

HISTORICAL MEMORIAL CENTER

Pennsylvania State Police

Oral History Interview of:

Corporal Richard F. Skillman

INTERVIEWER:

This is the Pennsylvania State Police Oral History Project. My name is Al Vish and this is Corporal Richard F. Skillman, Retired. The location of this interview is the Skillman residence in East Butler, PA. Mr. Skillman, do we have your permission to conduct this interview?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yes, sir.

INTERVIEWER:

On behalf of the Pennsylvania State Police Oral History Project, I want to welcome you and thank you for consenting to assist with this project. This is tape one in our series. Dick -- I'm going to call you Dick. Okay? Because you and I are...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Buddy-buddies.

INTERVIEWER:

That's right. We're close enough that I can call you by your first name. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background? Your dad's name, mom's name? Are they living, deceased, dates of birth, dates that they passed? Your siblings; brothers, sisters? Just give me a little idea of your family background prior to you joining the Pennsylvania State Police.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, my dad -- he was born about '96 and my mother was born about the same time and my dad was a laborer and my mother was a housewife.

INTERVIEWER:

What were your mom and dad's names?

MR. SKILLMAN:

My dad was Fred George Skillman and my mother was Millie Margaret Eichenlaub (ph). My dad was born in Butler and my mother was born in Herman, Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER:

And they're both deceased?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yes, sir.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And how about work -- your father's occupation.

MR. SKILLMAN:

My dad was a butcher and retired from that and went to the Valvoline (ph) Oil Company in East Butler, Pennsylvania and he retired from there and went with the ARMCO, American Rolling Mill Company.

INTERVIEWER:

How about brothers and sisters, Dick?

MR. SKILLMAN:

My brother was Robert Paul Skillman. He was born about 1918 and my sister, Bernice, she was born about 1921 and I have a sister, Loretta. She was born about 1928.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Are they still living?

MR. SKILLMAN:

My -- just my sister, Loretta. She lives in East Butler, Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER:

Now -- I'm sorry. Go ahead.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Her name is Graham (ph). Loretta Armelda Graham.

INTERVIEWER:

Loretta Armelda Skillman Graham?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yes, sir.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about your wife.

MR. SKILLMAN:

My wife...

INTERVIEWER:

Where'd you meet her?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...is Coreen Elizabeth Guile (ph). We were married in 1964. She worked for the Magnetics Company in East Butler, Pennsylvania and was working for -- it's Fang (ph), their head office in Butler, Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you know -- do you remember her date of birth?

MR. SKILLMAN:

1931.

INTERVIEWER:

Any children?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No children.

INTERVIEWER:

Dick, where'd you go to high school?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I went to St. Paul's Catholic School and I went to Butler Senior High School...

INTERVIEWER:

And you graduated?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and graduated there 1943. Went into the United States Army Air Force in -- April of '43 and I was there for two years, ten months and twenty-six days.

INTERVIEWER:

You got that down pat. What did you do prior to your -- the military service? Did you go right in after school after you graduated or did...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I went...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...right from school.

INTERVIEWER:

Right...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I went right from school and I went into the U.S. Air Force. Took basic training in Miami Beach, Florida. After I got out of training school in Florida, I went to Chicago to technical school in Chicago, Illinois. Then I went to Chanute Field, Illinois for further training and I went to Fort Wayne, Indiana for an AD in

specialized -- in hydraulics and propellers. Then I went to Malden, Missouri.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Can we just -- you said you went there for an A what? AD?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Uh-huh. A...

INTERVIEWER:

What does that mean? That's -- acronyms you know are tough.

MR. SKILLMAN:

I went for...

INTERVIEWER:

Stands for something. Do you know...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...ANE.

INTERVIEWER:

ANE. What is that...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Aircraft mechanics. And I went to Malden, Missouri and from Malden, Missouri, I went to Sedalia, Missouri. I was an instructor in propellers -- electric propellers and I stayed there until 1946 and I got out of the service in Fort Meade, Maryland.

INTERVIEWER:

In 1946?

MR. SKILLMAN:

In 1946. Then I came home.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR. SKILLMAN:

I worked at the American Rolling Mill Company in Glendora.

Then I joined the Pennsylvania State Police in August of '46.

August 1, '46.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Tell me about what -- tell me about your -- what made you want to become a State Trooper? What -- was somebody in the family a trooper? Did you know a trooper or somebody -- did you see them someplace? Were you excited about, you know, the uniform, being a -- what made you want to become a State Trooper back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I had no idea what I wanted to do when I came back from the service and I was in Butler, Pennsylvania. I ran into a friend of mine who had -- through the conversation, I'd asked what are you doing here and he said I was up at the barracks in Troop D Butler. Put in an application. So I said gee, that's good. I think

I'll go up and try that. So it was -- I went and contacted the first sergeant and got the application for the State Police and Westerman (ph), he -- I disappeared -- he disappeared and I didn't see him again for a number of years and -- well, I went for the interviews. Then I went to Hershey and went through training school in Hershey and I left Hershey and went to Greensburg to Troop A and finished up my training there and went on into Troop E Erie and I spent ten years in Troop E Erie at different stations and I was to (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Let's...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I went -- okay. I was at Meadville and then I went to Corry, Pennsylvania. Then from Corry, Pennsylvania, I went to Troop D Butler and I stayed there until I was retired in...

INTERVIEWER:

And what year was that?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...1984.

INTERVIEWER:

You retired in '84?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. I spent 38 years...

INTERVIEWER:

What made you -- I'm sure -- you know, I asked the question, but back then, you know -- what year was it when you came on? Do you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

1946.

INTERVIEWER:

1946. Just personally, I came on in 1967 and my starting salary was \$6,200 a year. What was yours back then? Do you remember?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I think it was \$75 room and board.

INTERVIEWER:

Seventy-five dollars room and board, and that's why the question -- you know, what -- was that good money back then? I mean, when you came out of the service, weren't there other jobs available, you know, that paid more? Why did you want to become a trooper?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I really didn't know what I wanted to do when I came out of the service and that was the -- one of the applications that are open...

INTERVIEWER:

That was available.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and I put in for it.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How old were you?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I'd have been 21.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you married at the time?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you permitted to be married?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember who initially interviewed you for the job?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Corporal Nutchon (ph). He was stationed in Troop D Butler and I think Captain Hanna (ph) was the captain at the time and first sergeant was Sergeant Milligan.

INTERVIEWER:

What was the process like? Tell me what -- you know, what you had to go through to apply. Height, weight requirements, visual acuity. You know, that kind of stuff. Physical, dental requirements. Do you remember what those were? Back then I imagine they were pretty stringent. They were pretty strict for me in '67, so I can imagine what, you know, the older guys had to go through.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well...

INTERVIEWER:

Maybe I (inaudible)...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...when we went to school in Hershey, you had crime and you had typing. You had phys ed. You had swimming. You had pistol range and you had to take care of the horses, but we were in -- we went to Hershey. We only were there for three or four months, then they shipped us out to Greensburg because the rodeo was in there and they couldn't take care of us at Hershey.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, what about...

MR. SKILLMAN:

And...

INTERVIEWER:

...your height and weight requirement to get on the job? You had to be a certain height, a certain weight back then? Like 1967 again -- now I'm just giving you comparisons. When I applied, one of the requirements was you had to be at least five foot, eight inches tall, no taller than six two or three and your weight had to be in proportion to your height. You had to have 20/20 vision. Did you have -- and dental requirements. This really floored me because I remember them telling us that we had to have at least 20 sound teeth in our mouth.

MR. SKILLMAN:

I never seen a doctor.

INTERVIEWER:

You never saw a doctor?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Only on -- before going in, I went to the local doctor for physical. Then when I went to Hershey, they -- we went to Harrisburg for

preliminary physical there and then to Hershey. Outside that, I don't recall of any great physical that they gave us.

INTERVIEWER:

There were no requirements as to the height and weight?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

How about -- did you have to take a test or interviews before you were accepted, you know, to start...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

...the job?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

No tests?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. We went -- you had crime and...

