendly rivalry resulting from the traditionally rambunctious garrison antics of the former and the law enforcement mission of the latter. As such, infantry units have a tendency to avoid working with their MP counterparts in the field until absolutely necessary or directed. During rotations through the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA, this has unfortunately translated into infantry brigade combat teams (IBCTs) not knowing how to best employ MP companies that are attached as part of their enabler package. Given their large value as a combat multiplier for the IBCT, this cannot continue. This article seeks to provide an Infantryman's view on how an IBCT can best employ an MP (Combat Support [CS]) company. I seek to blend doctrine — as outlined in Field Manual (FM) 3-39, *Military Police Operations*, and FM 3-96, *Brigade Combat Team* — with my experience in working with MP units as a rifle company commander in an IBCT, a company senior observe-coach-trainer (OCT), and as a senior analyst OCT at JRTC.

Most Infantry leaders do not fully understand the organization of the MP (CS) company, what it brings to the fight, the fact that there are multiple types of MP companies, or that there is an MP officer on the IBCT staff. MP (CS) companies are organized so that they can operate independently of a battalion staff. Each MP (CS) company has an organic operations section and headquarters section that allows it to operate with wider dispersion than a typical rifle company. The operations section contains as many Soldiers and NCOs as an infantry battalion operations section, including an organic retransmission team. The headquarters section contains a large number of mechanics, allowing the MP (CS) company to be mechanically self-sufficient in the field. These sections support three platoons organized in three squads with a platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and organic medic. Each platoon possesses firepower that rivals even the infantry battalion weapons company. Each MP squad has four gun trucks equipped with two M2A1 heavy machine guns, an M240 medium machine gun, and an MK19 automatic grenade



A Soldier assigned to the 529th Military Police Company fires an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon during weapons qualification and marksmanship proficiency training in Germany on 22 January 2021. (Photo by Michele Wienczek)

launcher. This allows the MP squads to free up weapons company assault platoons to focus on their anti-armor and support-by-fire tasks in direct support of the rifle companies. Indeed, due to the garrison mission of the MP Corps, MP squads are used to operating independently during their law enforcement shifts. This translates well to small unit actions in support area security missions once they move to the field.

Large amounts of firepower are not all that MPs can bring to the IBCT. MPs are used to conduct security patrols due to their garrison mission. This translates easily to support area security patrols, both mounted and dismounted. In accordance with FM 3-39, MP companies can provide static sight security, mobile security (both through patrols and escort), detainee operations, dislocated civilian operations, and quick reaction forces, amongst other capabilities. Individual MP platoons can defend against Level II threats within the brigade support area (FM 3-96). As mentioned before, the MP garrison mission makes it easy for the MP company to disperse into numerous squad and platoon-sized elements in order to support multiple missions across the entire IBCT area of operations.

In addition to the MP (CS) companies, the MP Corps has military working dog (MWD) detachments, law enforcement detachments, criminal investigative companies, and detention companies. Most BCTs will not see these specialty organizations as full detachments. MWD detachments are extremely small and always in high demand. MWD teams consist of a handler and his or her dog and are trained to detect drugs or explosives. The dogs are also trained to conduct some attacks. These teams can conduct patrols, entry control point operations, or help commanders do drug sweeps. Due to the numbers of MWD teams and commanders' constant demands for their skills, BCTs will not likely receive more than a handful of MWD teams in support.

Law enforcement detachments contain a wide variety of specialty MPs, such as traffic investigators, crime scene investigators, and security specialists. These detachments are designed to provide garrison specialties in deployed environments, and it is unlikely that BCTs will have direct control over them. It is the same with the criminal investigative detachments. These detachments consist of criminal investigative division (CID) special agents and MPs who are federal investigators. These detachments focus on specific cases and will not attach directly to BCTs. Detention companies are generally attached to divisions and corps and will have some interactions with BCTs during transfer of prisoners but are not generally task organized to provide direct support to a BCT.

The provost marshal, the IBCT's resident MP officer, is often underutilized and seen as just one more staff captain to be sacrificed as an action officer to the ever-demanding IBCT S3. Often, the provost marshal is seen as just being on staff to conduct physical security or anti-terrorism inspections and to be the action officer for anything remotely involving those two focus areas. While these areas are important to the IBCT and provost marshals do have experience in these matters, they also have a very important tactical role to fill as well. As outlined in FM 3-96, the provost marshal, "is responsible for planning, coordinating, and employing all... Military Police assets" under the IBCT's control. He or she is a vital staff officer in the field, helping coordinate support area security and ensuring that any attached MP assets are properly utilized. The provost marshal is also a useful staff officer for making sure detainee operations and displaced personnel are not overlooked during the planning process. A wise IBCT S3 will ensure that the provost marshal is given the time and resources to properly plan for the use of MP assets. Doing so will free up many frontline infantry assets, as discussed below.

IBCTs are traditionally their most vulnerable in their support areas. Locations such as the brigade support area, the brigade main command post (MCP), and supply routes present the highest payoff targets for enemy forces. To combat these threats, IBCTs typically reallocate combat power from the infantry battalions to protect these assets. Rifle platoons are commonly pulled from the fight to defend the brigade support area and MCP. Assault platoons are used to protect convoys instead of providing vital fire support for the infantry battalions. What is even more distressing is the amount of vital anti-armor weaponry, already in short supply, that is being assigned to conduct support area security instead of being used on the forward line of own troops (FLOT). Every rifle platoon sent to the support area brings with it two Javelin launchers and an M3 Multi-Role, Anti-armor, Anti-personnel Weapon System. Every assault platoon removes two TOW (tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided) missile launchers and two heavy machine guns that are vital to the success of the infantry battalion.

