



# The 1930s

The men who formed the Ohio State Highway Patrol early in the 20th century had a vision – one that transcended politics; one that showed compassion and sincerity; one that promoted the safety and welfare of Ohioans.

But first, the idea of a statewide law enforcement agency had to be sold to state legislators. It wasn't an easy task.

In Ohio, bills to form a state-based police force were introduced on several occasions, beginning in 1917. Senator Henry W. Davis, 23rd District (Mahoning and Trumbull counties), introduced bills to create a "Department of State Police" in 1917 and 1919. But labor opposition and general consensus that the public did not believe a state police would be permanent defeated these bills.

A rewrite of the Davis Bills was introduced by Representative Justin Harding, Warren County, in 1921, calling for a "rural state police force." Citing violent labor activity which occurred in late 1919, supporters paraded a host of luminaries before the legislature to speak in favor of the measure, including the superintendent of the Pennsylvania State Police. Again,

support was insufficient to overcome labor concerns, and the House voted the measure down by a 60 to 45 margin.

In the 1920s, support for a uniform state police force continued to grow. In 1923, an initiative to create a "Highway Police Force" was introduced, but was only one section of a larger bill. The Committee on Highways substituted the "Highway Police Force" provision with one to pay sheriffs additional money to hire deputies for highway duty. Other measures proposed during this time offered compromises, including: a police force with limited powers; committees rather than a single man to oversee the department; and no power in labor disputes. Each was defeated for reasons such as organized labor opposition, cost concerns, disagreements among supporters on how to set up and operate the force, and the opposition of Governor Vic Donahey.

Supporters of a bill to create a "Division of Public Safety" under the Department of Commerce in 1929 cited the general issue of crime in Ohio and the argument that Ohio was becoming known as a safe haven for criminals. This bill passed

**Camp Perry lieutenants on Nov. 15, 1933: from left – Earl L. Jackson, Ralph S. Harrod, Paul H. Atzel, Superintendent Lynn E. Black, Samuel K. Wood, Walter P. Creviston, and Karl E. Bushong,**





**Pennsylvania State Police and Camp Perry Instructor Lt. James Marshall steers the motorcycle, while Ohio Department of Highways Director O.W. Merrell accompanies him in the sidecar in 1933.**

the Senate, but died in the House. Another bill calling for the formation of a “safety police” was introduced in 1931, but it died in committee due to the cost.

With each failure to create a uniform state policing authority, support was substantially increased. An increasingly mobile society was becoming more than traditional law enforcement could keep up with, especially in the area of traffic control. The reelection of Governor George White and sweeping Democratic victories throughout the state were read as a mandate for major changes. The support of Governor White for a state law enforcement agency made the creation of such a force inevitable.

In 1933, the 90th General Assembly considered the Bill which eventually created the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Introduced by Representative Hugh A. McNamee, Cuyahoga County, HB 270 outlined a highway patrol which would enforce: state laws relating to registration and licensing of motor vehicles; laws relating to motor vehicle use and operation on the highways; and all laws for the protection of highways. Very important to the passage of the bill was a provision prohibiting use of the Patrol in labor disputes and strikes. The bill also stipulated that the force would be limited to 60 officers who were between the ages of 24 and 40 years and placed under a \$2,500 performance bond.

After years of failed bills, legislators finally passed HB 270 in 1933, creating Ohio’s first statewide policing

bureau. One month later, the Ohio Senate also approved the bill creating the Highway Patrol. Governor White signed the measure that same day with a June 30 effective date. Opponents of the Patrol proposed a referendum to nullify the bill creating the Patrol, but it was struck down on a technicality by the Ohio Supreme Court on September 20, 1933.

The two State Department of Highways employees working behind the scenes and inside the legislative halls were O.W. “Whitey” Merrell and Harry Neal. Merrell would, in 1931, become director of the highway department and Neal the traffic bureau director.

