Governor's Security Division History

The protection of Missouri governors has come a long way since 1881, when Governor Thomas Crittenden kept a .44-caliber Smith and Wesson revolver in his desk drawer. He had offered a $5,000 reward for the arrest and delivery of Frank and Jesse James, and kept the weapon handy to guard against retaliation. In less than a year, Jesse James had been killed, and in October 1882, Frank James surrendered, handing his .44 Remington revolver to Governor Crittenden in the governor's office.

In 1939, eight years after the creation of the Missouri State Highway Patrol, several troopers were assigned to escort and chauffeur Governor Lloyd Stark and provide security at the Governor's Mansion for the first family following death threats by Kansas City mobsters. Governor Stark had joined federal authorities in efforts to topple political boss Tom Pendergast. Within a year, Pendergast and 100 of his followers were indicted.

In early 1963, Colonel Hugh Waggoner called Trooper Richard D. Radford into his office one afternoon. He told Tpr. Radford to report to him at 8 a.m. the following morning in civilian clothes. At that time, he would accompany Tpr. Radford to the governor's office. The trooper was introduced to Governor John Dalton and was assigned to full-time security following several threats. Since security for the governor was in its infancy, Tpr. Radford had to develop procedures as he went along. There was no formal protection training available at this time, and the only equipment consisted of a suit, concealed weapon, and an unmarked car. After a couple years, Tpr. Radford was promoted to sergeant (There was no corporal rank at this time in Patrol history). He remained in this rank throughout the rest of his assignment with Governor Dalton and both terms with Governor Warren Hearnes.

During a trip with Governor Dalton to Omaha, NE, for the Midwest Governor's Conference, an officer interrupted a luncheon to announce the news that President Kennedy had just been shot. No one was sure of the extent of what was happening, so the conference was canceled, and all governors left for their capitals immediately. Captain Radford retired from the Patrol in 1988, as the commander of Troop E, Poplar Bluff.

Governor Hearnes preferred to use aircraft for more travel than previous governors. The Patrol's pilots provided air transportation for many flights. On some out-of-state trips the pilot would double as security for the governor. Some of these early pilots were Sergeants Boyd Fredrickson, Bill Turner, Howard Gebhart and Ron Brandt. This practice soon ended during the Hearnes administration. It became apparent that it was safer and more productive to separate pilot and security assignments.

After his election in 1972, Governor-elect Christopher “Kit” Bond became the target of a death threat. Following a nationwide trend, he issued an executive order in 1973 creating a “unit” of officers within the Patrol who would provide around-the-clock protection. Until the unit could be formed, Troopers Gary Venz and Carroll L. Plunkett were assigned to provide security.

In April 1973, the Executive Security Unit was formed, with Corporal John H. Ford as the unit’s leader. The other original members of the unit included Troopers Jack L. Merritt, Ron Smith, Clint T. Carlyle, Bob Gibson, Michael B. “Mike” Pace, and Christian T. “Chris” Ricks. The organizational structure placed the unit within the Criminal Investigation Division and was overseen by Lieutenant C.C. “Hap” Maddox.

Cpl. Ford was promoted to sergeant not long after the unit started, and Bob Gibson was promoted to corporal. Also, Tpr. Merritt left the detail, and Thomas A. “Tom” Taylor and Dave Hart came in, bringing the detail to eight members.

When Sgt. Ford was promoted to lieutenant in the Criminal Investigation Division, Sergeant Walter F. “Walt” Ruegg took over as detail’s leader. Then, in 1981, Sgt. Ruegg transferred to the Auto Theft section, and Sergeant Christian T. “Chris” Ricks became detail’s leader. He was later promoted to lieutenant (1988) and became the first Executive Security Unit director to hold the rank of lieutenant.

In 1981, Colonel Alan S. Whitmer made changes to the structure of the Patrol. One of these changes placed the Executive Security Unit within the Office of Professional Standards. In 1982, Col. Whitmer retired from the Patrol, and the Executive Security Unit went back to the Criminal Investigation Division.

When the Division of Drug and Crime Control was formed by statute in 1983, the Executive Security Unit became the Governor’s Security Division (GSD) within the newly created Criminal Investigation Bureau. At that time, the division had an office at General Headquarters near the major’s office, in the area now occupied by the Field Operations Bureau. The organizational structure has remained the same since, with the director of GSD reporting directly to the commander (major by rank) of the Criminal Investigation Bureau.

In 1989, Lieutenant Ricks transferred, and Sergeant Thomas A. “Tom” Taylor was made division director and promoted to lieutenant. He remained the division director for eight years. Lieutenant Taylor later became president of the National Governor’s Security Association.