A single MP platoon, based on number of gun trucks and machine guns, frees up an entire weapons company from support area security duties behind the FLOT. An MP squad, if properly utilized, can free up a rifle platoon. Additionally, since MP companies are completely motorized, they free up transportation assets the IBCT must use to transport rifle platoons to and from their support area security locations, since rifle platoons lack organic trans-



A 3rd MP Detachment Soldier and his military working dog negotiate a tactical explosives lane during a certification event at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA, on 23 November 2020. (Photo by Terrance Bell)

portation. This not only frees up rifle platoons for the maneuver battalions, but also frees up vital transportation assets to either reallocate combat power to other parts of the battlefield or to move needed supplies.

When employing the MP (CS) company, IBCT staff usually commit one of two major errors. The first is underutilization. Due to either lack of familiarity with MP company capabilities or due to MP companies being seen as a vague security asset, MP companies are commonly attached to the brigade engineer battalion and told to conduct security tasks. This error is generally caused by a failure to utilize the provost marshal as an MP subject matter expert. The second error is overspecification. With this error, the IBCT fully understands the usefulness of MP squads in support area security and seeks to task out those squads directly, parceling out all elements of the MP company to specific tasks. Here, the staff bypasses the company commander and the operations section entirely. Both errors are ones of extremes and fail to utilize the combination of the provost marshal and the MP company commander.

Just as the brigade fire support officer and the fires battalion commander have some overlap between their jobs, so too do the provost marshal and the MP company commander. It is important to remember that the provost marshal is a specialized staff officer whose job is to understand the IBCT schemes of support and maneuver and provide input on how MP assets — such as direct support MP (CS) companies, MWD teams, detention centers, and CID assets — can best complement those plans. The provost marshal helps draft the orders tasking attached MP assets, such as the MP company, to execute missions to support the IBCT plan. In keeping with our doctrine of mission command, these orders must task the MP company and provide the IBCT commander's intent. While an MP company can cover a very large area by breaking down into squads, the IBCT staff must not waste time and effort attempting to task individual squads. This not only underutilizes an experienced MP commander with his or her own operations section, but runs the risk of sending squads on missions without the proper support channels. The MP company's operations section is used to rotating squads and platoons in support of garrison activities. Giving the company a task and purpose allows that commander to best employ his or her subordinate elements. Any staff that bypassed a rifle company commander and tried to task platoons and squads directly would soon have an angry infantry officer appear in their tent, so why should staffs treat MP companies any different?

Way Forward

The major impediment to properly integrating MP (CS) companies with IBCTs is the lack of habitual relationships.

Many MP (CS) companies do not work with an IBCT before they are paired together for a JRTC rotation. Sometimes, they will get the opportunity to conduct joint operations during a brigade-level exercise before JRTC, but this does not happen as often as it should. Nor do MP (CS) companies usually stay with the IBCT they are paired with much longer than the JRTC rotation. This means that many of the lessons learned between the two organizations die shortly after redeployment to home station. The easiest way to prevent this would be to add MP (CS) companies to the IBCT structure. Including an MP (CS) company in the brigade engineer battalion would enable IBCTs to keep those lessons learned and build on them. This would enable many of the smaller habitual relationships discussed above to develop, in much the same manner that combat engineer platoon relationships currently develop in the IBCT with the infantry battalions. However, this change to the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE) would cause potential problems with the MP (CS) companies' garrison mission of law enforcement. Transferring MP (CS) companies to IBCTs would reduce the ability of MP battalions to manage the garrison mission effectively. In order to facilitate attaching MP (CS) companies to IBCTs, the MP Corps would need to restructure to either increase the number of MP companies (to allow for dedicated garrison law enforcement and task organization under IBCTs) or transfer the garrison law enforcement mission to Department of the Army civilian police. The latter would allow Soldiers to focus on their combat mission instead of having to regularly switch back and forth between a garrison mission and a combat mission.

An alternative that may not affect the garrison law enforcement mission as much would be to establish the habitual relationships within the division. Currently, MP battalions are aligned with a division from the corps' assigned MP brigade. These battalions, which are stationed with but not directly controlled by the divisions, consist of between two and four MP general support companies, a headquarters and headquarters detachment (which includes the staff found in infantry battalion HHCs and some support sections found in forward support companies), and assorted detachments (such as the MWD detachments and law enforcement detachments). The MP (CS) companies can be further aligned against each of the brigade combat teams in the division. Keeping the MP (CS) companies under the MP battalion allows the battalion to rotate the companies through the law enforcement garrison mission and through deployment and tasking cycles, much as the division will rotate the BCTs through an internal red-amber-green cycle.

While Infantrymen may have jokes aimed towards all branches outside of the Infantry, most are tempered by the understanding that other branches enable the Infantry through visible effects, such as long range fires on objectives, transportation to and from objectives, or logistics support. Infantrymen typically only see MPs as there to ruin the fun in garrison. However, the MP Corps can provide so much more if infantry planners understand how MP units function and what they can bring to the fight. Understanding MP enablers will allow IBCTs to become more lethal.

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