

For Immediate Release

Captain Neil Weaver
Government and Media Relations

Chris Loftis, Communications Director

Office (360) 596-4013

Cell (360) 485-3983

Chris.Loftis@wsp.wa.gov

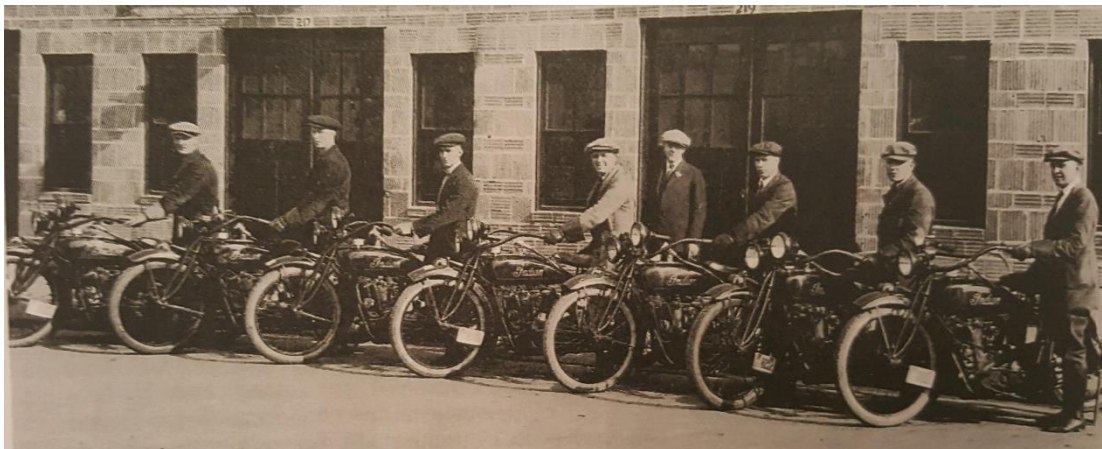
August 31, 2020

The Washington State Patrol Kicks-off Centennial Year

Olympia - Tuesday, September 1, 2020 marks the beginning of the WSP's 100th year of service. To mark the important event, WSP Troopers have been authorized to wear a special "Centennial Badge" through September 1, 2021, the 100th anniversary of the agency's first day of road operations. The original badge was worn by the first Patrolmen from 1921 – 1927. At that time, the Patrol changed to the six-pointed star badge that it still uses today.



In June 1921, the Washington state legislature authorized the creation of the new agency, originally named the Washington Highway Patrol, for limited duties relating to traffic enforcement. On September 1, 1921 after a three-day training class, the Washington State Patrol (WSP) swore in its first 16 Patrolmen: J.H. Brown; Miles E. Clark; Lance H. Cleland; L.D. Conrad; Fred J. Dibble; A.W. Dolphin; Herbert J. Flagg; John H. Fletcher; Harry Harkins; L.P. Hockett; E.V. Kuykendall; H.E. Lakeberg; H.B. Shuck; Frank R. Spinning; George H. Stevenson; and Percy F. Thomas.



Olympia Detachment circa 1923. Original officers pictured include Hyde (far left), Clark (2nd from right) and Lakeberg (far right)

These officers went on sometimes-solo assignments across the state equipped with only a badge, a side arm, a Highway Patrol armband and a WWI surplus Indian motorcycle. (Uniforms were not issued until 1924.) Enforcing fledgling traffic laws in a time when there were far more horses than cars and less than a thousand miles of paved road statewide sometimes meant dealing with real antipathy toward the very idea of a “speed limit.” They often carried camping gear in their sidecars along with emergency equipment to fight forest fires during what could be months-long deployments. It would be almost two decades before WSP began using cars as its main vehicle choice but the mission of keeping the public safe through traffic law enforcement proudly continues with the modern Washington State Patrol.



In the years after WWI, Washingtonians were on the move. More motorcycles, cars, and trucks meant the need for more paved roads and more concern for safety. Even though top speeds of the day were a fraction of current capacities, a lack of industry safety standards, inconsistent regulations, and lax enforcement attention often led to deadly consequences. In this undated WSP photo, a logging truck with no taillights led to tragedy on a foggy roadway.

WSP will provide regular information releases on key historical dates and events throughout the year including the stories and remembrances of each of the 30 WSP personnel killed in the line of duty in our first 100 years of service. In addition, during this time when the appropriate role of law enforcement is an issue of national discussion and debate, we will look forward, using this year of Centennial reflection to help our agency and industry meet the evolving needs of our ever-changing state during our next century of service.



Trooper Vernon Fortin died on September 30, 1923 when his motorcycle collided with another patrol officer's motorcycle while in route to the Lynden Fair for traffic duty. He was the first of thirty WSP personnel to die in the line of duty.

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