

# Badges? We Don't Need No Stinkin' Badges!



By Colonel David P. Glaser and Major David A. Charbonneau

The line “Badges? We Don’t Need No Stinkin’ Badges!” basically originated with a 1927 novel<sup>1</sup> and has since surfaced in various forms in several films—most famously the 1974 Western parody *Blazing Saddles*.<sup>2</sup> And that statement seems to have been a popular, real-life sentiment of many members of the Military Police Corps a few years ago. However, other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies—including the Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force—do not appear to share this view. So do Army military police need badges? Do badges serve a purpose? And, if so, what purpose do they serve?

From discussions with scores of military police leaders and instructors at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, it is evident that the Military Police Corps emphasizes the development of Soldiers and future leaders for their role as *police professionals*.<sup>3</sup> Newly designated military police receive months of comprehensive training, where they acquire the police skills necessary to support garrison activities and participate in full spectrum operations. To reinforce professional conduct and provide the Army with capable, competent, and ethical law enforcement practitioners, the Office of the Provost Marshal General requires standardized annual law enforcement validation for Soldiers in operational assignments. Military police receive specialized positional training, and all courses include training in leadership and supervisory police skills. Given that the Military Police Corps is the professional policing branch of the Army—and given the level of emphasis, resources, and time placed on police skill development—why is it that the Army Military Police Corps is the only joint Service police organization in which the badge is not used as a universal symbol to denote and identify its practitioners as certified professionals? Where are our “stinkin’ badges?” (The Military Police Corps uses the badge, but not as a universal symbol of professional law enforcement.<sup>4</sup>)

The Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force issue badges to their active-service patrolmen and civilian police so that they may present themselves as law enforcement agents in the conduct of their duties, enhance their ability to network with outside agencies, and instill discipline and pride in themselves and their profession. Department of the Army (DA) civilian police are also issued badges for ease of identification during the conduct of their official law

enforcement duties. But the use of a separate identifier (the military police brassard) for Army military police Soldiers performing installation law enforcement duties creates the perception among their joint and civilian peers—as well as those they serve—that they are somehow less qualified.

In a recent discussion, a member of the Marine Corps stated, “When working with civilian, federal, and outside agencies, it’s kind of hard to be taken seriously by the fellow police officers when all you have to show is your standard military identification. The flat badges and credentials are designed to substantiate our role as law enforcement officers aboard military installations. On base at a PMO [provost marshal’s office], our [military police] do wear an issued badge . . . when on duty.” The Marine Corps representative added, “The badges exist to further reinforce to our [military police] that they are law enforcement officers. They serve as a constant reminder to our [military police] that their conduct is expected to be a cut above the rest of the Marine Corps because they are charged with enforcing the rules and regulations.”

In a profession with high standards, being viewed as a professional by those you serve and those with whom you serve is critical. As General Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently stated, “You are not a professional just because you say you are a professional.” Rather, professionals earn their credentials through accredited training and years of experience. If we as Army military police truly are police professionals and we want our Soldiers and leaders to carry themselves as such and to be recognized as such, then we as an organization must provide accredited training. Badges and credentials serve as recognition of that training and of the professionalism of those who have earned them.

In April 2010, the Civilian Police Academy, U.S. Army Military Police School (USAMPS), was accredited by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Agency, meaning that it is now recognized as a federal law enforcement institution. If USAMPS would do the same for its institutional program, military police Soldiers could be accredited as outlined in paragraph 5-2g, Army Regulation (AR) 190-56, *The Army Civilian Police and Security Guard Program*.<sup>5</sup> resulting in equilibrium under a single standard of accreditation, badging, and credentialing. Our Soldiers would have the opportunity (when actively working in a policing role) to carry the same

badge and credentials that our DA civilian police counterparts carry. The foundation for this proposal already exists in Advanced Individual Training, the Basic Officer Leader's Course, Office of the Provost Marshal General-directed annual sustainment and developmental training, and local training at installation PMOs. If properly packaged, all military police Soldiers could be accredited through these existing programs, raising our policing profile and level of recognition as professionals in joint, interagency, and multinational circles.

Isn't it time to bring back the badge—as part of our ongoing efforts to build professionalism within our unique competency, to tie badging to the same minimum-level certification standards to which our DA civilian police counterparts perform installation law enforcement, and to be recognized in the same manner as our similarly experienced joint and local police counterparts? Accredited badging and credentialing are powerful symbols of professionalism in the eyes of our police peers, those we serve and, just as importantly, ourselves—the proud, dedicated warrior police who are expected to perform the job of a military police professional.

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>B. Traven, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, 1927.

<sup>2</sup>*Blazing Saddles*, Warner Brothers, 1974.

<sup>3</sup>The *profession* (collectively) and the *professional* (individually) possess a body of knowledge and a repertoire of skills and behaviors (*professional culture*) necessary for the practice of a vocation; *professionalism* is often recognized by a formal certification for those working in the vocation.

<sup>4</sup>According to AR 190-56 (*The Army Civilian Police and Security Guard Program*, 15 October 2009), the police badge and credentials will be used in the performance of installation law enforcement duties for all certified police personnel.

<sup>5</sup>AR 190-56, 15 October 2009.



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