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Arkansas State Police Project

Interview with

Jim Bray
19 May 2004

Interviewer: Michael Lindsey

Michael Lindsey: What was your motivation to join the State Police?

Jim Bray: I was born and raised in Lewisville, Arkansas, which is in Lafayette County.

ML: What did you do after high school?

JB: I went into the U.S. Naval Air Corp in 1942.

ML: What was your duty?

JB: I was a pilot. When I was ready to graduate from Pensacola [U.S. Naval Aviator Training Center] in early 1943, we had too many men in our platoon. That was kind of a silly thing [because] they spent all of that money training us. We all had about the same scores, so they decided to put all of our names in a hat and draw out five that would be reassigned. I happened to be one of the five names they drew out, so I was out of the program. I went from there to the regular navy instead of coming home and being drafted into the army. Since I already had a lot of training, I went into the navy as a petty officer. After I came out of the Air Corps, I went to a special school in Richmond, Virginia, that trained me as a mo-

tor machinist and I worked in the engineering department. Then I went to Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and boarded my first ship. From there we went to North Africa. I was in the invasion of Sicily, Salerno in Italy, Anzio, Normandy, and southern France. I came home and they put me on an LST, which stands for landing ship tank, and went to the South Pacific. The only engagement I participated in there was the invasion of Okinawa. I was discharged four days before Christmas in 1945.

ML: What sort of ship were you on in the Atlantic?

JB: It was an LCI, which means landing craft infantry. It had twenty-five men serving on it and [it] could carry an infantry company. We put them on the beach.

ML: What beach did you land on during the Normandy invasion?

JB: Omaha.

ML: From what division were the men you carried ashore?

JB: The 29th Division. It was pretty rough. I only got topside one time because I was in the engine room the whole time. We had a little break and the shelling had quieted down. I went topside and one of the boys said, "You don't want to look out there." Sure enough, it was rough. All you could see were bodies floating and the sea was actually a pink color because of the blood. It was pretty rough.

ML: How many trips did you make that day?

JB: We made three runs. We caught an eighty-eight-millimeter shell in one of the front turrets that held a twin twenty-millimeter gun. It exploded and killed two men stationed there. After it was over, I got a call from the captain. The old U.S.S. Augusta heavy cruiser had lost the man who was in charge of the ship's

evaporator. The evaporator was what made fresh water from salt water. It was actually just a still. Anyway, this guy had gotten killed somehow and the water tender strikers they had put in charge of [the evaporator] didn't know how to operate it efficiently. They were wasting a lot of fresh water because if you didn't keep the temperature and pressure correct on [the evaporator] it would make salt water instead of fresh water and you would ruin whatever fresh water was in the tank. The skipper of the Augusta asked for somebody in the fleet to take charge of this, and my captain volunteered me. I went over there and stayed four or six days getting things in working order. Then they got a replacement and let me go back to my ship. My ship went to Bizerte [a port city in Tunisia] and went into dry dock along with the battleship Arkansas. We stayed in the dry dock about a week and then we went to a port in Italy just north of Naples. This was the staging area for the invasion of southern France. We picked up some of General Clark's men, the 36th Division, and took part in the invasion on August 15. After the invasion, we stayed off the coast for forty-two days to let sailors ferrying supplies from ship to shore sleep and eat and refuel their ships during this operation. Then we got orders to go to Norfolk, Virginia. We crossed the Atlantic and when we got back in November I got a thirty-day leave and headed home. I reported back on December 12. When I got back, my ship wasn't there. They had given it to the [U.S.] Coast Guard. I transferred down to the amphibious camp at Virginia Beach and boarded the LST. We took it down to New Orleans and did a lot of work on it. After about two months, we left for the Pacific and passed through the Panama Canal. We were going to be in Panama for two days, and the captain de-

cided to allow the starboard-side crew liberty on the first day and the port-side crew liberty on the second day. I was on the port-side. Well, on the way back from the first night of liberty, one of the black crewmen cut one of the other men up pretty bad in a fight, so the captain cancelled all of the shore leave. To make a long story short, about four or five days after we left the Panama Canal that black sailor didn't show up for muster one morning. [He] had gone missing. I don't know for sure what happened to him, but I have a pretty good idea. Somebody threw him over the side. They had an investigation on it, but never could find out who did it. The navy just reported him missing in action, which, I guess, is what he was. We had five other black sailors on that ship, and I guarantee you there were no more problems like those at Panama on board.

