

# Toledo Police Museum

*this is our story . . .*



**Detective Captain Ralph VanVorce**

Appointed: April 10, 1916

Retired: July 16, 1941



**Detective Lieutenant  
Garnet Stevenson**

(VanVorce's partner on next slide)

Appointed: June 16, 1918

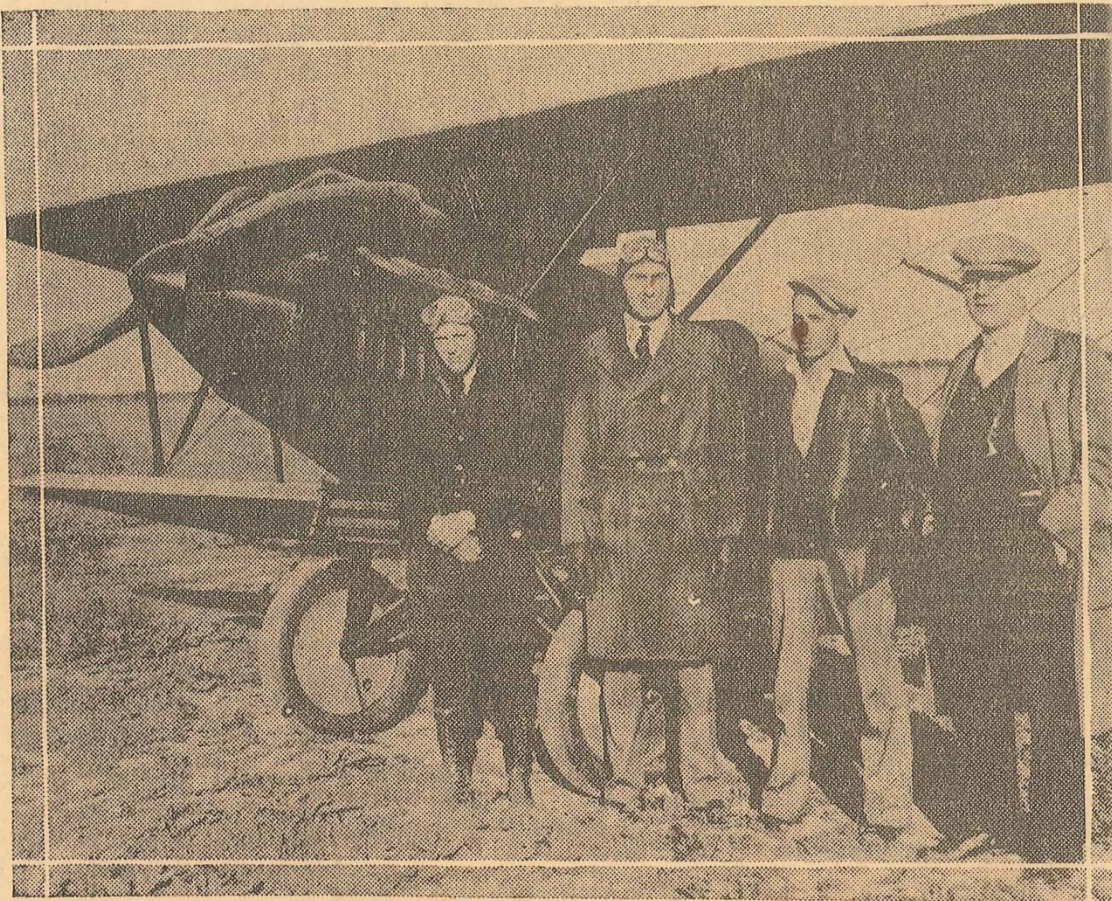
Retired: March 1, 1950

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The Toledo Daily Times, May 30, 1930

## Brings Prisoner Back By Airplane



For the first time in the history of the Toledo police department a prisoner was transported by airplane Thursday.

Detective Ralph VanVorce, of the auto squad, brought R. K. Lance, 20, of Tippecanoe City, Ohio, in his plane to Toledo. Lance was wanted here on an auto theft charge.

