

2012.3.27

BENNIE WILKENS

*Videotaping begins during set-up for COMMANDER WILKENS's presentation, amid various off-camera conversations among the audience as they settle. COMMANDER WILKENS recognizes and greets a few people as they come in. Throughout these opening minutes the camera is focused on him alone.*

DOROTHY NIX, *off-camera*: It's four o'clock. We're glad everyone could be here today. Mr. [James] Mackay [DeKalb Historical Society officer who usually acts as emcee for the "I Remember Hour"] sends his regrets. Mrs. Mackay is just not doing well at all today, so he couldn't be here. I have a little presentation I want to make here. Would you come up here, Mr. Clark? Mr. Clark has been responsible—was responsible last year for a lot of the success of our "I Remember Hour." As you know, he calls you on the phone or writes you—

UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE, *off-camera*: [Inaudible remark; sounds like, "If your name's on the list, it isn't here"?]

MRS. NIX, *off-camera*: Yeah. If anyone's here who would like to be notified about the "I Remember Hour," just give Mr. Clark your [inaudible]. We just wanted to give you this volunteer certificate [inaudible].

MR. CLARK, *off-camera, thanks her* [inaudible]. *Audience applauds.*

MRS. NIX, *off-camera*: Today we have Commander Bennie Wilkens, who's going to tell us about the history of the Decatur Police Department. *Camera shot widens to include MRS. NIX, COMMANDER WILKENS, and part of the audience.* And we're also pleased to have Lieutenant Dickerson from the police department, who's going to tape the proceedings for the police department; and we'll have that record as well as the one that we'll have here. I know that Commander Wilkens needs no introduction, and I'm not going to take any more of his time.

COMMANDER WILKENS: Thank you, Mrs. Nix. I appreciate being able to be here; and I'm going to talk about, of course, my first love, which is the police department. The Police Department of the City of Decatur has been in existence some one hundred and sixty-four years.

In 1822 DeKalb County was formed as the county seat—was formed, and Decatur was named the county seat. The town was laid out, and the land was ceded to

the white man by the Creek Indian nation; and almost on the heels of the exodus of the Indians, the citizens of the little frontier town of what is now the City of Decatur moved in. The very plot of ground on which this building stands is historic in that it formed part of the land lot that was allocated to survey and lay out a county seat, which was done so by the civil engineer or surveyor, Mr. James Diamond. There's a military militia district in the state named for him.

But this particular plot of ground was selected as the place on which to build the courthouse. The first building here, of course, was a log building. And the jail building, it, too, was a log building, a two-story structure with a lower part having no doors or no windows, the second floor being attainable by a set of steps going upstairs. When a person was put in the "calaboose," as they called it back then, the arresting officer would have to take the prisoner up the flight of stairs to the top floor of the jail building, open a trapdoor, put a ladder down to the ground floor, let the prisoner go down the ladder, pull the ladder up, and close the trapdoor. And there wasn't much chance of escape.

And also on that little building there was a shed or lean-to where the stock[s] [were] located. Can you imagine somebody sitting in the stock[s] here in the City of Decatur? Well, it was done back in the 1820s. But the marshal back then, he was a compassionate individual; so what he did, to preserve a little bit of the person's dignity, draped a curtain over the street side, where the people passing by could not see the person sitting in the stock[s]. So I would say that was compassion on the marshal's part.

Now, we talk about police officers and police department. In all frontier towns it was customary to have a town marshal. Well, Decatur followed suit in that respect; and they elected their first town marshal. And the marshal's office held sway for a number of years, and then a different type of law enforcement came into being. I'm going to get some facts and statistics—they're all statistics, but they're facts. And remember—I believe this is called the "I Remember Hour." And I may take a little poetic license here, but eventually you people are going to get something about the history of Decatur.

Now, in the hundred and sixty-four years of our existence we have had three officers killed or die as the results of wounds suffered in the line of duty. Our first officer that's recorded was Marshal J. E. Hurst. He was wounded in an affray and died September 5, 1887. Our second officer to die in the line of duty was Mr. Gus Ford.

