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Arkansas State Police Project

Interview with

Ron Lemons
Fort Smith, Arkansas
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Interviewer: Michael Lindsey

Michael Lindsey: Where were you born and raised?

Ron Lemons: I was born and raised in Gravely, Arkansas. It is on the western side of Yell County along State Highway 28.

ML: Where did you go to high school?

RL: Fourche Valley High School. That is in Yell County in the community of Briggsville. I went grades one through twelve at that school and there were thirteen people in my graduating class.

ML: When you were growing up do you remember seeing a State Trooper?

RL: I very seldom saw a State Trooper. In fact, State Highway 28 when I was growing up was a gravel road. I graduated from high school in 1964 and they paved it in the mid 1960s. It was rare to see a law enforcement officer whether it was a sheriff or a deputy or a State Trooper. We were on the backside of the county and in a very rural area. Where I grew up there was no crime to speak of so there didn't need to be any officers there.

ML: What did you do after you graduated from high school?

RL: I attended Arkansas Tech University for two years. I had odd jobs during that time to pay my way. In 1966 I went to work for the Arkansas Highway Department. In 1973 I became an Arkansas State Trooper.

ML: What was the application process in 1973?

RL: It is a bit different than it is now. We all had to travel to General Headquarters building out on Roosevelt Road to take a general knowledge test. We didn't have to take a psychological test. They also gave us a spelling test to see if we could spell words like "affidavit" and "arrest." If you passed those you underwent a background investigation. Usually they assigned that to a local Trooper. One from Dardanelle did mine. After that you took a physical examination. Even if you successfully passed all of those you didn't have a definite date you would go to work. When they had the money available and enough people that needed to go to Troop School you were hired. That process took me six months from the time I decided to make an application. That was relatively quick. I have known some who waited two years to get hired.

ML: What was your motivation to join the State Police?

RL: I got interested in law enforcement and I can't tell you when that switch flipped in my mind. I wasn't working in the Highway Department at the time and I just wasn't happy with the odd jobs. It hit me to be a law enforcement officer. I went to work for the Waldron Police Department. Waldron is a small town in Scott County and was close to where I lived. If you were going to town where I lived you either went to Danville or Waldron. So I made an application to the Waldron

Police Department and was hired in 1971. I went to the Arkansas Law Enforcement Training Academy in 1971 while I was at Waldron. I was employed at Waldron for about a year and during that time I decided that I wanted to make law enforcement my career. I realized that if it was going to be a career I needed to be in a larger department and something with more of a future. I knew if I made that step I wanted to go with what I considered then and still consider today the premier law enforcement agency in the state. I pursued that goal and was hired in 1973.

ML: When you were hired did they send you to a training academy?

RL: Yes, I went to a four-week class in 1973. It was in east Camden. I was hired on June 1, 1973 and for the rest of the month I was in the recruit class in east Camden.

ML: Did you notice any differences between the State Police training school and the school you went to when you worked at Waldron?

RL: Yes, ALETA had officers from different agencies and not just Waldron, and it was more structured around a classroom setting and firearms proficiency. For the State Police school we did more physical fitness and calisthenics. I remember that my class was hired under one of the early federal grants given to the State Police to hire more officers. The grant mandated that the officers start patrolling the highway on July 1. They hired us on June 1 and we stayed down there the whole time. We stayed there for four weeks and went to school six days a week. I never left east Camden until I graduated. They had a school going on at the regular training academy as well so they had to put us over in some old Navy barracks. I

can remember we would eat at the vo-tech chow hall and they would march us in formation over and back. It was quite a bit different.

ML: Where was your first post?

RL: El Dorado, Union County. They do it a little different now. Usually when an officer goes to work now he knows where his post is going to be. It wasn't that way when I went to work. Remember I am from a small town in Yell County and when I went to ALETA in east Camden it seemed like the other side of the world. Bill Miller was the Director when I went to work for the State Police. The night before we graduated he came down to the academy and spent the night. He had everybody's assignment in a sealed envelope. Almost no one knew where they were going to be assigned because we were all new hires. The next day after the graduation ceremony they passed out the envelopes. I think I made the comment to my classmates that I couldn't go any further south than Camden. Then I opened up the envelope and it said Union County. Now I am going twenty or thirty miles even farther south. I was down there for about sixteen months, from July 1, 1973 through October 1974. I enjoyed my time there and there was a lot to do. I moved back up here to Troop H, Fort Smith, in 1974 and have stayed in this Troop ever since.