INTERVIEWER:

Well, I understand now...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...traffic.

INTERVIEWER:

You know, that's if you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Mostly crime.

INTERVIEWER:

...passed. Right? I'm talking...

MR. SKILLMAN:

The...

INTERVIEWER:

...prior to you getting to the Academy, you didn't have to take any written tests?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did you need any letters of recommendation from anybody?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. You had to have three letters of recommendation from whoever you went to see to get a coroner's one or chief of police or the coroner.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember who you went to? Do you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I think Jack's sister was the one. Mose Campbell (ph) was the mayor and Jake -- he used to be on the railroad. He was a representative at the time.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

And then a -- the physical. We had -- that's all I can remember.

INTERVIEWER:

How about the background investigation itself; did they conduct a background investigation on you?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't know what they did to me. They had a -- if they did, I didn't know about it. We went into -- there was -- I think there was 54 of us went down to Harrisburg for the -- for -- to go in and they gave us a physical down there and I think Colonel Mauck (ph) or -- he was a second under Colonel Wilhelm and that's all I can remember right up to date.

INTERVIEWER:

So you said 56 went down with you?

MR. SKILLMAN:

There was 56 and I think there was 56 that are -- was

-- well, they split us up; 15 here and 15 at Harrisburg and 15 in --
at the training school.

INTERVIEWER:

Did everybody make it that went down?

MR. SKILLMAN:

There -- everybody went down. There was two guys that quit
just before they went in for their interview before Colonel Mauck
or...

INTERVIEWER:

Do you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's all I can remember there.

INTERVIEWER:

You can't remember what the interview was like or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. They...

INTERVIEWER:

...the questions they asked you?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...asked you do you believe in first aid and how far is the turnpike
and like three or four questions and that's all that I can
remember. They didn't give us no test or anything like that,
written test.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. In 1916, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote “No political influence or other influence avails to get a single undesirable man on the force or to keep a man on the force who has proved himself unfit.” Do you feel that this statement held true while you were with the State Police? Do you think that was true back then right through your career? Was there any, you know, political involvement?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I didn't even know who the coroner was.

INTERVIEWER:

So then obviously you must've agreed with Theodore Roosevelt. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I didn't know what he said.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Did politics play any role in the hiring process back then, Dick, that you know of?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER:

What about your notification; how were you notified that you were accepted and how much time were you given to report to the training school? Do you remember that?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I think Nutchon interviewed me at home. We lived up in the Chicora Road here. I think that was in July and I got notified -- I don't know where he come from. Harrisburg or some place to report to Harrisburg on the 1st of April. I think of -- yeah. April.

INTERVIEWER:

So you were notified when that you had...

MR. SKILLMAN:

To go to Hershey.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Or to Harrisburg.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Then we went to Harrisburg and when you were done with the interviews there, there was other troopers that picked us up and

took us to Hershey. Half of us went to Hershey, half of -- half went to Harrisburg.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you feel when you were notified that you had made it?
You'd been chosen?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I really didn't know what I was getting into. We didn't know nothing about pensions or anything like that.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you excited though I mean to be a Pennsylvania State Trooper?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I didn't want to let myself -- I was just happy that I was selected. That's all.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How about your family; how did they feel?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, my dad told me -- when I told him I was going to apply for the State Police, he said I'm not going to tell you what to do. You're old enough to know what you want to do and I know Sergeant Quigley (ph) at the barracks. I went and talked to him and he's -- he didn't say not to and he didn't say to join or not to

join. But then as time went by or when I went to Hershey, I was like -- I went and did what they told me to do and that was it.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Dick, let's talk a little bit about basic training. Tell me a little bit about your cadet training experience. Describe what a typical day was like.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, we were in training school and you were assigned what duties you were expected to do there while you were there. In the morning, you got up at about five o'clock in the morning and you had calisthenics. You walked a mile or two miles, hot or cold, whatever it was. And after you were done with the -- that you went and took care of the horses and after that you went to class. You had geography class. You had criminal code. We were mostly right there at training school. You never went out on our own. But you had swimming classes up at the Hershey Municipal Building up there where they had the pool and then you went on the range with pistols. Didn't have no rifles at that time. So mostly you learn how to shoot a gun and a lot of guys never -- that was in the class never handled -- know what a pistol was like. But every day, you had a series of shooting.

INTERVIEWER:

And how long was the day, Dick? Well, you said you started at 5:00...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, you'd get up five o'clock in the morning and class at eight o'clock in the morning and...

INTERVIEWER:

You were in class until when? Naturally you had to eat lunch, right? So you took a break...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Well, we were in until noon and then one o'clock you had your pistol...

INTERVIEWER:

Was that every day that you were out shooting?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. While we were there.

INTERVIEWER:

Ride the horses at all?

MR. SKILLMAN:

We -- our class, we took care of the horses. The rodeo team was in there and they -- all you got to do is take care of the horses and...

INTERVIEWER:

So you didn't get to ride?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. You could get on them and ride if you wanted to if you knew...

INTERVIEWER:

(Inaudible)

MR. SKILLMAN:

...anything about riding a horse.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

But...

INTERVIEWER:

It wasn't an everyday thing that you had to ride...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No, no.

INTERVIEWER:

To learn to ride.

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. When the rodeo team was there, they...

INTERVIEWER:

The horses were off-limits?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Off -- well, yeah. They took care of the riding the horses and that and doing the jumps and -- et cetera.

INTERVIEWER:

And where was your training located? Where was the Academy at that time?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, it was in -- at the old Academy. We weren't at the new Academy.

INTERVIEWER:

Where was that located?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I can't...

INTERVIEWER:

Can't remember?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, I know they had training schools in various locations and I can't remember where they all were either, you know. Mine was at Hershey.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Ours is -- our training was at Hershey what we had to

-- we only stayed there for either two or four months, then we went to Greensburg.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So the training -- Greensburg is -- that wasn't your first station. You're saying that was an extension of the training school in Greensburg?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

How long was the training period for you? Six months?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Six months.

INTERVIEWER:

Six months. Do you recall who the director was of the Academy or your training school?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Martin.

INTERVIEWER:

Martin?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Major Martin.

INTERVIEWER:

Major Martin. How many were in your class, Dick?

MR. SKILLMAN:

We had 15 guys.

INTERVIEWER:

Fifteen guys?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Wow. Did anybody drop out? Was anybody asked to leave?

MR. SKILLMAN:

One guy, he went home but he never come back. I don't know what his name was.

INTERVIEWER:

So you graduated 14 in your class?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. It was 15. I'm -- I forgot about him. I...

INTERVIEWER:

I thought you said...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I...

INTERVIEWER:

...he went home. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

He went home.

INTERVIEWER:

Never came back.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Never come back.

INTERVIEWER:

So...

MR. SKILLMAN:

The...

INTERVIEWER:

...it -- so that would make only 14...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. It -- it must've been 16 then. I have to give the list...

INTERVIEWER:

Right.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...of who's doing what.

INTERVIEWER:

One went home anyway with that.

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

What were you called back then? Were you called cadets?

Trainees?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Students.

INTERVIEWER:

Students. And the subjects back then -- you know, for example I remember when I went through, you know, it was the Vehicle Code, the Crimes Code. They didn't teach us typing then. We had the history of PSP, first aid classes, self-defense classes. Basically the same for you?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

No?

MR. SKILLMAN:

We...

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about it. Tell me what...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible).

MR. SKILLMAN:

...our biggest thing was -- there was take care of the horses and in class you had the Crimes Code and first aid.

INTERVIEWER:

Do the Vehicle...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't think we had too much of the Vehicle Code that I recall.

INTERVIEWER:

And how often did you get to come home during the six months' training?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I think we were down there -- you'd come home -- well, you were off the long weekend like and if you -- we lived in Butler or I lived in Butler. We got a ride up here at a bus or whatever do it - - outside of that, I can't tell you. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you guys...

MR. SKILLMAN:

If you wanted to go home, you could. If you didn't, you stayed there.

