
Military Police Heroism

By Mr. Andy Watson

On 31 January 1968, North Vietnamese Forces, primarily consisting of Vietcong guerrillas, began the first of several waves of coordinated attacks on all major South Vietnamese cities. Later named the Tet Offensive, these assaults influenced the course of American involvement in Vietnam. In cities and towns, street corners became ambush sites as alleys and the U.S. Embassy became combat zones. Bravely facing these surprise attacks and defeating them was a job readily undertaken by the Soldiers of the Military Police Corps. The Soldiers recognized in this article are just a few of those heroes.

Sergeant Michael A. Grieve and Private First Class Roland M. Bowen

Silver Star

As military police reaction teams answered calls for assistance, ambush sites appeared throughout Saigon, including the Phu Tho racetrack.

Sergeant Michael A. Grieve and Private First Class Roland M. Bowen served in Company A, 716th Military Police Battalion. During the battle for Saigon on 31 January 1968, they were serving as members of a military police alert team on a reaction mission.¹ After securing billets in the Cholon/Tan Son Nhut area, the patrol was called to support a fellow unit that was under heavy attack at the Phu Tho racetrack.² However, before reaching the battle site, the patrol was attacked and its jeep was disabled. As personnel in the jeep sought cover, Sergeant Grieve and Private First Class Bowen disregarded their own safety and braved enemy fire to remove the machine gun from the jeep.³ They then advanced 25 meters on the enemy, firing the gun despite bullets striking all around.⁴ The machine gun barrage allowed other military policemen from the patrol to maneuver out of the ambush site. While the covering fire saved their comrades, both Sergeant Grieve and Private First Class Bowen were mortally wounded. In recognition of their gallantry and selfless service, Sergeant Grieve and Private First Class Bowen were posthumously awarded Silver Stars.

Staff Sergeant Herman Holness

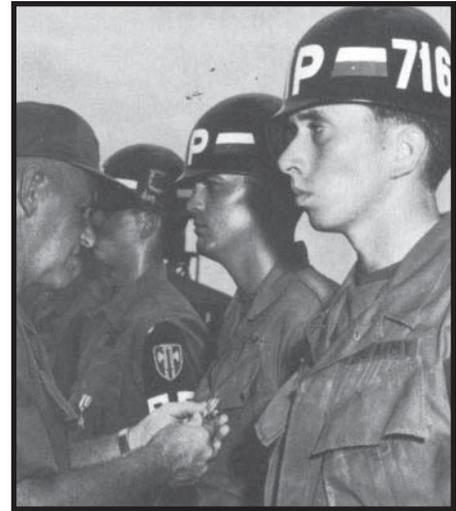
Silver Star

Staff Sergeant Herman Holness served in Company C, 52d Infantry, 716th Military Police Battalion. Company C, along with other infantry rifle companies, was assigned to the 716th Military Police Battalion and the 18th Military Police Brigade to reinforce security forces. These Soldiers performed numerous tasks and duties alongside their military police counterparts. Security guard duty and work with the military police led to "SG" markings on their helmet liners and brassards. On 31 January 1968, Staff Sergeant Holness was part of a reaction force sent to relieve a fellow unit that was under attack in the vicinity of the Phu Tho racetrack.⁵ While moving through the city, the lead vehicle of his unit was attacked by Vietcong forces using mines and machine guns.⁶ The men in the vehicle were seriously wounded and trapped out in the open. Staff Sergeant Holness advanced to the disabled vehicle and caught the attention of the enemy, who diverted fire to his location, allowing the wounded men to exit the vehicle. When Staff Sergeant Holness reached cover behind the vehicle, he returned fire on the enemy position with devastating effect. While still under enemy fire, he began pulling the wounded Soldiers to safety.⁷ Although badly injured himself, Staff Sergeant Holness refused medical aid until his fellow Soldiers had been evacuated.⁸ In recognition of his selfless service, Staff Sergeant Holness was awarded the Silver Star.

Specialist Charles R. Miller
Silver Star

After vehicles of a military police reaction force are ambushed with mines and machine guns, an extremely violent clash ensues. The ambush, firefight, and numerous rescue attempts during the alley fight near Bachelor Officer Quarters (BOQ) 3 resulted in sixteen military police killed in action and another twenty-one wounded.

Specialist Charles R. Miller served with Company B, 716th Military Police Battalion. On 31 January 1968, his unit was patrolling Saigon late at night when they responded to a call to provide reinforcements at a BOQ under attack.⁹ Racing to the area, Specialist Miller's vehicle was attacked and rendered inoperable.¹⁰ Although injured and soaked with gasoline, Specialist Miller assumed an exposed position near his fiercely burning vehicle and delivered deadly fire upon the Vietcong to cover the exit of the vehicle by a fellow Soldier.¹¹ Specialist Miller then found cover behind a tree and continued his attack against the ambushing force until forced to withdraw and seek medical attention.¹² For gallantry in combat and rendering assistance to a fellow Soldier in peril, Specialist Miller was awarded the Silver Star.



General Creighton Abrams pins the Silver Star on Specialist Miller (center).

First Lieutenant Gerald L. Waltman
Silver Star

First Lieutenant Gerald L. Waltman served with Company C, 716th Military Police Battalion. On 31 January 1968, after receiving reports of enemy activity near BOQ 3, a military police reaction team was dispatched to the area. While proceeding down an alley to engage the enemy, the lead vehicle of the reaction force was hit by a mine, with rocket and machine gun fire soon following.¹³ First Lieutenant Waltman organized a small squad of volunteers to attempt a rescue of the wounded men trapped in the vehicle still under enemy fire.¹⁴



Military police move into the alley behind BOQ 3.

