

9 Sep 2004

The following is a narrative of the situation and events leading up to, including, and following the attack on the American Consulate General, Karachi, Pakistan in November 1979. The attack coincided with the attack on the American Embassy, Islamabad, Pakistan and two American Centers located in Lahore and Rawalpindi, also in Pakistan. This narrative was written by MSgt Craig N. Mullis, USMC(Ret), who was the NCOIC at the time.

I became the NCOIC of the Marine Security Guard Detachment, Karachi, Pakistan in August 1979. At the time, Company B was also headquartered in Karachi. The CO was Maj Jeff Ronald and the XO was Capt Robert E. Lee. The Admin Chief was SSgt Gary Austin, who would be transferred out within a month, and the company clerk was Cpl Dennis Cooper. The NCOIC that I replaced was GySgt Mike Moeller who had already been transferred to Tehran, Iran a couple of months prior to my arrival. He would later become one of the hostages held in Tehran. I would finally meet him a few years later in Quantico. The assistant NCOIC was Sgt Mark Brown and he would transfer out within a month or so also. The remaining watchstanders were Sgt Gary Downey, Sgt Jim Banther, Sgt Roy DeWitt, Cpl Terry Davis, and LCpl Brian Tilden. Sgt Banther would also be transferred with two months. Sgt Downey would become the assistant NCOIC and would be, several years later, selected for warrant officer. Sgt Downey had been temporarily assigned to the Embassy in Tehran and was a hostage during the first takeover by Islamic extremists in Feb. 1979. He would later be awarded a Purple Heart for wounds suffered during that time.

The Detachment was charged, as all detachments are, with the protection of American lives and the security of the Consulate General in Karachi which is located on the southern, almost desert-like coast of Pakistan. The Embassy is located in Islamabad, in mountainous northern Pakistan. The Consulate was comprised of only one four-story building located on a major avenue not far from downtown Karachi (see attached photo). The building was made up of two parts, the largest part was the Consulate, which faced the street lengthwise, and the American Center, which had a theater and library, was attached at an 'L' at one end of the Consulate extending away from the street. Post One was located at the back of lobby at one end of the building (where the Consulate and the American Center formed the 'L') and Post Two was located at the back door in the middle of the building. My office was on the fourth floor, just outside the executive suite and across the hall from the elevator (which was right behind Post One on the ground floor). Company B Headquarters was in the middle of the building on the ground floor.

Two Pakistani security guards provided security in the lobby inside the front door. Their duties were to search all visitors upon entering the building. The Marine at Post One was behind a bullet-proof window at the back of the lobby and controlled access to the interior of the building from the lobby. The Marine at Post Two would control access from the motorpool and maintenance yard at the rear of the building.

For the entire time that I was assigned to Karachi, the Pakistani army maintained a small platoon sized presence near the front of the building. This force varied in size, but averaged approximately 25 men during the day. I mention this because the service this force provided us was markedly different than what the force in Islamabad would provide later. Refer to the Time magazine article for an account of their actions.

Between the time that I arrived on board and the events of Nov. 21 there was a significant turnover in personnel. As I've already mentioned Sgts Brown and Banther would be gone, but the Marines coming in proved to be quite different than normal Marines reporting for duty. Cpl Vicki Gaglia and LCpl Betty Rankin checked in sometime in Oct. or early Nov. I didn't expect WMs, especially at a hardship post. I had gone through MSG School with the first two WMs assigned to MSG duty. As I recall, the WMs performed well in school and the two that were assigned to Karachi came out of the second 'crop' assigned to MSG duty and were to prove likewise.

So this was the roster of players in the events of Nov. 1979 (see attached photo). But I should mention that we also had other Marines on hand. The Post Security Officer was a retired gunnery sergeant by the name of Sam Case and the Assistant Post Security Officer was also a retired gunnery sergeant by the name of Chuck Heise. We had plenty of Marines on hand when the balloon finally went up.

I should also mention at this point how, for those reading this that may not know how a Marine Security Detachment operates, the Detachment normally functioned in day-to-day operations. As with all Post Ones around the world, this one was manned 24 hours a day. Post Two was manned only during the day. The flag was run up in the morning during shift change so that the on-coming Marine would provide security for the Marine with the flag since he was exposed once he left the building to go to the flag pole. The reverse took place in the evening when the flag came down. Training was held on weekly basis and would normally be in my office. Reaction drills, bomb threat drills, etc. would be held in other parts of the Consulate and/or American Center. Firearms training with the .38 revolvers, shotguns, and gas grenades were held every 2-3 months or so. And, as usual, we had the Marine House to take care of and the Ball, Mess, and Bar Funds to maintain.

So this was the routine life for an Embassy Marine assigned to Karachi in Nov. 1979. But things would change dramatically by the end of the month. First, on the Nov. 4, the Embassy in Tehran was overrun and the Americans were taken hostage. This put an 'edge' on day-to-day living for State Dept personnel throughout the Middle East. Then on Nov. 20, the Sacred Mosque in Mecca was seized by a mysterious band of Muslim fanatics. It was initially unclear as to who seized the mosque and there were rumors spread by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini that the U.S. and Israel were behind the attack. That later proved to be false, but may have, at the time, been the catalyst that set off the events of Nov. 21 in Pakistan.