In 1998, Lieutenant Matthew B. “Barry” Lindsey, became the division director.

In 1999, the state of Missouri hosted the National Governor’s Association summer conference in St. Louis. This event was a huge success due in large part to the Patrol’s involvement in providing protection and service to approximately 45 governors and their families.

The division had several directors between 1998 and 2001, including Lt. Lindsey, Lieutenant Jerel A. Schomer, Lieutenant Elbert L. Marshall, and Lieutenant Gary L. Moore.

On October 16, 2000, Governor Mel Carnahan, his son Randy, and Chief of Staff Chris Sifford, were killed in a plane crash. The plane's pilot was Randy Carnahan. It was the usual practice of the division to have a member on the plane with the governor. However, due to the division being pressed to the limit of its manpower, the division was spared the death of a member. Governor Carnahan was running for the U.S. Senate, barnstorming several cities, and the presidential debates were scheduled for the next day in St. Louis. Division members were waiting for the governor in New Madrid, after the governor was put on the plane in St. Louis, and it took off in stormy weather. When the governor's plane did not arrive on time, inquiries with FAA officials eventually determined their plane had crashed in Jefferson County.

Division members responded to the crash site to assist with the investigation that night. Other members gathered the family in St. Louis and rushed them to the Governor's Mansion in Jefferson City. Positive identification of the remains took considerable time, and the medical examiner refused to issue a death certificate until positive identification could be made. Therefore, state officials could only declare the governor incapacitated and appoint Lieutenant Governor Roger Wilson acting governor that night. The division immediately began protection of Roger Wilson upon his agreement.

The next day, Roger Wilson became governor after positive identification was made of Mel Carnahan's remains. Due to these circumstances, all governors and their families are now fingerprinted and have DNA samples taken by the division. Members of GSD served as pallbearers for Governor Carnahan and his son Randy.

After the death of Governor Carnahan, the division experienced its most challenging and stressful period. The governor's wife, Jean Carnahan, was officially no longer Missouri's first lady, but due to the timing of Governor Carnahan's death, his name remained on the ballot for U.S. Senator. Governor Wilson announced he would appoint Jean Carnahan as Missouri's Senator to fill the seat should her deceased husband be elected.

However, under the Constitution, this appointment could not be made until the date he would have been sworn in. Therefore, she held no official office, but Colonel Weldon Wilhoit ordered the division to continue protection duties until she was sworn in as a U.S. Senator. This necessitated members of the division spending a great amount of time in Washington, D.C. The division fulfilled its primary duty of providing security for Governor Roger Wilson and his family. In addition to all these duties, the division immediately assumed security duties for Governor-elect Bob Holden. This tremendous workload required members of the

division often to work 16-hour shifts, even on leave days, for extended periods of time.

As were other divisions and troops, GSD was challenged again in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Upon learning of the attacks, division members transported Governor Holden to the Emergency Operations Center at SEMA. As all members were called to duty that morning, rumors of attacks on other state capitols including Springfield, IL, were being circulated. The division took immediate steps to fortify the Governor's Mansion by blocking entrances with vehicles. Of course, the rumors were proven incorrect, but a much more heightened state of security and alertness was put in place at Missouri's Capitol, the Governor's Mansion, and other state office buildings. Across the country, the size of governor's security details increased by 25 percent as a result of these attacks.

As a result of the 9/11 attacks, two members of the division were called up for active military duty. At this same time, the division was reeling with the effects of overtime related to keeping up with the extremely active family of Governor Bob Holden, including two young school age boys. To meet these demands, a contingent of 12 "reserve officers" from different divisions within GHQ were trained in executive protection and assigned to temporary governor's security duties, being called in as needed.

In 2002, GSD and the Training Division hosted and presented the first executive protection school at the Patrol Academy. Agencies from around the United States and Missouri attended the course.

In 2005, the 93rd General Assembly passed, and Governor Matt Blunt signed, the law creating the Governor's Security Division within the Highway Patrol. The law directs the Patrol, under Chapter 43, to provide transportation, security, and protection for the governor and the governor's immediate family.

In October 2006, Sergeant Michael V. Meyer was promoted to lieutenant and became the division's director. Meyer was one of the division's longest tenured members serving a total of 14 years in the division. On August 1, 2011, the detail leader's position was elevated to the rank of captain. Lieutenant Michael V. Meyer was promoted to captain on that date and assigned badge number 37. Captain Meyer remained the division director until his retirement in 2014.

