

**\*\*\*For Immediate Release\*\*\***

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**Paul H. Johnson**  
**Commissioned – October 1, 1946**  
**End of Watch – December 12, 1949**



Washington State Highway Patrolman Paul H. Johnson died in the late evening of December 12, 1949, from gun fire by a deranged suspect who had already shot and wounded three of his neighbors. Patrolman Johnson had been called to the scene when area residents said an elderly recluse had “run amok” threatening and shooting at them with his .22 rifle in the Ernie’s Grove community near Snoqualmie.

Patrolman Johnson was the tenth member of the WSP organization to lose his life in the line of duty in the agency’s first century of service. He served his country honorably for more than four years during WWII before joining the Washington State Patrol in 1946. He left behind grieving parents, four brothers, and two sisters. He also left behind a heartbroken state and agency who, on this anniversary of his death, honor him for his service and sacrifice. He was 32 years old.

## **BIO**

Paul H. Johnson was born on Sept. 3, 1917, in Seattle to Gust H. Johnson and Gunhild Jansson. One of seven children, he attended school in Arlington and Seattle, graduating from Ballard High School in 1936. His family described him as an accomplished trumpet player who often played at church and in a trio with his two brothers on the radio.

Johnson worked as a shipping clerk at a Seattle based retailer in 1940 before serving four years and three months in the United States Army during World War II. Much of his service time was spent in Kodiak, Alaska, as a member of the military police.

His career with the Washington State Highway Patrol began as a clerk in Wenatchee on August 5, 1946. He was later a member of the 14<sup>th</sup> cadet class and commissioned as a patrolman on October 1, 1946. He was assigned to Olympia, then transferred to North Bend, Renton, Seattle, and back to North Bend in 1949.

Patrolman Johnson was mortally wounded just seven months after transferring back to North Bend.

## **END OF WATCH**

On December 12, 1949, Johnson responded to reports of a man firing shots at his neighbors near Snoqualmie with a .22 caliber rifle. The suspect had begun shooting his own livestock in the mid-morning followed by his pets and the pets of neighbors before turning the handmade weapon on three of his neighbors including George Fitzgerald who came to the rescue of another neighbor, C.F. Johnston, who had been shot in the face.

Patrolman Johnson and another officer, Clare Powers, arrived at the Ernie's Grove neighborhood, were fired upon, took cover behind their vehicle, and tried to call out the suspect, Walter Peden, from his home. Peden opened fire again from a window, striking Johnson.

Johnson was rushed to Providence Hospital and underwent emergency surgery for a gunshot wound to the head. His parents and WSP colleagues waited while doctors tried to save him, reviving him twice. Sadly, he succumbed to his injuries shortly before midnight. He was 32 years old at the time of his passing.



*Seattle Post Intelligencer Photo - Neighbor George Fitzgerald was shot in the arm while rendering aid to another neighbor also shot in the melee. When he returned home from the hospital, he and his wife were able to subdue and detain the suspect.*

Peden was taken into custody after going into the Fitzgerald home where he had enjoyed a meal with his neighbors just the night before. George Fitzgerald, wounded in the arm in the earlier gunfire, had returned home from the hospital and with the assistance of his wife, was able to subdue and detain Peden until officers arrived.

When asked by investigators if he felt any remorse for killing an officer of the law, Peden answered "I'll take anything you give me." King County Judge, Malcolm Douglas gave him a declaration of insanity and sent him to the Western State Hospital in Steilacoom. Peden had a history of mental illness having been institutionalized briefly in both 1944 and 1947. The details of his final institutionalization are not known.



*Seattle Times photo and caption of Walter Peden shortly after being taken into custody*

Washington State Highway Patrolman Paul H. Johnson was buried at the Washelli Cemetery in Seattle on Friday, December 16, 1949, on a cold and wet northwest afternoon. Local newspapers commented that the “skies wept” as his family and 80 colleagues from the Washington State Patrol laid him to rest. He was survived by his parents, brothers Stanley, Harold, Wilmer, and Alvin and sisters Florence and Ruby, all of Seattle.

In May of 1998, he was posthumously awarded the Washington Law Enforcement Medal of Honor.



The Washington State Patrol holds Patrolman Paul H. Johnson, and the other 29 individuals who have given their last full measure of devotion to our state and society, in our hearts and memories. A public servant, a veteran, a brother, a son and a friend, he chose a dangerous career and knowingly drove into a perilous situation confronting an armed suspect. With courage and intent, he died serving and protecting the public. He lost his life but gained the eternal appreciation, honor, and tribute of an industry and state. We remember. We always will.

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## **Washington State Highway Patrolman Paul H. Johnson**

**End of Watch – December 12, 1949**

***Gone But Never Forgotten***