Around 8:30 or 9:00 on the morning of Wed., the 21st, I had some word to pass (and I have no recollection as to what it was) to all the Marines. It must have been fairly important because I decided to have an emergency recall in order to expedite matters. At that time of the morning there would be two Marines on duty. The Marine that had the 'mid' shift was probably in the rack asleep and the other Marines may have been in the rack also or up and about. Wherever they were, they made it in to the Consulate by 9:30 or so in the Marine van driven by a Pakistani. After passing the word I sent them back to the Marine House. Then around 10:00 or so I was going through the lobby and ran into Sam Case talking to one of our Pakistani intelligence agents. My timing was just right, because as I approached, the Pakistani was saying that there was going to be some 60 odd bus loads of university students that would be arriving within the hour to demonstrate against the U.S. As soon as he said that, Sam told me to sound an emergency recall. I turned to the Marine on Post One and told him to get the Marines back in to the Consulate. . . and I also told him to tell them that this was NOT a drill. They arrived in less than 10 minutes; some of them finished get dressed in the van.

By the time the Marines arrived, I was back in my office on the top floor getting the vault open. The vault was located adjacent to my office. The vault, of course, contained arms and ammunition, but also contained each Marine's reaction gear (helmet, body armor, gas grenades, gas mask, shotgun, and ammo). After the Marines changed into their utilities in the change room (also adjacent to my office), they would proceed to the vault and don their reaction gear. As they left the vault, I handed them their post assignments (Since there were only six Marines in the Detachment, emergency assignments would initially start with five Marines at defensive positions on each of the first three floors and roof and, if the bottom floors had to be evacuated the Marines would provide security while State Dept. personnel moved to 'safehaven' on the rooftop.) The first Marine out of the vault proceeded directly to Post One and relieved that Marine so he could change into 'combat' gear. The second Marine out relieved the Marine at Post Two for the same reason. Then the other Marines went to the 2nd and 3rd floors. The last Marine out was LCpl Rankin and I sent her to the roof. And for some reason that I can't remember, I told her that she didn't have to take her gas mask since she would be on top of the building. That proved to be a mistake.

Since my office was centrally located on the top floor and overlooking the street, it was designated as the command post. We could see quite a distance up and down the street from the window. Other personnel were arriving as the Marines were donning their combat gear and deploying to their defensive positions. Sam Case, Maj Ronald, and Capt Lee had all arrived. DEA agent Jim Greffinius was also there since he was 'drafted' to augment the security force. As the last of the Marines headed out of the office, somebody said something about a crowd coming down the street.

As we looked out the window we saw a small crowd coming down the street from our left. This crowd consisted of 75-100 Pakistani's shouting anti-American slogans. We saw no weapons in the crowd and the Pakistani army began to deploy in a line across the street to block the crowd from getting closer to the Consulate. After the Pakistani army was in position the crowd engaged it by shoving, pushing . . . almost like a wrestling match. However, as the crowd became more persistent, the army decided to get serious and broke out their lathi sticks and started using them to crack some skulls. (A lathi stick is a four foot long piece of bamboo that is a couple of inches in diameter, with both ends covered with metal caps or leather. In the hands of an expert, it can be deadly.) At that point the crowd broke and ran back up the street.

The crowd ran no more than a hundred yards or so when a group of reinforcements, about 50 or so motorcycles, came charging around the corner. When the crowd saw the reinforcements, they turned around and together, with the motorcycle gang, charged the army line. When the army saw the much larger crowd advancing toward them, they abandoned their position across the street and redeployed along the front of the building. When the crowd finally engaged this line, more fighting broke out, and windows were being broken. I had turned away from the window and went back in the vault to break out some more firearms when I heard shots being fired. . . and these shots were fired right under the window.

I ran to the window in time to see the crowd scatter like a covey of quail. They ran up and down the street and also headed for the park across the street. The shots had been fired by Pakistani army personnel and were aimed in the air to frighten the crowd. About this time I saw a Pakistani soldier fire a gas grenade toward the crowd that was retreating to the park across the street. The grenade hit the top of a palm tree across the street where it exploded resulting in a beautiful air burst . . . which headed straight for our window. Fortunately we buttoned up the window before the gas could enter, but we couldn't help LCpl Rankin up on the roof. She caught the full force of the gas. I heard her coughing several times while reporting on the radio. The gas cloud passed and she managed to stay at her post. Fortunately, this would be the extent of 'action' that day and no injuries were suffered by American personnel in Karachi.

