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Arkansas State Police Project

Interview with

Dean Friend
Hot Springs, Arkansas
12 February 2004

Interviewer: Michael Lindsey

Michael Lindsey: What was your motivation to join the state police?

Dean Friend: I was in the [U.S.] Navy for eight years, and for part of that time I was in the military police. It kind of got into my blood, I guess. Instead of staying in and retiring with the navy, which I should have done, I got out and joined the department here [at Hot Springs]. I was a motorcycle officer here. Back then this town was very corrupt. That is common knowledge. I was raised on a farm about twenty miles from here. I had a friend named Ray Davis, who is retired from the state police as well, and we rode motorcycles in the department together. Neither one of us was involved in anything because we rode during [the] daytime, escorting parades and working the races and things like that. We sent in our applications to the state police and I was able to start on August 15, 1963. My first assignment was in Conway. I don't remember the first car that I had, but it seemed like it was a 1960 Ford. It didn't have air-conditioning or a

“Grand Ole Opry’ radio in it. It had the old 37.10 [megahertz] radio in it. It had a dyna-motor in it, and when you keyed the mic[rophone], the dynamo would start to spin, making this whirring sound. Then you could start talking. It only had two hands on it. I was in Conway for a couple of years and experienced some pretty serious accidents while I was up there. During that time, they were putting in the missile silos. It was part of our duty to escort the missiles in. The people that were building those silos were making pretty good money. Of course, Conway is in a dry county—Faulkner—and they would go to Little Rock and get drunk on Friday nights and then come back. I remember one year from the middle of December until the middle of January I worked thirteen fatalities. It wasn’t just single [car fatalities], it was doubles and triples down on the bridges south of Conway. One time I was sitting on the side of the road and a motorist stopped to tell me a gasoline tanker had hit a bridge abutment on Highway 67 South. I went down there and the truck was on fire. The steering section had the guy pinned in. He was conscious and was screaming and begging me to kill him. I had to stand there and watch him burn to death because I couldn’t get him out. I can still see it today. Between Faulkner and Pulaski County, there is this one particular hill on Highway 65 that every time it started raining or misting there were wrecks. The hill made a turn at the top and people would take it too fast and drive off of it. Back then, the sheriff in Conway was Joe Castleberry, and I despised him. He caused me a lot of trouble. It wasn’t just me, but a lot of people.

Somebody in his office kept calling my wife and telling her I was messing around with women and that he had just seen me following a woman out to a motel. This was causing me some problems at home. He [Castleberry] was trying to get rid of the troopers because he didn't like the post sergeant, Gene White. I had a friend, Roy Gunner, who worked at the armory, and one day I went and picked him up to start my shift. I told my wife that if someone called her and told her something like that, she needed to call the civil defense radio operator, Bill Newbury, and tell him to have me 10-19 [return to station] immediately. I hadn't gotten very far when Bill called me to 10-19 my residence immediately. I turned around and was home in two or three minutes. My wife told me that a guy had called and said he had seen me go into a motel room in Plumerville with his wife and that he was going to kill me. Plumerville didn't even have a motel at that time. I asked her if she believed me now, and she said she did. Our troop headquarters was in Clarksville back then. Slick Wilson was the commander, and we had a troop meeting in the next day or two. I went in and told him the situation. I told him that if this was all the state police was going to be having me do that I would be going back to Hot Springs because I didn't want my family busted up. He said he was going to Little Rock the next day and that he would talk to Mack Thompson and let me know something. He called me and had me meet with Mack. Mack told me that he knew of the situation and that he had two places to send me, West Memphis or Lewisville. I didn't even know where Lewisville was,

but it turns out it was thirty miles south of Hope. I had already heard about West Memphis, and I didn't want to go over there, so I transferred to south Arkansas. A lot of things have changed for the better since then. They established a public information division and since I had always been an entertainer and played music, I was able to get into that. At one time, I went from Lafayette County and Sevier County all the way across the state to Desha County doing public relations. I would give presentations and show safety films to civic organizations and other various groups. Consequently, these efforts helped increase public support of the state police. We started getting raises and things got better. Also, they started letting officers go to college. It really improved since I went to work. When I went to work, dope wasn't prevalent. About the only thing we had to worry about at Lewisville was moonshine and whiskey. The way I looked at it was that it was my job to catch you and your job to get away and I always made sure to treat people like I wanted to be treated. I remember one time we were watching a still. The ABC [Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control?] and ATF [Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms] agents were there and we took turns watching the still and waiting for the moon shiners to come back. The ABC agent lived in Magnolia and smoked a pipe. It was his shift, and he ran out of tobacco. There was a little store in Lewisville that stayed open all day, and he was only about ten or fifteen miles away. So he took off and went up there [at] about 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. When he got back [to] the whiskey [still], these

