



Teams of 127th Military Police Company Soldiers from Baumholder, Hanau and Darmstadt make their way through a course at the Grafenwöhr Training Area in preparation for deployment to Iraq this spring.

Ready for Iraq

MPs hone Soldier skills before deployment

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A chill wind whipped the hills of Grafenwöhr Feb. 19 as a dozen 127th Military Police Soldiers huddled around a convoy of High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles. In about two months they would be dealing with the body-bruising heat of Baghdad, but that afternoon they shivered in the cold as they took in a critique of their live-fire convoy exercise and further instructions from 1st Sgt. Mark Porrett.

"They're chomping at the bit," said 1st Lt. Erik S. Archer, the company's executive officer. "They've mostly been doing community law enforcement, but that's only one of our five primary missions. Now we're really doing the MP mission."

The 127th had been at Graf since Feb. 8 doing everything they could to prepare for their upcoming year-long deployment to Iraq. In addition to individual and squad weapons training and qualification, Soldiers underwent Military Operations in Urban Terrain, medical evacuation and a slew of other skills training. They were scheduled for Situational Training Exercises at Hohenfels in the second half of March.

"I never cease to be impressed with the determination and adaptability of the Soldiers in this company," said Capt. Kevin F. Hanrahan, the company commander. "They are the most motivated Soldiers I've worked with. They're learning extremely fast and are intelligently applying lessons from one iteration of training to the next."

At present 81 percent of his approximately 150 Soldiers have qualified as expert on the M-240 machine gun, said

Hanrahan. Most are cross-trained to be both gunners and drivers, allowing them the flexibility of stepping into each other's roles as necessity dictates, and over 90 are trained as combat lifesavers.

Soldiers in the live-fire exercise negotiated the snow covered landscape, responding to simulated roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenade attacks and random fire. The exercise was also aimed at exposing Soldiers to the mechanics and rhythm of firefights they might encounter. They practiced treating and evacuating wounded as well.

"Being a cook you usually don't get out to this kind of thing," said Staff Sgt. Vaniser Earls, the company's food services sergeant. "This is a step up. I get to see what they do. I have a lot of respect for them because it's really hard," said the 16-year veteran from Chicago, Ill., with a Bosnia deployment behind her.

"I feel safe with my platoon. It's good training for the real thing. They're helping us out with stuff downrange we need to be aware of — always be aware of your surroundings, always be trustworthy of the people who have your back."

"It's fast, pretty much non-stop. You eat and run a lot," said Pfc. Eric Kellogg, of 3rd Platoon from Darmstadt. "I'm excited to go down there and help, but there's still a little voice in the back of your head that says 'keep your eyes open.' The 127th's ready to go. When our time comes we'll be ready to go."

Just where they will be stationed is yet to be determined, said company leaders.

"We think we'll be in Baghdad, we just aren't real sure," said Master Sgt. Damian McIntosh, the company's operations sergeant. "We're going in when they're pretty much established. It just won't be as dramatic as last time, when you went from living in a truck and out of your duffel bag. I think it'll be a good rotation. It's just long."

"We don't know exactly who we're going to work for," said Archer. "It really won't affect the mission though.



Pfc. Bobby Banks of 3rd Platoon, 127th Military Police Company, keeps a wary eye out for suspicious activity along the route during a live-fire convoy exercise.



1st Sgt. Mark Porrett provides after-action guidance to MPs following their navigation through a live-fire convoy course at Grafenwöhr Training Area Feb. 19.

Everything's still up in the air. It doesn't bother me. We'll figure it out."

"We're basically replacing the units already there and falling into that," said McIntosh. "We've been trained for that and we're ready to do any of the missions."

"We're going to do the same mission wherever we are. To

me it doesn't matter who we work for," said Hanrahan. "We're staying concentrated on going downrange. I'm never going to be completely satisfied with the amount of training we can do, but we're going to do the mission and do the best we can. The country's at war. It's tough, but that's where we're going to go."

The company's window for deployment to the Gulf is in April, said Archer. In the meantime Soldiers made the most of their time at Graf.

"It's good training. All of us are together working as a platoon," said Pfc. Nate McElroy of 3rd Squad, 1st Platoon. So far he had qualified on his M-9 and was looking forward to more. "I feel safe with my platoon. It's good training for the real thing. They're helping us out with stuff downrange we need to be aware

of — always be aware of your surroundings, always be trustworthy of the people who have your back," said the 19-year-old from Fayetteville, N.C.

