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CIVILIANS PROTECTING CIVILIANS: THE FLORIDA MOTORIZED UNIT DURING WORLD WAR II

BY CHRIS DAY

In the first half of the twentieth century, two events dominated the historical landscape: World War I and World War II. The first conflict led to the creation of a calamity beyond comparison and scope. The rise of Nazi Germany has been a favorite topic of historians for decades following the end of hostilities in Europe, but Nazi Germany was not the only story of the period. The Allies stood in the face of a modernized German onslaught, but the Allies learned quickly and adapted to this form of warfare. Many countries learned new methods of destruction from one another. For example, the Japanese learned how to attack naval bases in shallow waters from the British, who did so to the Italian fleet anchored at Taranto. The lessons of war were not only found in the waters of Taranto. The American military was watching the events in Europe closely and started planning for the eventual conflict. At the same time, the American civilian population was also aware of the German Blitzkrieg and the success of the Panzer divisions. One such civilian was a Tampa resident by the name of Guy Hobson Allen.¹

Allen was a branch manager for the American Oil Company and a member of the American Legion, which was planning to write handbooks on civilian defense based on information from Britain. Allen was aware of the events transpiring in Europe and believed that he needed to do something to protect his home and country. It would be easy to judge Allen's motivation to start a defense program as an opportunity to further his career in the oil business or bolster his own position in the community at large, but perhaps his time had a different outlook on life. Allen was a World War

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¹ Guy H. Allen to Claude Pepper, June 20, 1940, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, "Florida Motorized Unit," Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1. R. A. Gray Building, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

Iveteran and a family man. As a former soldier, he could be simply characterized as a patriotic man furthering the ideals of his country, but it was probably the sense of duty to his fellow citizens that drove him to start the Florida Motorcycle Escort Unit. This was Allen's response to the German Panzer Blitzkrieg. He concluded that if the Nazis were able to strike quickly, the United States, if invaded, must be faster and better prepared.²

Allen was a motorcycle dispatch rider during World War I and was familiar with the vehicle's advantages.³ In a letter to Florida senator Claude D. Pepper, he wrote, "I feel that we are in sore need of a modern cavalry mounted on motorcycles."⁴ As early as 1940, Allen believed that the United States needed to defend itself against enemy attack from within and abroad. He feared the activities of Fifth Column groups that sought to further their political and military aims through sabotage.⁵ The goal of the motorcycle troops was to put down any Fifth Column uprising or any other disturbances made by "isms," as well as coastal defense. Allen was elaborate in his description of what the troops would be capable of doing. For example, for coastal defense he outlined how the troops would be able to quickly move to the coastline of Florida to defend against enemy landings. The unit, using fast automobiles and trucks, would have anti-aircraft guns in tow that could be used to shoot down enemy planes. He believed mobility was the key to a successful motorized cavalry.⁶

Allen reasoned that since Florida's western coastline was only six hours from Mexico, defense was needed against parachute troops from these areas. It is unclear exactly how Allen came to this conclusion, but the concern was there. If enemy personnel did indeed land on American soil, he planned for the unit to participate in guerrilla warfare in order to disrupt enemy advancement. They could also be used as an advance unit in an effort to scout American troop routes, as well as provide flank and rear guard protection for military personnel. Lastly, Allen envisioned a unit that would be used as Engineer and Dynamite Squads, which would mine roads used by the opposition and attack disabled tanks and armored cars quickly and effectively. The possibilities, as evidenced by its author, were limited only by the imagination of the coordinator. He listed ten ways in which the troop could be used in a military setting. Allen's outline appeared to be a wish list of things that could be done with a

² "5 Legion Posts Will Install New Officers," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 11, 1941, folder titled: Sub-Division Publicity (Scrapbook), Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1. *Biennial Report: State Defense Council of Florida, 1941-1942* (Tallahassee, Fla., March 25, 1943), 7. Guy Hobson Allen to Colonel Louis Johnson, assistant secretary of war, July 12, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

³ "Tampa Motorcycle Riders Form Unit for Armed Defense," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 26, 1940, folder titled: Sub-Division Publicity (Scrapbook), Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁴ Guy H. Allen to Claude Pepper, June 20, 1940, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁵ Glenn L. Ferguson, "Florida State Defense: Civilians and Civilian Defense in World War II" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1999).

⁶ Guy H. Allen to Claude Pepper, June 20, 1940, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

motorized cavalry and expressed the ambition he had for the project. Before any of his wishes could be realized, Allen first had to find the right type of person to fill this position of protection.⁷

The personnel of the motorized cavalry had to fit a certain profile. Allen wanted them to be recruited from “the ‘Cracker’ type young men of the South and the West for in those sections you find real Americans.”⁸ He did not want any men picked from foreign families even if they had been naturalized. His opinion was that the West and the South still produced tough men who would fight to the end for their country. As far as men from foreign families were concerned, Allen felt that the American government could not have any confidence in men “representing the melting pots of all nations.”⁹ Allen believed that the personnel outlined would form a motorized cavalry group that would renew the memory of J.E.B. Stuart, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and other historical cavalymen.¹⁰

