

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



Conventional Forces, Special Forces and the Hidden Guerrilla

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS JAMES MEYERS

Leaders create conditions for success. Organizing, equipping, training, and leading Soldiers to accomplish operational missions are the goals of leaders. Will and determination mold Soldiers into effective organizations. Full spectrum operations demand Army leaders who are masters of both the art and the science of military operations, and have the training and temperament to adapt to any situation. Success comes from imaginative, flexible, and daring Soldiers and leaders.

— U.S. Army Field Manual 90-8, *Counter guerrilla Operations*

The Army's counter guerrilla manual, FM 90-8, states, "Counter guerrilla operations are geared to the active military element of the insurgent movement only." FM 90-8 also states, "An insurgent organization may have both an overt and a covert element. The overt element, the guerrilla, is readily identified." FM 90-8 goes on to explain, in detail, how conventional forces should conduct counter guerrilla operations against the readily identifiable guerrilla. But what if the Army is fighting a guerrilla that isn't readily identifiable?

In an article of the October 6, 2003, *Wall Street Journal*, Brigadier General Martin Dempsey stated, "Right now, I have more than enough combat power. What I need to know is where to apply it." This is the situation that faces the Army units conducting counter guerrilla operations in Iraq. But General Dempsey's predicament is not limited to Iraq. From my personal experience, I watched as 82nd Airborne troops in Afghanistan conducted operations without any real tactical intelligence.

The writers of FM 90-8 were conventional Soldiers who knew how to be conventional warfighters. Their instruction manual on how to fight an insurgency was based on what they knew — how to use units trained in conventional infantry tactics to fight a guerrilla that presumably would present a readily identifiable target.

The writers knew how to "find and fix" an enemy that had a presence on the rural battlefield. Unfortunately, the battlefield tactics the writers wrote about in FM 90-8 were designed almost exclusively for use against an easily identifiable and rural insurgent (the Viet Cong). FM 90-8 fails to address in depth the tactics and techniques that should be employed to identify insurgents that

camouflage themselves in the local populace as they have, and do, in such places as Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. I believe that FM 90-8's lack of depth is a major reason for the U.S. Army's continuing difficulty in conducting successful operations against a latent and incipient insurgency. I also believe there is an effective model that the U.S. Army could emulate when it is faced with conducting counter guerrilla operations against guerrillas that refuse to present an easily identifiable target.

The New York Police Department (NYPD) has been fighting a latent incipient insurgency for years involving a "resistance" that includes organized elements and unorganized, individual elements; the resistance may or may not be easily identifiable.

The insurgency they are fighting is simply their war on crime. Every day the NYPD is searching for contraband, looking for illegal weapons, getting into shoot-outs, making arrests, and defending against attacks on law enforcement officers. In recent history, the NYPD has been quite successful in reducing crime in New York City. The NYPD's success in combating crime is obvious in everything from the reduced amount of graffiti in the subways to the dramatic reduction of the murder rate.

The NYPD tried numerous things to improve its performance. Many of the tactics and techniques adapted by the NYPD were technologies and leadership ideals already in use by the U.S. military.

Now it may be time for the U.S. Army to look towards the NYPD for ideas on how to improve its ability to fight an insurgency. The part of the NYPD that I believe is most relevant to the U.S. Army is the force structure that the NYPD utilizes in each precinct.

Each precinct's work force is basically broken down into two groups: uniform and detective.

The uniform division is made up of regular uniformed officers and uniformed officers assigned to specialized sections. The majority of the officers in a precinct are uniformed officers who conduct regular patrol duties. These officers provide a visible presence to the public and respond to calls for help. Other uniformed officers are assigned to specialized sections such as the Emergency Services Unit, Street Narcotics Unit, and the Street Crimes Unit. These

officers conduct duties that target issues in the community, but they are also available to immediately assist patrol officers.

The other major part of any NYPD precinct is the detective section. The detectives do not conduct patrols and generally do not work in uniform unless there is a temporary, specific or special need for additional uniformed officers.

