HISTORICAL MEMORIAL CENTER

Pennsylvania State Police

Oral History Interview of:

Captain John McKenna

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INTERVIEWER:

This is Bob Gerkin [ph]. It's September the 28th, 2006. With me this morning is retired Captain John McKenna along with retired Trooper Walter Wenniger [ph] and retired Trooper William Fitzpatrick [ph]. Captain, I want to thank you for joining me today. Can you tell me what caused you to join the State Police?

MR. McKENNA:

It was interesting how I became involved in the State Police, and that's as a kid up from the coal regions, you always admired them because of they're very sharp looking, it looked like very disciplined group of people. When I was in the Marine Corps, I spent the last year down in Miami, and I was with an individual by the name of Tom Juran [ph], whose brother was a judge right outside of Harrisburg in Dauphin County, though. And one day, he was looking over an application, and I asked him what he had. He said, "It's an application for the Pennsylvania State Police," and he gave me one. I took it, but I didn't act on it, but when I got discharged and I saw him, and I happened to mention to one of my uncles that I was interested in the State Police, he immediately got me into his car and took me up to the old Blakeley barracks and had me go in to apply. And that was very

interesting. When I was in there, I was kind of shy about it, and I was standing against the wall. The trooper on the desk wasn't too friendly. I told him what I wanted. He told me to stand over there. "Somebody will be with you." So, I was standing against with my hands in my pocket, which is unusual, which I don't normally do, because in the Marine Corps, you never could put your hands in your pocket, and the first sergeant came up, and his name was

Dobbinspeck [ph]. He looked at me, and he said, "Are you the individual here for the State Police?" I told him, "Yeah." He said, "Well, first of all, we don't stand around with our hands in our pockets," so I immediately took them out. I was standing attention for this guy. And so he tells me, "I'll take you into the captain when he's ready for you." So, I stood there another 15, 20 minutes, very -- you know, it seemed like two days, in fact, standing there, very uncomfortable with nobody talking there. He finally took me into the captain, a completely different guy, very courteous. Had me sit down. Asked me my background. Actually filled out everything for me. Had me sign it, and he says I'll hear from him. That was my first dealings with the Pennsylvania State Police.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember who that captain was?

MR. McKENNA:

Captain Newman.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

And that was in, probably, January of 1954 when I went in there.

INTERVIEWER:

So, even though you had -- your first encounter with a trooper from the State Police wasn't real positive, it didn't discourage you enough to decide that...

MR. McKENNA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

...you didn't want to be a part of this organization?

MR. McKENNA:

No, in fact, it reestablished me. (inaudible). It was almost like being in boot camp again, like getting yelled at and not even being a part of the organization. And the lieutenant who investigated me was funny. His name was Spence [ph], and he was only a sergeant at that time. Later on, he became lieutenant. He came to our house to interview me, and I wasn't

home, but my mother told me where it -- I was. I was in what we call the corners of Dunmore, so he comes down and walks in this bar that I was in and interviews me in the bar and then said, "Well, if you've got a couple of minutes, come with me." I went with him. He took me over to the American Legion store and measured me. he took the measuring rule off the counter, had me stand up against the wall and measured me to see that I was 5'8" or taller and took all the information and left. The guy at the counter in the American Legion store, who was a good friend of mine, thought I was being arrested when he saw him put me up against the wall. And then, later on, I got the invite to go down to Harrisburg to be interviewed further for the job.

INTERVIEWER:

You served in the United States Marines?

MR. McKENNA:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

What year were you in?

MR. McKENNA:

I went in in 1950. I was discharged in December of 1953.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you saw combat from it?

MR. McKENNA:

I was in Korea. I was doing combat. I was in Korea in 1951 and 1952.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. During that time when you were in the Marine Corps, was there ever any thoughts about when you got out and joining the State Police?

MR. McKENNA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

Up until the time that I -- Tom Juran had that application -- an interesting note on that is Tom Juran's nephew became a Pennsylvania State Policeman who was stationed in Troop K here in Belmont barracks, yeah, which was interesting. Tom never got on, because he got married. At that time, they did not accept married men.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How did your family, specifically your mother and father, feel when you told them that you wanted to be a trooper?

MR. McKENNA:

My dad was already passed away. Very proud. Very proud. Said the fact that the State Police was very highly thought of...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

...in that area. An interesting note there, too, I came from a neighborhood that was predominantly Italian, first generation, and when the troopers went to these houses to do my background, most of them wouldn't talk to them. They thought that they were -- I was in trouble and that they were trying to get them to talk about me and until my mother explained to them that, you know, I was going to go on the State Police and they needed recommendations. They all gave me high ones, but they were a little skeptical at first. Why was the State Police asking questions about me?

INTERVIEWER:

During that time and further on in your career, did you ever sense that the feeling toward the State Police was somewhat different in the coal region than other parts of the state?

MR. McKENNA:

Definitely. What I found, though, in the more rural sections, my first station out of Harrisburg was Adams County, which is

Gettysburg, very small population. We were the only police department in that county at that time, except for the Borough of Gettysburg, and I believe, McSherrystown. The people there always seemed very on-guard. I think when you get to more populated areas, the Philadelphia area, Pittsburgh, Erie where they're used to the local police, they didn't have a disregard for us, but it was indifferent.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR. McKENNA:

We were not their policemen. Kind of indifferent to us. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

The process prior to joining the State Police, how long did that last, the application process?

