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Arkansas State Police Project

Interview with

Lyle Smith
11 March and 05 May 2004

Interviewer: Michael Lindsey

Lyle Smith: I went to work for the State Police on October 8, 1966 and my first assignment was in Washington County. I stayed there for nearly four years.

Michael Lindsey: Were you raised in Boone County?

LS: I was raised in Searcy County. I went to school at Leslie.

ML: What made you want to join the State Police?

LS: I was a barber before I joined the State Police. I was living in Benton and had been married about four months. A friend of mine was working for the State Police and he came by and picked me up one Friday night and I went riding around with him. He told me they had lowered the age limit from twenty-five to twenty-two. I had just turned twenty-three. He thought that I should go to work for the State Police. That was on a Friday night. I thought about it over the weekend and my wife said it would be fine. I only lived twenty miles from the State Police headquarters, so on Monday I went and got an application. They told me to mail it back to them. The next day I decided to just take it back to them. When I took it in I ran into another friend of mine that I didn't even know worked for the State

Police. His name was Carroll Evans and [he] lived at Clinton. He was in the Driver's License division at the time. He told me he knew the Major so we went in and talked to him. I turned the application in and Carroll told me that he had a squirrel hunt planned for that weekend and my brother, who was a game warden, was taking him and two more Captains squirrel hunting. Saturday was my busy day so I couldn't go. As luck would have it, they went up to where I was born and raised and went squirrel hunting. Each of them shot their limit in squirrels. My mother fixed their dinner and while they were eating, Carroll told them that I had put in my applications for the State Police. One of the Captains was named Buck Halsell. He said, "Hell, we have met the guy's family. Let's put him to work!" That Saturday was the first day of October and I was sworn into the State Police on October 8. I was in rookie school on October 14. Everything turned out just right and it happened very quickly. I spent thirty days in rookie school at Camp Robinson. We stayed in the military barracks and we had two Lieutenants in charge of the school. One was Charlie Logan and the other was Tommy Goodwin. Tommy went on to be the Director of the State Police.

ML: Your first posting was in Fayetteville. How did you feel about moving to Fayetteville?

LS: I was willing to move anywhere in the state. I was in the driver's license section at the time, but after everyone took their tests you went out on patrol. The tests would usually take a few hours and then you would spend the rest of your time on the road.

ML: Why did you transfer over to Boone County?

LS: To get closer to home—and in 1970 the State Police created Troop I. Before this it was a sub-station of the Fort Smith troop. Whenever it was originally created, Troop I had seven counties and I was just fifty miles from where I was raised. I spent the rest of my career in Boone County.

ML: I grew up here too and you are the trooper that I remember.

LS: I gave driver's tests and that was how most people got to know me. I gave in the neighborhood of 250,000 driver's tests during my career.

ML: I have had people tell me that is the most dangerous position in the State Police.

LS: I have to tell you an incident that happened about ten years ago when Bill Clinton was President. I went with ten other officers to Washington D.C. for a national police memorial. One of the guys called someone on the President's staff and got the ten of us scheduled for a special tour of the White House. We went to this certain gate at the White House and they took our driver's licenses and ran a computer check. This Presidential aide was standing there and when she heard my name she asked me if I had ever given driver's tests in Fayetteville. Sure enough, I had given her a driver's test in 1967 when she was in law school.
[Laughs] When you give that many tests you have people scattered all over the world.

ML: I have heard that some of the worst drivers were old women whose husbands had passed away and they had never driven before.

LS: That used to be a big problem, but you don't have that as much anymore. Back in the 1970s and 1980s I would give driver's tests to retirees from Chicago and up north where they had public transportation. They had retired and moved to

Mountain Home or Diamond City and then their husband would get disabled or pass away and they had never driven a car in their lives. Then they would have to try and learn how to drive. "Look out," is all I could say. Kids can correct their mistakes, but older people have a tougher time changing their habits.

ML: Is there an incident that comes to mind?

LS: There's no telling how many wrecks I have been in. I have been in two wrecks in a single day a few times. The *Arkansas Times* did an article about this time I had two wrecks in the same day. The computer systems came in later that allowed us to run checks on people taking driver's tests. I have arrested people wanted for attempted murder, DWI, and drugs. It was nearly every day that someone would come in and say they had never had a driver's license, but they were thirty or forty years old and you knew something was wrong. Then you would check on them and find out it was suspended or they were wanted for a crime. We have even had a few instances where we arrested people for DWI while they were taking their driver's test.

ML: Growing up here there were several big events in this area. The first that comes to mind was the C.S.A. [The Cross, Sword and Arm of the Lord were a violent cult] siege in Baxter County. This also brings up your experience as a sniper. Can you talk about how you became a sniper and what kind of training they gave you?

LS: I have always been a big hunter. I was the range officer for the State Police and every quarter I would make sure everyone in the troop qualified with their pistols. In the early 1970s, the commander at Troop I was Billy Bob Davis. He asked me if I would take a position as sniper. He asked me if I could kill a person and ex-

plained what my duties would be. I accepted the position and Bill King and I were appointed snipers for Troop I. They took us to Camp Robinson and issued us rifles. We spent a week firing the weapons and taking them apart. When they gave them to us they were disassembled and we had to put them together. After that we went down twice a year to qualify.