According to Allen’s initial plan, when the troop was organized it would fall under the command of two different military branches, depending on the situation. First, he proposed that it could be organized under the National Guard so that, if needed, they could travel across state lines in times of emergency. If the situation proved more drastic, the unit could be commanded by the regular army, with the troop acting as part of the army reserves.¹¹ This particular question about acknowledgment was the focus of Allen’s work during 1940 and 1941. He tried to receive some sort of recognition from either the state or the federal government. Allen sent the letter outlining his plan to Senator Pepper because he wanted Pepper to see if he could find a way to make this outfit part of the American military. Senator Pepper at the time was a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and an interventionist. Allen wrote, “Please understand that the motive behind this move is purely patriotic and that again I would like to advise that if some form of official or semi-official recognition is made of these troops that I would like to turn the outfit over to an experienced Army officer who is trained in this type of service.”¹² Pepper replied, commending Allen on his work and stating that he supported Allen’s efforts. Pepper’s support may have only been superficial, but an article from the September 5, 1940, *Tampa Morning Tribune* noted that Pepper had given a plan to the Senate Committee on Military Affairs regarding home guard units.¹³

Senator Pepper was not the only person Allen contacted to try to get national recognition. Within his own company, American Oil, he corresponded with

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Guy H. Allen to Claude Pepper, August 24, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

¹³ Claude Pepper to Guy H. Allen, August 30, 1940, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.



Courtesy of the Florida State Archives

A large contingent of the Miami motorcycle unit turned out for this photograph, taken during the early years of World War II. Troop organizers believed that over 250 men and women could be called upon to participate in the motorcycle corps in each of Florida's larger cities.

Lieutenant Colonel J. B. Osborn, who was a branch manager in Atlanta, Georgia. Allen hoped that Osborn could contact some people he knew in Washington D.C., and pass on the information about his proposed motorized cavalry. Osborn was later contacted by the U.S. military and informed that these types of cavalry units had already begun forming at Fort Knox in Kentucky and Forts Benning and Oglethorpe in Georgia. It was stated that they had been watching the events that had transpired in Europe and were responding accordingly.¹⁴ This letter signaled the end of Allen's pursuit of affiliation with the U.S. military. He now turned his attention to the state of Florida.

Allen began his search for that recognition during the 1940 election year that witnessed Spessard Lindsey Holland's victory in Florida's gubernatorial race. Allen sought out Holland in an effort to gain some acknowledgment from the governor-elect. By that time, troops were organized in three cities, Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Orlando. Allen wanted the troops to get together and participate in the governor's inauguration day parade.¹⁵ This was just one way that Allen tried to get the attention of

¹⁴ Major General, Adjutant General E.S. Ada[?] to Lt. Col. J. B. Osborn Jr. of the American Oil Company, August 2, 1940, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

¹⁵ Guy H. Allen to William Salinas, November 23, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

the governor-elect. In December 1940, Holland accepted an invitation from Allen to come and inspect the motorcycles troops. Allen wrote to Williams Salinas, member of the St. Petersburg troop, "You realize that this inspection will aid us greatly in getting some kind of recognition of our outfit from the Governor who will have charge of all future Home Guard organizations."¹⁶ Holland inspected the troops from Tampa and St. Petersburg. The group from Orlando was unable to attend. Holland was pleased with what he saw and took a copy of Allen's file back to Tallahassee in order to discuss it with the State Defense Council.¹⁷ Allen later contacted Governor Holland to inform him that the Tampa troops had been organized through motorcycle clubs and that it would easy to use the same method throughout the state.¹⁸

Allen did not stop at Governor Holland in his quest to become part of Florida's defense. He contacted Florida's adjutant general, Vivien B. Collins, to find out if they could be a part of the state guard. Allen told Collins he felt "sure that we can promise a representative group of riders from these cities to join the State Guard."¹⁹ The State Guard did not take on the motorcycle troops as part of their organization. Allen's group did not officially become a part of a state organization until May 1941, just a few months before the United States was hurled into the war by Japanese bombers. By that time, President Franklin D. Roosevelt had already called for a state of emergency and proposed the Lend-Lease Act, placing America in a more active role in the war. These efforts had an impact on the chances of Allen's group getting recognized. The national government began planning for civil defense under the leadership of Fiorello H. LaGuardia, and Florida fell into line with the plan right away.²⁰

The State Defense Council was created in October 1940, when Governor Fred P. Cone called together a group of leaders representing the interests of the state to begin planning for civil defense.²¹ After Holland won the election, he set out to continue what Cone had started in late 1940. Holland approved of the men selected by Cone to head the council. By doing this, Holland was able to create continuity and nonpartisanship in the call for defense. In his message to the joint session of Congress in 1941, the governor called for volunteers and stated that they would be accepted for their merits. He believed that this would create an environment in which

¹⁶ Guy H. Allen to William Salinas, December 11, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

¹⁷ Guy H. Allen to U.S. Senator Claude Pepper, February 7, 1941, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

¹⁸ Guy H. Allen to Gov. Spessard Holland, February 7, 1941, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

¹⁹ Guy H. Allen to Adjutant General of Florida Vivien Collins in St. Augustine, February 12, 1941, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

²⁰ Office of Civilian Defense, Washington D.C., Administrative Order No. 2, "Policies under which the Office of Civilian Defense and the Offices in Its Designated Areas Will Function," from Fiorello H. LaGuardia, U.S. director of civilian defense, July 10, 1941, Governor Spessard Holland: Administrative Correspondence, Record Group 102, Series 406, Box 24: 1941–1944, folder titled: Gov. Holland Defense Council, State—1941, Box 24, FF 9.

