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Arkansas State Police Project

Interview with

Paul Halley
10 December 2003

Interviewer: Michael Lindsey

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

Paul Halley: It was something that I had looked at from the time I was in Junior High School. At that time I lived in Ohio and I thought it would be good to join the Ohio Highway Patrol. As I continued on into High School and decided to go to college, that kind of filtered out. After I got out of the Air Force, I was stationed at the airbase in Jacksonville [and] the notion hit me again—to join the Arkansas State Police.

ML: You started in 1963. When did you first apply?

PH: In 1963.

ML: What was the hiring process in 1963?

PH: In 1963, the age limit to be a trooper was 25. I was 23 when I was discharged from the Air Force. They had an opening as a dispatcher. I was selected and I went to work around August 4, 1963. I was a dispatcher in Little Rock. Some time shortly after that the age limit was lowered to 23. Eventually it came down

to 21—it may have been at that time, but I am not sure. Anyway, it was low enough for me to apply for a trooper position. In August 1964 I was selected as a trooper and immediately went through trooper school. At that time it was held in Camp Robinson.

ML: Do you remember how long it was?

PH: Four weeks. From seven in the morning to eight at night.

ML: Was that constant activity?

PH: Yes, that was constant and everyday, including Saturdays and Sundays.

ML: Who was in charge of the troop school?

PH: Lieutenant “Snake” Griffin— I can’t remember the sergeant’s name.

ML: Was it kind of like a military boot camp?

PH: Yes, very much so. Of course, we were on a military reservation to begin with. I don’t know how long before this they adopted the military training style, but it is followed to this day.

ML: What sort of things did they focus on, other than marching and physical training?

PH: Pretty much what they do today, except it wasn’t as long. They hit the high places as best they could and turned us loose. Back then there were seventy-two that started that particular class. It was one of the bigger ones.

ML: Do you remember why it was such a big class? Did they get funding for that year?

PH: As I recall, the Legislature finally gave enough funding for them to go ahead and hire additional people. I can’t remember how many new hires were in that class though. A lot of them were troopers who had been working, but hadn’t gone through the academy. There were probably twenty or twenty-five new hires and

the rest were from those that had already been hired, but not been through the academy. Some had been working two years before they went through the school.

ML: Do you have any general memories on what the dropout rate was?

PH: I can only recall one that dropped out.

ML: Where was your first posting?

PH: We had four districts and I was assigned to District One, which was comprised of Pulaski, Lonoke, and Faulkner [Counties].

ML: How long were you there?

PH: Later they switched from Districts to Troops, but I was assigned to the Pulaski County area from 1964 to 1972. Then I transferred to Saline County. I stayed there for twenty-three years. In 1976, they opened a troop headquarters in Hot Springs and they put Saline County in that Troop.

ML: From 1964-1972, Little Rock changed quite a bit. Did you see any changes as far as crime and activity from your perspective?

PH: Back during the late 1960s and early 1970s was a period where the Vietnam War was in its heyday and there were a lot of protests dealing with that issue. Also, during that time the civil rights movement gained strength and there again there were a lot of protests. There was just one conflict after another during that time. The State Police was actively involved in the efforts to assist local agencies in dealing with these conflicts. Most of the marches and disturbances centered on Little Rock, Pine Bluff, West Memphis, Brinkley, Carlisle, and the Delta area. The Vietnam issue was not as widespread as the civil rights issue.

ML: The role of the State Police in these instances was to make sure things didn't get out of hand?

PH: Yes. We just wanted to keep the peace and tranquility.

ML: Do you remember any instances where things did get out of hand?

PH: Yes, one incident was in Forrest City and one was in Brinkley, Pine Bluff, and West Memphis. There were numerous outbreaks in Little Rock.

ML: Do you remember anything specific regarding those instances? I know that in Memphis, after Martin Luther King was assassinated, the city just blew up and the State Police sent over a number of troopers to help out. Did you get sent over for that?

PH: I got sent over there, but I did not get sent into Memphis. I stayed in West Memphis. During that time the state also experienced several uprisings in the state prisons, both Tucker and Cummins. We were spread very thin trying to keep the peace in Memphis, in other places, and the penitentiaries. Many of us went from one crisis to the next.

