

Evolution of the **Office of the Provost Marshal General**

By Dr. Ronald Craig

On 26 September 2003, the Office of the Provost Marshal General (OPMG) was reestablished. It had been 29 years since the office was deactivated. Major General Donald J. Ryder, former commandant of the U.S. Army Military Police School and commander of the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command (USACIDC), was appointed to the post. The OPMG had never remained in continuous service, having been dissolved and eliminated at various times in history, yet performed critical functions and served the military and nation in the most critical times.

In the Beginning

The first American provost marshal, William Marony, was appointed by General George Washington on 10 January 1776. Captain Marony was assigned detachments to serve as provost guard on a temporary basis. His primary duties were maintaining jails and supervising executions. Nine men served as provost marshal during the Revolutionary War, supervising at least 40 executions. In the summer of 1778, many provost marshal duties were transferred to the Marechausse Corps, a troop of light dragoons, referred to by General Washington as a grand provost marshalcy. Yet provost marshals still existed until the end of the war.

When the Revolutionary War ended, so did the provost marshal post. Until the beginning of the Civil War, provost marshals were appointed when needed and only on temporary terms.

Beginning in 1861, regimental provost marshals were formed in the Army of the Potomac. The organization was later expanded to division, corps, and army levels, with each Federal Army having a Provost Marshal General. By the fall of 1862, provost marshals were operating in all northern states, with primary duties of capturing deserters. A similar system existed in the Confederate Army; provost marshals were appointed to enforce conscription and other laws.

On 3 March 1863, Congress established the post of U.S. Provost Marshal General. Colonel James Fry, later a brigadier general, was appointed to the post. He operated with deputy provost marshals in each congressional district. The Provost Marshal General Bureau, which Brigadier General Fry organized, dealt mainly with recruitment and desertion issues, enforcement of the Conscription Act of 1863, and supervision of the Invalid Corps, which contained

disabled soldiers performing garrison duties. The Provost Marshal General Bureau was abolished in 1866, but regional provost marshals continued to perform their duties during the reconstruction of the southern states.

After the invasion of the Philippine Islands in 1898 and the defeat of the Spanish, the U.S. Army assumed an occupation position. In July 1901, Brigadier General Arthur McArthur was appointed Provost Marshal General of Manila, in addition to his duties as military governor. He established a provost guard brigade for law enforcement in the city and a constabulary in the



Brigadier General James Fry

provinces. But this provost marshal position, like all others, was temporary and was soon replaced with civil authority.

Within 3 months of entering the European conflict in April 1917, Major General Enoch Crowder—who was also the Judge Advocate General—was appointed Provost Marshal General. His primary duties—similar to the duties of Brigadier General Fry during the Civil War—were related to the management of the Selective Service System.



**Major General
Enoch Crowder**

On 7 July 1917, the OPMG of the American Expeditionary Force was established in Paris, France. Colonel Hanson E. Ely was the first to hold this position. But the duties were more complicated than those of previous periods. In addition to being commander of the military police, Colonel Ely was tasked with the protection of friendly inhabitants, maintenance of order, control of vehicle and pedestrian traffic, apprehension of deserters and stragglers, management of vendors with the Army, custody of prisoners of war, and control of troop behavior. After only a month in the office, Colonel Ely was replaced by Colonel William H. Allaire, who was also commander of U.S. troops in Paris. Colonel Allaire was promoted to brigadier general, and Colonel Kirby Walker was appointed Assistant Provost Marshal General. Colonel Walker was tasked with the supervision of all military police not with combat units. In July 1918, Brigadier General Allaire was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel John C. Groome, who served until September 1918, when Brigadier General Harry H. Bandholtz was appointed to the position.

At the time, the American Expeditionary Force Provost Marshal Department consisted of four divisions: military police, prisoner of war, criminal investigation, and circulation. Each corps—in addition to the District of Paris, the advance and intermediate sections, and some base sections—had a provost marshal with the rank of lieutenant colonel, and each tactical division had a provost marshal with the rank of major.

By 1919, there were provost marshals and military police stationed in 476 cities and towns in France, England, Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg, and Germany. In supervising this complex organization, Brigadier General Bandholtz managed an office of 47 officers, 10 clerks, and 31 enlisted men.