ML: I didn't know the navy was integrated during World War II.

JB: They weren't integrated until after the war. The blacks were on there to take care of and wait on the officers. They had duties when we were at general quarters, too. For the most part, they were pretty good. I think the one that went missing was from Cincinnati. We had one black on the LCI and he and I were the only southerners on the whole ship. He was from Alabama.

ML: Is there one landing that sticks out above all the others?

JB: Not really. They were all about the same. One other memorable thing happened when we were at Bizerte before the Sicily invasion. A German plane used to come over every night just to make sure we wouldn't get a good night's sleep. It was usually a bomber that carried a torpedo. We were sitting out in the harbor about 300 yards away from a heavy cruiser. I think it was the Brooklyn, but I

don't remember for sure. That little LCI didn't draw enough water to take a torpedo. I was working in the engine room with a little Irish kid named Connelly. He was so young he had never shaved in his life. He was just seventeen and his parents had signed for him to go into the navy. He had been on board about two weeks when a German bomber came over on one of those nightly runs. The plane dropped a torpedo, which hit just about [at] our waterline. The torpedo tore through the thin metal hull above the waterline on our LCI and set right up on the quad of engines. The bad part was that this boy, Connelly, was standing on that side when it hit, and it caught him at the waist and cut him in two. The torpedo has to run through the water to arm itself, which it hadn't done, so it wasn't armed and didn't explode. We went into dry dock and cut it out. That was the most horrifying experience I had during the war. It was just the two of us in the engine room. We hadn't even been in battle at that time. I guess Anzio was the roughest invasion. It wasn't rough until the third or fourth day. The Germans took a railroad gun up in the mountains and started firing on us. The shells made a weird noise when they went over. [The gun] had an eighteen-inch barrel and was moved in and out of the caves in the mountains on tracks. They hit a hospital ship one night and blew it up.

ML: What did you do when you got out of the navy?

JB: I was born and raised in the dairy business, and my daddy had developed arthritis pretty bad and needed some help, so I bought half of the dairy from him and worked on it. In 1947, I started working part-time for the sheriff. The Lafayette County Sheriff didn't have any other deputies, and if he needed something done, I

would do it part-time. I got paid \$15 a night, which was a lot of money in those days. A couple of times I had to make a trip to Little Rock to take a prisoner to the hospital. We sold the dairy farm in 1951 and I went to work for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission as a game warden in Lafayette County. I stayed there until I went to work for the State Police on January 1, 1959. I retired from the State Police in 1977.

ML: What would be a typical day for a game warden?

JB: You had a radio and a radio operator who was located in the State Police headquarters at Hope. He would come on about 7:30 in the morning and stayed until 5:00 in the afternoon. You didn't have contact with anyone after that. A typical day was checking on poaching, especially during the wintertime. We had deer in Lafayette County at that time, but we didn't have a season until 1952 or 1953. Before that, I was sent to Polk County and worked their deer season. In the spring, you would check fishing licenses. You had to buy your own boat to do that. I was only paid \$200 a month. Hopefully, you would get an expense account for \$35 a month to cover gas. It wasn't all that bad. The people in those days respected laws more than they do nowadays. We would double up a lot. A man from Hempstead or Columbia County might come down and work with me, or I might go up and work with either of them. Columbia County didn't have enough water to support much fishing in the summer, so the warden from there would come over and work with me so he would have something to do. Most of them were quite a bit older than [I was]. I went to State Police school in 1961. I was stationed at Little Rock first. They put me with another trooper, Bob Glenn.