Merrell, who many retirees refer to as the “grand-daddy” of the Patrol, knew how to make things happen. It was he who made possible the purchase of radio equipment, the building of barracks at Findlay, Massillon, Wilmington and Cambridge, and the coordination of early training facilities. Merrell’s background included tough negotiation and hard work in highway contracting, but he was known to relax while playing piano in the evening, according to William Newton’s newspaper editorial. “He smokes constantly, drinks little, and suffers from a tricky stomach, which he babies with bicarbonate of soda,” the 1930s article states.

Merrell graduated with a degree in engineering from The Ohio State University and spent some time as a plumber’s apprentice. “Sensitive about his real name – Otho Walter – he has his friends call him ‘Whitey,’ or ‘Spider,’ a name he was given when, as a



**Colonel Lynn E. Black stands in front of a very early Patrol vehicle – a mobile emergency radio vehicle – with unidentified local official, circa 1938.**

plumber's apprentice, he asked to climb inside huge boilers," the article states.

Neal took responsibility for badge design. He assigned the task to Mr. Joseph Goldberg, an engineer in Neal's Safety Department. The "Flying Wheel" badge design, partially inspired by a study of others, originally was Goldberg's idea. "What was important was to think up a simple design that would fit conveniently on a shoulder patch and signify every thing pertaining to the Patrol," Goldberg said in a 1983 interview.

Goldberg's solution was to combine the wings of the Roman god Mercury, to denote speed, with the wheel, to represent traffic law enforcement. But Neal's reaction to the design was lukewarm. "He kept asking me if those were the wings of a duck or the wings of an eagle," Goldberg said.

Goldberg also designed the Patrol's badge, with an eagle for freedom on the top, the State Capitol dome below, the state seal in the center and a staff of rods on each side. In 50 years, the only change in the badge was to replace the word "patrolman" with "trooper" when the first woman joined the Patrol's sworn ranks in 1977.

Both Neal and Merrell worked diligently with Governor George White to create the new law enforcement agency. Their vision was to create an organization that would keep state highways safe and curb growing rural

crime rates.

Despite the time it took to get things started, Merrell and Neal were confident the Patrol would survive any obstacles. In fact, they already had Goldberg at work on the insignia and badge design, and also had selected uniforms and equipment, set a training agenda, selected statewide operational base locations, and identified a possible superintendent.

Still, many administrative issues remained unaddressed, and Merrell and Neal knew they needed someone immediately. They chose six-year Highway Department employee, Fred "Fritz" Moritz (who later became the Division's third superintendent) to serve as assistant superintendent. Moritz, who had distinguished himself as a talented administrator and knowledgeable in legislative matters, was endorsed by Neal for his conspicuous concern for traffic safety, and as an "inside man" to watch over the new department.

Captain Lynn E. Black was Merrell's choice for heading up the Patrol. Merrell's policy of courteous and fair treatment of the public meshed well with Black's emphasis on motorist assistance. Black and Merrell also felt strongly that the Patrol remain free from political influence. Their goal was to create a policing agency that would treat everyone fairly and equally, and not let influence or affluence allow some people better treatment than others.

## Founding Fathers

It took persuasion, but O.W. "Whitey" Merrell convinced the Ohio Supreme Court to open the way for 60 men to patrol the highways and enforce state registration and vehicle operation laws.

In 1933, Ohio state legislators passed a measure to create the Patrol, and a companion bill to transfer the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to the State Highway Department.

Even so, a proposal to nullify both bills gathered enough signatures to make it to the November ballot, but was halted by the Ohio State Supreme Court on a technicality – that both bills were considered on one petition. The Court issued a decision to bar the referendum, clearing the way for the Patrol's formation.

Interviews with Patrol retirees state that Merrell



**Ohio Department of Highways Director O.W. Merrell looks on during the opening ceremony of another Patrol barracks.**

faced opposition to establishing a state highway patrol from local law enforcement and union members.



**Patrolmen inspect a commercial vehicle, including its weight, making sure it doesn't exceed highway limits.**

Black's sterling reputation as the leader of the Cincinnati-area based Indian Hill Rangers was widely known. The Rangers, created by a group of wealthy families to guard their neighborhood, still exist and are a regular police force today. Black's efforts caught the attention of Sheriff Asa Butterfield of Hamilton County, and in 1931,

Many believed the sheriff system worked just fine and that a state police would only create territorial conflicts. But for others – many others – the increasing use of motor vehicles on state highways and the lack of police enforcement in rural areas necessitated a statewide agency.