As I mentioned before, the Pakistani army provided excellent protection for the Consulate which sustained minimum damage. After the first crowd was dispersed, the army kept other rioters from arriving on the scene in buses. They kept trying several approaches to the Consulate, but the army managed to keep them at least a block or so away from the building. The Pakistani army in Islamabad, on the other hand, wasn't even in the neighborhood when a crowd of some 4 to 5,000 rioters attacked the Embassy and killed LCpl Steven Crowley and Army Warrant Officer Ellis. There were only a couple of armed guards outside the compound and they dropped their weapons and fled when the rioters arrived. And one of those weapons was used to kill LCpl Crowley.

We were to learn later that the Embassy had been attacked at about the same time that we were. The American Centers in Lahore and Rawalpindi were also attacked at about the same time. This led me to conclude that the plan to attack the American diplomatic posts was already in place and the only thing that the fanatics needed was an excuse. They found the excuse in the events that were unfolding at the Sacred Mosque in Saudi Arabia.

During the time leading up to the attack, Consulate staff made phone calls to American dependents living in the American sector of the city which was several miles away warning them to stay off the streets. Most Americans stayed home or gathered with friends. Fortunately no one bothered them. A day or so later all dependents and non-essential personnel gathered at the AID building and, under protection of the Marines, were escorted to the airport for emergency evacuation from the country. They joined many other Americans that were being evacuated from the rest of the Middle East that same day.

A day after the attacks, one of the Marines in Islamabad was sent to Karachi for medical treatment. He was the Marine on duty at Post One when the Embassy was attacked. During the initial stages of the attack, he had to remove his blouse in order to throw gas grenades at the attackers. The plans at that time were for the Marines to try and keep the attackers at bay until the Americans that were in the building were able to find refuge in the vault. In the process, this Marine threw numerous gas grenades inside the building and, as a result, received numerous large, gas blisters that covered both arms. I don't know if he ever received any recognition for his actions, but he, along with the other Marines at the Embassy, prevented a catastrophic loss of American life that day.

After evacuating the dependents and non-essential personnel, we ended up staying inside the Consulate 24 hours a day for about a week following the attacks. During that time the Detachment post inspection was held. It was during the inspection when the Marines were taking their test, that the CO called me into his office and directed me to send a Marine to Islamabad to augment the temporary security force there since the Islamabad Marines all had to report to Washington, D.C. for debriefing. I asked him if there were any factors that should be considered in who I should assign. He said no.

The reason that I asked him was because the Commandant had been informed that there were a couple of WMs in Karachi and he directed the Battalion CO to transfer them out as soon as possible. I had already received that word and was only waiting for replacements to arrive before I shipped them out to Brussels. The WMs knew they were being transferred and didn't like that at all. Some State Dept. personnel were even circulating a petition trying to stop their transfer. I heard that it eventually ended up on the desk of the Speaker of the House.

So I left the CO's office and went to the conference room where the Marines were taking their test. I told Cpl Gaglia to stop taking the test and proceed immediately to the Marine House and pack her gear. . . she was going to Islamabad that afternoon. I went back and informed the CO that Cpl Gaglia was on her way. A few days later the shit hit the fan!

Apparently the CO called Battalion headquarters and informed them that Cpl Gaglia was in Islamabad and when the Battalion CO briefed the Commandant, the Commandant got a little upset that a WM was in Islamabad at the site of the two killings just a week before. But I guess it wasn't that big of a deal, since Cpl Gaglia stayed in Islamabad for another week or so until she was relieved. When she got back to Karachi, she was immediately shipped out to Brussels.

That was about the last incident relating to the events of Nov. 21. Life eventually returned to normal. Marines transferred in and transferred out. By the time I left a year later, all the Marines had been replaced. The 'new' Marines included Sgts Jose Pineda, Skip Rutherford, Art Petersen, Kent Wagner and Cpls Chris Papierz and Stan Sirak (see attached photo). Cpl Cooper, the company admin chief, was replaced by SSgt Mike Mercier. GySgt Cal Braxton replaced me as NCOIC. My new assignment was HMX-1 and when I reported to Quantico, I stopped by MSG Battalion to see Sgt Downey who had been reassigned to Battalion headquarters. He was in his 'delta' blues when I saw him and he was wearing his Purple Heart. . . with a gold star!?!

Respectfully submitted,

Craig N. Mullis
MSgt USMC(Ret)



Marine Security Guard Detachment, Karachi, Pakistan and Company B (Nov. 1979)

From right to left:
Major Jeff Ronald, CO
Capt Robert E. Lee, XO
GySgt Craig Mullis, NCOIC
Sgt Gary Downy, A/NCOIC
Sgt Roy DeWitt
Cpl Vicki Gaglia
Cpl Terry Davis
Cpl Dennis Cooper
LCpl Brian Tilden
LCpl Betty Rankin



Marine Security Guard Detachment, Karachi, Pakistan (Nov. 1980)

From left to right:
Sgt Stan Sirak
Cpl Chris Papierz
Sgt Jose Pineda, A/NCOIC
Sgt Skip Rutherford
Sgt Kent Wagner
Sgt Art Petersen



American Consulate General, Karachi, Pakistan