

# 1978: Traffic sparks a battle in Seacliff area

History

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The Sentinel is celebrating its 150th year in 2006 by reaching into our archives to republish some of the noteworthy stories out of the past. The following story, called "The Battle on Seacliff Bluff," was printed in the Santa Cruz Sentinel on Feb. 1978.*

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Back in the 1920s when Seacliff was mostly cliff and open fields with very few houses, a man decided to build a shack on the edge of the cliff and live there above the beach.

His name was Paul Woodside and he rapidly gained the reputation as the Hermit of Seacliff Beach.

But even in 1925 the life of a hermit was not all that isolated in Santa Cruz County. The number of autos was increasing rapidly and a road ran along

the foot of the cliff.

Woodside, perched in his tarpaper shack high on the cliff, resented the road and the people who traveled it.

When plans were announced for an additional road which would cross his property, he became very agitated, waving guns around and making threats. He offered to shoot or bomb motorists using the existing road, and he refused to sell the property on which the new road was to be built.

Woodside was a big man, according to Cecilia Beauregard who heard all about it from her husband, Amos.

When Woodside made his shooting and bombing threats, citizens became alarmed and complained to the authorities. Woodside became more violent with each passing motorist and beach hiker, and is said to have fired guns at times to scare them away.

When Woodside increased his raving

threats mingled with pronouncements that Captain Kidd's treasure was buried on his land, papers were made out to have him committed as a mentally unbalanced person.

Judge Harry Bias issued the papers which were to be served by Sheriff Howard V. Trafton and Undersheriff Richard (Dick) Rountree.

When the lawmen arrived at the Seacliff shack, Woodside was seated there with his pistol in his hand and a sawed-off shotgun across his lap. At first things were peaceful with Rountree attempting to divert Woodside with conversation while Trafton maneuvered into a favorable position in case the hermit became violent.

An argument broke out when Rountree asked Woodside to go with them to the county jail. And a furious fight followed with Rountree trying to subdue Woodside whose guns had fallen to

the floor. Trafton managed to get one handcuff on the struggling cliff dweller but Woodside was a powerful man. He grabbed Trafton's revolver and sent a bullet into the Sheriff's chest. He then shot Rountree three times in the abdomen.

Rountree, dying, pulled his own gun and shot Woodside; and Trafton, fatally wounded, managed to wrestle his revolver from Woodside and shoot the madman in the head.

Rountree collapsed and died on the porch of the shack. Trafton, with a bullet in his chest near his heart, crawled up the cliff bank to where he had parked his car, in an attempt to get help.

Workmen from a nearby project found him there minutes later they had heard the shots.

Sheriff Trafton died in a Santa Cruz

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hospital a few hours later. Woodside also lived for several hours and died while still trying to pull a stick of dynamite out of his hip pocket.

Sheriff's deputies later discovered 12 dynamite bombs in the shack with 100 pounds of food and kegs of water. Woodside had prepared for a siege.

Trafton, well-liked and highly regarded as a law officer was widely mourned; he had served as sheriff of Santa Cruz County for 22 years and was a native of Wat-

sonville, born in 1871. He was the first native-born citizen to hold the office of sheriff.

Rountree, who had friends in all walks of life and was known for his sense of humor, was born in Santa Cruz in 1870. He was the son of Almus Rountree who also had served as a county sheriff.

"After Trafton was killed, Amos served as a deputy under Houlihan," Cecilia Beauregard recalls.

"When Houlihan left to become warden at San Quentin, Sinnott became sheriff. Amos had his own private detective agency for about a year. He was fearless, but I worried a lot about him — his life was threatened — and he gave it up."

Amos, whose purchase of the

new-fangled motorcycle changed his life, later moved to a ranch in Bonny Doon. He died in February of 1970 at the age of 80.

He is remembered mainly as the person who first painted center lines on the main paved highway in Santa Cruz County — and

perhaps those were the first center lines in the State of California. There are those who say they were.

Today his widow, Cecilia lives in Santa Cruz and enjoys visits from their children and grandchildren.