²¹ *Biennial Report: State Defense Council of Florida, 1941 – 1942* (Tallahassee, Fla., March 25, 1943), 6.

all patriotic Americans could participate.²² Until the congressional session opened for business in April, the Defense Council was maintained by the Governor's Emergency Fund, which gave them about \$50,000. Holland believed that this amount could not sustain the organization and pleaded with the legislators to pass a bill that would create a Defense Council as part of the regular state activities until the national emergency was over. He further stated, "I beg to advise that this Act is sponsored by the American Legion and other patriotic societies and that its passage is strongly urged by our National Government and by the National Defense Agencies."²³ House Bill 30, calling for the creation of a State Defense Council, passed on April 15, 1941, by a unanimous vote.²⁴ This was the state office that Guy Allen had been anticipating.

Before Allen's chase for governmental legitimacy, he began organizing a motorcycle troop in Tampa in July and August 1940. The majority of the members came from Tampa's Gasparilla Motorcycle Club. Allen believed it would be easier to organize units from local clubs, because the members already knew each other and could be easily contacted en masse. He corresponded with L. W. Patrick, the president of the Florida Motorcycle Association (FMA), because he understood that Patrick was willing to assist in the formation of troops through various motorcycle clubs.²⁵ In the beginning, Allen looked to use this idea to branch out onto the national level. The Gasparilla Motorcycle Club was charter member 545 of the American Motorcycle Association (AMA).²⁶ E. C. Smith of the AMA liked the idea of forming motorcycle units. He stated, "It will certainly add much favorable publicity for your club as well as the sport in general, all because it is a worthwhile community effort."²⁷ This particular option for Allen was not pursued with enough vigor to spread out nationally.

Allen focused on Florida's motorcycle unit and its beginnings in the Gasparilla Motorcycle Club. He gave speeches attempting to rally the members to his cause. In an address given to the club on August 16, 1940, Allen expressed his fears that when the Nazis conquer Europe their next target would be the United States. He supported his assertion by stating that Nazis had been found in Argentina with rifles and ammunition. He truly believed that this proved that America would be a target and needed to defend itself.²⁸ At this point Allen may have appeared paranoid, but he

²² Ibid., 7.

²³ *Journal of the House of Representatives, State of Florida: Twenty-eighth Regular Session, April 8th to June 7th, 1941* (Tallahassee: Allied Printing, 1942), 7.

²⁴ Ibid., 91.

²⁵ Guy H. Allen to L. W. Patrick, September 26, 1940, folder titled: L. W. Patrick—Chairman Motorcycle Escort Units, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

²⁶ F. D. Weesner, secretary of Gasparilla Motorcycle Club, to Claude Pepper, August 24, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

²⁷ E. C. Smith of the American Motorcycle Association (AMA), 8 East Long Street, Columbus, Ohio, to Gasparilla Motorcycle Club, 622 Zack Street, September 7, 1940, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

²⁸ Speech given by Guy H. Allen to the Gasparilla Motorcycle Club, dated August 16, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

was not alone. Many Americans believed that if Britain fell, the United States would be next. The general population was not privy to Hitler's real intention of invading the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Allen was able to rally the Gasparilla members to his cause and was able to form a troop of twenty-seven members.²⁹ The majority of the men were married and about thirty years old. These were Allen's "Cracker type" men, and the group practiced infantry skills on Wednesday nights at Plant Park and on Sunday practiced fast and cross-country riding near the outskirts of Tampa.³⁰

Troop formations did not stop in Tampa; St. Petersburg, and Orlando also began to organize units. The St. Petersburg troop was led by Carl Plummer, and it was formed in the hope of becoming a part of the home guard unit there.³¹ At the time of Governor Holland's inspection, it had twenty members to its credit. In Orlando, Sidney Crenshaw, who worked for the Orlando Linen and Towel Supply Co., organized a unit.³² They were not ready for Holland's inspection, but at the time they had eighteen members.³³ Allen hoped to expand troop mobilization to other cities in the state, but the creation of two other troops in the state without government assistance was quite an accomplishment. Not all of these tasks were simple because the draft and the need for traditional home guard units affected troop formation in early 1941.

Age restrictions created problems for Allen as early as October 1940. In a letter to Senator Pepper, he mentioned that since 90 percent of the membership was within the age restrictions of selective service, activities had been suspended until a solution could be determined.³⁴ This sentiment was relayed to Governor Holland by Allen, who told the chief executive that the group would remain organized until "something definite could be arranged."³⁵ This issue continued to plague the troop's existence. None of the evidence showed that something definite was ever arranged, but as will be seen later, many units had trouble maintaining their numbers because members were being picked for military service.

In the formation of a defense unit, some form of hierarchy must exist or the group would cease to be organized. Allen did not approach the situation without a plan of action. Since he had a military background, he relied on his previous experiences to incorporate a hierarchical command. While he was seeking national recognition,

²⁹ Guy H. Allen to L. W. Patrick, September 26, 1940.

³⁰ "Motorcycle Corps Formed for Defense," August 26, 1940, folder titled: Sub-Division Publicity (Scrapbook), Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

³¹ William Salinas (St. Petersburg) to Guy H. Allen, November 20, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series, 1316, Carton 1.