ML: That is surprising because it is tough to get promoted without moving from here to there.

RL: It is. I have been blessed in my career. I have made rank of Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Troop Commander in Troop H.

ML: When you were you promoted to Sergeant?

RL: 1989. I was promoted to Lieutenant in April 1995 and Troop Commander in August of 1997.

ML: Fort Smith has had a string of legendary Troop Commanders from Slick Wilson to Deloin Causey and others. Fort Smith sticks out as a big Troop.

RL: When I first came to this Troop it was twice the size as it is now. It included Benton, Washington, Polk, and Montgomery Counties. Our terminals would run traffic for Benton and Washington Counties and Mount Ida back then. There is no way they could do that anymore.

ML: In your first year at El Dorado what would be a typical day?

RL: A typical day would be patrolling U.S. 187 and U.S. 82 out of Union County. That is pretty much how it is today. There is different technology, but highway patrol is still highway patrol. You go out and look for violations, whether traffic or criminal. My Troop Headquarters was at Warren, Troop F. My Post Sergeant lived in Camden and his name was J.D. Tuberville. My Troop Commander was Captain Jimmy Loman. My day consisted of working and taking wreck calls.

ML: Did you notice a difference when you came up here to Troop H?

RL: There are geographic differences. Up here you have the mountain ranges and we have the interstate system up here. We had the bypass at El Dorado, but it was just a short four-lane highway with no real control of access. So it was a change coming up here because working interstate was different. The traffic volume was much heavier and U.S. 71 was also heavily traveled.

ML: Do you think that made the job harder?

RL: No, just different. I think it made it more fun. I enjoyed working the interstate.

ML: One of the big events in the 1970s was the Ruiz and Van Denton manhunt. What do you remember about that event?

RL: During that time I administered driver's license examinations and I was at the driver's license station in Paris when the call came in that the marshal was missing. Later that day his car was discovered at the Ashley Creek Landing. I left my driver's license station and joined in the manhunt. They shot the marshal and David Small, the Park Ranger, and left them in the trunk. The marshal, David Richey, was fatally wounded and the Park Ranger survived and testified against them in court. They (Ruiz and Van Denton) left there with the other Park Ranger and drove some forest service highways. The actually went through my hometown of Gravely. A woman saw them and testified against them. She ran a country store and she saw them. They were driving a Corp of Engineer's truck. It wasn't unusual to see a Forest Service truck, but you hardly ever saw a Corp of Engineer's truck and it stuck in her mind. Anyway, I do remember working that manhunt and manning roadblocks and patrolling inside the roadblocks. For several days we had roadblocks around the Parks community, Needmore, Y City, and over around Mount Ida.

ML: What hours were you working? You had gone to eight-hour days at that point?

RL: We had gone to eight-hour days from ten hour days when I first started. Compensatory time was not a word in my vocabulary. I didn't know what it meant until FLSA, the Fair Labor Standards Act, came into effect. Your days off might be your days off, but if they didn't have anybody working they would place someone on call. Back then they didn't have cell phones and pagers and being on call

meant being by a telephone. You didn't have quite the freedom people have today. It was just a way of life and you did it.

ML: On this Ruiz and Van Denton deal, when your shift was done you probably didn't go home when your shift ended?

RL: Oh no. The hours weren't an issue with me. I don't remember the hours or exact shift I worked. I just remember putting in a tremendous amount of time for four or five days. It was probably twelve hours a day. I would imagine that we had a day and night shifts to provide twenty-four patrol.

ML: Another thing that happened was the Cuban Refugee Crisis. Where you called out on that?

RL: I was. I was called out when they rioted in 1980. I wasn't at the main gate where most of the action took place. I was on the backside at gate nine near the Jenny Lind community. We had a group come up and look the gate over, but they didn't come out and went back in the compound. After that they had some people get out and we had to go around and round them up. I remember working some pretty long hours during that time too.