MR. McKENNA:

I probably made application in January, and I was accepted in the May class. January of '54, and I went in on May the 4th of 1954, so it was like four months, actually.

INTERVIEWER:

And the State Police academy was located...

MR. McKENNA:

On Cocoa Avenue. It was called the training school, at that time.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Do you recall your first day arriving at the training academy?

MR. McKENNA:

Just confusion. I remember not having a car. I went to Harrisburg first, naturally. We went -- and I can't even remember where the State Police headquarters was at that time. I could remember somewhere around the Capitol building. We were interviewed by, at that time, Deputy Commissioner Jacob Malk [ph]. We were then -- after that particular interview with Colonel Malk, we were then interviewed by Major Kahallan [ph], Tom Kahallan. And he swore us in. And the individuals that didn't have cars, like myself, we were driven to the academy by a trooper. The trooper that drove me was an individual by the name of Shevlin [ph], who later I met, and whose son right now is the U.S. marshal in Philadelphia. And we were driven to the academy and then split up into classes.

INTERVIEWER:

What were you required to bring when you reported to the academy?

MR. McKENNA:

Actually, they told us to bring very little. We had the suit that we had on and gym clothes and we called them sneakers at that time, athletic shoes. That was about it. Plus our underwear. The rest, they issued to us, the khaki uniforms and the black ties. We had no other civilian clothes there.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember how many cadets were in your class?

MR. McKENNA:

I believe the whole class was broke up into two, and I think we had 60 cadets.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

And that -- but we probably graduated with, maybe 55.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR. McKENNA:

A few dropped out.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Can you describe the training during your...

MR. McKENNA:

The training was very intense. I forget what time we got up in the morning. It seems like 5:30 or 6:00 sticks in my mind. Went

outside for roll call. From there, we would go on calisthenics. Either Trooper Mullins [ph], Mick Mullins, who had just died, was one of our instructors, and Charlie Gasferk [ph]. Either one of those two would usually run us in the morning. I -- it's so -- it seems like about five miles where there -- remember, but it certainly felt like it was. Then, we came back (inaudible) was you made up your beds and so forth. And they would have breakfast and then stables. I was kind of lucky that I had the dogs. I wound up with the dogs, who certainly had less grooming, much more pleasant than those horses. You know, they can kick you. But the most -- that whole time I was in the academy, I was just with the dogs and fit -- making their food and et cetera.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you required to walk -- ride the horses during the time that you were there?

MR. McKENNA:

Yes. Yeah. We rode the horses the whole five months I was there, the first couple weeks without saddles, which was pretty interesting with the guys falling off and everything else, to teach you how to grip with your knees rather than just trying to stay on with the saddle. I was never afraid of them. I was always pretty

calm around animals, but I -- the thing that I had best with them, I only had to groom them after I rode them. I didn't groom them at any other time, so I had very little experience with the horses other than riding.

INTERVIEWER:

Had you ever ridden a horse prior to coming to the academy?

MR. McKENNA:

No, never rode a horse prior to that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Yeah.

MR. McKENNA:

But it was one of the most pleasant things in the academy. That's probably one of the classes that you could really -- you didn't have to use your brains. You had to use the other end of your body.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. What other things do you recall about the training period?

MR. McKENNA:

The training period was -- again, to go back, it proved to be strict, which I -- all my life, I felt discipline. The -- as the time went by, the troopers and the staff were much friendlier. Also, during that time, it was rodeo time, and all the rodeo guys started to come

in, the troopers that would ride in the rodeo. They were a lot friendlier, because they were already out in the field, and they knew that it was to be in the academy. So, the five months I was in there was really pleasant. I enjoyed it. When I look back, although I had a lot of good times in the State Police, that was probably one of the best times. I certainly had no responsibilities, other than passing. I had no, really, pressure, so I found it very invigorating. I was always pretty athletic, so the running and the boxing and the wrestling didn't bother me that much.

INTERVIEWER:

Captain, do you remember what the starting salary was when you went in?

MR. McKENNA:

When I went in, it was $2,400 a year, and I don't know what happened, because I still have my first W-2 form. I think that year I only made $1,750. That was -- probably $2,400 was before taxes. They forgot to tell me about income tax, at that time. But I could -- still have my first W-2 form. That was $1,750. At that time, I believe, we still -- we were called student recruits in the academy, and when you came out, you made private, PVT. After three years, you automatically made PFC.

That was the first raise you got. You did $2,400 for three years, and I think after you made PFC, you went up to $3,100. You got a big -- what, $800 -- or $600 -- $700 raise.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. McKENNA:

And after that, there was no raises. Whatever the governor would give you (inaudible). There was nothing -- there was no steps. There was no longevity steps at that time.

INTERVIEWER:

What was your time off like during the academy?

MR. McKENNA:

At the academy? We got Wednesday nights off from 6:00 until midnight, and then the weekends, we got one weekend a month.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

Other than that, you had to stay on duty the other weekends, groom the horses and all. Getting through, as I said, I had the dogs, so it was -- we had to pen them once a -- on the weekend.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Now, you entered in 1954, and...

MR. McKENNA:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...at that point, men were not allowed to be married...

MR. McKENNA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

...correct?

MR. McKENNA:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Do you remember when that changed?