Newspaper reports of the time state that Merrell announced that Hamilton County Police Captain Lynn Black would be head of the Patrol only an hour after the court handed down its decision to bar the referendum, which allowed for the formation of the Patrol.

"It will be six weeks to two months before we get the men recruited, trained, and out on the road," Merrell said in one newspaper interview. "Black will go to work at once."

Merrell had no other person in mind other than Black for the job; Merrell admired Black's work in

Black accepted a position as a captain in the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office.

It was Black who led the way for future patrolmen at the First School, also known as the Camp Perry School, which opened October 3, 1933. Black went through more than 5,000 applications and interviewed nearly 300 men to narrow the recruits down to a group of about 125 to comprise that first training class. The cadets had their work cut out for them, as few had motorcycle experience and the Patrol just purchased 53 Indian motorcycles and one from Harley-Davidson. It is thought by some retired Patrol officers that motorcycles were more economical than cars at the time, thus the reason for purchasing the bikes.

For training, the Ohio National Guard volunteered Camp Perry, located on the shores of Lake Erie. It was very difficult to train due to frigid temperatures and a lack of heaters in the barracks. In fact, severe weather in November 1933 shortened the training.

Different sources give different numbers for how many entered training at Camp Perry. The most reliable figure is 112; several men left after the first day of training. Only 60 graduated as patrolmen – the limit imposed by state law - with 15 others serving as "weighmen" until patrolman positions opened, according to the graduation photo taken and information from Patrol personnel documents.

Many did not make it through graduation for several

Hamilton County. "Whitey" also liked Black's leadership qualities and the no-nonsense approach to law enforcement. Black was known by cadets and patrolmen as strict, but fair.

"(Black) was a very strict disciplinarian," said Retired Patrolman John Evans in a 2002 interview. "And he made a big name for himself at the Cincinnati Indian Hill Rangers that he formed and he was a good superintendent, a very good superintendent."

Evans said Black's leadership was complex, but fascinating. "He had his idiosyncrasies. He didn't want anybody to stay stationed very long until they would be moved to another station because he didn't want them to make friends. And that's been changed."

Evans also pointed out proudly that "I don't think politics had practically anything to do with the patrol."

reasons. Notwithstanding the cold, studies were not easy, and many men could not handle the strict military discipline incorporated into the training.

Although there was no money allocated by the state for classes, a curriculum was developed, covering everything from how to shoot a gun properly from different positions to how to operate a motorcycle. Black was the main instructor, but the training staff included: Moritz; Pennsylvania State Police Lt. James Marshall and Sgt. Herman Roush; Dr. H.E. Stricker, first aid; and James Davis, a motorcycle racing champion who provided riding instruction.

Despite the difficult conditions, silly antics often prevailed at the camp, brought on by the camaraderie amongst cadets. One time, when Cadet George Mingle (who later became colonel) went on “extra duty” for violating regulations, he was assigned to clean one of the camp’s two latrines as punishment. He was amazed at how many men used the latrine to which he was assigned, but, upon looking into the matter, discovered the cadet assigned to clean the other latrine had crafted an “out of order – use other latrine” sign.

On November 15, 1933, a cold, windy, snowy day, Ottawa County Probate Judge P.W. Gulau administered the oath of office for 54 “safety conservators,” or patrolmen, six lieutenants, and Capt. Black, according to information from a November 16, 1933, article from the Cleveland Press. The new officers then scattered immediately to their assigned posts.

The life of a Patrol officer was not easy in those days. There were many physical conditions to be met, and they were paid \$100 a month - plus room and board. Patrolmen were required to live in barracks at the local sub-stations – away from their families. They worked six days a week and much more than 40 hours a week, according to former patrolmen; they were on-call 24 hours a day, with only a 20-day furlough per year available, subject to the superintendent’s approval.

People in communities opened up their homes to the patrolmen, renting the Patrol space for each sub-post, which usually consisted of a simple room with a desk, some equipment, and a couple of cots for men to sleep. Oftentimes, homeowners cooked meals for the patrolmen, and filled in as dispatcher when needed.

