History of the Delaware State Police

The roaring twenties gave birth to the Delaware State Police. Cars speeding at 35 miles per hour, roving bands of troublemakers, and bootleggers provided the impetus. The result of these factors led to the beginning, in 1923, of a State Police force in Delaware.

Thoughts on the topic of forming a State Police organization for the First State had been recorded as early as 1906. Although interest existed, little, if any, positive steps were taken until the State Highway Commission was formed in 1917. As construction of paved highways was begun and registered motor vehicles began to rise, a need to regulate and maintain safety soon became apparent.

The first traffic law enforcement officers were given the auspicious title of “Highway Traffic Police.” Started in 1919, the H.T.P. consisted of one officer whose sole function was to patrol the Philadelphia Pike near Wilmington. In the following year the force was increased to three men and three motorcycles. From 1920 to 1923 these men served directly under the State Highway Commission. However, the winds of change were on the near horizon.

Governor William Denney addressed the General Assembly on January 3, 1923, and during his message stated “In my judgment the police force of the Highway Department is not adequate . . . I desire to suggest that a State Police force be organized . . . .” On April 23, 1923, the General Assembly, at the request of the State Highway Department, enacted two laws that created the Delaware State Police. This date marks the official organization of the present law enforcement organization.

The first State Police Station was located on the southbound side of the Philadelphia Pike at Bellevue. It was an old construction shack that served both as the station and as headquarters. This building housed fourteen men who worked twelve hour shifts, seven days a week. From this single location the officers policed the entire state. One day each week an officer was assigned to make what was known as the State Patrol. His tour would start at Claymont, Delaware, the

northernmost postal area where the postmaster would stamp his daily sheet. He would, then, travel south through all three counties stopping at all the post offices en-route. Upon reaching the southern Delaware – Maryland line, he would make a return trip.

A major step in reducing the time for communication of the needs of the public to the police occurred in July 1924, with the adoption of a flag system. Forty-two service (gas) stations were selected throughout the state and their telephone numbers published in the Wilmington Evening Journal. Anyone wishing to see a police officer could call the nearest store or station or store attendant who would display a red flag in front of his business. The officer on patrol, seeing the flag, would stop to determine the nature of the complaint. In this manner the public received prompt service (prompt meaning from one to twelve hours).

Officers remained on the road year-round, regardless of rain, snow, or freezing temperatures. Several lost their legs in accidents before the economy permitted the purchase of patrol cars. During 1924 – 1925, the State Police facilities were expanded to encompass five locations spanning the length of the state. Police stations were located at the following points:

- Penny Hill – Station 1
- State Road – Station 2
- Dover – Station 3
- Georgetown – Station 4
- Bridgeville – Station 5

1925

In 1925, the division realized an increase in manpower and the inauguration of twenty-four hour service to provide increased protection and better service to the public. In the same year, the Canine Unit was first established to respond to an increase in prowler complaints.

From its inception the Delaware State Police has attempted to be at the leading edge of innovation. The establishment of a Canine Unit in 1925 is but one in a multitudinal list of accomplishments to provide the best service and protection to the citizens of the State of Delaware. A scanning of the decades provides an indication of how the State Police have attempted to be innovative throughout its history.

1930 – 1939

In 1931, the name of the organization , by act of the General Assembly, was officially changed from “State Highway Police” to “State Police”. The year 1934 saw the first teletype service that linked the State Police with similar agencies in eight states. This was the first outlet with outside agencies other than by mail or telephone. The Bureau of Identification was established Penny Hill in 1935, as a means of both identification and assistance in criminal investigations. In 1939, the Bureau was moved to Dover and was the foundation for today’s State Bureau of Identification.

To reduce the time between receipt of a complaint and arrival of the officer, the first radio communications were

established in 1936. Though communications were strictly one-way, the officer received the complaint in a more timely manner. The year 1938, brought an end for the use of motorcycle patrol work. Sidecars had been available to a few officers who had been fortunate to patrol “in style.” Twenty-four men joined the force in that same year, thus doubling the size of the organization. In response to the agency’s growth and the increase in criminal activity, the Division was divided into two sections, Traffic and Criminal.

1940 – 1949

In 1940, the Bureau of Accident Prevention and Traffic Control was established. This unit was responsible for making a through study of all accidents and recommending steps to prevent them. In 1941, the Traffic Division acquired a key punch machine that increased the Division’s ability to analyze traffic data. To relieve the shortage of manpower caused by World War II, seven women were hired in 1943 to assist with clerical duties. Civilian employees, since this point, have played an integral role in the development of the State Police. During the years 1942 to 1943, the Division expanded its communications capabilities. It initiated high frequency communications that enabled two-way radio transmission and reception.

On November 1, 1945, the State Police established a system of coding messages. This was the grandfather of the 1973 Public Safety (Ten Code) Code. Also in 1945, a new type of recording device was purchased for use by the Criminal Investigation Division. This instrument recorded sound on film for use with microphones, the telephone, and radio conversations. The year 1946 saw the State Police secure an Emergency Field Unit

capable of responding to a variety of situations encountered by field officers. Additionally, in 1946, the State Police initiated a drivers' education program through its new Safety Education Unit.