MR. McKENNA:

When Purdy [ph] became our commissioner some time in the early ‘60s.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you graduated from the academy, where were you first stationed?

MR. McKENNA:

What they did with us, we only went five months. At that time, it was a six-month academy. We went five months, and they broke us up into three groups. They sent one group to Philadelphia, one to Greensburg, and one to -- I’m sorry, one to Montoursville

and one to Philadelphia. I went to Harrisburg. Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Montoursville were the three troops. I wound up in Harrisburg troop.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have any choice in that?

MR. McKENNA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. All right.

MR. McKENNA:

In fact, at that time, the rule was you couldn't go home for ten years to your home troop. The only other way you could transfer is you had a mutual agreement with a trooper. That's how I wound up coming to Philadelphia. He -- if the trooper in Philadelphia wanted a mutual with you, then they would respect that mutual. Going home after ten -- you could go after ten years. Even if you had a mutual, though, prior to ten years, they wouldn't send us there.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Was your first station the...

MR. McKENNA:

Actually, the Harrisburg troop, it was called Troop A at that time, second squadron, and that was -- I went there for a month, and I feel that probably was the last month of training, like the six months we would've had in. We did ride patrols but with another trooper. We were never by ourselves. October of '54, I was transferred to Gettysburg.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Can you describe the patrol vehicles at that time?

MR. McKENNA:

We had -- it was amazing. In Gettysburg, we had, I believe, five uniform vehicles, and we had two unmarked cars. The unmarked cars were '52 Chevys, six cylinders. The other cars were Fords. They were probably between '52 and '53 models. The Chevys, a lot of times, on weekends, you would get them. They had no radio in them. They were just strictly for the criminal men. The ones without a radio, which every once in a while you would get, you had to stop and call the barracks every hour. And it was amazing. In Gettysburg at that time, they still had gas stations with flag, meaning when you drove by that station, if the flag was up, that meant that the barracks called that station, and they wanted you to call the barracks. The Chevys, the '52 Chevys, unfortunately, probably their top speed was 75

miles an hour. If you get anybody over that, forget about it. You're never going to catch them. The -- now that was rare to be out in non-radio cars, but it did happen quite a bit in Gettysburg that you would be out in cars without a radio.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You mentioned flags in different locations. Were they starting to phase that out at that point?

MR. McKENNA:

Yeah, that was -- in Gettysburg, that's the only place I could remember, that one that was in New Oxford called -- a little town in New Oxford that had that flag. I can't remember any other place, but...

INTERVIEWER:

And every hour, you were required to go by that to determine...

MR. McKENNA:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...whether you needed to call the barracks?

MR. McKENNA:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

So, response time was a little slow.

MR. McKENNA:

Yeah, if somebody was waiting for you or they had a bad time, I hope they weren't choking.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you describe the patrol work that you were involved in at that time?

MR. McKENNA:

It was amazing. When I reflect back now, Harrisburg was an old Highway Patrol troop, and when I think about the non-comms and all, they were all Highway Patrol. My first sergeant was Sergeant Tempo [ph]. He was ex-Highway Patrolman. Corporal Uracavage [ph], he was a Highway Patrolman. The emphasis, mostly, was on traffic. In fact, they kept pressuring you for -- not pressure that you really felt undue pressure, you know, but the -- not like today's standards. I mean, guys make arrests today -- if we made 30 arrests a month, we were pretty high in the arrest category. We didn't have radar, and we didn't have (inaudible). Unknown to a lot of people, we made a lot of DUIs during that time. The traffic was very light after a certain hour, and DUIs were very easy to pick out during that time. Gettysburg, after 9:00 at night, you had very little traffic, and the bars not closing until 2:00, you had a lot of DUIs, so it never -- rather easy to

arrest. The hard thing about it was we had no breathalyzers. We did everything ourselves, our own examinations, and went to court mostly on our own probable cause that we developed ourselves. The traffic -- we used to -- every morning, every station in Harrisburg troop, at that time, had to put a recap into the captain what happened on the station, and the category for arrests was called “Gs”, and that’s where the terminology -- everybody would ask you, “How many Gs do you have this month?” And it -- another interesting thing I got to tell you, I was out with a trooper by the name of George Ackerson [ph]. George Ackerson was in the Myerstown class of the State Police. He always made it known to me very much, when he became a trooper, I was only 8 years old, so I knew who was boss in that car when we rode. But George was an interesting guy. He took me under his wing, but he showed me the arrest book. We had books at that time. When you made an arrest, you wrote them in a ledger, so everybody knew how many arrests everybody made. Well, George Ackerson pointed out to me that make sure that I make one arrest lower than him, that if he makes ten, I better make nine, because he’s the senior man. Well, I used to do that.

If I was to check George, if he made ten, I made nine. If he made 20, I made 19. Pretty interesting guy.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned the Highway Patrol. What was the feeling between the Highway Patrol and the State Police?

MR. McKENNA:

We never felt that difference. We always heard that there was kind of -- not animosity, but just -- I guess when they joined, the Highway Patrol had a lot more rank than the State Police, and here the guys, the State Police, always thought they were better or whatever the case may be, but their -- after the merger in 1937, a lot of these guys now became the supervisors of the State Police that (inaudible) was more unacceptable than anything. We never felt it there, because everybody in our station, except for the sergeant and the corporal, they were all -- came in after the merger. We had ten troopers there and two non-comms at that time, and the ten troopers all came in after the merger. The closest one to the merger would've been -- Ackerson came on, I think, in 1938 or so.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. What was the work schedule like? How many troopers did they have per shift?