## The First Class

It may have seemed like a great job and the 112 or so cadets were hand-picked by Colonel Lynn Black from more than 5,000 applicants, but training at Camp Perry, located in Ottawa County, just was not what they thought it was going to be.

The State of Ohio, in approving the formation of the Patrol in 1933, neglected (for many years, in fact, until it was evident the Division was up and going) to provide funding for training in the state budget. Therefore, when the Ohio National Guard offered use of the grounds at Camp Perry, State Director of Highways O.W. Merrell gladly accepted.

At the time, Camp Perry had minimal accommodations - unheated barracks and a large mess hall. The camp, established in 1906 as an Ohio National Guard Military Training Site, was named after Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, who defeated British forces in the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. The site became and remains to this day a popular shoot-



**Camp Perry Men Fred R. Collins and Thomas W. Thomas in their cold weather gear at Camp Perry in 1933 before heading out to their posts.**

Some men saw the Patrol life as solitary comfort, while others resented not being able to live with their families or the long hours. By the end of 1934, half of the Camp Perry graduates had resigned. Ten training classes were held between 1933 and 1938 to combat the resignations as well as to meet increases in manpower approved by the state legislature.

In a 2002 interview, retired Patrolman John Evans compared his experience working for the Patrol to today's troopers. Evans graduated with the Sixth Academy Class in Delaware on April 12, 1934.

"To the best of my knowledge, they work eight hours a day now and have for several years. When I was on the Patrol, we worked. We started off with 60 patrolmen to cover the state of Ohio and many times I would work 12 to 14 hours, get back to the station, and go to bed. Then I'd get another phone call and another accident happened and I'd go out again and be gone for another several hours. That went on consistently where we would work for very long hours. They don't do that anymore."

Evans recalled his time operating a motorcycle when he began the Patrol.

"I drove a motorcycle then. We did not arrest for speeding. Colonel Black was against calling it speeding. It was reckless operation. That's what you had to put on the report. You just observed as you were riding along on your motorcycle, like somebody passing another car and crossing a yellow line and taking the wrong lane on a curve. I had only had one bad occasion like that I was in a Patrol car by myself and I came to a pretty sharp right turn and here come a car and I pulled off to the bank that went up from the highway as far as could get and I still got hit."

When remembering his daily routine and the types of calls he had, Evans recalled a couple of incidents.

"Three times I was riding a motorcycle and I was run off the road into the ditch or the berm by an approaching car passing another car," he said. "Three times that happened to me and I arrested all three of them. If we arrested somebody, we'd wait until we got somebody there with a car. We would have to ask somebody to make a phone call for us to the Highway Garage. They'd send out a car. If it was necessary that we had to put them in a jail, the garage would send out a car and take in the person. Now, if it's just a case of writing a ticket, there is nothing in-

---

ing range; National Rifle Association Rifle and Pistol Championships have gone on there since 1907.

When the First Class began training in October 1933, winter came on strong and cadets froze in the unheated barracks. According to an article in the October 12, 1933, issue of the Lynchburg (Ohio) News, "The established routine begins with breakfast from 7 to 7:30 o'clock in the morning, followed by exercise and two classes before lunch at noon. In the afternoon the regiment includes two other classes, with supper at 5:30 p.m. Lights must be out in the camp at 10 p.m."

It was so cold, the two months planned for training turned into one month.

One Camp Perry account is documented by the one of the first commissioned officers of the Patrol and later, the first Patrol pilot, Capt. Ernest Webb, in his autobiographical book, "On Eagle's Wings."

"Our barracks were in old military bunk houses, no glass in the windows, but wooden shutters. There was a small cooking range for heat. This was a below

normal cold fall. We had problems keeping warm, the snow would blow through the windows and pile up on our blankets and clothes. We used layers of paper under the mattresses and between our two issued blankets. The last two weeks we were there, the temperature was down near zero degrees.