On September 14, 2010, Governor Jay Nixon was scheduled to appear at a press event at the Metropolitan Community College, Penn Valley Campus, in Kansas City. A homeless man with a mental illness, who was a student at the college, attacked a college dean just prior to Governor Nixon's arrival. The suspect made the mistake of thinking the dean was actually the governor. He stabbed the dean in the neck with a knife. Chancellor Mark James fought off the attacker and subdued him prior to police taking him into custody. Along with his many other accomplishments, Mark James was a former trooper with the

Missouri State Highway Patrol. Because of advance work done by division members prior to the governor's arrival, the detail was notified immediately of the situation and division members escorted Governor Nixon away from Kansas City. During police interviews, the suspect insisted that Governor Nixon was his target. Eventually, the suspect was determined to be incompetent to stand trial and was committed to a mental hospital.

In addition to the usual assignments, division members handled travel to the many natural disaster areas in Missouri in 2011. Gov. Nixon traveled to both St. Louis and Sedalia after tornadoes, and to Popular Bluff, Birds Levee Point (Mississippi County), southeast Missouri, and northwest Missouri after flooding. Gov. Nixon also visited Joplin for a week after the devastating tornado there and returned regularly to offer support.

The division was involved in operations when the governor met President Barack Obama in St. Louis in 2011. That same day, the governor attended the start of the Cardinals playoff game. This involved coordination of arrival times, motorcades, and movements in highly secured environments.

2012 was an election year, causing more extensive coordination of travel logistics. The division had to coordinate its manpower with the different troops involved to provide the necessary security. As traditionally done, the division provided security for both major party candidates on election night.

In addition to the usual assignments, the division was involved in escorting the governor and first lady to the inauguration of President Obama in Washington, D.C., in 2013. This took months of preparation and extra trips to Washington, D.C., to coordinate operations with the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Capitol Police.

Captain Mike V. Meyer retired September 1, 2014, after 33 years of honorable service. Lieutenant Robert F. Wolf was promoted to captain and designated director of GSD.

GSD personnel assisted the U.S. Secret Service with visits by President Barrack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden; and coordinated visits of the U.S. secretaries of agriculture, education, energy, and transportation. Members of the division attended dignitary protection training conducted at the North Carolina Highway Police Academy in 2014. GSD members conducted in-service training in tactical driving and firearms.

In 2015, division members handled the expected travel assignments for the governor and his wife. In addition to those assignments, division personnel handled several economic trade mission trips for Governor and Mrs. Nixon. The governor and first lady traveled to Paris, France; Alberta, Canada; a European trip to Italy; Germany and Spain; and a visit by the first lady’s and governor’s

staffs to Havana, Cuba. Missouri was the first official state delegation to visit Cuba since the 1950s.

During 2016, division members handled 400 travel assignments for Governor Jay Nixon involving 65 different cities in Missouri and 18 cities in other states. Division personnel handled economic trade mission trips for Governor and Mrs. Nixon to Colombia, Peru, Panama, Cuba, Germany, two separate trips to Israel, and travel to Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Ras Al Khaimah of the United Arab Emirates. On the first trip to Israel in March, division members traveled to a foreign country armed for the first time in its history.

On November 8, division members began to handle security for Governor-elect Eric Greitens, future First Lady Sheena Greitens, and their two children, Joshua and Jacob Greitens. Division members handled 40 travel assignments for Governor-elect Greitens and 48 travel assignments for Mrs. Greitens. (These totals do not reflect events within the Jefferson City area.)

From the gubernatorial election through the end of 2016, division members were tasked with providing security and assisting with travel arrangements for two families simultaneously. During that time three Patrol members assisted through 28-day internships, and one Patrol member was temporarily assigned to the division until the Missouri inauguration. The coverage included the Nixon home in University City, and the Greitens home in St. Louis, whenever the families were in residence. Troop C personnel assisted with overnight coverage at these locations. Immediately following the Missouri inauguration (January 2017), coverage ceased for the Nixon family.

On October 9, 2016, the presidential debates took place in St. Louis. Division members provided security and advance for Governor and First Lady Nixon, the governors from Indiana and Wisconsin, and the lieutenant governor from Mississippi. Division members performed site advances for the governors of Kentucky, New Jersey, and South Carolina.

During 2016, the division handled advance and security for visiting dignitaries, including the governors of New Mexico, Maine, South Carolina, Indiana, Wisconsin, Delaware, and New Jersey. GSD personnel coordinated two separate visits from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

On April 1, 2017, Captain Robert F. Wolf retired after over 37 years of honorable service. Lieutenant Dusty L. Hoffman was promoted to captain and designated director of GSD.

