

*Transcript of a Saint Paul Police oral history interview with*

# Lieutenant Russell V. Bovee

Saint Paul Officer

1957 - 1990



1957



2008

June 13, 2008

By  
Kateleen Cavett  
at

HAND in HAND Productions Office in Saint Paul, Minnesota

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All pictures are from the Saint Paul Police Department  
collections and the personal files of the Bovee family.

## *ORAL HISTORY*

Oral History is the spoken word in print.

Oral histories are personal memories shared from the perspective of the narrator. By means of recorded interviews oral history documents collect spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance. These interviews are transcribed verbatim and minimally edited for accessibility. Greatest appreciation is gained when one can read an oral history aloud.

Oral histories do not follow the standard language usage of the written word. Transcribed interviews are not edited to meet traditional writing standards; they are edited only for clarity and understanding. The hope of oral history is to capture the flavor of the narrator's speech and convey the narrator's feelings through the timbre and tempo of speech patterns.

An oral history is more than a family tree with names of ancestors and their birth and death dates. Oral history is recorded personal memory, and that is its value. What it offers complements other forms of historical text, and does not always require historical collaboration. Oral history recognizes that memories often become polished as they sift through time, taking on new meanings and potentially reshaping the events they relate.

Memories shared in an oral histories create a picture of the narrator's life – the culture, food, eccentricities, opinions, thoughts, idiosyncrasies, joys, sorrows, passions - the rich substance that gives color and texture to this individual life.

Kate Cavett  
Oral Historian HAND in HAND Productions

## **Russell W. Bovee**

was appointed policeman January 2, 1957;  
promoted to sergeant October 1, 1964;  
lieutenant January 11, 1973;  
and retired January 1, 1990.

RB: Russel Bovee

KC: Kate Cavett

RB: My name is Russ Bovee. I went on the police department on January 2, 1957.



### **Patrolmen appointed January 2, 1957**

Front Row: L. James Tynan, Jr. (326), Cecil J. Moser (488), Donald R. Smith (483), Gerald E. Grant (484), Robert P. Kunz (481), Harry L. Hughley (477) Second Row: Gerald N. DuBay (487), Gordon J. Bataglia (478), August John Moravec (495), James Oliver Mann (494), Albert E. Rogowski (480), William J. Faricy (254) Third Row: Richard E. Collins (482), Richard J. Pfiffner (491), Donald K Okeson (490), Donald M. Swenson (476), Donald W. Byland (489), William R. Kinsey (479) Fourth Row: Terrence J. Stockton (485), **Russell W. Bovee (486)**, Donald J. Loughrea (492), Albert Gorz (307), Glenn H. Hubenette (493)

KC: What branch of the service did you serve in, sir?

RB: I served in the army.

KC: The Korean War?

RB: Yes. I was a cryptographer.<sup>1</sup> And then I spent about three-and-a-half years overseas. I came back in December of 1954. I went in right out of high school and came back in December of '54.

KC: When you came on Saint Paul Police in 1957, Proetz<sup>2</sup> was the chief. And then Lester McAuliffe<sup>3</sup> was the chief.

RB: Yes.

KC: And he was chief from 1961 to 1970. What kind of a chief was he?

RB: I thought Lester was a good chief. He was from the old school. Very hard-nosed guy. A policeman. A policeman he was. I thought he was a good chief. He was fair. He wanted everybody to have the persona of being one of the really tough guys, but I thought he was very good. I had



Chief Lester McAuliffe  
1963

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<sup>1</sup> **Cryptography** is the practice and study of techniques for secure communication in the presence of third parties (called adversaries). - Wikipedia

<sup>2</sup> **William F. Proetz** was appointed patrolman March 1, 1937; promoted to sergeant March 16, 1948, detective September 20, 1948, lieutenant December 1949, and chief March 11, 1955; returned to detective lieutenant March 13, 1961; and retired June 12, 1963.

<sup>3</sup> **Lester E. McAuliffe** was appointed patrolman March 24, 1936; promoted to sergeant December 16, 1947; detective March 16, 1948; detective lieutenant December 1, 1949; assistant chief November 15, 1955; and chief May 23, 1961; and retired March 31, 1970.

no problem with him. I got to know him fairly personally. I had occasion even to go to his house for parties and things after a while. I thought he did a good job. Probably in my career was the second best chief that we ever had.

KC: What were some personal experiences you had with him?

RB: Well, I don't think we had too many personal experiences, but in the old days with the chief, if you dealt with anybody back then you dealt pretty much with Chief of Detectives. You didn't walk into the chief's office anytime you wanted, back in those days anyway. Most of the time in investigations I had I dealt with guys like George Barkley<sup>4</sup> and homicide commanders and things. You would occasionally have some involvement with the chief, but not nearly like it is today, I don't think. Assuming that anybody can walk into [Chief] Harrington<sup>5</sup>'s office anytime they want, you didn't just walk into McAuliffe's office without being invited. Nor did you with [Chief] Proetz and even [Chief] Rowan,<sup>6</sup> I think, had a little bit of that that not anybody could just walk in anytime you wanted.

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<sup>4</sup> **George G. Barkley** was appointed patrolman November 21, 1938; military leave March 13, 1942 to November 1, 1945; promoted to detective November 18, 1947; detective lieutenant May 1, 1956; rank changed to captain February 1, 1965; retired January 14, 1971, and died February 1974.

<sup>5</sup> **John Mark Harrington** was appointed police officer July 11, 1977; promoted to sergeant September 7, 1983; acting lieutenant January 4, 1997; lieutenant November 1, 1997; title changed to commander January 1, 2000; senior commander July 1, 2000 ; assistant chief May 8, 2004; chief July 1, 2004; and retired June 14, 2010. Elected to the Minnesota State Senate from Saint Paul 2010-2012. Appointed Chief of the Metro Transit Police September 4, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> **Richard H. Rowan** (1922-2005) was appointed patrolman October 13, 1947; promoted to detective June 20, 1955; deputy chief April 17, 1964; chief June 30, 1970; and retired December 31, 1979.

KC: Who was the best chief that you worked for?

RB: Oh, I think McCutcheon<sup>7</sup> was the best chief as far as the department was concerned. McCutcheon did more for the police department as a whole than anybody else. He was probably ahead of his time as far as the things that he started doing, the physical



Chief Richard Rowan  
1975

education programs and things like that that he started. Now other departments all over the country are doing it probably. I

think as far as the department itself that McCutcheon was by far the best chief I ever had. And like I say, McAuliffe would probably be a second for me.



Chief William  
McCutcheon  
1983

KC: Can you talk about your experiences with Chief Rowan?

RB: With Chief Rowan? It was kind of a unique situation for me because Dick was an Eastsider. My sister married a guy from the Eastside. They hung around together before he even went on the job. And when he was a young policeman my brother-in-law hung around with Dick, so I got to know him pretty well. Socially he was at my house many times. I used to have parties at my house. Casino nights and things that I would do at my house, and Dick and his wife were always there.

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<sup>7</sup> **William Wallace McCutcheon** served the Saint Paul Park Police 1948 to 1954, appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted to sergeant August 22, 1960; lieutenant December 12, 1965; captain June 20, 1969; deputy chief February 4, 1972; chief April 1, 1980; and retired July 15, 1992.

