

FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

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Policing a Manmade Wonder



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The Cover: Over the years, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, a manmade wonder, has sustained considerable damage. Yet, no one has been injured in any of these emergencies. See article p. 1. (Photo courtesy of Studio III, Norfolk, Va.)

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William H. Webster, Director

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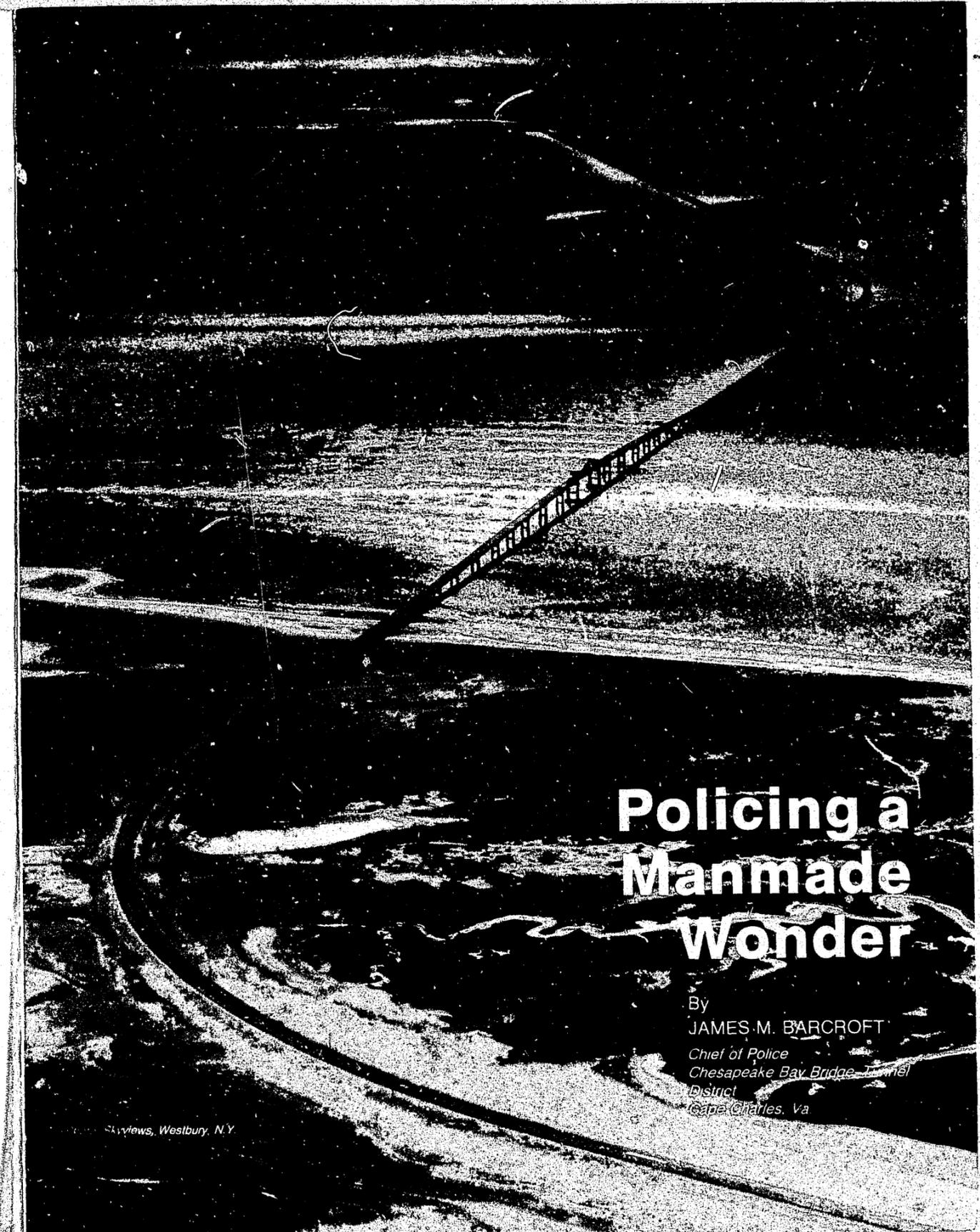


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Policing a Manmade Wonder

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Views, Westbury, N.Y.



Chief Barcroft

A pickup truck approached the toll plaza at the north end of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel at a high rate of speed. Inside were two men and a woman who was seated between them. The truck skidded past the booth and came to a stop against a cement lane barrier. When a bridge-tunnel police officer asked the driver to step out of the truck after determining he had no license or registration, the woman crawled out of the vehicle and screamed she was being kidnaped. As the officer handcuffed one of the men, the second man struck the officer and fled into nearby woods with his handcuffed accomplice.