³² Sidney Crenshaw to Guy H. Allen, October 15, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series, 1316, Carton 1.

³³ Clipping, *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 16, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series, 1316, Carton 1.

³⁴ Guy H. Allen to Oscar Johnson, secretary to Senator Claude Denison Pepper, October 31, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series, 1316, Carton 1.

³⁵ Guy H. Allen to Gov. Spessard Holland, February 7, 1941, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series, 1316, Carton 1.



University of South Florida Special Collections Department

Soldiers are shown training on the grounds of the Mirasol Plaza Hotel (now called Hudson Manor) on Tampa's Davis Islands in this World War II era photograph. The tremendous need for soldiers, sailors and Marines cut into the ranks of civil defense groups like the Florida Motorcycle Escort Unit.

Allen created a chain of command based on a military model. During a proposed wartime scenario, he decided cities such as Miami Beach, Tallahassee, Pensacola, and Jacksonville would have 250 men in their ranks.³⁶ These individual groups would be officered by a captain, two first lieutenants, and four second lieutenants, and each troop would be under military regulation. These troops would then be divided into three squadrons. The chain of command based on military protocol was concurrent with his vision of a viable unit of the armed forces. This was also evident in the equipment that he proposed was needed for the troop.³⁷

During the initial planning stages, Allen wanted the troops to be furnished with a variety of equipment including sidearms, grenades, gas masks, bowie knives, and ammunition bandoliers. It must be mentioned that the men in the troop provided their own motorcycles. The necessary items did not stop with the gear carried by troop members. Allen went on to explain how the motorcycles could be modified for combat. It was proposed that the motorcycles have shields for the motor and

³⁶ The peacetime force would consist of 50 members.

³⁷ Guy H. Allen to Claude Pepper, June 20, 1940.

tires, a front shield that extended above their heads with bulletproof glass, and also, if the motorcycle had a sidecar, it would be used to carry machine guns. These were to be heavily armored and armed motorcycle riders, but Allen did not stop there. In order to make them more self-sufficient in the field, he wanted armored trucks for a mechanic squad, field kitchen, ammunition supply, and radio station.³⁸ This was quite an endeavor, but how realistic was this wish list, and what, in the end, did the motorcycle troop become?

After the motorcycle troop became part of the State Defense Council in May 1941, the plan went through a few changes and even expanded from a motorcycle troop to a unit that had trucks, emergency cars, and later a taxicab unit. The next installment of the proposal was a streamlined version of the one given to Senator Pepper. Allen reported to the senator that the State Defense Council had accepted his plan with a few modifications.³⁹ The first state plan once again created a military hierarchy beginning with the overall command of a captain. This rank was followed by a first lieutenant, three second lieutenants, and a first sergeant. The motorcycle, emergency car, and auxiliary truck platoons were directly headed by one of the second lieutenants with a line sergeant communicating directly with the men in the platoon.⁴⁰ This version of command did not vary greatly from the previous design.

The possible duties of this group were different than the earlier proposal given to Senator Pepper. Instead of a swift attack force, the motorcycle troop became an escort group. The purpose of the group now was to guard truck and car convoys within the state while focusing on speed in cases of emergency. Other possible duties were to include scouting, advanced patrols, guarding bridges during marches, and convoy coordination. The men in the platoon were supposed to have an excellent knowledge of the roads in their local area, which made them the best candidates to find the fastest route for military or other convoys in the case of emergency.⁴¹ Instead of being a frontline assault force, the units had been formed as a support group to make military operations move faster and more safely throughout the state.

Since the duties of the troop had changed, did the membership also adjust? In the original plan, Allen wanted “Cracker”-type southern men as well as those from the West. He wanted rough-and-tumble men who could weather the ills of war and who were between the ages of eighteen and thirty. The qualifications were made more succinct in the new version. It called for white males ages eighteen to forty-five who could pass a mental and physical examination, be an American in heart and mind, take an oath of allegiance, and never have belonged to any un-American organization. These qualifications allowed for only a select group of individuals to

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Guy H. Allen to Claude Pepper, July 27, 1941, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series, 1316, Carton 1.

⁴⁰ Memorandum to All County Chairmen of the Division of Transportation and Communication, State Defense Council of Florida from Guy H. Allen, Bulletin no. 1, May 25, 1941, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1, p. 3.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

join the Motorcycle Escort Unit. It was clear that the initial intention was not to allow African American or women to participate, but war can change everything.⁴² After a group of eighteen select white men were formed, a unit could be created. In order to do this, the unit had to be sponsored by three men of excellent reputation and standing in the community. The sponsor's role was to coordinate public events with the chairman of the unit. Allen stated that public relations were necessary for "building up prestige for the unit."⁴³ The sponsors were supposed to give legitimacy to the corps and use this to bring more members to the organization. An example of the type of people considered applicable sponsors were found in Tampa. They were Port Tampa mayor A. T. Rollins, former president of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce Frank M. Traynor, and former president of the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce John Diaz.⁴⁴ These particular sponsorships were going to men who had strong ties in the community and could organize the necessary support for the troop. They could only be categorized as recruiters because they had no authority over how the unit was managed.⁴⁵ This portion of the organization did not exist very long after the State Defense Council became involved.

