

Joseph "Joe" Dussia, son of Louis (1888-1974) and Bridget (Colby) (1890-1963) Dussia, was born 7 June 1916, West Brownsville, Washington County, Pennsylvania. Joe's father, born in Derest, Hungary, immigrated to America through England in 1904. Louis married Bridget Colby 15 June 1908, Washington County. Bridget's parents were also Hungarian immigrants and her father, like Louis, was a coal miner. Louis applied and received US citizenship 18 December 1911. He spelled his surname on the citizenship application, "Ducia."

The Dussia's quickly grew their family. Louis Jr. was born 1909, Stephen in 1911, Mary in 1913 and Joseph in 1916. Louis registered for the World War I Draft 8 June 1917 in Gratiot County, Michigan. He was employed by Charles Van Duzen to farm in Bethany Township. Louis recorded he supported a wife and 4 children. The 1920 US Federal Census enumerated the Dussia family back in Washington County, Pennsylvania and listed Louis employed as a coal miner.

On 25 February 1920 tragedy struck the family when 11 year old Louis Jr. succumbed to bronchi-pneumonia. Louis Sr. began drinking heavily and further heartbreak came. Note misspelling of Dussia surname in the newspaper write up.

The Daily Notes (Canonsburg, Pennsylvania) Wednesday 12 May 1920

MAN WHO KILLED COAL POLICEMAN PLEADS GUILTY

LOUIS DUCCIA, CENTERVILLE, SENTENCED TO SERVE FROM FIVE TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON

Washington, May 12 - Louis Dussia today pleaded guilty to shooting and killing James Davis, a coal and iron policeman, at Centerville March 14 last. The court sentenced Dussia to serve five to twenty years in the penitentiary.

Dussia declared he had no recollection whatever of the shooting. It was said by officers he had been drinking before the crime was committed. He had grieved considerably over the death of a child last winter, and took to drinking. His wife protested and finally complained to Davis.

When Davis came to the Dussia home to remonstrate with him, he was shot dead. Dussia is aged 32 years and has a wife and three children. Davis and Dussia had known each other all their lives and were warm friends.

James V. Davis' (1879-1920) Pennsylvania death certificate stated his cause of death at 1:30 a.m. as, "shock and internal hemorrhage following gunshot wound in abdomen - murder." Louis entered prison 26 May 1920. He was refused pardon by the state board of pardons on 22 May 1924. The 1930 US Federal census enumerated Louis again living with wife and family in Washington County and employed as a coal miner. Another son, John Wesley, was born in 1920.

At some point during the early 1930's teenage Joe moved to Michigan and began attending Okemos High School. It is not known who he lived with or why he was either sent or came but

he was the only one in his immediate family to leave Pennsylvania. He was enumerated living with his parents in the US Federal 1930 Washington County, Pennsylvania census. Joe's name, as a center, was listed as an honorable mention on the Ingham County All-County League Football Team in the Lansing State Journal Tuesday 27 November 1934. He graduated in 1935 from Okemos High and went on to attend Michigan State College (now University) for 2 years in pre-med with hopes of becoming a doctor.

Family tragedy again struck and Joe afterwards came home to Denbo, Washington County.

The Evening Standard (Uniontown, Pennsylvania) Friday 28 February 1936

DENBO GIRL IS SUICIDE AUTHORITIES ANNOUNCE

Mary Dussia, who collapsed suddenly yesterday while at work in the Denbo company store and died before arriving at Brownsville General hospital, took her own life, Washington county officials announced last night after an autopsy had been performed on the girl's body.

Officials said Miss Dussia had taken a quantity of "Black Leaf," a poisonous powder.

Miss Dussia was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Dussa, of Denbo who with three brothers, Stephen and Wesley, at home and Joseph, of East Lansing, Mich., survive. Funeral services will be held Sunday afternoon.

Joe attended and graduated in 1938 from Douglas Business School (now Douglas Education Center), Monessen, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. He enlisted April 1, 1938 in the Pennsylvania State Police.

