



Henry County Sheriff's Reserves Reach 40 Years of Service 11/11/2014

Reserve law enforcement units are widely utilized in the United States and throughout the world. They exist in law enforcement agencies of all sizes and jurisdictions including many of our nation's largest. Reserve units are integrated into the full-time operation of their agency and often fulfill specific roles and duties based on the agency mission. They provide additional trained manpower during a crisis, and provide a transition for both officers leaving full-time law enforcement who want to continue to help their communities and those considering entering law enforcement as a career.

The Henry County Sheriff's Office Reserve Unit fills those same roles and more with a long history of service to the citizens of Henry County. Although assigned to the Field Operations Division they support important functions for the entire agency. The Sheriff's Reserve Unit currently consists of 21 active members all of whom are Georgia certified law enforcement officers. They volunteer their personal time to assist the full-time deputies and have contributed over 5,700 man-hours to the Sheriff's Office in the past 12 months.



Like most Reserve Units, the Henry County Sheriff's Reserve was born out of necessity. That necessity arose during the summer of 1974 when a ruthless serial killer named Paul John Knowles was committing brutal murders from California to Connecticut but primarily in the southeast. The total number of his victims known to law enforcement was 18 women, men and children. He confessed to these and 17 more murders. Because of his good looks it was easy for him to win over his intended victims. The media dubbed this cold hearted ex-convict the "The Casanova Killer".

After a lengthy killing binge, Knowles executed a motorist and a Florida State Trooper on November 17, 1974, in Pulaski County Georgia. Henry County Deputy Charles Hancock was on the square in McDonough when the lookout for Knowles was broadcast. He quickly recognized that he was behind the vehicle identified in the lookout. Hancock notified the dispatcher and Deputies set up a roadblock on Hwy 42 at Hudson Bridge Road. Knowles continued north with Hancock behind him. Knowles then attempted to crash through the roadblock, but he lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a tree. He escaped the vehicle on foot while firing shots at the pursuing Deputies. A chaotic footrace resulted, with Knowles pursued by dogs and helicopters called in from surrounding agencies. While fleeing through the swamp area around Hudson Bridge Road Knowles hid the .357 magnum revolver he took from the murdered Florida Trooper. He knew it was indisputable evidence.

Due to a malfunction in a weapon he had stolen, Knowles was finally cornered by an armed civilian with a shotgun, who escorted Knowles to a nearby residence where Deputies apprehended him. The brutal crime spree of Paul John Knowles had come to an end.

Because of the nature of his crimes and the fact that he had escaped from detention in other states, officials decided Knowles was to be housed at alternating undisclosed jails. While Knowles was in the Douglas County Jail he told GBI agents and Douglas County Sheriff Earl Lee that he would show them where he hid the Trooper's gun. It was later determined that his cooperation was a ploy by Knowles to attempt an escape. On December 18, while on the way back to Henry County Knowles forcibly tried to escape by reaching over the back of the driver's seat and grabbed Sheriff Lee's revolver. While struggling for the gun, shots were fired by Knowles through the floorboard of the car. He was shot to death by GBI Agent Ron Angel who was riding in the passenger seat. Knowles died the same way he lived, violently.





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It was shortly after the gun battle and ensuing wide spread man-hunt that the Sheriff's Office determined they did not have enough full-time Deputies to quickly respond to a major crisis. To correct that condition the Sheriff's Volunteer Reserve Force (SVR) was formed. This volunteer unit consisted of about a dozen civic minded Henry County residents. The SVR was later renamed the Sheriff's Reserve Unit and has remained an integral part of the organizations of succeeding Sheriff's.

Over the years Reserve Deputies have filled many roles and some have gone on to full-time law enforcement careers. "If you encounter a Reserve Deputy you should not be able to tell the difference between them and a full-time Deputy in form or function", stated Sheriff Keith McBrayer. "They are Georgia certified sworn peace officers and they make arrests and go to court like any other Deputy. We recognize their importance and appreciate their commitment and sacrifice", Sheriff McBrayer added.

Additionally, many officers who are unable to continue a full-time law enforcement career join reserve units to continue to help safeguard their community while pursuing other vocations. The experience and training they bring with them from their full-time jobs is valuable to the agencies they join.

One of the original SVR Deputies currently working for Sheriff McBrayer remained active as a reserve peace officer while completing his civilian career. Sheriff McBrayer observed, "It is possible that Captain Oakman may be the last of the original SVR Deputies still serving in law enforcement". Currently Jack Oakman is the Commander of the Professional Standards Unit. Captain Oakman believes strongly in the value volunteer law enforcement reserve units make to the communities they serve. "The spirit of volunteerism has always been a very strong characteristic in Americans. Regardless of where people are born, as they are assimilated into our diverse society they willingly give of themselves to better their communities in many ways. For a few these include emergency services such as Fire, EMS, and Law Enforcement."

Although the Sheriff's Reserve Unit is currently at its authorized maximum staffing, anyone interested in becoming a Reserve Deputy can learn the requirements at www.henrycountysheriff.net under the Field Operations navigation button. If you are a current Georgia certified Peace Officer in good standing with POST and a resident of Henry County you can leave a message for Sergeant Brett Bebout at 770-288-7127. Sergeant Bebout will contact you with additional information and the current staffing status.

Sheriff McBrayer stated, "Reserve Deputies receive the same professional training as our full-time personnel to insure they serve the citizens to our high standards. Because of this long standing tradition of important public service we have been able to reach out to support our community in many more ways".

In his closing remarks Sheriff McBrayer added, "On the occasion of their 40th anniversary, I want to recognize the contributions of this exceptional unit for their service to the citizens of Henry County. Without our Reserves we would not be as successful in times of crisis and when additional manpower is needed."