



# 701st Military Police Battalion

By Mr. David A. Kaufman, © 1995

*Before World War II, military policing was not a defined branch of service. During World War I, there was no formalized training or tactics for military police, who were usually chosen for their size and quickness with batons. After the war, military police duty consisted of small units that directed traffic on and around military posts, plus a little crime prevention patrol. Selection to units was at the whim of the unit commander. There were some political attempts to formalize the training, but these all failed. With the Selective Service Act of 1940, the Army grew dramatically in size and the need to professionally police itself became a reality. It was a difficult undertaking since there were no manuals, no equipment, and no officers trained as military police.*

The 701st Military Police Battalion, one of the first such battalions in the US Army, was activated at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, on 1 February 1941, with a cadre from the 1st and 20th Infantry Regiments.<sup>1</sup> Filled with draftees, the battalion was assigned to VII Corps to serve as internal security and zone of interior troops, thus releasing combat troops from that duty. As quickly as draftees were trained, they were sent out to train newly activated military police battalions. The troops had no outside civilian instructors, except for New York Police Department physical training instructors who demonstrated various restraint holds.<sup>2</sup>

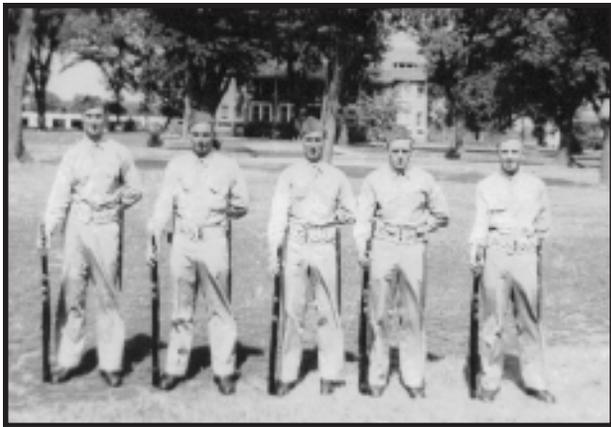
Detachments from the 701st were sent to guard railroad stations in St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri, and to guard radio stations. Many German spies and sympathizers were operating on ham radios so the government ordered all ham radios to shut down. Ham radio transmissions were monitored from a radio-monitoring site in Nebraska. In January 1942, Company B was temporarily detached to guard prisoners of war at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin. In the summer of 1942, the remainder of the unit was sent to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, to serve as a demonstration battalion for the Provost Marshal General's School. This was the first military police school for training officers and enlisted men. By demonstrating the "how-tos" of military policing to newly activated units, the Military Police Branch benefited, and the battalion itself became more professional.

From its newly assigned post at Fort Snelling, the 701st provided security and protection for the war industries around St. Paul and Minneapolis. Battalion soldiers guarded factories, ordnance shipments, radio stations, and airports against subversion and trained civilians to take over these duties. The battalion also provided firing parties for military funerals.

One of the battalion's more unusual duties was its participation in experiments at the University of Minnesota. In one experiment that led to the development of K-rations, the men existed on food pellets for long periods of time.

Fort Snelling was mainly a reception center, near the farming belt for Minneapolis-St. Paul. The military police and a few quartermaster troops were the only units assigned to the base. The US government purchased much of the surrounding farmland, but didn't harvest or distribute the vegetables grown there. The public complained, and a congressional delegation arrived to investigate. So the government harvested the produce, but took the vegetables to the reserve officers' blockhouses for storage. Military police were assigned to assist the quartermaster in distributing the food, but when they opened one of the doors of the blockhouse, liquefied cabbage poured out.<sup>3</sup>

In November 1942, the school and the battalion were transferred to Fort Custer, Michigan, and assigned to the 6th Service Command. In March 1943,



**A firing party at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, 1941**

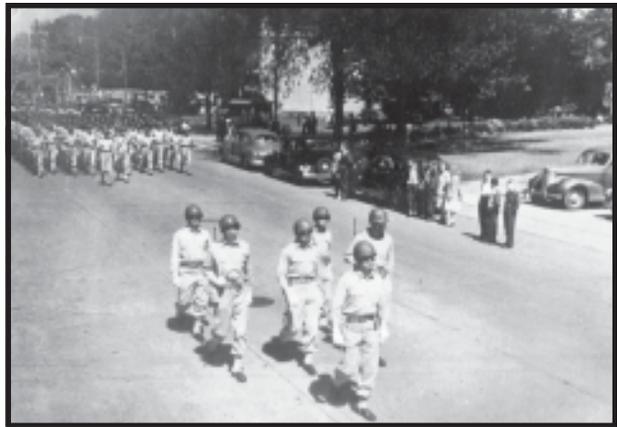
electrical workers in Michigan threatened to strike, which would have crippled the war industry in the region. The workers said they would walk off their jobs at a certain hour if their demands weren't met, so all four companies of the battalion were dispatched to Saginaw and Grand Rapids. A couple of hours before "zero hour," the strike was called off, due in no small part to the arrival of the armed soldiers.