The year 1947 witnessed a landmark in the investigation of driving under the influence in the State. All members of the Division of State Police received instruction on the use of the Intoximeter, a chemical test to determine the degree of alcohol in a person's blood through breath. As a final chapter in the decade of the 40's, the Delaware Association of Chiefs of Police, in conjunction with the State Police, began construction of a summer youth camp near the Little Assawoman Bay. This camp, today, is known as Camp Barnes in honor of Colonel Herbert Barnes who played a major role in its development.

1950 -1959

In 1951, the State Police acquired their first polygraph machine. With the training of two officers at the Keeler Polygraph Institute, the Division brought into use a new tool to combat the criminal element. Using radar for the first time, troopers arrested nine motorists on March 13, 1952. Initial units were cumbersome and brought immediate reaction from the public and the political arena. The year 1952 also saw the beginning of a program of underwater divers, today's Scuba Unit.
On May 15, 1953, a new seven station statewide teletype system went into operation. With this innovation, teletype messages

could be received from fourteen states outside Delaware as well as between the stations and headquarters. May 30, 1955, as reported by the newspapers, became another landmark day for speed enforcement in Delaware. This was the first “air to ground” traffic arrest using an airplane to check the speed of holiday travelers. On July 17, 1957, an event of significant importance to the Delaware State Police occurred. It was on this day that the cornerstone was laid at the new headquarters in Dover. Though not opened until 1959, the building was the centerpiece of the present complex and home of the Delaware State Police. The year 1957 witnessed improvement of the radar traffic enforcement system. On October 31, radar units were placed in the trunks of patrol vehicles to assist with maintaining speed limits.

Another milestone was reached on May 29, 1957, with the first expansion of State Police facilities since 1925. On this date Troop 4A, now Troop 7, was opened to give better protection to the citizens of the beach areas. Also, in 1957, inaugurated a new unit to assist in deterring juvenile delinquency. The Youth Division of the Delaware State Police began operating on September 19. As a final note to the 50’s, a unit that had initially begun in 1925 was re-instituted. The Canine Unit, which had fallen on hard times, was re-established and has remained a functioning unit since.

1960 – 1969

During the latter part of 1960, the State Police acquired its first fixed wing aircraft for traffic and criminal investigations. This plane would provide the foundation for

the Aviation Unit. The summer of 1961 witnessed the showing off of the State Police's new Education Field Unit. The unveiling took place at the Delaware State Fair. Headlines of the Delaware State News boldly asked the question: "CAR 21453 WHERE ARE YOU?" The car, belonging to the State Police, had a large speedometer mounted on its roof. The vehicle was not intended to catch speeders but rather to assist motorists in checking their own speedometers.

The year 1963, saw the initiation of 24 hour patrols of the Delaware Turnpike. In an effort to better serve the public, the State Police opened a new State Police sub-station, Troop 2A, (now Troop 6) at 3803 Kirkwood Highway in 1964.

In 1965, the State Police acquired, from federal surplus, a weasel (a tracked vehicle) to better serve the beach going public. Also, in 1965, Camp Barnes, for the first time, accepted physically and mentally challenged campers. Eighty children from the Stockley Center attended Camp Barnes after Labor Day. October 10, 1968, saw the opening of a full time troop at the Delaware Turnpike when Troop 8 became a fully functional facility. The year 1969 saw a change in the numbering system for State Police barracks in the state. Henceforth, the existing troops would have their own designators. Troop 2A became Troop 6 and Troop 4A, Troop 7.

The year 1969 also saw a self imposed code of ethics by the Delaware State Police. It was the first for any agency in Delaware. The State Police, in 1969, joined N.C.I.C. All complaints, crimes, warrants, wanted or missing persons were now on computer for instant reference in a system called CLUES. The year 1969 ended with the establishment of NEWCOM, the central reporting center for New Castle County.

1970 – 1979

On January 22, 1970, the State Police established a full time Drug Unit to combat the influx of drugs into the community. October 15th, marked the start of the use of VASCAR by the Delaware State Police.

VASCAR, an acronym for Visual Average Speed Computer and Recorder units were operated by the Traffic Division statewide. The year 1971 saw the expansion of the Delaware State Police Aviation Unit. On February 18th, the State Police accepted delivery of its first Bell Ranger helicopter.

In June, the State Police reported progress in attracting black and Spanish speaking recruits. A major goal set by the State Police is the hiring of six minority recruits in the next class. The State Police in January, 1973, announced plans for the construction of a police officer's memorial at the headquarters complex. This was in conjunction with the celebration of the Division's 50th Anniversary, April 28, 1973. Nineteen seventy-four saw the formation of a state-wide drug strike force with the state police providing the majority of the manpower. The year 1974 also saw the adoption of a new policy aimed at attracting female applicants to the force.

In 1975, the Division formed a Special Weapons and Tactics unit. The following year, 1976, saw the closing of Troop 8 that has housed criminal and traffic patrols for the southern end of the Delaware turnpike for eight years. Troop 2 was closed in 1977 for major renovations. It was reopened the following year as the consolidated Criminal troop for New Castle County. State Police initiated the Tele-Serve Complaint Processing System, for which minor complaints not requiring the presence of a police officer could be handled over the

telephone.

