



by **Norm Poirier**

**HEADLINES.** No matter who you are, you would instantly have befriended State Trooper Philip C. Melley. At 43, he was a tall, barrel-chested man with greying hair and a constant smile. He spoke with a trace of the coal-region brogue and carried himself with a gentleness and humility that contradicted the cynicism and bitterness men usually acquire after 20 years as enforcers of the law.

There was never politics in his speech — he spoke to reporters honestly and accurately, gentleman to gentleman, never withholding or trying to impress and careful not to displease.

"I miss the coal regions," he told us as we spent an evening together last week. "Up there a lad will tell you the truth. He'll tell you what he has to say and when he has finished, he has finished. You know he won't say any more. But what the lad has said is the truth."



**TROOPER MELLEY**

He came to Reading nearly a year ago after a lifetime of making friends in Schuylkill County. He never married but he was never selfish. He gave blood transfusions to more than 90 people in his county. And each Christmas he bought gifts for needy families who lived in the areas he patrolled.

He told us about the three gangsters who robbed the office of the Pottsville Coal Co. in 1948 and how he and several other troopers had the place surrounded when two of the thieves went in.

He stood in the street outside and just as the two started out he spotted the third walking down the street towards him, his gun drawn. To distract the third he motioned him forward and yelled, "Come here, I want to talk to you."

**The hoodlum did advance, confused, and gave Melley the chance to drop to the street, blasting the front door with his shotgun. He emptied the shotgun. Then he waited.**

"I thought sure I'd get it," he laughed. "But I was lucky."

The gunfire from the troopers wounded all three thieves.

This week, Melley wasn't so lucky. A month away from eligibility for retirement he walked up to one of the kind of boys he had done so much for during his years as a trooper:

He saw two troopers handcuffed to trees. He saw the boy holding a shotgun. He could have shot. But Melley never, never could have pointed a rifle at a boy and squeezed the trigger.

He probably would rather have died than do that.