



History of Railway Protection Force

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) is an *Armed Force of the Union* of India entrusted with protecting railway passengers, passenger area and railway property of the Indian Railways. This is the only armed force of the Union of India which has power to arrest, investigate and prosecute criminals. In common parlance the Force is referred to as RPF. The Force is under the authority of Ministry of Railways, Government of India. RPF is headed by Director General (DG). Ms. Sonali Mishra, an IPS officer of the 1993 batch of Madhya Pradesh Cadre has been appointed as DG from August 2025.

OBJECTIVES OF RPF

- Carry on an unrelenting fight against criminals in protecting railway passengers, passenger area and railway property.
- Facilitate passenger-travel and security by removing all anti-social elements from trains, railway premises and passenger area.
- Remain vigilant to prevent trafficking in women and children and take appropriate action to rehabilitate destitute children found in Railway areas.
- Co-operate with other departments of the Railways in improving the efficiency and image of the Indian Railways.
- Act as a bridge between the Government Railway Police/local police and the Railway administration.
- Adopt proactively all modern technology, best human rights practices, management techniques and special measures for protection of female and elderly passengers and children, in the pursuit of these objectives.

The origin of this force was 'Watch & Ward' and functioned under the administrative control of railway administration. Later on, this force was renamed as Railway Protection Force and its members were provided with the power of arrest without warrant for the unlawful possession of railway property. The term railway property included only the properties owned by the railway administration. In due course of time, the definition for the term Railway Property was extended and it included the properties owned by, or in the charge of or entrusted with the railways. The offenders are booked under the Railway Property (Unlawful Possession) Act 1966 which is shortly known as RP(UP) Act 1966. Now the Railway Protection Force has a separate administrative system and functions under the general supervision of the Railway Administration.

EVOLUTION OF RPF

1855-1861

The maintenance and security of Railways, the vital artery of national communication and economic progress has been a major concern of the Government of India that goes back to the times when the Railway commenced their operations in India in 1854. Since railways have a linear territory traversing inter-state lines, a foolproof security system has been hard to provide. Nevertheless, the genesis of such an endeavor can be traced back to 1854 when East Indian Railways employed certain staff designated as 'Police' to denote its own force by enacting the Police Act, 1861 and deployed a contingent for the security of the railway with the owner companies bearing their upkeep. The Railway Companies exercised full control over the Police Force.

1861-1956

On the recommendation of Railway Police Committee, 1872, Railway Police was organized into 'Govt. Police' (precursor of GRP) for Law enforcement and 'Company Police' (precursor of RPF) for Watch and Ward duties in Railways. The actual separation of duties came into effect in 1881. By 1882, as a result of formal division of the Police Force deployed on the railways into "Government Police" and "Private (Companies) Police", the Railway Companies directly assumed the responsibility of protection and Security of their property as well as of the goods entrusted to them by public for carriage. For this, they appointed "Chowkidars" for various departments and placed them under control of their local departmental heads. With an increase in commercial traffic and consequential steep rise in the incidence of theft of goods entrusted to railways for carriage, the "Chowkidar" system was reorganized after the first World War into Watch & Ward organization under a single superior officer designated as Superintendent, Watch & Ward – a system which continued up to 1954. Thus the Railway Police Administration functioned under three different systems viz the district system, as a part of District Police; the provincial system, for each province and the Railway Administration system, separate Railway Police for each Railway Administration inspite of recommendations of Indian Police commission, 1902-03. The provincial system found acceptance on recommendation of Railway Police Committee, 1921 and the present GRP came into existence. The 'Company Police' evolved into present RPF in 1957 passing through "Watch and Ward" phase from 1872-1954, and as "Railway Security Force" from 1954-1956. RPF was also given limited legal powers under Railway Stores (Unlawful Possession) Act.

1957-1985

Thus, for a full 100 years, the Force though being used for providing security to the vital artery of national communication and economic progress did not itself have any legislative status. Therefore, the Govt. instituted a special enquiry through Director, Intelligence Bureau (Ministry of Home Affairs) who in his report in 1954 forcefully brought out the necessity of organising the Watch & Ward on a statutory basis. The Railway Board also appointed a Security Adviser to the Railway Board in July, 1953 to work out the details for the reorganisation of the Watch & Ward department. It was decided in consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs that there should be an integrated well organised force on the model of the Police with adequate supervisory staff specially trained to meet the particular aspects of crime that were relevant to Railway property and to work in close collaboration and act as a second line to the States Police with whom, under the Constitution, policing on Railways rested. This led to the R.P.F. Bill for the better protection and security. It was only on 29 August 1957 that a Railway Protection Force Act was enacted by the Parliament and Railway Security Force was renamed as Railway Protection Force. The RPF Rules were made on 10 September 1959 and RPF Regulations were formulated in 1966. In the meantime in 1962 "Special Emergency Force" has been raised from the existing strength of RPF during Chinese Aggression, which was especially entrusted the task to protect trains in border districts. In 1965 it has been renamed as "Railway Protection Special Force" (RPSF). In 1966 RPF has been given legal powers for better protection of Railway property by enacting Railway Property (Unlawful Possession.) Act. This Act was further amended during the year 2012 and those provisions were made more effective.

But, while the provisions of RPF Act were soon found wanting for the maintenance of an effective and disciplined Force, the RPF Rules and Regulations too were found judicially unsound. The RPF Act, 1957 was accordingly modified by Parliament vide Act No.60 of 1985 on 20 September 1985 for the constitution and maintenance of the Force as an armed force of the Union. For carrying out the purposes of the Act, RPF Rules 1987 was framed. The RPF Act was again amended during the year 2003 widening the scope of responsibility entrusted to the Railway Protection Force to the protection of Passengers and Passenger Area, in addition to protection of Railway Property.