In August 1919, the OPMG in the American Expeditionary Force was dissolved, and military police

duties were redesignated under the American Occupation Forces in Germany until 1922. At the same time, the OPMG was terminated, though a Provost Marshal General remained as an advisor to the War Department until 1927. Meanwhile, in 1937, the War Department published *Basic Field Manual IX*, which provided guidance for the organization of a Provost Marshal General Department, when needed in the future.

As the United States prepared to enter World War II in 1941, the OPMG was once again reactivated. General Andrew W. Gullion—who was the adjutant general—was appointed to the position. The Provost Marshal General School was established at Arlington Cantonment, Fort Myer, Virginia, in December 1941 and began training in January 1942. Though the school would relocate four times before the end of the war, it would continue to function until the end of the conflict.

Change in Duties

Initially, the duties of the Provost Marshal General in 1941 were limited to the control of enemy aliens, but in August additional duties were transferred from the Army Assistant Chief of Staff, which included the investigation of—

- Applicants for employment with the military.
- Security clearances.
- Scientists in sensitive positions.
- Applicants for the Women's Army Corps.
- Applicants for the enlisted reserve.
- Applicants for Army commissions.
- Employees of the American Red Cross.
- News personnel requesting access to theaters of operation.
- Air Corps technicians.
- Employees in war production plants.

To handle the increased workload, the OPMG created the Investigations Division in November 1941, which soon employed 954 persons. In November 1942, this division was also assigned the responsibility of investigating aliens residing in the United States.

When the Army reorganized in March 1942, the OPMG was placed under the Chief of Administrative Services, creating an increase in duties and responsibilities. In May of that year, the office began investigating personnel for employment with the top secret Manhattan Project, which was creating the

atomic bomb. In November 1945, the Provost Marshal General was moved under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Service Commands in the Army Service Forces. This continued until 25 June 1946 when the Provost Marshal General became a staff division of the Army Service Forces, under the Chief of Staff.

For the first 2 years, the duties of the Provost Marshal General centered around the protection of the war industry and the development of the Military Police Corps. After 1943, the office also dealt with the internment of prisoners of war in the United States and the investigation of Japanese-Americans held in relocation camps. Toward the end of the war, the Provost Marshal General concentrated on investigating crimes and apprehending deserters and escaped military prisoners, along with the investigative duties of the War Crimes Division of the Judge Advocate General's Office. The personnel of the OPMG conducted more than 289,000 investigations in 1942, 1,370,000 in 1943, 398,000 in 1944, and 131,000 in 1945.

Major General Andrew W. Gullion remained the Provost Marshal General from July 1941 until April 1944, when he was replaced by Major General Archer L. Lerch. Major General Lerch, a former commandant of the Provost Marshal General School, served until July 1945, when he was replaced by Brigadier General Blackshear M. Bryan. Brigadier General Bryan served until April 1948, when he was replaced by Major General Edwin P. Parker Jr.

With the end of hostilities, there was pressure to discontinue the OPMG, as was the tradition. There



**Major General
Andrew W. Gullion**

were questions about peacetime requirements, but the Chief of Staff convinced the Army not to eliminate the position. In June 1946, the OPMG, for the first time in American history, became a permanent organization. In November of that same year, the Provost Marshal General School was reduced in size and moved to Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

Major General Parker occupied the position of Provost Marshal General when the school was later relocated to Fort Gordon, Georgia, and through most of the Korean War. However, in February 1953, he was replaced by

Major General William H. Maglin, who had served as commandant of the Provost Marshal General School from September 1943 to June 1944, October 1944 to May 1945, and October 1947 to June 1950. He served as Provost Marshal General until September 1957, when he was replaced by Major General Haydon L. Boatner. In December 1960, Major General Boatner was replaced by Major General Ralph J. Butchers, who commanded from December 1960 to July 1964, when the first military police company was dispatched to South Vietnam. He was then replaced by Major General Carl C. Turner, who would serve as Provost Marshal General during the first 3 years of major conflict in Southeast Asia.

