

## PROFESSIONALISM IN OUR PROFESSION

by

*Lt. Henry L. Atkins*

When a person enters a career as a law enforcement officer he must be prepared to make a study of police sciences and methods. The field is titanic in size and universal in scope. In perhaps no other field is one expected to know a creditable amount about so many varied subjects. The practicing officer must, to be efficient, be acquainted in some degree with almost every trade, craft and profession. No man should propose to make a career of law enforcement unless he first dedicates himself to service, honor and intelligent study. Neither of these is exclusive of the others and none is sufficient in itself.

During the next few minutes I will discuss with you some of the characteristics of a professional law enforcement officer. No attempt will be made to cover all aspects since the field is vast and complex and time is limited. I will discuss the points I feel are the most important in attaining professionalism in our profession.

The word "profession" is defined by World Book Encyclopedia as being "an occupation requiring an education, especially law, medicine, teaching or the ministry". Although law enforcement is not included in this definition, I believe in this day and age we would all agree it would fall into this category. A man entering law enforcement today must have a good, basic education. He must also have the ability to learn a variety of skills, which will be discussed later.

The word "professionalism" is defined by World Book as "professional character, spirit, or methods, or the standing, practice, or methods of a professional, as distinguished from those of an amateur". We can no longer entrust the enforcement of laws of our state and nation to anyone other than a true professional. I believe that at this point we are semi-professional, for a profession as such has minimum standards, ethics, etc. However, law enforcement, particularly in Alabama, has taken giant strides in the direction of becoming truly professional in the last two years. In 1971 the Alabama Legislature passed a minimum standards act requiring a person to meet certain conditions and requirements before becoming a law enforcement officer. Several bills were introduced in the past session of the legislature, and most received the strong backing of Governor Wallace and many of the leaders of the legislature. These bills were designed to strengthen and move law enforcement forward in Alabama. Most of the bills were sponsored by the law enforcement organizations within the state and were designed to help overcome some of the problems facing law enforcement today. Some of them related to low salaries, job securities, working conditions and other problems faced by officers working for some of our smaller municipalities, counties, and possibly some state agencies. Several of the bills were enacted into law; however, if all the bills that were introduced in the legislature had become law, they would only be a starting place for us to move forward and become professionals. Only we can assure ourselves of becoming professionals.

How do we become professionals? First and foremost, we must have public respect. How do we get this respect? By demanding it? No! Respect can never be demanded from anyone, least of all from the public we serve. Respect and good will must be earned and we cannot expect someone else to earn it for us. When we earn the respect of the public, the problems of the enforcement officer become the problems of the public.

These are some of the things the public expects and demands of an enforcement officer.

Honesty. Without honesty you cannot succeed in any lawful profession. It is a must for an enforcement officer.

Courtesy. This must be part of the stock and trade of every law enforcement officer. Being courteous does not mean you are soft for you can be courteous and still be hard as nails. In any profession, courtesy, dignity and ability reflect honor on the man. The enforcement profession is no exception.

Loyalty. To the public, your supervisor and department.

Obedience to the law. Any law enforcement officer is expected to be a law-abiding citizen at all times, off duty as well as on duty. Any officer worthy of wearing his badge must set a good example for others to observe. Be selective in choosing your friends and associates. This means we can't have among our close friends and associates people of questionable character. The public expects us to pay our own way. People of questionable character may not attempt to bribe an officer, but may attempt to give him a valuable gift which may be intended to achieve the same objective - to tie his hands or blind his eyes. Don't accept them. The public expects all enforcement officers to live within their incomes and to provide the best home address their salaries permit. This does not mean that they should live on Country Club Avenue, but it does mean that every officer should live in a respectable community. Pay your bills on time, for overdue bills and a bad credit rating can ruin your reputation in any community.

Good health. We must keep in good physical condition, for without this we cannot enforce the law in a professional manner.

Personal appearance. The personal appearance of an officer is the first step toward respect from the public. An officer who is well groomed, wears a well pressed, neat, clean uniform with all leather and brass shined, just naturally draws more respect than an officer who is not well groomed. While it is not always possible in our type enforcement work to stay as neat and clean as in other law enforcement work, we should always try to look our best when making personal appearances, attending court, or any other public function where uniforms are worn. The uniform should be standard for everyone in the division, and we should wear only equipment and clothing issued by our agency.

Fair and impartial enforcement. The public expects us to enforce the laws fairly and impartially. The majority of the people respect an officer and the agency he represents when laws are enforced firmly, courteously and impartially. The officers in Alabama have been able to do so because we have had the backing of the division and department heads. We are fortunate to have men who will back their officers when good, solid cases are made. These are some, but not all, of the things the public expects of a professional enforcement officer.

Next, I would like to discuss with you some of the things we as supervisors and administrators can do to move us toward professionalism in our profession.

First, the screening of new applicants. The state sets the minimum standards for a person applying for a job as an enforcement officer. He is required to take an examination and is then placed on an eligible roster. Here we can be of great service to our department and profession. If we are assigned to investigate an applicant, let's investigate him. Dig into his background, talk to people other than those he lists as references. Find out as much as we possibly can about him before he is offered a job. If he does not measure up morally, as well as physically, we need to know these things before he is employed, not after he has served his probationary period and been given permanent status. Once a person is employed as an enforcement officer, he looks to his supervisors for the initial phase of his training. This training can and will, to a great extent, determine whether this person will become a professional or simply a semi-professional. We, as supervisors and administrators, have the responsibility to see that he is set forth on the right path toward this goal. It is we who must guide him through the strange and sometimes difficult transition from a civilian to an enforcement officer. The first few weeks, days, or even hours, are very important. While we now have a minimum standards law in Alabama and a

person entering law enforcement must receive two hundred and forty hours of formal training within nine months of his date of employment, most of these people will work in the field several days, weeks, or even months before being enrolled in a Police Academy. During this time he will look to us to guide him in the proper direction toward becoming a professional law enforcement officer.