MR. McKENNA:

Our work schedule was 16 hours a day. There was no question about that. They -- we got one night off and one day. They very politely used to remind us, though, that the administration folks said we get 24 hours off, but -- during the week, but they didn't mention one day. They just said 24 hours. Sometimes, when you committed a little misdemeanor of conduct, sergeants were happy to give you from noon off to noon the next, you know, which occurred occasionally with me. They would call you in off patrol. You'd go out at 8:00. They'd call you in at noontime and say, "You're off until tomorrow at noon-time." That was your 24 hours. And that -- it was a payback for whatever you had did. Chinstrap not under your chin and so forth. But we worked 16 hours a day. If you worked a midnighter, you worked -- you normally 11:00 to 7:00, and we only started the midnighters when Eisenhower came there. Prior to that, we had no midnighters. We -- weekends, we had a car out until about 2:00 a.m., but that was it. When Eisenhower bought the farm and actually came there to live, we started our midnight patrol. The midnighters would work 11:00 to 7:00, and then in the afternoon, you would take the desk from 4:00 to 11:00. And then you'd go on midnight patrol 11:00 to 7:00. The PFC did it four times

during the seven-day period, and the -- I'm sorry, the private did it the four times, and the PFC did it three times. You got seven days in a row as the midnighter.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did the State Police have a lot of interaction with President Eisenhower?

MR. McKENNA:

With the Secret Service, we had. The Secret Service had the power of arrest on his property, not outside, so any people coming -- there was no parking signs near his farm. Anything that happened outside, he would call us. And an interesting about the Pennsylvania State Policemen, carried over from Teddy Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt liked the State Police, too. And he took a lot of people in the Secret Service during the Second World War without college degrees from the Pennsylvania State Police and stayed with them afterwards, and a lot of them guys were extremely easy to get along with. They were -- so we had very little trouble with that particular item.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned a Myerstown class. Can you explain how...

MR. McKENNA:

I understand there was something like 500 troopers put through that area. There's a couple of pictures of them, and I have a picture of them in their graduation, and extremely -- when you look at it real quick, you would think it was some kind of military group, sitting there in perfect rows. If you look, it's almost like a cemetery with crosses in the military cemetery. And I understand they put something like 500 people through that class. It was -- it would've been a year after the merger, 1938, or maybe not even a year, in that category. And the instructors were some from the Highway Patrol and some from the State Police. And through my career, I accumulated a picture of the class, and those officers were still wearing their respected uniforms. The State Troopers had theirs, and the Highway Patrol had their uniforms. But the captain, Captain Kahn [ph] at that time, he was Highway Patrol. Most of the non-comms in Harrisburg and the lieutenants were Highway Patrol -- former Highway Patrol members.

INTERVIEWER:

So, the Myerstown training school was prior to the training school on Cocoa Avenue?

MR. McKENNA:

I think the -- no, no. the Cocoa Avenue was there prior to 1929, but because of the large group, we would never be able to hold that many people, and I believe Myerstown was a college, a former college or something, that they were able to use that and train these hundreds of troopers. It was the first time that they ever took that many troopers on at the same time. And I think then, the next year, it was after the Second World War, they took a group on, a lot of troopers.

INTERVIEWER:

After you left Gettysburg, where did you go?

MR. McKENNA:

I was transferred to York.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

York County. We were right in the city at Sherman and Market Street in an old house, naturally. Working condition there were a little different than Gettysburg, although some days you did work 16 hours, but not as consistent as Gettysburg. The difference was there was 19 troopers in York compared to the 10 troopers in Gettysburg. When you worked the 16 hours, that was -- also included fatigue. You had to sweep. You had to cut the grass.

We had to wash our cars. So, there was a lot of things there that were non-police work and non-uniform work to do. And that was the same thing in York County. A lot of the extra hours was -- had nothing to do with police work. It was just grooming the barracks.

INTERVIEWER:

So, Gettysburg and York were both substations...

MR. McKENNA:

Both substations...

INTERVIEWER:

...of Harrisburg?

MR. McKENNA:

...of Harrisburg, right.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How long did you stay at...

MR. McKENNA:

I think I was in York just shy of a year, and I was transferred to Chambersburg.

INTERVIEWER:

And during your time at York, you continued in the patrol section?

MR. McKENNA:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Midnight patrols, how many patrols went out? How many troopers were...

MR. McKENNA:

We only had one midnight patrol, and that would be two troopers, again, to -- traffic, at that time, in the ‘50s was not as heavy as they have today. In fact, in York, one of our duties was on Route 30, we turned every red light on blinking light, and that was -- we had the keys to the box, and then every morning, at 6:00, or 5:30, for work traffic, we turned them back on to the regular cycle of lights. Sometimes it happened to our advantage at nighttime. You’d turn them all on blinkers, and you’d see a lot of speeders. But that was not the reason we did it. I don’t know what -- it was just not to impede traffic going in and out if you had to be stopping every block. Because Route 30, at that time, was pretty built up from York to Wrightsville. It was pretty heavy as to little boroughs and little townships all the way through there.