I worked with him for two weeks before I got my own unit and they moved me to Malvern in 1959. Malvern was the place that no one wanted to go. Back then, the State Police districts were commanded by lieutenants. A captain commanded the entire highway patrol. Lieutenant Floyd Short was my lieutenant in the Little Rock District. He called me in one day and asked if I wanted to work Malvern. I asked him if he wanted me to answer that in one word or two. I said, "I am going to either say 'no' or 'hell, no'." He asked me why and I told him that he and everybody else knew the reason. It didn't make a difference to make an arrest because the cases would never be called up in the court docket. Before this, I was over on special assignment between Hot Springs and Y City during football season. After a football game in Fayetteville, a municipal judge from Malvern was heading back home and had been hitting the bottle. A trooper in Mount Ida picked him up because he was about to clean out the ditches on both sides of the road. He got him off the road and took him to the sheriff's office in Mount Ida. He called headquarters and said that he had a municipal judge from Malvern and that someone needed to come over and pick up this judge and take the judge's car back, too. The trooper hadn't arrested the judge or put him in jail; [he had] just taken him off the road. We had another trooper at Hot Springs who liked to see his name in the newspaper and hear it on the radio. He said that the State Police had arrested a municipal judge for DWI [driving while intoxicated] and put him in jail in Mount Ida. This wasn't true. It wouldn't have done any good to arrest him because he never would have been charged. Back in those days, you didn't arrest the judges. You might take them off the road, but that was it. It shouldn't have

been that way, but it was. Anyway, this municipal judge took after the State Police. When I got sent to Malvern, I asked my boss what I should do when I [stopped someone] for DWI. He told me to just take the person home because it wouldn't do any good to put him in jail or take him before the court. I worked Malvern from out of Little Rock for about two months. I didn't move and instead drove back and forth. The sheriff at that time had one outside deputy who had heart problems, so all he did was serve papers. The sheriff also had a woman and a man in the office. The sheriff's office was closed at 5:30 every afternoon. I don't know where the sheriff went, but you couldn't find him after that time. That meant that the trooper had to do all of the policing in the entire county. I had told my boss when he sent me down here that I would go because I didn't have any other choice, but that I hoped he would move me before too long. While I was at Malvern, I had been visiting with this judge and gotten him into a pretty good humor. He got to be a pretty good friend, but I had told the boss I didn't want to stay long. So sometime in the early part of 1960 the trooper in Magnolia got into a bit of trouble and needed to be moved. My boss asked me if I wanted to move and if I hadn't already told him I wanted to move I probably would have just stayed in Malvern. I did move to Magnolia and stayed there for a while. [Referring to a three-inch knife] That was where I got this knife. A guy I stopped pulled it on me and I had to hit him with a stick. He ended up going to the penitentiary. Another incident occurred on Saturday afternoon about dusk. I finally got this guy to pull over and he got out and pulled this pistol on me [referring to a small revolver]. It is a .32 caliber "Saturday Night Special." It is held together by

a wood screw. I don't know if it would fire or not. I never tried it for fear it would blow up. The cylinder would rotate and everything appeared [to be] in working order when I got it from this guy. I shot him with my .38 pistol and broke his leg, which kept him from pulling the trigger. My district commander, who was a lieutenant from Hope, came over and we got him to the hospital. The incident never made the paper. The county took care of his medical bill. He filed suit against me, but nothing ever came of it. That was a pretty hair-raising incident.

ML: Did you find that people in Magnolia were more violent than [those] in Malvern?

JB: I think that when people got hopped up on moonshine whiskey, some went half crazy. I didn't find them any worse in Magnolia than Malvern. There were just more of them. You didn't have the type of blacks in Malvern or Little rock that you had in Magnolia. I didn't have any prejudices against blacks. I had a black woman who helped raise my brothers and me. I would just as soon sit down at her table as I would anybody. I knew too much on the sheriff in Columbia County, so I got transferred again. The boss asked me if I wanted to go to Pocahontas or Mena. I said, "Lord, have mercy. Mena, I guess. I don't think you can even drive from Pocahontas down to Little Rock" [laughs]. On July 3, 1961, I went to Mena. It was so hot. I stayed in a motel on Highway 71 for about two months. I thought I had gone to the end of the world. When nighttime came, there was no activity at all. There was very little traffic on Highway 71 in those days. I stayed there until August 1965. Then I got a chance to move to either Nashville or Malvern. My son had a lot of friends in Malvern, so I came back here in 1965 and