His town council introduced a resolution in honor of Gus Ford, Policeman, killed in the line of duty January 16, 1920. Our third and last, as far as we know, Lieutenant B. E. Cowart, Decatur Police Department, was killed in the line of duty on January 17, 1971. Well, in view of all the—every time you turn your television on, you hear about an officer being wounded or killed or die as the results of being wounded; and I think we've been pretty fortunate in that we have gone some one hundred sixty-four years, and only three of our people have gotten killed or died as a result of wounds inflicted while on duty.

Things come about through—over the years, and in 1892—prior to 1892 our peace officers here in Decatur did not wear uniforms. But in 1892 the town council ordered the town marshal to wear a uniform. The town marshal was allocated X-number of dollars to defray the expenses of that cost. And over the years, right on up to the last, even to this very day, you keep hearing the word “marshal.” We'll go a little more into that a little later on; but the term “policeman” jumps up in 1893. They hired a night policeman in 1893.

We're going to get into some of our people that have commanded the police department. Our first chief of police was a former town marshal, M. D. Googer, Sr. He was elected marshal and chief of police January 6, 1914. One year later M. D. Googer, Sr., was elected marshal, chief of police, chief of the fire department, and chief of the sanitary department. He was wearing three hats, and they were really loading the poor man down.

Then the second chief of police, the late George S.—S for Seaney [spelling?] Swords. He was appointed chief of police and marshal March 20, 1931. The late Marcus D. Googer died in Wesley Memorial Hospital on March 11, 1931; and George Swords was appointed chief of police and marshal March 21[sic], 1931.

On May 4, 1945, Assistant Chief Floyd B. Walden [was] promoted to chief of police upon the retirement of George S. Swords, assistant chief [sic]. [NOTE: According to City of Decatur's official website (<http://www.decaturga.com/index.aspx?page=481>) George Swords retired in 1947, and Luther Spinks became police chief.] Upon Walden's attaining the position [of] chief of police, the title of assistant chief was abandoned. A little later on it was reinstated.

In 1947 Chief Walden was transferred to the Licenses Department, and the now-late Luther Spinks was appointed the chief of police; and upon his appointment the

rank of assistant chief was reinstated. Then Chief Spinks retired in 1969 [sic; 1968, according to <http://www.decalurga.com/index.aspx?page=481>], and Chief Lee A. Cole was appointed to succeed him. Chief Cole served successfully, along—as well as—all the other chiefs; they had no problems. And Chief Cole retired in 1980, and J. A. Matthews was appointed chief, where he is currently in that position. Also the chief of police still retains the title marshal. We still have a city marshal, and the chief of police is the chief of police and the city marshal. Back few years ago it was the town marshal; now it's the city marshal.

The metamorphosis of the police department, it actually came about during the administration of the late Chief Floyd Bartow Walden. He made some moves, along with the city managers going along with him. He promoted three of his senior men to lieutenants. Prior to that the only rank in the police department had been the chief or the assistant chief, whatever the case might be. Those were the only two ranks to ever—along with the marshal, of course—to ever be in the police department. So I think we can safely say that that was the beginning of our current successful police department.

Not too long after that, after the three senior officers were appointed to the rank of lieutenant—by that time, Chief Luther Spinks had taken over the administration of the police department; and he, in turn, elevated his three lieutenants to the rank of captain, one of the reasons being [that] DeKalb County has captains on their force, and a DeKalb County police captain was making no more money than our lieutenants. So the late chief decided to elevate them to the rank of captain. At that time yours truly, myself, was appointed sergeant in charge of safety education; and we reactivated the school patrol, and that's how I got involved in all of this, with all of these nice things that have happened to me.