INTERVIEWER:

How long were you stationed at York?

MR. McKENNA:

I was there probably a little less than a year.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Where did you go from there?

MR. McKENNA:

Chambersburg.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And was that a bigger station than York?

MR. McKENNA:

No, Chambersburg, again, too, was less troopers. I think when I was at Chambersburg, we had 15 troopers there, and we had -- one had -- one trooper was assigned to the driving unit that was there. We had a corporal in charge of that. And we had a sergeant and three traffic corporals.

INTERVIEWER:

All right.

MR. McKENNA:

The -- a lot more area in Chambersburg. Chambersburg, it self, Franklin County, was an extremely large county from the Maryland State Line up to the Blue Mountain interchange, almost, of the turnpike. A lot of territory. The State Police again,

there, with the exception of Chambersburg and a few other small towns, we were the only police department. York had a lot of police departments, but Chambersburg did not. We were pretty much busy. Chambersburg was a busy station at that time, although York was a busy -- I could remember in York in December of ’54, I investigated 1,000 (inaudible) that station at that time, because we took our own numbers. They were not pre-numbered, and -- so you could see the -- even though there was not much traffic, that was a busy station. It was murders. I don’t know how many, but York was a busier station, only because of the size of the county and the population. Chambersburg was busier per man because of the huge area we had to patrol and only, maybe, two guys out.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR. McKENNA:

Two guys out. Two or three, at the most, because they had garage inspectors there. They had criminal men as well.

INTERVIEWER:

So, your responsibilities were far more than just patrol while you were stationed in Chambersburg?

MR. McKENNA:

Right, we've -- uniformed guys in Harrisburg troop normally investigated everything. If there was a burglary, investigated the burglary. Normally, suicides, we would go to it, and we would investigate it. A criminal man may show up and he may not show up. The -- so the uniform guy got very little assistance from the criminal men, at that time. If it was too big when you came in, the criminal man took it off you, but you did the initial report. You did the initial report, and they would do supplementals.

INTERVIEWER:

Were any troopers assigned specifically to process crime scenes?

MR. McKENNA:

No, we did our own. The -- if it was big enough, they would send out the portable kit to you. You dusted your own crime scene.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

Yeah. Now, homicides, the criminal men came out, but they did their own crime scenes. They didn't have any specialists and that. The specialists were mostly in the troop headquarters, but Chambersburg was 52 miles from Harrisburg, so by the time you

called there and got dispatched (inaudible), you could clean the crime scene yourself. We used to call them BCI men at one time, and Troop K had their own -- every troop had their own in the barracks where they took the photography and so forth. Now, if we had a fatal, they would come out and do our photography work, but the crime scene would be cleared out. They would come out the next day.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, if they have a fatal vehicle accident...

MR. McKENNA:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...they would respond?

MR. McKENNA:

Yeah, they would respond.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How long were you at Chambersburg?

MR. McKENNA:

I was only there a short time. what happened in Chambersburg, one night I come jokingly in the barracks, and I -- at that time, because we were single, and the married men, if they lived at X miles -- number of miles from the barracks, they couldn’t go

home. They had to sleep in the barracks, too. And jokingly, I come in the barracks, and I said, “Anybody in here that knows anybody east of the Susquehanna River that wants to transfer, speak up now.” One of the older troopers says, “Do you mean that?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “I got a call today from a guy named Sam Mackey [ph], who’s stationed in Media.” I didn’t even know where Media was. “And he’s looking to come here. His wife is from Franklin County. Her mother had just died and left the house, and so if you’re interested, I could get you together.” So, we talked to each other. He put his transfer in. I put in mine, and we were gone within weeks. I went -- but when I came here, I didn’t come to Media. I went to troop headquarters, which was Troop A, fourth squadron was Philadelphia at that time. And that’s how I came to Philadelphia.

INTERVIEWER:

Was that pretty common, a mutual transfer? Was that usually the only way you could...

MR. McKENNA:

It was the only way you could go, at that time, that they -- you could put in transfers, but they seemed to be ignored. They -- then, once you got a mutual, they seemed to act very quickly. And you only went through classes -- even though you put down

mutual, and see I was lucky, I never realized that, at that time, there was a class coming out of the academy, so I was tacked on to their transfer, and I went with them, because when I came to Belmont, everybody thought that I was as young as the guys coming in. We all came the same day.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, Captain, you mentioned married men. How long did you have to be on the job before you could get married?

MR. McKENNA:

Yeah, we got -- any -- when I first come on, you signed enlistment papers. That's why you always heard guys out of certain areas say, "I'm enlisted in the State Police on a certain day." Two years was your enlistment date, and you actually got discharged. You went into the captain, and you had to re-enlist again. I never realized how dangerous that was, because if they refused your re-enlistment, you had no recourse, because that's a contract, and it was like the military. You got discharged. And they actually gave us discharge papers. I have three of them, I believe, before they stopped it. You had to do one enlistment before you could get married, which would've been two years. You had to ask permission to get married. They did a cursorily investigation of your wife, and then the captain would give the

permission to get married. I have my letter that I submitted to get married, and the last paragraph you had to put in there was that this marriage will not interfere with my duties as a Pennsylvania State Policeman. That's the -- I showed that to my wife there once in a while when she wanted me to do something. But that was the last sentence you had to put in there. And I've seen guys when I was stationed in York that they actually called in and tried to talk them out of getting married, because they claim that their wives might've had a background that was not acceptable and so forth. But it was two years. After the first enlistment, you could get married. I could see why. You couldn't afford a wife after the first two years.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you ever hear of a situation where someone was refused permission to get married?