ML: Do you remember any sort of events leading up to the big breakout?

RL: I don't remember anything. Since I was a Highway Patrol Trooper in Scott County, which is in Troop H, I wasn't around headquarters much. I was there when the first planeload of Vietnamese arrived at Fort Chaffee in 1975. They deployed some of us out there thinking there might be some problems because the Vietnam War was winding down. There really weren't any problems. They were housed at Fort Chaffee too.

ML: Do you remember any problems that might have happened with the Vietnamese?

RL: No, they might have had some intelligence about protests, but I don't know that to be a fact. I just know they sent some State Troopers to the airport. We might have been there for the first two planeloads and after that they did it themselves. As far as I can remember there was never a problem with the Laotian or Vietnamese that arose.

ML: You said you were in the driver's license section. I have had people tell me that is the most dangerous section in the State Police.

RL: It may very well be. My life was probably on the edge more giving driver's tests than it ever was during my law enforcement duties.

ML: Do you have a story or two that come to mind?

RL: I gave tests on the "out run" in Franklin, Logan, and Scott Counties. They give them every day in Fort Smith. In rural counties and towns we go about once every two weeks. It wasn't unusual a few years ago for older women to not drive. Then when their husbands would pass away they would have to learn. This occurred in Booneville to a really nice elderly lady. Her husband had owned a farm there and she had never needed to learn to drive. He passed away and she was restricted. She came in and took the written test and passed it the first time she took it and I issued her a permit. She goes down to the Pontiac dealership in Booneville and buys her a brand new Pontiac. The permit lets her drive with a licensed adult for a thirty-day period to teach her how to drive. She started out with her kids teaching her to drive. I remember the first time she came back to take the driver's test. She just flat out couldn't drive. The new Pontiac had two knocked

in fenders at this point. I politely failed her and it went real well. I told her to drive at least thirty more days because she couldn't drive down the street in a straight line. I think her children gave up on her because she started hiring people to teach her to drive. She came back after sixty days and I think every fender on the Pontiac had dents on it. I had to fail her again and she got angry with me this time, but what can you say to a seventy-something year old lady. It was a good ending because she finally learned how to drive after a friend from her church taught her. I certified her to drive and she was fully capable, but I don't know if the new Pontiac survived [laughs]. It looked like a total wreck by the time she got her license.

ML: Another big event was the CSA siege in Marion County.

RL: I was there. Back then each Troop had their own SRT, Special Response Team, and I was on that team as a sniper. We spent about ten days up in Marion County. It was hot and dusty. There were chiggers and ticks. We worked twelve-hour shifts. Ours was from midnight to noon. They had several assigned areas and ours was called the "T-block." It was where the county road ended in a T intersection.

ML: Did you know that something was going to happen up there or was it a call out of the blue?

RL: We didn't know. We weren't privy that they were going to do the search warrant. Along about that same time a Missouri Highway Patrol Trooper was fatally wounded. If I remember right that put things in motion to have a raid at the CSA compound. There had to be a tremendous amount of planning prior to this be-

cause the FBI, the ATF, the State Police, the Missouri Highway Patrol were all up there. I can remember them mustering us in Branson, Missouri at one of the music theaters to brief us. The FBI psychological profiler said that these people would show a lot of bravado and they would make comments about violent actions, but ultimately they would come out and give up if we did it right. We had to show them that we were there and we weren't going to leave. It happened just like he said it would.

ML: Who all was at this muster in Branson?

RL: We had the FBI, ATF, and about six different State Police SRTs. It was everyone that had anything to do with day-to-day operations up there.

ML: Do you remember what day that was?

RL: We were staying in a motel in Mountain Home and we went up there. The plan was set in motion shortly after we met in Branson. We worked the midnight shift and we went back to the motel and got some rest, but the other guys I think went right out to the compound and we relieved them a few hours later.

ML: When did you become a sniper?

RL: The early 1980s.

ML: What kind of training did they give you?

RL: We use a .25-06 caliber rifle and you had to display your proficiency at least twice a year. On your own you maintained your proficiency. We would go to Camp Robinson two times a year to prove our proficiency. My hands-on training was provided by the other sniper in this Troop. I was familiar with the rifle and he would work with me on the different tactics.