There is a lots [sic] to be considered in the police department. There's a lots of water has gone over the dam; there's lots of changes that have been made. Starting with Chief Walden, who initiated the rank, then Chief Spinks comes along [and] goes along with the ranks and makes more ranks. And incidentally in 1946 we only had sixteen men and the chief of police. Now we have fifty men, including—we have fifty personnel, fifty people in the police department, including the chief of police. The chief of police is included in that number of fifty people. And all the chiefs of police since Chief Spinks have continued a very good and firm policy on education. In the

thirty-five years and six months that I attended the Decatur Police Department—that I was a member of the Decatur Police Department, I averaged attending one [inaudible] school per year. [*To current police Chief Matthews, in the audience, off-camera*] Now, Chief, I believe you are conducting at least one per month, isn't that right? Everything is happening so fast and so quick. The laws change overnight. Chief Matthews might go home this afternoon, especially with the state legislature being in session like they are, and he's liable to get a directive from the city manager or the city attorneys and [be told], "Chief, so-and-so is illegal in Decatur," or "It's legal," one of the two. He doesn't know hardly from one day to the next what's coming off. But that is the reason for the education. You have got to keep abreast of the changes, not only the changes of the law but in the changes of the people and the customs. We can't bog down in our public relations. If we do, we're left out in the cold. We've got to keep that up. If we don't do that, we're going to be looking for—we might find ourselves looking for a job. We have got to maintain a good rapport with people.

Now, these figures I'm going to give you, it's going to surprise you. The budget for the City of Decatur 1946-1947 was \$109,440. The budget for the City of Decatur Police Department for 1986-1987 [is] \$1,445,944. The difference in the budget, 1946 to 1987, is \$1,336,504. That's how much the budget has increased since yours truly started to work for the Decatur police in 1946. Personnel has tripled plus one in the police department.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *interrupting with question, off-camera*: What's the population?

COMMANDER WILKENS: Sir?

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: What about the population?

COMMANDER WILKENS: The population has decreased since 1941—1946. I don't have the exact figures, but it's—we're down [*to Chief Matthews, off-camera, in audience*] well over a thousand, aren't we, Chief Matthews?

CHIEF MATTHEWS, *off-camera*: A little better than eighteen thousand [inaudible].

COMMANDER WILKENS: Eighteen thousand? Well, we're about—we're almost three thousand down from 1946. I think we had about twenty-one or twenty-two thousand in 1946, so we're down—well, to be on the safe side--better than two thousand, we're down that much. The number of vehicles has increased tremendously.

Some of the things that have taken place—a lots [sic] of the things that have taken place—have been for the betterment not only of the police department but for the betterment of the City of Decatur or the people of Decatur. And some of the things are—I would be the first to say, and most anybody else would be—that some things have happened that have not been for the best of anybody or all concerned, at least.

I can recall the time, back in my days as a rookie, that right here on Sycamore Street, on Saturday evening and up to 8:30 at night, it would be physically impossible for someone to walk fast, let alone run, down Sycamore Street on the sidewalk; we had so many people. Now, where those people have gone, I really don't know. One thing Decatur has lost--and our Chamber of Commerce may not agree with me—but one of the things that Decatur has lost is part of—not all of it, but part of—its small-town image. Lots of people don't like a small-town image. Fine—to each his own. I'm an old country boy, myself, and I like a lots of elbow room; so I like the small-town image.

Another thing that I have witnessed here in my tenure as a police officer, during the Christmas holidays, then we had traffic all the way around the square. I have stood under the traffic light myself along with other police officers eight hours, stopping just being relieved for lunch, and our chief of police now has done the same thing, we had so blooming much traffic that we would place an officer under each one of the red lights on all four corners of the square, plus we probably have two down at Sycamore and Church and Ponce de Leon and Church. We—at one time we had—now, this is--we had about twenty-something men. When I started, we had sixteen officers. We had about twenty at that particular time. We had six independent drugstores, two chain drugstores, we had a bowling alley, two movie houses, and we had four or five hardware stores, and grocery stores were running out our ears—both chain and individual grocery stores. Where did the people go? Well, we've just been talking about an exodus—some of them did go. Lots of them have gone on to their reward—they are no more; they're dead. Some of our good people are still around; and I can look out here in the audience, and I see two lovely ladies here on the front row that—there's one back in the middle row back there, Mrs. Steve Furse [spelling?]. I've had the pleasure of knowing a lots of you people over the years. I have--the only reason that my tour of duty has been successful is because of the people of Decatur. They made my job easier, they helped me in my job; it was a mutual situation. I have helped them a little bit, and they have helped me a lots. It hasn't been quite balanced out, but

the public here in Decatur has made my tour of duty--which ended on July 31, 1980, thirty-five years and six months—people made my tour of duty successful with their cooperation.