The Pittsburgh Press (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) Tuesday 4 July 1938

MOTOR POLICE HONOR RANKING GRADUATE

Harrisburg, July 5 - James L. Burkholder, Juniata, who attained the highest scholastic standing among 238 graduates for the Pennsylvania Motor Police Training School at Myerstown, will be honored at graduation exercises here tomorrow.

Burkholder will receive a wrist watch awarded by Commissioner Percy W. Foote. Second and third place awards will be presented to George W. Pinkerton, York and **Joseph Dussia**, Denbo, Washington County.

Joe married Esther Colkitt in 1941, West Virginia. Esther was born 24 April 1916, Jefferson County, Pennsylvania.

Joe rose through the ranks with the State Police. By 1959 he was a Sergeant.

The Morning Herald (Uniontown, Pennsylvania) Thursday 19 February 1959

DISTRICT STATE TROOPER IS CALLED EXPERT ON SAFES

So you thought Alias Jimmy Valentine was the best safe cracker of them all? Forget Jimmy. A guy named Joe wears the crown, and easy, too, since Joe is a State Police officer.

Sgt. Joe Dussia, commander of a State Police sub-station in DuBois, hails from the little mining town of Denbo, near Brownsville.

Fortunately for the police profession in particular, and society in general, Joe Dussia left Denbo to become one of the top officers in the famed Pennsylvania State Police. He is an expert on safes and locks, how they're made and how to open them.

He was many things before entering the State Police service in 1938. A coal miner, locksmith, a pre-med student to name a few. In fact, he once had his heart set on becoming a doctor. So much, that he studied for two years at Michigan State College. He might have finished, but financial straits at home abruptly ended his medical hopes. Joe Dussia returned to Denbo, to Vesta No 6, but he still aimed high. He managed to study for and win, a diploma from Douglas Business School. Then he did something that he only intended as a "short break until things straightened out." He enlisted in the Pennsylvania State Police. The "short break" will reach its 21st year next April 1.



Maybe his earlier dream of being a doctor accounts for Joe Dussia's skill at opening safes and locks. You need a fine touch, and no one doubts Joe's touch.

Dussia is skilled to the point where he numbers in seconds the time it takes to open a difficult safe or lock. He has been called on to perform some unusual jobs. Like opening a young lady's diary, picking the lock of a car when the owner forgot to take the keys from the ignition before locking the doors.

The veteran officer scoffs at fiction characters who blithely open safes with a twist of the wrist or by sandpapering the tips of the fingers. He said "there isn't a man alive who can open a modern well-machined lock or safe by the techniques employed in the movies, in comic strips and on television." The sergeant made it plain that good locks and safes provide protection beyond belief.

As for rewards, he never accepts money for his talents. This despite the fact he visits many states where he demonstrates his skill for the benefit of police schools and college classes. His own person locksmith equipment is valued in four figures, and consists of such things as electric drills, electric key machines, oxygen and acetylene cutting and welding outfits and enough pikes and files to make a layman's head spin.

Dussia is emphatic about this; "To become an experienced and skilled locksmith requires years of intensive work and study. There is no other way."

Lansing State Journal (Lansing, Michigan) Thursday 19 August 1965

FRIENDLY LOCKPICKER

SAFECRACKING SCIENCE TO EXPERT



SAFE IN HIS HANDS—Sgt. Joe Dussia, Pennsylvania State Police officer, gets a greeting from his pet deer, "Bambi." He raised the animal from a fawn. Dussia, commander of the DuBois substation, is also known for his skill at "opening" safes and locks.

Harrisburg, Pa. - Happiness is an open safe to Capt. Joseph Dussia.

Dussia, 48, head of the state police crime laboratory happens to be one of the best safe-crackers and lock pickers around.

"I learned at an early age that I had the ability to work with safes and locks," the police veteran says.