The night of 21 June 1943 brought the toughest test yet for the 701st. The day before, a race riot had broken out in Detroit, Michigan, and quickly overwhelmed the Detroit Police Department, which was depleted because of the draft. More than 40 people were killed and more than 800 were injured before the battalion arrived. Within two days, the military police controlled the city and brought calm. Only sporadic outbreaks of violence were reported during the remainder of the summer.

After the 701st returned from Detroit, Company B was included in a training film on riot control that was shown to other military police battalions. Soon after, the 701st received orders to drop personnel not fit for overseas duty and to secure as replacements those who were fit. Personnel prepared as if they were finally going overseas. However, Company A was directed to report to Fort Wayne Ordnance Depot, Indiana. For a short time, the company's soldiers worked in factories because of a draft-generated shortage of defense industry workers.

In September 1944, the Provost Marshal General's School was transferred to Fort Sam Houston, Texas, and the 701st was directed to prepare for combat training. However, plans changed, and the battalion sent a large security contingent to a civil aviation meeting in Chicago later in the fall. The battalion continued training at Fort Custer through the winter of 1944-45.

Early in 1945, the 701st convoyed trucks to the Boston port of embarkation, preparatory to moving



**On parade at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, 1942**

overseas. However, a truckers' strike in Chicago caused the recall of the battalion. Working with the 748th Military Police Battalion, the 701st returned and kept the cargo moving without incident by providing armed escorts. As a result of their assistance in suppressing the Detroit riot and escorting truck convoys to expedite supplies during the Chicago truckers' strike, the 701st received a Meritorious Service Unit Award in June 1945.

In August 1945, the 701st went to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, to prepare for assignment to the Pacific theater. The atomic bombings forced the Japanese to surrender, the war ended, and the battalion was sent to Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Draftees were mustered out, but replacements brought the 701st back to full strength.

Soon the 701st was sent to China, arriving in Shanghai on 17 March 1946. Shanghai was a city in transition, as was the Nationalist government. Corruption and vice had been rampant for centuries. Now, US and Nationalist military personnel were involved in these activities, primarily in the black market. There were also thousands of defeated Japanese troops who had to be repatriated back to Japan.

The 701st absorbed personnel from the 40th Military Police Battalion, the 1116th Military Police Company (Aviation), and the 116th and 247th Military Police Companies. The 701st also formed a liaison with the Navy Shore Patrol, the 23d Gendarmerie Regiment (English-speaking Chinese trained as policemen), and the Shanghai Voluntary Police (businessmen who volunteered to combat crime). The 701st also established the Auxiliary Military Police Battalion. Initially comprised of Sikhs, its ranks were soon filled with White Russians, French Foreign Legionnaires, and members of the Shanghai Police Department.

Companies A and B were assigned to town patrol. Representatives from the 701st, the Navy Shore Patrol, the 23rd Gendarmerie, and the Shanghai Volunteer

Police rode four to a jeep, patrolling the streets randomly, much as they would in the United States. They supported two-man foot patrols on their assigned posts. The patrols operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in 8-hour shifts. There was limited radio capability since personnel in the jeeps could communicate with each other but not with their headquarters. The patrols, especially those on foot, were on their own.

Company B was withdrawn from this assignment and sent to West Field Air Base, which provided air support to Peiping Headquarters Group, to guard military supplies and the 332d Troop Carrier Squadron. Company C was assigned to harbor patrol. Company D was assigned to Kiangwan Air Base—the busiest airport in China, with its movement of cargo, mail, and military personnel—and also provided dignitary escorts. A detachment from the battalion headquarters was assigned to Ward Road Jail, where many Japanese war criminals were held. This detachment also escorted war criminals to Sugamo Prison, where some of the criminals were executed.

As thorough professionals, soldiers from the 701st knew that their jobs were not only military but also diplomatic. The battalion's relations with the Russians were difficult. In addition, the Chinese communists continually attacked the rail lines. The US Marines patrolled the area and provided security, and on 29 July 1946, four of them were killed and several wounded in an ambush by the communists. The Marine base responded to the ambush location and ensured the patrol's safe return. Because of the ambush and other hostilities, protection of the military police on patrol in Shanghai and Peiping was improved. They no longer patrolled in jeeps but in M8 and M20 armored cars.