I look back now, and I hesitate to call on names because I might just forget someone. So I think that I can safely say that the people that I have met in Decatur over the years since 1946, I think I can safely say that, had I been a minister, I would not have made any more friends as a minister. I recall, in times when we'd have weather just like we had the last few days, snow on the ground, I recall calling up some of our elderly people and asked them did they--they were incapable of getting out--asked them, "Do you need any groceries?" I've done that many times. I would have them prepare a list—now, I'm spending taxpayers' money doing this—but I never did run afoul of the mayor or the city commission doing it. But they would make up a list, I'd go by and pick it up, pick up the money, go to the grocery store, pick them up some groceries, then take them back home. That meant a lot.

It's—and I see people still around that I know, and they have been good for Decatur; and every time that we lose one of our senior citizens, we lose—it's just like taking something out of what you do, taking something out of Decatur. Decatur is truly the city—the town, if you will—of homes, schools, and churches. It's still that. It still stands for that. Despite the changes, despite the exodus, despite the change in the population, and even in the crime situation. The crime situation is getting worse. The police department is working twenty-four hours a day; but, ladies and gentlemen, I want to make this observation: The time has come for the people—you are the people—the people, the police, and the court officials to get together. The police department can't do it all by itself. The courts can't do it all by itself [sic]. We have to have a combination of the interest of the people, the hard work of the police department, and the dedication of the judicial system. That's what it's going to take.

I doubt seriously if we will ever wipe out crime. The first crime on record was when Cain killed his brother Abel, and the killing has continued since that time. And right now when you pick up a paper or turn on your news, TV, you wonder, "Is it going to stop?" I don't know. I really don't know. As a retired professional police officer, I don't know when it's going to stop. However, I think the voice of the people, the actions of the police—the police can go so far, the courts can go so far. And don't let anybody tell you or me or anybody else that we need a lots more laws. We got more

darn laws on the book now than we can enforce properly. For every offense there's a half a dozen laws or maybe even more. It's not my intent to get into the political situation. I don't intend to. But I will, as your friend and as a past police officer, remind you that now is the time for all of us to get together and see if we can't at least alleviate part of the situation.

Our sources of information for this talk have been the records of the [Decatur] Police Department and the minutes of the town council for the town of Decatur; the minutes of the City Commission—for the City Commission of Decatur; Franklin M. Garrett's *Atlanta and Environs; The Story of Decatur*, by Miss Caroline McKinney Clarke; plus conversations held with retired Chief [of Police] Marcus D. Goodger, Jr., who was the son of our first chief of police. I may be treading on dangerous ground; but if any of you have any— Before I make this statement, I will say one more thing: One of the worst things that happened during my tour of duty— Can anybody in this room imagine what it was? One of the worst things that happened in—to anybody or anything in the greater Atlanta area? The Winecoff Hotel fire. The Hotel Winecoff fire. To me that is one of the worst, if not the worst, thing that happened during my tour of duty.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Well, I think a terrible thing was that the girl [Emory student Barbara Jane Mackle] was buried alive.

COMMANDER WILKENS: Yes, that was in the criminal—that was—but that was a manmade catastrophe. Of course, there's a possibility that the Winecoff was, too. But to me that was the most horrible thing. Fortunately, the girl [Barbara Jane Mackle]-- where the girl was buried alive—which is a wonder--she survived. But that [the Winecoff fire] is one of the worst things [that] happened.