ML: Were the snipers a separate group or were they part of the S.W.A.T. team?

LS: We didn't have a S.W.A.T. team during those years. In the mid-1990s they came up with the Special Response team that had twenty people from around the state. They talked to me about joining it, but there was a lot of physical training like rappelling off buildings and running. My age played a difference and I backed out, although I kept my rifle if they needed me.

ML: Did they send you over to the C.S.A. siege?

LS: Yes. We had two Missouri officers shot right near the state line. They were shot on a Monday afternoon. They called everybody out. My Captain and my Sergeant went up there and even helped load one of the dead officers in the ambulance. John Paul Davis was the Captain and Jim Thomas was the Sergeant. They told me to stop on the state line and search every car heading south. We stayed there from Monday until Friday. About Friday, the FBI and State Police decided to do something about the C.S.A. encampment at Oakland in Marion County. We stayed there from Friday to Tuesday when they decided to give themselves up.

ML: Is there anything that comes to mind about the operation? One person told me that he remembered it getting really cold.

LS: It was very cold. It was right at the first of April when it happened. I remember

the date because it was the first day of turkey season. That morning I was on the outer perimeter and wasn't supposed to let anyone come into the camp. About four o'clock in the morning this old truck comes driving down the road and I stopped them. It was two older gentlemen and they were dressed all in camouflage. Of course we were looking for guys in camouflage. I stopped them and asked them where they were going and they told me they were going turkey hunting and asked what I was doing. I told them and they said, "Well, hell! You just messed up a good turkey hunt. I guess we'll go somewhere else." [Laughs]

ML: Did you have any run-ins with the C.S.A. guys prior to this?

LS: I hadn't had any direct dealings with them. Several months before that we had a tip that Jim Ellison, who was in charge of that bunch, was in a lawyer's office. At the same time, I was in the dentist's office when they paged me and told me to get to Yellville as fast as I could. We were going to try and catch Jim at this lawyer's office. We knew what kind of weapons they had out at the compound. I am talking about claymore landmines, grenades, dynamite, and machine guns. I burned the road up getting to Yellville. I guess Jim smelled a rat, because he ran out the back door. There is a little bluff about ten or twelve feet high behind this office that runs down into some brush before reaching Crooked Creek. Jim went down in this before we could catch him. They put me on a helicopter and dropped me off on a sandbar, by myself, and told me to watch the river. So I am sitting there on the sandbar with no radio. They told me that the officers were going to be walking down the hillside. About that time a shotgun goes off. It was a deputy sheriff who tripped and fell and the shotgun went off. [Laughs] Being a sniper

meant that I got called out for every big event in Northwest Arkansas. Most of them had happy endings, but some had sad endings. I got into one shooting over in Marion County at the community of Peel. This guy was wanted in Colorado for holding his grandparents hostage. The S.W.A.T. team out there had the building he was in surrounded, but somehow he managed to escape. He had wired the inside of the building with explosives. Thankfully no one was hurt. He got out of Colorado and came to Arkansas where he moved into a rural area. His father was a lawyer and a banker who owned several hundred acres overlooking the river outside Peel. The neighbors said that every time they saw him he had a rifle and a pistol. One of the neighbors worked on a towboat on the Mississippi River and was gone most of the time. One of the times he was gone this guy tried to buy his daughter. You can imagine that this scared the family to death. When the man got home they called the Marion County Sheriff's Office. Roger Edmondson was the sheriff at the time. The sheriff's office found out he was wanted and also discovered that he had been a mercenary in Rhodesia. He was a bad dude. When they got ready to go to his house they called me. The house was in an open field and I could drive by the front door. I was the lead car and I went by the house and stopped at the far corner. I jumped out and ran to the back of the house to cover it in case he came out that way. There were about thirteen other State Police officers and Sheriff's deputies there. [State Police] Sergeant Keith Cornett, the Sheriff, and his Chief Deputy went to the front of the house. They used the bullhorn to tell him to come out of the house. Well, he started yelling and cussing and just going ballistic. They kept telling him to not go out the back and to come out the

front and he wouldn't be hurt. After forty-two minutes he exited the back of the house and started straight away from me. If he had gotten to the far corner of the house he would have gotten behind my Sergeant, the Sheriff, and the Chief Deputy. I hollered that he left the back of the house. He turned and started towards me. I was standing there against a tree. I was watching him through the cross hairs of the scope and he was walking towards me. He stopped and stood there and looked at me and started grinning. His motions seemed like they were in slow motion. All of the people have told me that it wasn't that he was moving slow, but that my mind was moving so fast. He stopped and grinned at me. He had a pistol stuck in his belt. He grabbed the forearm of the rifle and brought it up to his shoulder. Just as he put it to his shoulder and pointed at me was when I pulled the trigger. He just dropped and that was it. I don't care how justified you are you still have to live with it. That was the only time in my career that I have had to pull the trigger on the job.