ML: Were the snipers part of the SRT team?

RL: Yes, we were part of it, but we deployed out from it. We would find a good vantage point to provide cover of the location. We would also watch for anything unusual. I remember my partner and I were on the T-block at the CSA siege. The first day we were there, Kerry Nobles – who was the second in charge - drove up to get his mail and talked to some of the team members down there. He got a drink of water from us. That sticks out in my mind. He wasn't a wanted person at that time so he just came up, got his mail, talked for a bit, and went back.

ML: How long were you in the SRT team?

RL: Early 1980s until I made Sergeant in 1989.

ML: Were there any other instances where the SRT team was called out?

RL: That was the only time we were called out to go outside of our Troop. There were several instances where we would help execute narcotics search warrants or if we had information on a wanted person we would get called out. We did some marijuana surveillance where narcotics would locate the fields and we would go in and watch it and catch them in the act.

ML: The marijuana eradication program was a big deal for the State Police. Did you go out on any of the helicopter searches?

RL: For a brief time in 1988 I was in the Criminal Investigation Division. It was only for ten months and I liked highway patrol better. I did a very small amount of marijuana surveillance from a helicopter. I wasn't trained as a spotter, but I did know what it was if I saw it. If we got some information that someone was growing a patch it might be just myself and one deputy sheriff go out there and get a

vantage point and catch him. I remember that happening on more than one occasion.

ML: While you were a Trooper and now that you are a Troop Commander, how do you tell if the Troopers are doing their job or not?

RL: It is pretty easy to tell. You hear the term OVC, officer violator contact. That could mean that an officer is doing his job, but there are often a lot of extenuating circumstances that might cause him to not have a good month. You can look at your accident analysis to see where they are occurring. I can tell you that on I-540 right in front of this building (Troop H Headquarters) there is more traffic than any other highway in my Troop. However, Sebastian County isn't the high accident area in my Troop. Crawford County has more accidents per month than any other in my Troop. You have to deploy your Troopers where there is the most traffic and they will have the highest visibility. I think that a car on the highway, even if he is not doing anything, is a deterrent. He doesn't have to stop people one right after the other. We had to place our limited number of officers in the places of high visibility like I-40 and I-540. US 71 Highway comes in third and then it falls off to the state highways.

ML: You mentioned that you didn't have a lot of Troopers. It seems like the State Police as a whole is down on numbers. What is the process you follow to get more Troopers here?

RL: It varies from Director to Director. In the rural counties you want at least two Troopers in each county. I don't have that. Scott County only has one Trooper. Prior to each troop school they will ask you where your critical vacancies are and

you know that without having to look at a piece of paper. I could make a case that every county had a critical vacancy, but I know I am not going to get five or six Troopers out of a thirty person troop school. I go for as many as I can get and sometimes I get two, three, or just one. I am sure people have told you that we have a hard time keeping Troopers in the Delta.

ML: Yes, it sounds like one of the last places people want to hear is they are going is to Dumas or Lake Village. That is like the end of the world if you aren't from there.

RL: Right. I think the Department is trying to recruit people from that area and this will lead to a better retention rate. When I went to work they wouldn't station you in the county you grew up in. They will do that now. If you can get a young man or woman and assign them to the area they grew up in, most likely they won't transfer.

ML: Do you notice a difference from the Troopers that are hired today compared to when you joined?

RL: When I went to work I wasn't familiar with the law enforcement lingo. I have a funny story about that. When I started at Waldron I didn't know anything about law enforcement and I had never even rode in a police car. They had an old 1968 Chevrolet. I got recommended by the city council and I showed up to work in my new Levis and they were going swish-swish-swish like new Levis do. The Police Chief was a gung ho guy and into this lingo and he gets in the car and says, "Waldron PD Three, SO, we are 10-8." We go along and he is always saying "PD 3 to SO" and I don't want to look stupid so I am keeping my eyes open looking in the Esso (gas station now known as Exxon-Mobil) station to see who this guy is talk-

ing to. All night long I did this and finally at the end of the night he said, "Waldron PD 3 is out at the SO." We got out and we were at the Sheriff's Office [laughs]. I thought, "Man, SO means sheriff's office!" To answer your question, the men and women we get now know the lingo and are knowledgeable and by the time they get through with the academy they are motivated and ready to be a State Trooper. They know a lot about law enforcement when we get them. When I got in the Vietnam War was winding down and it wasn't popular to be an officer then. We were still having some civil unrest. I never went to a full-blown riot, but we did have a lot of protests. Now it is the in thing to be in law enforcement and you see it on TV a lot. I didn't have that when I went to work.

