

Pop Sutton-The Soldier's Friend

By Gary Knehans

He was county sheriff when the only public hanging took place in Pulaski County. But, rather than establishing a legacy of being a stern executor of the law, an officer more eager to break bones than to give someone a break, Dotson "Pop" Sutton lived a life of boundless generosity and goodheartedness that was directed especially toward young soldiers and their families during the early days of Fort Leonard Wood. He became known as the "soldier's friend."

This distinction was all the more remarkable because often it was Sutton's duty as a law officer to curtail the activities of the more exuberant among the men in uniform. The veteran lawman did not enjoy having to take the rowdier soldiers into custody. He understood that loneliness and the sobering prospect of being shipped overseas to fight in World War II prompted the young men to act the way they did. So, many times "Pop" would just counsel a soldier in a fatherly way and make sure the man reached the barracks safely after his brush with the law.

Sutton had many opportunities to befriend soldiers, as he was on the police force at Fort Leonard Wood during its period of construction and activation. When the army had its own men trained for military police duties, "Pop" became a deputy sheriff of Pulaski County.

"Some of the soldiers made very pitiful remarks to me when they would tell me good bye, knowing that they would not see me again," he said in 1948. "One night, while on my beat on the west side of the bridge, a soldier came to me and said, 'I was looking for you. I wanted to tell you good bye. I will be shipped out in the morning, but my wife and little boy will be here for thirty days. Take good care of them.'"

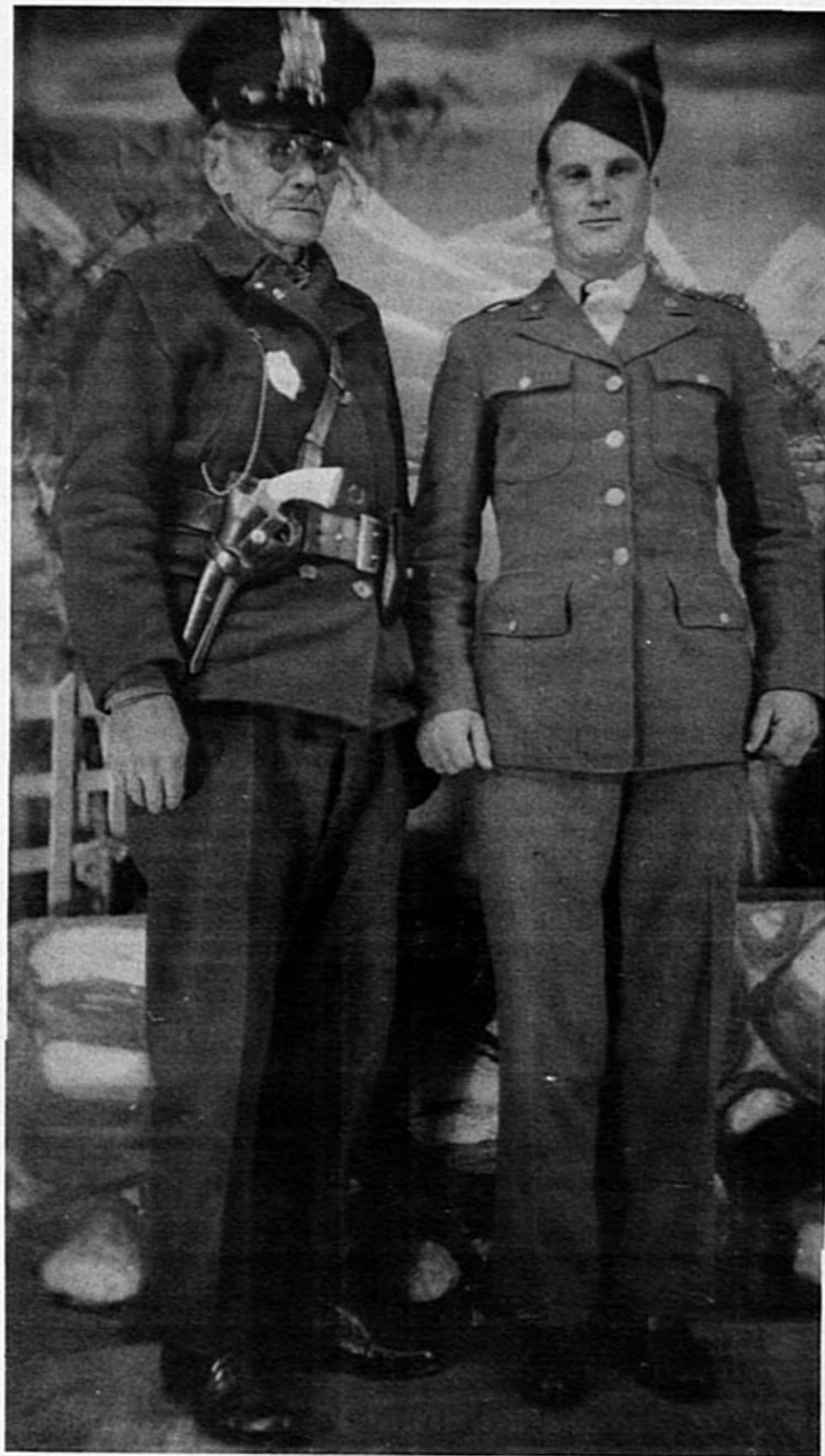
"He nervously said, 'May God bless you,' and walked away. I never saw him again.