ML: Did you get sent to the bus incident in Jasper?

LS: No I did not. That happened on Saturday, July 3. Saturday and Sunday were my days off and I was floating on Archie Creek. They got a hold of my brother and had him track me down. It took him several hours to find me and by the time I got back to my truck and into Harrison, they called me on the radio and told me it was all over.

ML: Another thing that comes to mind was the big bus crash in Jasper that killed so many people.

LS: I wasn't there then because I was at Fort Chaffee dealing with the Cuban refugees.

I was guarding a gate when this wreck took place.

ML: Were you there the day they decided to break out?

LS: I got there that night. Again, I was on the river fishing. [Laughs] I was on vacation and my brother came and got me on Sunday morning and said, "Your Captain has called to say your vacation was canceled and you need to go back to headquarters." I thought he was kidding at first. I broke camp and headed back to Harrison and they gave me the riot gear and tear gas and I drove to Fort Smith. The actual shooting had occurred the day before and we had few subsequent problems.

ML: Did they put you up in a hotel?

LS: They put us up in motels. The state paid for it. I ate better than I ever have in my whole life. The people of Barling fed us very well. They were scared to death. The people of Barling and Fort Smith would set up picnic tables and bring us everything in the world to eat and drink. I missed out on two or three of those incidents because I like to hunt and fish. After one of the last ones the Lieutenant asked me to make sure and let him know the next time I went on vacation.

[Laughs]

ML: Do any wrecks you investigated stick out?

LS: I guess one that sticks out more than any other because there was a baby involved and the daughter of Deer's basketball coach Daryl Jones was involved. Her name was Shannon Jones and she went on to play basketball for the Lady Razorbacks. I guess this happened about ten years ago. One Friday afternoon she was coming home from the University following a flat bed eighteen-wheeler. It was raining.

They started going around a right hand curve and the trailer started bouncing and slid into the oncoming lane. An older couple from Green Forest was driving in the oncoming lane and they had their grandchild in the back of the car. It decapitated the older gentleman. His head was hanging down to the side. The airbags had gone off and people thought the car was on fire [because of the smoke from the airbags]. This young lady went over and rescued the baby from the back seat of the car and the baby was okay. The grandparents were killed instantly. The truck ran off into a creek bed by the road. We were there about six or seven hours before the wreck was cleaned up and everyone was out. When the trailer crossed into the other lane, the back two tires hit the car. The dual tires were knocked off the trailer. The motor in the car was in the lap of the grandparents. I had another accident on the eastside of Alpena involving a man and woman named Richard and Oleta Hallmark. They were both intoxicated. She ran off the shoulder, over-corrected and met a two and a half ton truck loaded with charcoal headlight to headlight. The motor and transmission from the car were laying in a field about fifty yards from the road. They were just pancaked inside the car. They even had objects that went through them. Stuff like that you just don't forget.

ML: How do you deal with seeing that sort of carnage?

LS: It is kind of like a doctor. You never get used to it, but you get to where you can tolerate it. Another memorable incident that I got involved in actually carried over into my current job as Chief of Police in Harrison. I was called to respond to a man and a woman in a house at St. Joe. I got there at ten o'clock with Captain John Paul Davis and Sergeant Keith Cornett. We met some sheriff's deputies too.

They had been receiving reports of a naked woman tied up in the back seat of a car. What had happened was that a man and woman had gotten divorced and the man had started dating a girl from Little Rock. The girl came up on the weekends to spend time with him. The guy's ex-wife and her boyfriend kidnapped this girl. They took off all of her clothes, duct taped her hands and feet, cut all of her hair off, painted her head and back yellow, and then put her in the car and hauled her around Searcy County. People who saw this called into the sheriff's office. Deputies finally found the car that evening at a trailer house on Wollum Road. They wouldn't come out of the house, so they called us to come down and help. John Paul and I pulled up to the trailer house. I turned my spotlight on the front door and John Paul gets on the bullhorn and tells them that we had the house surrounded and to come out. A woman named Pat Lewis comes to the door with her hands up and we arrest her. Then the boyfriend comes to the door and says he can't put his hands in the air because he had been shot. Sergeant Cornett confirms that the boyfriend had been shot last week because he had worked the case. So we get him arrested. We knew that the girl was probably still in there. Finally she came out and she was just wearing a man's shirt. We got her a raincoat and started to go into the house. Pat stopped us and said that she had a mean dog on the inside. John Paul told her that if the dog bit us we would kill it. So we let her get a pit bull named "Brando" out of the house. We go in the door and I am going down the hall searching the house. I get to the first bedroom and reach inside the door to turn on the lights when I hear a rattlesnake's rattle. There was instant silence throughout that trailer house. I finally found the light switch and saw a