The entire 701st Military Police Battalion—less Company C, which remained in Shanghai—was

assigned to Peiping Headquarters Group in late 1946. General George C. Marshal commanded a special mission in China to end the civil war between Nationalist Chinese and Chinese communist forces. Peiping Headquarters Group was truce headquarters. The battalion provided security for Peiping Headquarters Group and also guarded supply trains and railroad tracks. Communist forces continually tore up the tracks or removed the ties and used them for firewood and shelter.

At Peiping, the 701st set up joint operations with the 5th Marine Regiment and provided security for the supply depot there. The military police provided personnel for the 36 peacekeeping teams in northern China and Manchuria. Each team was composed of a US Army officer, Nationalist and communist officers, a US noncommissioned officer, a neutral Chinese interpreter, and a radio operator. Unfortunately, the peacekeeping teams were a failure and were withdrawn to Peiping. However, Nationalist China was collapsing rapidly, and the truce headquarters had to be withdrawn from Peiping. The 701st guarded supplies and helped US dependents leave the city.

After the withdrawal, Company B went back to providing security for West Field Air Base and the Army Graves Registration Service (AGRS) teams that were recovering casualties from remote regions. The teams worked mostly in western China because of the US aircraft shot down or lost between Burma and Kunming. The area, which was desolate and mountainous, had rivers to ford, rocks to climb, and various Chinese dialects to cope with. This area covered all of Yunnan Province and a good part of Szechwan Province.

The teams usually consisted of a military policeman, an enlisted man from the AGRS, and a Chinese interpreter. They had a jeep with a 1/4-ton trailer; were armed with .45-caliber pistols and



Nanking Airfield, 1946



Shanghai, 1947

automatic weapons; and had canned rations, some spare parts, and a large suitcase with Chinese currency. Two to four teams would be flown into the interior in C47s to a major town with an airstrip and proceed from there. In most cases, the hill people remembered a plane crash and could help pinpoint the area. A major problem was that the Chinese people thought that the big aluminum bird had been sent to them to provide metal, and they often stripped the planes of almost all identification. However, they were respectful of the dead and frequently gave the remains a decent burial. The teams were able to disinter the bodies, pack them in small boxes along with any identification, and return them to the United States.

On 1 April 1947, the 701st was redesignated the 701st Military Police Service Battalion. Company A was deactivated, so Company D was redesignated Company A. The unit strength, which should have been 212 men, was reduced to 160. A fire department team was established, with duties that included continuous inspections of buildings and locations. The battalion had the responsibility of protecting US forces withdrawing from Peiping by rail. Personnel with automatic weapons on armored flatcars guarded the trains, while planes provided cover from overhead.

Company B became involved in a sensational incident in April 1947, when two of its soldiers and an officer from a military intelligence unit arrested a 10-man Nazi spy ring headquartered in Shanghai. The Nazi ringleader, Lieutenant Colonel Ludwig Earhardt, who headed German military and naval intelligence in Asia, was among those arrested. Eventually, 19 Italian and Japanese nationals were also arrested. The arrestees claimed responsibility for sinking US ships, including one aircraft carrier, as well as other acts of espionage following the German surrender. They were all transferred to the Ward Road Jail.

As the Chinese communists increased their gains throughout China in 1948, the personnel and equipment of the 701st were reduced because of attrition. Replacements were slow in coming. To combat the expanding communist threat, the military police began to use more and more infantry tactics. Communist forces were only 15 miles from Nanking, the capital of Nationalist China and headquarters of the Joint US Military Advisory Group-China. Evacuation of all US forces and their dependents began in November 1948. The 701st was withdrawn to Japan and assigned to the 25th Infantry Division and I Corps in early 1949. The battalion was then transferred to the zone of interior and assigned to the Presidio of San Francisco

While assigned to the Zone of Interior, the 701st Military Police Battalion was authorized to wear the Special Service shoulder insignia. In China, the unit wore both the China-Burma-India and China Headquarters patches.



Company B had an unauthorized patch while serving in China. The patch is beautifully constructed with a silk base and silk thread.

It has a light green shield with black border and a tan scroll with red highlights and teal lettering. The center disc is also teal, and the rooster is white with tan legs, wearing a tan crown and swinging a red baton. The craftsmanship is of such quality that the letters "MP" can clearly be read on the black brassard. The numbers "701" are also tan.



and Fort MacArthur, San Pedro, California (both 6th Army stations). The 701st was transferred to Fort Knox, Kentucky (a 2d Army station), where it was inactivated in 1956. The battalion was reactivated in 1986.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Robert K. Wright, *Military Police - Army Lineage Series*, Center of Military History United States Army, Washington, D.C., 1992, page 204.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Robert K. Wright.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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