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MILITARY POLICE SELECTION: AGE VERSUS MATURITY

Submitted by Major Larry B. Berrong  
for credit as student study project

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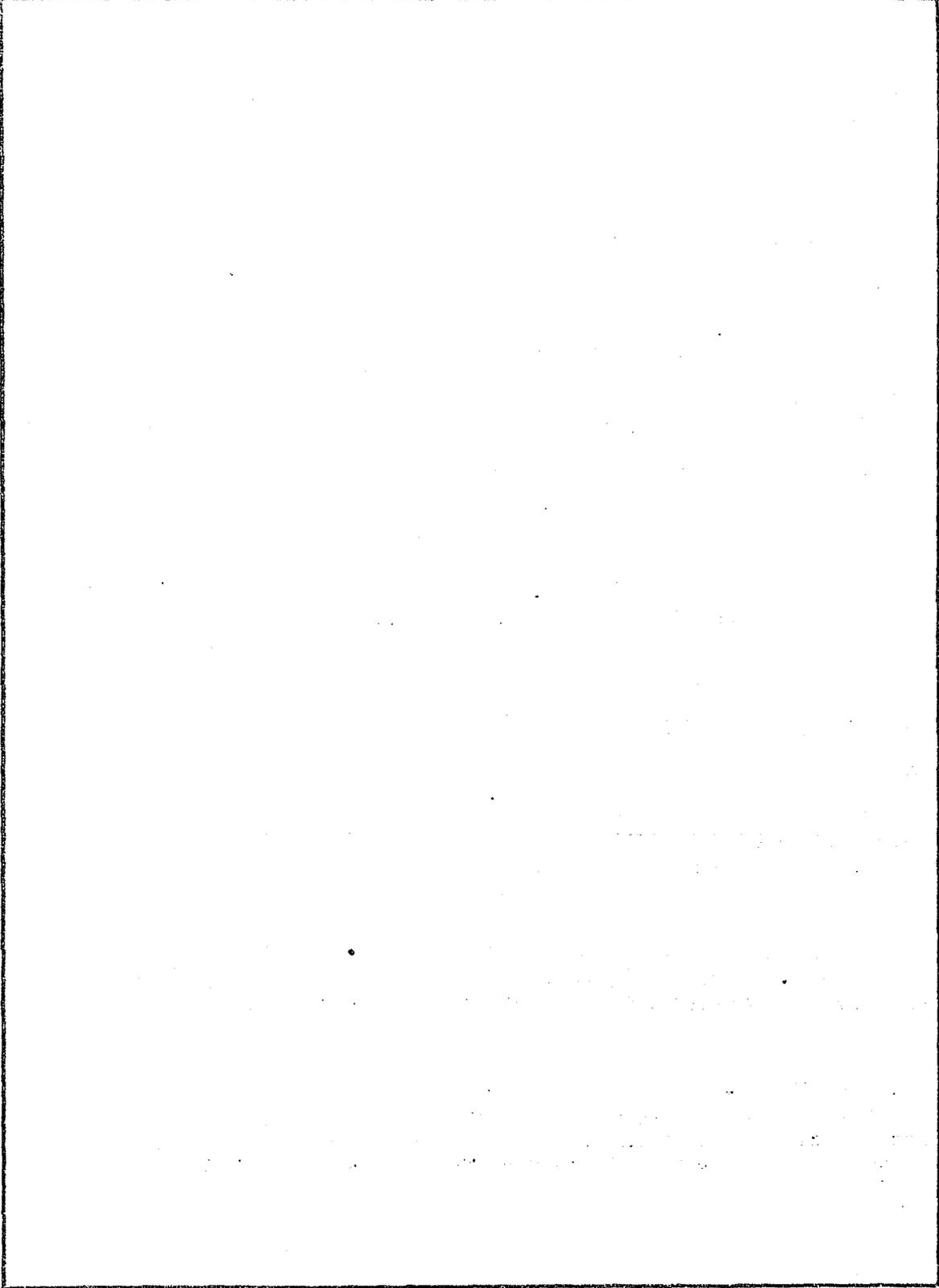
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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Military Police Corps and subsequently, the Army, is faced with a dilemma regarding personnel selection standards that must be resolved. It is that there is a growing concern that the 18-20 year old volunteer is too young for law enforcement duty. This age group on the other hand is the most readily available source of manpower.

This is not a new issue. It is an old one that has never been effectively put to rest and has received recent attention from the 1976 Task Group Report: Provost Marshal and Military Police Activities. The purpose of this paper is to informally examine the above report and other available information to see if there is truly reason at this point to question the ability of young men and women under 21 years of age to perform Military Police duties and to provide recommendations toward solving this problem.

To accomplish the stated purpose, I will discuss in Chapter 2, existing reports pertinent to the question and some information that I have compiled from data supplied by the Military Police School. Chapter 3 is a discussion of alternatives and Chapter 4 presents conclusions and recommendations.

