
Regimental Command Sergeant Major



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The Military Police Brassard: A Symbol of Authority, Not an MOS Badge

Hello once again from the home of the Military Police Corps Regiment. I trust that you all had a great holiday season, your batteries have been recharged, and you are leaning forward into another exciting year. The past year was a great one; because it was the Year of the NCO, we were reminded of our pride and traditions. That spirit was rekindled across the Army. Although it will be tough to replicate the spirit of 2009, I look forward to your accomplishments throughout 2010. In this issue of *Military Police*, I want to remind the members of our great Regiment of a unique military police tradition and warn against compromising the symbol of that tradition—our military police brassard.



The military police brassard can be traced back to the early 1900s; and although the brassard has changed in shape and color throughout the years, its intended purpose has not. Following successful campaigns during the war in the Philippines, Army leaders began to realize the importance of provost troops. Soldiers who performed policing tasks were termed “military police” and were adorned with the first military police brassards. This new distinction was written into the U.S. Army Field Service Regulations, which stated, “Officers and enlisted men, when actually performing the duty of military police, will wear a blue brassard on the left arm, halfway between the elbow and shoulder, bearing the letters ‘MP’ in white.”¹ The important thing here is not the specified color or placement, which have since undergone several changes, but the intended purpose. Note that the brassard was to be worn **when actually performing the duty of military police**. This requirement has not changed. The military police brassard is a symbol of authority intended to be worn during law and order missions. Here, we have strayed.

In the past few years, there has been a change in Army uniforms from the battle dress uniform to the Army combat uniform (ACU). During ACU development, senior Army leaders decided to remove branch-specific identification from the uniform. In a significant cultural shift, officers were not to wear branch insignia anywhere on their ACUs. According to Sergeant First Class Jeff Myhre, Program Executive Office Soldier product manager for Soldier clothing and individual equipment, “The Army really wants to create an atmosphere where everyone is a Soldier first and their military specialty second.”² I mention this to emphasize that the military police brassard is not a military occupational specialty (MOS) badge and should not be treated as such. Our current military police brassard wear policy states, “The MP [military police] brassard insignia is only authorized for wear on the ACU by military personnel who are performing military police duties. The authority for military personnel to wear the MP brassard is at the discretion of the provost marshals, directors of emergency services, and the military police commanders, when the mission requires identification of military police.”³ It is the “at the discretion of” verbiage that seems to be a problem for some commanders.

Commanders: You have the authority to determine whether your Soldiers wear the military police brassard. Its integrity and the preservation of a long-standing tradition are on your shoulders. Is it necessary to identify motor pool personnel as military police? What about military police Soldiers who are performing company detail? Or conducting routine training? Or shopping at the post exchange?

The average citizen who sees a Soldier wearing the military police brassard assumes that something went wrong and that there is an authority figure present to handle it. But that is no longer the case; more often than not, the Soldier is simply going about his or her daily business. Our Soldiers are under the mistaken impression that the military police brassard may be worn whenever and wherever they please. There are many reasons why this mind-set is problematic; I will share just a couple of these. As previously stated, the average citizen views the brassard as the symbol of authority it was intended to be. Unfortunately, this includes citizens with bad intentions. One of our brassard-clad Soldiers could end up in the wrong place at the wrong time and get drawn into something that he or she is not armed to handle. The consequences could be grave. The fact that the military police brassard does not make a Soldier bullet-proof or almighty is a lesson in judgment that we learn as we mature. Why, then, do we allow our Soldiers to be placed in such a position?

Furthermore, the wearing of the brassard under unapproved circumstances makes us appear arrogant and unprofessional. A nondeployed staff Soldier who wears a military police brassard to a staff call or planning session that is not law and order-related is viewed as arrogant by others. If you find yourself in a similar situation, refer to the specific purpose of identification as a military police Soldier and ask yourself what message you want to send to others. Does the brassard grant you any privileges, advantages, or clout? No, it doesn't. And I am willing to bet that everyone in the room already knows what branch you represent. So, why not just take it off and be a team player instead of symbolically separating yourself?

A few months ago, I was visiting an organization when the senior officer in charge began to complain about how everyone continually comes to him for blotter reports, investigation inquiries, and other routine law enforcement matters. He explained that this was distracting and indicated that everyone should know that these were not his functions. He further described his solution, which consisted of creating cards and fliers containing provost marshal's office contact information. Interestingly, he was wearing his military police brassard and, per his directive, so was everyone who worked for him. I respectfully suggested that he remove the contact card from his left shoulder. Just something to think about.

NCOs: I expect you to educate everyone around you and begin enforcing our policy so that we can grow another generation of Soldiers who know the standards and can pass on our history and tradition. I also encourage you to dust off the Spring 2008 issue of *Military Police* and read the article entitled "New Changes for the Military Police Brassard," written by our great historian, Mr. Andy Watson. (You can also read it online at <http://www.wood.army.mil/mpbulletin/pdfs/Spring%2008/Brassards.pdf>.) The article does a wonderful job of highlighting the history of the military police brassard, which has led us to where we are today.

You should be very proud to be military police men and women, and the fact that you want to wear your brassard is a good thing—the brassard has a way of making you stand straighter and walk taller. But as with all good things in life that are taken for granted, they become routine and the rich tradition fades. Let's all do our part. Do not use the various brassards of other branches, which you might see popping up across the Army, as your benchmark. We all know what "right" looks like, and I hope that I have convinced you to "grab the handle" and help us regain the integrity of our Regiment's most sacred symbol—the military police brassard.

I would like to, once again, remind everyone to keep our Soldiers who are currently in harm's way in your thoughts and prayers. Reach out and thank a family member for holding down the fort and supporting us while we do the business of our Regiment, our Army, and our Nation.

Of the Troops and For the Troops! NCOs Lead the Way!

Reference:

Andy Watson, "New Changes for the Military Police Brassard," *Military Police*, Spring 2008, <http://www.wood.army.mil/mpbulletin/pdfs/Spring%2008/Brassards.pdf>, accessed on 25 January 2010.

Endnotes:

¹Army Field Service Regulations, U.S. Army, 1914.

²Matthew Cox, "Your New Uniform: Army Combat Uniform Will Put BDUs, DCUs Into History Book by December 2007," *Army Times*, 21 June 2004.

³"Changes to the Military Police (MP) Brassard Wear Policy Outlined in AR 670-1, Paragraph 28-29b (9) (a) and (b)," Department of the Army, DAPE-MSO, 17 June 2008.