"After attending Michigan State University for two years as a premedical student, I contacted Harry Miller in Washington, D.C. Miller was one of the country's top lock and safe experts.

"We worked out a system of manipulation, which to me is a type of science. It's a way of opening safe locks by a combination of touch, hearing and seeing - plus a thorough working knowledge of the inner part of the lock.

"The safe burglar doesn't operate by science. He just wants to get the contents. But a legitimate safe repair

man has to protect the safe, too.

"I still don't have the system perfected, though. I have some locks in my

quarters at police headquarters where I stay Monday through Friday.

"At home, I have 500 to 600 more. When I first began practicing at home I taught my wife to change the combinations of locks. It was a way of constantly testing myself."

Dussia is an accomplished lecturer on his favorite subject and teaches at Indiana, Iowa, and Western Reserve universities.

"Once there was a gambling game," he related. "It was in a basement, and the only entrance was a steel door. There was a guard sitting just inside the door, to warn of police.

"Well, the police knew about the game and wanted to catch the gamblers in the act. So they got me to pick open the lock. I managed to be quiet enough so that when we opened the door, a policeman grabbed the guard before he could yell. The police poured through.

"Another time I was stuck with an officer on a rural road. Our car was disabled and had no radio. there was a phone booth nearby but neither of us had a dime.

"So I picked open the outer box, then the coin box. I took out \$1 in change, put in a dollar bill and called a tow truck. A day later, the owner of the independent telephone company in the area called us to tell of finding a dollar bill in a pay phone.

"Once there was a numbers raid. But the numbers were locked in a safe by the numbers writer, who claimed he didn't know the combination. The police obtained a court order to open the safe and gave me the job. The numbers were in there."

The Courier-Express (Dubois, Pennsylvania) Monday 16 August 1976

DUSSIA RECEIVES RECORD \$87,000 BACK PAY CHECK

(Note: The following appeared in the July issue of the Journal, official publication of the National Lodge of Fraternal Order of Police. It concerns former State Policeman Joseph Dussia of the DuBois area.)

Today everyone is trying to get his name in the book of World Records. Some do it by eating worms and all sorts of things but the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania can say there got there by eating "crow."

To the list of World Record holders add the name of Lt. Col. Joseph Dussia of the Pennsylvania State Police and his only helper, Past National President of the F.O.P, John J. Harrington.

The record set by Lt. Col. Joe Dussia is the receiving of the largest pay check ever received by a policeman, \$83,464.46 in salary plus two fringe benefits: cash payments for hospitalization and life insurance, a total of \$87,000.000. This is for a period of three years during which both Dussia and Harrington fought the case and finally won.

In 1973, the Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police James Barger order Deputy Commissioner Joseph Dussia suspended without pay and to be court-martialed. Brother Dussia is a Charter member of the F.O.P. and Past president of McCluskey-Roynan Lodge. Lt. Col.



RECORD PAY CHECK FOR DUSSIA — Lt. Col. Joseph Dussia, (right) formerly of the Penna. State Police, receives a check for back wages and benefits amounting to a record \$87,000. Dussia won his court-martial case against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Helping him in his effort was John J. Harrington, left, Past National President of the Fraternal Order of Police. Harrington is shown the check and thanked by Dussia in front of the state capitol building at Harrisburg. (FOP photo)

Dussia contacted the National President of the F.O.P., who at the time was John J.

Harrington. Advised by Brother Harrington not to accept the suspension or court martial and with a promise from Harrington to stand by him and help him, Dussia decided to fight the case to a finish, not only for himself but for the benefit of all the Pennsylvania State Policemen, in that the Court-martial system in the largest and oldest State Police Department was both unfair and illegal, at best it was a "Kangaroo Court."

Harrington asked Governor Milton Shapp of the State of Pennsylvania for a meeting between

Commissioner Barger, Governor Shapp and himself. The meeting was granted and Harrington presented all the facts as to why the whole case should be thrown out the window. The Governor, it seems, didn't want to get involved by overruling his Commissioner. It was at that time Harrington advised the Governor he and Dussia would take the case to the highest court, the Supreme Court, if need be.