MR. McKENNA:

Not really, but I'll say one thing. I won't mention names. I saw a trooper who was told not to marry a certain woman and he defied him and he married her, and he was transferred to Greensburg from Troop A, Harrisburg. That's a long shot. A long, long shot. You know, at that time, they didn't have the tenure that they have now that they could only transfer the youngest guy or they didn't

want to transfer you within troops. At that time, there was no boundaries where they could transfer you. They could bounce you any place. The joke there was, like, don't send your laundry out, because you didn't have winter sports up in Erie. That's if you're in Philly (inaudible). And to get to it, it didn't happen that much. You know, if -- some guys, if they talk about it, you'd think it happened every day, but it really didn't. It didn't happen that much. And some deserved it. Some didn't, unfortunately, but that's life.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You mentioned when you were in Chambersburg that it extended to the Blue Mountain interchange of the turnpike. What was the turnpike like at that time?

MR. McKENNA:

The turnpike then, when you went up there at nighttime, that (inaudible). It was a one-booth tollgate, and the only thing he saw, besides troopers out there, at certain hours, was bears and elks and deer and everything else. They would almost hug you just to have something -- I mean, it would scare -- I mean, they were out in the wilderness, that poor guy. And I say Blue Mountain, and I'm almost positive. It might've been another one, but I'm almost positive. I believe that interchange is in the

Smithsonian. I know there's one down there, and I always thought it was that one, but I'm not sure, because it was only the one -- like, he took care of both sides. It wasn't one of those busy, busy areas, you know. Yeah, it was a lonely outpost there. He was like the French Foreign Legion.

INTERVIEWER:

And when you left Chambersburg on a mutual and went to Troop K, what caused you to be interested in a transfer at that point in your career?

MR. McKENNA:

The two things that come up, you were always -- the desire was to go back home, I think. I always wanted to go back home to Blakeley barracks. And I thought Philadelphia would be a stepping stone. But unfortunately, when I got here, there aren't too many people that wanted to come to Philadelphia except that ones that were here already. So, I came here in 1957, and I've been here ever since. But when I could transfer, I didn't want to. I was already married and had children, so I never wanted to go back. I had an opportunity when I was in Hazelton, but I came right back here. But I think every trooper wanted to go back home. I think they always thought that it was cheaper to live there. And they're right. This -- down in this area, the economy

is very tough to buy houses and all. A trooper that would come from Lackawanna County down here, what he's going to buy down here for $150,000, he could get a mansion up there. I know the prices up there is high now, too, but down here, the real estate is really heavy. And also, costs factored down here, a trooper up in Montoursville, certainly, his dollar goes a longer way than a trooper in Media. So, that was another reason that you didn't want to get around big cities. Another one, too, was there was not a lack of respect, but, as I said earlier, an indifference. I'll give you an example. When I first came here, we still wore the boots and so forth, and they just did away with the kitchens. And we used to eat in a place, Haitch and Haitch [ph] at 54th and City Line Avenue. We'd go in there, and we'd sit next to the uniform guy from the 19th police -- naturally. And when we sat there, we got a bill, full price, you know. He got nothing. We weren't jealous of him, but it just showed you they knew who responded to their complaints. They knew if they called up and said they're getting strangled, the State Police is not going to be here. The guy in blue is going to be there. So, that's why I said the big cities were indifferent -- place, and you -- the only time that we really, probably, were feared, we gave the

drivers' exams, and you could see people shaking as they would come up to your cars. And that was another story about Philadelphia. The stories, it was just like Animal House day there, and that was horrible. We'd set out what they call pads, and Saturday, you probably would do 60 drivers' exams, and if you ever gave them, you know what I'm talking about. That's a lot of drivers' exams. So...

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned earlier that they did away with the kitchens.

MR. McKENNA:

Yes, when I first came on, the barracks still had kitchens in them. Troop A in Harrisburg had, probably, one of the better ones in the state. It was family style. You sat down, and you were served an old

KP [ph]. Philadelphia was cafeteria style. You'd walk through with a tray and KP. They had troopers assigned to cleaning the pots and pans and all. We never had that in Harrisburg. I think Captain Kahn at Harrisburg always thought troopers were below that, washing dishes and so forth. He didn't -- not for cars, though -- for troopers washing cars and cutting the grass, but I think he really -- the kitchen was run really good. They stopped that. The substations, what they did, they made contracts with

restaurants, and we ate in the restaurants, and you could have anything you want, as much as you want. You could eat 50 steaks, if you wanted. You just signed it and you walked out. The married guys got subsistence. They had a -- they used to call it a bean check that they got every month. Most of the wives, unfortunately, never knew it. That was like extra poker money. I can remember a couple troopers almost died long before their time for mentioning in front of guys' wives about their subsistence checks and the wives -- all of a sudden, the trooper had to explain to his wife how he got that sudden raise in pay all of a -- it came in an extra check, and it came once a month. Very few wives, I think, ever saw that.

INTERVIEWER:

So, when you were actually at the substation, you had cooks there that prepared your meals?