Allen's project became part of the Defense Council's Division of Transportation and Communication. Under that title, the actual group came under the heading of Subdivision of Motor Escort and Transportation, with Cody Fowler, a lawyer from Tampa, as the chairman. After receiving Allen's proposal in May 1941, Fowler made a few modifications and sent out a finalized version of the organizational plan on July 2, 1941. Fowler's revisions structured the group under the guidelines of the state-recognized plan. The motorcycle troops were considered a civilian operation and not military. Therefore, military titles would no longer be used in reference to those in charge, and it was also unnecessary for the unit to participate in formation drills. Its objective was to stay organized and be ready to be called a moment's notice. The leadership of the escort unit now consisted of group leaders and chiefs with directors and assistant directors over them.⁴⁶ This seemed to take the military luster out of the motorcycle corps. No longer would they be seen as the frontline group, but in the end Allen accomplished his goal of setting up a defense force that, if necessary, could save lives.

The plan sent out by Fowler did not greatly change the duties of the Motor Escort Unit or the qualifications for membership. It did eliminate the need for sponsors. The County Defense Council chairmen became the new recruiters, and

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁴ Clipping from *Tampa Daily Times*, August 26, 1940, folder titled: 1941—Organization Plans #2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁴⁵ Memorandum to All County Chairmen of the Division of Transportation and Communication, State Defense Council of Florida from Guy H. Allen, Bulletin no. 1, May 25, 1941, 2.

⁴⁶ Memorandum to All County Chairmen of the Division of Transportation and Communication, State Defense Council of Florida from Cody Fowler, July 2, 1941, folder titled: 1940—Organizational Plans #1, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.



Courtesy of the Florida State Archives

Members of the Winter Haven motorcycle group are pictured here in this 1942 photograph. The Polk County city was chosen by the state as the rallying point for the January 11, 1942 test mobilization. Units from eleven Florida counties participated in the civil defense exercise.

they used vehicle registrations to find potential volunteers for the unit. This idea did pose problems for organizers in later years because the numbers on paper did not always match usable participants. Along with the changes in Allen's original plan came the organization of car units. When the unit was still referred to as Motor Patrol and Transportation, a memorandum was sent out detailing the organization of automobile units. Allen had never ignored the necessity of cars, but the unit structure created by this helped solidify the use of cars.⁴⁷ The subdivision maintained this organization through 1942, but made some minor alterations, which included changing the Emergency Car Group into an Automobile Unit. The Auxiliary Truck Group moved out of the subdivision, and the Taxicab Unit took its place. The Subdivision of Motor Escort and Transportation became a group that would assist in evacuations, first aid, supplies, and convoy assistance. Despite all of this organization and the numbers on paper, the State Defense Council did not know exactly what the group was capable of doing. They got their first and only real test in the mobilization and movement toward Winter Haven.

In December 1941, orders went out to the county chairmen of the Division of Transportation and Communication calling for the mobilization of their units

⁴⁷ Memorandum to chairman, Division of Transportation and Communications, from Cody Fowler, chairman, Division of Transportation and Communications, folder titled: Advisory Board M.P.T.—Bulletins—Sub-Division, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

and their movement to Winter Haven on Sunday, January 11, 1942. Eleven counties and 740 vehicles—including 68 motorcycles—participated in the event.⁴⁸ After the units mobilized and made their way to Winter Haven, they traveled into the city and paraded through the town. It was not clear exactly why Winter Haven was chosen as the place for this to occur. It did not seem to have any value as a military target, and it was not a place vital to the security of Florida. The only thing of significance there was that Governor Holland's brother and personal representative to the State Defense Council, Frank L. Holland, lived in that town. It was quite possible that the organizers of the event felt it was relevant to bring the units to him for review. Regardless of the motives for picking Winter Haven, the organizers needed the test mobilization to determine if there were any problems or defects that needed to be handled.⁴⁹

In order to make sure that everything went well, Cody Fowler sent out field orders to the county chairmen so that they knew exactly what to do, where to go, and how to get there. Part of these orders dealt with the rules of the march. The order of the march, the distance between vehicles, and the speed of motorcade were all established before the units were called to participate. For example, the summary of rules sent to James L. Ferman, chairman of the Hillsborough County Division of Transportation and Communication, clearly outlined vehicle placement within the column. It started with the county division chairman's car in the lead followed by the subdivision chairman and his staff. Then the Motorcycle Units followed them with the Auxiliary Truck and Car Units in tow. This large group had two motorcycle scouts ahead of them in order to monitor road conditions and alert them to any problems they might encounter.⁵⁰

Not only was the order of the march strenuously demarcated, but so were the speed and the spacing of the cars. The units were supposed to be fast and safe at the same time because wrecked vehicles were not useful. The maximum speed set for the exercise was forty miles per hour. Each vehicle was to maintain a distance twice the amount of its speed in feet. For example, if a car were traveling at twenty miles per hour, it would have to maintain a distance of forty feet between it and the car in front of it. That spacing was just between the cars in the group. Each team had to remain ninety feet away from another team, groups had to be 120 feet apart, and units had to be 150 feet apart. This was how the columns should maintain their formation, and it required discipline and practice that had not occurred on this scale.⁵¹

⁴⁸ The counties that participated were Hillsborough, Polk, Pinellas, Pasco, Sarasota, Manatee, DeSoto, Hardee, Osceola, Indian River, and Highlands.