four-foot rattlesnake in the corner. It was Pat's pet. I found out later that they had held the girl's head down in a cage with this rattlesnake. That poor girl was a basket case. They ended up sending Pat Lewis and her boyfriend to the penitentiary for a few years. After I became Chief of Police we got an animal pound. Pat Lewis was on probation and part of her probation was that she not have a mean dog. The probation officer went out to her house and this pit bull got ahold of the probation officer. He got the dog and took it to the animal pound here in Harrison. I was just holding the dog for Searcy County for a few weeks. On the weekends we didn't have anybody at the pound. We got back on Monday and somebody had cut off all the locks and "Brando" was gone. We had a pretty good idea where "Brando" was at. I called the Searcy County Sheriff's Office and they went out to her house. She refused to come out of the house. They called the State Police and they ended up with another three or four hour standoff with Pat Lewis. Then they brought the dog back to the pound. "Brando" was a vicious dog and it came out that it had bitten fifty-four people. The Sheriff's Office called me and asked if it would be okay to let Pat's son Jason take the dog. I didn't care as long as I got rid of "Brando." Jason sold a pet python for seventy-five dollars to pay for the pound bill. Jason took the dog to Western Grove where it promptly went to the neighbor's house and killed their cat. That incident came out in the paper, too. Jason was on probation and he wasn't supposed to have a dog. When this happened Jason's dad took his shotgun and ended that problem.

ML: I have heard other people talk about you, but they always refer to you as "Termite." How did you get that nickname?

LS: When I went to work I went out to the military base. [Laughs] We had to do a lot of marching in those days. Tommy Goodwin was my Lieutenant. I wasn't too good at staying in step. I got out of step one day and he called me out to the side and had me count cadence to all of the guys. I could handle that. Then he put me back in formation and I took about two steps and I was out of step again. He said, "Guys, I think we have got the termite of the bunch." By him making that statement I got stuck with the name "Termite." When I graduated from rookie school, my class gave me a plaque that was made out to L.R. "Termite" Smith for a sportsmanship award. [Laughs] All of the older guys in the State Police have called me that ever since.

ML: Did you get the Valor Award for the incident in Marion County?

LS: Yes. I got the Distinguished Service Award in 1999. I had given driver's tests for so long and I had a lot of relatives that lived in Van Buren and Searcy County—lived in the rural areas. Anytime any of these people would get information on marijuana or methamphetamines they would call me. People would call me from all over north central Arkansas. I relayed that information on to Rod Combs, who worked on the Drug Task Force. Rod Combs sent a letter into the State Police Director recommending me. The recommendation had to be approved by the Governor—it wasn't for a single incident, but for hundreds over the past ten or fifteen years. Rod had thought that there were probably a thousand or fifteen hundred drug arrests made from the tips I passed along. The recommendation was approved by the Director, the State Police Commission, and the Governor and I was given this award in 1999.

ML: From a lot of people I have talked with, the CID and Highway Patrol are two different animals and they don't always work well together. But it sounds like that wasn't the case up here.

LS: Troop I and the CID worked very closely together. If we had meetings, CID and the troopers attended. I had a very good relationship with all of the guys. One of the best incidents I had involved a man named Les Mooring at Allred, Arkansas. I had a lot of kinfolk out there and I got some information that there was a big marijuana patch at his house. I contacted CID and the Drug Task Force went down there and it was exactly where I told them it would be. About a year later, the same guy called me back and said Les had a big indoor growing operation. I contacted CID and DEA. They flew over at night with their infrared equipment and it lit up like a Christmas tree. I also had some connections with the Petit Jean Electric Co-op and I asked them to look at his electric bill and tell me what it had done in the last few months. It had doubled and tripled in the last few months and Les had never complained about it. So the Drug Task Force got a warrant and found a big indoor grow operation. Well, Les Mooring got out on bond and he flew the coop and no one could find him. A little while later my contact called me again and told me he had an address on Les. It was in [the] Hague, Netherlands and he gave me a phone number. I contacted DEA and they asked me where I got my information. I told them it was from a confidential informant. About a month later DEA called and told me that the address I had given them was good and that they had arrested Les. Les fought extradition all the way to the Supreme Court in the Netherlands. The Netherlands honored the extradition order and they brought him

back to Arkansas. Their picture was on the front page of the *Democrat-Gazette* when they landed in Arkansas and he is in the penitentiary today.

ML: That reminds me of a program the State Police started in the 1980s up here, called the marijuana eradication program. Did you get sent on any of those missions?

LS: I went on a lot of those. I even rode on the helicopters as a spotter. They would put a harness on you and you would put your feet on the rails. I went in on the ground, too.

ML: I have heard that it was pretty easy to spot these fields early on because they were so big, but later on it seems like they tried to camouflage them and they got smaller. Is there a trick to spotting them?

LS: There is not a trick to it. After you have seen a marijuana plant from the air it is pretty easy to remember. We have had guys who could spot one plant in the middle of the forest. There is a little bit of difference in the green color of a marijuana plant and a tree. It is like looking at a pine tree among oak trees. Marijuana has a little different green tint.

ML: When is the growing period for marijuana?

LS: A lot of people would plant them in January or February in Styrofoam cups in a greenhouse until they got to be about sixteen or eighteen inches tall. Then they would transplant them just like you would a tomato plant. This speeds up the growth period.