MR. McKENNA:

They did, at one time, but when I came on, we were at restaurants.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

There was a restaurant in Gettysburg, and then there was one in York when I was there and one in Chambersburg where the single guys could go in and eat. Troop headquarters still had the mess halls. They -- and some stations probably did, too, but not in Harrisburg.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you transferred to Philadelphia troop, then you went to Media?

MR. McKENNA:

I was in Philadelphia for about two years, then I came to Media.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. What were your duties in Philadelphia?

MR. McKENNA:

Philadelphia, first, when I went in there, because of my experience on substations, they put me on the expressway. The expressway, at that time, although we didn't think so, but everybody else did, thought it was, like, elite, especially if you come out of the academy. We were the only patrol in Belmont at that time. I was on the expressway, I don't know, for about a year, and I noticed the guys giving drivers' exams, they never did midnights. They didn't work Sundays. So, not being total the idiot, I figured, "Well, I'm working midnighters, I'm working

Sundays, and I'm working" -- so I went in and asked the first sergeant, you know, if he ever had a chance to -- I never gave drivers' exams, and I'd like to learn how to get drivers' exams. He thought it was very admirable to bounce me on -- giving drivers' exams, which wasn't bad. I gave them for about a year, and again, I had every night off. This was the only troop that was eight hours. Whatever you did was eight hours and nothing beyond that, except on weekends. They needed the manpower. You gave drivers' exams during the day, if you weren't off duty. You gave drivers' exams during the day, then, you would take the desk at nighttime. We had the old switchboards where you actually plugged in. We had a switchboard, we had a radio, and then with the car, and then you had another guy that -- just like an old fire watch type guy. He had to walk around the barracks, and he would be the relief for both switchboard and radio, if you had to go. Switchboard was extremely interesting. You got that in the daytime sometimes, too. If you weren't really astute on it, you could really cause chaos. I remember, I cut the captain off numerous times, and I hear him bellowing and the first sergeant come on yelling at you. But actually, when you plug it in, you've got to remember, if you plugged -- when your call came up, you

had to put the plug in, “Pennsylvania State Police, Troop A, Philadelphia, how could I help you?” And they’d say, “This is captain.” Well, now, you had to switch that off, and you had to get another one and plug it in the captain cabin. You have a call in to Mr. so and so. The captain said, “Okay.” Now, you had to switch him off. You had to remember who this was, because there was other plugs in there with lights on them, and now you had to unplug that and put it in the captain’s. Well, sometimes, you didn’t give it to the captain. You gave it to the cook or something, you know. Then everybody would get angry and come in and hollered at you. Many times, the first sergeant -- and it was always the first sergeant that would come down and scream, you know. But -- well, they were -- I think being in the military, them things didn’t bother you that much. Like, if I wasn’t in the military, I’d probably be scared, thinking it’s -- after being in there, after taking all the abuse in there, I wasn’t too concerned. You didn’t want to goof up, but I wasn’t really going to have a heart attack over that switchboard, you know.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. Do you remember who the captain was of the troop?

MR. McKENNA:

My first -- was Captain Johnson. Our major was Major Rook [ph], who was an interesting fellow.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. McKENNA:

And Captain Johnson, himself, was a fairly nice individual. Never got back there where they -- the lieutenants and the captain in Belmont, and it's still the same way. We used to call that officer's country. I never got back to that area except to see the first sergeant. And when he called you -- I'm more afraid of him than anybody. If they said, "The first sergeant wants to see you," I'm thinking, "What did I do wrong?" If they said lieutenant, you figured -- he just didn't yell at you. They were more sophisticated. But even upstairs in the bedrooms, that end of the hall was officer's country. We never ventured down there. You had the captain's bedroom, the major, the lieutenants, the first sergeant, and a duty sergeant. That was all down one end. We never ventured down that end at all.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember who the first sergeant was?

MR. McKENNA:

When I first -- it was a guy by the name of Kilmo [ph], and not a very friendly guy. He's limited with vocabulary. But again, too, you know, if -- you know, he's like all the rest of them. I went there in my career. In fact, I was shocked one time. A trooper -- I heard him getting chewed out by another lieutenant. When we left that office, I used to get everybody coming to me with all their headaches and stuff. I guess I had a big shoulder, but he come into me, and he says, "You know, I just got chewed out by lieutenant so and so." He would mention his name. And he says, "I -- what he did wasn't right." I said, "Well, what did he do?" He said, "He was in there cursing and he's using vulgar language." And he said, "I think -- I always thought that lieutenants are true gentleman." And it really stuck with me after that. Except for a few guys, I never really, you know, used any obscene language. It's not in my vocabulary anyhow. But that was an interesting thing there. He felt that sergeants and everybody has a certain right to yell, scream, and curse, but not the higher ranks. He looked at you that you were more sophisticated, that you shouldn't be solving problems and so forth. And some of that stuff went with me my whole life.

INTERVIEWER:

When you had -- spent your year on the driver exam unit, where did you go from there?

MR. McKENNA:

Giving the drivers' exams?

