

An Anonymous Letter on Concerning 800th MP Brigade

There are good reasons why responsible media will not print anonymous letters, and there may at times be good reasons to disregard that rule. We believe this is one of them. The writer is obviously an insider, and given that court martials are underway, it would be unreasonable to ask her or him to provide a name and address. We are not so familiar with the US Army that we can sort out the jargon – somewhere on the Contemporary Orbats site there is a guide to US Army acronyms. Nonetheless, readers do not have to military experts to get the gist of the letter.

The Letter

As a former active component trainer of many mobilizing MP units (although I mostly trained combat support rather than EPW guard units like the 800th) I have some observations:

1. Lack of training. The allegation is that the brigade did not receive corrections-specific training during mobilization. This is generally true of reserve MP units. Their post-mobilization time is principally to administratively and logistically prepare units to deploy, and provide some Soldier-skills refresher training to (hopefully) keep them getting killed right off the plane. They attempt to conduct some collective training based on best information on what they'll do in theater. However, THE 800TH MP BDE IS AN INTERNMENT/RESELLMENT UNIT – THE ONLY ONE IN THE ARMY – AND THEIR ONLY METL TASK IS GUARDING PRISONERS AND DETAINEES!!! What were they doing all those years on AT and drill status? If they want to claim that they didn't know the basics how to run a prison, then they need to return all their drill/AT pay to Uncle Sam.
2. Claim that they weren't trained in Geneva Conventions. Every soldier gets initial training on the Law of Land Warfare in Basic (and again in AIT for MPs). Same with officer initial training – and all this is identical for AC and RC soldiers. I also recall a refresher class during the standard mobilization POI. However, even if these idiots forgot all their training, that's why the unit is supposed to schedule refresher training (just like for weapons qualifications) in theater. Also, I'd like to point out (since no one in the media has bothered to look at the Geneva Conventions) that they are extremely simple and common-sense. There is no specific ban on “ass pyramids” for example, but even someone who forgot their Geneva Conventions training would know that one ought not to do anything to humiliate OR PHOTOGRAPH prisoners.
3. Claim that their EPW guard training did not suit them to run a more conventional prison. There is some basic truth to this, however, IT WAS PART OF THEIR METL. Also, the particular unit in question had a civilian corrections officer in charge. Finally, if you know anything about running prisons, it is not rocket science. While some specific techniques of handling high-risk detainees are not generally known,

they are not hard to find out and learn. Not to denigrate corrections officers, but if you don't believe me, go to your local penitentiary and see if some the geniuses who work there had any trouble figuring the job out.

4. Claims of torture. This is media lying to promote their story (and enemy propaganda). What you see in the released photos is not torture (defined as infliction of physical pain to elicit information), it is a breakdown of military discipline. In parts of the 800th MP Bde, there was never much discipline to begin with. What you see in the photos is undisciplined co-eds taking their job in the prisons (which legitimately required handling prisoners and strip searching during intake) as a frat-house giggle-fest rather than a serious job. Their obvious disdain for standards, and their false attitude that they could get away with anything, resulted in an escalation of outrage into what we see in the photos. The fact they took pictures is indicative that at the time, they likely didn't think it was "any big deal." The fact that they still can't keep their mouths shut shows a lack of intelligence to match their lack of standards.

If I may add a personal impression; most RC Soldiers simply join the local unit – regardless of its branch. However, there is a great element (particularly among senior personnel) of choice as to whether you join a combat support or a Guard MP unit. Join a combat support MP unit and you have a lot of equipment to maintain, a lot of range time, and a lot of field time. Join a guard unit (MTOE title is Internment/Resettlement Guard Company or Battalion) then you have less of all that. It looks like the 800th MP Bde reaped what it sowed, and now blaming everyone else (intel, the Army, anyone) for the fact that their total lack of discipline has handed us the greatest propaganda defeat in recent history. Since both the Iraqi War and the overall GWOT are largely wars of ideas, this media disaster is worse than any tactical setback could ever be.