Department-wise he was not quite as easy to deal with I think as far as McCutcheon would have been. And, in fact, I think the general consensus was that McCutcheon pretty much ran the department when Rowan was the chief. McCutcheon came up and made the ideas and things that should have been done and stuff and – Dick was the last of the old Irish police chiefs that just kind of rolled with the punches. I really never had any scrapes with him. He certainly never did me any favors because we were friends. And he certainly never hurt me in any way either.

KC: You say he was one of the last old Irish chiefs, so politically he was well connected?

RB: Well, you know, way back when I guess it was pretty much a closed circle, I guess. Who was chief and who were deputy chiefs and everything was pretty much a tight circle back then. McAuliffe, of course – I don't remember if Rowan was deputy chief or chief of detectives at the time when McAuliffe was chief. I don't remember that. But again, we had Irish mayors for a hundred years here and the mayor decided who the chief was going to be, so generally it wasn't going to be some Polish guy.

It was just kind of expected, I guess, that Rowan would have become the next chief. He was a graduate of the FBI Academy, which everybody seemed to put a lot of faith in at that time. All of the fair-haired people in the department were sent to the FBI Academy. That was their steppingstone to success or promotion. And Dick was one of the first ones run through the FBI Academy that I remember. There may have been some before him, but he was one of the first ones to go to the FBI Academy. So you kind of knew that he was next in line to be promoted.



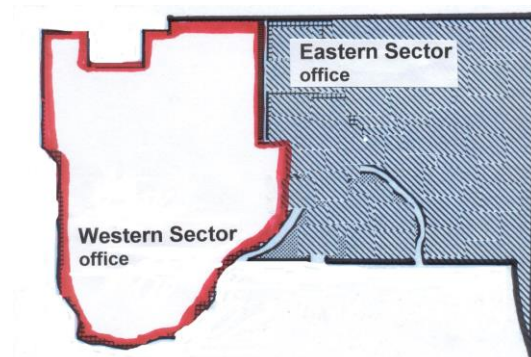


Lieutenant Russ Bovee  
1973

KC: Can you tell me some stories about experiences that you had in Saint Paul? How long were you Homicide?

RB: It was a great department to be in. I thought I was reasonably successful in the years that I was there, but to kind of isolate one thing is difficult when you have so many different assignments and get involved in so many different things. Thirty-five years is a long time to cover. I was in Homicide two or three times. When I was promoted to lieutenant,, I took over the Narcotics Unit. I was there for a short time. And then the department changed from Homicide to Crimes Against Person, which was homicide, sex, robbery, and it was a different situation. I went in there and charged the robbery part of the crimes against person and I was there for some years. Then they asked me to come up on the

Hill<sup>8</sup> here and be the Sector Commander up here in uniform. I did that for a few years. And then when I went back into Homicide, it was again separated into the Homicide Unit as opposed to Crimes Against Person. And I can't recall exactly, but I think what years that I went in there was the last several years that I was there, I was a Homicide Commander.



1982 – 1986 there were two police sectors in Saint Paul

KC: Were there any homicide investigations that you felt were particularly challenging?

RB: They're all challenging, I guess, unless it's a no-brainer. I left a few behind that got unsolved, but in those days there wasn't a lot of DNA and technical support available to you that they have nowadays that make it a little easier. I think the rate of clearance was good all the years that I was there, but certainly wasn't a hundred percent ever. I never recall us in solving every homicide that came through.

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<sup>8</sup> **Cathedral Hill** neighborhood is roughly from the John Ireland west to Lexington, between I-94 [Old Rondo] to Summit Avenue. It encompasses what remains of the "Rondo Neighborhood" (Rice/John Ireland to Marshall, to Lexington, to University) - a diverse, but predominately Black neighborhood since just after WWII.

KC: Can you define what the LEAU<sup>9</sup>— Law Enforcement Aid Unit did?

RB: Well, basically the objective of the unit was to have people that would work on the street and collect intelligence information on people. It was not a group that went out and actively participated in trying to arrest people for different functions. We assisted in the arrest of a lot of people, but our basic function was to gather intelligence, not only from the street, but from other law enforcement departments. We worked a lot with Minneapolis. We worked a lot throughout the state with units, sometimes even outstate [rural Minnesota] units. But to gather information on who was here and who was doing burglaries at the time, or most likely to be doing burglaries, or who was most likely to be a suspect in any particular crime.

And an occasion when we had somebody that – we had a burglar in Minnesota or in Saint Paul here that travelled out of city a lot. He would go all over the state into small towns and commit burglaries. And we spent months following him all over the state, so we were a unit that could just pick up and go, and we followed him all over the state until ultimately we caught him committing a burglary some place. It wasn't in our jurisdiction, but we developed the information and put him at the scene of the crime and things like that. Those are things you couldn't do if you were assigned to a specific job in Saint Paul.

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<sup>9</sup> LEAU— Law Enforcement Aid Unit—a Special Investigations Unit.

We were – I guess elite is not the word I want to have, but we were a flexible unit. We would come on the street at night and we would go visit after hours places, not for the purpose finding what they were doing wrong, but to talk to people and find out if there was anything the department should know. That was a basic function of the unit.

And when they originated the Bomb Squad in Saint Paul, we were the unit that got involved in that process of starting up the Bomb Squad. Bob Lee<sup>10</sup> was on our unit at the time, and he ultimately went to school and learned everything there was and then came back and educated the people and brought in all the equipment to become the first Bomb Squad. Prior to that, when there was a suspicious package at a bank or something, they'd just send us out there to open it up with a knife. We didn't have the luxury of going and blowing up somebody's shaving kit. No. The Bomb Squad came out of that unit originally.

Trying to remember who was in the LEAU. Joe Doran<sup>11</sup> and Paul Paulos.<sup>12</sup> I believe there might have been eight at one time. Paulos and [John] Splinter<sup>13</sup> and Doran and Bobby Anderson,<sup>14</sup> they were on one side.

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<sup>10</sup> **Robert Miller Lee** was appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted to sergeant October 1, 1964, lieutenant January 11, 1973, retired January 3, 1978; deceased April 26, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> **Joseph C. Doran Sr.** was in the Park Police March 1957 – March 31, 1961; appointed patrolman March 31, 1961; promoted to sergeant December 21, 1968; and retired December 15, 1989.

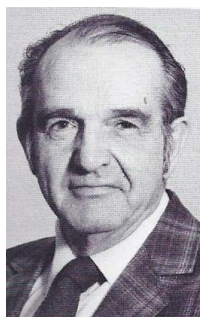
<sup>12</sup> **Paul Richard "Paulos" Panagiotopoulos** was appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted to sergeant December 12, 1966; and retired September 4, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> **John Splinter** was appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted detective March 1, 1962; and retired June 3, 1988.

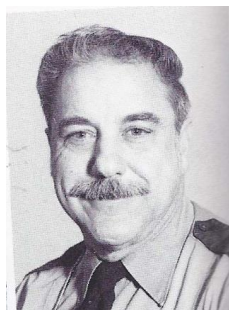
<sup>14</sup> **Robert Lyle Anderson** was appointed patrolman March 28, 1955; promoted sergeant January 2, 1968; lieutenant August 4, 1973; and retired January 31, 1991.