⁴⁹ "Winter Haven Sees Massing of 672 Autos," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 12, 1942, folder titled: Sub-Division Publicity (Scrapbook). James T. Swann, Assisting Cody Fowler, to General A. H. Blanding, January 21, 1942. Letter contained critique of mobilization from Guy H. Allen, folder titled: Test Mobilization—Winter Haven (Reports), Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1. Florida State Association of Retail Grocers, letter, July 30, 1941, folder titled: Gov. Holland Defense Council, State—1941, Box 24, FF 9, Governor Spessard Holland: Administrative Correspondence, Record Group 102, Series 406, Box 24: 1941–1944.

⁵⁰ Cody Fowler to James L. Ferman, December 28, 1941, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

The test mobilization took place in three different columns traveling to Winter Haven. Each column had set criteria and a route to travel so that one group could connect with another as they traveled to their destination. For example, Column #1 originated in Pinellas County and traveled State Road 17 and State Road 2. The group was due to arrive in Plant City in order to meet up with the Plant City and Tampa units. All of these movements were placed on a schedule. Then they proceeded east on State Road 17 through Lakeland and stopped in Auburndale to meet up with the unit from Pasco County. The entire group then moved along State Roads 17 and 2 until they arrived at their final destination outside Winter Haven. There were detailed instructions on how to meet, where each group should be in reference to the column, and how long to wait at each point. Columns 2 and 3 received similar directions, and all of them were supposed to end up outside Winter Haven, where they would be assembled for a parade through the city.⁵²

While these units were mobilizing, ten airplanes with ten observers and four passengers circled above, watching the movement of the convoy below. The observers were supposed to report on whether the units arrived at their assigned points on time, conditions of the formations, mishaps en route, safety precautions when columns halted, number of vehicles in column, and any other information they felt might be important. Planes flew out of the Tampa airport and traveled toward Winter Haven and observed on their way. Then they landed in Winter Haven and gave a report to Al R. Hathaway, chairman of aviation participation. The pilots then took off again and went toward Auburndale and observed the column once again. The observers then landed a second time to give another report before taking off and returning to Tampa.⁵³

After the test mobilization, Allen had all of the reports compiled and sent out a memo indicating issues of concern. The problems that occurred during the test were not of great significance. It must be remembered that this was a civilian group whose members may or may not have a military background, so they may not have been used to responding to certain commands. Most of the issues that arose were lack of timing, not responding to the forward march call, confusion, and spacing. These mistakes were probably caused by lack of practice in a large-scale scenario, but there were two incidents that caused some concerns about safety. The first was that some of the participants arrived under the influence of alcohol, which helps to explain the problems of spacing, and the second was that when a column halted on the side of the road, the participants got out of their cars and congregated in the middle of the road, becoming a traffic hazard. Even with these minor issues, the Winter Haven test

⁵² General Instructions, folder titled: Test Mobilization—Winter Haven (Reports), Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1. "Civilian Auto Defense Units to have Review," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 6, 1942.

⁵³ General Instructions, folder titled: Test Mobilization—Winter Haven (Reports), Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

mobilization was considered a success.⁵⁴ Cody Fowler remarked about the event, “this mobilization proves that this division is not a ‘paper’ organization.”⁵⁵

The test mobilization was a high point for the Subdivision of Motor Escort and Transportation, but as the war became more demanding of the resources of the United States, the makeup of the units began to change. In order for a country to be successful in a time of war, it needed the participation of all its citizens as a team. Nobody could be left on the sideline because some people in society did not regard them as worthy. The units in late 1942 and into 1943 began to lose valuable members to military service. This was one of the problems that it faced in its maintenance of their membership strength. The Florida state government realized the necessity of bringing everyone together for a common cause. Women were brought into the defense council during its early stages of planning in order to deal with the needs of health and home. African Americans were later asked to help organize their communities for civil defense in 1941, which some had already started doing. The motorcycle escort units were not an all-white male organization. Even though the initial call for members was directed specifically to white men, African American men also became part of the organization along with women.

In the days before the American entrance into the war, the question of how to bring in the African American community was one of the items discussed by Governor Holland and Frank Holland. The latter stated that African Americans would be “extremely important in labor and other auxiliary groups, may present a terrific problem in morale if we are actually subjected to a severe attack, and as a class are the most fertile field for subversive propaganda by enemies of our nation.”⁵⁶ He believed that blacks would be an important source of labor, but at the same time did not trust that they would support their country. It was a mistake to think that blacks did not view the United States as their country. This was evident in the correspondence between Allen and L. W. Patrick from Miami. In a letter dated December 29, 1941, Patrick wrote: “I have been approached by the Colored district asking to help set up a motorcycle unit of colored riders only.”⁵⁷ Why would African Americans volunteer to start a unit if they did not feel that their country was in danger? Allen replied to the letter by stating: “The colored question is being considered now. There will be a definite place for them in this work. Just keep in contact with them until you receive

⁵⁴ Memorandum to Chairmen of the Division of Transportation and Communication from: Guy Allen, Divisional Bulletin XII-15, February 13, 1942, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1. ⁵⁵ *Florida Civilian Defense News: Official Bulletin of the State Defense Council of Florida*, no. 19, Tallahassee, Fla., February 1, 1942, folder titled: Florida Civilian Defense News, “Florida Motorized Unit” Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 2.