guys had already run off, and the condenser from the still were gone. The condenser on a whiskey still was the most important part. The guy never did live that down. [Laughs] I remember on July 5, 1964, the sheriff came by and told me that Roosevelt Johnson, a black male, was shooting up Little Babe's place. That was what everyone called her, Little Babe, and she owned this small bar. I went down there and talked with Little Babe, and she told me Roosevelt had been in there shooting holes in the ceiling and had run across the highway to Bonnie Ray's place. Bonnie Ray was a man, but his name was Bonnie Ray. The sheriff went around one side of the building and I went in the front door. Roosevelt was in the kitchen there and they had a little cubbyhole where they passed out hamburgers and things. I told him, "Roosevelt, throw that gun out now or you are going to cause me a lot of trouble." A lot of the blacks down there called me Mr. Dean. He said, "Mr. Dean, don't you come in here." I had a fully-automatic M-2 carbine, and I told him, "Roosevelt, if I have to kill you, you are going to cause me a lot of trouble because I am going to have to write a lot of letters and go through a lot of stuff, so throw your gun out and come out here." He ran out the back door. There was a pulpwood truck that was seventy-five or a hundred feet out back. When he ran out, I followed him and fired a few rounds over his head. By this time, he was on the other side of that pulpwood truck, and when I fired he started firing back with that .45 [caliber] automatic. He hit about two inches from my shoulder. I was lying prone at that time. When he did that I kicked the

carbine up to full automatic. All I could see were his knees and feet, and I hit him five times—three times in one leg and two times in the other leg. The sheriff was a former FBI agent—his name was Sonny Lester—and he had shot at Roosevelt's head during all of this. Roosevelt's head was behind the truck's glass, and if Roosevelt hadn't ducked at just the right second, the sheriff would have shot him right in the head. Anyway, after I shot him, Roosevelt crawled into some tall weeds behind the truck. I went in after him and was scared to death. I came up on him and he had that .45 aimed at me. I was so scared I didn't know where I was at and I didn't notice it at the time, but the breech on an Army .45 locks back when it is out of ammunition. The breech was open and he was out of ammunition. I didn't shoot him, thank goodness. I arrested him and he was raising all kinds of hell. I took him to the hospital and he really started raising hell. The doctor had to come over and knock him out. I called Sergeant Tom Smalley, and he told me I made one mistake and it was that Roosevelt would be looking at me from the witness stand in a few months. I went to court and the court-appointed attorney told me that he could get Roosevelt out of jail time because I didn't have a warrant when I went in there [Bonnie Ray's]. He said that it was a misdemeanor to start with, and that it didn't happen in my presence so I should have gotten a warrant first. That is what happened. They gave him a five-year suspended sentence. That wasn't the end of the story with Roosevelt. Kenneth Hendricks was stationed in Marshal and had gotten shot in the arm during a bank robbery.

Kenneth and I were close friends and he had gone through training school together. We were up there on a manhunt for three or four days looking for these guys before we finally found them. In fact, one of these guys was hitchhiking and got into the car with an FBI agent that was looking for him. Anyway, when we caught all these guys, I got back home about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and my wife was climbing the walls. Roosevelt had called her and said, "Mrs. Friend, I just want you to know that I am going to kill you and the kids." I had a sawed-off shotgun—it was legal with an eighteen-inch barrel. I loaded it with buckshot and about midnight I found Roosevelt with a bunch of his friends in a lake area in the south part of the county. Roosevelt is probably six feet three inches or four [inches] and when I got out of the car I laid the barrel under his nose and told him, "Roosevelt, you need to make peace with your lord because I am going to blow your head off." Roosevelt started getting serious. I finally let him go and told him never to call my wife again. I never had any more problems with Roosevelt. In fact, I was recently talking with the sheriff down there about Roosevelt, and he told me that Roosevelt had made a real good citizen. Another thing about that situation was that when we were reconstructing the scene, some of my carbine rounds went through a shack behind the truck. Two or three went through the outside wall, through the bed, through another wall and into a bathroom where they busted the water tank on a commode. Those .30 caliber carbines had a lot of knock-down power.