INTERVIEWER:

Did they have things for you to do like Poteet duty, scrubbing floors, that kind of stuff?

MR. SKILLMAN:

At Hershey?

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. SKILLMAN:

I -- most of our chores at the time was taking care of the stables and -- we didn't get the full thing of the training there because we were going -- we were there when the rodeo team was there and everything was...

INTERVIEWER:

Rodeo.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...paying attention to the rodeo and we were like out in left field.

INTERVIEWER:

How about the uniforms; what did you guys wear? Like us, we were in those blue fatigue-type things.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, they took us...

INTERVIEWER:

What...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...in the gym and there was all these uniforms laying there and pick out what might fit you and what didn't fit you and you made up your uniform and got your gun belt and your britches and...

INTERVIEWER:

So they didn't have a quartermaster that handed this stuff out to you size-wise you're...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No, no. You just went and...

INTERVIEWER:

You just...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...picked it. If it fit you, okay. If it didn't, you'll have long pants or short pants or...

INTERVIEWER:

I'll be darned. And you were called students, correct, you said?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have any tests during the times you were down there? You had to maintain a -- you know, an average? Again -- and Dick, you know, I only throw in my experience just to kind of help you jog your memory. In '67, you know, we had tests, daily quizzes and monthly tests that we had to pass with at least a 70 percentile.

MR. SKILLMAN:

The only thing that I can remember is your geography and stuff like that, they told you about the different locations and roads and anything doing with what your job will be, where you're going to be at and where dams were, what the main dams were in the area. It was nothing -- I don't recall of any tests where they sit down and you had to figure out yes or no.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. SKILLMAN:

And why that was is because the rodeo team was there and we had a -- Captain Donovan (ph), he gave us the Crimes Code and I don't remember about the Vehicle Code, but...

INTERVIEWER:

Did...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...those are the only two things we worried about that I know of, that I remember.

INTERVIEWER:

Did they teach you typing (inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. Well, you...

INTERVIEWER:

They...

MR. SKILLMAN:

They had typewriters there.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. SKILLMAN:

I had typing when I was in high school.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So you didn't have to worry about learning how to ride the horses because the rodeo team was in at that particular time.

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you -- what did you find to be the toughest part of your training? Maybe nothing. Maybe you were a super-trooper.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, they used to take us up there to the municipal swimming pool and we played water polo or whatever you call it and learned how to dive and stuff like that. But I don't recall of anything say real serious.

INTERVIEWER:

So you kind of pretty much enjoyed the entire experience, right?

I mean, nothing there was tough for you? Did you have a favorite part of the training?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. The...

INTERVIEWER:

Swimming...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...only thing that I know that they had you doing was the stables and you had to have them in the morning and the evening. Then during the night, you had night guard. You had to feed the horses and clean up around the place that was going to be cleaned up.

INTERVIEWER:

Did they have dogs then -- back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

So you had to take care of the dogs...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. I took care...

INTERVIEWER:

...and the...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...of the dogs. We used to have to go to the local restaurants and bring all the bones in for the dogs to eat.

INTERVIEWER:

Are you serious? Is that...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Sure I'm sure. And we used to have to take care of the goats.

INTERVIEWER:

You had goats?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. The major had an ulcer had we fed him goat milk. Go out and milk the goats, make sure the goats were in the pens (inaudible) and the dogs -- you go out and get their bones and throw a bucket of bones out for them. I don't know what else they fed them, but we got the local restaurants -- used to take a troop car and go to the restaurants and bring the bones back and pass them out -- I think there was about 12 dogs there.

INTERVIEWER:

What were they used for? Were they like bloodhounds or were they...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, they had...

INTERVIEWER:

...attack dogs?

MR. SKILLMAN:

They were show dogs. They didn't even -- they didn't -- to me -- to my knowledge, they never had no riot control or like canine dogs to...

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. SKILLMAN:

They just had them dogs there and they'd have them in their rodeo and -- I was trying to think what else. That's about all. They were there and they'd bark and they'd -- you holler at them and they'd holler out the window shut up, but...

INTERVIEWER:

What about -- is there anything that you can think of in that -- in your training period in the six months that you disliked?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No, not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER:

What about -- did you guys have to do KP? The...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. We had to do kitchen duty. Yeah. You had a week of your turn, so many guys worked out of the kitchen there.

INTERVIEWER:

Right. What was that like? You had to scrub pots, pans,
dishes...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. I don't remember the -- serving the guys in the morning...

INTERVIEWER:

Was the food...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and...

INTERVIEWER:

...good?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. The food was all right. It wouldn't kill you.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you get enough? Did they...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

And -- that's one thing. They...

INTERVIEWER:

They fed you good?

MR. SKILLMAN:

The guys at the rodeo were the big thing. They were there and we served the -- all meals. We worked in the kitchen.

INTERVIEWER:

And then what did the rodeo team do? Did they do...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

...nothing down there? Just...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, they trained.

INTERVIEWER:

...things pertaining to the rodeo?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Just through -- yeah. That's all.

INTERVIEWER:

So the students down there, anytime the rodeo detail was in kind of like had to take care of...

MR. SKILLMAN:

The kitchen and so...

INTERVIEWER:

...the kitchen and the horses and that kind of stuff for the rodeo team?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. And...

INTERVIEWER:

All right.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...we didn't mingle with the -- yeah. We say hello to them and this and that, but as far as...

INTERVIEWER:

Well, you were a trainee.

MR. SKILLMAN:

We were trainees. We had our side and they had their side and they'd -- the rodeos -- they trained all day for the rodeos.

INTERVIEWER:

Was it like being in the military? Could you say it was like your...

MR. SKILLMAN:

You mean...

INTERVIEWER:

...military training?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...saluting and that?

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. Saluting, the yes sir, no, sir. Was it as...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...tough as the military?

MR. SKILLMAN:

What?

INTERVIEWER:

Was it as tough as the military?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, no. It didn't have nothing to do with the military that I remember.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, I always -- you know, I always thought that the Pennsylvania State Police was a semi-military organization, you know, with their yes, sir, no, sir stuff and saluting the officer and that. So...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, you saluted and this and that, but you didn't...

INTERVIEWER:

But you don't think it was as tough as the military's...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. Not that I recall.

INTERVIEWER:

What about your accommodations at the Academy, Dick? Your room, what was it like?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, there was 14 or 15 of us in a room...

INTERVIEWER:

So it was kind of...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and...

INTERVIEWER:

...like...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...you kept your bed clean and...

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember who your roommate was or some of your roommates, 15?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, there was...

INTERVIEWER:

Do you -- you've had...

MR. SKILLMAN:

We were in the upstairs. There was 14 or 15 of us in the one room.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you have any contact with them today? Any of them?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

I can tell you where most of them are at.

INTERVIEWER:

Is that right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

And...

INTERVIEWER:

Where are they?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, some of them are dead.

INTERVIEWER:

I could imagine. Okay. How about those that are living; are you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, there's...

INTERVIEWER:

...close to any of them?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...Chuck Baker, Floyd Clouse. He got killed. He was over in Beaver Falls. And there was Roland -- Gil Roland, Willy Wertz (ph). Gil Roland is dead. Al Zolenski (ph), Tony Airsey (ph). He's a -- he's down in Wyoming. He lives down around Wyoming. And Carl Ziegler, he was in Philadelphia and Joe Dean. He was down in Philadelphia. Wipperman (ph) and Wertz, they were down in Greensburg with us. Yardnack (ph), he's down in Lancaster.

INTERVIEWER:

That's amazing. You know, I can't remember I'll bet you a half a dozen out of my class, but then my class -- I have like 115 cadets in my class.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Gee. Well, there was only 15 of us.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Think who else was down there. Kenny Owens, he's dead. He was from down around Philadelphia.

INTERVIEWER:

Now you said -- you mentioned Clouse. You were -- were you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Floyd Clouse.

INTERVIEWER:

Floyd.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. He was in...

INTERVIEWER:

Did...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...my class.

INTERVIEWER:

He was in your class?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah, but he went to Beaver, Butler Troop D and I went to Erie.

