

VANGUARD: HISTORY OF THE 972D MILITARY POLICE COMPANY

By Sergeant Matthew P. Ahern

Soldiers of the U.S. Army Military Police Corps Regiment strive to uphold the regimental motto—*Assist, Protect, Defend*. Established after the inception of the Corps on 26 September 1941, this motto has long been embodied by Soldiers fulfilling military police duties. These words are particularly emphasized within the context of the Army National Guard portion of the Military Police Corps Regiment, considering the critical roles that these Soldiers have in defending the home front in times of emergency. Given the expeditionary nature of their mission set, U.S. Army special operations forces are often referred to as the “tip of the spear.” In this context, Army National Guard military police are the center of America’s shield. They are the backbone of the Nation’s defense, serving as protectors on the home front; frontline responders during extraordinary emergencies; and a deployable force ready to defend the United States and allied elements abroad. These qualities are exemplified in the history and current operations of the 972d Military Police Company, Massachusetts National Guard.

The 972d Military Police Company was established in Gloucester, Massachusetts, in 1787 and is older than the Military Police Corps Regiment by nearly 200 years. In 1861, upon the Confederate firing on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, the 972d (known then as Company G, 8th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment) was among the first units in the Nation to answer President Abraham Lincoln’s call for state militias to help suppress the rebellion. Within days, the company was routed to Washington, D.C., to defend the Nation’s capital. The unit played a critical role in securing the U.S.S. *Constitution* from secessionists occupying Annapolis, Maryland, and was ultimately staged in the U.S. Capitol during the opening days of the Civil War. For their swift, protective action in responding to this national emergency, the Soldiers of Company G earned the moniker “Minutemen of 1861.” A century before the *Assist, Protect, Defend* motto was formalized, the 972d embodied those values—and it continues to do so today.

Over the past half-decade, the 972d Military Police Company has been known for its constant presence and its swift and robust response during local and national emergencies. It participated in COVID-19 relief efforts and was the first Army National Guard unit to put boots on the ground during the 2020 summer of civil disturbance in Boston, Massachusetts. It stood by, ready to respond if civil unrest and disorder were to occur during the 2020 national elections. And, facing fears of a correctional officer shortage in 2021, it was activated as a part of a task force established to aid Massachusetts Department of Corrections staff in maintaining unchecked operations of the state prison system.



8th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment in the Capitol Rotunda

The 972d Military Police Company is one of the few military units that has twice been called to defend the U.S. Capitol—first in 1861 and then again on 6 January 2021, as part of the swift response force summoned in the aftermath of the Capitol riot, where it augmented local law enforcement agencies and provided law enforcement training to nonmilitary police units activated alongside it.

Today, the 972d protects the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by providing an annual presence at the “First Muster,” held on the Salem Common; the Boston Marathon (where it augments local police departments along the 26.2-mile route); and the Independence Day celebrations, held at the Charles River Esplanade. The 972d safeguards against potential threats, acts as a deterring force, and assists local agencies in maintaining peace. Its commitment to the values of the Military Police Corps Regiment goes beyond the expectations of traditional Army National Guard Soldiers.

“Vanguard” is now the callsign of the 972d Military Police Company; that code name describes the constant role of the company in being among the first to respond to emergencies. Repeated quick and robust responses are the key factors that allow the 972d to effectively carry out the *Assist, Protect, Defend* motto, regardless of the circumstances. Whether referencing the “Minutemen of 1861” or the “Vanguard” of today, the 972d Military Police Company is among the first line of protection for the Massachusetts Commonwealth during times of crisis.



Sergeant Ahern was previously a team leader and unit historian for the 972d Military Police Company. He currently serves with the 126th Military History Detachment.