



10-15-1984

## Bandits and Liquor: First Highway Patrol

Kate Jackson Lewis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

---

### Recommended Citation

Lewis, Kate Jackson (1984) "Bandits and Liquor: First Highway Patrol," *Westview*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol4/iss1/9>

This Nonfiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).



# Bandits and Liquor:



*Original six Highway Patrolmen served under State Tax Commission. Left to right — Larry Malone, Abe Block, Lawson Gilliam,*

“**L**ady, get inside under the counter and lie low. We’re expecting Pretty Boy Floyd to come through any minute,” ordered a uniformed law officer. Hastily I entered the ‘Dan Binns’ store at Parker, 20 miles north of Coalgate and pushed my way into a space among gunny sacks, lard stands, and local people seeking safety from the well-known robber and highway killer.

I had meant to buy some candy for a community candy-breaking at the two-room school where I taught. Now that I was “sardined” into a space near a window, I found myself stealing glances toward the road for a

glimpse of the handsome bandit, but all in vain. The Robin Hood highwayman failed to appear.

Pretty Boy was one of many bandits making Oklahoma’s highways, roads, and streets unsafe during the early thirties.

Until recently, I thought the cars parked outside the community store were manned by highway patrolmen. Now, 47 years later, Thea Bonner, retired Coalgate sheriff, has set me straight.

Asked if he remembered the event, the colorful law-man instantly replied, “Sure I remember that; I was there. I also remember the man that

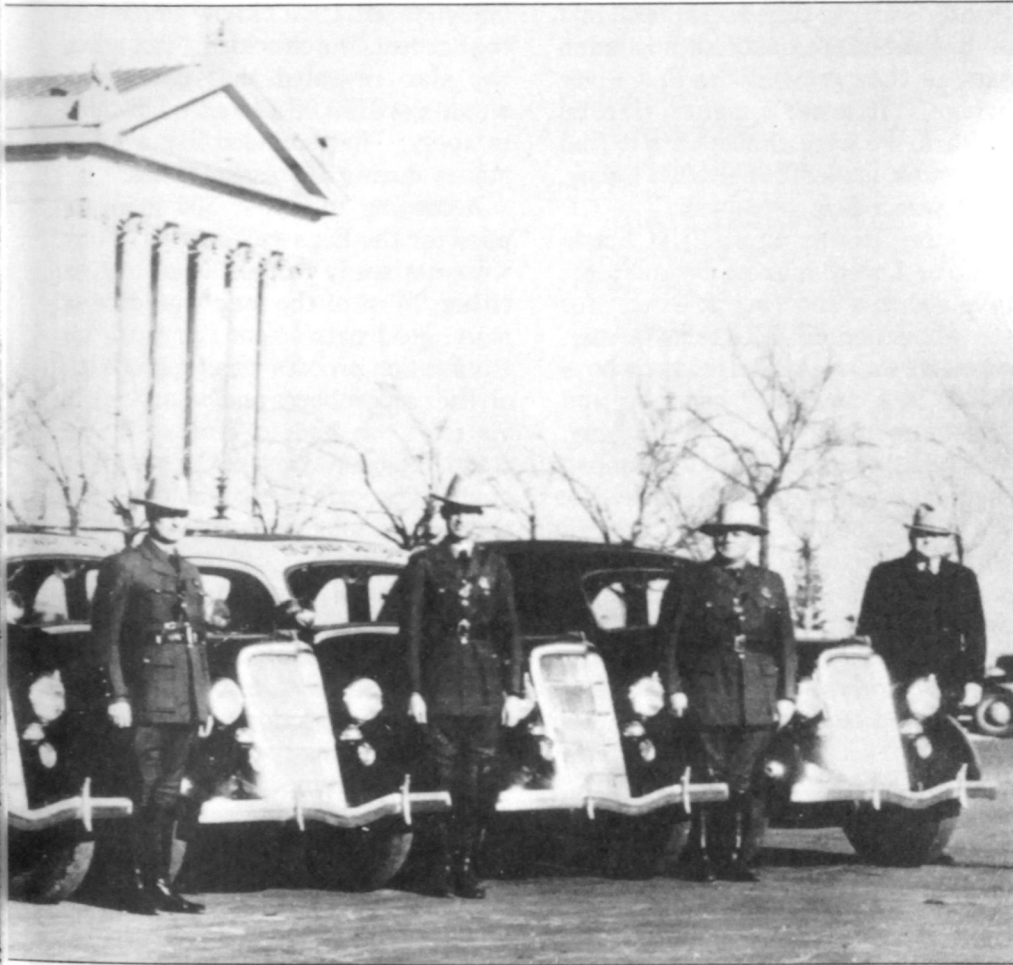
ordered you to get under the counter. It was D. Arthur Wilson from the State Crime Bureau. The Bureau called me to meet officers Wilson and Maxey at Parker. Hughes County’s sheriff Harve Ball was there too. The caller told me that they received a tip that Pretty Boy Floyd was expected to pass through there to meet Joe Harris, a bankrobbing friend of his, at Legal, over east of Parker. Evidently, some one tipped off Floyd that we were waiting for him.”