ML: I have also heard that growers would booby trap their fields.

LS: I was lucky because I never got into a booby-trapped field. It happened though. Some people would use shotgun shells or hang fishhooks. We had a Marion

County deputy that got into a booby-trapped field. The growers had a shotgun fixed up and it went off and hit him in the leg. As a result he had to retire from police work.

ML: Did you see the [numbers and size] of fields shrink?

LS: In the early 1970s it was not uncommon to find an acre of marijuana. We would have to take one or two pickup trucks out there. I have seen marijuana plants eighteen feet tall that we had to cut down with chopping axes. I got information once that these two brothers were growing marijuana behind their house. I went with Lieutenant Rod Combs and my nephew who was a dispatcher and had a pickup. We found plants that were eighteen feet tall. They had it tied up to let it get that tall and they put chicken manure on it as fertilizer. Over the years they went from an acre to a half an acre and now days you would be lucky to find six or eight plants together. You will be out looking and find a few plants at one place and another few a half-mile away. You can still find some pretty large patches near the Buffalo River. They don't put it on their own land anymore because the laws allow us to confiscate property.

ML: It seems like these large fields of marijuana produced a lot more than was consumed locally.

LS: The 1970s was the time of the "Hippie" movement and that was when marijuana really got started. They moved out into these rural areas where I was raised. The local people were reluctant to get involved and that was where *I* became involved. They would call me and tell me where they were, or they might call my brother, who was a Game Warden. I had a guy call me one Friday night at home. He

asked me to come to Branson the next day because he had something important to tell me. I had grown up with this guy in Searcy County and he was always on the rough side. He told me he wouldn't talk with anybody else. So I went up there on my day off. He worked construction with a guy who was bragging that he robbed a jewelry store in a tower building in Springfield. This guy was saying he got over a million dollars in jewelry and that he had put a plastic tie-down around a guy's neck meaning to kill him, but that he put it on the wrong way and the guy got loose after he left. My friend told me this guy belonged to a motorcycle gang. I told the Captain about it and then called the Missouri State Police who confirmed that the event happened. They told me to contact the Springfield Police Department. I called a detective up there and told them the guy's name and about the slip knot around the guy's neck. He asked me if I was at the State Police headquarters and then said they would be right down. He said that they didn't release the information about the slip knot being tied the wrong way. In two hours they were at headquarters. I called my friend in Branson back and told him that I had two detectives with me. He said that he would talk with them if I came up with them. So I went up there and he told the detectives that this guy was planning on moving very soon and that they had better hurry up. He showed us where this guy was living and they agreed to get warrants and come back the next day and arrest him. I got back to Harrison that night and my phone rang. My friend told me that this guy was moving that night. So I called Springfield and then we were on our way back to Branson. They recovered every bit of that jewelry. Most people don't think that I ever got in on stuff like that because they associate

me so much with driver's licenses. The shooting over in Peel was another instance like this. They told me to keep quiet about it and the next day there was just a small article in the *Harrison Daily Times* that a man was shot and killed by police. I didn't say anything to anybody. Not even my son. There was a Game Warden that was out there and he called my brother who called me the night it happened to see how I was doing. Well, when John Paul Davis came in he put me in for the Valor Award. I didn't think it would be a big deal. I went to Little Rock and got the plaque from the State Police Commission. The next day my brother picked up the *Democrat-Gazette* and called to warn me that I needed to tell my mom and dad what had happened before they read the paper. The article told every detail of the shooting and I had to call my parents and let them know before they read it in the paper. Then I had to come back home and tell my son. I had never told him about it. On Monday afternoon it was on the front page of the *Harrison Daily Times*. I have never had a negative remark regarding that incident.

ML: Did you see the type of activity change during your career? Did the people change?

LS: I think the young people have changed. I don't know if they watch too much violence on television, but you used to be able to scare them. This day and time a fourteen year old kid can kill you just as easy as a forty year old. You had never heard of Littleton, Colorado or Jonesboro incidents before. Since I have been Chief of Police we have had a shooting right below the high school. A kid fired four or five rounds at another kid and there was a school bus right behind

him. We got an AR-15 in a culvert right in front of the high school. A UPS driver was driving by and he saw a kid put this gun in the culvert. Kids are a lot more violent.

ML: Has drug usage increased?

LS: Yes, definitely. That is the biggest problem we have in Harrison. We get marijuana and methamphetamines nearly every day. Methamphetamines pose the biggest problem. It does more to destroy families than anything else. It is linked to most of our robberies and burglaries in town.

ML: You have probably seen a lot of technology changes during your time. Is there anything that sticks out?

LS: The biggest change was in communications. When I went to work in 1966, if you wanted a "28," which is a vehicle license check, you had to get on the phone to the Revenue Department. Washington County gave me a big book with every vehicle license. You would have to get it updated every month. Every county had a specific prefix on their license plates. Pulaski County was number one, Jefferson County was number two, Washington County was number five, and Boone County was number thirty-eight. In our rookie school we had to memorize the prefixes for all seventy-five Arkansas counties so you could determine who you needed to call to get registration information.