## II. EXAMINATION OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION

### Presidents Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice

Although this report deals with civil law enforcement and not the military ~~per se~~, there is some pertinent information that transfers logically to our problem. If the word military were added at the appropriate points in the <sup>following</sup> excerpt, it could be mistaken for a passage from the Military Task Group Report discussed on page 3.

"The police personnel need that the Commission has found to be almost universal is improved quality. Generally, law enforcement personnel have met their difficult responsibilities with commendable zeal, determination and devotion to duty. However, the Commission surveys reflect that there is substantial variance in the quality of police personnel throughout the states."<sup>1</sup>

The basic measurement of quality recognized by this commission is education. They recommended that ultimately all police have Bachelor's degrees but realizing the limited capability of police departments to compete for and attract college graduates, proposed as an alternative, three levels of entry: community service officer, police officer, and police agent. Entry as a police agent would require at least 2 years of college, preferably a BS, or demonstrated performance on the job. Entry as a police officer would be under less stringent standards and the CSO would be a young man between 17 and 20 years old with a high school diploma. Responsibilities are

proposed commensurate with selection standards and ability.

In regard to age the Commission said:

"Most departments require that a recruit be between 21 and 35. Both limits are arbitrary, and the lower one undoubtedly keeps out of police work many young men, who are unwilling to wait 2 or 3 years<sup>2</sup> after graduating from high school to begin their careers."

The point that the 21 year old minimum keeps many people away who want law enforcement careers is an important one from two respects. The first is, of course, that a person who goes into another field after high school is unlikely to quit after three years to join the police ranks unless he has failed or is extremely dedicated to becoming a cop. More important the military can fill this three year gap and certainly does already in some cases. But we could use this as a selling point and hopefully attract some dedicated law enforcement types who would serve us for three years and return to civilian life as policemen or serve the initial three year enlistment and decide on the military as a life time career."

Task Group Report: Provost Marshal and  
Military Police Activities--An Assessment

The purpose of this report is to "provide the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff, United States Army, with an evaluation of the effectiveness of law enforcement activities in the Army and a proposed plan to correct deficiencies found in the evaluation."<sup>3</sup> One of the questions addressed is "What can be done, if necessary, to improve the quality, training, and management of military police personnel."<sup>4</sup> It is here that

we find information pertinent to our inquiry. Data was collected by surveying major commands (MACOMs) and selected commanders and staff officers.

Zeroing in specifically on age requirements--5 of 11 MACOMs feel that the minimum age for military police should be increased. The same number also recommended psychological testing, among other things, for perspective MPs. The feedback from the individual survey on the question regarding age criteria is reported verbatim below:

"(c) Item 36. What is Your Opinion of the Current Age Requirement (18 years) for the Military Police? This is one of the most obvious and clearly expressed needs in the entire survey. As Table 41 indicates, 19.5 percent of the respondents indicated the current age requirement should remain the same. 73.8 percent favored an increase in minimum age for military police personnel. Only .4 percent said the age requirement should be decreased.

TABLE 41

	<u>Absolute Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency (%)</u>
Remain same	246	19.5
Increase	932	73.8
Decrease	5	.4
No opinion	74	5.9
No response	6	.5
TOTAL	<u>1263</u>	<u>100.1</u>

These data reflect all categories of respondents in Tables 42 and 43 overwhelmingly in favor of increasing the minimum age level for military police. This observation correlates data from the Basic Law Enforcement Post Graduate Survey.

TABLE 42

	<u>BN-SQDN CDR</u>	<u>CO CDR</u>	<u>POST PII</u>
Remain same	18.4	18.5	20.2
Increase	72.4	76.3	75.0

	<u>BN-SQDN</u> <u>CDR</u>	<u>CO</u> <u>CDR</u>	<u>POST</u> <u>PM</u>
Decrease	0.4	0.2	2.4
No Opinion	8.7	5.0	2.4
TOTAL	<u>99.9</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>

