

Air Force Breaks New Ground at Camp Bucca, Iraq



Air Force Officers Reflect on New Missions in Iraq

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Airmen are breaking new ground at Camp Bucca, Iraq, by performing three of the Army's traditional missions—detainee operations, patrolling duties, and convoy escort duties. In another first, the airmen are also helping to provide force protection for an Army camp.

In October 2004, I was notified by the director of security forces for Air Combat Command that the Air Force would augment Army forces conducting a detainee operations mission. The unit would be the first to mobilize, train, certify, and deploy as an Air Force expeditionary security forces squadron (ESFS) in support of detention and security operations on the ground in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Together, we revolutionized the area of joint doctrine through superior accomplishments while serving with the Army's military police.

In early November 2004, Air Force officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) mobilized and formed a squadron of airmen from 17 active duty Air Force bases around the world. They then led this newly formed squadron through a 32-day training and certification program and successfully deployed to Iraq, where they conducted transfer of authority operations with their predecessors at Camp Bucca. After thorough analysis of the ESFS mission sets and capabilities, senior Air Force and Army leaders assigned the new unit not only the mission of augmenting an Army military police battalion in detainee operations, but also the mission of providing force protection for Camp Bucca.

During their tenure at Camp Bucca, the joint security force used the concepts of integrated base

defense to establish the first true 360-degree security of Camp Bucca by building a layered defensive belt that incorporated mounted and dismounted patrolling units and detailed coordination with allies of the Multinational Division South East. With the assistance of US Air Forces Central Command Force Protection, the unit also installed more than \$2 million worth of technical security upgrades to secure the camp and its associated theater internment facility (TIF), to include revamping the entry control points. The unit accomplished this while running convoys up and down the main supply routes.

The airmen who would be in daily contact with the detainees at the TIF arrived excited and prepared to make a difference. Leaders trained their personnel in the art of fighting rioters and led successful operations to retake control of rioting compounds, three times reestablishing order and discipline within the TIF. Airmen contributed to the revamping of standard operating instructions and instilled ownership and pride in their areas of responsibility. This infusion of "blue blood" into the mix within the TIF resulted in a measurable performance and transition to a jointly run mission.

In every possible regard, airmen contributed immensely in transforming all aspects of security at Camp Bucca and ensured that detainees were properly secured and treated in accordance with Army regulations and the standards of the Geneva Conventions. Their steadfast devotion to duty and dynamic, positive attitude prove the highest traditions of the US armed forces.

Captain William M. Dains

The world as our military fathers knew it four years ago, let alone 40 years ago, no longer exists. The services no longer ramp up preparations for “joint ops” exercises, then immediately abandon them at the end of the exercise. Joint operations have become a daily reality of military life for all the services. As a junior at the US Air Force Academy in 1998, I was first introduced to the concept of joint operations in a study of Joint Vision 2010. I did not know then that in just over two years I would be quickly inundated by joint operations. Who would have thought just four years ago that US Army Soldiers would be guarding US Air Force instal-

lations. Who could have known that the same Army would later use US Air Force personnel to perform a similar force protection role at one of the Army’s camps in Iraq. Who would have dreamed that Army, Air Force, and Marine units would not only share missions but combine forces and resources to accomplish the same mission at the same location, not just on staffs but at the unit level.

That has been my reality for the past 180 days at a deployed location known as Camp Bucca, Iraq. Our integration and my time here have been the single most important experience of my military service. Air Force security forces combined with an Army field artillery unit and a Marine Corps battalion landing team to work in conjunction with an Army military police battalion to run all aspects of the camp’s detainee mission and to assume the roles that support it.

Though extremely educational for all, our integration did not come without some challenges or “bumps and bruises.” These brought with them definite lessons, experiences, and successes that we will take forward into our careers until we are once again called forward to form “one team, one fight.” This joint venture encountered some specific challenges that needed to be addressed. Air Force security forces typically deploy in squads that link up with other squads at deployment locations and fall under smaller deployed headquarters units. Usually, the deployed units attempt to maintain squad integrity, but most airmen know they may be reassigned “downrange” to meet mission needs.