have been here ever since. I was in two wrecks in my career. One occurred in 1966. In that case, I had arrested an old man with a load of whiskey in Bismarck. I put the whiskey in my car and since neither the car nor the whiskey were the old man's—he was doing it for his son-in-law—I felt sorry for him and let him drive the car in to the jail so he wouldn't have to pay the wrecker bill. We were coming into town on Highway 84 and I stopped at a stop sign. The old man behind me didn't stop. I saw he was going to hit me, so I held my foot on the brake as hard as I could. His front bumper came all the way up to the turtle hull in my police car. It gave me a pretty good jolt. I had my seat belt on, but it didn't have a shoulder harness. I had a pretty bad headache after that. That night I had an engagement at Glen Rose School to give a talk on safety. When I got home, I fell out and went to the doctor the next day. He X-rayed me and I had broken three of the spurs that hold the muscle onto your spine. He put me to bed and gave me a collar, but I wasn't about to wear that because it was too hot. I was off for nineteen weeks. When I went back to work, they sent a young trooper from Cabot down here to drive me. That was in April 1967. I don't remember if the State Police went in and took over the penitentiary before or after I had that wreck, but we went in and stayed about three or four days. I was one of the first group of fourteen guys that went to Tucker [Prison]. We got a pickup [truck] bed load of home-made weapons from those prisoners.

ML: How would they make weapons like that in prison?

JB: There was a machine shop there. They used a lot of implements on their farm, which required a machine shop to maintain them. Two of the trustees had keys to

the gun locker. It was a mess. I didn't change clothes for three days and nights. I did get a shave. The man who did it was there for first-degree murder. He did a good job [laughs]. We took over the towers and changed the locks. We searched them and got all of those weapons.

ML: Did they use those weapons on themselves at all?

JB: We had gotten word that they were going to break out. One of them squealed that they were ready to break out, and we got there in time to stop it. They were [also] having trouble at Cummins—which was the big prison—too. We went down there after we left Tucker. The prisoners were in a cellblock and were refusing to come out and were causing trouble. We sent two trustees in there to bring out the ring leader. A big fight started, and they would have killed those trustees, [so] we threw some tear gas in there and went in after those trustees. We got a dose of the tear gas, too, but we got the trustees out. Then we turned on the big fans to pull the tear gas out and brought [the prisoners] out one at a time. Not all of them were dangerous. Some of them were very docile. You always see memorable things during incidents like this. An old black man came out and he had his mattress over his shoulder with all of his belongings. All of the sudden a little mouse jumped out fro his bedroll, and he tried to catch him but couldn't. Tears just started rolling down this man's face because that was his pet. We finally got that settled down, went back home, and got two days off.

ML: How long were you at Cummins?

JB: Two days.

ML: Who were the people that went to Tucker?

JB: There were fourteen of us, initially. [Referring to a memorandum] All in all, the following troopers went down there: Lieutenant Gene Donham, Lieutenant Floyd Weaver, Sergeant Otto Pace, Sergeant F. C. Scroggin, Troopers Jim Ross, A. H. Atkinson, James Beach, Billy Skipper, Henry Tong, Harry Smith, Darryl Rose, Paul Halley, Owen Philpott, Jim Bray, Hank Burgen, Sherman Jones, W. R. Jones, Bill Davidson, Barney Phillips, Earl Thomas, Jim Thomas, and Herschel Yates.

ML: Where did you sleep while you were at Tucker?

JB: What little bit of rest we got was in our cars. At Cummins we had a house where we could rest, but not at Tucker.

ML: I have had people talk about the number of escapes that occurred after free-world guards took over the prison. [Editor's note: for many years trustees—putatively non-violent inmates—literally ran the prisons at Tucker and Cummins.] Did you go on any of the manhunts?

JB: The only manhunt I was on was in north Arkansas—the Joe Hildebrand manhunt. The only thing I remember about that was the people up there wouldn't help you out because he was one of their own. It was weird. Then again, I was up there once on a bank robbery at Mountain View when Ken Hendricks was shot. That time the people up there brought us so much food that we couldn't eat it all.

ML: Shortly after the penitentiary deal was the crackdown on gambling in Hot Springs. Were you in on any of that?

JB: Yes. I went on several raids. I worked the raid on Jud's, which was down on Lake Catherine. It was a big restaurant with slot machines. They didn't have a

gambling room, just the slot machines. We went to one at Belvedere's, which was a country club. We had about ten or twelve different groups with three or four men in each doing those raids. We tried to raid them close to the same time.

ML: Did those raids have an effect on the gambling?

JB: Yes. For a little while, you couldn't find a place to gamble. I am sure a few of those places went back to it in the back rooms, but it stopped the openness of it. It was wide open before. They didn't try to hide it. They would have slot machines sitting up on the bar. I am sure that some of the officials got payoffs from those, but, to my knowledge, the State Police didn't.