ML: What are some of the more humorous experiences you have had with the State Police?

LS: After I had gotten out of rookie school and assigned to Washington County, I was working patrol by myself for the first time. I had this gentleman pulled over for a

traffic violation. He was sitting in my car and I felt the car start to shudder. I looked at the gas gauge and it still read a quarter of a tank. The car continued to sputter until it died. The guy looks at me and told me he thought I had run out of gas. Sure enough, I had run out of gas on my first day on patrol. My Captain was Damon Wilson and he was a gruff old man that really put a scare into me. There was no way I was going to get on the radio and tell them that I had run out of gas. The State Police policy is to always have half of a tank in case you get called on an emergency. So I ask this fellow that I stopped if he would mind taking me to the nearest gas station. He agreed and dropped me off at a gas station. I got five gallons of gas and the tow truck driver took me back to my car. When we got back there are deputy sheriff's cars and State Police cars there and people were all over the place. You can image what an empty State Police car parked on the side of the road might look like to another officer. Since I hadn't called it in they thought I was in serious trouble. After this I knew that the next time I saw Captain Wilson I was probably going to be fired. We had a troop meeting a few days later and just as it was breaking up he tells me that there was no shame in running out of gas because it has happened to everybody, but to make *damn sure* I called it in next time! Another incident involving my car occurred while I was driving Mrs. Rockefeller back from a Razorback game in Fayetteville. It was my misfortune in this case to be driving one of the few State Police cars with air conditioning. When Mrs. Rockefeller, Jay Rockefeller, and Lieutenant Governor Footsie Britt and his wife got into Fayetteville on the Rockefeller's plane I drove the Lieutenant Governor and his wife to the game while another officer took Mrs.

Rockefeller. It was hot that day and when we got to the stadium she told me that she would be riding back with me and to meet her in front of the stadium fifteen minutes before the game was over. I was there fifteen minutes before the game was over, but she didn't show up. The Lieutenant Governor and his wife got in the car as the game was ending, but there is still no sign of Mrs. Rockefeller. About fifteen minutes later she came stumbling out of the stadium and gets in the car. By this time traffic was bumper to bumper in both lanes leaving Razorback Stadium. She threw a screaming, cussing fit that she has to wait and ordered me to turn on my lights and siren and get her to the airport. I told her that I couldn't do that because it wouldn't help. She was calling me every name in the book. I called the other officer in front of me and told him what Mrs. Rockefeller wanted me to do. He didn't respond and I saw him shake his head. We spent three hours trying to get out of that traffic jam with her yelling at me the whole time and telling me she was going to have me fired and that we would have done a better job for the Faubuses. When I dropped her off Footsie apologized and said he would make sure that the incident didn't hurt me and he was true to his word.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by James Defibaugh]

[JD]

Follow Up Interview
May 5, 2004

LS: I wanted to tell you about an incident that occurred down in Searcy County involving a man named Tom Storey. It happened about fifteen to eighteen years

ago. The Searcy County Sheriff's Office was flying marijuana eradication operations that particular day. They got out in the Snowball area and flew over Tom's property. Tom came out and pointed a rifle at the helicopter. So the helicopter landed and they went to his house. He came outside with a rifle and a standoff ensued. I, Hansel Bradford, and John Paul Davis—along with several other officers— went down to Tom's house. It was a concrete house that was mostly built underground. There were only four or five feet of the house above ground. It was basically a concrete bunker. I remember very distinctly that it was very hot that day. I went to the corner of the house with my sniper rifle and in just a few minutes Mr. Storey opened the door and came walking out. He was probably thirty feet from me. He saw me and started point at his chest and saying, "Hey Mr. Sniper are you that good of a shot? See if you can hit me in the chest." I just stood there and looked at him while John Paul talked to him. Storey went back in the house. Then he told John Paul to get a warrant for his arrest from the prosecutor and he would come out. John Alsworth was the acting Deputy Prosecutor of Searcy County and he prepared a warrant and brought it out there. We were there for about four hours total, but after about an hour Tom came to a window that was facing me, leaned out, and poured a glass of water. He said, "Hey, Mr. Sniper. it sure is hot out there. It is cool in here; would you like a drink of water?" We sat there and talked for a minute before he went back in. He came out of the house a little later and yelled for me to see if I could hit him and then he went back in the house. Another hour passed and he came to the window again. He yelled out to me, "I am having me a good cold drink on the inside. I am having me a bourbon