INTERVIEWER:

When he was killed in the line of duty, were you here in the
Butler Troop?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. I was in Erie.

INTERVIEWER:

You were up in Erie? So...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...you weren't actually involved in that?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I went to Erie with Joe Betzker (ph) and me and it was -- Joe Betzker and I was the only ones that went to Erie at that time. Clouse was down here in Butler. Baker, he stayed in Greensburg. Hershey -- some of them guys went back east. The guys that were from the east, they trained maybe at Harrisburg, but they sent them back into that area. And usually the west were Butler, Uniontown, so on and so forth.

INTERVIEWER:

They sent back out west?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Well...

INTERVIEWER:

How about -- can you tell me something about equipment? What kind of equipment did you guys have when you went through there?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Gave you a 38 and a -- your Sam Brown and a -- well, the Sam Brown as your belt across -- your belt around.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's all.

INTERVIEWER:

What was -- what kind of badges did they have back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

What kind of what?

INTERVIEWER:

Badges.

MR. SKILLMAN:

(no audible response)

INTERVIEWER:

Badge.

MR. SKILLMAN:

They don't wear badges.

INTERVIEWER:

No. We didn't wear them, but they were issued to you. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. Pocket badge.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes. You know, tell me about that. What kind was it? Because I remember reading...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Mine...

INTERVIEWER:

...someplace where some -- when we -- when they first started way back 1905 and that, they were silver and then eventually they got up to the gold badges...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. The...

INTERVIEWER:

...that are issued now.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...ones that we had were silver and they were about as big as your fist.

INTERVIEWER:

But you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

But...

INTERVIEWER:

...didn't wear them. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No, you didn't.

INTERVIEWER:

And was there a reason for that, why they didn't wear the badge?

MR. SKILLMAN:

State Police don't wear badges.

INTERVIEWER:

Why is that?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't know. The buttons on your blouse and everything was considered your badges.

INTERVIEWER:

Your uniform was...

MR. SKILLMAN:

But you didn't have no badge where you wore it on your chest or anything like that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. While you were going through the Academy, can you think of any of the instructors that impressed you? You know, that were kind of someone that you looked up to, you know, when you went through there or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Whisker (ph). He was the first sergeant and Sergeant Myers (ph), he was the pistol -- taught you pistols. And there was Ronna (ph). He was the PT guy and Moose Lauder (ph). He was down there, but he was one of the rodeo guys.

INTERVIEWER:

And these guys impressed you, you know, why? Because they were...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, they...

INTERVIEWER:

...sharp?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yes. We didn't know just when they came on the job or how much time they had on us. We got along with them. No fighting. Used to sit around in the evenings at Hershey and roll out a barrel of water and pour it on some guy sitting under the thing (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

That's good. Gives you something to do anyway...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...in between times. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I forget all the guys' names that were at Hershey at that time. A lot of them guys -- well, they were a permanent party at Hershey and...

INTERVIEWER:

You mean the Academy staff?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. We were talking about your time at the Training Center.

Did you have a graduation ceremony?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there a reason for not having it? I mean, you just -- you guys just -- they...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't...

INTERVIEWER:

...just didn't have them back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I have no idea.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you know anybody in the classes before you or after you?

No?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Not at all.

INTERVIEWER:

When you graduated then, Dick, from student, what was your rank when you left the Training Center?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Student. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

You were still a student?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Weren't you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

P2C, I think.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm sorry?

MR. SKILLMAN:

P2C.

INTERVIEWER:

P2C?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Private second class or -- I guess that's what it stood for.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. But you -- were you called a trooper then or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

We were always called a trooper.

INTERVIEWER:

So -- but you weren't -- were you called a trooper even in the Academy while you were -- no. You were a...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

...student.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Student.

INTERVIEWER:

So you had to go from student to trooper sometime in there and I'm assuming it would be, you know, when you graduated. Right? So you were a trooper, private second class.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Second class. Then you're a private first class.

INTERVIEWER:

How long did it take you to make private first class?

MR. SKILLMAN:

When you got out school. I think about a year. I'm not sure of that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you got out of the training school...

MR. SKILLMAN:

You're a P2C.

INTERVIEWER:

...you're a P2C, private second class. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

And did you have a...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Three years...

INTERVIEWER:

...probationary period?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Three years you made PFC.

INTERVIEWER:

So it was automatic. You went to PFC after three years?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. You could've done...

INTERVIEWER:

How about probationary period? Was there a probationary period for you then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. Not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have to recite the Call of Honor before you graduated?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER:

But you do know what the Call of Honor is all about?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I think I do.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you still recall the Call of Honor?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I think so.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. I'm not going to ask you to do it.

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's good because I don't remember it all.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. So now you've left the Academy and you're at a troop, all of those stations and troops that we talked about earlier, right, when we first started the interview. Is that correct? You -- where did you go out of the Academy, right out of the Academy? How did you get there...

MR. SKILLMAN:

How did I...

INTERVIEWER:

...and what...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...get where? To the Academy?

INTERVIEWER:

No. How did you get from the Academy, from the training school to your station?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I went from the Academy to the -- Greensburg. That was...

INTERVIEWER:

How did you get there?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...to finish up a course.

INTERVIEWER:

Did they take you there or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

They took us there in troop vehicles.

INTERVIEWER:

Good. So what about your home vehicle? You didn't...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I...

INTERVIEWER:

...have your own...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...didn't even have money to own one. I didn't have no money when I got on the job.

INTERVIEWER:

So right out of the training school, they put you in a troop car and took you to your station?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And then once you were on your station, you're saying you don't remember having any probationary periods or anything. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. All I can remember is the -- Major Mauck -- I guess he was a major at the time. You're not a policeman until you have at least five years on the job. That's what he used to say...

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Dick...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and he'd spit his tobacco out.

INTERVIEWER:

...when we talked about your training period at the training school and you told me about your uniforms down there where they threw them in a pile in the middle of the room and you went in and you picked out what you thought would fit you, et cetera, and that's what you wore while you there.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Upon graduation, did they -- what -- you didn't wear the same things. Right? Did they give you uniforms then to take with you?

MR. SKILLMAN:

You wore the same thing until they measured you for your first fitting. They used to measure you in the summertime for winter and in the wintertime for summer.

INTERVIEWER:

So when you left the training school and went to your station, your first station, you were still dressed in your student gear. Is...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...that correct?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Until they came in and measured you up and fitted you for the uniform?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Hearst Tyler (ph) Uniform Company out of Philadelphia, they used to send the tailors to each troop. He'd measure you up for your britches and your -- anything in -- your pants and -- mostly your britches and your shirts.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And we're talking -- when did you come out of the Academy? When did you come out of the training school? '46, '47?

MR. SKILLMAN:

'47.

INTERVIEWER:

Uh-huh.

MR. SKILLMAN:

January of '47, I went to Erie.

INTERVIEWER:

1947 you went to Erie. What were the uniforms like in 1947?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, they were wool. Wool shirts and wool trousers and puttees and leather shoes that fit with the puttees and you got a blouse.

They were all form-fitted.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

And an overcoat and a blouse.

INTERVIEWER:

And a raincoat.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, that...

INTERVIEWER:

No raincoat?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't know whether...

INTERVIEWER:

(Inaudible)

MR. SKILLMAN:

...they gave us a raincoat or not.

INTERVIEWER:

Didn't it rain back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

They had rain back there. Yeah. But I tried to say -- I don't know when we got the raincoat, but the uniforms, they shipped them in then they gave you them. When you got them, they issued them to you. See when we came out to -- when we went to -- from Greensburg to Erie, there's only a quartermaster at Butler.

INTERVIEWER:

One quartermaster...

MR. SKILLMAN:

At Butler.

INTERVIEWER:

...at Butler. And Erie...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Nothing...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...in -- they didn't have a quartermaster and they do now.

INTERVIEWER:

So you had to come from Erie down to Butler to get fitted?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Let's talk about your career with the State Police. What were the times like back then, Dick? What -- you know, what was life like back then? You said you didn't have enough money to buy a car.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Heck, no, I didn't have...