Paul Paulos  
1984



John Splinter  
1984



Joe Dorn  
1984



Bobby Anderson  
1984

And then the other side was [Leroy] Thielen<sup>15</sup> and I and George Mikel<sup>16</sup> and Bobby Lee. I think there were eight of us on the crew then. McCutcheon was in charge of it for a while.



Leroy Thielen  
1984



Russ Bovee  
1984



George Mikel  
1984



Bobby Lee  
1960

Like I say, it was kind of a freewheeling group that did a lot of different things. We weren't bound by any one type of crime that you had to be involved for. We worked robbery. We worked bank robberies with the FBI, worked

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<sup>15</sup> **Leroy H. Thielen** was appointed patrolman January 4, 1954; promoted to detective; March 1, 1962; lieutenant; January 29, 1971; retired March 28, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> **George F. "Jigs" Mikel** was appointed patrolman March 4, 1957; promoted to sergeant February 26, 1966; and retired June 7, 1985.

burglary cases, worked rapist cases. We followed known rapists that we suspected were going out. It was kind of a broad field of investigation.

KC: Any cases that stand out?

RB: There was a lot of them, I guess. The Sackett investigation,<sup>17</sup> of course, we got involved in. Very often when Gary Hogan<sup>18</sup> was bombing places in downtown Saint Paul, we were involved in that investigation. We followed Gary Hogan around and staked out his house and things like that for months and months until he was caught.

The Bagley case. Bagley was the burglar that travelled all over the state. We spent a lot of time on the Bagley case watching his house, and when he packed up to go, following him all over the state. We spent a lot of time on that. I guess there are not a lot of them that really stand out more than any other ones. They were all pretty much things that were pretty active, things that kept you pretty busy.

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<sup>17</sup> **Police officer James Sackett**, Sr. was shot by a sniper at 12:30 a.m. on the night of May 22, 1970, while responding to a fake police call to a home in the 800 block of Hague Avenue, near Selby Avenue and Victoria Street. An 18-year-old woman, Connie Trimble, was charged with making a fake call for help, telling authorities that her pregnant sister was ready to give birth. Trimble refused to reveal the names of others involved and served time in jail for contempt of court. In the spring of 2006, Ronald Reed and Larry Clark were convicted of first degree murder when Trimble testified that Ronald Reed persuaded her to make the fake phone call that brought officer Sackett to the ambush. Both Clark and Reed received life sentences.

<sup>18</sup> A bomb went off in the women's restroom of the downtown Dayton's store in 1970. Mary Peek was seriously injured in the blast. A second, much more powerful bomb with a faulty timing device was found nearby and didn't explode. Police theorized that the first bomb was meant to draw police and fire personnel to the area, where they'd be injured or killed by the second bomb. Police found bomb making instructions and a pamphlet on urban guerrilla warfare in **Gary Hogan's** home. The bombing came at a time of racial unrest across the country and growing opposition to the Vietnam War. There were numerous bomb threats and evacuations in the Twin Cities at the time. Hogan was convicted of attempted first-degree murder and aggravated arson and sentenced to twenty years in prison. He served just more than three years in the St. Cloud Reformatory.

KC: It would be my illusion that this would be the unit that would identify then the Sackett killers.



Sergeant Russ Bovee  
1972

RB: I think that probably a lot of our information resulted in who they really were. Yeah. In fact, I was called down one night to the watch commander<sup>19</sup>'s office to go over to the jail to interview a prisoner over there who had information on the Sackett case. I went over there and interviewed this guy and his information was very good, but he indicated he needed to be out on the street to find out where these people were, where we could find them. So I got him released from custody temporarily and he went out on the street and immediately fled. He never showed up at court, of course.

Paul Lindholm was the county attorney at the time that was not in favor of releasing him anyway. Paul Lindholm called me up. He didn't show up for court at noon. Paul Lindholm waited 'til about ten or eleven o'clock at night to call me and tell me that he didn't show up for court. So, my partner and I went out and went through the neighborhood up here until we found him and took him back into custody. Then at four o'clock in the morning, I called Paul Lindholm at home and told him that he was back in custody.

He ultimately gave us information that was accurate and was very good. The only unfortunate part of it was that when they interviewed Paul Lindholm for TV and in the newspapers, he named the informant, which is probably the

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<sup>19</sup> The Saint Paul **police watch commander** provides nightly and weekend/holiday supervision, being responsible for reviewing arrests and monitoring on-going police activities in the City. This position is the main source for notifying departmental administrative personnel regarding issues and incidents occurring throughout the City.

worst thing he could ever give is the name of somebody to tell them that this is the guy that gave us the information, which was a no-no anytime.

One of the most difficult things in the LEAU job was to develop information from people and then not tell anybody where you got it. In fact, I was held in contempt of court in Minneapolis one time because I refused to give the name of somebody, but you couldn't operate unless you did that. The good judge over there, the lady judge that probably got the job for political correctness, wanted to put me in jail. I see her mother to this day down in Florida. Her mother lives down where I do in Florida. [Kate laughs]

KC: Did she put you in jail?

RB: Oh, the department kind of intervened and there was a lot of – somebody from Minneapolis. It happened in Minneapolis and there's a federal court over there in Minneapolis and somebody intervened, but it was just one of the controversies, one of the many that arose that I somehow seemed to get involved in over my career. I had several with different organizations and things.

KC: Tell me the story.

RB: There isn't a really lot to tell. I forbade the FBI from coming into my office in Robbery, refused to allow them into the police department and come in my office and that developed into a big hassle.

KC: And why would you do that?

RB: Well, that particular incident was a result of the bank robbery of the Western State Bank [July 9, 1971]. We responded to the call at the Western State Bank and by the time we got there and everything was kind of straightened out and found out what happened and then had to interview everybody that was in there. So my people all went out and interviewed everybody that was there and when they got almost done – because people were anxious to get out of there. They



didn't want to stick around for two hours because they were having to be there when the bank got robbed.

We were almost done with the interviews, and the FBI came and in all their glory, they usually ran through the door and held their badges up in the air and announced who they were. And I told them, I said, "Why don't you just get copies of our reports?" and they said, "No, we're the FBI. We have to start all over and everybody's going to have to get re-interviewed and nobody can leave." And it got to be a pretty big hassle, so I said, "Well, if they don't want to cooperate with us and if they want something from the Robbery Division at Saint Paul, then they're going to have to get it through other sources, because I'm not going to allow them to come in our office." [Kate chuckles] And that kind of got blown out of proportion, and somebody from Washington had to come in and straighten that out with everybody. But there were just little things that happened that somehow – I wasn't always politically correct.

KC: [laughing] Who was the chief then?

RB: McCutcheon. They went into him and cried to McCutcheon, and he says, "It's your problem with him and not mine." But I knew an agent in Washington who was from the area here. I knew him well, and they sent him in to smooth the waters.

But a lot of things happened in those days, and I don't know whether you have ever discussed it with anybody else that had come in here, but the FBI is probably the most overrated law enforcement organization in the world. I don't think you'll find three policemen that will tell you that they think that they're a great investigative organization or really want anything to do with them. If you ever had any experiences with the FBI, you grew not to trust them. Very few policemen will tell you, "Boy, the FBI's a great organization." At least in my experience anyway.

There's been some controversies over the years that have directed my career, but as I said, I was never a big advocate of women on the police department and that caused some consternation for some people, I guess.

