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# Military Police Heroism

By Mr. Andy Watson

*Maneuver and mobility operations are featured in this article on military police heroism. Facing danger, military police Soldiers maintained circulation control, area security, and assistance to fellow Soldiers whenever possible. Also, a belated congratulations to Staff Sergeant Timothy Nein. Staff Sergeant Nein received the Distinguished Service Cross (upgraded from the Silver Star) in recognition for his actions and leadership in reversing an ambush near Salman Pak, Iraq, in March 2005. His actions mirror those of previous military police—combining resolve and a sense of duty.*

## **Private First Class George F. Swearingen Silver Star World War II**

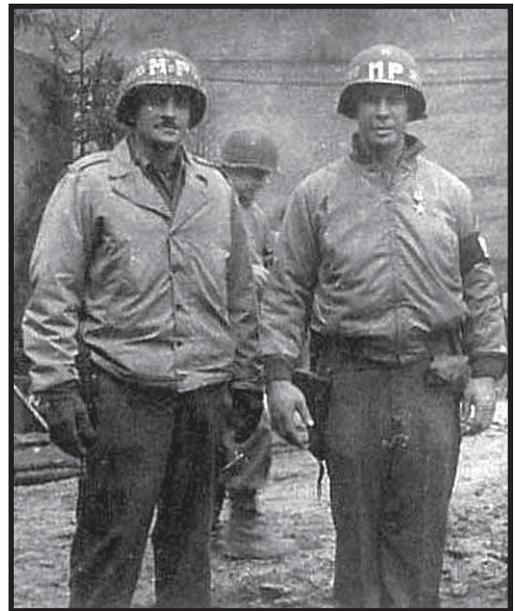
Private First Class George F. Swearingen served with the 2d Infantry Division, Military Police Platoon, during the division's campaigns in Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, Ardennes, and Central Europe. As a military policeman during this time, one of his many tasks was ensuring proper traffic movement. During the Ardennes Campaign, Private First Class Swearingen put the mission first by ignoring the danger of an artillery barrage targeted on a traffic control post near a busy intersection.

The attack took place near Camp d'Elsenborn, Belgium, in December 1944. As Private First Class Swearingen approached traffic post No. 8, he noticed two wounded Soldiers and a third Soldier suffering from shock due to artillery bombardment.<sup>1</sup> After assisting the Soldiers, Private First Class Swearingen took control of the post, ensuring the movement of traffic. While still under German artillery bursts, Private First Class Swearingen remained on duty and cleared vehicles in the area. Despite being wounded twice, he continued to serve until the danger abated.<sup>2</sup> "Medics tried to take me, but I would not go," Private First Class Swearingen remembered. The last shell of the barrage landed near him. "I wasn't hurt, but the concussion caused me to temporarily black out."

In recognition for his courage under fire and the prevention of casualties, Private First Class Swearingen received the Silver Star.<sup>3</sup> He was also awarded the Purple Heart. After returning to civilian life, George Swearingen served 26 years in law enforcement.

Recently, members of the 690th Military Police Company, Florida Army National Guard, visited Mr. Swearingen at his home in Jacksonville, Florida. Swearingen was presented with certificates of appreciation and a lifetime membership to the Military Police Regimental Association from Brigadier General David Quantock, Chief of the Military Police Corps Regiment and Commandant of the U.S. Army Military Police School, and Command Sergeant Major Jeffrey Butler, Military Police Regimental Command Sergeant Major.

"I feel pretty good for an old man," Mr. Swearingen said. Although 94 years old and in a wheelchair (from an automobile accident), Mr. Swearingen has a positive outlook and credits his longevity and happiness



**Picture taken shortly after George Swearingen's Silver Star presentation near Wahlerscheid, Germany, 20 February 1945. Mr. Swearingen is on the right wearing his medal.**

Photograph courtesy of Michael Hitt

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to working in his yard, staying busy, and eating right. Proud of his service, Mr. Swearingen has a large sign in his yard featuring the 2d Infantry Division and its Military Police Company.