INTERVIEWER:

How...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...money to buy a car.

INTERVIEWER:

How much money were you making at that time when you (inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Seventy-five dollars a month. We got a raise and it was based on 1941, what they made in '41, so I only got \$70 a month. So I said why didn't you leave me at \$75 and forget about the raise.

INTERVIEWER:

So you were getting \$70 a month when you graduated from the training school?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, when they made the raise, the first sergeant and I forget who else were entitled. I don't think the commissioned officers were in that raise. I think it was to the first sergeant.

INTERVIEWER:

What about -- let's just -- if I can just take you back to the training school for just a couple of minutes again. I have another question. What were you paid while you were at the training school? What were you getting paid there?

MR. SKILLMAN:

About \$70 a month.

INTERVIEWER:

The same?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Then when we made PFC, we got 90-some dollars a month. That's room and Board.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So the training school was \$70 a month.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

You graduated from there and you went to your first station. Still at \$70 a month until...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...you made PFC.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

How about -- or private second class?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Forget about that.

INTERVIEWER:

Forget about that. You didn't get a raise until you made private first class?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And then it was \$90 a month?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I think \$96 a month.

INTERVIEWER:

Ninety-six.

MR. SKILLMAN:

And we didn't have no hospitalization or anything like that.

INTERVIEWER:

No hospitalization?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

No retirement?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. Well, you only got retirement when you were ready to retire.

INTERVIEWER:

I understand, but you weren't paying into your retirement I mean,
the...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. How about -- could you give me just a brief overview of your career and the major highlights in your career? And then we'll talk about them, you know, in -- more in depth as we get along. Just kind of like give me a capsule review of -- from the time you left the Academy or the training school through your retirement with the State Police, the -- you know, your promotions, anything stick in your mind that you -- that was a highlight of your career. You know, those kinds of things.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, we -- when we come out as a trooper and usually you were assigned to traffic and as time went by, you might go onto one of the special duty jobs, you know, the BCI or into the quartermaster or a garage or...

INTERVIEWER:

All right.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...anything like that.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm going to interrupt you only because you used BCI. Another one of those acronyms. BCI standing for...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Bureau...

INTERVIEWER:

...Bureau...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...of Criminal Investigation.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's in photography and stuff like that. Fingerprints, stuff like that. That's one of the things that we had in the Academy. You

had courses in fingerprints. But as you come out of the Academy, if you wanted to further -- you want to -- like we had classes in...

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...Butler.

INTERVIEWER:

...to request to go to those classes or did everybody go...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Everybody went there.

INTERVIEWER:

Everybody went to those classes?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. The...

MR. SKILLMAN:

But your main job was traffic.

INTERVIEWER:

How long were you on traffic? Was there a certain time you had to stay in traffic before you could specialize?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Ten years.

INTERVIEWER:

Ten years?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And then you were allowed to specialize?

MR. SKILLMAN:

You might be there 20 years, but, you know, I was...

INTERVIEWER:

But you could not put in for a special-duty function until you had ten years on the job?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No, no. You can put it in anytime, but when -- whether they picked you or not, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. So if the openings were there, the...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

How about -- when were you promoted? When did you make corporal?

MR. SKILLMAN:

In 1970.

INTERVIEWER:

1970, you made corporal. Did you have to take a test to do that?

Were they testing back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, I took tests, but I don't know when it -- you know, how come...

INTERVIEWER:

Like promotional tests?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. They were -- yeah. You...

INTERVIEWER:

Yearly?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...were allowed every year when the -- when they decided to give you a test, then they'd notify you. It might be a year. It might be six months. You just never know when they come out.

[Interview ended and resumed]

INTERVIEWER:

This is the Pennsylvania State Police Oral History Project. My name is Al Vish and this is Corporal Richard F. Skillman, Retired. The location of this interview is the Skillman residence in East Butler, PA. Do we have your permission to conduct this interview, Mr. Skillman?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yes, sir.

INTERVIEWER:

On behalf of the Pennsylvania State Police Oral History Project, I want to welcome you again and thank you for consenting to assist with this project. This is tape two in our series. This is a continuation of the Corporal Richard F. Skillman, Retired interview and the tape number is two. Okay. Richard, when I was doing my research prior to us getting together for the first time, I read something about the Pennsylvania State Police being involved in an aviation division and I believe that that was started in 1945. And the interesting thing that I remember reading about that at that time was that your name was mentioned as being part of that aviation division. How about -- can you fill us in on that portion of your career? How you got started and how you decided you want to go to the aviation

division, how you were chosen? You know, those kinds of things.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, when I come on the job, that was in '46 and I went through different things in school and then I was assigned to Troop E in Erie. And while I was in Troop E in Erie, I heard that that was an aviation division and I requested to be assigned to the aviation detail and Lieutenant Maroney (ph) was the CO at Troop E Erie and I submitted a letter or he submitted a letter for me to I don't know who. But as time went by, I was in Troop E Erie for ten years when I was called upon to go with the Pennsylvania Aeronautics Commission and Lieutenant Maroney advised me to go to Harrisburg where I met Colonel Mauck and I was told about the aviation division there. And I left Colonel Mauck's station in Harrisburg and I went to Troop D in Butler where I met Sergeant Paul Mayo (ph), who was on the detail. I don't know how many years he was on, but anyhow I -- he was going to go to another position and I was to take his place.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Then I...

INTERVIEWER:

...remember -- and do you remember who the Commissioner was at that time?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Colonel Wilhelm.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have to go through any training before you got on the detail at all?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. I...

INTERVIEWER:

How did you get your flying experience?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I learned to fly when I was in high school. Then I finished up my flying when I come back from the United States Air Force and when I was in the Air Force, I was trained as a ANE mechanic. Then I had three different positions in the Air Force. I taught school and I was assigned to the hydraulics and propellers and general maintenance of aircraft all over. And when I submitted my letter to the Aeronautics Commission, I guess that's how I got accepted.

INTERVIEWER:

How many men were assigned to the unit? Do you remember?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, when I came on the -- when I was assigned to the Aeronautics Commission, there was four of us. There was myself and Earl Moore and Bill Hall and McGordy (ph). We each had a territory in the State of Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER:

How big?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, mine was 23 counties that I took care of.

INTERVIEWER:

So they divided the state up into like four sections? Each one of you had...

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

...a section? And I remember reading when it first started back in 1945, there were two men involved, two State Policemen and each one was responsible for half the state. Is that...

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right. But as time went by, they broke up to quarters of the state. Each man was assigned to that area...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and he took care of that area.

INTERVIEWER:

What were your duties? What did they consist of? What did you have to do?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, anything to do with aviation. There was air shows, public relations, airplane crashes. As I said, just anything to do with aviation.

INTERVIEWER:

At that time, were they using planes for spotting marijuana fields?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. That and that...

INTERVIEWER:

Not...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

...at that time. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

We had an airplane based in Johnstown and if I wanted the airplane, I had to go to Johnstown and get it and come back and fly my territory or whatever I had to do in my territory.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have to do that on a daily basis or was that just on a need-be -- whenever they...

MR. SKILLMAN:

On a daily...

INTERVIEWER:

...would need...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...basis, I had to get to where I had to go by troop car, by tractor-trailer, horse, wagon; however you had to get up into the mountains and it's hard to say where I was going to be every day.

INTERVIEWER:

But you didn't necessarily have to get into the airplane every day. Correct?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. I could have, but I didn't. There was a civilian fellow, Rick Colombo (ph) -- well, when I went with the Commission, Tom

Wolmer (ph) was the civilian with the Aeronautics Commission and he was based in Johnstown and then as time went by, Tom Wolmer left the Commission and Rick Colombo was my partner who worked hand-in-hand with airports and public relations and meetings; anything to do with aeronautics. We could go in crashes. Mainly our stuff was -- my stuff was crashes and Rick Colombo, he's there -- he took care of anything to do with aviation as far as in the airways and the private fields and the main airports. He worked -- well, I guess he could go anyplace in the state he wanted because he had an airplane assigned to him. We had...