First, let's sit down with him and discuss the policies and procedures of our department. These policies should be documented so that there is little doubt about their meaning. Explain to the officer what is expected of him and what he can expect of you and the department. Become genuinely interested in his problems and personal life. You can be a friend and still be his supervisor.

Next, teach him the proper way to wear his uniform. This to me is very important, for it is much easier to teach the correct way of wearing the uniform than to have to correct him for improper dress. One of the best ways to do this is by example. If we set a good example, if our shoes are shined, our brass polished, shirts and pants cleaned and pressed, we will usually have little trouble impressing on the new officer the proper wearing of the uniform of his profession.

Now we come to the actual work of the new officer. He should be taught the fundamental rules governing the wearing, handling and care of his service revolver or pistol. Safety and legal responsibility regarding the use of this weapon should be highly stressed. We must instruct him in the fundamentals and techniques of checking for violations when on patrol, arrest of violators, search and seizures of illegal equipment and devices, and the procedure for carrying the case through the courts. We should go with the officer, make arrests with him, evaluate his ability to handle situations and the way he copes with different problems that may arise and observe him in court, his testimony, bearing, appearance. This is a very critical period as he is working in a probationary status, and if he does not measure up, this is the time we can be of service to our department and our profession. If, after careful observation and evaluation, we deem this individual to be unsuited for enforcement work, he should be dismissed. We should never attempt to transfer our problems to another county or district, although at times a transfer is in the best interest of the department and the individual. I do not believe a person should be transferred during his probationary period. As we work with and advise and watch the new officer, we should try to obtain for him the best possible formal training available that our budgets will allow. Our Police Academies in Alabama provide this basic training for our officers. However, we should not stop here. We should have in-service training programs from time to time. These can be used to acquaint officers with recent court decisions, new regulations and laws, concepts of enforcement, new equipment, to bring *Out* mutual problems of enforcement, and how to cope with them. This also gives the individual a chance to express his ideas and opinions and provides for a closer working relationship with other officers.

We must also see that we have a good relationship with other enforcement agencies. We must be willing and ready to provide reasonable assistance to other agencies because we may need their assistance some time and cannot expect help unless we are willing to give help. Harmonious relations between law enforcement agencies is, to me, one of the best signs of professionalism.

These are only a few of the ways that we may promote professionalism in our profession, but because time does not permit us to cover every aspect of this subject, I submit to you, for your consideration, the following Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. It is my sincere belief that if we follow this code, we will in time become true professionals.

Material prepared by Col. Walter Allen, Alabama Department of Public Safety, for the Alabama Police Academy, reads as follows:

## LAW ENFORCEMENT CODE OF ETHICS

“As a Law Enforcement Officer, my fundamental duty is to serve mankind, to safeguard lives and property; to protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation, and the peaceful against violence or disorder; and to respect the Constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equality and justice.

“I will keep my private life unsullied as an example to all; maintain courageous calm in the face of danger, scorn, or ridicule; develop self-restraint; and be constantly mindful of the welfare of others. Honest in thought and deed in both my personal and official life. I will be exemplary in obeying the laws of the land and the regulations of my department. Whatever I see or hear of a confidential nature or that is confided to me in my official capacity will be kept ever secret unless revelation is necessary in the performance of my duty.

“I will never act officiously or permit personal feelings, prejudices, animosities or friendships to influence my decisions. With no compromise for crime and with relentless prosecution of criminals, I will enforce the law courteously and appropriately without fear or favor, malice or ill will, never employing unnecessary force or violence and never accepting gratuities.

“I recognize the badge of my office as a symbol of public faith, and I accept it as a public trust to be held so long as I am true to the ethics of the law enforcement service. I will constantly strive to achieve these objectives and ideals, dedicating myself before God to my chosen profession... law enforcement.”

### **“DEVELOPING A GAME AND FISH PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM THROUGH LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL”**

*by*

*Lieutenant Tom Crawley  
Tennessee Game and Fish Commission*

The State of Tennessee is not a great deal unlike many of the other states in the Southeastern Association. We are a long state similar in structure to Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. From our mountainous areas in the extreme eastern part of the state to the lowlands of West Tennessee it encompasses a lot of different type habitat which makes it possible for sportsmen to harvest a wide variety of game. Because of this wide variation it was discovered a few years ago that a majority of our sportsmen in Tennessee like to hunt and fish as close to home as possible. This being true, it was the responsibility of the Game and Fish Commission to try to keep local sportsmen informed.

In the past, most of our Information-Education efforts had been centered around sending news releases out of our central office in Nashville and in subsequent years related efforts by an Information-Education representative in each of the three grand divisions of the state. However, it was felt that even with this effort we were still not reaching the local county sportsmen to the extent that they should be. For example, a bear hunter in upper East Tennessee would have very little interest in crappie fishing on Reelfoot Lake which is located in the extreme western part of the state some 300 miles away. By the same token, coon hunters in the Hatchie Bottoms would have very little interest in a boar hunt in the Cherokee National Forest.