

**Southwesterner in Focus**  
**FROM GUNFIGHTS TO SAFETY**  
**LAWS, 'CAP' FALBY RECALLS EAR-**  
**LY DAYS**

By Tom Bryan  
EPT Sundial 11/15/64

From shooting it out with smugglers to promoting highway safety measures, Cap Falby has dedicated his life to developing law enforcement agencies of El Paso County.

Alan G. (Cap) Falby, 67, born in Batavia, Ill., and raised in Denver, Colo., where his father owned a paint and hardware store, came to El Paso in 1921, and was one of the county's first highway patrolmen. After 21 years in the sheriff's department he was elected El Paso County Sheriff, a position he held for seven years.

His record as sheriff during World War II and post-war years brought him wide recognition.

He was elected National Sheriffs Association president in 1948 and was the only sheriff elected, Texas Police Association president.

In 1949 he resigned as sheriff to become manager of the Sun Carnival Association, a post he held 10 years.

Today, he and Mrs. Falby, the former Doris Coulson whom he married here in 1936, spend much of their time pulling their camp trailer to points in the United States, Canada and Mexico to fish and relax. They reside at 420 Hastings Ave. with her mother who "baby-sits the cat" when they are away.

Despite his being afflicted with a heart ailment and diabetes, which forced him to retire in 1959, Falby is the strong and energetic man who served so many years here.

When Falby was 17, he left his Denver home "hoboing" his way to Los Angeles, "but I got on the wrong train at Bisbee Junction, Ariz., and ended up in Bisbee, Ariz.," working underground in mines.

The young miner, with the clarinet he "found in a trash barrel" played in the company band, "so they would keep me on the day shift."



*FROM SHOOTING TO FISHING—Former El Paso County Sheriff Alan (Cap) Falby, who described his 27 years in the Sheriff's Department as a "constant shooting battle with smugglers," and his wife, Doris, are standing by their 22-foot camping trailer which they take to such places as Canada and the Gulf of Mexico on numerous fishing trips. Falby received national recognition as sheriff here from 1942-49, - (Times Staff Photo)*

#### **ARMY SERVICE**

After World War I began, he enlisted in the Arizona National Guard as a musician, he said, because mining was considered a strategic occupation, so the armed services were not accepting miners.

After pleading with his commanding officer that he "had not enlisted as a non-combatant, or conscientious objector" he was reduced in rank and transferred to the Stokes Mortar Platoon, a "suicide outfit" which served as a special detachment; hitting various points in

the front lines with the Stokes mortar and French-designed one-pounder canons.

The Stokes mortar, he said; was used in blowing up enemy barbed wire—its range of accuracy was about 300 yards.

The action was “shoot and run,” and the outfit, armed only with pistols and knives for self-defense, was easily spotted by German observers in balloons.

At the time the Armistice was signed in 1918, Falby was in officer training in France. He dropped out of OCS, rather than to stay on with the occupation forces, and was transferred back to his original outfit.

His outfit was discharged at Ft. Bliss after a gala parade through Downtown El Paso to the Mills Building, and he returned to Bisbee to work in the mines and play in the company band.

“I noticed how the fellows had deteriorated physically,” Falby said, “from working underground during the years that I was in the Army.”

He said, he became disgusted with the work, blew up a mine shaft as a prank, was fired and went to work in a pit mine where he stayed until he left Bisbee in 1920 to come to El Paso by way of Denver.

### **FIRST JOB**

He went to the local musicians union to get his first job in El Paso playing in a labor day parade. He was a member of El Maida Shrine Band and is a member El Paso Old-timers Band. He has played in the municipal band and in dance combos during his early years in El Paso.

Falby was working in the constable’s office, when in 1921 a state law was passed to cre-

ate a highway patrol at the county level. He and Frank Wertz were the first two County Highway Patrolman, hired in 1921 by the County Judge. Seth B. Orndorff was El Paso County Sheriff.

Falby borrowed money to purchase his first motorcycle and uniform—“our badges was the only thing the department furnished, and then we had to put up deposits for the badges.”

By 1925 he was captain of the County Highway Patrol, which was renamed the State Highway Patrol in 1928, though it still was under the jurisdiction of the Sheriff’s Department.

Department of Public Safety was organized in 1933-34, “to take the department out of local politics,” but it was five years before there was a state patrol under the department. El Paso and Bexar Counties had the only active highway patrols in the state, he said, so the DPS “adopted El Paso County’s uniforms and set up in 1935.”

Falby served Sheriffs Tom Armstrong, Chris Fox and Bill Hawkins, before running a successful campaign against Hawkins in 1942, to become sheriff.

As captain of the highway patrol, Falby was sent to the Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., Traffic Safety Institute, sponsored by the International Chiefs of Police.

He spent his honeymoon taking the Institute’s basic course in 1936, having married in Santa Fe, N.M., en route to Chicago. He returned to the institute in 1937 and 1940.

### **VARIED EXPERIENCES**

Falby’s experiences as a county peace officer on the border varied from getting his “best Sunday hat shot off” while trying to

apprehend a hatchet murderer in the Lower Valley to driving his motorcycle through a fence, an incident which provoked County teenagers, whom he had lectured on safety, to send a note to his hospital room which read "Why don't you practice what you preach?"

The law officers' biggest problem here, he said, was smuggling.

"Thirteen officers were killed in the city and county during the prohibition days," he said. But the largest smuggling enterprise here has been stolen cars.

"In 1930, we lost 30 brand new automobiles which were stolen into Mexico."

He spent much of his time in Mexico locating the stolen cars and "stealing them back."

"We had people give us duplicate keys," which he would take with him to Chihuahua City and the smaller towns in that state when searching for stolen cars. He would sneak into people's yards—often high government officials, or other local dignitaries—at night, check the motor and block numbers—often changing altered numbers, and stealing them to bring back to this country.

During the Fox administration of the sheriff's department; Falby helped create in 1933 the first rural schoolboy patrol in the United States. Because of the patrol, we set a record in the county of 25 years with no child being killed while going to and from school."

"When I took office as sheriff, gambling was wide open in El Paso," he said, "and the business interests were against doing anything about it.

"The gamblers would use every means in the world to corrupt our officers, including sending them groceries and clothing and paying their family hospital bills."

He said he raided the gambling houses, which were patronized by many prominent people from El Paso and the surrounding towns, with "all I had, until they finally closed."

Retiring from the job of sheriff did not get Falby out of politics, nor did he cease to promote the betterment of the department. In 1951, he ran as police commissioner and won.

Falby said "the individual capacity of law officers has doubled since I started through the training they now receive.

"But today's officers are handicapped on the basis of civil rights of the public, and an officer is more alone now in trying to accomplish his goal than the peace officer has ever been, because of lack of public support."

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# From Gunfights To Safety Laws, 'Cap' Falby Recalls Early Days

By TOM BRYAN

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