VanVorce flew his plane to Tippecanoe City, leaving the Municipal airport, Stickney avenue, at 1:15 p. m. He arrived at 2:45. Pilot William Kenney, who has been teaching VanVorce to fly, was at the controls when the plane brought Lance to Toledo at 6 p. m.

VanVorce and Lance were taken to the Safety building in a police speed car, accompanied by VanVorce's partner, Detective G. J. Stevenson.

The above picture was taken shortly after the flying detective landed at the Stickney avenue airport. Pilot Kenney is at the left. Next to him is Detective VanVorce with his prisoner. Detective Stevenson is at the extreme right.

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## Flying Detective Praises Planes for Police Work

Van Vorce Says They Will Be  
Used by All Big Cities  
at Early Date

Municipally owned airplanes for police duty are just around the corner with prosperity, according to Ralph Van Vorce, Toledo's flying detective.

"I believe nearly every large city in the country will get an airplane for municipal business as soon as the depression is over," Detective Van Vorce said.

"They don't cost as much as the average person believes, either."

He hunched his big shoulders expressively and gave an example.

"I've got four planes on my salary."

### Speed Offsets Cost.

Toledo policemen haven't been paid their May nor June salaries. They also took a 10 per cent cut recently.

Van hastened to explain that two of the planes he has purchased in recent months were wrecked ships sold only for the parts in them.

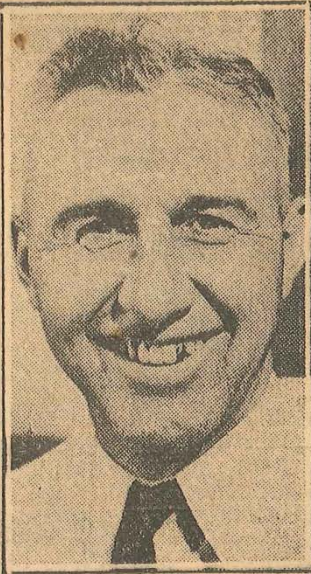
"You get around so quickly and easily in airplanes that they more than pay for themselves," he said.

"Police would use them to bring back prisoners from other cities and to get clues in other towns. If criminals were headed toward Toledo in an auto, an airplane pilot could watch the roads and pick up the car much more easily than half a dozen scout cars. Signals could be arranged for ground crews to catch the car."

### Plane Landed Prisoner.

"There is no chance of prisoners escaping from an airplane. If it is an open cockpit plane, the prisoner would be in the front seat in full view of the pilot and any move on his part could be followed by the pilot with a little side slip and short dive that would make the prisoner sit down fast. In any case it would be death for the prisoner to attempt to turn on the pilot because he could not land a plane unless he was experienced.

"A few years ago a man was picked up in Akron in a car stolen from Toledo. I flew to Akron, picked up the man and returned him to Toledo within eight hours. We



Ralph Van Vorce.

learned he was a burglar and that his partner had several thousand dollars worth of narcotics stolen from drug stores.

"We caught the partner at his home in the South End just as he was starting for Chicago. If it had not been for the fast transportation by plane we would have missed him and lost a valuable prisoner."

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The News Bee, June 30, 1933

**VanVorce was very forward thinking. He was a huge proponent of using airplanes as crime fighting tool.**

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"There is no chance of prisoners escaping from an airplane, if it is an open cockpit plane . . . any move on his part could be followed by the pilot with a little side slip and short dive that would make the prisoner sit down fast . . ."

But at the time of this article, Toledo police officers had not been paid for the months of May and June and had taken a 10% pay cut. Airplanes were not a priority.

May 10, 1936

### Third Plane Called Best



Detective Captain Ralph Van Vorce with his newest airplane. He purchased the Bird Challenger early this year. It is the third plane he has owned.

## Toledo Police Captain Buys Bird Challenger

### Van Vorce Purchases Plane Recommended by Wiley Post; Praises Ship

Should the Toledo police force require an airplane to accomplish a mission after the next two weeks, Detective Captain Ralph Van Vorce, 3033 Fernwood avenue, intends to be prepared.

Though having owned two other airplanes, Captain Van Vorce thinks he is now in possession of the finest and most capable ship he ever has had. The Bird Challenger was purchased in Newport, R. I.