KC: Talk about why you didn't feel that women were appropriate to be police officers.

RB: It just has always been my opinion. The patrol function, which is the first and most necessary part of being a police officer that most women that I ever had any experience with weren't equipped to handle that job. There have been some that did an adequate job that they've gotten by, but by and large, it's not the kind of a job I don't think that should be taken up by a eighty-six pound woman. It's like not any different than the fire department. I always said that if I was on the third floor of a building on fire, I want some large fireman to come up there and carry me down, not some ninety-five pound woman to climb up there and try and carry me down.

There are a lot of places where there's a specific need for women, in particular, interviewing rape victims. Things of that nature. Surveillance—you're much less conspicuous sitting in a car with a female partner on a surveillance than you are with two guys sitting in the car. Certain investigative things that are very important to have a woman. But I never advocated them for patrol division. And my experience as a patrol commander having women working for me was not very good. You know. It reinforced anything I believed in before, anyway.

KC: What were your concerns about women being patrol officers?

RB: When I was Sector Commander, I was concerned for the safety of them because, like I say, the first woman they assigned to me, as I told you before, didn't weigh a hundred pounds with all her equipment on. For her to work on the Hill up here on the midnight shift and answer calls to bar fights and things, she was ill

equipped for the job, and as were most of the patrolmen that worked there were worried about her safety and felt the need to run in on every call she had to have.

I don't want to isolate her, but none of the guys that worked for me ever came in crying because someone took the car they had cleaned the night before. And it wasn't just because of her. I just have always advocated that patrol people and firemen should be equipped to do what you have to do. And I didn't think there were too many women that were equipped for that. As I said, there is needs in other areas, but I never thought it was in the Patrol Unit.

KC: In 1970 when Officer Joe Sackett was killed.

RB: I was working Criminal Intelligence in 1970, and I was on the street on the night that he got killed. I was not in Homicide at that time.

KC: Were you at the scene that night?

RB: Yes, I was.

KC: Can you tell me about that?

RB: Well, there isn't a lot to tell about it, I guess. A call came out and we happened to be working in Criminal Intelligence and at that time spent the lion's share of our time up on the Hill up here. So we were nearby and we got there. There were other squads that had responded also. No suspects or the only thing we had of a lead at that time was a general direction of where the shots came from. Searched the neighborhood as best we could, but there really wasn't much that happened that night. The suspects got away right away, of course. By the time it was all over, why, the investigation had went to the Homicide Unit.

And over the years as part of the Criminal Intelligence Team, which at that time, I believe, was called Law Enforcement Aid Unit--LEAU, we became involved in their investigation when suspects were generated and things. We became involved in some of their investigations. Not as homicide investigators, but the department used us for things that my partner, Leroy Thielen and I went

down to Omaha, I believe it was, where the two suspects that were ultimately convicted were in prison on a bank robbery charge. We went down there and tried to interview them because we were fairly sure that they were the shooters, but didn't get much cooperation at that time. But those are the kind of things we got involved in. I think they committed the robbery shortly after the shooting and they were in custody when we went down there, so it couldn't have been too long after. I can't remember dates like I can't remember names.

KC: Any other stories that you remember around the Sackett investigation?

RB: Oh. Well, I guess like I say, there's so many things that happened on that over the years. We got involved, of course, in talking to people that were ever involved in it at one time or other over the years. And then, of course, when Connie Trimble got religion and decided that she wanted to bare her soul, they told me about what was happening and expected that there would be some kind of charges forthcoming. Dunaski<sup>20</sup> and his partner [Jane Mead<sup>21</sup>] called me often here and in Florida to tell me what was happening anticipating that I would be one of the witnesses at the trial anyway. In the reviewing reports and things I remembered about the thing, so that they could question her down there. And in fact, I interviewed Connie Trimble a couple of times, as well as I did the cousin – I can't remember. Her name escapes me right now. That's where they went right after the shooting right before and after the shooting. I can't remember what her name is, but we interviewed that family, too. It just lasted for so long and over so

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<sup>20</sup> **Thomas Francis Dunaski** was appointed patrolman October 26, 1971; promoted to sergeant October 10, 1979; retired September 30, 2008. Named officer of the year 1977; received the Chief Richard Rowan Award in 2006.

<sup>21</sup> **Jane Huber Mead** was appointed police officer June 30, 1986; promoted to sergeant June 26, 1994. International Homicide Investigators Association 2007 Cold Case of the Year Award; 2007 Minnesota Women Police Association Officer of the Year.

many years [36 years], it's hard to go back and single out any individual thing that happened, I guess.

KC: Did you have any reactions about Connie Trimble from early on?

RB: I think that when we talked to her the first time, we knew she was lying. I mean, there was no question. Really, I don't think there was any question in the people investigating that the shooting – any time – that it wasn't [Ronnie] Reed and [Larry] Clark that did the shooting and Connie Trimble that made the call. I think that was chiseled in stone from the first beginning of the investigation. Being able to prove it and, again, with the lack of the technical things they have now, it obviously got carried on much too long.

KC: Who put those dots together early in the investigation? That it was Reed, Clark, and Trimble? Do you have any memory of that?

RB: Oh, I don't know. I think it was a combination of the information that came in. Obviously we discussed right from the beginning whether we thought Connie was telling the truth. I guess – I don't know – Captain Ernie Williams<sup>22</sup> was in charge of the investigation at that time—the Homicide unit. But at that time in an investigation of that magnitude, everybody was involved. The chiefs were involved. Every time information came in, everybody was made aware of it, which unfortunately probably meant everybody knew too much about what was going on. And the newspaper knew too much about what was going on.

It was I think a combination of everybody that was involved that the consensus came out, but being able to prove it, of course, took a long time. Connie was the key to it, and everybody kind of figured that sooner or later, she'd cave, if nothing else for the reward money. But I think a lot of things just

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<sup>22</sup> **Ernest H. Williams** was appointed patrolman November 1, 1949; promoted to detective October 1, 1954; detective lieutenant July 1, 1964; rank changed to captain February 1, 1965; and retired August 25, 1975.

sat back and waited for something to happen with her and that's ultimately, I guess, how it got prosecuted. Like I say, there wasn't much question about who did it. It's just how you're going to get it through the court system, and I think it was pretty much because Connie changed her mind and gave some testimony anyway. Gave some and then took it back.

KC: Do you think if the technology we have in 2008 had been available in '70 it may have been prosecuted sooner?

RB: Well, I don't know. Certainly DNA wouldn't have been a factor. I don't know whether they ever could have processed the bullets to get anything off there. There's an outside possibility, I suppose, but that's a real wild guess.

We did make a voice print with Connie Trimble. The consensus was it was positive, but I don't know that anything we would have ever found at the phone booth up there would have helped at all. I guess in that particular case, I don't know what possibly technology could have helped the investigation at that time.

KC: Were you finding people very frightened?

RB: Well, you know that was a time when people were uncomfortable. You know, the Black Panther<sup>23</sup> thing was talked about all the time. The Inner City Youth League<sup>24</sup> was up there teaching kids how to make bombs, and the Gary Hogans and things. There was a lot of stuff going on, and I think everybody was uncomfortable. I worked in the Hill here. Most of my career was spent in the Hill in one way or another. I grew up fairly close to the Hill here, so I knew a lot of people. I was comfortable working up here, but I think overall I think on the

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<sup>23</sup> The **Black Panther Party** was a black revolutionary socialist organization active in the United States from 1966 until 1982. The Black Panther Party achieved national and international notoriety through its involvement in the Black Power movement and U.S. politics of the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>24</sup> **Inner-City Youth League** previous location at 851 Selby Avenue at Victoria in Saint Paul.

police department the consensus became that you had to start being careful that something like Sackett would happen.