Division personnel handled foreign and economic trade mission trips for the governor to Switzerland, England, Israel, and Qatar; and for the Governor and Dr. Greitens to China and South Korea in 2017. GSD also traveled with the governor to cities across all parts of the state of Missouri and to 23 cities out of state.

GSD coordinated with the United States Secret Service for visits of Vice President Mike Pence to St. Louis in February; and the visits of President Donald Trump to Springfield, MO, in September, and to St. Louis in November 2017.

During 2017, the division handled advance and security for visiting dignitaries, including the governors of Florida and Wisconsin. GSD personnel coordinated visits from the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Secretary of Labor, U.S. Secretary of Interior, and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

In addition to the required POST training, members of GSD assisted the Patrol's Academy in the instruction of basic and advanced dignitary protection courses for both Patrol members and officers from outside agencies.

Sergeant Jason E. Riggs (Q/GSD) began 2020 by handling the advance preparation for Governor Mike Parson's trip to the Superbowl to see the Kansas City Chiefs take on the San Francisco '49ers. "It was nice to go to Miami in February," said Sgt. Riggs. He was there four days, from the Friday prior to the game until the Monday after. Sergeant Anthony C. "Tony" Helfrecht accompanied Gov. Parson and First Lady Theresa Parson to Miami on the day of the Superbowl.

Sgt. Riggs explained that GSD connected with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and Miami Dade Police Department which served as "hosts" and also worked with NFL security. "It was necessary to coordinate which gates we would use and routes we'd walk to enter the stadium with the governor and first lady. The Superbowl includes several VIPs, including foreign diplomats. The two governors met, so we coordinated when and where the greeting took place". Sgt. Riggs said the team makes sure events are smooth for the governor and first lady, but something unexpected will come up during the detail, which can happen at any planned event. The Chiefs beat the '49ers 30-20 at Super Bowl LIV in 2020. The governor's security team coordinated the "after celebration" visit, too. "I'm sure the San Francisco celebration wasn't as much fun as the Chiefs," said Sgt. Riggs. He said that although there were a lot of moving parts, everything went well during the trip. "Our main goal with the governor and first lady is that they have a smooth trip. It was a great experience. All of the agencies involved, and the NFL worked well together and cooperated".

"The KC Chiefs Super Bowl parade and rally was incredible," said Corporal Stacey L. Mosher. "There are so many moving parts to any type of public appearance. It gets more complicated when you add in freezing temps and over 500,000 people dressed in heavy coats and Chiefs jerseys. I'm also a huge fan, so trying to stay focused when Mahomes and Hill and Kelce were 10 feet away was a challenge. I was impressed with all the agencies who worked together that day. Anytime you have a crowd that large and emotional you are going to have some conflict, with the potential for violence. I left there feeling very confident

about the professionalism and skill level around me. Proud to be a part of KC Chief's Nation, but even more proud to be a part of our profession".

A few weeks later, the state and country found itself in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic.

"In February 2020, right before things got crazy, we were at the National Governors Association winter meeting in Washington, D.C.," said Trooper W. Robert Plumley (Q/GSD). "The information about a new virus in China was just being reported as we were completing the advance work for the governor's trip. We were there for seven days and in Ronald Reagan National Airport with a lot of international travelers. Once we got back from D.C., everything started changing. The state and country started shutting down. We started wearing masks when they were mandated. However, we were still in cars and on airplanes".

Sgt. Riggs indicated there were a couple of quick trips to Washington, D.C., regarding the coronavirus. However, in a matter of weeks, out-of-state travel ceased. "We didn't know how the coronavirus was going to unfold for the country," said Sgt. Riggs. "We didn't travel as much in state either. But we still had to do our jobs and deal with COVID. We wore masks and tried to give the governor a little more space. The few events we did attend, we had to protect them. Six feet isn't that far, until you're trying to protect someone. We normally give them space to walk and stay outside in their personal space, but within arm's reach in order to step in when needed. So, COVID did cause us some issues. We handled what travel occurred much as we normally do, but with masks and hand sanitizer. Also, people social distancing from the governor worked for us".

"It [the virus] changed the type of activity," said Cpl. Mosher. "Instead of traveling, the governor and his staff worked extremely long days in the office, on the phones, and on video conferences. We maintained our coverage. Being exposed was inevitable, as were the swab tests and quarantines. I think we all dealt with it like most essential employees: being mindful about the CDC recommendations while accepting the risk".

Trooper William R. Plumley pointed out that precautions were taken at campaign events and fundraisers during the 2020 gubernatorial campaign.

