Cincinnati Police Target Ranges

The Greater Cincinnati Police Museum

"Preserving the History of Law Enforcement in the Greater Cincinnati Area"

Cincinnati Police Target Ranges

by Lieutenant Stephen R. Kramer (Retired)
Greater Cincinnati Police Museum Historian

We believe that there was never a restriction against Cincinnati law enforcement officers carrying firearms since local law enforcement was established in 1803. Every male citizen, other than the Mayor, was appointed a nightwatchman and served on a rotating basis. And, of course, it was understood that every man was trained in marksmanship and had a right to carry a firearm recognized by the United States Constitution. Over time, a few men were selected to represent the citizenry in enforcing the laws. These men were paid, but not paid much, and if they carried a firearm, it was generally of inferior quality.

This was never more glaring as a problem than when Patrolman Martin Kunkel chased four armed burglars in a running shootout and his pepperbox revolver failed to fire every time he pulled the trigger: resulting in his death in 1878. While it took six more years, in 1884 the City standardized sidearms, requiring each man to carry a Merwin & Hulbert .38 M&H revolver (at their expense). But their level of training was whatever the officer determined for himself to be sufficient.

By 1904, the only place for patrolmen to formally practice their shooting skills, if they desired to do so, was at the City Armory, presumably the one on Western Avenue near Lincoln Park. When bankers inquired as to where they might train their clerks, they were informed there were no target ranges in the Department. So the bankers funded all the necessary steel plates, ammunition, targets, etc. for a target range inside the Hammond Street (2nd District) Station. The bankers and clerks trained with their weapons and the excess targets and ammunition were left to the Police Department.

By 1906 another range was built on the top floor of City Hall in the west wing. During 1911, District 2 opened on Broadway with an 8-foot-wide and 25-yard-long target range in the basement.

During October 1933, the Police Division was given permission from the Cincinnati Park Board to build a target range in Mt. Airy Forest, but that never came to fruition.

The Police Division held its first annual shoot at Bald Knob on September 14, 1937. We assume they had recently installed the target range there. It was a makeshift target range where they shot through targets and into the side of the hill.

After World War II, reinstituting the Crime Laboratory (which closed for the war) and establishing a modern target range

became the Division's most pressing needs. During June 1945, Cincinnati City Manager W. R. Kellogg, Council Finance Committee Chairman Willis D. Gradison, and Safety Director Oris E. Hamilton visited the FBI's Target Range at Ft. Thomas with a view toward setting up a modern target range in Cincinnati. Charles E. Richter, of Richter Philips Jewelers, between 1945 and 1948, travelled more than once to California, Texas, and Arizona, during jewelry business trips, to observe and photograph target ranges, latest improvements, personnel, and functions to assist the Division in equipping the new range.

On February 1, 1946 the City of Cincinnati acquired title to a 32-acre tract of land near Lockland from the Wright Aeronautical Ex-Service Men's Club to be used as a police target range. An excellent 25-yard range was already erected on the property. It was, at the time, intended that when finances were made available, a modern series of outdoor ranges would be erected for combat training.

On March 8, 1946, H. L. Sloan, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Quantico target range, came to Cincinnati to consult with Captain Earl Reynolds, Police School Commander regarding developing the Police Target Range.

A Watchman was hired for after-hours security and Workhouse prisoners were transported to the Range during the day for various maintenance duties.

Beginning June 10, 1946 and continuing through to November 15th, all officers were given instruction on the use, care, and construction of the service revolver. Accuracy and avoidance of injury to innocent persons was stressed. Officers were required to demonstrate safe handling of their sidearm and ability to place ten-shot groups closely in a bullseye target from 25 yards and in a Colt T 6 silhouette target. They were also instructed

on the ballistics of issued ammunition. Additionally, sergeants were instructed in the property techniques for daily roll call inspections of revolvers and how to check for defects in a weekly inspection.

During 1947, members of the Division were instructed in the use and care of the shotgun and given advanced training in the use of the revolver.

During 1949, the property was graded for a driveway and parking lot. Plans were being made for the procurement of equipment as soon as funds would be made available.

Finally, during 1951, funds were approved. During March 1951, a contract we let to the Interstate Manufacturing Company, for $35,000, to transform the range into one of the most modern, up-to-date ranges in the country. Due to material shortages (Korean War), the project took three years. It included dueling targets, a running man target system, bobbing targets, and turning targets. For testing physical conditioning, there was also an obstacle course with an 8-foot wall, wood tunnel, and running over ground with automobile tires. Shooting from moving vehicles was also part of the curriculum. Training was also given in the use of submachine guns, tear gas guns, rifles, and handguns. During May 1954, Frank E. McAvoy of McAvoy Target Equipment traveled to oversee the final installations and declared that the range would be ready by the first of June 1954 and would be the finest range in the United States.

Soon thereafter, people began to build residences and businesses near the range and complaining about the noise.

District 5 on Ludlow was built in 1957 with a two-lane target range in the basement. District 3 on Warsaw opened at the end of 1907 without a target range, but a one-lane target range was installed in the basement during 1969. Then, during 1975, the

new District 4 on Reading Road opened with a target range.

All of the indoor ranges were closed soon thereafter due to lead contamination concerns.

During the City's budgetary crisis in 1976, the Target Range was incrementally shut down. Practice sessions were eliminated. The Annual Guy York Shoots were ended. The "Running Man" system was dismantled. And then the range was closed in 1977. Minimal qualification sessions were conducted at the Indian Hill Range.

After the numerous shooting deaths of Cincinnati Police Officers, during May 1979, City Council decided to fund a rebuild of the Target Range. It was completed by mid-1982.