KC: Were you surprised when the ambush happened?

RB: Not really. Not really, I don't think. I think that it was kind of expected that something would happen, because there was a lot of talk about the Black Panther movement and killing policemen and idle threats and things that went on in those days. I don't know that anybody – we never heard of bulletproof vests<sup>25</sup> in those days, so nobody thought about that too much. But I don't think that anybody was real surprised that it happened, at that time anyway.

KC: That night when you finally got to go home, what goes through your mind? What are you feeling?

RB: I don't know about other people, but I didn't take my job home. My wife knew little or nothing about whatever happened in the police department. The only way she'd ever find out anything is if we went to a police function and one of the other wives would tell her what their husbands told them. But I never brought my wife into it. I never met people in the line of duty that my wife would have ever associated with, so it was never something that I brought home to my wife. I never worried when I got home about what happened. Go back the next day and start over. That's all.

KC: Did you tell her that an officer had been killed that night?

RB: Well, I think she knew about it before I got home. It was in the news and everything. Yeah, she knew about it before I got home. As a policeman's wife, I suppose she always – there's something in the back of your mind that you worry about those things, but we never discussed it, so it never came up.

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<sup>25</sup> A **bulletproof vest**, ballistic vest, or bullet-resistant vest is an item of personal armor that helps absorb the impact from firearm-fired projectiles and shrapnel from explosions and is worn on the torso. Soft vests are made from many layers of woven or laminated fibers and can protect the wearer from small-caliber handgun and shotgun projectiles, and small fragments from explosives such as hand grenades.

KC: Do you have children, sir?

RB: Yep, six.



Bovee Family

1970s

1980s

1990s





KC: [An officer was killed] It's in the news. It's prominent. Did your children talk to you about it? Did they express any concerns or reactions?

RB: I don't think so. I don't know if they ever had any. I don't know if they ever discussed it with my wife. We never discussed it. And again, I never brought it home and I think that kids at their age then weren't big on reading the newspaper and listening to all that propaganda that the Pioneer Press put out. So I don't think that they were that involved in the process. I don't think they saw it as something they had to worry about. At least they've never, ever discussed it with me, or never even today ever come back and – the only thing they ever said is that they were always held to a higher standard than the other kids in the neighborhood, so they didn't like that. They couldn't do things other kids could do.

KC: You held them to a higher standard.

RB: So they say. I don't know that that's necessarily true, but it probably is.

KC: What was the propaganda that the Pioneer Press put out?

RB: I was, again, never a big advocate of newspaper people. I had to ban them from my office several times. The newspaper seems to think that they had the right and the obligation to tell everybody whatever they thought. And it wasn't necessarily what was right.

I think one of the worst things that ever happened – the worst thing that I can remember anyway, when Cassie Hansen<sup>26</sup> was abducted and murdered. We

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<sup>26</sup> In December 1981, **Cassie Hansen** was abducted from a church by a cab driver, sexually assaulted, and strangled. Her body was thrown into a dumpster. Dorothy Noga pointed out to police a suspect, Stuart Knowlton, in the murder. Noga agreed to wear a wire to record audio and help police convict the murder. Noga was brutally attacked; she was stabbed thirty-two times by Knowlton, before he was arrested. Noga's testimony put Stuart Knowlton behind bars. He died in prison in 2006.

really had very little to go on, but one of the things we knew is that when we found her in the dumpster up here, one of her shoes was missing. And we thought there might be a possibility that if we could find the guy right away, then the shoe would still be in his car.

Pioneer Press found out about that and we vehemently tried to tell them not to put that in print anywhere. The next day, it was in the newspaper that the police were looking for the missing shoe and thought it might be in the suspect's car. Probably from about that day on, I really never desired to cooperate too much with the newspaper. Right down to the fact that they tell you who you should vote for for elected office, because that's who they think should be in office.

I had a lot of problems with the media over the years, or I should say the media had a lot of problems with me. I didn't ever have any problems with them. They had a lot of problems with me and I just never believed that the media should be a part of the investigation unless you need them to be. And they always were. You think it's bad here, you should go to Florida.

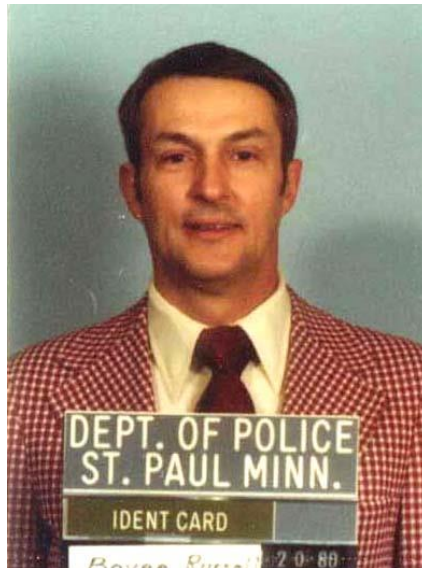
KC: Were there ever times when you needed them to be part of the investigation?

RB: Oh, I think there were occasions when we would ask the media if anybody had any information about a crime we were just stymied with. And occasionally they would put out something. But by and large, they got in the way more than anything. They shouldn't have been allowed in a lot of scenes where they were, but the public's need to know seemed to drive them to be able to say and do whatever they wanted. I guess it must have been sometimes when there was a



Lt. Russ Bovee  
1981

need for them to put something out. By and large, I think we tried to not tell them anything we didn't want them to know.



Lt. Russ Bovee  
1980

KC: In all of the different capacities you worked in Saint Paul, which one did you find the most satisfaction in?

RB: That would be a difficult question, I guess. I found a lot of satisfaction in almost every place I worked at one time or other. It was satisfying in homicide to put somebody in jail that you knew committed a crime, but then on the other hand, a group of narcotics people that we knew killed a gal up here in the Hill. And knew a lot of the people involved heavily in narcotics that were involved in that that we didn't solve for a long time. But after I left, it was solved because somebody that got sent to prison informed on the other people.

There were some real mysteries once in a while that you just never got any information on. Home intrusion kind of things where somebody got killed. There was an elderly woman up in Highland Park area that an intruder broke in and strangled her and ransacked the house. We never, ever had a clue of who might

have done that. I didn't dwell on a lot of them that we couldn't solve, because if there was any chance for them to being solved, we would work on it. If there wasn't, then there was not much more you can do.

The school teacher that got killed on the street up there in the Indian reservation, I guess there's no doubt that it must have been a road rage incident. We didn't call it road rage at that time, but I'm sure a fender bender caused an argument that got him shot in the street up there, but there just was no evidence to be gained and we never ever found who did that. Every once in a while. that one pops up in the paper, too.

