

N.C. Highway Patrol Feature: 40th Anniversary, July, 1929-69



The original 37 members of the North Carolina Highway Patrol assemble in front of the capitol at Raleigh on July 1, 1929.

Raleigh -- Those 37 men who stood on the steps of the state capitol for the state highway patrol's first swearing-in ceremony had reason to be proud. They were the "cream of the crop" from more than 1,800 applicants.

That historic ceremony was conducted on July 1, 1929. Today, as the patrol observes its 40th anniversary, the opportunity to serve in the organization doesn't draw a great number of applicants.

The screening is just as rigorous, though, and most of the men who are selected come to feel that the uniform of the highway patrol imposes on them a special responsibility for professional conduct.

Veteran members of the patrol remember when they gained celebrity status just by

young trooper came into the headquarters and told me that most of the drunks he arrested complained about being taken to jail in a patrol car that was not air-conditioned."

All the patrol cars today



Trooper W. W. Stone was the youngest man on the force when it was organized July 1, 1929. Today, Technical Sergeant W. W. Stone is the only charter member still on active duty in the patrol. He is assigned to Troop C Headquarters at Greensboro.

are air-conditioned and as modern as the latest technology can make them. The trooper himself has an easier time of it, too. No longer is he required to put in a seven-day work week of 16 hour days.

Troopers today don't become overjoyed discussing their salaries, but the pay scale has risen enormously since those \$100-a-month days of a generation ago.

Sergeant Stone who was the youngest man on the force 40 years ago is today the oldest member. He has served at eight different posts throughout the state, a result of early patrol policy which specified that men be shifted to different territories every 90 days.

"Troopers today are better educated than they used to be," he says. "And they're more sophisticated than they used to be, but they seem to have the same kind of dedication that marked the early day trooper."

Although Sergeant Stone is the patrol's only charter member still on active duty, there are many men serving the organization whose careers date back almost to the beginning.

Patrol Commander Col-

onel Charles Speed joined the patrol in 1935. Lt. Colonel Edwin Guy, executive officer of the patrol, joined the patrol in 1939. The Director of the Patrol's Training and Inspection Division, Major E. W. Jones was in the same patrol training school with Colonel Speed. Major John Laws, Director of the Enforcement Division, donned his patrol uniform in 1937 and Captain O. R. Roberts, Assistant Director of the Communication and Transportation Division, was sworn in two years later.

The six troop commanders are also long-time members of the organization who worked their way up from the bottom. They are Captain R. F. Williamson, Troop A, Greenville; Captain R. E. Sherrill, Troop B, Fayetteville; Captain J. B. Kuykendall, Troop C, Raleigh; Captain William S. McKinney, Troop D, Greensboro; Captain R. H. Nutt, Troop E, Salisbury and Captain Ernest S. Guthrie, Troop F, Asheville.

Although Colonel Speed's position as Commander involves a multiplicity of duties, he feels he may have had a more varied job back when he was patrolling two and a half counties in western North Carolina on a cantankerous motorcycle that "threw him every chance it got."

In addition to regular patrol, Colonel Speed recalls that he was required to issue a driver's license to every motorist in his territory and to investigate crimes unrelated to traffic law violations.

The commander feels that one of the primary differences between law enforcement then and now is public attitudes.

"Back then, there was very strong sentiment against crimes of violence and the entire community would seek to help the law enforcement officer solve a crime and bring the criminal to justice."

The attitude carried over into the realm of court activity also, Colonel Speed recalls. "People seemed to take a more intense view of their responsibilities toward jury duty and on court days, people from all over would

come into town to observe court proceedings."

Two factors that greatly influenced the role of the highway patrol, the Colonel

feels, are the massive secondary road program from 1949-1952 and the increase in teenage drivers after World War II.

The Kerr Scott road program enabled people to work in town and live on the farm, thus creating a whole new mobile society.

"The great numbers of young people who began driving after World War II brought a problem that was entirely new in the state."

