

LAW ENFORCEMENT

By THEODORE BONIN, *Wildlife Officer*

It has often been said that "A law is only as effective as its power to be enforced". We game law enforcement officers need not be reminded of this fact as we are constantly aware of it. However, in our democratic way of life and thinking we cannot effectively enforce the law by means of strictly iron handed methods. By this I mean we enforcement men should not only teach the letter of the law but by example win the confidence of our community.

We should take into consideration the pioneer spirit of our people. About three hundred or more years ago our settlers first landed upon our shores practically empty handed. They were hungry and shelterless and naturally they took for granted the abundance of game and timber and other natural resources that were here for the taking and quite humanly they also assumed that there was an inexhaustible supply of this God-given bounty.

However, such was not the case, as time has proven. Our great forests which once extended to the shorelines have been cut to the ground, the axe, plow and finally the bulldozer have rapidly reduced that wildlife habitat that once was a source of plenty for our tables. Great highways, dams, drainage, agriculture and industry have practically swallowed our public domain while we have, for the most part gone on unconscious of this fact feeling that we as free Americans are at liberty to take everything our good earth has to offer, as our own.

Our ideals of freedom and liberty, for which we have spilled our blood on many shores, are the source of wonderment to the peoples of many nations abroad. However, when we speak of liberty we often confuse it for license. A man may have the liberty to travel our great highways, enjoy our great national parks, nevertheless, he does not have the license to destroy their beauty or the wildlife therein.

Therein comes the question of *Education* and *Public Relations*. Our game agents, wardens, or whatever we choose to call them in our respective states, should be ambassadors of conservation to their people. They should strive at all times to win the confidence of the people of their community and encourage them to understand that whereas they enjoy all of the liberty this country affords they do not have the license to bring to extermination our natural resources. Yes, folks, this takes a lot of tact, persuasion and education. The mere act of putting an offender in jail won't solve the question. The average American can be led but he will not be pushed around. Therefore, we should wear our badges or uniforms, no matter how modest they may be, with dignity so that we may assume and command respect.

Now how do we command this respect? By a thorough knowledge of our laws, the ability to interpret them, and impart them to the people of our community and to enforce them impartially.

Very often, and I say in most cases, a man will pay attention to you if he is even partially convinced that you know what you are talking about. So I say, let us know our game laws to the letter, preach them and enforce them. Nobody, except the pathological law breaker looks down upon the man who does his duty impartially.

During the time that I have been a game law enforcement officer I have seen a great transition in public opinion as concerns the law enforcement man. This is due largely to the example set by the men of our Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies who have won the admiration and respect of our general public in recent years. By their example they have taught the general public that the law man, who is there to protect their lives and interests is not just a "cop".

In spite of the fact that there is an occasional scandal caused in some of our law enforcement agencies, by and large, the lawman is fast becoming to be regarded as a professional man. The crooked "cop" is becoming a rarity. This is due to the fact that our great law enforcement agencies have set the example and have set a pattern for others and established the fact that law enforcement men have entered the ranks of professional men. That they have made a career of law enforcement and thus entered the category of other professional men.

Now my applying the title of "professional men" to us lawmen may seem a bit strange, however, Noah Webster who wrote the Dictionary did not think so. The word professional man is not relegated to the doctor, or the lawyer, or the clergyman. It is in essence applied to a man, other than a tradesman, who dedicates his life's efforts toward a cause of undertaking. Certainly we are devoted to the cause of conservation and are therefore following a profession and should command the respect and dignity accorded a professional man. We must be counsellors. Teach the inexperienced, check the greedy, inform the ignorant and protect the foolish. Conservation enforcement is an honorable profession to be practiced by honorable and responsible men and women. Those who do not qualify and fail to live up to the highest standards run the risk of being deprived of the privilege of being regarded as professional men.

VALUE OF THE HANDBOOK TO CONSERVATION OFFICERS IN THE SOUTHEAST

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Mr. Chairman, Fellow Law Enforcement Officers and Guests:

Regardless of whether or not enforcement personnel may have had the advantage of special training in the field of game and fish law enforcement, the handbook, or manual, or still better the instructions for the guidance of all game and fish law enforcement officers, whether State or Federal, continues to be a most important tool of the enforcement officer. Why is it such an important tool? The answer is simple. The Congress and the Legislatures are continually changing laws and regulations governing means and methods of taking wildlife. Each change in a law or regulation usually necessitates a new interpretation, a different enforcement technique, etc. In addition, agricultural practices have changed considerably during the past decade. I mean, gentlemen, things have really changed since you and I were assigned our first badge and gun. It may be that when we first started to work in this profession that we had a supervisor who, if he was sincerely interested in wildlife conservation, would spend a few hours each month sympathizing with an acute problem which we might have, or giving us one man's opinion on a particular technique or method of enforcement. He was the boss so it had to be done in accordance with his thinking. Now, gentlemen, please don't feel that I am being critical of supervision; quite to the contrary, I am fully cognizant of the great need for supervision. What I am trying to point out is that the opinions contained in the handbook, or manual, came about in most instances as a result of long-time experience by a group of experts frequently coordinated with technical aspects indoctrinated by a group of men of a particular profession. No one can deny that game and fish law enforcement is a profession, and I, as a member, am quite proud of my profession. We know that some progress has been made in some of the States toward the compilation of a handbook for enforcement personnel. I do not know how many states in the Southeast have adopted the use of such an official handbook.

I am familiar with certain material prepared by the Institute of Government, University of North Carolina, on the "Law of Arrest" and the "Law of Search and Seizure" which are two very important subjects in the enforcement field. I am sure that most of you must be aware of the book on wildlife law enforcement by Mr. William F. Sigler, Professor of Wildlife Management, Utah Agricultural College. This book contains a wealth of knowledge but still leaves quite a bit to be desired in the way of a guide for game and fish law enforcement officers. Worthy of mentioning, also, is the field manual prepared by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as a guide for United States game management agents. This manual is generally referred to as the agents' Bible.

* This paper was presented by Mr. F. C. Gillett in Mr. Lupton's absence.