ML: In 1961 or 1962 the State Police was having a severe budget problem.

JB: Oh, yes. I was stationed in Mena and the legislature hadn't appropriated the State Police any money. Our orders were to drive to the city limits and park our cars and sit there. The only traffic violation we would move for was a DWI. I lived about three blocks from the city limits, and in a few weeks I couldn't put seven miles on my car. That lasted about three weeks. In 1963 while I was in Mena we took riot training. We had to go to Camden, which is a long way from Mena, the first two times. The total training lasted thirteen weeks. After the two trips to Camden, we went to our district headquarters in Hope once a week for the next eleven weeks. It just so happened that they gave this training every Tuesday. Tuesday was my one day a week I had off, if I could stay away from the telephone. My post sergeant wouldn't change my day off, so I worked thirteen weeks without a day off. I never got it back, either. That is one thing I will always remember.

ML: How in-depth was the riot training?

JB: It was pretty in-depth. I still have my stick and helmet. We were taught how to break a man's arm or leg with the stick or hit him across the back of the neck to knock him out.

ML: Who were the trainers?

JB: The original trainers were two troopers from Alabama.

ML: Did they tell you why they chose Alabama?

JB: Just because they were the best at doing it—I guess because of the integration problems they had down there. That would be my guess. I never had to fistfight anybody after this training. I very seldom got out of the car with a stick or a “slapper.” I was afraid to hit anyone with the “slapper” because you could kill them. I just didn't carry it in my pocket.

ML: Can you tell me about your training school?

JB: R. E. Brown was in charge of the school, and he was hell on wheels. We had it out at Camp Robinson during the winter, and it was so cold. We slept in those little huts with canvas sides and a coal burning stove. Each one held four men.

ML: What time would you start, and when would you get off?

JB: They would wake you up at 5:30 a.m. and your last class would be over at 9:00 p.m.

ML: Did they send you to any of the racial problems in east Arkansas?

JB: I didn't go to Memphis when [Dr. Martin Luther] King [Jr.] was killed [on April 4, 1968]. I was sent to Pine Bluff, though. I don't remember a whole lot about that. The blacks had taken over the Holiday Inn. We had the National Guard

with us, and they issued the Guard rifles, but no shells. I happened to have some shells in my trunk, so the Guardsman who was riding with me had bullets. I couldn't believe they didn't issue them shells. Of course, we didn't have too many shootings. The only shooting that was done was by [Lieutenant] Floyd Weaver. He had an AK-47 that almost cut the wall of the Holiday Inn down. That made the blacks get down on the floor and crawl out of the building. While I was at Magnolia, Trooper Ditmars got killed. They say his wife killed him, and she went to the penitentiary. I have always said that I don't think she killed him. She was messing around with one of the gambling kingpins that lived in Wake Village, a small community outside Texarkana on the Texas side. I think they are the ones that killed him. They shot him with his own service revolver.

ML: Do you remember what year that happened?

JB: I think 1961, but I am not sure. Pod Porterfield was the main investigator on that case.

ML: There have been a lot of changes in the State Police.

JB: You get into trouble now over a little thing or nothing that you wouldn't have years ago. I still remember the first hippies I ran into. It was on Highway 67 and they were in an old Volkswagen bus with all the signs on it. That was a mess. They were smoking pot, and I didn't know what pot was because we didn't have any of that. We used to have trouble with Mexicans coming up through here on Highway 67 and breaking the law. They would ride in the back of a truck with canvas sides. They would get out speaking Spanish and claiming they couldn't understand you until you started talking about taking them to jail. Then all of the

sudden they would understand English. They were passing through looking for work as laborers.

ML: Did you spend all of your time in highway patrol?