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. McKENNA:

Philadelphia was a unique troop. We gave drivers' exams in Philadelphia all -- six days a week, and then on different days, we would go to Doylestown one day a week. We went to Westchester. We went to Eddystone. We went to Norristown, and we came to Media, Delaware County. So we had a -- what they called traveling details to five different areas. We used to try to get on the traveling detail, the young -- the single guys, because if we got that, there was always two cars that went. Well, we would try to get the -- be the driver on the cars, because now we could leave early and go and eat breakfast. The other ways, you never got breakfast normally, because we slept almost to the dead end when you could -- and Philadelphia had roll call every morning. That was another troop that had roll call every single morning, so if you didn't eat by 7:30, you weren't going to eat, so these other areas, going to Norristown and Doylestown,

we would try to convince the corporal the day before, “How about letting me be a driver?” And then, all of the single guys would pile into one car, and the corporal would be going by himself. But that was only so we could get there early and have breakfast. And then when -- that was interesting, what we would do for breakfast, we went to lunch, and we’d always order soup, because you got crackers. Well, breakfast, you got toast. And you always got jelly. So, we put them in our pocket, and at lunch, we would order soup. We’d get crackers. We’d put them in our pocket, and every other cracker that we could pick up. So, then, mid afternoon, we’d have jelly and crackers. We’d have our afternoon snack. The traveling exams was fun. I don’t know if I could tell funny stories, but one time we rode to Eddystone. It was me and Trooper Cardash [ph]. And the corporal was Corporal Barren [ph]. He’s long dead, but in the machines, they would have certain things to read. They’d say, “Read the blocks in A, B, and C,” and that would give them your visual, what you are, 20/30 or whatever it is. And they would sometimes be red or sometimes not. Well, Corporal Barren turned his back, and we switched his card. And first poor guy in there was of Asian birth, by looks. So, he sits down, and the corporal says, “Read the

letter" -- or yeah, "Read the letters in box two." Well, we put the numbers in, and this poor guy is reading the blocks like -- he's going, "One, five," you know. Now, the corporal is frustrated. "No," he said, "not the numbers. No." He said, "Just read the letters in there." He kept reading and reading them. Finally, the corporal thinks this guy maybe doesn't understand English and starts talking to him a little bit less than English, and the guy very -- like he graduated from Harvard said, "I'm sorry, sir. There is no letters in there." Now, the corporal knows he's been had. He picks it out. He looks at it, and he didn't do nothing. Then, all the way back over, me and Cardash (inaudible) and we never knew that the corporal could talk oriental. Amazing guy. That -- once he told that guy (inaudible) could you understand English, boom, he knew.

INTERVIEWER:

After your completion with the driver exam unit, where did you go then? Did you stay in troop headquarters?

MR. McKENNA:

No, I was transferred into Media.

INTERVIEWER:

Oh, okay.

MR. McKENNA:

I came into Media in May of 1959.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How big a station was that?

MR. McKENNA:

We had 19 troopers there and a sergeant and three corporals.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You also mentioned earlier that you had roll call. Was that only at troop headquarters?

MR. McKENNA:

Only at troop headquarters.

INTERVIEWER:

Was that for every shift or just for the first...

MR. McKENNA:

Just for the first shift in the morning. Now the expressway guys were excluded. They did not have to stand roll call.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, that was a separate group, the guys that worked the expressway?

MR. McKENNA:

The drivers' examiners, the BCI men, the fingerprint, anybody except the expressway guys, patrol guys. Everybody else. We had a lot of people who served warrants out of there. If you arrest -- you were in Pittsburgh and you arrest somebody from

Philly that don't pay, we get all the warrants down here, which was quite a bit, and we'd go out and serve them. So, we had a very large group of warrants (inaudible). And then we had criminal intelligence, which in Philadelphia, we had a really excellent criminal intelligence group there at that time. We had the BCI, the photographers, and so forth. We had the drivers' exam, which was a large unit, at that time. Drivers' exam. So they were all the roll call guys. They were (inaudible) that's going to be there that's going to work that day.

INTERVIEWER:

Would you say that the work that the State Police was involved in, in a place like Philadelphia, was far different because of your location to the city?

MR. McKENNA:

Definitely. Definitely. We -- the drivers' exams, probably the volume of exams were -- probably no other station of the State Police would ever do what Belmont did in a day. Plus, we had 24 welfare offices, unemployment offices. We had Biberry [ph]. That was a mental institution. And all of these, at that time, we actually investigated crimes on their property, which sort of dissipated from the rental properties after a while. As time went on and we got more sophisticated, we said, "Well, wait a minute.

Why are we investigating crimes at an unemployment office that the state don't even own? That should be Philadelphia police." So, finally, through the years, it sort of dissipated. We did all the liquor stores. You can imagine how many. I think it was something like almost 150 or 160 liquor stores in Philly. If they got burglarized, we used to go down. They'd send a trooper down to investigate it. Sometimes it was in conjunction of the Philadelphia police to be there, but then we got away from that. And I remember, one time, in the local stations, it was actually an order that if there was bank job, a trooper had to go to it.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you investigate burglaries at liquor stores, because they were state stores?

MR. McKENNA:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

Sure.

MR. McKENNA:

Because the inventory was lost and it was a state store and so forth.

INTERVIEWER:

What year was that when you were at Media? Do you recall?

MR. McKENNA:

I came to Media in 1959, May of ’59.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. What was the probationary period at that time when a trooper came out of the academy?

MR. McKENNA:

Actually, if you counted the academy time, it would be 18 months. I believe it was a year when you came out, when you graduated. And the six months that you were in there. It’s probably more like 18 months.