ML: How long were you in the Hope District?

DF: Fourteen or fifteen years.

ML: Where did you go after that?

DF: Here [Hot Springs].

ML: What made you want to come back to Hot Springs?

DF: The trooper in the other county ran for sheriff and got beat and I got tired of handling all of his work and my work. Plus, I always wanted to come back to Hot Springs. I had wanted to come back years before, but one of the officers up there told me that I would never be able to come back to Hot Springs as long as he had anything to do with it. I think that he may have thought that since I came off the police force at Hot Springs that I might interfere in the things they were doing with raids on gambling. I did have some broken service in the state police. I had made sergeant and then quit and got into the insurance business. I was really successful at it and sold a lot of policies, but hated it. I did a lot of business in the area down in south Arkansas and I found myself making excuses for not going down there and going fishing instead. So I got back into the state police. I think that they are hiring them too young these days. Twenty-two is too young to handle the responsibilities that they place on them. Of course, the training is a lot better now. When I was a sergeant I was an instructor at the training school on several different things. In fact, I was working a school in 1968 when Martin Luther King [Jr.] was killed in Memphis. They sent several of us over there and I rode with a Tennessee State Trooper for three or four days. I was deputized as a highway patrol officer.

ML: Did you stay outside of the city limits?

DF: We went wherever we wanted to go. There were a lot of sad situations and a lot of fun [ones] too. You develop habits in police work and you develop hunches. It pays to follow hunches. Back then we worked ten hours a day, six days a week. While I was in Lafayette County the trooper in Columbia County would work my accidents when I had off and vice versa. Well, I went down to Columbia County to work an accident that was just a few feet away from the Louisiana state line. After I finished I was heading north and met this late model Oldsmobile and I can't tell you why, but I turned around. When I stopped this car there was a black male driving and it just didn't look right. I asked him for his driver's license and he told me it was in his suitcase in the trunk. He opened up the trunk and when he opened the suitcase he palmed a screwdriver up his sleeve—this happened during the winter. I saw him do this and I pulled my .357 Magnum and told him that I was going to leave him lying on the highway unless he dropped that screwdriver. I got him handcuffed and went through his suitcase and found three or four bill-folds with different drivers' licenses and credit cards. I took him to jail and called CID. Travis Ward was the CID agent then, and it turned out that this guy had come from California and through Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas robbing people at roadside parks. The car was stolen, too. So it really pays to follow your hunches. There are a lot of ways to tell if a car is stolen. You can ask them what kind of tires are on their car or how many miles are on it. Whether they know the answers or not can give you an idea if it might be stolen.

ML: Did they send you over to any of the penitentiary problems?

DF: I was at the penitentiary a lot. The problems that the penitentiary had at Pine Bluff occurred after they took the strap away. There were state troopers there regularly. One time they had a sit-down strike in the mess hall. They linked their arms together and refused to move. The mess hall was all stainless steel and concrete. Major Melvin Delong was in charge of a detail of about twenty-five of us. [Winthrop] Rockefeller was the governor. We went in there and he had orders to disburse them. We had birdshot in our shotguns. Delong told them who we were and who had sent us and that we were ordered to disburse them. He said, "I am going to bring my men to attention, order them to load, aim, and then fire." We had pump shotguns at that time. The convicts just sat there and giggled. Delong brought us to attention and said, "Squad, load." We shucked those shotguns and it was a chilling sound. He said, "Squad, aim." We came down on them. He said, "Gentlemen, I am counting to three and when I get to three I am giving my men orders to fire." He said, "One." They started to squirm. He said, "Two," and they hauled ass out the door. That was the only time it went to that extreme, but we were over there a lot. I don't believe in corporal punishment in most cases, but I do know that when they took the strap away we started having problems. I had a lot of trouble in Lewisville with bootlegging. It wasn't just moonshine; [it] was bottled and bonded whiskey and beer. Around the time that people began to realize that police officers needed a warrant to search their vehicle, I stopped this bootlegger that I had arrested several times in the past. Lafayette County is a dry county, and across the bridge in Miller County there are liquor stores. I was sitting there one day and I saw this guy go over and come back, so I stopped him.