"This did not stop our outside activities, such as calisthenics at 6:00 a.m. every day, military drill, jogging one mile each way to the mess hall, three times a day, motorcycle practice in deep sand and riding across canals on a two-foot wide walkway with no railings. Pistol practice everyday and classroom work until 10:00 p.m. at night."

Driving motorcycles on the way to assigned barracks after graduation was not much better according to Webb.

"Our first stop was a gas station to get newspapers. We padded our trousers and under our shirts, anything to keep the cold out. A makeshift scarf protected our faces."



**A patrolman provides a motorist with enough gasoline to get to the next stop.**

volved there except writing a ticket and it can be an arrest ticket or a warrant ticket.”

“At this time, the patrolmen were not allowed to live at home. We got two days off a month, \$100 and meals. Through my association with the Governor, he changed this to higher pay, and all married patrolmen could live at home,” Evans said. “Throughout his second term as governor, he pushed bills through the legislature for the betterment of the Patrol.”



**Gear issued to patrolmen in the early years of the Division was sparse, but practical.**

Patrolmen looked very different in those days. A patrolman dressed in puttees, caps, helmet and goggles, leather coat, breeches, boots and drove a motorcycle. Not much equipment would fit on the motorcycles, either – a fire extinguisher, first aid kit, and later a one-way radio.

There were only white males in the force at the time, and entering information took time – using pen and typewriter. General Order Number Seven was 10 pages of instructions detailing how early patrolmen were to fill out each and every section of their daily report.

In December 1935, when HB 569, the driver’s license law, was passed to become effective in October 1936, legislators passed on to the Patrol a new responsibility. While administered by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, the actual responsibility of testing drivers to obtain driver licenses fell onto the Patrol and local police agencies. When the law finally went into effect, the Patrol handled about one-half of the examinations, primarily in rural communities.

General Headquarters was located on the eighth floor of the state office building on South Front Street in Columbus. Six districts existed, each with its own headquarters and three subposts:

District A Toledo — Defiance, Findlay, Bellevue

District B Ravenna – Medina, Salem, Geneva

District C Sidney — Middletown, Lima, Springfield

District D Delaware — Marion, Mansfield, Newark

District E Cambridge — New Philadelphia, Marietta, Bridgeport

District F Chillicothe — Wilmington, Portsmouth, Athens.

A flood of “General Orders” came from general headquarters in those early days, attempting to clarify policies and establish procedures. Most of the orders covered the transfers of men, but others had more lasting significance. For instance, General Order Number Two (12-4-33) reduced the number of days off from four to two, an action hardly popular but necessary in light of the small number of men. It was around this time that Captain Black took on the rank of Colonel.

Change was the constant within the organization. Black’s belief that no one should stay in the same area for very long was practiced thoroughly – many men went from

post to post in a matter of months. Black believed that being “too familiar” would be difficult for patrolmen, especially if they gave a citation to a family member or friend. There would be the temptation, he thought, to overlook infractions.

Terrible floods occurred in January of 1937, when the Ohio River crested 20 feet above flood level in Cincinnati, and engulfed much of southern and eastern Ohio. Because of the enormous impact of the flood, Colonel Black temporarily suspended the Sixth Academy’s classes in January, and told the 22 cadets to report to southern Ohio. Patrol units withdrew from the flood zone in early February and Sixth Class Cadets returned to school in Findlay, where they graduated in March. According to The Cincinnati Enquirer, an estimated 100,000 people were left homeless in river towns stretching from Pittsburgh to Cairo, Illinois. There were 385 people killed and property losses went past \$500 million.

One result of the flooding was a statewide flood





**Cadets training on motorcycles at the Ohio State Fairgrounds in 1935.**

***Information compiled from “The Harley-Davidson and Indian Wars” by Allan Girdler and facts from the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA).***

Not many people live to be older than 100, and even fewer can profess to be able to continue doing what they love beyond a century.

The late motorcyclist Jim Davis did both.

Davis is one of the pioneers of motorcycling’s “glory days.” The Patrol knows him from his work for 14 years teaching cadets at training camps how to ride motorcycles.

Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, Davis won the first AMA sanctioned race in 1924, and the AMA inducted Davis into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1998 for his years of racing and teaching.