TABLE 43

	<u>MP</u>	<u>Non-MP</u>	<u>Cbt-Arms</u>	<u>Cbt Svc Spt</u>
Remain Same	12.6	21.2	19.3	20.4
Increase	85.8	71.4	73.7	74.9
Decrease	.8	.3	.2	.7
No opinion	.8	7.1	6.8	4.0
TOTAL	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Age per se, infers maturity, wisdom and better judgment. The cause and effect relationship between age and emotional maturity is accepted almost axiomatically, perhaps more so in law enforcement than other fields. Some reasons given for favoring an older MP are that he has had additional time to form his character, make life-important decisions, and rid himself/herself of adolescent "wildness." Additionally, the older MP theoretically would have cracked through the crust of peer pressure that confines and influences the late teen years. However, accompanying review (Appendix Q) of 55 reported incidents of MP misconduct reveals that military police above 22 years are most frequently involved. The most significant point concerning the issue of age in Army law enforcement is the lack of precedent involving 18-year old police among other law enforcement bodies. There are few, if any, civilian law enforcement organizations that permit entry into the force at age 18. The issue involves the responsibility attendant to an individual on duty as a military police and several facts about that responsibility. First, he wields the authority of the service which means he may legitimately use force to deprive a person of his/her freedom. Second, he/she has at their discretion the means of deadly force (a firearm and club) for use in duty. Third, the police is able, by virtue of position, to gain unquestioned access to essentially any area within their jurisdiction. There are no other fields of endeavor that can duplicate these responsibilities and very few fields of any type that would entrust responsibilities even remotely approximating those cited above to a youth of 18-years. The data in response to this item clearly indicated that field supervisors appreciate the factors which mitigate for increase in the MP entry age level."

Two points are significant when reviewing the preceding--there is no specific evidence that people over 21 can do a better job.

just a suspicion that people below 21 are not sufficiently mature to handle such "overwhelming" responsibility. Herein is the crux of the issue--is age related to maturity?

Secondly, although five of the MACOMs perceive a need to increase the minimum age standard for MPs, 11 of the 12 reported satisfaction with MP's handling of stress situation--tasks often associated with maturity and, by some people's reasoning, consequently, age.

Because of its interest value, the following question and response are also presented verbatim:

"(5) Item 53. What is Your Overall Assessment of the Quality of the Military Police Personnel at Your Present Assignment? Interpretation of this question centers on what is to be accepted as "good" or "bad" when related to military police. Is the assessment of "fair" satisfactory or are military police required to be "good" or "better" before accepted as effective? The data provide an answer. Table 65 reveals 69.3 percent of the respondents rated military police personnel quality as good or excellent. 21.9 percent rated personnel quality as fair. 6.0 percent rated personnel quality as poor.

TABLE 65

	<u>Absolute Frequency</u>	<u>Relative Frequency (%)</u>
Excellent	264	20.9
Good	611	48.4
Fair	277	21.9
Poor	76	6.0
No opinion	10	.8
No response	25	2.0
TOTAL	<u>1263</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Obviously, a majority of respondents is satisfied with MP effectiveness. Depending on the interpretation of "fair", a problem area is or is not indicated. For the purpose of this interpretation, "fair" will be considered unacceptable military police performance. In short, the military police are "just fair" to a significant number of respondents, notable non-MP, combat arms commanders (Tables 66 and 67).<sup>6</sup>

US Army Military Police School  
(USAMPS) Attrition Rate

In searching for relevant data, I felt it may be helpful to examine attrition from law enforcement training at USAMPS to determine if it had any correlation to age. The results are interesting.

The target audience consists of male students who started training during the 7T-Quarter 1976. Data are presented in relative percentages in Table 1 for comparison of the different age groups one to the other. I did not compute Chi Square between age groups but this may be desirable if a similar survey of a larger sample size, for example, a whole year, were included in a more detailed study.

Table 1 Attrition from Law Enforcement Training

By Age for 7T-Quarter

<u>Age</u>	<u>Number Started Training</u>	<u>Number Attrited</u>	<u>% Attrited</u>
17	7	4	57.00
18	967	114	11.78
19	527	79	14.99
20	235	45	19.19
21	174	31	17.81
22	130	17	13.07
23	94	11	11.70
24	54	9	16.66
25-29	161	16	.09
31-39	42	3	.07
TOTALS	2391	329	13.71

Table 2 below compares three age groupings for a little different perspective:

Table 2 Attrition from Law Enforcement Training

By Age Grouping for FY7T

<u>AGE</u>	<u>Number Started Training</u>	<u>Number Attrited</u>	<u>% Attrited</u>
17-20	1736	242	13.94
21-30	622	86	13.58
31-39	22	1	.04
TOTALS	2391	329	13.71

The 18 year old age group shows very favorably when compared to the overall attrition rate. There also is little difference between attrition rates when comparing the 17-20 year old group to the 21-30 year old group. In training at least (based on this modest sample) the individual under 21, especially the 18 year old, appears to be on a par with those older.

Probably the most critical statistic is that 72.60% of all males trained in the 7<sup>T</sup>-Quarter were 20 and under. I do not know if this is indicative of a year's cycle, but if it is, how could this age group be replaced? Is there an alternative source for this large amount of manpower?

This survey is admittedly not very scientific but it does offer a feel for how well students do by age group in law enforcement training. Some interesting questions are also posed. Why does the 18 year old apparently do so well? Possibly because he is fresh from the high school academic environment and maybe is still in good condition from high school athletics are reasons. Also, he probably finished high school and according to recruiters, his chances are good for making a good soldier.