⁵⁶ Memorandum to Spessard L. Holland from Frank L. Holland, June 20, 1941, folder titled: Gov. Holland Defense Council, State-1941, Box 24, FF 9, Record Group 102, Series 406, Box 24: 1941-1944. 2.

⁵⁷ L. W. Patrick to Guy H. Allen, December 29, 1941, folder titled: Advisory Board M.P.T.—Bulletins—Sub-Division, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.



Courtesy of the Florida State Archives

This photograph, likely taken in Miami in 1942, shows nine members of the African American motorcycle escort unit, including one woman (seen sharing the second motorcycle from the right).

definite ruling from the council.”⁵⁸ In early 1942, Patrick did begin to organize the black riders in Miami along the lines of the state defense plans. He wrote:

Mr. Allen back to this colored subject again, it seems that when there is a job to be done the colored people are most always the first to complete the job that has been assigned to them, now don't get the idea that I love them but you must give credit to them for being patriotic. These people wanted the motorcycle boys in uniforms and raise money to get same. No white people have even thought to [do] such a thing here as yet.⁵⁹

This comment was in direct contrast with the ideas of Frank Holland. The African American population in Florida was not a foreign group that happened to live in America. They were Americans living in Florida.

On October 28, 1941, the State Defense Council approved a plan that started the organization of blacks in Florida.⁶⁰ The resolution stated that all programs needed

⁵⁸ Guy H. Allen to L.W. Patrick, December 31, 1941.

⁵⁹ L.W. Patrick to Guy H. Allen, February 2, 1942.

⁶⁰ *Florida Civilian Defense News*, no. 13, November 1, 1941, folder titled: Gov. Holland, Defense Council, State—1941, Box 24 FF10, Record Group 102, Series 406, Box 24: 1941–1944.

to be extended to blacks. This was justified because blacks composed one-third of the total population of Florida. The information bulletin stated that neglecting blacks meant overlooking “numerous . . . patriotic citizens,” and it would be a “costly loss of willing assistance.”⁶¹ This call for participation did not direct the activities, but it created a situation in which blacks could work with local and county organizations. This resolution created the Negro Defense Committee headed by Florida A & M College president John Robert Edward Lee.⁶² Following these events, counties began organizing local African American taxicab units. For example, three units were formed in Monroe County, four in Marion County, and one in Leon County. In April 1942, it was reported that Leon County had completely organized the African American Escort Cars and Drivers. Several different counties saw the creation of black taxicab units and automobile units, and in Dade County two motorcycle escort units were created.⁶³ This proved that blacks were willing to take an active part in the defense of the country as well as the state. Lastly, in 1943 President Lee reported that the organization of blacks in the state had gone well. He stated, “Negroes in Florida have gone ‘all out’ for defense.”⁶⁴

During World War II, women played a significant role in the defense of the nation and the buildup of wartime industries. This was as true in Florida as elsewhere in the United States. From the beginning of the organization of the motorcycle troops by Allen in 1940, women participated in the unit. Seven women from the Gasparilla Motorcycle Club’s ladies auxiliary signed applications to join the Tampa troop.⁶⁵ In 1942, the only female member of the Tampa troop under the Subdivision of Motor Escort and Transportation was Evelyn Harger. Her husband, John Harger, was the director of the unit.⁶⁶ This did not mean that she rode around on the back of his motorcycle and was considered a member. She had her own motorcycle and was her own member. All over the state, women were becoming part of the defense force. This occurred more in the car units though, especially when circumstances forced organizers to use women instead of men.

This occurred in Dixie County, where 866 automobiles were registered for defense, and 81 of them were driven by women. When Allen found out about this, he wanted to know if county chairman W. R. Pratt was taking his job seriously.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Memorandum to Council Chairmen and Secretaries, from George L. Burr Jr., executive director, Informational Bulletin no. 4, November 10, 1941.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Albert E. Peirce Jr., chairman of Monroe County, June 4, 1942. F. O. Hicksen, chairman of Marion County Division of Transportation and Communication, June 25, 1942. “Leon County, Florida, Defense Council Minutes, March 18–April 29, 1942.” Located in Strozier Library, Florida State University.

⁶⁴ *Biennial Report: State Defense Council of Florida, 1941–1942* (Tallahassee, Fla., March 25, 1943), 77.

⁶⁵ Guy H. Allen to Cody Fowler, May 17, 1941, folder titled: 1941–1942 Tampa, FL— M.P. & T. Hillsborough 2, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁶⁶ “Tampa Motorcycle Escort Unit Does Speedy Efficient Job,” *Tampa Daily Times*, July 27, 1942, folder titled: Sub-Division Publicity (Scrapbook).