ML: Both as a Trooper and as a Troop Commander are there any special enforcement tactics you have tried to use to slow people down and prevent accidents?

RL: We were the first to use laser speed enforcement. I like to think that we are pretty innovative in enforcement techniques. In the early 1990s we obtained our first laser. Speed is the number one cause of accidents in Arkansas. Following too close is number two. That was the case when I went to work and that is still the case today. So speed enforcement is a major duty for the Highway Patrol. We still do laser enforcement when manpower allows and we can get two or three guys together with a Sergeant. We use sobriety checkpoints pretty regularly. My Troop is one of the best, if not the best, for narcotics interdiction on the interstate. There is an untold amount of narcotics on the interstate and we do our best to intercept those. Anytime you get several kilos of cocaine or several hundred pounds of marijuana you are doing at least some good.

ML: Did you participate in the CAP program in the 1980s?

RL: Yes I did.

ML: Can you talk a little bit about your training and your experiences?

RL: A lot of the training I received was from my fellow Troopers. I do remember going to a forty-hour class in Little Rock on criminal interdiction on the interstate system. I learned more from my on the job training though. I think my experience in the CAP program carried over into my time as a Troop Commander. I think my Troop, month in and month out, will get more drugs than anybody.

ML: Some people think I-30 is a bigger route for drugs coming up from the south.

RL: I am not saying it isn't, but that we are getting a lot of drugs here. I am sure I-30 gets a lot. We have some officers that are very skilled and motivated.

ML: Are there any memorable stops or bust come to mind from your CAP days?

RL: I stopped Dan Akroyd. He was driving a stretch Mercedes with tinted windows. He was speeding, but not by a ridiculous amount. When you are doing CAP patrol you look for everything. He happened to collect police patches and we sent him an Arkansas State Police patch. We stopped him over at Alma and he mentioned it on the Johnny Carson show. I didn't actually stop him. One of the team members stopped him and he told me to come up there because I wouldn't believe who he had stopped. Anyway, he talked about it on the Johnny Carson show and said he had been stopped at Ozark, which was probably the last highway sign he remembered. He took our picture and we took his picture. As far as narcotics seizures, we had some big ones, but I think we get bigger ones today than we did back then. Do you remember Tommy McIntosh? We arrested him.

ML: That was a CAP team member that arrested him?

RL: Yes. He went to the penitentiary. We got a kilo of cocaine, which is a lot of narcotics.

ML: Do you remember who the Trooper was that stopped him?

RL: David Hyden. He lives in northwest Arkansas. He is actually the one that stopped Dan Akroyd.

ML: Did you sense that there was a backlash against the CAP team by other Troopers?

RL: You would get comments that we were just high activity. Nobody ever came up to me and said they didn't like it because I worked four twelve-hour days one week and three the next. They might have said it, but not to me. That is what we would do. One week we would work three and one week four. It was a pretty good shift. I always thought that if you were going to get up and go to work you might as well work twelve hours. I don't remember anyone coming up to me and telling me they wanted me to get off so they could get on the team. We all were high activity Troopers and were motivated. Otherwise you wouldn't be good at it.

ML: When you look at narcotics interdiction today, how is it different?

RL: It really isn't that different. We have a lot of technology that we didn't have then. We have cameras that can look in gas tanks. We have density meters you can run along the door to tell you if it is hollow or has something in it. As far as your probable cause and your key factors, that hasn't changed. The people that haul that stuff are the same. If there are two people in the car their stories will never ever be consistent. They don't know where they are going half of the time and the guy that is riding for sure won't know. The driver may say he is going to his

aunt's funeral and the passenger may say he is going to see his sister. The factors that you key off of haven't changed. Also, we didn't have K-9s then.