History and the facts will show that Dussia took the case all the way to the Supreme Court and won. Harrington, at no expense to the F.O.P. hired a lawyer, the former District Attorney fo Philadelphia, **Arlen Specter**, and entered the case as a friend of the court.

The Supreme Court ruled in favor of Lt. Col Dussia and also ruled that the Court Martial system of the Pennsylvania State Police was unconstitutional. The State tried to get the Supreme Court to reverse itself. The Court would not change its decision and the verdict stood.

After 39 years of service to the Pennsylvania State Police, Lt. Col. Joseph Dussia retired on June 4, 1976.

The Indiana Gazette (Indiana, Pennsylvania) Tuesday 8 June 1976

COL. DUSSIA RETIRES STATE POLICE POST

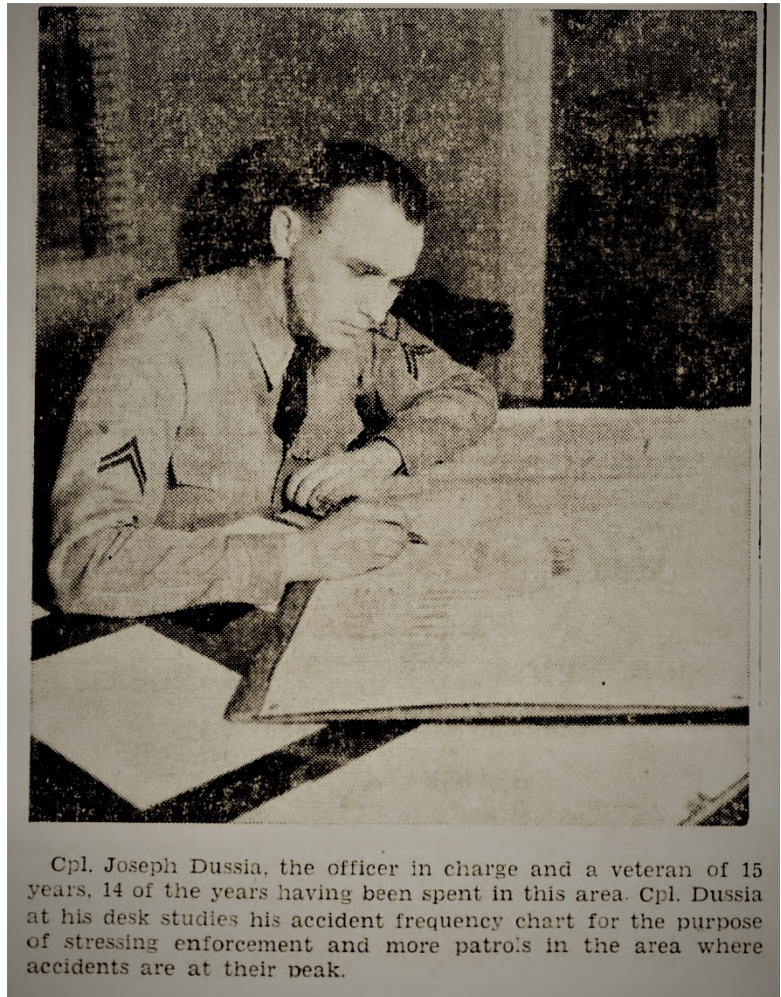
Harrisburg - Lt. Col Joseph Dussia, who was reinstated by the state police three months ago after a 2 1/2 year court battle, retired at midnight Sunday.

The retirement was compulsory as Dussia reached his 60th birthday today.

He served 38 years, rising from recruit to deputy commissioner. He was suspended on July 1973 on charges of divulging answers to a promotion examination.

He returned to duty March 4 under a state Supreme Court order which denied re-argument of an Oct. 3, 1975 decision in the Dussia case. That decision held unconstitutional the state police court-martial procedure.

