



*After the Shooting Stopped:*  
**US Military Police**  
**After the Armistice of World War I**

**Military police with German prisoners of war, 1918**

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*While there was a great demand for military police in Europe during World War I, the need increased after the Armistice of 11 November 1918. US military police became part of the occupation forces and remained in Europe until 1922.*

The first military police units formed in the US Army were two companies with the 1st Infantry Division in May 1917, only one month after the US declaration of war against Germany. They were also the first US military police to arrive in France, in July 1917. By the end of that year, US military police had arrived with four more divisions and began training with the French armies. The divisional military police were placed under the train headquarters of the division and the commander of the trains also served as the provost marshal of the combat division. (A “train” was defined during World War I as a convoy of wagons or trucks, not actual railroad trains.) This situation existed until October 1918, when the commander of the divisional military police company became the provost marshal of the combat division.

On 20 July 1917, Lieutenant Colonel Hanson E. Ely, an infantry officer, became the first Provost Marshal General (PMG) of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) in France. He had only 12 soldiers when the PMG department was formed, but

it had grown to include 152 officers and 31 enlisted men by October 1918. During the first year, US military police in France were mostly selected at random from infantry units. A regiment of dismounted cavalry—1,600 men—was even specifically selected for guard duty. With each unit directly under the control of local commanders, there was no central control of the military police during that period. Most received a brief training session (while some received no training at all) and were expected to perform a variety of military police duties, including traffic control, convoy escort, and law and order functions. Because of the lack of training, many of those men were inadequate for the job.

On 18 July 1918, General John J. Pershing, commander of the AEF, issued General Order No. 111. This order reduced from two to one the number of military police companies with each combat division and designated the Military Police Corps as an organization, indirectly under the command of the PMG. This arrangement was unsatisfactory to the PMG and

others at headquarters, and on 15 October 1918, General Order No. 180 made the military police a formal division of the PMG department.

On 5 September 1918, a training depot was established at Autun, in eastern France, to train officer and enlisted military police. On 27 September 1918, Brigadier General Harry H. Bandholtz was appointed PMG of the AEF and began organizing the Military Police Corps and promoting education. After selecting a British officer with years of military police experience as chief of instruction, 21 enlisted men were selected and put through 10 days of rigorous training to become the core of instructors.

The school opened on 21 October 1918. The curriculum was brief, with each class lasting only two weeks, but the formal education greatly improved the quality of US military police in France. During its short existence (it closed in April 1919), 244 officers graduated, 22 more received commissions in the officer candidate program, and 3,297 enlisted soldiers graduated.

Circulation was the first problem that the AEF and PMG were forced to deal with in France. Upon their arrival, the AEF command realized there would be a much greater demand for military police, primarily to control the circulation of personnel and vehicles. American soldiers tended to congregate in various locations, including the dock area as they arrived in France, transportation points of departure, leave areas, training areas, and all other places from



**The training facility at Autun, France**

the front lines back to the ports of entry. Thus, much of the military police resources were dedicated to controlling movement.

A department of criminal investigations was officially formed on 11 May 1918 but, as with the military police, there was no centralized control. It was not until 27 November 1918, after the fighting stopped, that General Order No. 217 finally established the department as a PMG division and placed control of it with that office.

General Order No. 71 of 10 December 1917 delegated the management of prisoners of war (POWs) to the PMG department. However, until June of the next year, American soldiers were required to surrender their POWs to the French military. In June 1918, the US Army began retaining the POWs it captured and started building enclosures to house them. The situation required the establishment of POW escort guard companies and labor units. The first escort guard company was formed on 1 June 1918; eventually a total of 122 such companies came into being. Meanwhile, the first POW labor company was organized on 26 July 1918 and was assigned to the POW enclosure at St. Nazaire. There were eventually 122 labor companies, whose personnel also processed the POWs.

The Third Army, formed in August 1918, performed occupation duties in the American sector of Germany (in the area of Coblenz) after the Armistice. The Third Army, with two corps and five divisions (including their military police companies), crossed into Germany by the middle of December 1918. In April



**American troops at a port in France, 1918**

1919, divisions began returning to the United States, but most military police soldiers from those divisions did not return home for deactivation. Many were reassigned to other units. The Third Army was deactivated in the spring of 1919, and the new organization became the Army of Occupation, under the command of Lieutenant General Hunter Liggett.

The number of US military police peaked in March 1919, with 1,100 officers and 30,000 enlisted men. By this time, the Military Police Corps had thousands of experienced men, many of whom had received formal training at the Autun school. With the return of peace came pressure for more professionalism among the military police. Their appearance and the performance of their assigned duties greatly improved, and they were required to meet a higher standard than most troops. Another peacetime duty of the military police included the recovery of stolen government property. From January to March 1919, they recovered more than \$220,000 worth of government property.

Most of the military police battalions and companies assigned to occupation duties were dispersed. A prime example was the 12th Military

Police Battalion, composed of the 5th and 6th Military Police companies, with headquarters at Orne, France. The soldiers of the 5th Military Police Company were dispersed to 15 locations, and those of the 6th Military Police Company were scattered at 7 locations. The 124th Military Police Battalion in Marseille, France, included the 247th, 248th, 277th, and 283d Military Police companies and, by March 1919, the men of those companies were dispersed among 14 towns in southern France. By then there were 50 military police companies with combat units, 88 companies with the Services of Supply, 8 criminal investigation companies, and 122 POW escort guard companies. Detachments and units of military police were located in 476 towns and cities in France, England, Italy, Luxemburg, and Germany.

In Paris meanwhile, the 2d Provost Guard Company guarded American military prisoners at La Roquette Prison, with duties as prison guards, hospital guards, and other details. They would be among the last US military police to leave Europe in 1922, when they returned control of the prison to the French.