ML: Do you have people dedicated to this?

RL: No, we don't have the manpower to dedicate to a criminal apprehension patrol. I just have dedicated men that are proficient in it. They may be working I-40 and then have to go to Mount Gaylor to work an accident.

ML: As a Troop Commander, what is your biggest headache?

RL: Probably trying to keep the people out there at the optimum time. I try to have them deployed properly. When you have accidents you wonder if there was something that could have been done to prevent that. So, probably the day-to-day scheduling of personnel and factoring in their time off and training time. With just twenty-two people, losing three people for training is a big deal.

ML: Twenty-two seems really low.

RL: We have actually had fewer people than that. The most we have had is twenty-eight.

ML: It seems like there should be more than that.

RL: It does seem like that. I have eleven hundred miles in this Troop and twenty-two people. I guess when people see a State Trooper it sticks in their mind and they think there are more than are actually out there. In my opinion we do a very good job of patrolling with the manpower we have got. There is a need to have twenty-four hour patrol, seven days a week. We run twenty-four hour patrol five days a week. We have a Trooper that works from ten at night to six in the morning and on his two days off we don't have anyone until another Trooper goes on at four in

the morning.

ML: You have twenty-four hour radio coverage right?

RL: Yes. I also supervise the civilian staff too. The radio is a major problem because we run it twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, but we only have five radio operators. Right now I have a Sergeant working the radio because the day radio operator is on vacation. We have been authorized to hire another radio operator.

ML: When you look back over your career are there any officers that stick out?

RL: My supervisor for a brief time was Arnold Buck Byford. He is the Sheriff of Scott County. One of my favorites of all time was one of my Post Sergeants, Hansel Bradford. I learned a lot from him.

ML: Is there a commonality between Byford and Bradford?

RL: They are not similar in their personalities. I think I am naming them because of the time period. It was in the late 1970s and early 1980s when I really enjoyed being a Trooper. I don't regret becoming a supervisor, but I really enjoyed being a Highway Patrol Trooper. It was one of my favorite times in my career and they were big in my life when I was a Highway Patrol Trooper. Another one was Ed Wolff. He is a Major now and we were Troopers together. He taught me a lot.

ML: When you look back over your career are there any memorable traffic stops that stick out?

RL: Early on in my career, after I came up to this Troop, I caught two escapees from the penitentiary in McAlister, Oklahoma. I chased them up Highway 59 north of Van Buren. They turned their vehicle over in the middle of the road. I had my

shotgun on them and took them into custody. Another time, I arrested three Indians from Stillwell, Oklahoma that had just robbed a country store and beaten up the elderly lady who ran the store. They sent me up Highway 59 to look for three large Indian males in a 1968 Ford truck. I met them at Cedarville and it couldn't have been more plain if they had a neon flashing sign reading, "It is us," above their truck. Those guys filled the cab up. They were huge. I got behind them and proceeded to stop them. They pulled over into a little country gas station and got out of the truck. I am six foot two inches, but these guys were six-six at least. I got my shotgun out and told them they were under arrest. They didn't give me any trouble. The guy at the service station was over there changing a tire and he looks up and backs into the service station and locks the door, so he wasn't going to be any help if these guys gave me trouble. The Sheriff got up there pretty quick though. I remember two of those guys' names, Eugene Butch-Eagle and Johnson Sutt [sp?]. I found a picture that the sheriff took of me standing by them and we were all grinning. There were a lot of felony stops but those two come to mind. Early in my career in El Dorado I chased a guy that had robbed a store. He jumped out and had a shotgun. He threw his shotgun down and dove off in a creek. He got half way across and I got him to give up and come back to me. He had thrown the moneybag down, which we found later. All of that occurred during the first two years I worked.

ML: What about traffic accidents that stick out?