During the last two weeks at Transcontinental airport the new ship has been undergoing a complete overhaul and a recovering of the fuselage and wings. The fuselage has been strengthened, a new cowling will be installed and a new 6-cylinder motor is ready for installation, he said. The oleo landing struts and a hydraulic tail wheel are the

next step in overhaul program before the ship will be declared ready for flight.

When questioned about his new plane, Captain Van Vorce said a Bird Challenger was the passenger ship recommended by the late Wiley Post. Questioners were informed Mr. Post had an agency in Oklahoma where these ships were sold at the time of his tragic death with the late Will Rogers.

Captain Van Vorce stated his flying career started about 10 years ago when he was the pupil of Pop Wells and his flying partner, Joseph Leatherman, who formerly used to barnstorm in this section. He also received further instruction from Art McDaniel, the man who sent Tommy Metcalf, instructor at Transcontinental airport for his first solo flight.

During his periodic flying career Captain Van Vorce has only taken the time to acquire a private pilot's license. He estimated his total flying time at slightly more than 200 hours.

The distinction of having flown the first prisoner to the Toledo jail in the history of the Toledo police department was attained by Captain Van Vorce in 1928 or 1929 when he transported a prisoner from Tippicanoe City, O., to the old police station on Superior street.

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**May 10, 1936**

## VanVorce purchased a "Bird Challenger"

VanVorce's new aircraft was the recommendation of Mr. Wiley Post, a pilot who was killed in a plane crash with the actor Will Rogers in 1935, a year before this article was published.

VanVorce received his flight training from a former barnstormer and Tommy Metcalf, Toledo's first commissioner of aviation, and president/owner of the Metcalf Flying Service at the airport from 1930-1950. He is the namesake for Toledo Metcalf Field on Lemoyne Road in Millbury. The Toledo Executive Airport was also named Metcalf Field at one time.

Though VanVorce never did see the reality of TPD using an airplane for law enforcement purposes beyond his prisoner transport, his heart was always in the right place and he went to extreme measures to be prepared.

*Times 5/17-37*  
**Flying Sleuth  
Forced Down**

With his motor missing, Captain of Detectives Ralph Van Vorce made a safe, forced landing in a field a mile north of Erie, Mich., yesterday afternoon after being blown over Lake Erie during a heavy rain and wind storm.

Captain Van Vorce, who has been flying 10 years and hold a private license, had left Ann Arbor, Mich., at 1 p. m. to return to Toledo when he was buffeted about by a severe storm a few miles east of Dundee, Mich.

The pilot reported a strong wind and heavy rain. Blinded by the storm and his instruments virtually valueless, Captain Van Vorce said he was blown over Lake Erie out of the storm area before he was able to fly back on his course again.

Inland his ship again was buffeted by a storm. Up-rushing currents took him to an altitude of 4,000 feet where the pilot said it hailed and was intensely cold. His motor began to miss and after a few minutes he reached a lower altitude where he could see land and sighted the field where he landed about 2:15 p. m. After the storm subsided and his motor dried he resumed his trip, landing at Transcontinental airport about 4:30 p. m.

Captain Van Vorce left Toledo for Ann Arbor yesterday morning to visit his brother, Merle, who recently returned from Florida. He was flying a Byrd Challenger bi-plane with a open cockpit.

Several planes at the Transcontinental airport narrowly escaped damage when a severe windstorm struck the airport suddenly. Ships were buffeted on land, but taken into the hangar.

One plane, a Taylor Cub owned by James Stroule, was damaged when it was blown against the wall side the hangar before the hangar were closed. Other ships were moved by the wind, but were damaged.

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**May 17, 1937**

VanVorce was forced to make an emergency landing in a field in Erie, Michigan after a strong storm blew him out over Lake Erie.

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Detective Captain Ralph VanVorce was a pioneer airplane pilot in the 1920s. He owned his own plane and made police history when he transported a prisoner to Toledo in an airplane . . . the first known prisoner air transfer made in the United States.

After retiring, he founded the former Lee Lumber & Coal Company on Secor Road and operated the firm until he retired in 1972. He passed away at the age of 85.