It all started in 1908, when Davis was 12 years old. He asked his dad for a motorcycle. “There were five or six other kids in my neighborhood with motorcycles, which still had pedals on them, and we were always racing each other,” Davis said in an AMA article posted on the group’s website. “I won the first official race I entered and won a pair of rubber goggles and a quart of oil. I was on top of the world.”

In 1915, Davis was at his neighborhood Indian dealership when Frank Weschler, head of sales for Indian, came to visit. The owner of the dealership in-

troducted Davis and told Weschler of the 19-year-old’s racing exploits. A few weeks later the dealer called Davis into the dealership. Davis was surprised and thrilled to find a brand-new, eight-valve closed-port Indian factory racer with his name on it.

By 1916, Davis was on the Indian factory team. This was in the days of brakeless racing machines that ran locked in gear with the throttle wide open, on banked board speedways that allowed lap speed of 120 miles per hour. Jim Davis clearly was a man of skill and bravery. Not to mention nerve.

“Early in 1920,” Davis recalled 75 years later, “I went to Phoenix with two bikes. The referee said I couldn’t ride, that there was a new rule and they’d already picked the riders.” Professional racing at the time was controlled by a trade group, heavily backed by the major manufacturers and deeply political. Davis knew this.

“I said, ‘If A.B. Coffman (head of the sanctioning body) says I can ride, can I ride?’” They said yes, if they got a telegram. So I went downtown and persuaded the girl to send a telegram saying I could ride and signed by A.B. Coffman. I rode, won the event, and got the money.”

But Davis’ telegram stunt did not go unnoticed.

“When I got back to Los Angeles, the referee there, who was a friend of mine, said I couldn’t ride.



**Cpl. Floyd C. Moon is wearing a “blue-black” uniform shirt and Stetson hat. The Patrol changed from wearing caps to the Stetsons sometime in 1939.**

I asked why not and he said he didn’t know, but he’d just gotten a letter saying I was suspended one year. A week or so later, the Harley team manager, Bill Otto-way, asked if I’d like to ride a Harley. I said sure, but I’m suspended. A week later, I was back racing.”

How’d that happen?

“The Harley factory did it. They supported the association, and I guess they just put on the pressure,” the AMA article states.

Davis raced for Harley-Davidson until 1925. Indian re-hired him for the 1926 season and he immediately rewarded the company by winning three national titles that year on both board tracks and dirt ovals. Davis’ biggest season was in 1928, when he won six national titles and was named the overall AMA national champion, a feat he repeated in 1929. Davis won his final AMA national at Syracuse, New York, in 1930 before retiring from his motorcycle racing career five years later.

Colonel Black hired Davis in 1933 (before his retirement, according to AMA archives) to teach cadets to ride motorcycles. Davis worked for the Patrol for 14 years and taught the members of the first four Academy Classes how to operate and ride the Pa-

trol’s motorcycles, which required skills not everyone possessed. The first Patrol class started with 112 members, but only 60 graduated. While many factors contributed to the high wash-out rate, a number of recruits failed to earn their commissions because they could not master the art of motorcycle riding, even under the expert tutelage of Davis.

When the first class of patrolmen broke camp in November 1933, the Patrol owned 53 Indian motorcycles and one Harley Davidson. Additional Harley Davidson motorcycles were purchased in 1938, and by 1939, the Patrol owned 93 motorcycles and 91 patrol cars. However, the benefits of patrol cars over motorcycles - increased safety; more room for first aid and other equipment; room for a two-way radio - convinced the Division to retire motorcycles all together in 1955.

After leaving the Patrol, Davis went to work for his family’s architectural business and became an official for the AMA. He received the AMA’s Dudley Perkins Award, the highest honor given by the association, for his life-long contributions to the sport of motorcycling. He became a celebrity in the later years of his life. He frequently spoke at gatherings of motorcyclists, entertaining crowds with humorous tales of his life and times in racing. Davis remained sharp to the end. He died on February 5, 2000, in Daytona Beach, Florida. He was 103.