1980 – 1989

In 1981, the State Police initiated a pilot program in New Castle County for the investigation of fatal accidents. The program that uses the acronym FAIR (Fatal Accident Investigation and Reconstruction). The Division, the same year, was awarded an outstanding achievement award in a national competition for its uniform and dress. The year 1982 witnessed the initiation of the use of roadblock checkpoints to curtail driving under the influence. Nineteen eighty-three saw the initiation of the Delaware Crimestoppers program in an effort to solve difficult crimes.

The year 1987, was marked by the acquisition of an Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), that would change the course in the apprehension of criminals. This computer, which can scan 650 fingerprints a second, is an extremely valuable crime fighting tool. September 1988, witnessed the formation of a Serial Killer Task Force that was created with the New Castle County Police to apprehend a suspect who had already killed five women in the New Castle County area. This case, the most expensive investigation and manpower exhaustive, led to the arrest and successful prosecution of Steven B. Pennell.

In October of 1988, the state police created the first police based victim services unit in the state to provide crisis intervention, information and referrals to crime victims, witnesses and family members who lost a loved one to a sudden

death.

After the successful completion of this investigation, the State Police implemented a well trained, specialized unit to handle homicide investigations. In March, 1989, the State Police formed a state-wide homicide unit. Also in 1989, the Division created a unit to deal with white collar crime. The unit is known as Financial Organized Crime Asset Seizure Team (FORCAST).

1990 -1999

The decade of the 1990’s brought about a concerted movement by the Delaware State Police to actively engage in Community Policing and community directed services. As a full service police agency, the Delaware State Police viewed these activities as a natural extension of its role. Units worked directly with or in conjunction with the community and included: School Resource Officers, Camp Barnes, DARE, IMPACT, Community Relations, Community Outreach, and Rural Community Policing.

As an organization the State Police has always striven to maintain a high standard of excellence within the framework of current police technology. The Delaware State Police as an agency have gone through many changes since its inception in 1923. The Division of one patrol officer has grown to over five hundred and the simple motorcycle has been replaced by evermore specialized patrol vehicles. Addressing the problems and concerns for public safety is one thing that has never changed and remained a top priority.

Some of the Divisions accomplishments included the creation of the Domestic Violence Unit and Victim Services specialists to address the need for continual support for victims. Furthermore, the Division developed a Video Lottery Enforcement Unit to address the regulation of slot machines at Delaware's horse racing facilities.

The 1990's was the decade of technology. The Delaware State Police changed to an 800 megahertz communication system which enabled all police agencies and fire / EMS to communicate with one another seamlessly during critical incidents. In addition, Troopers received laptop computers in their patrol vehicles which greatly enhanced the efficiency with which they performed their day to day duties and tasks.

In 1998, the Delaware State Police celebrated their 75th anniversary and continued their commitment of community service. In the following year, the Division developed another unit called the Governor's Task Force or GTF that paired probation officers with Troopers to address quality of life issues in high crime areas. Lastly, the indoor firing range facility was constructed near Smyrna which proved to be a valuable asset for the training needs of Troopers and other agencies.

2000-2009

During this period, the Delaware State Police constructed a

new state of the art 53,000 square foot facility, Troop 2 in Glasgow, New Castle County and moved Troop 5 to a newly renovated building along Route 13 in Bridgeville, Sussex County.

The Division also created the High Tech Crime Unit (HTCU) which conducts comprehensive investigations involving computers and computer related technology. In 2007 the HTCU joined forces with the Delaware Attorney General's Office, U.S. Attorney's Office and federal law enforcement agencies to form the "Delaware Child Predator Task Force." This highly successful Task Force is responsible for coordinating on-line child exploitation investigations and prosecutions throughout the state as they pro-actively identify, arrest, and prosecute sexual predators who would use technology as a means to target and reach their victims.

Delaware law requires the Delaware State Police to maintain a registry of sex offenders available to the public. The State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) is the section within DSP responsible to provide this service. The Sex Offender Apprehension and Registration Unit (SOAR) within SBI is responsible for registering and tracking sex offenders as required by the Delaware Sex Offender Registry Law (Megan's Law). The SOAR unit consists of fourteen employees to include five sworn, four agents and five civilian employees. There are four sworn detectives assigned to the unit to conduct criminal investigations of offenders who fail to follow Delaware's Megan's Law requirements. SOAR also has four agents; these were newly created positions in 2008, consisting of recently retired police officers who conduct statewide notifications for all offenders residing in State Police jurisdictions.

During the decade the Division created a Motorcycle Unit that

has been instrumental in providing services in highly congested areas and improving traffic enforcement. Adding to an already impressive Honor Guard Unit was the formation of a Pipes and Drums Unit. Unit members perform at funerals, parades, official state functions and other special events. These units proudly express the Troopers commitment and professionalism to the public we serve.

As we begin the new decade, the Delaware State Police continues to move toward intelligence based policing, community service and commitment to quality services.