ML: Did the State Police have a tactical unit during that time that would respond to these situations and [if so], who was in charge?

PH: Yes there was one. Generally, the district commanders were in charge of details inside their command areas.

ML: Do you remember anything specific about going into the penitentiaries?

PH: There was one incident where we went to Cummins. They didn't have individual cellblocks like you see on TV shows. It was just a huge room and they would have a lot of beds. They were barracks. I don't remember what the inmates were

mad about, but it was more than the trustee guards could handle, so they sent us down there. When we got down there it was probably seven o'clock at night. They had to transfer a number of inmates from one barracks to another, but they refused to go. They took us in there in a big, long line. They lined us up back to back, with half facing one barracks and half facing the other barracks. One of the barracks was quiet; the other one was causing all of the problems. They were screaming and hollering and cat-calling. They were acting like idiots. We didn't take our pistols in; they asked us to lock them in the car. Instead, we took shot-guns, I guess because a pistol would be easier to take away than a shotgun. When we lined up back-to-back, the Captain in charge had a bullhorn and gave the order to lock and load. Simultaneously, that is what we did. Immediately, there was silence. The whole place became deathly still and you could have heard a pin drop. I guess they realized that once we did that we were not going to put up with any foolishness. Things quieted down after that. Another occasion, we had to go back because they started some fires and tried to burn the thing down. The guards had put a bunch of inmates in the gymnasium. They had a basketball court and ping-pong and other games in there. They had wooden risers for seats. There were a bunch of inmates on the risers. These inmates were supposed to be some of the worst and the source for most of the problems. They had them segregated from the rest of the population. There were six of us that were sent into the recreation room to watch them. It wasn't too bad; they were doing some name calling, but it wasn't anything new to us. I have arrested a bunch of drunks and got the same thing. I and some others were sitting on a ping-pong table facing

them. All a sudden one end of the table gave way and hit the floor, with us with it. The troopers that were there remained completely calm and just stood there. This was later referred to by the main man of this group of inmates that when the table fell and it didn't change the demeanor of the State Police that the troopers were in charge. It ended the problems and the inmates settled down.

ML: Whenever you moved from Little Rock to Saline County, was there a difference in how you spent your day?

PH: No, we did the same thing in Saline County that you did in Pulaski County. You still worked traffic and investigated accidents. One difference was that in Pulaski County we didn't have to augment the Sheriff's Office as much because they had enough personnel. When I got to Saline County, the Benton Police Department was small, the Sheriff's Office was small, and Bryant only had two town marshals when I moved here. In that regard, I found myself helping them a whole lot more than in Pulaski County. I responded to disturbance calls to provide backup, accidents calls on county or city roads. I spent a lot of time backing up the other law enforcement agencies. I carried a county radio in addition to my state radio. I ended up buying a scanner type radio myself so I could listen to a lot of bands without having to have three or four separate radios.

ML: From 1960 to 1995, did the type of activity you responded to change? Or has the general mix of calls stayed the same?

PH: I don't think the general mix changed that much. We patrolled the highways the same in the 1990s basically the same as we did in the 1960s. As far as highway patrol, it was the same. You stopped speeders, arrested DWIs [driving while in-

toxicated)], investigated accidents, and backed up other agencies. As the population increased, the number of calls increased.

ML: What made you decide to move over to CID?

PH: I had twenty-eight years on the highway and I got tired of listening to the drunks mouth off. I got tired of fighting them. I got tired of the carnage from the accidents. It was getting difficult to see as well at night. So all of this combined to lead me to CID. It was almost all daytime driving and a little less blood and carnage.

ML: Those are two completely separate entities within the State Police. Did the Highway Patrol tend to stick together and stay in their own world, while the CID stuck together and stayed in their own world?

PH: Basically yes. The Highway Patrol had their duties and the Criminal Investigation Division had their duties. Occasionally, the two paths would cross, but mostly they didn't. It operated as two separate entities.

ML: Are there any other events that you experienced that you feel should be noted?

