
Unusual Duty Locations of Military Police

By Dr. Ronald E. Craig

During the Second World War, the newly formed U.S. Army Corps of Military Police was called upon to provide qualified personnel for duty in locations around the world. Some of those locations were in exotic and unusual places.

In March 1942, American troops arrived in the small Canadian town of Dawson Creek, British Columbia. The soldiers were to begin one of the largest construction projects of the war: building a road connecting the continental United States and the Alaskan Territory. When completed, the road would stretch 1,500 miles—from Dawson Creek to Delta Junction, Alaska—over some of the roughest terrain in the Western Hemisphere. The road was crucial because of the Japanese threat to the Aleutian Islands and possibly the Alaskan mainland. While the road was being built, Japanese troops invaded the Aleutian Islands in June 1942, making the threat a reality.

By April 1942, 11,000 American military engineers and 16,000 civilian workers were busy with the construction project. With that number of soldiers in the area, military police were needed to maintain order. Although the military road was completed in 8 months and 12 days, the military police were necessary as long as military personnel were still in the area.

The men of the 253d Military Police Company arrived in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in June 1944. A detachment of 20 soldiers was left in Edmonton to police the American military and civilian personnel there, and in July, the remainder of the company moved to Fort Nelson in northern British Columbia. Four officers and 92 enlisted men patrolled the rough Alaskan-Canadian highway from Edmonton to the Yukon Territory's Whitehorse, covering approximately 1,150 miles. They were authorized to police the military personnel and the civilian contract workers. The soldiers also rode trains and provided security and order between Dawson Creek and Wainwright in Alberta, Canada. A detachment of 40 men policed the Dawson Creek area, and 6 men were stationed at Blueberry, British Columbia, to record the number of vehicles traveling the highway. Due to the arrival of winter, the unit moved south to Dawson Creek in October and then to Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

By April 1942 (when construction of the Alaskan-Canadian highway began), the U.S. government restricted travel to and within the Alaskan Territory to prevent sabotage and espionage. All persons of Japanese ancestry—U.S. citizens and resident aliens—were removed from the territory, and no others were allowed to enter. The travel of German and Italian resident aliens was also restricted; they could not leave their community without a travel permit. Eventually, all persons residing in the territory had to obtain a travel permit.

Enforcing the regulations that governed these restrictions was the duty of the Alaskan Department provost marshal, who established stations in 34 towns. In June 1942, the 761st Military Police Battalion was activated at Fort Richardson, Alaska, to help enforce the travel restrictions; but due to a shortage of personnel, there was only one military police soldier for every 1,355 square miles. The battalion was divided into 35 detachments (that ranged in size from two men to a platoon with one detachment located at each station and the thirty-fifth at headquarters). Military police arrested aliens without travel permits, searched baggage, seized contraband, processed travel applications, issued travel permits, censored photographs, and confiscated liquor.

On the other side of the world, the first 4,000 American troops arrived in Northern Ireland and were quartered near Belfast on 26 January 1942. Included in this first contingent were the 34th Infantry Division and a detachment of the 34th Military Police Company. Another 8,000 troops arrived in Northern Ireland on 2 March, including the balance of the 34th Military Police Company. By the middle of May, the 1st Armored Division and its MP platoon were stationed in County Down, and by the last of May there were over 32,000 American troops in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Base Command was activated on 1 June 1942, and by July, U.S. Army Air Corps troops and planes arrived with MP units. In October and

November 1942, most troops left Northern Ireland in preparation for the invasion of North Africa (except for additional Army Air Corps units that were still arriving). During the last week of November, the 879th Military Police Company (Aviation) arrived at an air station 18 miles west of Belfast. The company guarded the interior of the air station with sentry dogs, patrolled roads by jeeps and motorcycles, served as gate and perimeter guards, and performed convoy escort and special guard duties. They also investigated traffic accidents, operated a station guardhouse, and patrolled the local town.

Other MP companies also served in Northern Ireland. The 1145th Military Police Company (Aviation) arrived in Northern Ireland in early July 1943, and in October, the 1195th Military Police Company (Aviation) joined them. In February 1944—without a change in duties or location—the 879th, 1145th, and 1195th Military Police Companies were consolidated into the 984th Military Police Company.

Another unusual locale for American military police was on the northern coast of South America—tropical British Guiana (now Guyana). A platoon of military police was stationed at an air base 25 miles up the Demerara River from Georgetown. The air base was needed so that personnel could patrol the southern Caribbean Sea and aid in protecting South America. The air base also

served as a forwarding depot for equipment that was being provided to U.S. allies as a result of the U.S. Lend-Lease Act of 1941.

It was an extremely isolated location—only the dirt roads and the river could be used to move supplies. Two officers and twenty-five enlisted men patrolled the air base, assisted by a Puerto Rican Guard Company and the native auxiliary military police. The American military police also patrolled a fenced-in area where the women civilian workers lived. The fenced compound was established to prevent and quell disturbances and stop unauthorized trespasses. In Georgetown, 12 military police were quartered in a local house. They patrolled the town to maintain order, arrested American military and civilian personnel, and checked boats that arrived from the air base.

From Alaska to Northern Ireland to South America, a few of the more than 200,000 World War II American military police enforced the law and maintained order gallantly and honorably. Performing duties in locations far from the theaters of war was extraordinarily tedious and did not always appear important, although their performance was critical to the war effort. Unusual locations could not reduce their dedication to their duty and their country.