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Military Police Provide Critical Support to CF Missions

What does "Mission Critical" mean to your organization? Whether it is support to a provincial government during an ice storm or particularly severe forest fire season or support to combat troops conducting kinetic operations in the hills and valleys of rural Afghanistan, Canadian Military Police bring capabilities to Canadian Forces operations that are critical to mission success. In a domestic (Canadian) environment Military Police secure the establishments the Canadian Forces operate from. This function can range from the provision of patrol services in an urban environment such as Halifax or Edmonton to securing a remote operating location under austere conditions in the Canadian north. In addition to domestic obligations, the Canadian Military Police provide a full spectrum of policing and security services to the Canadian Forces deployed to foreign countries. Canadian Military Police in Afghanistan provide patrol services, support to combat operations security and force protection services, Major Crime investigative capability as well as detention and custodial facilities. Perhaps the most important function they perform is participating in the professionalism of the Afghan National Police through instruction and mentoring. In order to achieve success in their myriad tasks, it is critical to be able to quickly access and disseminate sensitive police information via secure and reliable means. The solution to this information management challenge is the Security and Military Police Information System (SAMPIS), an application of the Versadex suite of products operating on CF networks at the designated (Protected B) level.

In the early hours on a hot July morning, Canadian Military Police at the Kandahar Airfield in southern Afghanistan received a phone call reporting the homicide of a Canadian soldier in the Afghan capital of Kabul. For all practical purposes the cities of Kabul and Kandahar are a world apart as the communications infrastructure and the security environment impose significant challenges to even the most routine tasks. Canadian Military Police investigators from the National Investigation Service are dispatched from Kandahar to Kabul via helicopter to conduct the scene examination and the ensuing investigative inquiries. Meanwhile back in Kandahar an occurrence number is generated and the occurrence is populated with all of the information provided in the initial complaint. Once the investigators have finished processing the scene and all of the perishable evidence has been secured, they compile and submit their investigative plan, and begin to task follow-up interviews to Canadian Military Police in Kandahar, the United Kingdom, and Canada simultaneously. Using the SAMPIS (Versadex) system, it is common practice to have the investigation occurring in a remote and austere location, Case Management occurring at an intermediate location and investigative support being provided from National Headquarters, thousands of kilometers away in Ottawa, Ontario. SAMPIS allows Military Police to conduct Mission Critical operations in real time, globally, under the most challenging conditions imaginable.



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Background on Nature of MP and Implementation of SAMPIS

The Canadian Military Police are comprised of more than 1200 Regular Force Military Police and 2000 Reserve Members. The Military Police are augmented by civilian staff and commissionaires for a total force in excess of 3500 personnel. Military Police provide Police and Security services to 37 locations across Canada from Victoria, on the west coast of British Columbia to Goose Bay on the eastern shores of Newfoundland and Labrador. Military Police also support all CF missions abroad. This has included missions in the Former Yugoslav Republics, Haiti, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Somalia, Eritrea, and most recently Afghanistan.

By the early 1990s the Military Police had attempted to create a number of "in-house" solutions to electronic records management. The in-house solutions were short lived as they operated as isolated stovepipes built on aging technology and lacking any long-term support. By 1995 it was clear that the Military Police required a comprehensive records management suite that would bridge all of the diverse Military Police units and provide a unified, long-term solution to our police records management. Versaterm was selected through a competitive bid process and implementation began in 1999 with our "go-live" date of 07 Jan 2000. It would be difficult to overstate the complexity of this project. The software was initially implemented in a pilot group in Ottawa and national rollout followed, commencing on the west coast and moving towards the east. Even in hindsight, the obstacles appear overwhelming: navigating the web of Federal network security regulations, installation of over 2000 computer systems and training of all Military Police across Canada in both French and English, installation of over 200 Mobile Data Terminals using a veritable potpourri of cell phone networks and providers, and the establishment of centralized control and robust common business practices that would facilitate the operations of the many MP units. It is a credit to the dedication and sheer willpower of the project team and Versaterm who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the project.

The First Five Years

Like any good relationship the first five years are critical and sometimes a little rocky. Following the roll-out and implementation of SAMPIS, our project team exchanged backslaps, was earnestly and sincerely congratulated by the organization and promptly disbanded. After all, the project was a success! Unfortunately, it took a couple of years to realize that there was (is) an ongoing requirement for sustainment of the system. Due to the magnitude of the project, by the time the roll-out was complete in the east there were already problems in the west. Cell phone carriers changed their technologies, internal networks changed protocols and infrastructure and of course Versaterm produced newer versions of software in response to our change requests. What was happening? A beautiful bride had been courted, engaged. The marriage was a lavish affair full of hope, promise and potential. Following the honeymoon, she began consuming resources at an alarming rate, she seemed incapable of performing the domestic chores that had so enamored during the courtship and she appeared to atrophy daily. After some agonizing introspection and enlightening discussion with other agencies it was realized that the source of our discomfort was the lack of attention devoted to sustainment. For the system to remain healthy and contribute in a meaningful way to daily operations it would need dedicated sustainment.

The Way Ahead

In the summer of 2007, the Canadian Forces Provost Marshal (head of the Military Police) established dedicated positions for the ongoing and pro-active sustainment of SAMPIS. Since the creation of the sustainment team, the VPN client has been upgraded, and the renewal of the server infrastructure has begun. Version 7 of the Versadex software will be rolled out in 2008, and the Military Police participation in PIP/N-III will be implemented. There remains much hard work to be accomplished. A host of "housekeeping" issues require attention as well as some lofty strategic goals such as the creation of robust "business intelligence" tools that will aid in resource allocation and performance measurement.

Conclusion

There are few police agencies whose understanding of "mission critical" is as literal as that of the Canadian Military Police. The conduct of complex police and security operations throughout the vast geographic expanse of Canada and in some of the most hostile combat environments in modern history is a continuing challenge. Success in these tasks is achieved through the professionalism and dedication of the men and women of the Military Police and by using technology as a "force multiplier". The real advantage of the SAMPIS system is that it binds us as an organization enabling us to have a collective impact far greater than the sum of the individual efforts.

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Morning Routine: Timmies and weapons cleaning



Cpl O'Doherty in a Blackhawk



Sgt. Hallett in Patrol Dress

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