"My country needs me there and I'm going. Hoo-ah," said Pfc. Matthew Quevedo, a 19-year-old MP from Port Orange, Fla., assigned to 4th Squad, 1st Platoon. "They're telling us

what type of stuff to bring down, telling you to be careful down there. Keep alert, keep your head in the swivel, do what your NCOs tell you to do and stay cool."

"A lot of the training is straight down from folks who are just back from Iraq, the 709th MP Battalion. It's definitely helpful," said Pfc. Anthony Dibasilio, also of 3rd Platoon.

Briefings covered everything from social profiles of the city's mosaic of ethnic neighborhoods to the specific relations among powerbrokers in the different parts of town, the intelligence background they will need to tell who's who in Baghdad.

"We've got lots of good information," said 3rd Platoon's Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Hadden from Darmstadt, who served in Basrah during Operation Desert Storm over a decade ago. "We're setting up to go one on one with them and that's definitely helpful."

"Soldiers are spending a lot of time talking about 'do this, don't do that,'" said Archer. "Soldiers are more focused because they know the training is for a real-world event. The reality of the upcoming deployment has really sunk in these past couple of weeks. Soldiers are keenly aware that this training isn't designed to check off a block — it's designed to save lives downrange."

"It's good learning," said 1st Platoon's Pfc. Kerina Ward, 20, of Tucson, Ariz., after an afternoon spent calling in and loading medical evacuation helicopters. "The Blackhawk training was awesome, learning to carry and load the litters ... and we got to fly."

"I feel confident. I guess all this training helps," said Pfc. Richard Wrzesien, a 19-year-old from Baltimore, Md., assigned to 1st Platoon's 2nd Squad following medevac training.



Master Sgt. Damian McIntosh (left), 127th MP Company operations sergeant; Sgt. 1st Class Jimmy Stogner (right), platoon sergeant; and Spc. Jeremiah Walker, a radio and telephone operator and nuclear, biological and chemical specialist, work in the Tactical Operations Center during training in Grafenwöhr.

The 127th will leave their vehicles in Germany when they deploy and acquire up-armored HMMWVs and Armored Security Vehicles, M-1117s, in their place when they get to Iraq, said Archer. "They're just awesome. They're about eight feet tall with dual mounted .50-caliber machine guns and MK-19 grenade launchers."

Soldiers usually train to operate with stealth, said Archer, but tactics are shifting in response to lessons learned in Iraq. The emphasis now is on operating more openly in an attempt to make their presence and their might apparent, instilling fear in their enemies while at the same time reassuring the local populace.

MPs have shouldered much of the burden and faced much of the danger involved in patrolling Baghdad and other cities, and in training Iraqis to police their own neighborhoods and villages as part of the transition to an indigenously run government. Their skills and their numbers are in demand, he said. Field artillery Soldiers are being cross-trained to do the MP mission in order to beef up the limited number of MPs available.

Archer said he envisions a future where the MP mission would expand due to the changing battlefield.

"The wars are getting shorter and shorter, but the aftermath is getting longer and longer," he said.

As the training continued Soldiers began to mentally prepare themselves as well for the separation from friends and family that the deployment will entail.

"Right now it's more excitement than being scared," said Earls, the food services sergeant. Her husband, a Soldier with the Hanau-based 5-7th Air Defense Artillery, and their 10-year-old daughter will have to make the best of it on their own while she's away.

"That's my biggest fear because I'm the one who's usually at home with her. When I'm gone he's going to have to take care of her and face the big challenge — the biggest challenge of his military career."

"I'll miss my wife," said Archer, "but it's what we signed up to do. It's an honor. It's a great unit. I have absolutely no fear about what I can't control."

Many of the younger Soldiers were cognizant of the worry their parents would experience when they deploy.

"My dad's excited. My mom's not too happy," said Kellogg.

"I guess they're a little scared. They're proud of me, but they're scared," said Wrzesien.

"My mother doesn't believe me that I'm going. She thinks I'm just a beginner and that I couldn't be going," said Pvt. 2 Victoria Romero of the company's Headquarters and Headquarters Company. "My dad, I haven't told yet. I'm a little scared of going, but I'm going."

Whatever their feelings about leaving their families behind, his Soldiers are intelligent, determined and adaptable enough to deal with any contingency, said Archer.

"The company's ready to go," he said.