JB: Yes, except for my last three years. After Floyd Weaver died in Little Rock, I was put in charge of the drivers' license section. I would drive up there six days a week from Malvern. I left about 5:30 in the morning and wouldn't get back until 7:00 p.m. Also, I started giving tests at Malvern, Benton and Sheridan. One of the scariest tests I ever gave was at Magnolia. This was the first year that everyone had to take a test when they renewed their license. Before this, they just brought their old license in and got a new one without taking a test. The drivers' examiner had them running out of his ears, so I was told to go help him by giving the driving part of the test. In Magnolia, the courthouse sits on the square and the highway goes around it. U.S. [Highway] 82 came in on the east, ran around the south side, and left town to the west. There were yield signs around the square to allow traffic on U.S. 82 to pass. I was giving a driving test to this black woman and I had run her through some signs to make sure she recognized them and had her parallel park. I watched her with her signals—just the normal stuff you do when you give a test. I had noticed that before we came up to a yield sign, she hollered. I asked her what was the matter and she said, “Nothing is wrong, Mr. Big Hat.” Most of the blacks in those days called [us] “Mr. Big Hat.” We came up to another yield sign and there was an eighteen-wheeler carrying a load of something—I don't remember what—coming down U.S. 82. He had the right of way, but she just hollered and didn't stop. I was sitting on the side facing this

eighteen-wheeler and he locked up his brakes and got it stopped inches from my door. I told her to pull on around and stop. I asked her what in the world she was doing, and why was she hollering like that. She said, "Mr. Big Hat, that sign says, 'Yell' and I hollered as loud as I could!" [Laughs] She didn't pass. Another time I had a nun that had just come over here from France. I was giving her test in Little Rock and we had just come down off the hill at State Police Headquarters and turned onto Roosevelt Road. She overcorrected and ran up on a guide wire and turned the car upside down on Roosevelt Road. It was a rough job and I was glad to get out of that. When I retired, I called Captain Donham, who was the captain in Hot Springs then, on my last day about lunchtime and told him, "I can tell one thing sure and two things certain: I am not riding with another person today." He asked me what I was going to do with the people that came after lunch, and I told him that was tough because I [was] done. I [was] alive and I [was] not getting into another car. So he came over and rode with them that afternoon [laughs].

ML: Are there any officers in the State Police that you had a lot of fond memories of or respected a great deal?

JB: I enjoyed the old inspector, Earl Scroggins. He was one of the original thirteen rangers. He was strict, but I respected him because he was honest and fair. One incident that comes to mind occurred when they sent that trooper down to work with me after I was hurt. We were working Highway 270 and a car had gotten its back end stuck in a ditch. The front end was sticking out in the highway. We got [the driver] out of the car and he was as drunk as a skunk. We were bringing him into town and right as we got near the viaduct he told us he needed to use the

bathroom. We weren't going to let him go in the car, so we pulled off the highway. He tried to run, but I had a hold of him and hauled him back to the car. In those days, we used the jail at City Hall instead of the sheriff's office because the county jail was up three flights of narrow stairs and there was never anyone there to watch it. Coming out of the driveway in the back of City Hall, the fire department was on the right side and they had a drink stand that the fire department operated. As we were bringing him in, he reached down and got one of the empty drink bottles and hit it on the concrete steps and broke the bottom of it. He came at me, and I backed off. Lendall Holcomb went around and came in behind him. To try and scare him, a city policeman named Tanner fired his gun. The bullet ricocheted off the concrete and hit me in the chest. It just barely hit me. It cut through my clothes and hit my skin, but just bruised me for a few days. That was pretty scary. We finally had to get rough with him and took him to the hospital. He was so rough and mean that the doctor couldn't even sew up the cut on his head. We had to wait and take him back to the hospital the next day when he sobered up. Another thing that happened was when I got a drunk out on Highway 67 by Three Bridges—between here and Glen Rose. It was on a Saturday afternoon. He was a great big redheaded fellow. We got into a tussle and he tore the chain on my whistle and ripped my shirt. I got him into the city. He badmouthed me the whole way in, calling me every name he could think of. I took him up to the jail and they had these big iron-bar doors for each cell with a big key to lock it. When I pushed the door to he said, "You are still a no good, goddamn son of a bitch." I had all I could take, and I opened the door and hit him in the chest and

knocked him down and all he could say was, “Oh, my God, I thought that damn door was locked.” You couldn’t do that now, but I had listened to that for forty-five minutes and it was hot. He had ruined a shirt that cost \$35 and I wasn’t making much money back then. We only got \$180 a year for clothing expense. That was primarily just to keep the uniforms clean. Our uniforms were wool back then, while nowadays they even wear short sleeved shirts. Also, we didn’t have air-conditioning in our cars. The first one I got with air-conditioning was in 1966. I had one at Mena with air in it, but the wrecker man put it in there. He felt sorry for me, and put it in at no charge. It wasn’t because he was going to get all the business, because he was the only wrecker there. That saved me a lot of sweat.