**Captain William Luk and Corporal Cass T. Parnell**  
**Bronze Star for Valor**  
**Korea**

On 18 October 1950, Captain Luk and Corporal Parnell were both serving with Headquarters, IX Corps, performing traffic reconnaissance near Tugye-ri, Korea, when the area came under attack by North Korean forces.<sup>4</sup> Witnessing the destruction and the wounded evacuating the area, both men quickly organized a force of nearby Korean National Police volunteers to stage a counterattack and, in so doing, commandeered a 2 1/2-ton truck armed with a .50-caliber machine gun.<sup>5</sup> The Korean National Police volunteers, Captain Luk, and Corporal Parnell fought against the attacking forces' left flank, causing the enemy to break off their attack. For stopping the attack and inspiring others into action, Captain Luk and Corporal Parnell were awarded the Bronze Star for Valor.



**Private First Class**  
**William L. Sanders**

Photograph courtesy of Specialist Harold A. Newcomb, Jr.

**Private First Class William L. Sanders**  
**Silver Star**  
**Vietnam**

Private First Class William L. Sanders served with the 615th Military Police Company, 720th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Group, 18th Military Police Brigade, Long Binh, Vietnam. The 615th was responsible for night patrol security along Highway 1A, which ran from Long Binh to Thu Duc.<sup>6</sup> These duties included examining U.S. and Vietnamese vehicles for proper authorization and then escorting the owners and vehicles to the nearest U.S. military installation or Vietnamese National Police Station. The night patrols also drew enemy fire to locate and suppress enemy ambush sites.

In the early morning hours of 12 May 1967, Private First Class Sanders was manning an M60 machine gun on an armored military police jeep.<sup>7</sup> Suddenly, Vietcong forces attacked the patrol with mortars, grenades, and small arms fire.<sup>8</sup> Within a few minutes, one machine gun had been destroyed and four men were wounded.

Private First Class Sanders assessed the situation and noted that while he was protected by the armor plating of his vehicle, the other men and their jeep were exposed to withering machine gun fire.<sup>9</sup> He shouted to his comrades to take cover and then stepped beyond the protective armor plating of his jeep, covering his fellow Soldiers while silhouetting and exposing himself to enemy fire.<sup>10</sup> Five men moved to safety as Private First Class Sanders was mortally wounded while providing covering fire. Private First Class William L. Sanders received the Silver Star posthumously for his gallantry and lifesaving actions.

**Sergeant Thomas L. Cooksey**  
**Distinguished Service Cross**  
**World War I**

Sergeant Thomas L. Cooksey served with the 315th Train Headquarters and Military Police, 90th Division, maintaining circulation control during World War I. During this time, he had to deal with a variety

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of conveyances—from bicycles and animal power to increased motorized traffic. The Distinguished Service Cross citation for Sergeant Cooksey mentions some of the obstacles he faced a week before the end of World War I.

“The Distinguished Service Cross is presented to Thomas Larkin Cooksey, Sergeant, U.S. Army, for extraordinary heroism in action near Cantigny-Devant-Sasse, France, November 5, 1918. During a very heavy attack in the vicinity of his post, where artillery fire and aircraft machine gun fire had created a most confusing situation, Sergeant Cooksey calmly directed traffic, aided wounded, and removed obstructions, thereby preventing wild disorder. He also assisted the drivers of ammunition trucks [with] getting their machines to places of safety.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Major Clair H. Thurston Distinguished Service Cross World War II**

Major Clair H. Thurston served as the provost marshal for the 9th Infantry Division during operations at the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, Germany, in March 1945. The bridge capture and its use by American forces driving into Germany greatly shortened the war in Europe. Taking the bridge was just the beginning. After the bridge capture, German forces tried to destroy or recapture the site using explosives, demolitions divers, artillery fire, aerial bombardment, and infantry assaults. Unable to take cover during the frequent attacks, military police at the bridge kept traffic flowing across the Rhine River into Germany. But maintaining a constant stream of traffic and supplies proved to be a hazardous job, and numerous military police Soldiers on the bridge were killed or wounded. During the period 7–10 March 1945, the Military Police Company of the 9th Infantry Division suffered 72 casualties.<sup>12</sup> Due to these losses, Major Thurston gathered Soldiers from nearby infantry units to conduct military police training courses near the bridge.<sup>13</sup>

Major Thurston oversaw organization at the bridge and led by example. He constantly exposed himself to enemy artillery fire and air attacks to direct and maintain the traffic over the vital Ludendorf Bridge.<sup>14</sup> On one occasion, Major Thurston, previously wounded by a shell fragment, rushed across the bridge on foot during a heavy air bombardment and carried a man, dazed from the concussion, to safety.<sup>15</sup> His actions inspired others to continue crossing the bridge in the face of devastating enemy fire.<sup>16</sup> Recognized for his dauntless leadership and gallantry, Major Thurston received the Distinguished Service Cross.