As First Lieutenant Waltman led the squad toward the burning vehicle, the rescue was halted due to intense enemy fire. First Lieutenant Waltman then directed an attack on the enemy emplacement in a nearby building.¹⁵ As his squad entered the building, a rocket-propelled grenade exploded into the structure, injuring all but one of the men. Grimly acknowledging that the original rescue attempt could not proceed, First Lieutenant Waltman ignored his own injuries, calmly reassured his men, and led them out of the Vietcong entrapment under the cover of U.S. helicopter rocket fire.¹⁶ For his leadership and as an example of courage under fire, First Lieutenant Waltman was awarded the Silver Star.

Specialist Ronald P. Kendall
Silver Star

Specialist Ronald P. Kendall served with Company C, 716th Military Police Battalion. On 31 January 1968, following an attack on BOQ 3, the reaction force of military police sent to engage the enemy was ambushed. After the lead truck was attacked with mines, rockets, and machine gun fire, the focus of the mission was altered to save the wounded and trapped Soldiers in the disabled vehicle. Specialist Kendall was driving the second vehicle in the reaction force and immediately maneuvered into the alley to rescue the stranded and wounded Soldiers.¹⁷ While still under an intense enemy barrage, Specialist Kendall positioned his vehicle to protect his comrades. Wounded in the process, he ignored his injury and helped two of the most seriously wounded military police Soldiers out of the killing zone.¹⁸

When informed that his unit was repositioning to another location, Specialist Kendall returned to the alley to recover his truck.¹⁹ Refusing to turn back, he made his way to the truck and drove it clear of the alley, despite continuous and concentrated enemy fire. For saving his fellow Soldiers and exhibiting bravery in extreme circumstances, Specialist Kendall was awarded the Silver Star.

First Lieutenant Frank Ribich, Bronze Star for Valor,
and Private First Class Paul V. Healey, Distinguished Service Cross

The battle to recapture the grounds of the U.S. Embassy and the resulting images became iconic for the Military Police Corps in Vietnam.

Although featured in previous issues of *Military Police*, one cannot omit the following heroes—First Lieutenant Frank Ribich and Private First Class Paul V. Healey—who served in connection with the assault on the U.S. Embassy. First Lieutenant Ribich, who served with the 527th Military Police Company, led the military police team to recapture the embassy. Ribich’s determined leadership and courage under fire were essential to the mission. For his actions, First Lieutenant Ribich was awarded the Bronze Star for Valor. Private First Class Healey, who served with Company B, 716th Military Police Battalion, eliminated numerous Vietcong from the embassy grounds with skill and perseverance. For his actions, Private First Class Healey was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

Sergeant John H. Shook
Silver Star

Sergeant John H. Shook served with Company B, 716th Military Police Battalion. On 31 January 1968, Sergeant Shook was a member of the team assembled to retake the grounds of the U.S. Embassy. When the doors of the embassy compound were opened, Sergeant Shook led a charge into the bullet-swept enclosure.²⁰ Braving enemy fire and grenades, he moved from position to position within the courtyard of the embassy, killing Vietcong insurgents with rifle fire.²¹ Sergeant Shook also assisted a trapped embassy officer, braving open ground to send riot gas grenades to the officer and then directing his comrades’ fire on the enemy.²² Sergeant Shook was awarded the Silver Star in recognition of his “fearless and aggressive efforts” during the assault at the U.S. Embassy.²³



Military police pause near the U.S. Embassy after its recapture.

Specialist Leon J. Shrum
Silver Star

Although Saigon received most of the attention in the massive offensive, there were numerous other cities that became targets of the Vietcong as well.

Specialist Leon J. Shrum served with the 148th Military Police Platoon, 95th Military Police Battalion. On 31 January 1968, Specialist Shrum and fellow military police Soldiers from the 148th were defending My Tho against attacks by the Vietcong. While moving to engage a portion of the guerilla force within the city, a reconnaissance patrol was ambushed by a much larger force and trapped at a street intersection.²⁴ Responding to a call for assistance, Specialist Shrum volunteered to carry a supply of machine gun ammunition to the overwhelmed troops.²⁵ Under enemy fire and across approximately 250 meters of open ground, Specialist Shrum rushed the ammunition to the ambushed patrol.²⁶ While aiding the patrol members in repelling the attacks, Specialist Shrum was mortally wounded. For his actions in preventing further casualties in the ambush and for his selfless service in immediate danger, Specialist Shrum was posthumously awarded the Silver Star.

Endnotes:

¹“General Orders No. 974: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 2 March 1968.

²Ibid.

³“General Orders No. 1103: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 13 March 1968.

⁴Ibid.

⁵“General Orders No. 1133: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 15 March 1968.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹“General Orders No. 1234: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 21 March 1968.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³“General Orders No. 1137: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 15 March 1968.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷“General Orders No. 1235: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 21 March 1968.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰“General Orders No. 1135: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 15 March 1968.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴“General Orders No. 1216: Silver Star Citation,” Headquarters, U.S. Army Vietnam, 20 March 1968.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

Mr. Watson is the U.S. Army Military Police School historian.

Voices of Experience

The military police historian, Mr. Andy Watson, is currently conducting audio and video interviews with 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 or those of your unit, please contact Mr. Watson via e-mail at <ATSJSH@wood.army.mil> or telephone at (573) 563-5440.