with ice-cold Coke right now. Wouldn't you like to have a cold drink?" Then he leaned out of the window and poured it out. I think I would have taken a drink if I had one at that time. Finally the Deputy Prosecuting Attorney arrived and he handed the warrant to Tom Storey. Tom went to go back in the house and as he did he ate the warrant. He ate every bit of it. The Prosecutor told us to let him because he had already been served with it. Tom turned to go back in the house and Captain Davis said, "If you go back in that house there will be tear gas coming in. We have stood up to our end of the bargain and we are through messing with you." So Tom decided to finally come out of the house. The report from the Searcy County Sheriff's Office was that Tom pointed a rifle with a scope at them. So they took him to the jail and we went in the house. He had a safe in the back. It had a door with big oak beams surrounded by steel plates. The door had three locks on it. We called the jail and told them to ask Tom where the key was so we wouldn't have to damage the safe. He told us in pretty straight language where we could go, so we got a sledgehammer to beat the locks off the door. Well I beat for a while, then John Paul beat for a while, and then Hansel Bradford beat for while. We finally got those locks off and sure enough, there was the rifle matching the description provided by the Sheriff's Office. Tom went to the penitentiary and served a little over a year. While he was in the penitentiary it came out in a news release from California that Charles Manson said he would move to Snowball, Arkansas and live with his friend Tom Storey if he got out of the penitentiary. While Tom was in there, his wife called me and John Paul numerous times asking us if we would write letters to help Tom get out of prison. He served his

time, and when he got out he filed a lawsuit against thirteen of us. We spent a week in federal court. There is no telling what it cost to defend us against this guy. The Attorney General sent a lawyer to defend us, the Game and Fish Department sent a lawyer to defend a Game Warden that was there that day, and the Prosecuting Attorney from Searcy County was there representing the Sheriff's Office. It took the jury about five minutes to return a verdict of not guilty.

ML: I talked with my parents who grew up in this area in the 1950s and they mentioned that during that time there was invariably a family that would come into Harrison from the rural area and cause problems once they got into town. Did you see that type of situation during your time?

LS: You still had some of that in the 1960s. You would have certain families come into town and they would get into fights and go on a big drunk. Usually every Friday night they would be fighting amongst themselves or with someone else. They were involved in shootings too. It has changed a lot, but there are still certain individuals who regularly create trouble.

ML: In the early 1980s, the State Police were finally allowed to wear short-sleeve shirts. Was that something you were in favor of?

LS: I was very much in favor of that. When I first went to work we didn't have air conditioning in the cars. We had to wear eight-ounce wool shirts and pants. Plus, we had to wear a tie. If it was a hundred degrees outside, it was even hotter in the car. I was vocal about changing to short-sleeve shirts. We voted on it a time or two. Officers in south Arkansas were actually against it. I couldn't understand why officers from the southern part of the state where it was so much hotter

would be against it. We had a meeting one time in Little Rock, and the issue came up. I asked them that question. They said it was because of mosquitoes. Now they have a better handle on mosquitoes down there, but those swamps and irrigation ditches bred a lot of mosquitoes. They said that when you were on a traffic stop at night the mosquitoes would literally fill your car. Most of the Sheriff's Departments provided the Troopers with mosquito repellent. They said they would really eat you up working an accident. We changed around 1980 and got short-sleeve shirts. We first got air conditioners in our cars in late 1966, but my 1966 Ford didn't actually have one. In 1967 all cars that came out had air conditioning. When you get out and work an accident with eight-ounce wool on, by the time you go home you have white streaks down the sides of your shirt.

ML: Before the State Police had radars, officers that worked on interstates [Interstate Highways] would pace cars to get a speed. Up here, it seems like it would tougher to pace somebody due to the crooked roads. How did you work traffic up here before radar?

LS: You made very few stops for speeding. It is pretty hard to slip up behind somebody up here. Instead, you concentrated on other things like broken taillights or headlights or out of date license plates. Those gave you probable cause for a stop. I think we made more felony arrests then, because if a car came by you would stop them for minor things and try and spot bigger things. We probably made more DWI [Driving while intoxicated] arrests in proportion to the population than we do now for that reason. Nowadays you can sit on the side of the road and clock a car coming up behind, toward you, away from you. If you can see it, you

can clock it.

ML: The general guideline that I have heard is that the State Police wanted one OVC [Officer vehicle contact] per hour. Did they hold you to the same guideline?

LS: As far as ever getting on to us, they would only tell us to go out and get to work. They never had any numbers that they required us to produce. As long as a guy would go out and get four or five contacts, which can be a warning ticket, they were doing okay. It is pretty easy to stop that many people for taillights, license violations, and so many other things. The state was never real bad about that sort of stuff in this area. It might have been different in other areas. We never had a Captain who told us we had to get so many each day or we would be in trouble.

ML: Are there any other officers in the State Police that you respected or looked up too?

LS: John Paul Davis would be one. Hansel Bradford was the most honest man I have ever met in my life. Anytime Brad told you something you knew it was true. He was the first Trooper I met when I started, and we retired together the same day. There are a lot of the older officers, like Damon "Slick" Wilson. He was very plain spoken and his language tended to be off color. I was scared to death of him, but he was always very fair to me. Billy Bob Davis was another Troop Commander that I respected very much.

ML: What was your working relationship with the sheriffs?

LS: I had excellent relationships with all the sheriffs I have worked with. I gave driver's tests and this gave me the opportunity to visit with all of the sheriffs in the Troop. I did the same thing when I was in the MVI section and this allowed me

to get to know them.

