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SUBJECT: Gang Members in the Military – Part I

Introduction

Gang members have been enlisted in the military services since the mid-1980s. However, following the January 9, 2005, attack of two police officers in Ceres, California, by a military gang member, law enforcement authorities began paying closer attention to gang members in the military and discovering the skills and knowledge in tactics, and access to military weapons were also being used to benefit gang members.

Background

In the mid-1980s, military police began noticing some enlisted soldiers also had street gang affiliations. However, it was not until the early 1990s — after several incidents involving property crimes, illegal narcotics' sales, and assaults — that military police began looking at gang members in the military. Currently, United States officials in the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, National Guard, and Navy have identified members from the following gangs enlisted within their organizations: Asian Boy Crips, Bloods, Crips, Gangster Disciples, Latin Kings, Nortenos, Surenos, Wah Ching, and various outlaw motorcycle gangs.

Gang members enter into military services for various reasons. Some gang members enlist as a means to start their lives over by escaping from their gang and the gang lifestyle. Others are instructed or ordered by their gangs while some volunteer to enter the military in order to gain skills and knowledge that can be used later to benefit their gangs. Within the first six months of basic training, recruits receive training in areas such as combat tactics, weapons, and basic first aid. Law enforcement authorities and military officials have uncovered three major motives why gang members are enlisting in the military: 1) to learn combat tactics; 2) to learn medic skills; and 3) to gain access to military weapons and supplies. The use of combat tactics that are taught in the military can aid gang members in their attacks against law enforcement authorities and rival gang members. Once out of the military, these trained gang members can then provide training to other gang members on various combat tactics — such as positioning themselves or conducting counter-intelligence operations — in order to gain an advantage over their enemies.

Due to the war in Iraq, enlisted personnel are currently being trained in urban warfare. Some law enforcement authorities on the East Coast believe the increase in home-invasion robberies occurring in a city outside a major military installation is directly related to the urban warfare training that soldiers are currently receiving. The experience of encountering hostile gunfire obtained in a war environment is beneficial to the military gang member's survival on the battlefield. Having gained experience with hostile gunfire, upon returning home to their gang, the military gang member would have less fear of return fire when in combat against rival gang members and law enforcement authorities on the streets.

The following are examples where gang members have utilized their military training in combat tactics for attacks against California law enforcement authorities and rival gang members.

- In January 2005 in Ceres, California, a Norteno gang member awaiting deployment to Okinawa, Japan, arrived in his hometown and ambushed two Ceres police officers — killing one and severely injuring the other. Although — while in Iraq — the gang member had not experienced any combat, he used his military training to shoot out the windows of a nearby vehicle to use as a shield in his attack against the officers.
- In July 2000 in Orange County, California, members of the King Cobra Boys — an Asian street gang — engaged in a fight with the Lao Family — a rival Asian gang. Both gangs agreed to continue the fight later at a local high school. One of the King Cobra Boys was a Marine who worked in the Marine's armory and was experienced with weapons. Using his military training, the military gang member was able to place his gang members at a location where they were able to observe and ambush the rival gang members. Fortunately, no one was fatally injured. Prior to law enforcement authorities arresting the gang member on base, a search warrant was executed at his residence where numerous military-issued manuals for machine guns and handguns were seized.

All military personnel are taught basic first aid skills, such as bandaging a wound. However, medic training — a specialized field and difficult to learn — is a desirable skill for many gang members to learn. With this training, gang members would be able to treat the gunshot wounds on their fellow gang members and avoid having to transport their wounded to a local hospital for treatment where law enforcement authorities would expect someone who is shot to go for aid. In addition to receiving medic training, the military gang member also gains access to medic supplies that can be stolen for later use.

Gang members' access to — and possession of — any type of weapons is always a major concern for law enforcement authorities. While in the military, enlisted gang members are exposed to high-power weapons, such as machine guns and rocket launchers, and explosives, such as grenades and C-4 — as well as body armor, night-vision devices, gun parts, and ammunition.



Although the military has security measures in place to prevent the theft of their equipment and supplies, enlisted personnel are able to steal items by improperly documenting supply orders or by falsifying paperwork. Not only are military weapons and supplies stolen by enlisted gang members but also by service members who then sell the weapons to gang members on the street. It is difficult for the military to track explosives, such as grenades and C-4, to ensure that all the items signed out for training exercises were detonated and not secreted away for use elsewhere. Enemy weapons seized in foreign countries and brought back to the United States by military personnel pose another threat to law enforcement authorities since there is no program currently in place within the military that documents and tracks their ownership. *See Intelligence Operations Bulletin, Gang Members in the Military – Part II (Volume 46, November 2005) for more information. Part II will address weapons and characteristics.*

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