
Military Police Heroism

By Mr. Andy Watson

Last year, members of the 617th Military Police Company were recognized for their efforts in Iraq. They reversed an ambush, killing the attacking insurgents and capturing several prisoners. Soldiers from the 108th Military Police Company who rescued four wounded Iraqi National Guard soldiers while exposed to deadly crossfire were also recognized for their courage. These incidents demonstrated the professionalism and personal bravery of today's military police Soldiers, but there have been similar examples throughout the history of the Military Police Corps. Countless military police Soldiers have served faithfully and bravely, whether recognized for their actions or not, from the American Revolution to today. The list below is just a sample of military police heroism.



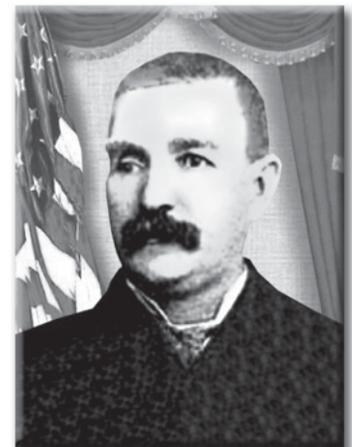
Distinguished Service Cross

Second Lieutenant Walter J. Burns Distinguished Service Cross World War II

On the morning of 8 November 1942, Second Lieutenant Walter J. Burns was with the 204th Military Police Company enroute by landing craft to Casablanca in French Morocco. The landing party came under attack from an enemy warship at a distance of only 20 yards. When the coxswain of the landing craft was wounded, Second Lieutenant Burns voluntarily exposed himself to heavy fire from the enemy warship in order to helm the landing craft.¹ He calmly guided the boat toward shore under the instructions of the wounded coxswain and received a severe thigh wound from enemy gunfire. Even after being wounded and thrown from the controls, he returned to take the wheel. When it became evident that the boat could not reach shore, Second Lieutenant Burns retained control of the situation and gave the order to abandon ship. An instant later, the boat was shot out of the water by enemy shell fire. Second Lieutenant Burns gathered his men and swam to shore, where they were taken prisoner until freed by American forces a few days later.²

Sergeant William J. Wray Medal of Honor Civil War

William Wray enlisted in the Union Army's 23d Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment on 2 August 1861 for a period of three years. He served in Company F, fighting at Marye's Heights during the Battle of Fredericksburg and defending Culp's Hill at Gettysburg. By 1864, he had been promoted to sergeant, but had sustained substantial battle wounds and was unable to perform his normal field duties. In the spring of 1864, he was transferred to Company K of the 1st Veterans Reserve Corps. The Veterans Reserve Corps was composed of Soldiers who had suffered wounds or illness that prevented them from serving in their former regiments. These Soldiers were then tasked to perform provost and guard duties. The 1st Veterans Reserve Corps was assigned to Fort Stevens, one of the many forts protecting Washington, District of Columbia.



Sergeant William J. Wray

On 11 July 1864, Confederate troops approached the capital from the northwest and confronted Forts DeRussey and Stevens. The next morning, the Confederates attacked Fort Stevens. As the attack intensified, the men of Company K faltered, but Sergeant Wray rallied them and the Union Soldiers held their line against the Confederate charge.³ After failing to take the forts or penetrate their defenses, Confederate General Jubal Early led his troops in a general retreat. On 12 December 1892, Sergeant Wray was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at Fort Stevens.⁴

First Lieutenant William McCammon
Medal of Honor
Civil War

William McCammon joined Company E of the 24th Missouri Infantry Regiment in 1861. After capturing Tiptonville, Tennessee, in April 1862, First Lieutenant McCammon's regiment was assigned to the 3d Division of the Union Army of Mississippi. On 30 May 1862, the Union Army captured the town of Corinth, Mississippi, and constructed defensive works to protect and hold the valuable railroad center of the area. At this time, First Lieutenant McCammon served as the regimental provost marshal, maintaining order and preventing desertion and theft.

On 3 October 1862, the Confederate Army of West Tennessee, under the command of Major General Earl Van Dorn, joined with Major General Sterling Price's Confederate Army of the West to attack Corinth with 22,000 men. As the Confederates drove the Federals back, First Lieutenant McCammon took command of Company F in a desperate defense of the breastworks. Although the loss of men in Company F during the battle on 3 and 4 October was heavy, the Confederates were repulsed.⁵ First Lieutenant McCammon continued to serve as commander of Company F until the Confederates withdrew from the battle. On 9 July 1896, he was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions at Corinth.⁶



1896 version of the Medal of Honor



Silver Star

Specialist 4 Sergio J. Gherardini
Silver Star
Vietnam War

Specialist 4 Sergio J. Gherardini was a member of the 66th Military Police Company, 93d Military Police Battalion. Specialist 4 Gherardini distinguished himself by exceptionally valorous actions on 30 January 1968 during an enemy ambush in Qui Nhon. He and other members of his unit were moving through the city aboard a truck when guerrillas on both sides of the street opened fire. As Specialist 4 Gherardini leaped from his vehicle to seek cover, he observed several wounded South Vietnamese soldiers a hundred meters to his front in the ambush killing zone.⁷

Braving a savage fusillade, he fearlessly moved forward alone to rescue the fallen men. He was wounded by enemy fire, but continued his advance, placing fierce counterfire on the Vietcong. When he reached the casualties, he pointed out enemy positions to the men at his rear as he reloaded his weapon and administered first aid to the wounded.⁸ With bullets striking all around him, Specialist 4 Gherardini then personally eliminated an enemy automatic weapons position and killed three guerrillas. He was mortally wounded while courageously attempting to rescue his fallen comrades. A base camp at Phu

Tai, South Vietnam, was named in his honor and later the military police station at Fort Drum, New York. He received the Silver Star posthumously for his heroic actions.

