



# Learning By Doing

Story and photos by Sgt. Matthew Smallish

The Michigan Army National Guard 210th Military Police Battalion and its subordinate companies; the 46th, 144th, 1775th and 1776th MPs conducted two weeks of annual training in July at the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center, Indiana. The training area used to be an Indiana state sanatorium, the Muscatauck State Development Center. Some MP Soldiers speculated that the former sanatorium might be haunted by former inmates; the possibility adding to the tension of the training environment.

The Michigan Army National Guard 210th MP Battalion convoyed to the training site; the area surrounding the facility was littered with Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers, smashed cars and other detritus from a recent tornado. The 210th MP Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Scott Hiipakka said, "Upon our arrival to the Training Center the burnt out cars and rubble buildings scattered around the site made our training environment realistic." The buildings of the Muscatatuck State Development Center were intact; however they were surrounded by half-demolished buildings and mock-up structures designed to look like Iraqi and Afghan huts. During annual training, the daily heat index averaged 120 degrees, the heat and conditions of the facilities added realism to the MP Soldiers' training.

The first phase of training consisted of individual warrior tasks and a two-day squad-level competition between the companies of the battalion. Each squad had to demonstrate proficiency in basic warrior skills and complete a two-mile rucksack march. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Scott Hiipakka and battalion Command Sgt. Maj. Jon Sawyer supervised the training; ensuring tasks were executed to Army standards. A 46th MP Company squad led by Sgt. Len Lieffers took first place in the competition, achieving the best overall score out of the competing squads of the 210th MP Battalion. Sawyer said, "The Soldiers were challenged and honed skills during the squad competition and this training was used again during platoon lane evaluations."

The next phase of training evaluated the readiness of the Michigan Incident Response Force. The MIRF has a quick reaction force that must have Soldiers on site at a state or regional emergency within eight hours. The MIRF exercise ran for 48 hours and tested the abilities of squad leaders from the 144th and 46th MP Companies to react to several domestic and civil disturbance scenarios. These scenarios ranged from peaceful neighborhoods trying to function without water and food to rioting college students attempting to bully a local mayor and rioters breaking into condemned buildings. The tactical operations centers of the 144th MP Company and 210th MP Battalion were evaluated

on their abilities to monitor and assist the ground forces during the exercise. The 1775th and 1776th MP Companies provided officers and senior non-commissioned officers to serve as exercise evaluators while their junior NCOs and enlisted Soldiers role played as local law enforcement, displaced civilians and violent criminals. 210th MP Battalion staff officers and staff non-commissioned officers took part in a weekend 28-hour exercise where they were removed from their staff positions and reorganized into MP squads. They executed troop leading procedures and were assigned squad level missions such as establishing patrol bases, conducting reconnaissance patrols in the outskirts of the training area, cordons and searches, recovery of priority intelligence requirements and clearing buildings. The missions completed by the staff squads gathered the intelligence needed for battalion units to conduct a riot control action securing the city hall that Sunday.

While the staff officers and NCOs were working as MP squads, MP Soldiers of the 46th and 144th MP Companies prepared to secure the city hall. Soldiers performed vehicle and equipment maintenance and conducted classes on the riot control measures they would need to complete the upcoming mission. The Soldiers received instruction on riot control formations, less than lethal munitions and working with local government and law enforcement. This instruction was combined with lessons learned from the battalion's 2005 deployment to support Hurricane Katrina recovery operations.

The battalion completed its preparations to assist a civilian government re-establish law and order after a tornado damaged its infrastructure. The 46th and 144th MP Company Soldiers faced a 24-hour exercise conducted in lanes that had them providing site security, assisting displaced civilians, working with non-English speakers, supporting local law enforcement, conducting roving patrols and quelling rioting college students. The role players for these scenarios were provided by the 1775th and 1776th MP Companies, being MP Soldiers themselves and understanding the missions their comrades in the 46th and 144th MP Companies were expected to carry out made these role-playing MP Soldiers a force to be reckoned with.

The culminating event of the 24-hour exercise was a riot control operation to secure the city hall. The 46th and 144th Soldiers undertook this mission in full riot gear and battled rioters in earnest because the scenario put one MP platoon in the city hall building, surrounded by a mob of rioters. The quick reaction force of the two MP companies battled rioters, apprehended many criminal role players and rescued their trapped fellow MPs in the city hall building.

The two-week annual training scenarios and physical



Left: Soldiers from the 210th Military Police Battalion practice quelling a riot of college students during training at Muscatatuck Urban Training Center. The Soldiers are part of the Michigan Incident Response Force. Right: Military Police Soldiers practice squad missions such as establishing patrol bases, conducting reconnaissance patrols, and cordons and searches.

conditions at Muscatatuck Urban Training Center gave the MP Soldiers of the 210th Military Police Battalion a hands-on evaluation of their warrior skills and a test of their abilities to plan and execute Military Police operations in a natural disaster environment. Lt. Col. Scott Hiipakka said, "The training we conducted guarantees we can fulfill our quick reaction force mission and help the civilian authorities we will encounter in such circumstances and work with them to re-establish law and order within the community." Citizens of Michigan can rest assured that their Michigan Army National Guard 210th MP Battalion will be quick to help any Michigan regional or local government and its respective law enforcement agency re-establish law and order if a natural disaster strikes the state at any time.