Dussia was award back pay of \$83,464 based on an average salary of \$31,000 for the suspension period. Deducted from that amount was \$21,700 he earned in private employment.



Cpl. Joseph Dussia, the officer in charge and a veteran of 15 years, 14 of the years having been spent in this area. Cpl. Dussia at his desk studies his accident frequency chart for the purpose of stressing enforcement and more patrols in the area where accidents are at their peak.

Dussia was suspended by Commissioner James D. Barger, who had served under him as a lieutenant when Dussia was a captain eight years ago in Greensburg.

When he returned to duty in March, Dussia was assigned by Barger to a newly created post of director of the Bureau of Inspection.

Dussia said he is returning to a job as chief of a 13-man security force at Treasure Lake, a 15,000 acre resort near DuBois, Clearfield County. That's where he worked during the suspension.

Joe unfortunately only enjoyed one year of compensation and retirement from the Pennsylvania State Police. He died 18 July 1977, Clearfield County. Esther lived only 3 1/2 years after Joe's

death. She died 11 November 1980, Jefferson County, Pennsylvania. The couple had no children. They were interred Lakelawn Memorial Park and Mausoleum, Reynoldsville, Jefferson County.

Pittsburg Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) Tuesday 19 July 1977

JOSEPH DUSSIA DEAD AT AGE 61

Joseph Dussia, former deputy commissioner of state police, died yesterday (July 18) in DuBois Hospital, Clearfield County.

Mr. Dussia, 61, of Big Run, Jefferson County, joined the state police in 1937 after receiving a bachelor of science degree from Michigan State University. He remained with the force until his retirement last year as a lieutenant colonel. Since then he has been chief of the Treasure Lake police department, outside DuBois.

Mr. Dussia became commandant at the Greensburg state police barracks in 1965 after having served as director of the crime laboratory at state police headquarters in Harrisburg.

In 1967, Mr. Dussia was named deputy commissioner under Commissioner Frank McKetta. He was retained in the post when the Shapp administration took office in 1971.

He was suspended from the force in 1973 by then Commissioner James D. Barger on charges he participated in a conspiracy to leak answers to troopers taking promotional examinations.

Mr. Dussia was reinstated as a lieutenant colonel on March 4, 1976, after the state Supreme Court ruled the court martial proceedings against him were unconstitutional because the state police commissioner acted as prosecutor, judge and jury in the case.

Mr. Dussia was recognized as one of the best safecrackers in the United States. He did post-graduate work at Penn State, Northwestern and Maryland universities, and later lectured at colleges and police departments on burglary and lock picking.

Author of the book "Safe in His Hands," a 20-year account of his work with locks, Mr. Dussia taught courses on safes and investigating safecracking cases at the state police training school at Punxsutawney.

Mr. Dussia, a director of the Sargent and Greenleaf Inc. safe firm in Rochester, N.Y., owned and operated the Dussia Detective Agency in Big Run and the Dussia Safe Masters. He also was a consultant on physical security for various firms.

A recipient of commendations from the state Senate and House, he contributed articles on criminology to professional journals.

He was a member of the International Chiefs of Police Association, the American Association of Criminology and the National Locksmith Association.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Esther C. Colkitt Dussia, and two brothers, Stephen of California and John of Ridgway, Elk County.

Friends will be received from 7 to 10 p.m. today at the Richard I. Fait Funeral Home, 117 North Jefferson St., Punxsutawney. A mass of Christian burial will be offered at 11 a.m. tomorrow in SS Cosmus and Damian church, Punxsutawney. Burial will be in Lakelawn Memorial Park, Reynoldsville.

Joe's brother John Wesley Dussia (1920-1985), a World War II veteran, also became an officer in the Pennsylvania State Police . Brother Stephen (1911-1996) worked in the coal mines and was certified as a 1st grade mine foremen but eventually moved to California where he was employed for Shell Chemical Company.