ML: I am supposed to ask you about the “open mike” story.

LS: That story has been all over this state. Chuck Medford and I used to work together. I went to Carroll County one morning in 1979 and I met Chuck about halfway between Green Forest and Berryville. He turned around and pulled in behind me and got in the front seat of my car. I turned around to face him and why I dropped the microphone in the front seat of the car I will never figure out, but I did. When I turned to face him my mike was turned up and I keyed it. We sat there for twenty-eight minutes and we didn't leave out anybody in the state. We talked about all of them for twenty-eight minutes. Everyone in the state was listening to this conversation, even Little Rock. They recorded the conversation in Little Rock. John Paul Davis was the Administrative Assistant to the Colonel in Little Rock and they called him into the radio room to listen to these two Troopers talking on the radio. He came over and listened and he told me that the minute he walked up he knew who it was—no one else knew at the time—because my voice was kind of distinct on the radio. Chuck and I talked about the promotional system and about one of our Highway Patrol Majors—Buren Jackson. Chuck said something about the promotional system and I said, “That silly S.O.B. [Major Jackson] knows exactly who is going to be promoted before they ever come to Little Rock.” Well, Buren was there and he was listening. I saw him a few days later and he asked me if I really called him a silly S.O.B. I said, “Major, if it is on tape it is kind of hard to deny.” We had two deputy sheriffs who were looking for us and since our mikes were keyed they couldn't talk to us. After twenty-eight minutes one of

them finally found us and came sliding to a stop beside us. Someone made an obscene remark wondering what the deputy was in such a hurry about. The deputy came running back to my car and yelled, "Lyle, your mike is keyed." The most famous words of all were there last ones they heard, "Oh shit!" [Laughs]. I have been to the academy in Camden in years past and they tell that story to the Troopers. During that whole conversation nothing bad was said about anyone, but it was something you sure didn't want put out on the radio.

ML: In the 1970s and early 1980s the State Police went through a pretty severe budget crisis and they had to cut down on their mileage. Do you remember anything about those times?

LS: Oh, yes. Luckily I was still giving driver's tests at that time, but I could still only drive to the testing station and come back home. The day you worked highway patrol they would tell you to pull out on the highway, drive down the road a mile or two, and sit on the side of the road close to home. You would back up under a shade tree to sit there and save gas. You still had your normal duties like responding to accidents. We went through three or five different deals like that. It would be spring [the state's fiscal year starts July 1] and the budget would be getting close and they would have us park the cars.

ML: Do you have any particular memories about cars you drove?

LS: I always liked the Chevrolets. I had a 1966 Ford with a 428 engine in it and it would run. Then I had a Chevrolet that had a 140 M.P.H. on the speedometer. I had a lot of trouble with the Plymouths and Dodges, especially with the rear ends and transmissions. I always took good care of my cars and changed the oil every

three thousand miles. The Boone County Sheriff's Office normally purchased my car when I turned it in. The car I was driving when I retired is still being used by the Omaha Police. They told me it has over two hundred thousand miles on it now.

ML: Are there any other traffic stops that stick out over your career?

LS: I had my son and daughter in law with me in my personal car one time and we were going into town [Harrison] on Highway 7 South. Right in front of Junior Harness' residence were two guys standing in the road. One had a can of beer and I could tell he was drunk. I turned around and went back to the house and got my State Police car and asked my son to come with me. When I pulled up the guy with a beer in his hand threw the beer in Junior's front yard. The other guy might have had a drink or two, but wasn't drunk. They had car trouble and had to stop. I got out and told the guy that threw the beer into the yard that he was under arrest and put him in the back seat of the car. He had been in the penitentiary before and he got very irritated. We got the car out of the road and some friends of the other guy came by and I told them to take him home. I went back to the car and the guy in the back seat was on probation and I told him I was taking him to jail. I had on Levis at the time and I didn't have anything but my service revolver with me. I didn't have any handcuffs either. So we headed on into town. When we came off the first little hump he came over the back seat and grabbed me around the neck. We went across the road into the ditch on the other side. Well I got my hands on a flashlight I had and I got in the back seat and got in a pretty good scuffle. I caught him on the cheekbone and got him under control. During

this fight I had hit the emergency button on our radio and if you hit it your system stays open to dispatch. By the time I got him settled down, Harrison dispatch was hollering at me, “Is everything okay? Is everything okay?” I finally told them that I had it under control and that I was taking the prisoner to the county jail. Captain Davis got on the radio and asked me if he needed to meet me there. I told him that from the looks of the subject he probably would need to meet me. He met me at the county jail and he gets into it with the prisoner after the prisoner got out of the car and started cussing him. The courts revoked this guy’s probation and sent him back to the penitentiary.

ML: You didn’t have one of the cages in the back at that time?

LS: I didn’t. Other officers had them. I never did like them due to my job function as driver examiner. This also made sure that I got to haul every politician that came to town. Usually any Governor that came to town, I drove them around. I hauled Bill Clinton all over Northwest Arkansas.

[End of Interview]

[Edited by James Defibaugh]

[JD]