Major General Turner was replaced in September 1968 by Major General Karl W. Gustafson, who had served as school commandant from July 1964 to January 1965. Major General Gustafson remained the Provost Marshal General until July 1970 when he was succeeded by Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey. Major



**Major General
Archer L. Lerch**



**Major General
Edwin P. Parker Jr.**



**Major General
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**Major General
Carl C. Turner**



**Major General
Karl W. Gustafson**



**Major General
Lloyd B. Ramsey**

General Ramsey served during the final years of the Vietnam War and was the last Provost Marshal General until 2003.

Reasons for Deactivation

On 20 May 1974, the OPMG was abolished. Some of the reasons for the deactivation included the following:

- Prior to 1946, the office existed only during wartime, mainly due to the emphasis placed on assigned duties. In 1946, the Army Chief of Staff convinced Congress to continue this position, but there were disagreements as to what the peacetime duties of the office would be.
- During the Civil War and World War I, the primary duties of the office included soldier draft and conscription. This type of duty was seriously reduced in 1940 when the Selective Training and Service Act was passed, and the Selective Service System was established as an independent agency. Provost marshals at the local levels were sometimes involved in these activities, but most work was accomplished by other agencies. During the life of the draft, the Justice Department enforced related laws.
- In 1962, with the reorganization of the U. S. Army, the Provost Marshal General School was redesignated the U.S. Army Military Police School. The school had been under the direct control of the OPMG since its organization in 1942. In 1962, when the school was renamed and transferred to Fort Gordon, the U.S. Continental Army Command and Fort Gordon began furnishing administrative and logistical support, previously the responsibility of the Provost Marshal General. The removal of the name from the school and its transfer to another

command seriously reduced the control that the Provost Marshal General could exert over training. This arrangement lasted 11 years, when, in 1973, the Military Police School was placed under the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC).

- In June 1965, the 15th Military Police Brigade—the first brigade-level unit in history—was formed in Germany. This was followed by the formation of the 18th Military Police Brigade, which deployed to South Vietnam in September 1966. The formation and functioning of brigade-level units within the Corps reduced the command and control functions of the Provost Marshal General and placed another echelon in the command structure. The brigades also absorbed much of the administrative functions.
- In October 1968, the Military Police Corps became a combat arm of the Army in South Vietnam. The OPMG had never been organized to deal with a combat organization.
- In 1970, the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) was removed from the command of the Provost Marshal General due to allegations of corruption. Although this measure was meant to be temporary, it became permanent. This seriously reduced the responsibilities of and need for the OPMG.
- In 1970, the Administrative Support Theater Army concept, which was designed to restructure the Army, made drastic alterations to the military structure and temporarily eliminated provost marshals from the makeup.
- In 1973, TRADOC was formed as an organization to monitor and manage all training.

The Military Police School was one of the schools brought under the wing of this new entity. This further reduced the ability of the OPMG to influence and control training.

Conclusion

The consequences of the above factors, and the fact that a proper and flexible structure was not in place, resulted in the demise of the OPMG. The loss of draft responsibility in the 1940s injured the organization but was not a lethal blow.

These failings were further complicated during the 1960s with the formation of another echelon of control and command within the structure of the Military Police Corps—the brigades. Although this move complicated the infrastructure and command network, it was the loss of the school and control over training in 1962 that damaged the survivability of the Provost Marshal General position the most.

When the Military Police Corps became a combat arm of the Army in 1968, it threw an element of confusion into an already desperate situation. The

OPMG had always been structured to support a combat support organization, but not one as complicated as the Corps. This was followed by the loss of control over the CID, a major part of the power of the Provost Marshal General, and the introduction of a new type of Army, one operating independently of the provost marshal—or so they thought at the time.

But the elimination of the OPMG left law enforcement functions in the U.S. Army incohesive and fragmented. The Military Police School was under the command of TRADOC, organic military police units remained under the control of unit commanders, the CID functioned within its own command, and various military police units were managed by a representative in the Pentagon. After the events of 11 September 2001 and the new Global War on Terrorism, the need for a centralized agency was recognized. The reestablishment of the OPMG will provide provost marshals and military police with the cohesiveness desperately needed for peacekeeping and stabilization missions, homeland security duties, and law enforcement functions.