Now I'll make my statement. If there's anybody in the audience [who] has a question, I will try to answer it; and if I can't answer it, I will get you an answer. Or, if you recall something or want to know do I recall a certain thing in my tour of duty, I'll try to answer you if anybody has a question.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Sir, [inaudible; refers to the Winecoff Hotel fire]. I was seven years old [inaudible] at night. [*Camera pans out into audience to show speaker from the back.*] I'll never forget it as long as I live. [Inaudible] was on that fire. I will never forget it.



COMMANDER WILKENS: I was just a rookie police officer at that time. When you see people jump out seven- or eight-story windows, a thing like this. It's horrible. I guess it's the worst thing-- And I had come back from World War II, but this thing was—it was even closer than that to see-- Of course, I don't know that I even knew any of those people, but they were human beings; and you could see it happen. It wasn't—it was [sic] an act of God. It was an act—I understand it was later found out to be an act of carelessness on somebody's part. I don't—there is a possibility that it might not have been arson, but at least the fire started as the results of some human error somewhere along the line. Of course, the people I had seen dead in World War II, that has happened since the beginning of time; and those things—those were not acts of God, either, but they were things that you were associated with, and you expected it. I mean, those things could happen. But this thing of the Winecoff Hotel fire, or with innocent people. Over the years I've seen innocent people, young and old, male and female, even children and babies, killed as the results of somebody's carelessness. That has always touched me. And I think it would touch anybody that had anything to—that had any sense of compassion about them. [*Acknowledging question from the audience*] Yes, sir.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Two questions. You mentioned the name “Marshall” several times. Is this Marshall Street named after him?

COMMANDER WILKENS: No, sir, I don't think so. Now, I wouldn't want to be taken to task on that; but I don't think it was. I think there's a different spelling. I think our Marshall Street is spelled with two Ls, and I believe the marshal is spelled with one L. And as I say, that's a carry-over from the frontier days—not only out West, like Marshal Matt Dillon—we had town marshals all over the United States, especially in the frontier towns. And as towns grew bigger, they began to have policemen, and they had different types of law enforcement. They began to have detectives and so forth sort of combined under one heading of the police department.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: The other question: How long was the police department in the City Hall? When did it move--become part of the function—not the function, but when was the beginning date of it being housed in what is City Hall?

COMMANDER WILKENS: Well, it—City Hall was built in—a lots of that stuff is kindly [sic] in limbo, but City Hall itself was first occupied in 1927. One room was

allocated to the police department. Now, prior to that, I think there were two shacks, if you will, houses of very poor construction that was occupied by the City of Decatur, along with its various offices. Now, in the very beginning—on this we have no way of substantiating because we had a courthouse fire, we've had several things that have happened, and two or more fires in regards to the police department and the marshal's records. But there's a good possibility that when the first courthouse was built, the first marshal probably occupied maybe a corner, or maybe his office could have been in the first log jail that was built here. Now, we have no way--with those records, as I say, some of them have been destroyed—most of them have been destroyed.

That's—and later on there's a possibility that—well, we do have record of a stone jail being built and that one being torn down, and a little later the old red-brick jail that a lots of you people here know about. And the sheriff could have—well, and I think in Sheriff McCurdy's time, I think he did have his family in the old brick jail. But when I joined the police department in '46, the jailer was living in part of the—the jailer had an apartment in the old red-brick jail. And when they built the new—what was then the county building and the jail--the jailer, Mr. Jackson, who was the jailer at that time--the chief jailer did have an apartment in the new jail. But the marshal's office—its physical location has been in limbo throughout the years. It pops up. Of course, we know of it for a fact that it was in the City Hall, and it was in buildings—it was occupied that you could say where they were city-owned buildings or at least under the direct control of the city.