"I had lots of soldiers tell me good bye and say, 'I want you to pray for me.' I met some soldiers in Waynesville one night; and they said to me, 'Pop, we want to tell you good bye. We will never see you again.' I said, 'Why?' They said, 'We are going to be shipped out tomorrow morning.' I said, 'Well, when the war is over, you may come back here. And they said, 'No. If we live to get through, we will all go home, but we wanted to talk with you before we started back to our barracks tonight. We know we are going across, and we may die, but we wanted to tell you that if we do, we will have a warm feeling toward you when we go down for the way you have always treated us when we were in Waynesville.

"I met a soldier at the west end of the bridge in Waynesville one morning, and he said, 'Can I talk to you without making you mad?' I said, 'Yes, sir, I may not approve of what you say, but I will not get mad.' He said, 'I got drunk last night and spent all my money. Will you give me money to get a sandwich and a cup of coffee, or go with me and get it. I have had no breakfast.' I said, 'I will go with you, and I want you to tell me why you told the truth.' He said, 'I always tell the truth.' I went in the restaurant and ordered his breakfast. He said, 'No, just a sandwich and coffee. I don't want this to cost you much.'"

At one time, "Pop" had a collection of more than 100 photographs taken of himself in the company of Fort Leonard Wood soldiers. The photo that accompanies this article was one of them.

His law enforcement career began in 1900, when he was elected constable of Roubidoux township. He then served four years as Pulaski County Sheriff, riding his favorite horse, "Midnight," all over the county in the line of duty.



Pop Sutton posing with Sergeant Lawrence L. Sutton of Kentucky. Photo courtesy of Benny Doolin.

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much," he says, "but averaged 28 points a game."

Bales believes Holiday would have averaged thirtysome points per game if the three-point field goal had existed then, or if Holiday had shot the ball more often. The Tiger cager once scored 54 points in the first three quarters of a game against Dixon before being pulled out to

sit on the bench.

The Tiger coach in 1958-59 was Kenny Foster. His players included Derrell Holiday, Larry George, Jerry Garrett, David Wells, Bill Morgan, Jim Bales, Frank Graves, Ogden DeWitt, Eugene Hammack, Howard Solki, and Dan Kipp.

By the way, the

superintendents who established the Frisco League Tournament could not have foreseen the beginning-of-the-season status the event has now attained. Before the Missouri State High School Association effected a rule change some twenty years ago, high school basketball teams were allowed to begin official practice in early

October and to play their first games in early November. With the rule change, official practice usually is allowed to begin around the first of November and the first games are allowed to be scheduled about three weeks later. For some Frisco League teams, their first game in the league tournament is their first game of the season.