**Motorcycle training was difficult for some cadets. Famed motorcyclist Jim Davis was brought in to teach them.**

stage evacuation mapping system, developed by Lt. John Krichbaum. This not only would help future tragedies by allowing an orderly, controlled evacuation, but also served as groundwork for post-World War II preparedness plans organized by the Division in the 1940s.

Later that year, on September 27, tragedy directly struck the Division in the loss of Patrolman George A. Conn of the New Philadelphia Post. Conn was not the first patrolman to die on duty – there had been five killed before; four in car or motorcycle crashes and one was electrocuted. However, Conn was the first Patrol officer to be shot and killed.

Conn left his post that day to serve a warrant to a man from Freeport who failed to appear in court. According to an October 3, 1937, Sunday Star (Columbus) article:

“At 7:45 Tuesday morning, Officer Hall at the New Philadelphia barracks reported to Cambridge that his buddy, Conn, had not slept in his bed. Lt. Bouten immediately checked with the village of Gilmore, where Conn was supposed to go that morning.

“Although Lt. Bouten was beginning to worry, he merely asked the Gilmore operator to see if there was a uniformed highway patrolman in the village and, if there was, to have him call Cambridge...

“Reports (of Conn’s abandoned patrol car along Route 8 near Freeport) brought Sgts. D.D. Stark and R.T. Summers (sic) to the scene with all the men they could locate. They were alarmed for two reasons: The ignition key being left in the switch was a violation of department regulations, and the fact that the radio had been left on so long



that the battery had run down indicated involuntary disappearance on the part of Conn.”

Officers determined at that time that someone wiped the car clean of fingerprint evidence. A couple of hours later, a driver spotted what he thought was just a large yellow cloth on the side of the road. He stopped to pick it up, only to discover Conn’s body underneath.

Conn had been shot seven times. There was not much physical evidence at the scene – the yellow cloth, a few cigarette butts, a map, a pencil and bullet casings. There also was an automotive service certificate, apparently handed to Conn right before the shooting. His weapon still was in the holster and his uniform intact, but his cap was missing – and never found.

The auto service document proved essential. Police determined that someone stole the vehicle from a Minnesota resident. Lawmen soon found the vehicle – deliberately burned - near Cambridge, Minnesota. A contingent of officers, led by Lt. Ralph “Red” W. Alvis, went to Minnesota to develop leads and investigate the car.

A break in the case came in December when an inmate at the Belmont County Jail told officials that he could clear up the case. He said a fellow inmate, Booker T. Johnson, bragged about his involvement in killing Conn. Johnson’s story implicated four other people – Bernard Masulla, Peter Sereno, Charles Ford, and Bernice Bradley.

Officials extradited Charles Ford, who said he met the

other four in a Pittsburgh brothel, where he had a job to drive for them. After staying the night in Huntington, West Virginia, Ford said they robbed filling stations along the way for money and, on September 27, at about 4:30 p.m., stopped on Route 8 near Freeport so Masulla and Johnson could relieve themselves.

While Ford and the others waited at the car, Conn pulled up and asked to see the “papers” for the vehicle. Ford said Masulla shot Conn after sneaking up behind him outside of the parked car.

Among the most convincing evidence was Ford’s ability to guide officers to different areas involved in the crime. He led a group to the murder scene, where the car was abandoned, places along the way they had robbed, and landmarks in Steubenville.

In the end, Sereno and Johnson were acquitted; Ford pleaded guilty to manslaughter; and Masulla was convicted and sentenced to life at hard labor at the Ohio Penitentiary. Bernice Bradley was never located.

One positive result of the Conn case was the investigation techniques learned as a result. Before Conn was murdered, Investigations Unit activities consisted mainly of motor vehicle registrations and school bus inspections. The forensic side of Investigations was forged because of the Conn case, and cadet training changed to include such skills.

The Division used several different locations as training grounds during the 1930s, including a warehouse in Delaware for the Second Academy class, Findlay headquarters, and the Ohio State Fairgrounds. These changes in training facilities would stabilize in the next decade, as the Patrol found its home (for a 20-year period) at Hartman Farms, south of Columbus.