Now, there have been buildings on the lot where the present City Hall is. There were some buildings there prior to the erection of the now brick City Hall that were classified as city offices. Could you call it a city hall? I don't rightly know. Now, if Chief Googer were—late—I mean, retired Chief M. D. Googer of the fire department—if he were here, he might be able to—or former Mayor Andy Robertson, he could probably tell you about that. But our records doesn't show a great deal, and some of the records-- Now, there was a rumor—this—I call it a rumor because it was never confirmed. The marshal at one time, the town marshal, was living—this was before M. D. Googer, Sr., was living down on Sycamore Street. Mind you, this is unconfirmed; but there was a hotel down there. And the city—the town marshal was living in there, and he had his records in there. And it's my understanding that the building burned, along with some of the marshal's records. And we do have rather sketchy records. We have

from—we have written records on the police department beginning in 1892, as they are part and parcel on the city record per se. They're taken from the minute book of the town council, and I could—I'd like to read you a couple of extracts from that and give you some idea as to what we're dealing with in the way of records. [*Begins reading from a sheaf of papers*]

Marshal ordered to wear uniform--\$25 appropriated, 2/1/[18]92.  
Policeman—

That's where the first time that “policeman” shows up in any of our records.

Policeman employed to assist the Marshal—4/4/[18]92.  
Motion made and passed to buy Night Marshal pistol—not to exceed \$15.  
Motion to hire extra Night Policeman—

There comes the word “policeman” again, the second time in the records.

--Night Policeman or—

They clarified it. They keep going from “police” to “marshal”; now that they've used the word “policeman,” they kindly [sic] rock it backwards and forwards.

--or Marshal adopted.  
Two uniforms ordered for two policemen at \$25. Each ordered to pay \$12.50 of the cost.

That happened in 1893.

Salary for Marshal set at \$40 a month—1896.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: Was that a full-time job?

COMMANDER WILKENS: Sir?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: Was that a full-time job?

COMMANDER WILKENS: Oh, yes, sir. That was a full-time job. Well, I'll give you—let you in on a little—well, it's not a secret, it's a matter of record. When I started to work for the City of Decatur in 1946, I was making \$150 a month. There's no way you could live on it now. Now, Mr. Googer [M. D. Googer, Sr.], he was a colorful man; and somebody—some people might even say he was a character. But he was a good officer. But up and down, he would leave, and then he would come back. And he—here's a rather interesting entry here: [*Resumes reading from papers*]

M. D. Googer elected Marshal for year 1910. Salary \$85 a month.  
Free transportation offered to Marshal by Georgia Railway & Electric

Company was accepted by the town on March 1, 1910.

The police officers would—they would walk up to what is—what's called Oakhurst. Walking beat. Then they would get on the—when they got ready to come back to City Hall, they would get on the streetcar--what was termed the streetcar—and ride back to City Hall to end their tour of duty.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: Which streetcar was that? [Inaudible]

COMMANDER WILKENS: No, it wasn't the Decatur car. That was the—

UNIDENTIFIED AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: South Decatur?

COMMANDER WILKENS: No, it was—it was Georgia Railway. I think, since it was electric, it used to run down from Atlanta Avenue and across that way and out Hibernia—I believe it went out Hibernia.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: Did they call it South Decatur? Didn't they call it South Decatur?

COMMANDER WILKENS: Well, now, South Decatur did come through. And it come through Agnes Scott over there. And the North Decatur line, it come around and circled the square; and the end of the line was over here, what was then the [inaudible] North McDonough Street.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER [*off-camera*]: When did the north—when did the streetcar circle the square?

COMMANDER WILKENS: It was making that circle in 1946. Run down in front of the Decatur High School.

[Inaudible conversation among audience members with regard to streetcar service in Decatur]

COMMANDER WILKENS, *continuing to read*:

Marshal to be provided with platform scale for weighing coal.

It seemed that he was—he took care of the way that the coal—checked the people's—making sure that people were getting value received from their coal dollar.

Salary of the Chief of Police set at \$85 per month—January 5, 1914.  
The Night Marshal is exempted from street tax.

When I came here in 1946, they were paying—we were writing—the police department was writing street tax, going from door to door. And ministers--the street tax was

three dollars per annum; ministers were exempt. And here [in the record], the [inaudible] Night Marshal in 1914. They were exempt.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I remember the first time they came to my house [rest of comment inaudible].