The keen-minded sheriff recalled many later events leading up to the demise of both Floyd and Harris. For brevity’s sake, these must be omitted.

*(Western Oklahoma and the rest of the state were in need of a deterrent to bandits like Pretty Boy Floyd)*

# First Highway Patrol

— by *Kate Jackson Lewis*



*Leedee Hunter, Raymond Shoemaker, Fat Mullins (substitute for R. Q. Nelson).*

"We needed better communication among officers back then. By the time we got word that we were needed at a certain place, the bandits were miles away. If we'd had the highway patrol, the bandits couldn't have roamed the highways so long," Bonner added.

Oklahoma City Veteran Patrolman Carl Tyler said the advent of the auto on state roads and highways brought on the need of a state patrol. The vehicle became a weapon in the hands of machine-gun toting, fast-driving bandits of the thirties. As safety conditions grew worse, citizens began pressuring governors and legislators to come to the rescue of the state's

existing law officers, mostly county sheriffs. The lawmen were hampered in covering the state's many miles of roads and highways by jurisdictional boundaries, slow communication, and small numbers.

Various Oklahoma governors proposed establishment of a statewide patrol but were unable to sell members of the legislature on such an organization.

Jim Nance, well-known Purcell publisher and former political leader said, "As we celebrate the state patrol's 46th birthday, we must remember Governor E. W. Marland as the father of the Highway Patrol. The

illegal liquor transportation across state lines prompted Mr. Marland to persuade his leaders and supporters in the House and Senate to pass a bill creating the patrol."

In 1935 the legislature authorized the State Tax Commission to set up a six-car emergency patrol to act until men could be schooled and equipment facilitated for a much larger group. Since records were not kept on the original squad, accounts vary as to the number of patrolmen it included.

Tom Hunter, Purcell, son of Leedee Hunter, who drove one of the first yellow and black '36 model Fords used by the preliminary patrol, came up with a picture of a six-car squad with one man standing by each. Pictured were Larry Malone, Abe Block, Lawson Gilliam, Leedee Hunter, Raymond Shoemaker, and Fat Mullins. Hunter, a lad of six at the time, recalled that his father wore a brown wool coat and tan pants with brown stripes down the sides, along with high-topped boots and a stiff-billed cap. His gun was kept in a scabbard on his left hip. "I can remember Daddy putting his handcuffs around both my ankles."

A recent publication, "The First 40 Years of Highway Patrol" recorded that a six-car 12-man squad was fielded. Carl Tyler verified the account. Though he was unable to name the entire group, he said, "I know Dub (Morris) Wheeler was one of them. Dub was an OU All-American football tackle. He's still living down at Atoka."

Tishomingo's June 28, 1963 JOHNSTON COUNTY DEMOCRAT carried an account of another member of the earliest patrol squad. Reporter Bob Peterson wrote, "Cliff Kiersey, salty former Bryan county sheriff, was saluted Friday by state peace officers for his career in law enforcement. Kiersey also holds the distinction of being one of Oklahoma's first six highway patrolmen, and that was before there was even a Highway Patrol as Sooners know it today."