⁶⁷ Guy H. Allen to Cody Fowler, February 16, 1942, folder titled: Dixie County—Cross City, FL., Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

Pratt's response was that most of the automobiles in Dixie County were being used to transport workers to the local mills, whose business was 75 percent defense contracts. Since the county was thinly populated and most of men were working defense jobs, he decided that the best and only way to accomplish the task at hand was to enlist women.⁶⁸ Allen replied that Pratt had done an excellent job considering the adversity that he faced. Allen wrote, "Results are the things that will count most from here on out." He also wanted Pratt to send him a picture of the women's unit and expressed his appreciation for their spirit.⁶⁹ Surprisingly, Allen was not any more understanding about the women's car unit formed in Quincy under the direction of Gadsden county chairman T. P. Harvard. The unit was led by Mary Celia Davidson, and it was comprised of thirty-eight cars.⁷⁰ After he received the report, he told the chairmen of the automobile unit, motorcycle unit, and taxicab unit that Harvard needed some guidance in his organization.⁷¹ Even though some disapproved of certain roles for women, the fact remained that they were an essential part of the defense of Florida because without everyone participating, the numbers needed could not have been achieved.

Even with all of this unity, the Subdivision faced problems that could not be controlled. As they later found out, war industries need everyday resources. The two main resource problems that affected them were tire and gasoline shortages. As early as 1942, the group began to feel the pinch when it came to tires. Allen hoped that the federal government would give them some relief because they were part of the defense force.⁷² He also asked for some sort of modification of the law that would allow his units to get tires, especially for the motorcycle riders. He felt that if they were not allowed to get tires, they would be forced to disband.⁷³ This problem, coupled with gasoline shortages, made it difficult for the unit to function and practice like they did in Winter Haven. In an article from the *Tampa Morning Tribune* Allen urged people not to get discouraged because of the gas and tire shortages. He told people not to sign up for conflicting duty even though they were not able to practice at this time. He said that even though they feel as if they were doing nothing, they were helping the war effort just by staying organized and allowing themselves to be called at a moment's notice.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ W. R. Pratt, chairman, Dixie County Division of Transportation and Communications, to Guy H. Allen, February 19, 1942.

⁶⁹ Guy H. Allen to W. R. Pratt, February 22, 1942.

⁷⁰ SDC-10 Form from T.P. Harvard, chairman of Gadsden County, to Guy H. Allen, June 9, 1942, from the city of Quincy, folder titled: SDC-10, 1-17-42, M. E. & T., Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁷¹ Guy H. Allen to Don McKay, chairman, Automobile Unit, L. W. Patrick, chairman, Motorcycle Escort, and Erskine W. Landis, Chairman, Taxicab Unit, July 1, 1942—Subject Gadsden County M.E. & T.

⁷² Guy H. Allen to L. W. Patrick, district chairman, Subdivision of Motor Escort and Transportation of Transportation and Communication, February 10, 1942, folder titled: Advisory Board M.P.T.—Bulletins—Sub Division, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁷³ Guy H. Allen to Cody Fowler, February 12, 1942, folder titled: State Council—Gen. Cody Fowler, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁷⁴ "Auto Defense Units Urged Not to Become Impatient," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 28, 1942, folder titled: Sub-Division Publicity (Scrapbook), 16.



Tampa Bay History Center Collection, 2000.008.001

Though slightly idealized, the scene depicted in this postcard would have been a common sight around Tampa during World War II. Resources necessary to keep planes like these in the air, such as gasoline and rubber, limited the quantity of these items available for civil defense efforts.

Apathy was another problem that Allen had to face. In the beginning, people were willing to join due to outrage over the tragedy at Pearl Harbor, but as time passed the sentiment faded. In a letter from Harry F. Stearns, Hillsborough county chairman of the Motor Escort Unit, he stated that he only had about ten members who were willing to make the personal sacrifices necessary to maintain their position in the unit. He complained that some were taking defense halfheartedly and only attended meetings when it was convenient. Stearns wrote that one man said, “Uncle Sam never did anything for him, why should he do anything for Uncle Sam.”⁷⁵ Stearns asked him to leave. The same sort of difficulties occurred in Pensacola as well. The chairman there stated that it was “difficult to make the population here, away from actual submarine sinkings and similar disasters, realize there is a war going on.”⁷⁶ This, along with the fact that most of the people in the town were part of the Navy, made it difficult to recruit in Pensacola. Apathy and loss of members to the draft made maintenance of the unit an arduous task.

⁷⁵ Memo from Harry F. Stearns, chairman of Motorcycle Escort Unit, Hillsborough County, n.d., folder titled: 1943—Various Activities, Record Group 191, Series 1316, Carton 1.

⁷⁶ Brown Rainwater, chairman, Transportation and Communications, Escambia County Defense Council, to Guy H. Allen, April 29, 1942, folder titled: Escambia County—Pensacola.

By 1943 and 1944, the need for the Motor Escort Unit began to diminish. The tide of the war had turned in favor of the Allies, and fear of a German or Japanese invasion had lessened. It is difficult to determine exactly when the group formally dissolved, but the correspondence and memos for the group lessened dramatically in 1943 and disappeared in 1944. Guy Allen created a civil defense force in his free time, and it was propelled from a local organization into a viable state defense unit. Allen was not seeking to promote his company or himself to any large degree. He did receive recognition for his work by being named chairman of the Subdivision of Motor Escort and Transportation, but he did not start it for titles. Allen was a soldier who remembered the horrors of World War I and was keenly aware of the terrible things taking place in Europe in 1939 and 1940, and how those events had affected the civilian population more than the events of the first war. He was a man of duty and believed that as a citizen of the United States, it was in his power to protect it any way he could. World War II made many people rise up and join the team for victory.