I asked him if I could look in his trunk. He asked me, "Do you have a warrant?" I said, "No, I don't have a warrant," and he said, "You ain't looking in my trunk." I asked for his driver's license and then asked for his proof of registration. He didn't have it, and I told him that since we were going by the law I had to arrest him. The law says that if you cannot produce your vehicle registration I have to arrest you. I told him to follow me to the sheriff's station. He said, "Mr. Dean, you know this is my car." I said, "Really, I don't know that because you can't show me proof." We got out behind the sheriff's office and he said, "Oh, Hell, just go ahead and look. You know I have got too much [liquor] in there."

[Laughs]

ML: Do you remember what the limit was for personal consumption?

DF: It was two cases not to exceed three gallons or a gallon of whiskey or a gallon of wine. Wine is considered the same as whiskey. If you live in Texarkana [which is in a wet county] and you are in Hot Springs [which is in a wet county] you can carry as much as you want traveling between the two. If you live in Hope [which is in a dry county] it is different. A city marshal down there arrested some people for over-possession. Not long before the case went to court, the marshal had a get-together and furnished the beer. The case went to court and the defense attorney asked him to produce the beer. The marshal went and got some beer, but it was the wrong kind. He had served the confiscated beer at his party. There was a city marshal at Glenwood, and he was the typical city marshal back then. He stopped this car one night and looked at the driver's license and said, "It says here that you are supposed to be wearing glasses." The driver said, "Oh, I have con-

tacts.” The marshal said, “It doesn’t make a damn [bit of difference] who you know; you are still supposed to be wearing glasses.” [Laughs] Another story was that he stopped a car one night and asked them where they were from and they said, “Chicago.” He said, “Don’t you start lying to me; you have got [an] Illinois license on your car.” [Laughs] Thank God things have changed since then.

ML: Are there any other officers or commanders that you have a lot of respect for?

DF: I have the absolute greatest respect for some of my commanders. When I was in the Hope District the commander was Milton “Scrub” Mosier. He was one of the absolute greatest people. My favorite is Gene Donham. He was the commander here when they built the troop headquarters here. If you were right, he would go all the way. If you were wrong, he would have your ass. He was a great guy. I was one of the first five sergeants transferred into the Motor Vehicle Inspection section. We patterned it after programs in five states. We went to St. Louis and had a meeting with representatives from these five states and then we patterned our law after them. It went into effect on January 1, 1968. We had a MVI [Motor Vehicle Inspection] division and they let the sergeants pick the men that they wanted. We would dummy up cars and go to inspection stations and see what kind of inspections we would get. I was working with a really good friend of mine, Bill Mullenax, south of Hamburg in a town called Portland. We had received some complaints on an inspection station down there. As we pulled in, a car was being pulled out, and it was really ragged. I had them put it up on the rack and the tie-rods were bound with hay wire and it still had a legal inspection sticker on it.

ML: Did that occur more at the start and then taper off?

DF: No, it stayed that way throughout. When we were running it, we could run these dummy cars through. We had a director at that time named Ralph Scott, and I liked and respected him. He called all of the supervisors in and told us that he was thinking about putting the MVI division into the highway patrol division. My and my big mouth told him that it wouldn't work because the highway patrol commanders were more interested in keeping the accidents down than watching these inspection stations. He said, "By God, I am going to do it anyway," and [he] did and then it started going downhill. The problem is that if you had a broken windshield that wouldn't pass a true inspection at one station, you could just go down the street and get a sticker. If the legislature had charged fifteen or twenty bucks for an inspection, they would have gotten a good inspection. It takes fifteen or twenty minutes to give the type of inspection required by law, but the mechanics only make \$3 on it. The stickers cost them fifty cents. You can't take a mechanic making \$30 or \$40 an hour and pay him \$3 for twenty minutes of work. It just never worked and I am glad they did away with it. We can still inspect your car on the highway, though. I think Memphis has a pretty good deal. They have a city inspection over there, and the city operates the inspection stations.

ML: During your career you saw a lot of technology changes. Is there anything that sticks out as being particularly effective?

DF: Our radio communications. We had a \$25 million system put in that you can hardly talk across town with. You were supposed to be able to talk car-to-car

across the state, but it never worked. Or course, it was a lot better than it was before. When I worked in south Arkansas, the station closed at 2:00 on weekends. I had a Louisiana receiver in my car, and I could hear the Louisiana State Troopers talking, but I couldn't communicate with them. At places in the county I could talk with the sheriff's office in Texarkana and in other parts I could talk with the office in Magnolia when they were open. Most of the time, I was completely by myself. You would be dealing with drunks and log haulers and you would just have to bluff your way through. Radio communications are so much better now.