The Patrol faced new challenges with the coming decade, as well. War would greatly cut the number of men patrolling Ohio’s highways, and, as a result, the state’s American Legion veterans would volunteer to step up in order to keep safety a state priority. Also, communications would become even more crucial, as technology changed and information was exchanged more rapidly.

Transportation also was changing; by the end of the 1930s, there already had been five vehicle-related crashes that resulted in the deaths of patrolmen; and by the late 1940s, aircraft began aiding those on the ground with surveillance of rule-breaking on highways and spotting criminals in manhunts.



**Patrolman George A. Conn’s murder in 1937 by fleeing fugitives prompted the beginnings of the Patrol’s Investigative Unit.**



A patrolman talks with a couple of motorists during a traffic stop.

## Floyd C. Moon

Retired Lt. Colonel Floyd C. Moon, 99, was the Patrol's oldest retiree at the time he passed away early in the morning on February 4, 2008.

He graduated in 1934 with the Second Academy Class — the Delaware Men. During visits from a handful of comrades, Moon recalled stories from those days with amazing clarity and detail, including names, dates and commentary. The lucky ones who stopped to listen to those stories always heard an impassioned chronicle of another time and place, filled with heroes who achieved awesome feats, despite incredible hardships.

"It's a different world that we were in," Moon said of early patrolmen in a 2006 interview. "Basically you have it in your heart that (fellow patrol officers) are close buddies."

Prior to Moon joining the Patrol, the Great De-

pression loomed on the horizon. Nevertheless, Moon continually worked from the age of 11 — everything from odd jobs to a position with an engineering firm. He attended The Ohio State University, but had to discontinue his academic career.

"After two years, it was right at the start of the Depression. I'd used up all the money I'd saved working at the Fairfield Engineering Company," Moon said. "Even the Columbus Police Department laid off a number of men at the time. Those who were laid off were pushing push carts and hauling ashes in the alleys just to make a living."

Moon obtained a job with Delbert Murphy, who owned a small auto body paint shop at the corner of Fifth and Long streets in Columbus. The most he ever earned at that job was 50 cents an hour — after three years.

"Few people realize just how bad it was during the early '30s," Moon said. "And it wasn't until



**The Patrol worked with other Ohio agencies to plan and organize civil defense strategies.**

about 1935 that things started to look up again.”

After reading about the formation of a new Highway Patrol, Moon said he went with a friend who wanted to sign up. He did not plan on applying, but figured he would, since he was there.

His friend did not pass the physical exam, but Moon did, and got the job. Moon became the Patrol’s first plainclothes investigator in 1941. Also, soon after his promotion to major, then Colonel Scott Radcliffe named Moon assistant superintendent, and added the rank of lieutenant colonel — the first time that rank was associated with that position.

During his career, Moon took several leaves of absence at the request of Ohio governors for different assignments. He provided security for Gov. John Bricker during his nationwide campaign for vice-president; he investigated fraudulent liquor permit abuse in northeast Ohio; and led the Ohio Liquor Control Department more than once on an interim basis, until finally securing the position full-time after retiring from the Patrol.

After 29 years with the Patrol, four years with a Franklin County Probate Judge and 16 years with

the Ohio Liquor Control Department and Commission, Moon finally retired in 1979.

Even after retiring, Moon never seemed to let go of old Patrol habits.

He enjoyed investigating and getting to know people — and he used the skills learned as a patrolman to learn more about those with whom he came in contact. In fact, during Moon’s memorial service, one speaker said he hoped St. Peter and the rest of Heaven were ready to be investigated, now that Moon resides there.

“I value how you’re able to evaluate people. You learn how to evaluate people. I’ll give the Patrol credit for that. It sticks with you,” Moon said with a chuckle during an interview. “It might not always be right, but you have the privilege of doing it.”

Moon’s contributions to Ohio are labeled “legendary” by some. For Moon, he did what he loved doing, and he repeatedly told visitors he would be more than happy to do it all again. “Working for the Patrol was the best time of my life. It was a lot of fun. It really tries a man’s mettle,” Moon said.

“It’s very interesting work. Every day was different. I’d like to do it all over again.”



**Motorcycle drill was a huge part of training; these formations later were used in parades and ceremonial events.**