INTERVIEWER:

He was a civilian, you say. He was not a policeman?

MR. SKILLMAN:

He wasn't a -- he was a civilian. He wasn't a policeman. And the only four policemen was Mayo, Bill Hall, McGordy, Earl Moore. We were assigned to each territory.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. So Dick, what you were saying is that there were four of you in the unit then and you each had the responsibility of a quarter of the state. Correct?

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

How long were you in the division?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Eighteen years.

INTERVIEWER:

Eighteen years?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Um-hum.

INTERVIEWER:

In that 18 years' time, was there anything, you know, that was really exciting that you could tell us about? Do you remember any special cases, any special things that involved the airplane at that time?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, we had -- we averaged about 80 accidents a year.

INTERVIEWER:

And you had to investigate these accidents?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah, and make a report up of them and submit them to the Aeronautics Commission and they filed them or what they do with them, I don't know. But -- and we worked both with the --

hand-in-hand with the FAA and the Civil Aeronautics Board on the air crashes, big ones and little ones. We worked with military aircraft, big ones and little ones, and...

INTERVIEWER:

So you and the other three State Police involved in the unit were the only ones that investigated airplane crashes. Is that correct?

With...

MR. SKILLMAN:

For the...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...state. For...

INTERVIEWER:

For the state.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...the state.

INTERVIEWER:

The normal trooper though...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. He didn't...

INTERVIEWER:

...didn't do anything with the air crashes. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

They were all yours?

MR. SKILLMAN:

We did the investigation, did the reports on them. The big thing about the troopers, when there was a airplane come down, they called me and I got a hold of the station that it happened in and they sent a man out and guarded the aircraft until we got there. Once we got there, it was our responsibility to take care of it.

INTERVIEWER:

And I think you mentioned -- I remember you saying that back in those days at that time you weren't using the aircraft for locating purposes, those kinds of things. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. If we were out and there was an airplane, we'd go -- I could go get an airplane at one of the airports and go searching for it and go with other guys that search for them. We had airplane crashes in the mountains. We had to get an airplane up to find out where it was at in the first place.

INTERVIEWER:

Now you say you'd go to the airport and get a plane. You're talking about the plane assigned to you. Right? You just couldn't go to any...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. You can go to any airplane...

INTERVIEWER:

Any airport?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Airport and you'd get an -- rent an airplane and use it and the only time -- if I was in the area where I could get hold of a state airplane, I used it.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you mentioned also that you used it in air shows.

What did that consist of...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, we went and...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...checked there to see if they had insurance, see if the pilots that were in the air show, if they were licensed and up to date on their medical and their pilot license. We checked the airplanes and

see if they're up to date. Anything that pertained to the aviation industry.

INTERVIEWER:

How many planes do you recall being in the state at that time...

MR. SKILLMAN:

That the...

INTERVIEWER:

...for the years...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...state owned?

INTERVIEWER:

Yes.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, the State Aeronautics Commission at that time owned -- there was three, maybe four state-owned -- State Aeronautics owned.

INTERVIEWER:

Not Pennsylvania State Police?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. The State Police didn't have nothing to do with owning the aircraft.

INTERVIEWER:

What kind of aircraft were they? Which ones...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, we had Cessna, Super Cubs, Tri-Pacers (ph). We had Cessna 195s, Cessna 172s, Super Cubs.

INTERVIEWER:

And did you have to -- you had to know how to fly all of them?

Did you have to take...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I got a...

INTERVIEWER:

...training in all of them or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I -- through my lifetime, I had advantage of flying about every kind of a light aircraft that there was.

INTERVIEWER:

So you were a little bit ahead of everybody else on...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Well, some of the guys that did the same thing that I did, they didn't want to go get the airplane and take it to their territory. I had the advantage where I was close by where I could get to an airplane. Some of the older guys that was on before I was, some

of them flew and some -- they had their license, but they didn't fly.

INTERVIEWER:

That part of your career, would you say that was the best part of your career? Did you enjoy that?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. I was all over the state, my buddy and I that flew from -- the civilian, Rick Combo, he'd come and get me and we'd go check the airports and if there was an air crash and he was in the area, he'd go with me, find out what happened and in the meantime, the FAA had a detail that they did nothing but aircrafts. They worked out of Pittsburgh. The (inaudible). We had FAA out of Harrisburg, out of Philadelphia. Then we worked for the Civil Aeronautics Board out of New York. If there was a fatal accident, they called the Civil Aeronautics Board. We would go more or less help in the investigation. If they needed anything, we'd help them. If we needed supplies or stuff, we could get them and we could -- had checks that we could pay for whatever we wanted, a Jeep or a car or a horse; anything to get us to the scene and back. You never know back in the mountains where they'd be.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, how long were you in the unit?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I was there 18 years.

INTERVIEWER:

Eighteen years. What brought it to a halt? What...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, they did...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...away with it.

INTERVIEWER:

They did away with it...

MR. SKILLMAN:

In...

INTERVIEWER:

...in '78, I believe, or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

1970.

INTERVIEWER:

1970?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. They turned it back to -- the Aeronautics dropped out of it and the FAA took it over.

INTERVIEWER:

So that took the Pennsylvania State Police out of it then. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

For a certain amount of time. Then eventually we got back into it with our own aircraft, correct, with the helicopters and...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

No?

MR. SKILLMAN:

The State Police never had owned an airplane until they bought their own helicopters and airplanes and did the patrol work with the airplanes or whatever they did. I don't know what they did.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember when that was (inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

1975. Something like that.

INTERVIEWER:

And their unit is still in operation today. Correct?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. That's right. There's six aircraft. Six aircraft and I think six helicopters and they're stationed in different areas and they -- they're assigned to patrol a certain area...

INTERVIEWER:

And what...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and they check traffic and -- now just what they're compelled to do, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you miss it?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. I -- it was something that you -- you know, a lifetime you never got to do.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, when it ended in 1970, were you promoted at that time?

Were you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

No?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

You didn't get promoted until...

MR. SKILLMAN:

'72, I think it was.

INTERVIEWER:

...'72. Did you have special uniforms for the aviation unit at all back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. We had our regular uniforms or we could -- we had civilian clothes. We weren't compelled to wear uniforms. And we had regular uniforms and we had trousers so we could wear in order to fly the airplane. Putts and your guns and everything, you couldn't take them with you in the airplane. You could...

INTERVIEWER:

You couldn't...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...take -- well, you could take them with you, but you wouldn't wear them in the airplane, control the airplane and have a gun hanging on your side.

INTERVIEWER:

So you didn't have enough room you're saying with the...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, that's...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...true, but it'd be -- made an inconvenience to do it.

INTERVIEWER:

So after your stay or stint with the aviation unit, 18 years' worth, where did you go from there?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I went back to regular duty and then I was in the crime unit from the start, but when I went back to regular duty, then I was -- took over the criminal intelligence and -- for the State Police...

INTERVIEWER:

And what did that...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and my...

INTERVIEWER:

...entail? What was that about?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, we (inaudible) anything that had to do with updating criminals and stuff like that and investigations and information and the knowledge of what's going on in the area.

INTERVIEWER:

Kind of like the intelligence officer?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Intelligence. That's what it...

INTERVIEWER:

That's -- did you do anything around organized crime, that kind of stuff, intelligence information?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. That -- we were in -- yeah. More or less update what was moving and what wasn't moving...

INTERVIEWER:

Where did you get your...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and in...

INTERVIEWER:

...information -- your intelligence information from?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well...

INTERVIEWER:

Where did that come from? Did you have to develop that or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

From the troop, the men in the troop. Each guy -- they used to bring it in to you. If they made a report, they -- you got a report of what's going on and it'd bring you -- update what's news in the area.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have to go out and verify that information that they gave you or did you just take for granted, you know, that information was correct?

MR. SKILLMAN:

It's hard to say how they -- you come about -- the stuff was there and what you did on your own to bring it up to date and to renew it and add to or take away, you had to do it that way.