ML: You mentioned how the first time you went to Malvern the judges would take up tickets and do other things. Did you see that change in your time there?

JB: Yes. It changed. I very seldom lost a case.

ML: Are there any traffic accidents that stick out in your mind as particularly memorable?

JB: Oh, yes. There was one where this woman was stuck up between the door and tree twelve feet off the ground when she ran off the side of the mountain at Mena. I worked one here in Malvern—the man that was the chef at the Sands Restaurant was crossing the train tracks at Highway 270 and he ran into a train while he was going fifty-five or seventy [miles per hour]. That was a pretty nasty accident. One that really bothered me was while I was working at Mena—I got a call to go out into the country to an accident. I went out there, and this pickup truck was on top of a baby. The front wheels were right on top of his head. This thirteen or

fourteen year old girl was babysitting for two different families while they went to a dance. The baby was acting cross, so she got in the pickup truck to drive him around and calm him down. She didn't have a license. She lost control and flipped it. It threw all of them out since they weren't wearing seatbelts. Two other men and I lifted the truck up off that baby. I don't think we would have had the strength ordinarily to do this. It didn't bother me until I went home that night.

ML: How many wrecks would you typically work in a week?

JB: Probably about fifteen.

ML: Looking through your scrapbook, there is a newspaper article about you moving to Malvern with your family. I don't think newspapers run these types of stories anymore, and it kind of shows to me that the State Police was more a part of the community back then.

JB: Oh, yes. When I was stationed [at Malvern] the first time in the 1950s, I would park my car at the sheriff's office and go inside to type my reports on their typewriter. It was easier to go in there and listen to the radio while you did your accident reports. You never locked your car back then, and it wasn't unusual around Christmas time to come outside and find a ham or turkey or even a couple of bottles of whiskey in your car.

ML: Was there a director that you thought highly of?

JB: I liked Herman Lindsey. When I was at Magnolia, I arrested Forrest Rozell. He was head of the Arkansas Education Department. He was going to Waldo to do the commencement exercises. I paced him at eighty-two miles per hour. Back then, the speed limit was sixty. I stopped him and he explained who he was. That

didn't make any difference to me. I treated him with respect just like everyone else I stopped. He said he was in a hurry to get to the commencement exercises. I told him that he should have left a few minutes earlier and went ahead and wrote him a ticket and had him sign it so I wouldn't have to take him in.

ML: How would your post sergeant and troop commander gauge your activity?

JB: You had an activity report you had to send in every week. It listed how many accidents you worked, how many arrests you made, and how much time you spent in court. They called them OVCs, or officer violator contacts. An OVC could be anything, like stopping somebody for a headlight or taillight [infraction], writing a warning ticket, or even assisting a motorist. That is what they gauged your work by. One time I had a sergeant that came over here from Pine Bluff. I stopped a car for a headlight infraction or something like that. When I got out of my car, I had my warning book and my summons book. I came back to the car and he asked my why I took both books. I told him I didn't know which one I was going to need. He said, "You mean that when you got out of the car you didn't know if you were going to write him a warning or arrest him?" I told him that I didn't. He said, "You should have." I told him that might be the way he policed, but it wasn't my way. There could have been a lot of circumstances that might have changed my mind when I got up there.

ML: Is there anything else that comes to mind that we haven't talked about today?

JB: I have to say one thing. You might have heard about troopers getting divorces. If you have heard how we used to have to work, then you understand why. You didn't have too much of a family life. When I was stationed here, you got all of

the callouts. I have changed clothes as many as three times in a single night. I would go back to bed and get called out again. You always worked your regular shift from 2:00 to 12:00. On Saturday it was typical to not get off until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. Then you had court on the weekday mornings that you had to go to. Nowadays, if troopers go to court, they get comp time and they only work five days a week. It is a lot different. A woman used to have to put up with a lot. My rule was to always get up and have breakfast with my family, regardless of what time I got in the night before. In 1976 a group of about twenty men, some of them retired, formed the Arkansas State Police Association. I was elected secretary and treasurer when it was created, and I still hold that position today.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]

[JD]