
CIVILIAN POLICING INTERNSHIP

By First Lieutenant Lisa Beum

In early September 2011, the 385th Military Police Battalion, Fort Stewart, Georgia, began an internship program with the Savannah-Chatham Metropolitan Police Department (SCMPD). Under the program, an Army military police lieutenant is sent to the SCMPD to “shadow” a civilian police lieutenant for 1 month. During that time, the military police lieutenant observes the daily operation and management of a civilian police unit, studies lessons learned and best practices, and gains an enhanced perspective on leadership and development. The final goals are to incorporate best practices into Fort Stewart law enforcement operations and to continue to build the relationships established with the SCMPD.

As an Army military police lieutenant involved in this program, I was introduced to the civilian police world on 12 September 2011, when I met with Lieutenant Kenneth Patton of the SCMPD Central Precinct. Patton, who has lived in Savannah, Georgia, most of his life, has worked for the SCMPD for nearly 20 years, serving as a lieutenant for about 6 years. (Although Army lieutenants typically have only a few years’ experience as police officers, civilian police lieutenants have usually been police officers 10–15 years; consequently, they are generally very knowledgeable policing experts.) Due to the fact that Lieutenant Patton has held several specific jobs as an officer within the SCMPD, he is very familiar with not only the SCMPD, but also the city of Savannah and surrounding areas.

On the civilian side of policing, all officers begin as privates and have the opportunity to move their way through the ranks of sergeant, lieutenant, and captain, to chief. Following a 2-year commitment to patrol duty (to allow time to become proficient in the basics of policing), officers have a chance to apply for a transfer to a different job within the department; other departmental jobs include undercover officer, special weapons and tactics team member, narcotics officer, member of the crime suppression unit, marine patrol officer, and bomb squad member. The ability of officers to rotate from one job to another while they move through the ranks creates a well-rounded group of individuals who are specialists in multiple areas. These diversified officers are, therefore, able to offer more to their precincts.

The Central Precinct, which is located in the inner city of Savannah, is known for its high crime rate—particularly for Part 1 crimes, or crimes such as murder, rape, larceny, and robbery. Therefore, Chief Willie C. Lovett, who is the head of the five SCMPD precincts in Savannah, assembled a focused task force made up of officers—each specializing in a particular area of expertise—from all precincts and sent them to the Central Precinct for what began as a 30-day trial period. The goal of the task force was to work with the Central Precinct to decrease the number of crimes within a 7-square-mile area. The group met daily to review activities that had occurred the day before, establish objectives for that day, and plan for any necessary improvements. Based on these daily discussions, the task force continually adapted their tactics, working together to use all available assets to overcome challenges and reach their goal of lowering the crime rate. For example, the task force initially met at the same time every day and initially concentrated only on designated areas. However, after analyzing the activities of the first week, they realized that they needed to deviate from their set schedule, changing the time they began working the road each day. They also began spreading their forces throughout the precinct, concentrating on different “hot spots” each day—and then adjusting as needed. This rendered their scheduling and tactics unpredictable to anyone who might be trying to plan criminal activity around the task force work rotation.

Each Wednesday, the captains of the five precincts and representatives from each subdepartment come together for a computer statistics meeting. This is an opportunity for participants to synchronize and network across the board. The captains review their precinct statistics from the week before, compare trends from the previous year to the current one, justify their numbers to the department chief, and provide an in-depth explanation of their plans for improvement. During the first half of the initial task force trial period, the crime rate for the Central Precinct was unchanged—in spite of the fact that the task force had been working hard for 3 weeks and continuously changing tactics to rid the area of crime. However, all good things take time. By the fourth week, the crime rate for the Central Precinct had finally dropped, indicating



Officers conduct a guard mount, where they discuss activities of the previous day, trends, and the focus of the current day.

improvement in the area. The decrease in crime numbers led Chief Lovett to retain the task force for an additional month to determine whether it was the task force that was responsible for the drop in the crime rate.

During my first week at the Central Precinct, I worked with the lowest-ranking police officers and their sergeant supervisors, riding along with patrolmen and members of the crime suppression unit. I got a firsthand look at the problems and issues out on the streets and the methods the officers used to handle the situations. I saw multiple traffic accidents and crime scenes and witnessed robberies in progress, and I saw how officers took control of situations. Sergeants were capable of managing the police officers and crime scenes in the less significant cases; but for larger incidents, lieutenants were called in to assess the full situation and issue orders for further action.


Each patrol vehicle is equipped with a computer system that monitors the officer's location and activity (much like the Blue Force Tracker, although this military technology had not yet made its way into military police patrol cars). Police officers are in constant communication with each other via radio or the vehicle computer. Lieutenants also have radios with them so that they can keep track of where their officers are at all times and so that they have real-time information about what is happening on the streets. This allows for shorter decision-making reaction times since leaders continually receive up-to-date information that otherwise might have taken hours or days to relay. In addition, the computer system decreases the amount of time officers must spend typing information into

databases at the ends of their shifts because they can do that in their cars at the time the incident occurs.

Information flows freely among the ranks, from the lowest levels to the highest and vice versa. Leaders use the information and statistics they receive from the patrol officers to track criminals, hot spots, and crime patterns. The information regarding people, hot spots, and patterns—which drives the focus of the police department and, ultimately, the patrol distribution plan—is, in turn, passed down to the lowest levels by the lieutenants during the guard mount. The leadership presence during the guard mount serves to impress the importance of the information upon the patrol officers. It also allows the lieutenants an opportunity to observe how the patrol officers are doing and to discuss any additional issues.

Throughout the rest of the month, I observed and worked with the SCMP lieutenants. I noted how they

managed personnel, represented themselves to their superiors, and interacted with the local populace. Officers who adhere to the regulations and conduct themselves in a professional manner build a rapport with the community—a rapport that might be used to obtain information to help solve a case. Locals who feel comfortable talking to the police often become informants, providing officers with key details about crimes. Therefore, officers strive to maintain a positive image within the community by attending city council meetings, listening to the concerns of the public, and working with community members to reach solutions to their problems.

The internship program is very beneficial in the development of military police lieutenants. It provides them with an opportunity to work with civilian police agencies and allows them to gain a new perspective on the operation of a police unit in a garrison type environment. By talking and interacting with individuals outside the military, lieutenants develop important social skills and foster relationships between individuals and organizations. Due to positive feedback regarding the internship program (from the military participants as well as the SCMPD), lieutenants from the 385th Military Police Battalion continue to be sent to the SCMPD in hopes of professionally developing military personnel and building upon existing military/civilian relationships. 

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