Why are attrition percentages higher for the 19 and 20 year old? They are a little longer removed from academia--maybe did not finish high school--(Speculation)--and are coming in the Army because they have failed in civilian work or were not particularly

happy doing what they were doing. A more detailed study of this type could provide these and other answers.

### III. DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVES

There seem to be three alternatives. Listed in the order that I will discuss them, they are: maintain the current age minimum for MPs with no changes; raise the age minimum to some hypothetical optimum age; or maintain the 18 year old age minimum with modifications.

#### Maintain the Current Age Minimum

There is a definite perception among military police officers that younger MPs are less mature and less able to cope than older MPs. This is demonstrated by the Task Group Report: Provost Marshal and Military Police Activities and it is confirmed by a survey in which I participated while assigned to USAMPS during the summer of 1973. As a base for designing the Basic Law Enforcement course, we surveyed over 3,000 MPs and supervisors throughout the world. On site surveys were conducted for 32 units. Repeatedly Provost Marshals and other supervisors mentioned immaturity and inability to cope with stress as problem areas in MP performance. Often times this was associated with age.

In spite of the wide spread view that the under-21 year old MP is less mature, it is difficult if not impossible to find enough specific examples of this to establish it as fact. To pursue the point further, I informally interviewed fellow MP classmates and most of them concurred with their peers in the field.

Again, however, no specific examples of this being demonstrated were mentioned. A frequent comeback when I challenged their unsupported position was--how many civil police departments use 18 year old cops?

Two facts are unquestionable--maturity is essential for police work and <sup>not</sup> all of our MPs in the field are ~~not~~ mature. Some under-21-year old MPs fall into this category as do some who are older. I would not speculate on the ratios but I do suspect that where there is so much smoke that there must be some fire. More bluntly stated--it is unlikely that so many law enforcement professionals would share the view that younger MPs are less mature without some basis. This is tempered, however, by my belief that part of this attitude is a socialized prejudice against "youngsters" under 21.

#### Raise the Age Minimum

The first step in raising the age minimum would be to determine the optimum age. At what age does one achieve maturity?

The second step would be to identify a source of manpower to meet the needs of the MP Corps.

People below 21 years of age fill a large part of our manpower needs. If the trainee input at USAMPS during the 7<sup>th</sup> Quarter is any indication, 70% of the people entering the MP Corps are under 21 years of age. This fact alone negates this as a practical solution at this time.

#### Maintain the Age Minimum with Modifications

Maintaining the current age minimum has been discussed in preceding paragraphs--what remains is the "with modifications."

If maturity is one of the desired characteristics of an MP, then ultimately what we should strive to do is to weed out the immature, regardless of age. Age then is not the determining factor--rather it is maturity.

How then do we identify those who are sufficiently mature to cope with the responsibilities of law enforcement work? This could be accomplished through a combination of means to include psychological testing, more intensive background investigations and a period of probation for the first six months of duty as an MP. This could be the subject of a study in itself.

When we have mastered the ability to identify those whom we would want as MPs the next step is to attract them. An agreement between civil and military police to allow credit for military training and experience would be of immeasurable value to this purpose. Such an arrangement was discussed at one time with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). They, in fact, initiated the discourse, however ~~halted~~ when the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) failed to fund the project. Such an arrangement would be a great inducement to qualified, motivated high school graduates to enter the Army for three years until they could join civil police forces. My bet is that many of them would stay with us.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

##### Conclusions

The 18-20 year old age group provides an irreplaceable source of manpower for the military police corps. VOLAR dictates this fact of life. Furthermore the qualified 18 year old straight out of high school who is interested in a law enforcement career may be the optimum raw recruit to mold into an MP. He is motivated and tracking with his chosen profession. We should actively recruit these people and a co-ordinated system sponsored jointly by the military and civil police organizations could be a great help to this end.

Maturity is a first order prerequisite for MPs. Every effort must be made to insure that the people we allow to become MPs are qualified to cope with the stress and complexities of the job. This can be accomplished, not by arbitrarily discriminating against some segment of the population or age group, but rather by a positive screening process consisting of psychological testing, background investigation and trial on the job or probation.

##### Recommendations

1. Identify or develop psychological testing that will assist in the selection of individuals sufficiently mature to cope with the stress and demands of MP duty without regard to age.
2. Investigate the feasibility of establishing an agreement

with civil law enforcement agencies which would provide for transfer of credit for MP training and experience when transitioning from a military to a civil law enforcement career.

3. Actively recruit high school graduates who are interested in law enforcement careers using the civil-military agreement as enticement.

4. Employ background investigations and a probation period in conjunction with psychological testing to screen prospective Military Police.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>President's Commission, Challenge of Crime in a Free Society, (US Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.) p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>3</sup>Department of the Army, Task Group Report: Provost Marshal and Military Police Activities--An Assessment, Vol. I, p. ii.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 41-43.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

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