INTERVIEWER:

So did you have contacts that you could rely on for information?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. Well, in...

INTERVIEWER:

How did you develop those contacts, Richard?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, you meet people and friends and just...

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have paid informants? Did you pay anybody for this information back then?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. No, not that I recall. You -- it's hard to say how it -- you kept track of everything that was going on. You tried to keep track of everything going on.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you responsible for the whole troop or just...

MR. SKILLMAN:

For the troop area.

INTERVIEWER:

And that would be five counties at that time?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Five counties.

INTERVIEWER:

What a responsibility.

MR. SKILLMAN:

But -- well, it's hard to say how you kept track. You were out meeting people, knowing people and hearing this and hearing that and you put it together. Something come up that was important, you'd make a report. Goes to Harrisburg. What they

did with their -- I don't know. Or they called you in. They had meetings in the intelligence end, what was going around -- on around the state and if there was something important, you tried to follow through and keep information going in to Harrisburg. When Harrisburg got it, I don't know what happened to it then.

INTERVIEWER:

But if you were to hear something or if one of the guys, one of the troopers brought some information to you, you would go out and investigate that information and make sure that...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Make a report up on it and pass it on to Harrisburg. As I said, what Harrisburg did it -- you never know.

INTERVIEWER:

Was that information eventually shared then back with the troopers out on the road so they'd know what's going on?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't know. I -- when you got it and put it on paper and it goes to Harrisburg, I don't know what...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So after then the aviation detail, you went back to the crime unit as the intelligence officer. Correct?

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

And how long were you there?

MR. SKILLMAN:

About four years, maybe five years until I retired.

INTERVIEWER:

So you retired from the intelligence office position? Is that...

MR. SKILLMAN:

From intelligence, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And do you remember anything interesting or exciting happening to you while you were in that unit, that detail?

MR. SKILLMAN:

(no audible response)

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have any special training you had to go through for that?

Did they send you to any schools?

MR. SKILLMAN:

It was like a hand-me-down from the sergeant that had it before.

I took his position. Picked it up and made everything as I -- that I

knew what was going on. But how it was deciphered in the

headquarters or...

INTERVIEWER:

Right. Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...in the -- Harrisburg...

INTERVIEWER:

(Inaudible)

MR. SKILLMAN:

...I don't know.

INTERVIEWER:

So your training was more or less on-the-job training. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. Picked it up as you went along.

INTERVIEWER:

Right. And there was only one for the troop. Is that correct?

You were...

MR. SKILLMAN:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

...responsible for the entire troop.

MR. SKILLMAN:

In other words, if something went on and a guy from Mercer told me this is going on, I'd make up a report. I'd submit it to

headquarters. Headquarters -- they sent it to Harrisburg or wherever they sent it and then unless they come back and said look after this or look into this, that's as far as we went that I know.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Let's go back in your career. Do you -- obviously you worked traffic at one time or another. Did you not?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Ten years.

INTERVIEWER:

Ten years on traffic.

MR. SKILLMAN:

I worked that out of Troop E Erie.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you feel when you heard that another trooper you know was injured or killed in the line of duty back then, Dick? What -- did that affect the way you did your job at all? Did it, you know, make you a little more cautious? Just...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, you tried to stay cautious all the time. You never just want to go out and laugh it off.

INTERVIEWER:

Right.

MR. SKILLMAN:

You always hope to be on guard at the right time.

INTERVIEWER:

How about did you stand formal inspections then -- back then?

Did you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

We used to.

INTERVIEWER:

Used to?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Once a month, you went to the Troop Headquarters and the guys come in from all the substations to headquarters.

INTERVIEWER:

And what did you do?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Had drill and bring up information and they'd tell you what's going on or what you -- what they wanted you to know and...

INTERVIEWER:

Kind of...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...that's about all.

INTERVIEWER:

...inspection...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. I had -- your equipment and...

INTERVIEWER:

Equipment? When you were promoted and transferred -- did you get transferred when you got promoted?

MR. SKILLMAN:

No, sir.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You stayed right where you were. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yes, sir.

INTERVIEWER:

And you did -- do you -- did you have to take a test for that promotion?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. I...

INTERVIEWER:

(Inaudible) test?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

What was that about? What was the test like?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, most of it was criminal. It was for -- on the criminal end and -- of the law. But it had traffic and geography. It had -- well, they could ask you anything they wanted to.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there a certain score you had to make? You had to obtain? How did it -- you know, when you were taking the test...

MR. SKILLMAN:

They didn't -- they gave you the test. You put down what you -- yes or no, and there's never -- I never know of any score you had to make or was -- looked forward to them making.

INTERVIEWER:

Were there any other factors involved in determining who was going to get promoted and who wasn't? Efficiency ratings or...

MR. SKILLMAN:

No. I don't know. All I know you took the test and they tell you -- they could've told you that day when you were done whether you were high or low, but you would know maybe a month to two before the -- where you'd come out, where you were on the list for promotion.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. Back then in your younger days when you first started out as a Pennsylvania State Trooper, do you remember any of what the working conditions were like back then and -- I guess what I'm asking is what were some of the complaints back then, you know, compared to today? You know, the guys today for example might be complaining about radio systems not being up to snuff, those kinds of things. What were some of the things that your era was concerned about while you were on the job?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well...

INTERVIEWER:

Other than money.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...some things that...

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. Things that you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, there were so many things...

INTERVIEWER:

That we needed change...

MR. SKILLMAN:

When I come on the job when I was out working traffic, it was strictly traffic, the traffic laws. But it's hard to explain. There was something new every day and then some days you'd have murder. Some days you clean out the garbage. But you never knew what you were going to do from one day to the next. You were only -- do what they told you to do.

INTERVIEWER:

Were the guys though -- when you get together, you know, the guys, you talk amongst yourselves. Were the guys complaining about maybe lack of equipment that you had or you needed better communication systems, better vehicles in order to catch the speeders?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, when I come on the job, we first started in Greensburg. In Greensburg, they had radios, but they hadn't got them out to the other troops...

INTERVIEWER:

So when...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and...

INTERVIEWER:

...you came on, you're saying you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

We had radios in Greensburg, but when we got to Erie, we didn't have radios and they were just starting to build, get the radio equipment in. And outside of that...

INTERVIEWER:

Well, how did you keep in contact with each other? What if you needed help? What were you supposed to do? How did you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, in Greensburg, we had the radios to contend with, but...

INTERVIEWER:

How about up in Erie?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...in Erie -- they were just starting to get them in Erie.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. SKILLMAN:

And as you got the -- got used to the radios and how they worked and how to contact the other guys. We used to have two-way radios and then they got to where you'd talk car to car and then each substation had its own radio and transmitters. But out on the road, that's all you depended on in them days was the radio. Years ago, they used to go to -- when we were taught,

they had places where they'd stop along the road and if the flag was up, you went in and see what the message was. If the flag wasn't up, you'd keep on going.

INTERVIEWER:

So there were certain areas that you would have to -- you'd go by on patrol to check to see if that flag was up. If...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. You always looked for that flag up in the area you were in. You had certain stations where you were -- the flag would go up and you'd know to stop there to find out what was going on.

INTERVIEWER:

That's...

MR. SKILLMAN:

If you got up and there's no flag there, you just went...

INTERVIEWER:

Continued on.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Keep on going.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you think of any incident or assignment that you had throughout your career as being particularly significant that -- to

you? You know, anything that you did that really stands out in your mind that you remember?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I can't explain that because there was -- every day, you had something new to look after or look into. You might be out on a break-in or a traffic stop or a traffic check on the road. We had -- one time we had -- a policeman got killed in Pittsburg and we were looking for him up around Erie and went out and had roadblocks and -- et cetera and check everything that came through. Then I remember one time we had some guys in Buffalo busted out or escaped and they were on the railroad. So we were out in the railroad yards looking for them and hoping a train didn't run over us or anything like that and when the train is coming down the track 70, 80 mile an hour, you'd better make sure you know what track it's on.