In the ensuing 3-hour search, bridge-tunnel police were aided by the Virginia State Police, deputies from two nearby counties, and a Virginia game warden. The manhunt ended when a bridge-tunnel officer wounded the two fugitives with a single shotgun blast when they refused to halt as they entered a wooded area. Charges against the men in the October 1982, incident included two armed robberies.



"Gillnet across the road"

This story is one of many that has given the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel its local nickname—"a big gillnet (or fishnet) across the road." This renowned feat of engineering skill spans 17.6 miles of the lower Chesapeake Bay and connects Virginia's naturally picturesque Eastern Shore with the resort area of Virginia Beach. Tourist and commercial traffic take the bridge-tunnel to avoid extra travel by land, and the bridge-tunnel police force has the responsibility for whatever passes through the bridge-tunnel's two toll plazas.

Acting as a human fishnet for law offenders is not the only unusual duty assigned to the bridge-tunnel police. Although the division's officers are commissioned under the same section of the Code of Virginia that applies to all political subdivisions in the Commonwealth, they are charged with other duties beyond those usually associated with a law enforcement agency. Those duties include the transportation of large sums of money, firefighting, emergency wrecker operations, toll collection, and transportation of arrested persons.

It is the bridge-tunnel itself that makes the jurisdiction unique. Measuring only about 50 feet in width at its narrowest point and 17.6 miles in length, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel is the world's longest bridge-tunnel complex. The \$200 million construction took 3½ years to complete and included building more than 12 miles of trestled roadway, two mile-long tunnels, two bridges, almost 2 miles of causeway, four manmade islands, and 5½ miles of approach roads, totaling 23 miles. Considering that the job was accomplished under conditions imposed by hurricanes,



Processing a DUI suspect

northeasters, and the unpredictable Atlantic Ocean, it is no wonder the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel earned status as one of the wonders of the modern world and is an important tourist attraction in itself.

With a great deal of fanfare, the bridge-tunnel was opened to traffic April 15, 1964. The creation of a separate police department within the new Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel District was authorized by the Virginia General Assembly in the same year.

What began as a traffic enforcement/patron service department has grown into a department of 72 personnel, 57 of whom are sworn officers, including a chief of police, a captain, 4 lieutenants, 4 sergeants, 4 corporals, and 15 civilians. On any given day, there are at least two officers in marked patrol units patrolling the roadways. More officers are assigned as needs dictate.

The district has no jail or judicial facilities within its boundaries, and officers must sometimes transport an arrested person as far as 80 miles for incarceration. This also requires an officer to testify in two different court jurisdictions. Traffic offenders are tried based on their place of residence, not their direction of travel. A southbound motorist from New York, arrested for speeding, will be tried on the north side of the facility in Northampton County. A northbound motorist from South Carolina, arrested for the same charge, will be tried in the city of Virginia Beach.

As is the case throughout the country, the intoxicated driver is one of the most common problems faced by our personnel. We use two breathalyzer machines and eight licensed breathalyzer technicians, with at least two technicians on each shift, 24 hours per day.

High speed on the two-lane road-

way without shoulders is another potential problem which we attempt to reduce through strict enforcement of the speed limit and the use of handheld radar units to apprehend violators. However, although traffic enforcement takes up much of the police officer's time, he is faced with other problems, including murder, kidnapping, grand larceny, shoplifting, domestic problems, juvenile runaways, mentally disturbed individuals, bomb threats, and suicides.

Late one afternoon, a vehicle was stopped by an officer for a speeding violation. As he approached the vehicle, he observed a hysterical woman clutching her 3-year-old daughter. When questioned, she stated she was taking her daughter to meet Jesus and that she was going with her. Her intent was to jump from the bridge with the child in her arms.