No one today seriously questions the need for the highway patrol in coping with the complexities of modern automotive travel. And the patrol's many national awards for professional excellence has vindicated those who argued for the establishment of the special law enforcement unit to enforce traffic laws four decades ago.

The furor raised by the suggestion that such a unit be formed was intense. The argu-

ment was carried on for many months in newspaper columns and in the state's General Assembly. Those who argued against creation of the patrol feared it would become a political police force such as had emerged in other states.

That fear proved to be unfounded, and today the patrol seeks less, not more, involvement in cases unrelated to traffic law enforcement.

From that original band of 37, the patrol has grown in number to 877. No longer under the supervision of the state Highway Commission, the patrol is the largest division of the vast department of Motor Vehicles.

Modern data processing equipment, an extensive driver education program, a public information program and an army of clerical personnel in the Department of Motor Vehicles supports the activities of the patrol in the

field.

Of particular pride is the Patrol Training School conducted in cooperation with the Institute of Government at Chapel Hill. The 16 week training program is designed to develop the highest standards of professionalism in the individual.

Veteran motor vehicles administrator Joe W. Garrett has helped to formulate and implement many of the policies which have brought the patrol to its present status.

As State Motor Vehicles Commissioner, Garrett feels that much greater challenges await the patrol in the future as traffic becomes denser on Tarheel highways.

"The patrol will continue to be the first line of defense in preventing death and injury on the highways," says the commissioner. "In the years ahead we will have more vehicles and more drivers. The job of controlling

this tide of traffic will become more difficult each year."

"However, the past achievements of the patrol convince me that the organization, backed by other divisions within the department, will be able to fulfill its responsibilities in the manner in which North Carolinians have become accustomed."



Colonel Charles A. Speed, commanding officer of Today's 877 man State Highway Patrol.

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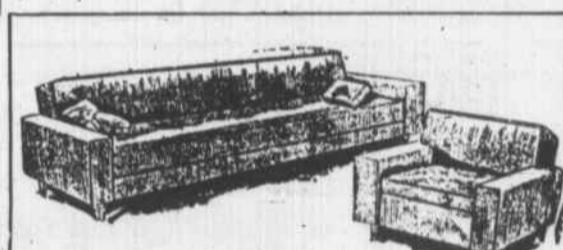


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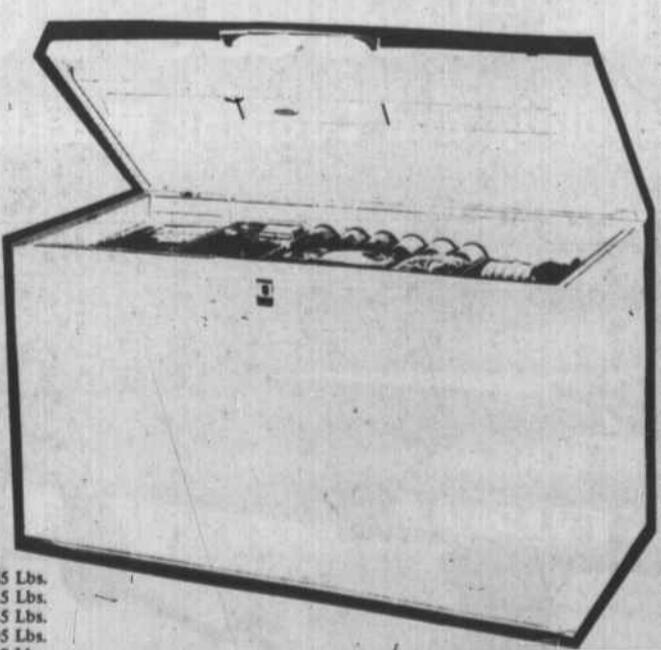
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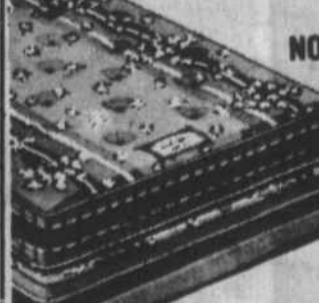
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