Although six patrol cars manned by six (or 12) men tried to enforce state traffic laws, Oklahoma had more than 70,000 square miles to patrol — an impossible task. Safety conditions grew worse.

Relief soon came. J. M. Gentry, newly appointed Public Safety Commissioner, set up the first patrol training school at OU in June 1937. Eighty-five men completed the school and were installed on July 15th. In the second school one month later, 40 men completed training and were ready for duty.

By September, 125 patrolmen, equipped with black and white '37 Fords and a "Flying Squadron" of 16 Indian motorcycles, traveled Oklahoma's roads and highways. Jack Hitch was appointed captain over the 135 patrolmen.

Gentry's position as Safety Commissioner was short-lived. He lost his life in a traffic accident soon after he set the safety system in motion.

According to James Hall, Purcell member of the first patrol, "Safety conditions did improve, for in 1941, Oklahoma's highway patrol won the Grand prize for national traffic safety. This was the highest tribute paid in highway safety."

Tyler said that 24 men of the first 125 member squad are still living. They are Joe Boyce, Eugene S. Clark, Tyrus R. Cobb, Hugh W. Enos, Floyd C. Hays, Norman C. Hold, Robert R. Lester, Fern D. Petty, Jack T. Smith, Cecil L. Snapp, Ormus Soucek, Carl H. Tyler, Walter Abbott, Owen K. Bivins, Eugene L. Bumpass, Dave Faulkner, Howard Flanagan, Harold

J. Harmon, Emerson C. McIntosh, Forrest A. Mussen, Oliver L. Nickerson, William F. Norton, Ed Vandagriff, and Harold W. Watson.

Many and varied were the experiences of the early patrolmen. Leedee Hunter's brittle-paged scrapbook told of his interception of liquor-laden cars as they crossed the Red River bridge. "If a car's lights slanted upward, we were almost sure to find the trunk loaded down with liquor. That was a dead give-away."

"Once," Hunter wrote, "J. H. Blackard and I were looking for suspects involved in a shooting at Binger for the abduction of a Gotebo farmer, when we found two Arizona cowboys asleep in a car. They heard us and started speeding down the highway. We chased them, but they abandoned their car and escaped into the woods. We missed the men, but I fell heir to a white Stetson hat to go with the black one I had got from his cohort the night before." Mrs. Hunter, his widow, proudly showed the hats, her husband's brown and tan uniform, and high-topped boots.

Another account told of Hunter's stopping a newlywed couple, asking to see the driver's license. The youth brought out his marriage license. But that was not the sort which would placate the patrolman; so the red-faced groom was arraigned before the judge who charged him a ten-dollar fine and released him to continue his honeymoon trip.

O. K. Bivins, now deceased, said, "Oh, we all confiscated liquor and chased after killers, but that's all over now, and I'm enjoying my rocking

chair. It's softer than park benches."

Hall told of listening to the 16th legislature's discussion which led up to the passage of the patrol bill. "I was the doorkeeper of the House where it was my job to keep legislators in and lobbyists out. I don't know which was the hardest," he chuckled. "But when the plan revealed that patrolmen would get \$150.00 a month, I decided to apply. That sounded like a lot of money during depression times."

According to Tyler, 500 men applied for the Highway Patrol. "They were not seedy run-of-the-mill types either. Most of the men would have made good patrolmen. I'm sure the elimination process was tough. With all the bank robbers and liquor traffic violators we had to deal with, we could have used most of the men who applied. I'm sure they could have used the money. Jobs were so few and far between."

As the patrol grew in number, more duties were assigned to them. On July 22, 1937, they were asked to issue driver's licenses. A few years later, school bus inspection was added to the list. The ramshackle, crackerbox buses were banned from the roads and were replaced by safe and comfortable buses for transporting the state's children.

Sheriff Bonner, close associate of early patrolmen, commented, "Give 'em all the praise you can — and that goes for today's patrolmen. I think they oughta' get the bullet-proof vests they asked for but were turned down."

Westview Pasteup by:

Southwestern Oklahoma State University Advertising Layout I students.

Lori Kepple

Bryan Miller

Tom Trujillo

Andy Maddux

David Millwee

Mark Turvaville

Joe Meador

Charlotte Ramos

Alan Willemsson