COMMANDER WILKENS, *continuing to read from printed material*:

M. D. Googer elected marshal, chief of police, chief of the fire department, and secretary of departments at a salary of \$100 per month—January 4, 1915.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Let me just say that in answer to his [audience member's] question about the word “marshal,” that’s a title, like the word “captain”; whereas the word “Marshall” [as in] Marshall Street is a person’s name. Just like the word “forest.” If it’s got one R, it’s a mass of trees; if it’s got two Rs, it’s a person.

COMMANDER WILKENS: Now that you mention it—I wouldn’t belabor the point, but now that you mention it, it sounds logical. And, you know, “marshal” per se, if you go far enough back, you get—in the French army, looking even in today’s armies in Russia, you have field marshals. “Marshal” has always been a title; and back, further back in antiquity, it would carry more weight than our town marshal. The town marshal, he was a pretty important individual. He was a keeper of the peace and guardian of our rights and property, so he had a pretty important job.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: “Police marshal” is a title; whereas the Marshall Street is named after people.

COMMANDER WILKENS *nods, then continues to read*: Here’s one:

Motion carried to sell horse and buggy at auction and buy motorcycle for use by police. Committee appointed to sell horse and buggy at auction and buy motorcycle for police—

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: What year?

COMMANDER WILKENS: January—February 16, 1917. I could go on ad infinitum with this, but it’s an interesting thing. Hopefully we’re going to have a history of the police department in print, and it will be available. If there be no further questions, I would like to reiterate what I said: People, we have got to help ourselves. We need to get something done because crime is rampant. The police are overworked, the jails are full, they’re having to turn some of the people a-loose.

DOROTHY NIX, *from audience, off-camera*: Commander Wilkens, could you talk a little bit about the children, your work with the children. I know they always felt welcome at the police department, to make--call home to be picked up after a movie—

COMMANDER WILKENS: That's true, Ms. Nix. Thank you for calling it to my attention. It has been the policy, since we—of course, prior to my—or prior to Chief Spinks being the chief of police, we had a school patrol. But we—what we did, we more or less activated it. It had been dormant for quite a while, and we activated it. There's people in this room—[*pointing to off-camera audience members*] Mr. and Mrs. Furse—I worked with them, their children when they were going to school, in school patrol. And I've worked with church groups, civic groups, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Campfire Girls, Bluebirds, Sea Scouts—you name it, I've worked with them along with—myself and numerous of the other police officers. And Ms. Nix made mention of the fact, when the children got out of school, they used to come to the Decatur Police Department when we were down here, when we were housed in the old city hall building.

The late Chief Spinks persuaded the city manager to have the phone company install a phone where the kids could get to it—the children could get to it, students, if you will. They would come in and want to—of course, we couldn't—we had a special phone installed where these youngsters could come in and call their mamas and daddies. And I daresay, Mrs. Furse, to you, along with many mothers and fathers, you knew that, in your case, if Steve was out, that he could go—maybe he went to the football game, and maybe you didn't get a—you and Steve, Sr., didn't have a chance to go with him, and you knew that all Steve had to do was walk up the hill from the school, walk in [to the police station], pick up the phone, call you, and you could come get him. That was—those are the things that, over the years, that we have--

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: That's so comforting, too, for the children.

COMMANDER WILKENS: Yeah, indeed. And the youngsters, they—most of our children had—they had no fear of the police department. We—and most of our population over the years had no fear of the police department. We—although if I had never been a member of it—our department, our police officers have never been ogres. They've never picked on people. We would be more pacifists than we would be anything else. I guess you could put us in that category. Now, we have enforced the

law. We have done our job over the years, and we intend to keep on doing it. But the police--over the years, and still are--they have been maligned more so than any other group of individuals known to man, the police officer. There used to be an old saying--well, it was originated in the Communist Party--"Blame it on the police." The Communist Party initiated that saying, "Blame it on the police."

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I second your motion. That was true.

COMMANDER WILKENS: And over the years we have worked especially with our young people. I distinctly remember thirteen journeys that I made to New York and--Washington and New York with the school Safety Patrol. And even our--one of our commissioners, Candler Broome--you all know him--Candler was--he went to Ponce de Leon School--Ms. Willa Barrett was the principal down there, and Candler was on school patrol. One of our police lieutenants, Lieutenant James McGuire [spelling?] is--I remember when he was a school patrol.