First Lieutenant James B. Percival
Silver Star
Korean War

On 5 December 1950, First Lieutenant James B. Percival was in command of a military police detail posting road signs when his unit was ambushed near Singye, Korea.⁹ One man was killed and two were wounded before First Lieutenant Percival could organize and direct fire. During the two-hour fight, he was wounded but continued to direct the firing line and personally killed at least seven of the ambushing force.¹⁰ The arrival of friendly forces dispersed the enemy. First Lieutenant Percival died shortly after the firefight from wounds received during the engagement. He received the Silver Star posthumously for his actions.

Sergeant William F. Humphrey
Army Commendation Medal
United States

Sergeant William F. Humphrey and another noncommissioned officer (NCO) from the military police detachment at Fort Knox, Kentucky, were returning from a routine assignment on 8 August 1959 when they encountered a traffic accident.¹¹ The accident involved a truck carrying hot asphalt road mix and a car with four passengers. Hot asphalt was pouring into the car through a broken windshield and spilling onto its occupants—a man, a woman, and two children. Sergeant Humphrey went to the car and released the two children in the back seat. He then used his hands to keep the asphalt off the faces of the adults while he tried to free them. He managed to free the woman but could not free the male driver, who was pinned behind the steering wheel. Sergeant Humphrey continued to keep the hot asphalt off the driver's face with his bare hands until a wrecker arrived. The driver was freed only when the wrecker pulled one of the doors off the damaged car. Sergeant Humphrey sought treatment for his severe burns only after the accident victims were removed by ambulance.¹²



**Army
Commendation
Medal**

Specialist 4 Kenneth E. Wade
Silver Star
Vietnam War

Specialist 4 Kenneth E. Wade served with the 25th Military Police Company, 25th Infantry Division. On 23 February 1969, the Dau Tieng base camp came under intense attack by a large enemy force. Specialist 4 Wade drove his jeep with a mounted .50-caliber machine gun to the camp perimeter to aid in the defense of the base camp. He moved his jeep alongside three armored personnel carriers (APCs) that had been hit by rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and poured suppressive fire on the enemy to allow the APC crew members to escape.¹³ The enemy was close enough to throw hand grenades at the escaping crew members and Specialist 4 Wade. He continued his relentless fire until he was fatally wounded when an RPG struck his jeep.¹⁴

Sergeant Jay D. Gumm
Distinguished Service Cross
World War I

Sergeant Jay D. Gumm served with the 117th Train Headquarters and Military Police Company, 42d Division.¹⁵ During the shelling of Vadenay, France, on 15 July 1918, he voluntarily left a place of safety and ran through an area under artillery barrage to rescue a French soldier who was lying severely wounded in the street.¹⁶

Sergeant First Class Jeanne M. Balcombe Soldier's Medal Korea

Sergeant First Class Jeanne M. Balcombe served in the 55th Military Police Company. In the early morning hours of 21 August 1999, she was on duty at the local troop medical clinic with three other military police personnel. She had ordered that a blood test be administered to a Soldier to determine if he had consumed alcohol while off base without permission.¹⁷ An intoxicated friend of the Soldier in question was present at the clinic, and he became belligerent when he discovered that a blood test had been ordered for his friend. Grabbing a pistol from a South Korean soldier standing nearby, the angry friend aimed it at the four military police personnel. Sergeant First Class Balcombe placed herself between the gunman and the other military police personnel and in so doing was mortally shot.¹⁸ The gunman fled the scene but was later captured. Sergeant First Class Balcombe was awarded the Soldier's Medal for "heroism in the face of danger." In addition, the award for excellence in leadership for Military Police Advanced NCO Course graduates was renamed in her honor.¹⁹



**Sergeant First Class
Jeanne M. Balcombe**

Endnotes

¹Major Robert H. Fisher, editor, "Our First D.S.C.," *Military Police Journal*, Volume VI, No. 2, September 1956, p. 24.

²Ibid.

³Center of Military History, Medal of Honor Citations, <www.Army.mil/cmh-pg/mohciv2.htm>.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Dr. Ronald Craig, compilation of military police awards, military police archives computer records, retrieved during November 2005.

⁸Ibid.

⁹First Lieutenant Joe C. Gunn, editor, "Action Awards," *The Provost Marshal's School Training and Newsletter*, January 1951, p. 5.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Major George E. Allen, editor, "Ft. Knox MP SGT Honored for Action During Emergency," *Military Police Journal*, Volume X, No. 4, December 1959, p. 21.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Dr. Ronald Craig, compilation of military police awards, military police archives computer records, retrieved during November 2005.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Home of Heroes, WWI US Army Recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross-Citations, <www.homeofheroes.com/verify/1_Citations/0_wwi_Army/dsc_05wwi_Army_FG.htm>.

¹⁷Officer Down Memorial Page, Sergeant First Class Jeanne M. Balcombe, <www.odmp.org/officer.php?oid=15287>.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Sergeant First Class Kenneth Abruzzini, Sergeant First Class George Gardner, and Staff Sergeant Raymond Dunn, "Excellence—A Tradition," *Military Police*, PB 19-00-2, November 2000, p. 11.

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