RL: I don't remember any of the names of the people that were fatally killed. Maybe that is something in your mind that blocks that out. I can remember the accidents

and the reasons why. The last one I worked occurred on Highway 59 when an elderly man crossed the center line and hit a tractor trailer. I don't remember his name though. The worst case scenario for a Highway Patrol Trooper is a fatality accident and I have been to many of those. Oddly enough, I remember one when I was a supervisor that involved a hitchhiker. He was traveling across the country and didn't have a home to go to. It was cold and someone had given him a ride to Van Buren on the interstate. They had given him ten dollars to buy something to eat. He went into the Waffle House to get something to eat and then he walked out onto I-40 and got hit by a car. He stepped in front of a car and went right into a lady's lap and was killed instantly. I have wondered if he did it on accident or on purpose. He was an Indian and was from Canada. We had a tough time finding a next of kin. I remember his name. It was Edward Kinnoshin. Why I remember his name, I don't know. It was just a sad story. The Mounties helped us locate a sister that lived on an Indian reservation in Canada. I think about him from time to time.

ML: Has the activity the Highway Patrol works changed?

RL: We have more vehicle miles driven, but what you look for to prevent accidents: speed, following too close, and alcohol are the same.

ML: Do you think the mission of the State Police has changed?

RL: As far as the Highway Patrol? No. Our mission is the same now as it was in 1973.

ML: What about equipment? That has to be a big area of change.

RL: We didn't have cellular phones, pagers, and computers. Now some Troopers

have laptops in their car and by the time they pull away from an accident they have their report already done. When I did it you typed them out and you had to do it in triplicate. The Sergeant would bring around carbon paper and you had better not screw it up and make sure the lines were straight or they would send it back. Now technology has made it easier, faster, and better than when I was a Trooper. We have in-car video cameras. That has been a major step forward. It protects the officer and improves the complaint process. We can look at the tape and see if our officer acted properly and most of the time they do.

ML: The State Police Commission has gotten a lot of press lately. In your opinion, what is the role of the State Police Commission?

RL: They are a civilian oversight committee and they are charged with approving promotions. I can't tell you what the causes were of problems with the last two Directors and the Commission. My experience with them is that they are successful business people that have a genuine interest in making sure the State Police employees have the best. Whether those Directors thought they were being too aggressive, I don't know. I do know there was friction between the last two Directors and the Commission, but all of the state agencies have civilian oversight. I think it is good. They all take the time to do it for no pay.

ML: When you were first transferred up here Slick Wilson was the Captain and this was his Troop. He ran it the way he wanted to and what Little Rock said might not have much bearing on what happened here.

RL: That is right.

ML: Do you see that type of situation continuing today?

RL: I don't claim to be remotely associated with how Slick Wilson ran his Troop. What you said was right, he ran his Troop. You can't do that in this day and time. He was a very loyal and dedicated Arkansas State Policeman, as much as anyone I have ever known. In this day and time you just can't do that and I don't look at myself as anything like that. I am not being derogatory toward Captain Wilson. I am actually complimenting him. It is just a different day. We network more with Little Rock. Technology has brought that together.

ML: Is there a certain Director that sticks out as memorable or effective?

RL: I think Doug Harp was progressive. Our first policy and procedure manual came from him in 1976. Before this we didn't have a policy and procedure manual. When you talk with people promotions always come up. I don't think Colonel Melton made many promotions under his tenure. Colonel Dozier is doing quite a few and Colonel Harp did quite a few. That might be a way to show they are being progressive, but the manual was a big deal in Colonel Harp's career.

ML: If this was an ideal world, how would you make this an ideal Troop?

RL: I would triple the manpower. I think every Troop Commander would tell you that. It goes back to scheduling, which is such a big item on my agenda. Also, I would want to get more training for officers. Other than that, for our manpower we do an excellent job. Also, my career will only last three more months. I am retiring.

ML: Do you know who is replacing you?

RL: Lieutenant Steve Coleman.

ML: Is there anything else in your career that we haven't talked about today that sticks

out as being important?

RL: No. I have been blessed in my career. I haven't been seriously injured. I have been fortunate to be promoted. A lot of that is just luck. I worked hard and was dedicated, but there are a lot of qualified people who do the same thing everyday. I was fortunate enough to rise to the rank of Troop Commander and a lot of it is being at the right place at the right time.

[End of Interview]

[JD]