[*To audience member, presumably Chief Matthews, off-camera*] And, Chief, I want to--I want you to verify this one thing that I have forgotten to tell you: Didn't we--it was in '64--that we integrated the police department? Wasn't it '64? [*Pauses for affirmative response, which is inaudible on tape.*] We integrated the police department, and now we have a number of--we have some black lieutenants--in fact, [*pointing to off-camera audience member*] Lieutenant Dixon back there. He came with the police department as--in uniform. He came here from New York. I think he was in the Ports Authority in New York. And Grandville [Granville?] Dixon came here and joined the police department, in uniform. Now he's a lieutenant in the detective department, and he's in charge of the detectives--he's physically in charge of the detective department. Of course, he's got a supervisor--just as the chief, he is actively in charge of the police department [sic]. Lieutenant James McGuire [spelling?], and we got several sergeants; and integration has not, to the best of my knowledge, been a problem for the police department. Well, integration has never been a problem, I don't think, to most anybody in Decatur, because it has been a peaceful situation. I don't know of any outrages committed by blacks or whites, demanding, marching on City Hall and all that. It hasn't happened. We've got a black commissioner; she's been on the commission now for--she was elected to a second term. There never has been a black-and-white issue in the City of Decatur. We've had some bad blacks; we've had

some bad whites. But there's never been a black and white—irrespective of how the individual may feel about it. We may have some blacks that dislike whites; we may have some whites that dislike blacks. But it has never come to fore. When the chips are down—I used to be able to, even prior to integration—I used to be able to—I used to work [high school] football games. I had no problem, back when our schools were totally segregated. I used to attend the Herring Street football games, and my biggest allies when trouble came up were the black people that were at the game. So black and white has never been a issue, especially with the police department. And as far as I know—[*To audience member, presumably Matthews, off-camera*] Chief, can you recall any incident that would be otherwise—other than a peaceful transition? [*Pauses for response, apparently concurring with COMMANDER WILKENS, which is inaudible on tape*] I don't recall one. [*Glances down at wristwatch*] Do we have any more questions or any more observations?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Let me just add to what you said there, since Communism [inaudible], in 1958, when Gus Hall was elected president of the Communist League of America, he said, "My first project will be to win the minds of college kids." So we've seen Kent State, Berkeley, Columbia, and so forth. But this other thing, "Blame the police"—the agitators are trained and taught, whenever a policeman approaches you, you're supposed to yell at the top of your lungs, "Police brutality!" Doesn't make any difference if the policeman touched them or not. You have to yell, "Police brutality!"

COMMANDER WILKENS: That's strictly the Communist way of doing things. There's no question about it. I mean, where else could you find a situation like that or a situation being created? It's just got to come right out of the Kremlin. It may not happen so much in the Kremlin, but it's happening out here. The agent—well, it's just like Khrushchev said, "We'll take America without firing a shot"; and they could very well do it if we don't get up off our backsides and then do what we're supposed to do.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Bennie, you really were loved by the schoolchildren.

COMMANDER WILKENS: I wouldn't argue with you on that. I know I was. Anybody else have any observations?



UNIDENTIFIED MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I am very proud of the fact that America today is showing more signs in the area of honesty, morality, and patriotism.

COMMANDER WILKENS: Well, it's high time, because—it's high time that we—all of them are cleaning up our act, because so many things are happening, it's tragic to see innocents pushed around by forces that really should even be in existence, let alone out in--actively involved in actions.

DOROTHY NIX, *off-camera*: If there are no more questions, everybody join us in the Old Courtroom for refreshments. And I had one more thing that I wanted to say. [*Camera pans to DOROTHY NIX.*] Perhaps some of you don't know that Commander Wilkens is still continuing his work with the children. He is our tour guide for our school tours of the museum. And we certainly appreciate do appreciate it.

COMMANDER WILKENS [*back on camera*]: Thank you all for coming. [*Audience applause*]

END OF RECORDING