

# LAW & ORDER ON THE RAILROAD

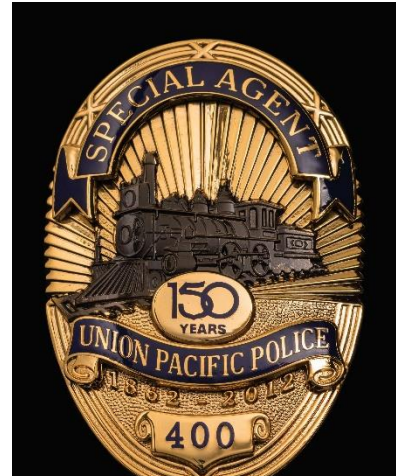
## **Policing the Railroad Today:**

Modern-day railroad special agents are much more than the hired guns from a hundred years ago. Experience and highly specialized training make today's railroad police some of the most highly trained law-enforcement officers in the country. Most major railroads, including Union Pacific, still employ their own private police forces. In the 21st century, railroad special agents spend most of their time combatting trespassing, burglary, vandalism, and theft. Although some trespassers intend to commit a crime, most are pedestrians taking shortcuts along the tracks or across the rail yard, often unaware of the potential risks involved.

## ***History of Policing in America***

American policing developed as an enterprise designed to protect the interests of those in power and punish or control the rest. In early America, police forces advanced differently in northern and southern states. Early police in northern cities operated as enforcers for competing political machines; graft and corruption were often the norm. Commonly, when a new administration came to power, the entire police department was replaced. In addition, 'Big Business' often hired local police as an armed unit to break labor strikes, usually with deadly force. In fact, in 1897, when an association of police officers petitioned to join the American Federation of Labor (AFL), they were rejected because, the AFL said, the police were "controlled by forces inimical to the labor movement."

In southern states, policing originated to guarantee white supremacy. The first policemen were the slave patrols. Formed to control the movements of Black people, these patrols utilized intimidation and ruthless violence. Following the Civil War, the patrols developed into formal police departments. And, since formerly enslaved people were now free to move about as they wished, Southern police forces regarded monitoring and limiting that movement as one of their primary duties.



*Commemorative Special Agent Union Pacific Police department badge made for UP's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012, Union Pacific Collection, PHYS\_5490.*



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Temporary Form 4385 3422 163 U.S. G. S. 6-20-75,000-11

**STRIKE GUARD** **Jacob B. Beutler**

Name in full \_\_\_\_\_

Born (date) **Aug. 17, 1875** at **Missouri**

Employed at present in the **CHIEF SPECIAL AGENT** Department

At or on **Laramie, Wyo.** as **Special Guard**

Occupation since first entering company's service.

Dates of employment		Where Employed	Occupation	Department	Rates of Pay	
From	To				Amount	Per
7/14/22	8-18-22	Laramie	Guard	Spec. Agent	6.00	

The above is a true statement of the above named-employee's personal record so far as I am able to determine.

**July 14, 1922, W. J. McClement, Spec. Agent, Wyo.**

(Date) (Signature) (Title) (Div. or Dept. over)

Formal, professional police forces—like those existing today—started to appear in the 1930s. Before that, especially in the west, policing was largely an ad hoc, vigilante endeavor. Even officials such as town sheriffs were locally elected or appointed; most were not law enforcement officers by trade or training. In several cases, they were railroad workers, which

mattered during labor disputes and strikes.

## Railroad Police

As states enacted laws formally recognizing railroad police, more railroads began to form their own special agent departments. Pennsylvania became the first state to pass such legislation with the Railroad Police Act of 1865. Other states soon followed, their statutes permitting railroad officers to carry weapons, make arrests, and enforce laws anywhere the railroad owned property. Such railroad acts authorized the governor of the state to appoint railroad police officers and give them statewide authority. Though these officers were certified by the state, they were employed by the railroad companies.



A uniformed special agent patrolling a rail yard, circa 1970s, Union Pacific Collection, PHYS\_9783.

## What makes a Railroad Special Agent?

Since their first appearance in Pennsylvania in 1865, today railroad police work in every state and undergo the same training as any other local, state, or federal law enforcement officer. Some agencies, such as Amtrak police, also attend the Federal Law Enforcement Training Academy. Although they are railroad employees, the officers are authorized to conduct official investigations and make arrests for crimes committed against their employer.



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While hiring standards vary among railroads, most of their police officers must be certified by the state in which they work, meet a physical fitness standard, and possess a college degree or have completed a required number of college hours. Once employed by the railroad, the officers usually undergo several weeks of training in addition to that required by a police academy or their previous law enforcement experience.

Today, railroad police officers, who may be in uniform or plain clothes, routinely patrol—on foot or in a motor vehicle—rail yards, depots, and railroad property. They also conduct complex investigations involving cargo and equipment theft, vandalism, arson, train/vehicle collisions, and even local assaults and murders that may spill over onto railroad property. Such variety requires that officers be flexible and familiar with the most recent law enforcement techniques.



*Law enforcement officers Andrea Young and Dennis with police dog, Union Pacific Collection.*



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