I don't think there were too many that were solvable. Sometimes in the cold cases that they're doing now, DNA evidence that we had at the time but didn't have the DNA capabilities are involved in settling cases. By and large, DNA wasn't a factor. We'd never gather any evidence that DNA could have been a factor. I really don't sit back and think about too many that got away, at least that come to mind anyway. And as I said, I think we probably ran seventy, maybe even over seventy percent clearance rate most of the time on homicides. But then most homicides are not strangers, so that's probably a percentage that most departments have anyway.

KC: Did you institute the murder meetings? Or was that before you?

RB: Well, I guess I – when I was Homicide Commander, we kind of started the War Rooms. We never had one before and we kind of started that concept. I don't know whether we could take credit for starting it or anything, but I think that the first time we ever put together a place and a meeting process for more than one department or division to be involved in was during the time that I was in Homicide.

KC: What are some of the things that you're proud about in being a Saint Paul officer?

RB: Oh, I don't know. I always thought it was a great department. It was a good department to work for. Regardless of what anybody thinks, I don't think there was anybody ever in our department that took graft or was accused of it or did it. It was a clean department. The group of guys that were there at that time by and large were veterans. In fact, when we went on the job, you had to be a veteran almost to get the job.<sup>27</sup> But there were veterans from the Korean War, the Second World War some of them, the Korean War and a few after that. There was a common bond between the people that were there.

As time went by, you started getting people that weren't veterans that never served in the military or had a different perspective on what life should be, I guess. But for a long time, there was a common bond. It was a great department.

At one time, I was on the Board of Directors for the Credit Union. At one time, they had gone from conception until probably the Eighties and no policeman or fireman ever declared bankruptcy. They borrowed money, they paid it. As time went by after that, some of the younger people that came on had different ideas of whether they had to pay their bills and began declaring bankruptcy frequently. And that's not a big deal to people, maybe, but I think it reflects the character of the people that were there at the time.

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<sup>27</sup> **Veteran's Preference.** Since the time of the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given some degree of preference in appointments to government jobs, recognizing their sacrifice. Veteran's preference recognizes the economic loss suffered by citizens who have served their country in uniform, restores veterans to a favorable competitive position for government employment. Veteran's preference laws have changed over the years. After WWII, Minnesota had the strongest veteran's preference law in the USA with absolute preference; no non-veteran could be appointed to a first class city — Duluth, Minneapolis, or Saint Paul. In the early 1970s, veteran's preference laws changed relating to promotions, no longer discriminating against females, who could not join the military at the time.

I enjoyed all the time I was there. When the department changed to the point where I didn't enjoy going to work anymore, I walked in and retired.

KC: What happened that you didn't enjoy going to work anymore?

RB: Well, I think it got to be where people in the department start worrying more about turning in their partners if he did something that they didn't like rather than worrying about who the criminals were. I got in the elevator one morning to go up to my office, and an old timer had been on the job for a long time, was a patrolman, was a drinker – everybody knew it – for his lifetime. He was a heavy drinker. And he got on the elevator with me, and at the same time a young wet-behind-the-ears sergeant got on the elevator, and he could smell that this guy had been drinking, and he took him by the arm and took him right in the chief's office and demanded that he be suspended. And he wasn't drinking on the job. He had been drinking the night before. I said, "If that's the most important thing this guy's got to do today, then it's not the job that I really want." And I went in the chief's office and told him I was going to retire. And I did.

It's, again, a different group of people from the time I went on 'til the time I retired. I never, ever remember not enjoying going to work. Even the many, many times the phone rang at three o'clock in the morning and I had to get out of bed and go to a homicide scene or whatever, I never, ever did not enjoy going to work. And I'm not saying that I enjoyed going in and seeing bodies or people in distress, but the work factor was always there for me.

When I didn't enjoy it anymore, and part of that too was probably when somebody decided that the police department should be a smoke-free building. That was kind of another hassle that I got into, because they said you could only smoke in designated areas, so I made my office a designated area and I used to let my secretary come in and smoke in my office. And the deputy chiefs didn't like that at all. It seemed a waste to me to have my secretary have to run out in

the twenty below to stand outside and have a cigarette and be away from her desk and answering the phone and all that because somebody didn't want to inhale some secondhand smoke.

KC: And I was surprised you didn't come with your cigar today, sir.

RB: It's in the car. It's in the car. [Kate laughs] I probably shouldn't even designate too much about him.

KC: Oh, come on.

RB: I will tell you that he was assigned to my Homicide Unit without my consent. Everybody thought he was an up and coming person. Young sergeant. He was non-Caucasian. I'll tell you that much, but I don't want to go any further than that. He was in my office six months maybe, and I wasn't crazy about his work anyway. He came one day and said – that was just about the time or it may have been a little after they declared it a smoke-free building – and I still smoked in my office, which was enclosed. And he came to me one day and said that the law says I should provide him with a smoke-free environment to work in. And he didn't like the fact that I would smoke a cigar in my office and the fumes would seep out of there. So I told him I would provide him with a smoke-free office or smoke-free work environment, and I went in to the chief and had him transferred out in the Patrol Division on the midnight shift. And I told him, "Now you can go out there and open up the windows of that car and get all the fresh air you want." And he wasn't too happy about that. Again, I was often involved in some controversies that were not politically correct, I guess.

KC: And the smile on your face tells me that you loved every minute of those. What else should I ask you, sir?

RB: I guess I did, yeah. There were many people that didn't say what they thought and for whatever reason, if they wanted to be politically correct, they didn't say what they think, and in a lot of cases, which was probably right.

KC: So, how did you get by with it?

RB: I don't know.

KC: Were you that good of an investigator? That good of an officer?

RB: Well, it didn't always involve the police department but I mean, it did sometimes. Some of the things, I guess, that involved the police department became controversial. Some didn't, like the FBI thing. I told McCutcheon what happened. I told him that it was an insult to our department and if he wanted somebody to put up with that to take me out of there. I wasn't going to do it. And he thought I was right, so he didn't get involved in the controversy.

One weekend, we had a really bad weekend. There was a murder on Friday night and we went out and investigated and, for whatever reason, and I guess I never did know what was happening that weekend that had all the media in the city tied up, because nobody showed up at this homicide. Saturday there was a double homicide. And none of the media showed up there either. And then Sunday night we had two more. We had five homicides in three days, and nobody really knew a lot about it. The media didn't know anything about it.

So on Monday morning, they said, "You know," the chief says, "you have to have a press conference and tell them at least what happened," that these murders took place. And we had been out of the street from probably six, seven o'clock on Friday to two, three o'clock Sunday morning, most of us without even going home. And when they called me for a homicide, I got dressed and I went out and I never put on a shirt and a tie. I went as casually as I could and I went right away.

At that time I drove a Cadillac with personalized license plates and the media was always more concerned to write in there that I showed up in my Cadillac than they were about who got killed. But at this time, they didn't know anything about it, so we said, "Okay, we'll have to have a press conference." So I



call a press conference of all the newspapers and all the TV stations, brought them into my office, and I sat them down and I went through all five of the homicides to tell them what had happened, to give them information that they could publish. When I got all done I said, "Anybody have any questions?" And one guy raised his hand and he said, "Yeah. I want to know how come you have a sweater on that says North Oaks on it. You're obviously not a member of North Oaks Country Club." That was the first question that the media gave after learning about these five homicides. So, needless to say, that press conference kind of got cut short with some unhappy people, but I maybe had a little short fuse sometimes.