The coronavirus also affected training for the division. Although they worked as a group on protection drills, defense tactics, and completed firearms qualifications, there were no outside agency training opportunities. Even training at the Academy was limited for the division. "Coronavirus changed a lot in 2020," said Sgt. Riggs. "We completed the training we had to get and did so with masks and distancing".

“The Governor’s Security Division has a strong work ethic. This team is cohesive and works well together,” said Tpr. Plumley. “Everyone takes their job seriously”.

Missouri’s bicentennial gubernatorial inauguration occurred January 11, 2021, with Gov. Mike Parson saying the oath of office. The Patrol provided GSD with officers from every troop and several divisions. The entire detail included 177 employees, both uniformed civilians and members. Members wore their blouses and white shirts and ranged in rank from trooper to colonel. Their assignments included dignitary escorts and protection, SWAT, Mobile Field Force, and building security. Although prepared to handle any civil disobedience, the day was relatively uneventful.

Sergeant Jason E. Riggs was posted stage left on the ground beneath the speaker’s podium. “I monitored the crowd. In outdoor public events like the inauguration, we are always watching even though mostly friendly people are expected. It’s less stressful than other outdoor events, when you don’t know who could be in the crowd”.

“Inauguration details include several departments along with our people, and the security is good. You always try to keep an eye on everything you see. You can’t really pay attention to what is going on regarding the inauguration. Your right ear is listening to the event while the left ear is listening to the radio. I have to be on guard the whole time. It’s an interesting and historical event, but we have a different perspective on it. It’s a proud moment to be there when a governor is being inaugurated. He is the 57th governor. There aren’t a whole lot of inaugurations over the course of time. It’s an interesting assignment”.

“The 2021 Bicentennial Inauguration was historic,” said Cpl. Mosher. “Being able to stand on the Capitol steps and witness an inauguration was an awesome moment, especially when the stealth flew over”!

On September 18, 2021, the division provided protective services to Governor Michael L. Parson and First Lady Teresa Parson during Missouri’s bicentennial parade, celebrating Missouri’s 200 years of statehood.

GSD members also assisted the Training Division in the instruction of basic and advanced dignitary protection courses for Patrol members and officers from outside agencies in 2021.

Captain Dusty L. Hoffman transferred to the Public Information and Education Division February 8, 2024. Lieutenant Thad M. Wilson served as acting director of GSD until his retirement May 1, 2024. Sergeant Diana P. Hutzler was promoted to lieutenant and designated director of the division effective May 1, 2024.

Conclusion

Members of GSD receive specialized training in executive protection through the United States Secret Service and other states. Training includes evasive driving techniques, special firearms training, advance procedures for routes and event sites, cover and evacuation procedures, etc. All officers are trained in flying armed on commercial aircraft. Members of the division travel with the governor and their family to locations around the world.

Specialized equipment used today has advanced much since the birth of the division. When the unit first started, the members had no portable radios or other special equipment. In fact, when the unit went to its first National Governor's Association conference in Seattle in 1973, they had to borrow portable radios from the University of Missouri Police Department. Later they were issued Motorola walkie-talkies, which were large and bulky, and seldom worked. Along with other specialized equipment, all members are now equipped with the latest portable radios, programmed with frequencies capable of interoperability anywhere in the United States. In 2014, all members were equipped with tablet computers allowing access to email and all reporting functions while traveling.

In the beginning, division members were issued Smith & Wesson .357 magnum revolvers with 2 1/2-inch barrels. In 1990, as the rest of the Patrol transitioned to the Glock model 22, the division went to the Glock model 23, a compact version of the .40-caliber pistol. They were issued ASP expandable batons and received special training long before the rest of the Patrol received them.

Over the years, many members of the Patrol have been assigned to protect and serve the governor and first family. Tirelessly, they have held themselves to standards befitting the Patrol. They are often reminded they are the most personal contact the highest officials of our state and other dignitaries will have in forming an impression of the Patrol.

"One of the neat things about this job is you get to see things you wouldn't otherwise," said Sergeant Jason E. Riggs (Q/GSD) in 2021. "In the summer of 2019, I spent 17 days in Australia. I was the advance for Gov. Parson's trade mission. I probably wouldn't have ever gone to Australia if not for that trip. It's still work, but you're there and see things you normally may not".

Today, all 50 states have security details within their highway patrol, state police, or department of public safety. The Patrol's Governor's Security Division is a member of the National Governor's Security Association, which gives the Patrol reciprocity, cooperation, and recognition by other states and the United States Secret Service.