ML: Did you get sent into the Cuban refugee crisis [reference to the riot at Fort Chaffee] in 1980?

DF: No. We had some problems with the Vietnamese refugees. We went up there and got two or three that spoke English and gave them drivers' tests so they could teach the rest of them. The last ten years I gave drivers' tests here.

ML: I have had people tell me that is the most dangerous job in the state police.

DF: It is really not all that great. I have some experiences about that.

ML: What is the first one that comes to mind?

DF: I was a supervisor in driver's license and motor vehicle safety in south Arkansas, and I wasn't actually giving tests at the time. One of the troopers was giving drivers' tests in Ashdown. He had this black lady who took the test several times before she ended up passing. You had to wait thirty days before you took the road test. Lo and behold, the trooper was gone, so I had to go and give his testing for him. I looked out there and saw her. After everyone finished their written exams, I went out to give the road tests. There is a drugstore across the street from

the courthouse in Ashdown. She had parked facing the courthouse. We got into the car and she started it up, put it in reverse, and proceeded to slam her foot down on the accelerator. Here we went across the street and she broadsided a brand new Buick Roadmaster that the druggist had bought a few weeks [before]. She bent the holy Hell out of that car. She looked at me and said, "Does this mean I don't get my driver's license today?" I said, "Lady, as long as I am in the state police and have anything to do with it, I will make sure you never get your driver's license." I got into [a] car with a lady one time and, for some reason, she just floor-boarded it and drove off the side of the road and into a ditch. I got hurt one day at headquarters riding with a young girl. The brakes on her car were so touchy. We were going down a hill and she hit her brakes and I went over my head and wedged between the windshield and the dash[board]. I have had problems ever since with my back and neck. I may have had whiplash later on. It takes two or three days to develop whiplash. One very good improvement is the installation of camcorders. We are subjected to whatever type of criticism you want to hand us out on the highway. If someone complains, it is my word against yours and I might get suspended over it. I have never been one to stop someone for going just a few miles over the speed limit. Little things like changing your tires can cause your speedometer to be off by up to five miles per hour. There were times when I let people go that had been drinking, or taken them home when I should have arrested them. I remember one time there was a five-mile stretch of highway south of the county that went to an oil well. There were no houses on the highway. At the time, the kids were drag racing on the main highways. They

had their meeting place in town, and I pulled in there one night and made them a proposition. Keep in mind that the motor vehicle inspection law had just come into effect at that time. I told them that I knew they were dragging and that I knew I couldn't catch them. I told them that if they would do their drag racing on this deserted road, I wouldn't care if they ran until daylight. If they don't have an accident, then I won't be down there. That was my promise to them, but I expected them to strictly adhere to the speed limits elsewhere, to have their licenses signed, and to obey every part of the inspection law. From that day forward, I didn't have a problem with them dragging on the highway.

ML: That answers all of the questions that I have. Is there anything that comes to mind that I need to consider?

DF: There are lots of stories. We had a riot in Pine Bluff in 1968. They brought us in from all around the state and they kept us outside the city limits until they gave us a signal to go into town. When they gave the signal, we all went in with blue lights and sirens. That was a strong psychological effect. The chief of police down there had given his men orders not to arrest anyone if they were vandalizing or looting. We went in and cleared it up really quickly. Mike Fletcher, who is the commander of the Hot Springs troop now, was a radio operator then. We had a communication van set up outside of town. Another trooper and I had gotten some cherry bombs from some kids. We told Mike that we had information that they [the rioters] might try to blow this van up. We told him to keep his eyes open. We snuck back there two or three hours later and threw those cherry bombs in there and Mike Fletcher came out of there in a panic. [Laughs] It was really

funny. I had a kid go to work down there named Bill Fuller. Bill didn't have a butt, and he was really tall. He just had a hole in his back with legs up to his armpits. When Bill went to work, Scrub Mosier took him to a uniform place in Little Rock to get his uniforms. Scrub came back laughing saying that the shop didn't have anything that would fit him except a necktie and a handkerchief. [Laughs]

[End of Interview]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]