I also was a Master of Ceremonies for a lot of functions on the police department. I was Master of Ceremonies for the Ranking Officer's Association for twenty years. I was the Master of Ceremonies for the Retirement Committee. I had the job before [Ron] Ryan.<sup>28</sup> And I did a lot of that stuff around at different functions. But the Ranking Officer's Association was a retirement party and it was a roast. There was no question it was a roast. And everyone who attended it knew it was going to be a roast, including the retirees who were always gracious enough, and the people in my regime were gracious enough to let me tell stories and things about them and make people laugh at their expense.

But I used to tell a lot of stories., and sometimes people became offended at the stories that I told. Occasionally, not very often. So I used to make a list and say, "Tonight's program I will probably insult the Irish, the Catholics, the Jews, the lesbians, the gay people, the chiefs." I made a list of all the people that

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<sup>28</sup> **Ronald Michael Ryan, Sr.** was appointed patrolman June 26, 1968; promoted to sergeant May 8, 1972; lieutenant March 30, 1990; title change to commander January 1, 2000; and retired April 29, 2005. Worked for the Ramsey County Sheriff June 1, 2005 – October 11, 2008 in positions of lieutenant, special projects, and commander.

probably might get insulted and I put it on the table with a note that said, "If you're offended by any of this, please leave, because this is what's going to happen."

Well, nobody ever left, but inevitably, if I made a lesbian joke, the next morning the chief would call me in and say, "One of the policewomen complained about you making lesbian jokes." And I said, "Well, first of all, I told them I was going to do it. And secondly, it's not a departmental function. It's a Ranking Officer's organization which has nothing to do with it, so really there's nothing anybody can do about it anyway except not come to the next one."

Those are the kind of things that happened, and I guess I got by with that because, by and large, most people wanted to come and hear me talk. And the other thing was that a lot of it was not controlled by the police department. Then with all of the things I got involved in over the years, I guess people got accustomed to there being some conflict if I was involved or whatever. Nowadays, I probably couldn't function there anymore. [Kate chuckles]

KC: And as you share this with me, you have a wonderful smile on your face, so you enjoy being you.

RB: I enjoyed making people laugh and if you ever would ask ranking officers – Jerry Dexter,<sup>29</sup> any of the ranking officers that are old timers – ask them if they ever enjoyed coming to one of my programs. I would be very surprised if they would give you a negative answer, with the possible exception of Deputy Chief

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<sup>29</sup> **Gerald E. Dexter** was appointed clerk typist November 12, 1957; appointed to police steno June 26, 1958; appointed policeman to the Bureau of Police April 24, 1961; military leave October 25, 1961 to September 1, 1962; promoted to sergeant September 30, 1967; and retired October 16, 1987. He was chief in St. Croix Falls Wisconsin 1987- 1990.

Griffin.<sup>30</sup> If he were alive today, he would probably have some things to tell you.

KC: What made Saint Paul Police ethical? How did it maintain its ethics?

RB: I don't know. Again, I think that number one is again the people that came from that era of World War II and Korea and what was the next one?

KC: Vietnam.

RB: Vietnam I think was probably the next one. But the people that came from that era that wanted to be in law enforcement were a generation that had the same ideas about everything. And I don't think that the fact that you could go fifty years lending money to policemen and never having a one of them default on it has to tell you something about the character of those people that you were dealing with.

In my time, if I were on patrol and I stopped somebody for driving erratically and maybe they had been drinking and it was Norm Coleman's<sup>31</sup> father, I would never, ever have thought about taking that man to jail. If the guy wasn't really causing a problem and he lived six blocks away, I'd take him home and say, "You shouldn't be driving when you're drinking," and take him home and then no harm and no foul. When you get to the point where if you do that, your partner's going to turn you in, it's a whole different philosophy on life to me.

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<sup>30</sup> **James Stafford Griffin** (July 6, 1917 – November 23, 2002) was appointed reserve patrolman August 6, 1941; full patrolman August 1942; the first Black male to be promoted to sergeant September 16, 1955; captain March 2, 1970; and deputy chief October 6, 1972; and retired August 31, 1983. The Headquarters Building at 367 Grove Street was named for Griffin in 2004.

<sup>31</sup> **Norman Bertram "Norm" Coleman, Jr.** was Saint Paul mayor 1994-2001, and was a United States senator from Minnesota from 2003 to 2009.

My dad enjoyed his drinks, and as he got elderly, his driving wasn't as great as it should be, and on occasion he'd be stopped for a driving violation. He was getting up there in his eighties and maybe he shouldn't have been driving anymore, but he'd get a little erratic – make a turn or not a full stop or something – and the police would stop him and when they found out who he was, instead of wanting to throw him in jail, one guy would drive his car. He never went more than about five blocks from home anyway. One guy would drive his car home, and the other guy would put him in the backseat and they'd take him home. And they'd say, "You got to be careful. Maybe you shouldn't be driving anymore." They never thought they should have put him in jail for that.

Now, policemen don't have the opportunities to make a decision based upon the situation. This is what they're supposed to do and that's what they have to do. It's not the same. Not the same. And a lot of it, I think, was because of the way people from when I was on the department, the way they were raised. Not like my kids were raised even, I guess. It was a generation of people that were trustworthy. They had a job that they appreciated. They worked hard for their money. They didn't want to screw it up by doing something wrong. If there ever would have been a thief among them, I think they would have taken care of it themselves. It was just unheard of that anybody would steal from the police department or anybody else, that they would do something that was inappropriate. It was a generation of people that, by and large, didn't do that.

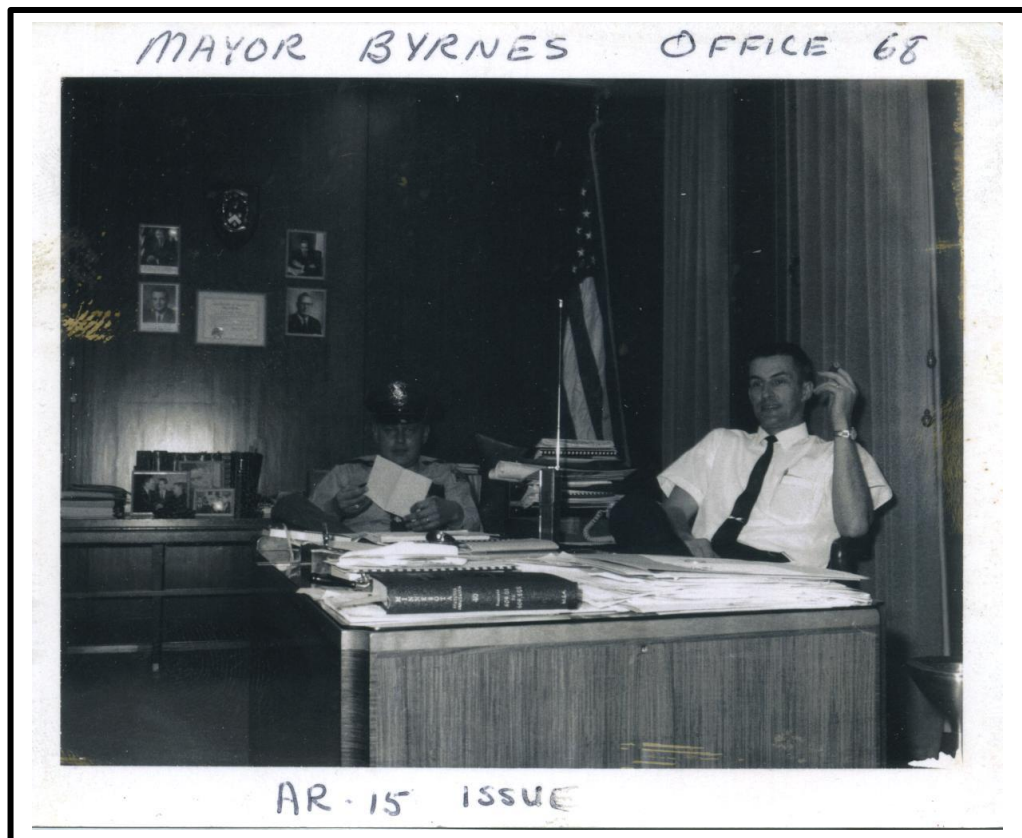
And the changes happened long after all the years of hiring veterans when anybody could come on the job and they started changing the requirements for the weight, the height, you know. When they started changing what we'd known for years had to be there to be a policeman, then all of these other things started coming into it.