Another incident involved a woman who parked her car on an

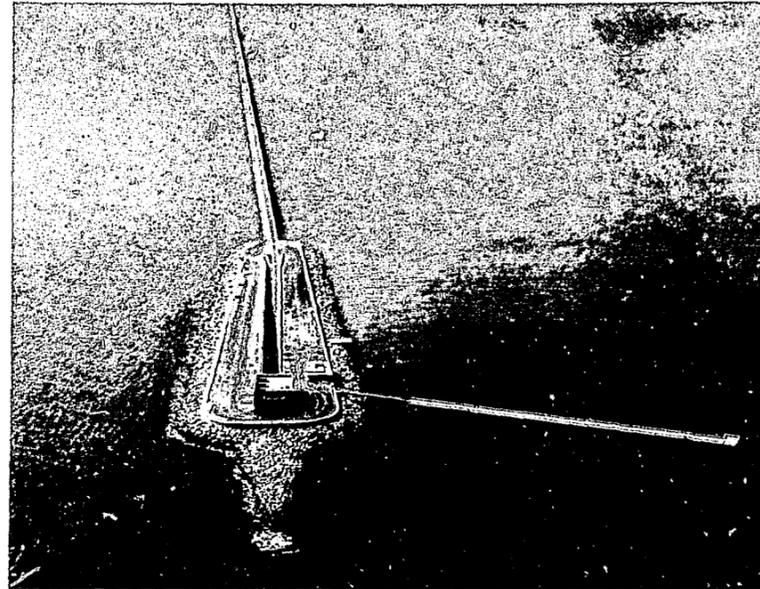


Traffic enforcement with radar

island opened to the public, wrote a suicide note, left it in the vehicle, walked to the end of the fishing pier, climbed over the railing, and jumped. Before officers arrived, the woman had recovered from her leap into the water, swam approximately 150 yards, climbed onto the rocks that surrounded the island, and was preparing to jump again. After officers removed her from the rocks, she stated that after she jumped into the water, she had changed her mind, but after climbing back onto the rocks, she decided that she really did want to die.

Bridge-tunnel officers are called upon several times a year to deal with persons suffering from phobias. When most people hear about phobias, they tend to think about people who suffer from claustrophobia or acrophobia. However, the phobics encountered on the bridge-tunnel are mostly those who for some reason become hysterical, freezing at the steering wheel, while crossing the facility. This condition does not always occur in the tunnels, but also takes place on the islands, trestles, bridges, and in the parking lots.

The several bomb threats received range from a caller giving specific information regarding the location and reason for the bombing to simply saying there is a bomb on the bridge. While a vast majority of the telephone bomb threats have been proven to be hoaxes, the real thing did occur in the late 1970's. At the southern end of the facility, where the beach is close to the bridge roadway, officers en-



No. 1 island, from the south, is the first manmade island where tourists stop to sight-see, fish, dine, or just refresh themselves. Photo: Fred J. Habit, Jr.

countered fire-bombs (Molotov cocktail type) being thrown onto roadways. Fortunately for all concerned, no one was injured, and with the help of undercover officers from the bridge-tunnel and the Virginia Beach Police Department, the bombings were quickly halted.

Over the years, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel District has attracted worldwide attention by being struck or narrowly missed by ships using the much traveled channels of the Chesapeake Bay. Since opening in 1964, it has been struck seven times, twice by the U.S. Navy and five times by commercial shipping, resulting in the bridge being closed to traffic five times, with a cost in excess of \$6,250,000 in repairs.

On a cold and windy night in October 1981, a railroad flat barge sank with a load of boxcars. The tide and wind conditions were such that the boxcars began to float toward the bridge piling. With the help of our officers, the U.S. Coast Guard actually guided floating boxcars between bridge piling for more than 6 hours without any damage to the piling or roadway.



Inservice classroom instructions

"The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel District Police serve as a vital link between the law enforcement agencies of the Eastern Shore and the greater Tidewater area. . . ."

Officials were not so fortunate on another occasion. In 1972, a commercial barge drifted into the roadway 3 miles from the Virginia Beach shoreline. An officer was on patrol late one night when suddenly all of the roadway lights went out. There in front of him was a large ship—right in the middle of the roadway. Without warning, a converted, powerless barge had struck the bridge span. The bridge-tunnel was closed to traffic for several days for repairs and safety checks.

The longest closure, 6 weeks, occurred after the U.S.S. Yancey, a Navy war vessel, struck the bridge-

tunnel and knocked out several spans of roadway during a period of high winds in January 1970. During that and other closings, the bridge-tunnel police force has joined with Federal and local governments in providing emergency services. Helicopters and U.S. Navy LCU landing crafts have ferried repair workers, medicine, ambulance patients, perishable produce, and truckdrivers over the Chesapeake Bay. On one occasion, a stretcher patient was carefully carried by foot over a damaged span from one ambulance to another. Luckily, no one has been injured in any of the waterborne colli-

sions. Other waterborne emergencies which do not threaten the bridge structure itself are the many hundreds of pleasure craft assisted annually by bridge-tunnel police officers. In addition to their regular communications systems, patrol units are equipped with CB radios and are constantly monitoring the fishermen in the area during the fishing season which lasts approximately 9 months. Bridge-tunnel patrol units are called to locate overdue boats and spot disabled or distressed boats and lost fishermen. Many times this will require a unit to remain on the scene with roof lights activated, acting as a beacon for rescue craft, either by air or by water.

Due to the wide variety of duties, it has become necessary to develop our own inservice training school. We presently conduct three to five 40-hour inservice schools each year. What began as an inservice school exclusively for bridge-tunnel district police officers has now branched out to become an inservice school for several Eastern Shore law enforcement agencies, in order that they may meet their inservice training requirements.

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel District Police serve as a vital link between the law enforcement agencies of the Eastern Shore and the greater Tidewater area, and we are proud of our association with these agencies.

FBI



Without warning, a converted powerless barge struck the bridge span, closing the bridge-tunnel to traffic for several days. Photo: Studio III, Norfolk, Va.

END