Army and Air Force personnel review convoy procedures before heading out onto a main supply route.

Upon arrival at Camp Bucca, given the two distinct missions of force protection and detainee operations and all the subcategories required for each, we quickly realized that for this mission we would be breaking down our squads and headquarters elements. When our Air Force security forces and the Army field artillery unit took over the mission from the Army unit being relieved, we began assigning our personnel where needed. However, the Army tried to cling to its company and platoon structures. Army doctrine, as we in the Air Force learned, was not so willing to break units down below platoon level. Although this issue was eventually overcome, it proved to be one of the challenges our command had to face.

Eventually, through compromise, trust, understanding, and hard work, all the services involved understood how their forces had to adjust to fit the mission, instead of trying to adjust the mission to fit their doctrines. Other issues have not been fixed and will require further improvement. One issue is that the members of each of the services must have a better understanding about what the other services bring to the fight.

For example, the Army deploys units with attached assets that might be required in the deployment area. The Army had to learn, however, that the Air Force deploys in a much different manner. The Air Force deploys squadron-, flight-, and squad-sized elements that are intended to use equipment already in place from previous Air Force deployments. These specialized elements arrive at the deployed



Soldiers and airmen practice a joint tactical assault to quell detention facility unrest.

locations and become part of the bigger units. As a result, during this deployment, Camp Bucca got Air Force security forces with no supporting elements. The Army quickly realized that they needed to support these forces in all aspects of the mission and that these forces possessed a vast wealth of knowledge and experience regarding force protection. However, unlike forces from the Army or Marines, Air Force personnel do not come as an all-inclusive, self-sustaining unit. Experience in this mission has taught each service much about the capabilities of the others. As rotations continue to bring new troops in, it must be an ongoing initiative to ensure that each service fully understands and uses the others to their best advantage.

This deployment has taught all the services involved a great deal about the others that could never be learned in a classroom. It brought with it challenges and areas where we know we need to improve. However, it also has shown some spectacular successes. The first and foremost success is that the mission is accomplished each day, and each day brings with it a better understanding of how to do things.

What I believe to be the biggest success of the Air Force security forces is their daily experiences, routines, and doctrine in air base defense and integrated base defense.

As described in a famous book from the Vietnam era entitled *Snakes in the Eagle's Nest*,¹ the Air Force security forces on this deployment have used their core duty expertise to improve on the air base defense of this camp. Prior to their arrival, the camp's security was adequate and thought-out. What was missing was the element at the center of security force efforts at all air bases—integrated base defense using the principles of defense in depth. Through the combined efforts of the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Air Force, Camp Bucca continually moves forward. The Air Force has brought its vision and concept of integrated base defense, but our Army and Marine Corps brethren have grasped and run alongside us with it. This has truly been a joint opportunity, all the way down to the mixed Army-Marine Corps-Air Force fire team level. We have all learned from it and realized that our deployment here is a direct reflection of what the future has in store for the world's most powerful military.

Captain David T. Watts

When Air Force security forces arrived at Camp Bucca, Iraq, the rumor mill began operating at full speed.

“The Air Force is coming... great.”

“Detainee ops isn’t an Air Force mission—what are we getting?”

“The Air Force is taking over Camp Bucca.”

“The Air Force isn’t organized to fit in with the Army, but at least they’ll bring money. We’ll get a swimming pool now.”

Army and Air Force leaders held high hopes about a joint operation. The squadron members were uncertain about how things would go with this mission, which was completely foreign to security forces. Detainee operations training at Fort Lewis, Washington, had brought a team of airmen from 17 different bases to form the squadron and prepare it for the mission at Camp Bucca, Iraq. When the unit finally arrived, the squadron members had mentally prepared themselves, but they were still not quite sure what to expect.