It was a great experience and it's a great department. I've dealt with a lot of departments both in the state of Minnesota, out of the state of Minnesota. Florida. It's a great police department. One of the best. Probably, by far, I think a better police department than Minneapolis is. And it's always been a pleasure, but like I say, my time came and went. Again, I probably could not function today there, but never sorry for any of the days I spent there.

KC: Thank you, sir. This has been delightful.



Russ Bovee's City



*Officer Bovee guarding Mayor Bryne's office*

While Thomas. Bryne was Saint Paul's mayor (1966 -1970) there were sit-ins over several days protesting the purchase of AR-15 rifles.

(The AR-15 is a lightweight, air-cooled, magazine fed, autoloading, centerfire, shoulder-fired rifle. The Ar-15 is a generic term for a civilian semi-automatic rifle similar to the military M16 rifle.)

## Officer hailed for '71 hostage rescue dies

### Quick action earned him on-the-spot promotion and the adulation due a hero

By John Brewer [jbrewer@pioneerpress.com](mailto:jbrewer@pioneerpress.com)

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Lt. Thielen 1984

On a cold January afternoon in 1971, LeRoy Thielen went from a hard-working, under-the-radar cop to public hero.

The burly St. Paul Police Department detective used "cobra-quick action," a Pioneer Press article said, to disarm a mentally unstable young man outside St. Paul-Ramsey Hospital (now Regions) in a standoff caught on film by local media.

"He never told stories about it," son Mark Thielen said Sunday evening at a visitation preceding his father's funeral. "He said, 'That's just what we do.'"

Thielen, 80, died Thursday of complications from a burst appendix at his home in White Bear Lake.

Though he didn't talk much about it, the officer earned universal praise for his actions Jan. 28, 1971, when 17-year-old Greg Seifert, a patient in the psychiatric ward of the hospital, somehow smuggled in a gun and shot Ramsey County Sheriff's Deputy Roger Rosengren to death.

The youth then took 25-year-old intern Stephen Pliska as a hostage.

Thielen, a St. Paul detective at the time, showed up with his partner, Russ Bovee. The police plan, according to Bovee, was to let Seifert drive away from the hospital with the hostage. Officers would then take him down, he said. But outside the building, officers were flanked by reporters and gawkers drawn by a live radio broadcast of the event.

A sniper was dug into a snow bank near the entrance to the hospital — orders were to incapacitate the young man as he left the grounds — but the cold, snowy conditions froze the gun and it wouldn't fire, Bovee said.

Worried about what would happen if the gunman left the building, Thielen and Bovee came up with a plan. Thielen tucked his service revolver into his belt at his back, donned a doctor's coat and went to talk to Seifert. Bovee followed suit.

"I didn't say who I was, and he didn't ask," Thielen said in an interview later. He told the young man that doctors help people and that he wouldn't hurt him. He and Bovee talked to the young man for hours and eventually led him — and the hostage — down an elevator into the hospital lobby.



*Sergeant Roger  
Leslie Rosengren*  
Ramsey County Sheriff's  
Department, Minnesota  
End of Watch: Thursday,  
January 28, 1971

Thielen told the teen he would drive him wherever he wanted to go. "It was now or never," Thielen said at the time. "If he'd gotten out of there, it would have just caused more trouble."

The detective saw his chance as the boy turned to walk out of the lobby. "He came out the door like a shot," said retired St. Paul Pioneer Press photographer Spence Hollstadt, who photographed the rescue. "I didn't see him and then there he was, and I started shooting (pictures)."

Thielen got his hand around the cylinder of Seifert's gun, preventing it from firing. Bovee swept in and Pliska turned on his captor. The three wrestled the boy to the ground.

The heroic rescue drew a lot of attention — something Thielen, a World War II veteran, wasn't familiar with. "In those days, they didn't make big things out of it," Bovee said of the rescue.

On the spot, St. Paul Mayor Charlie McCarty promoted Thielen from detective to lieutenant. Bovee received a commendation. "That was probably the first battlefield promotion for the St. Paul police," Bovee said.

Later, a billboard from the city congratulated the officers on their heroism: "Some call him pig!" it read, with a picture of an officer giving a child CPR. "St. Paul salutes officers Thielen and Bovee."

Thielen retired in 1986, after 32 years on the force. The officer spent much of his retirement at his lake home in Webster, Wis., with his wife, Ramona, and caught as much of the Twins and Vikings as he could on television and radio.

Thielen had a stroke in the mid-1990s and was dependent on his wife for daily care. The attack left him paralyzed on his right side — that's why he didn't know his appendix burst until he became sick while staying at his White Bear Lake home, his son said.

"He felt like he died when he had the stroke," Mark Thielen said. "He had been very outgoing, an avid fisherman and hunter." And a good cop.

Bovee, who retired in 1990, said his longtime partner was one of a kind. "They just don't make them like that anymore," Bovee said.

Thielen is survived by Ramona, his wife of 55 years; sons Michael, Mark, Jim and Charles; daughters Jeanie Mooney and Judy Neale; 13 grandchildren; five stepgrandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

A funeral service is set for 11 a.m. today at Sacred Heart's Catholic Church in Webster, Wis., where Thielen also will be buried.

John Brewer can be reached at 651-228-2093.





—Staff Photos by Spence Hollstadt.

Thielen Grabbed Weapon and Was Joined by the Intern and Sgt. Bovee (White Coat) in Wrestling Youth to Ground.

# 17, Kills Ramsey Deputy





In this 1971 series of photos, suspect Greg Selfert, 17, holds a pistol to the head of medical intern Stephen Pliska outside St. Paul-Ramsey Hospital (now Regions) the afternoon of Jan. 28, 1971. Selfert had already shot and killed a Ramsey County sheriff's deputy in the psychiatric unit of the hospital and was attempting to escape after hours of negotiations. As Selfert

turns to walk toward a waiting car, St. Paul Police Detective Lefty Thelen, disguised as a doctor, lunges for the pistol and wrests it from the young man. After Thelen had wrangled his hand around the pistol's cylinder, rendering it inoperable, fellow officer Russ Bovee (white doctor's coat) rushes in to help subdue Selfert. Selfert went to prison for the shooting.

Retirement :