PH: We have already alluded to the penitentiary problems and race riots. We had an incident in the basement of the Capitol building where a group of Vietnam protestors acquired what we later found out to be mustard gas and they used that in the basement. I was assigned to several tornado areas and numerous manhunts. I provided security for Governors' Conferences in the state. I remember one time when President Nixon came to the Texas-Arkansas football game and we provided security. From 1979 until I retired, I was assigned to every legislative session to provide security for the State Senate.

ML: Did you ever have problems during those sessions?

PH: Oh, yeah. On occasion, someone would want to inflict bodily harm on one of the senators.

ML: Was there any issue that the Senate addressed that caused the most protests?

PH: I remember that the session in 1983 was the worst, but I don't remember why. There were more people that came and caused problems.

ML: Were there any senators that stuck out as being particularly memorable?

PH: They didn't have term limits then and when a member was elected they pretty much stayed. There wasn't a big turnover. None of them stood above another.

ML: Was there any vehicle that stuck out in your mind as being particularly memorable?

PH: The Ford's lasted better than any of the others. The best was probably a 1978 Ford. It had fewer problems. I only had three Chevrolets and they were all terrible.

ML: I have had some people talk about cars that could barely run 100 miles per hour. Do you remember any issues like that?

PH: No, the only car I had that wouldn't run [fast] was a 1967 Ford. It would do about 100 or 110 and that was about it. The rest would do what needed to be done.

ML: What about technology changes?

PH: When I first started they had plain, stripped down cars. They didn't have air conditioning. If you wanted air conditioning you had to go and buy it yourself.

When you got another car you took it out and put it in the new one. 1966 was the first year they started buying cars with factory installed air conditioners. That was

a huge improvement. That was one of the best things they ever did. As the years went by, they bought cars with power windows and door locks, which added convenience. A lot of the time, without power door locks, you might forget to lock your doors.

ML: Is there anything else that sticks out as being a notable improvement equipment- or even policy-wise?

PH: [I] can't remember the year, but when we went to short sleeves and no tie, [that] was an improvement. Even though we had air conditioning, wearing long sleeves and a tie was uncomfortable. I remember back in the 1960s they were buying re-capped tires to put on the cars. It pretty well shut us down. We were all scared to drive at high speeds on the recapped tires. We knew from experience that the caps would come off. I didn't want to take a chance on having an accident and hurting others or myself. Finally, they found the money somewhere to buy a decent tire.

ML: Do you have any memories about troop commanders that you want to relate?

PH: Colonel Tommy Goodwin was the best State Police director that I worked under. Colonel Goodwin was easy-going to a point. He had a way of getting things done without being forceful. Captain Gene Donham was the best highway patrol commander. I worked under him for twenty-three years. Captain Donham had his rough side, but he was fair. He could chew you out today and shake your hand tomorrow. With him, you knew what you should and shouldn't do and if you did what you shouldn't you knew what would happen. He had a line and if you crossed over, you better watch out. Those two stand out.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by James Defibaugh]

[JD]

Follow Up Interview
19 December 2003

ML: Jim Thomas wanted me to ask you about the “Monkey Story.”

PH: I was down on the Mabelvale overpass and there was a Texaco truck stop there then. I came across some people pulled off on the side of the road. I stopped to see what their problem was. It was pretty obvious in just a short time that they were highly intoxicated. They had this monkey on a chain and a dog running around. I could see what the problem was: these two intoxicated people didn't need to be where they were. I was trying to get them in my car and they didn't want to go. This monkey jumped up on my shoulders. I reached up with my right hand and swatted it off the first time. I guess that just made it mad, because it jumped back on me a second time and when I reached back to swat it again, it bit down on my wrist. Then it jumped off and hit the ground running. If I could have found it I would have shot it on the spot, but I couldn't find it. I finally got them rounded up and down to jail. Then I went to the hospital to get a tetanus shot. I remember that quite well. Another aspect of that story was that on the way to the jail—this was a husband and wife—I can't remember what he said, but he made her mad. I had cuffed her hands in front of her and his behind. I didn't think she was going to give me much of a problem. The next thing I know she is beating the fire out of him. I reached back to separate them and she hit me over the top of the head with those handcuffs. It didn't take me long to stop and cuff

her hands behind her back. They fought all the way down the jail.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by James Defibaugh]

[JD]