High-ranking leaders spoke to the squadron members and challenged them to accomplish the mission while maintaining high standards. They also told the airmen that they had to treat captive terrorists with dignity and respect. Despite all the uncertainty, everyone was confident that the squadron members had the determination, character, and professionalism needed to do the job. At the time, the detainee population was large and made Iraq’s largest theater internment facility (TIF) an overwhelming place with a complicated mission. Today, the TIF has a detainee population nearly double in size, and it is running smoother than ever. The Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps all have a piece of the daily operations, and there is a true sense of “jointness” at Camp Bucca.

All three services are taking the opportunity to consider the many successes, challenges, and areas that still need improvement. Looking at the events of this year alone, it is easy to realize that Camp Bucca has turned into a good news story with too many successes to list in one article. Just a few of the most significant accomplishments include a complete redesign of the organizational structure to enhance communication, information management, and operational capabilities; the revamping and construction of a new tactical operations center to improve command and control; and the construction and opening of a new compound that includes special housing units. The overall security of the

facility has been greatly improved by increased vigilance, the installation of thousands of rolls of concertina wire, and the addition of an automated security system.

Lessons were learned with each day, and each major event led to other successes. Operation Vigilant Thunder was conducted at brigade level to prepare Camp Bucca forces to deal with contingency situations. That operation changed the status quo and set the bar for information operations, planning, and rehearsals and the way detainee disturbances are handled. US forces have also been baptized by fire in the last six months, having quelled riots and fights, not to mention the numerous alerts and threats to personal safety.

The greatest achievements and most notable milestones have come from the advancements in Iraqi-US relations and the growing strength of the Iraqi government. Iraqi police assist with the enforcement of detainee visitation rules, helping to screen visitors for weapons, contraband, and forged identity cards. The presence of the Iraqi police sends a strong message to the public that there is cooperation between Iraqi and US forces. In addition, two events especially stand out. One groundbreaking event was an Iraqi Highway Patrol tour of the TIF, signifying the first step toward the day when the facility can be handed over to the Iraqi police. Another clear milestone in Iraq’s history was when US guards testified against detainees in the Central Criminal Court of Iraq, in front of an Iraqi judge, and under the Iraqi court system. These successes, large and small, are just a few of the accomplishments that spell mission success for the Soldiers, airmen, and marines working at Camp Bucca.

Not every challenge was easily overcome. Challenges ranged from learning to work in a joint environment to complex logistical problems. In the first few months after the Air Force arrived, they were plagued with differences of opinion, personality conflicts, communication problems, and conflicting doctrine. As those problems were resolved, more problems arose. Supply issues and manning shortages proved to be daunting obstacles to daily operations but were finally remedied by additional forces and a new organizational structure. The myriad of situations created by the detainees, combined with battles to fight complacency and to enforce standards, put leaders to the test almost constantly. Also, the rapidly increasing size of the detainee population led to uncertainty about the ability to support expansion due to limited resources, manning, and space. Eventually, adjustments were made, and

these obstacles and challenges were turned into successes. Of course, there is always room for improvement. Some of the opportunities to improve operations include—

- Taking advantage of available technology.
- Developing better intelligence and information operations.
- Speeding up the processing of legal cases.
- Continuing to develop doctrine and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

As the population of Camp Bucca increases, the number of cases awaiting disposition in the Central

Criminal Court of Iraq also increases. As this process improves, officials hope it will result in shorter stays for detainees in Camp Bucca, which will contribute to a lower camp population.

An area for improvement that will always require attention is the continuous process of reviewing and updating SOPs, training troops in accordance with what is in writing, and then following up to ensure that professional standards are met. Improving on technology, military intelligence, and legal processes, as well as ensuring that everyone is on the same page, will only give Camp Bucca more “good news stories.”

References

- ¹ Alan Vick, *“Snakes in the Eagle’s Nest: A History of Ground Attacks on Air Bases,”* 1995.