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Articles of Interest From American Police Beat

Are Cameras Reducing Accidents?

By Lance Burris for American Police Beat

Twenty-three states presently employ red light cameras, to the dismay of many motorists who have received traffic tickets in the mail.

This program, according to the states who participate, is aimed at reducing safety problems at urban and rural intersections.

An added advantage, they say, is that the cameras produce monetary gain for the cities and towns.

Of the states who have bought the cameras, 23 are facing class-action law suits filed that questions the benefits of the program.

The suits allege the process is a violation of their rights and that the effort has not stopped traffic accidents. Attorneys tell the courts that their clients' 5th, 6th and 14th Amendment rights have been violated.

The opponents claim the camera actually creates more hazardous conditions because drivers slam on their brakes trying to keep from getting a ticket and in some cases rear-end the vehicle in front of them.

In the city of Lafayette, Louisiana, a suit is demanding that the city dismantle the cameras and return money to those who have been cited and fined.

Red light cameras, they claim, violate constitutional rights by having only a picture to prove guilt, the inability to confront one's accuser and the unfairness of the vehicle's owner getting the ticket, whether they were driving or not.

In addition, they say the cameras take away rights they would have if they were ticketed by a police officer.

Proponents want the cameras to stay, claiming that a

ticket is issued because the driver did something wrong. Those in favor also claim that the camera frees up an officer to work in neighborhoods plagued by high crime and drugs.

A U.S. Department of Transportation study of 132 red light camera sites in seven different jurisdictions, before and after installing the red light cameras, shows a significant decrease in right-angle crashes (from 40 to 14), but an increase in rear-end collisions (7 to 38). The most dangerous type of accident, the T-Bone, also declined once the cameras were up.

According to a report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 22 percent of all traffic accidents in the U.S. are

caused by drivers running red lights.

Every year these accidents kill 800 people and cause \$7 million in property damage, medical bills, lost productivity and insurance hikes. The report states that red light violations have increased by 10 percent since the 1980s. Because of this, more cities are installing the red light cameras.

Are these cameras a violation of a driver's rights? Does a driver have certain unalienable rights under the constitution? Is it an invasion of

privacy? Do the benefits out-weigh any criticism or outcry against it?

These are questions that will have to be answered in a court of law.

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A man was having trouble getting his neighbor to keep his chickens fenced in. The neighbor kept talking about chickens being great creatures, and as such they had the right to go where they wanted.

The man was having no luck keeping the chickens out of his flower beds, and he had tried everything.

Two weeks later, on a visit a friend noticed his flower beds were doing great. The flowers were beginning to bloom.

So the friend asked him how he managed to keep the birds away. "How did you make your neighbor keep his hens in his own yard?"

"One night I hid half a dozen eggs under a bush by my flower bed, and the next day I let my neighbor see me gather them. I wasn't bothered after that."

Two mothers were talking about their sons. The first said, "My son is such a saint. He works hard, doesn't smoke, and he hasn't so much as looked at a woman in over two years."

The other woman said, "Well, my son is a saint himself. Not only hasn't he not looked at a woman in over three years, but he hasn't touched a drop of liquor in all that time."

"My word," the first mother said. "You must be so proud."

"I am," the second mother replied. "And when he's paroled next month, I'm going to throw him a big party."

The History of Taps

There are two different tales of the origin

By Janett L. Grady

Have you ever wondered where "Taps" came from? Me neither. But on a recent stay with my sister and her family in Lowell, Massachusetts, I had the unfortunate experience of attending the funeral of a young police officer.

During the playing of "Taps," I found myself wondering where it came from. Later, I looked it up and found out that "Taps" goes back to the Civil War.

Two stories exist as to how it came about. The "authorized" one is that a Union Army general named **Daniel Butterfield** reworked another bugle call, "Scott Tattoo," to create "Taps," with his bugler, a man named **Oliver Wilcox Norton**.

A Union Army colonel named **James Moss** ordered the playing of "Taps" over the grave of one of his soldiers, thereby starting the tradition of "Taps" being played at military funerals.

But another, more popular story gives credit to a Confederate soldier. It goes like this: In 1862, A Union Army captain named **Robert Ellicombe** was pinned down with his men near a place called Harrison's Landing in Virginia.

After an exchange of gunfire in the dead of night, Captain Ellicombe heard the cries of a wounded soldier coming from the darkness.

The captain had no way of knowing whether the soldier was Union or Confederate, but he decided to risk his own life to try and save the man.

Crawling on his stomach through gunfire, Captain Ellicombe found the man and began pulling him over to the Union side. When the captain finally reached the relative safety of his own lines, he discovered that he had been dragging a Confederate soldier who was now dead.

The captain fired up a lantern for a closer look. In the dim, flickering light he saw the soldier's face and went numb with shock. He was looking at his own son.

The boy had been studying music in the South when the war broke out, and without telling his father, he enlisted in the Confederate Army.

The following morning, well behind the lines, Ellicombe asked permission to give his son a military funeral. The captain had asked if he could have a group of Army band members play a funeral dirge for his son. Since the boy was an enemy soldier, the request was denied. But out of respect for the heroic captain, they said he could have one musician. Captain Ellicombe chose a bugler, asking him to play a series of notes found on a piece of paper in the dead boy's uniform.

The bugler said he'd try. According to this version of events, the mournful melody, which we now know as "Taps," was born.

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