The detectives in each precinct report directly to the precinct commander, but the head of all NYPD detectives (at NYPD headquarters) has ultimate control over the detectives in each precinct.

The detectives work closely with the uniformed officers and complement their work. Detectives are typically older officers who first served as uniformed officers before becoming detectives. Thus, the detectives are familiar with the NYPD and police procedures. Many times the detectives have numerous human sources in the precinct that provide them with valuable information. The detectives collect all of their criminal information by either clandestine (working undercover) or semi-clandestine (conducting interviews in civilian attire) means.

How does the NYPD model relate to the U.S. Army? A conventional military battalion is broken down into numerous specialty sections just like the NYPD. In an infantry unit, the majority of the troops are common, uniformed grunts, just like the NYPD. And just like the NYPD's force structure, an infantry battalion has specialty units such as scout platoons, mortar platoons, anti-armor platoons, and maybe even a hand-picked quick reaction force (QRF).

But what the infantry battalion lacks is



Department of Defense photo

U.S. Special Forces troops ride horseback as they work with members of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom in November 2001.

a detective section. By not having a detective section, the infantry battalion has no clandestine or semi-clandestine means of developing battlefield information into tactical intelligence.

The U.S. Army, however, does have its own detective section — Special Forces (SF). SF Soldiers are typically older, experienced Soldiers who have spent time in regular Army units before passing Special Forces Assessment and Selection and the "Q" (Qualification) Course.

SF Soldiers have been around the Army and know how to conduct conventional operations. Many of these Soldiers have been in countries where conventional forces end up conducting counter guerrilla operations. SF Soldiers are trained to develop human contacts by clandestine and semi-clandestine means.

Unfortunately, even though SF is considered a force multiplier, SF Soldiers rarely work in a situation where they are assigned to directly support conventional forces in anything other than a special reconnaissance (SR) mission.

I believe that a SF Advanced Special Operations Techniques (ASOT)-trained ODA (Operational Detachment-Alpha) would be indispensable to an infantry battalion. When dealing with a guerrilla that conceals himself among the populace (much like drug dealers), human intelligence (HUMINT) is probably the most effective way of developing information about the guerrilla that can be turned into tactical intelligence. An ASOT ODA is specifically geared towards HUMINT. The precinct detectives develop information on criminal activities, which

is then turned into indictments and arrest warrants. Like the detectives, an ASOT ODA is trained to develop local HUMINT sources in order to develop information that can then be turned into tactical intelligence.

An ASOT ODA could develop tactical intelligence to directly support a conventional commander and help him apply his combat power. While I was serving in Afghanistan, SF provided virtually all of the tactical intelligence that the local 82nd Airborne company commander received. The tactical

intelligence SF provided him was almost exclusively derived from HUMINT collection by the local SF unit.

Now, I am not suggesting that each Army battalion be permanently assigned its own ODA, or that the ODA should be under the conventional forces command. I believe that the easiest model to emulate would be the current model used by SF ODAs when they conduct SR missions that support conventional commanders. Following current doctrine, the SF ODA would support the conventional commander, but would still be controlled by a Special Operations Command and Control Element (SOCCE) assigned to the supported conventional commander.

Luckily, the 82nd Airborne company commander I dealt with was farsighted enough to realize that SF Soldiers with beards didn't affect his mission success. The valuable tactical intelligence that SF provided, however, did affect his mission success.

By leveraging SF's unique skills, I believe that SF can act as a valuable force multiplier for conventional forces. Just like a precinct commander in the NYPD, a battalion commander needs a detective section when he is conducting a counter guerrilla operation in which the guerrilla decides to conceal himself among the local population.

Sergeant First Class James Meyers served as a senior communications sergeant for a National Guard Special Forces company in Afghanistan. He currently serves with the Special Operations Command Pacific. Meyers is a graduate of the Special Operations Qualification Course and has a bachelor's degree in international relations.
