

Sgt. Sam Taylor is behind the wheel of his Cadillac touring car, parked beside the Speight farm siege site. Beside him (right-left) are Sgt. Olin R. Ruth, Lt. Mack B. Lilly, and Pvt. Eldon S. Duckworth; in the rear (right-left) are Pvt. Fred Currance and Lt. Charles A. Wood (who didn't participate in the marathon drive). Courtesy of the West Virginia State Police Archives (WVSPA).

# An Early Manhunt

By Merle T. Cole

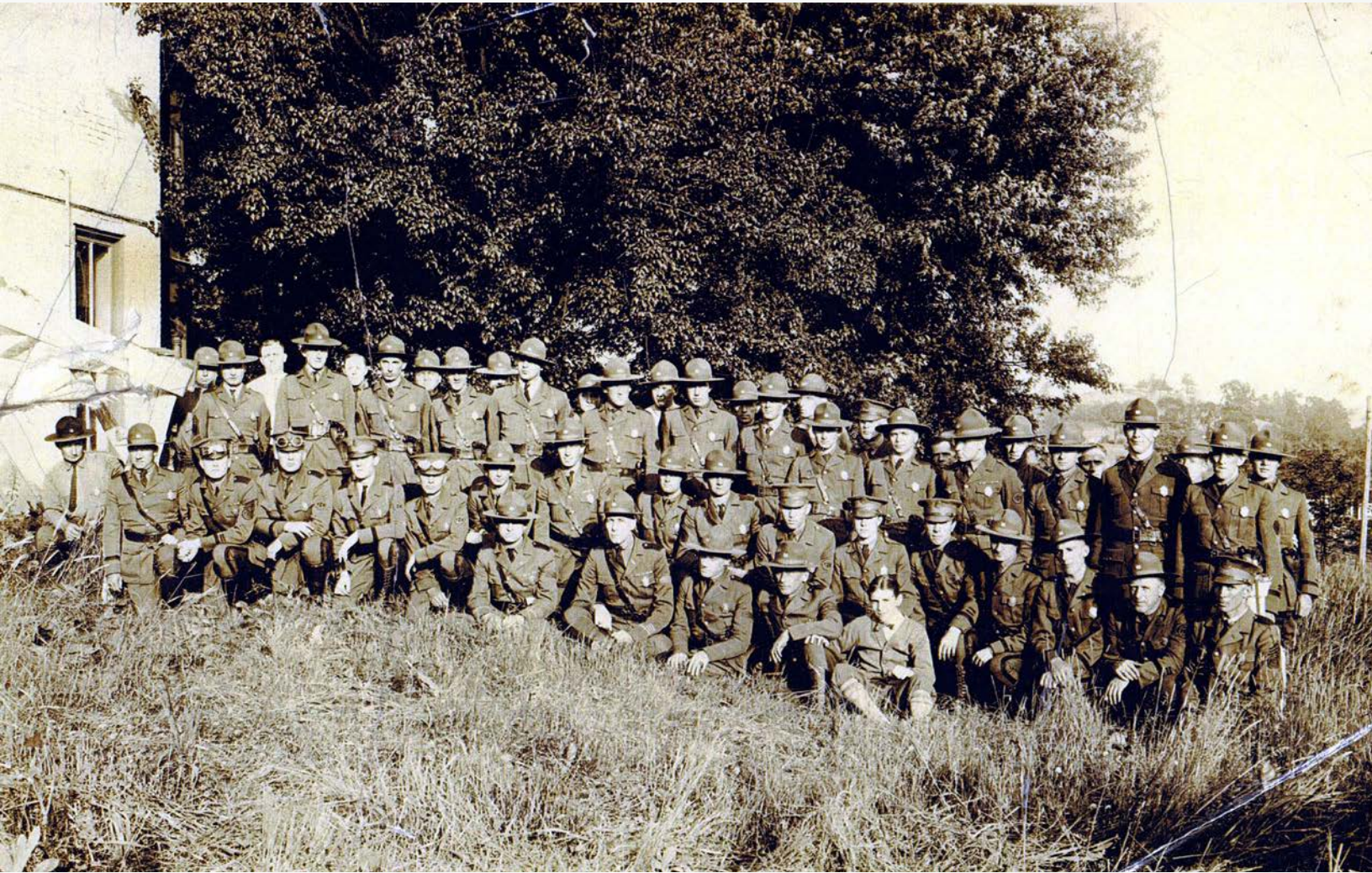
**T**he DPS's capability, determination, and band-of-brothers spirit were clearly shown in an early manhunt in Berkeley County. On the evening of June 20, 1924, farmer George Speight cold-bloodedly ambushed and murdered Pvt. Ulric C. Crawford—the young agency's seventh line-of-duty death. Troopers found Crawford's

corpse the following morning and reported the murder to Company A headquarters at Haywood Junction in Harrison County.

The commanding officer promptly organized a detachment to take the noon train from Clarksburg to Martinsburg. Given the urgency, Sgt. Sam Taylor (the first 1919 enlistee) drove

an advance party in his personal Cadillac touring car, along with five other troopers, including Lt. Mack B. Lilly, another prominent DPS leader. The little band made a record-breaking run and arrived at Martinsburg, "six hours ahead of the train carrying the rest of the posse," and set off after Speight.





The manhunt task force poses beside the farm building near Tomahawk after the siege ended. Courtesy of the WVSPA.

The reinforced posse, numbering nearly 50 men, trapped Speight in his stone barn near Tomahawk on June 21. A siege unfolded, and the firefight was so intense the troopers had to get more ammunition from Martinsburg. They also brought back a machine gun (which proved futile) and dynamite and then set the barn ablaze. When Speight finally called out

## Early Days Database

The West Virginia State Archives maintains an invaluable historical and genealogical research tool. Check out the online database of early Pay and Muster Rolls, 1919-1924 (AR2056). <http://www.wvculture.org/history/collections/ar/ar2056.html>.

that he'd surrender, troopers approached very cautiously. They found him suffering from about eight bullet wounds but still trying to aim Crawford's stolen revolver at them. They overpowered him and carried him into a

nearby field to render first aid, but he died "within a few minutes of being given fresh air and water." Pvt. Crawford was given a military funeral and buried in the Masonic Cemetery at Walkersville, Lewis County. 🍂