### **Specialist John A. Golembiewski, Silver Star, and Specialist John C. Mitchell, Bronze Star for Valor Vietnam**

Specialist John A. Golembiewski and Specialist John C. Mitchell served in Company C, 720th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Group, 18th Military Police Brigade, where they frequently performed convoy security missions in a V-100 armored vehicle. On 28 April 1969, they were part of a convoy escort mission near Quan Loi, Vietnam. Despite the danger, the mission was routine until a truck in the middle of the line detonated a mine. Specialist Golembiewski, the crew chief, moved his V-100 forward to provide security as a North Vietnamese force opened fire on the convoy with rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine gun fire.<sup>17</sup> The crew’s V-100 was hit by rocket-propelled grenades that severely damaged the vehicle, engulfed it in flames, and caused internal explosions.<sup>18</sup>

Specialist Golembiewski (suffering from severe burns) and Specialist Mitchell (wounded by a piece of shrapnel in his hip) evacuated the V-100 and pulled an unconscious Private First Class (first name unknown) Wilborn—injured by shrapnel in the explosion—free of the burning vehicle.<sup>19</sup> Specialists Golembiewski and Mitchell then assisted other Soldiers from disabled vehicles in the convoy to the safety of a roadside ditch. “We were all hit and didn’t have time to grab our weapons. We just got out of there as fast as we could . . .” remembered Specialist Golembiewski.<sup>20</sup>

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As the ambush continued, a helicopter landed to assist the wounded and extract personnel from vehicles when it was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade. A door gunner was killed instantly, and the crew chief was thrown from the helicopter. Dazed and wounded, he staggered in the direction of the enemy and fell.<sup>21</sup> Despite his own painful injuries, Specialist Golembiewski scrambled to the fallen crew chief and dragged him away from the exposed position.<sup>22</sup> Flames were covering the helicopter as Specialist Mitchell assisted the door gunner, who was still strapped in the aircraft. Although the gunner's clothes were on fire, Specialist Mitchell pulled him free.<sup>23</sup> Specialists Golembiewski and Mitchell administered first aid to the wounded personnel until another helicopter arrived to extract the wounded and the 1st Infantry Division forces dispersed the North Vietnamese attackers, ending the five-hour battle.<sup>24</sup>

Specialist Golembiewski was recognized for his selfless actions and leadership under fire, receiving the Silver Star. Specialist Mitchell, also recognized for bravery and sacrifice, received the Bronze Star for Valor. Specialist Golembiewski, Specialist Mitchell, and Private First Class Wilborn received the Purple Heart.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>“General Orders No. 17: Silver Star Citation,” 2d Infantry Division Headquarters, 20 February 1945.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>First Lieutenant Joe C. Gunn, “Action Awards,” The Provost Marshal’s School Training and Newsletter, January 1951, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>“General Orders No. 2593: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 2 June 1967.

<sup>7</sup>Major Gary A. Sorensen, “Sanders Awarded Silver Star Posthumously,” *Military Police Journal*, Volume XVII, No. 2, September 1967, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>“General Orders No. 2593: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 2 June 1967.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>“General Orders No. 37,” War Department, 1919.

<sup>12</sup>Bruce Jacobs, “Remagen Bridge,” *Military Police Journal*, Volume VI, No. 7, March 1957, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>“General Orders No. 146: Distinguished Service Cross Citation,” War Department, 21 June 1945.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>“General Orders No. 2564: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 16 July 1969.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>“Three Rescue Huey Crew in Quan Loi Ambush,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, May 1969.

<sup>21</sup>“General Orders No. 2564: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 16 July 1969.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>“Three Rescue Huey Crew in Quan Loi Ambush,” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, May 1969.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

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### Voices of Experience

The Military Police historian, Mr. Andy Watson, is currently conducting audio and video interviews of postdeployment military police personnel. Mr. Watson is also seeking unit histories and other documents from deployed units. The recordings and histories obtained will be compiled for use in research and as preservation. Security of the information will be maintained. If you are interested in preserving your experiences and those of your unit, please contact Mr. Watson via e-mail at <ATSJSH@wood.army.mil> or telephone at (573) 563-5440.