INTERVIEWER:

How about -- can you remember any humorous incidents that you may have experienced? Things that stick in your mind, you know, that you just found it funny that happened to you, you know, during your career?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I remember one time on substation, we had a clean-up day and the sergeant gave us money to go down to the local store to buy soap and supplies to do the cleaning in the farmhouse we lived in and I bought a box of Spic-N-Span. I thought it was cleanser and put it in the water and it didn't make no soap, so I put the whole box in and we did the woodwork in the house and the landlady that had the farmhouse who lived in it, she came in and we heard her scream and then we wondered what was going on and here the Spic-N-Span took all the paint off of the walls and we didn't do that again. We didn't do...

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have to refinish it?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, I don't know. She had somebody come in and do it. But that's the funniest thing that I know. I can still hear her squealing on about the paint. The Spic-N-Span took all the paint off the wood that it was on, you know.

INTERVIEWER:

And that was at a substation?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. That was out in the substation. But...

INTERVIEWER:

Which substation was that?

MR. SKILLMAN:

West Springfield.

INTERVIEWER:

West Springfield?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. There was nine -- seven of us there. Seven of us stationed there.

INTERVIEWER:

Seven?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Seven guys.

INTERVIEWER:

Is that the times when you had to sleep with the phones? Called sleeping with the phones and that?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. That's the time.

INTERVIEWER:

Just exactly what did that mean, sleeping with the phones?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I remember one time I was on the station and the patrol was out for the night patrol and the phone rang and I got up and I

walked into the door. The wind had blown the door shut. And I walked into the thing and almost killed myself. But you'd go -- you work eight hours on the desk and the rest of the time, you didn't stay -- you had to stay in the station. Somebody had to stay in the station the whole time. But when the -- I forgot my train of thought there. When they'd -- if you worked 8:00 to 4:00 on the phone, you might be on evening phone until eight o'clock or you might be out on patrol until eight or ten o'clock, whatever hours you had to go. Then you come back and you didn't go home. You stayed on station. The guys that stayed in station, somebody had to answer the phone.

INTERVIEWER:

So if you answered the phone and it...

MR. SKILLMAN:

You might answer...

INTERVIEWER:

...was (inaudible)?

MR. SKILLMAN:

...it all night long and the next morning, you were up back out on the road again.

INTERVIEWER:

But if you took an incident that night, if an incident come in while you were on the phone, you had to go out and take care of it?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah, unless there was other guys that were on night patrol.

INTERVIEWER:

In your mind, what are some of the most noteworthy changes that you saw occur on the Pennsylvania State Police during your career? From the time you came on to the time you retired there, what are some of the most noteworthy changes that you can remember?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, one was uniforms. We went from wool uniforms to poplin uniforms. And the funny thing about that that I recall they -- there was about 4,000 guys on the State Police at that time and they had a outfit in Dubois or something that made shirts and they sent them out to the quartermaster and the quartermaster sent them to the troops. In them days, you had a quartermaster, one in Erie and they -- pardon me. They didn't have one in Erie. They just had it in Butler. If you wanted anything, you had to go to...

INTERVIEWER:

To Butler.

MR. SKILLMAN:

...Greensburg, to Butler, to Little Washington. But they got all these shirts and they went to put them on and some guys had long sleeves and the other guys, they'd have real short sleeves. So they had to take all the shirts back to do them over again.

INTERVIEWER:

So the uniform was a notable thing that you remember changing?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah. That was...

INTERVIEWER:

Anything else? How about firearms, cars?

MR. SKILLMAN:

They said what?

INTERVIEWER:

How about the cars? Did -- you know, when you came on -- what year did you come in?

MR. SKILLMAN:

'46.

INTERVIEWER:

In '46. And you retired in when?

MR. SKILLMAN:

In '84.

INTERVIEWER:

In '84. I'm sure you saw a big change in cars. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

The power of the cars, the air conditioning. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Air conditioning, radios and I remember when we used to come from Butler -- from Erie to Butler to get the cars or get them inspected and then you'd get up at five o'clock in the morning. You'd be to Butler at eight o'clock in the morning and get the car inspected. Then you had to go back to Erie and then they'd put you on patrol or on station until night patrol. But in them days, you only got a night and a day off.

INTERVIEWER:

What...

MR. SKILLMAN:

They had to give you the day, but they didn't have to give you the nights and if you were single, you stayed in the station. If you were married, then you'd go home. But if you were -- if you weren't married -- how is that? You had to stay on the station.

You worked all day and stayed -- and then on your day off, you'd go home. But...

INTERVIEWER:

How about the money? I'm sure that was a notable change. When you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well...

INTERVIEWER:

...you came on -- how much were you making when you came on?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I think it was \$75 a month room and board and then I remember they had a raise and I got \$70 a month and I told them why didn't you, you know, let me have the \$75, forget about the raise and I was losing money on the deal. I got a raise and I didn't get the raise.

INTERVIEWER:

When you retired, how much were you making?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I really don't know offhand. I know it was...

INTERVIEWER:

Approximately.

MR. SKILLMAN:

About \$27,000 a year.

INTERVIEWER:

What did you like most about serving with the Pennsylvania State Police? What was the best thing about it?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, it was -- every man has a different way to look at life, you know?

INTERVIEWER:

Sure.

MR. SKILLMAN:

And when I remember -- I enjoyed the job. I really did. When I was only -- and when I was in traffic or when I was in the aviation end of it. When I was on traffic, there was something new every day. You had truck accidents, train accidents. You might be out on a boat. You might be going to Harrisburg, taking a car to Harrisburg or a truck. But you would just -- something to keep you busy all the time.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there anything you disliked?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Not that I can remember. But some guys, everything bothered them and other guys go along, happy-go-lucky. If it happens, it happens. But I know we had the Farm Shop and the South Park and the parkway in Pittsburg and then we had the mine strikes and coal strikes and it just -- it's just something -- every day something new. You never got tired of what you were -- might've got tired, but not what you were doing.

INTERVIEWER:

Is there anything that you would've done differently in your career with the PSP if you could do it all over again?

MR. SKILLMAN:

(no audible response)

INTERVIEWER:

Would you do it all over again?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I don't know how to -- how you tell that because every man has his own way of looking at something. Some guys...

INTERVIEWER:

Obviously you enjoyed being a State Trooper.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Well...

INTERVIEWER:

Would you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...some guys...

INTERVIEWER:

...do it again?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah, I would. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

All right.

MR. SKILLMAN:

But some guys are never satisfied no matter what you tell them to do.

INTERVIEWER:

And you retired in when? Nineteen eighty...

MR. SKILLMAN:

Four.

INTERVIEWER:

Four. As a corporal. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

How old were you then, Dick?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I might've been probably -- shoot. I...

INTERVIEWER:

Kind of taxing the mind now?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you in your 50s?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Around 38...

INTERVIEWER:

Thirty-eight years? When -- what...

MR. SKILLMAN:

I had 38 years on the job.

INTERVIEWER:

And how old were you...

MR. SKILLMAN:

So...

INTERVIEWER:

...when you came on?

MR. SKILLMAN:

I was 21.

INTERVIEWER:

Twenty-one. Thirty-eight years.

MR. SKILLMAN:

You said when I retired.

INTERVIEWER:

That would make you like 55.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah. Around that.

INTERVIEWER:

Have you had any involvement with the Pennsylvania State Police since your retirement? PSP Retirees' Association? PSP or, you know, friends or relatives?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, I...

INTERVIEWER:

(Inaudible)

MR. SKILLMAN:

...belong to some of the retirees -- the Northwest Retirees out of Erie...

INTERVIEWER:

And you belong to...

MR. SKILLMAN:

...and Butler.

INTERVIEWER:

...the Pennsylvania State Police Retirement -- Retirees' Association. Right?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you keep in touch with some of your old friends from the State Police?

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, Richard, I'm just about out of questions to ask you here. In closing, is there anything else that you'd like to say, you'd like to add about the Pennsylvania State Police, about your career? Anything that you would like to leave -- you know, your thoughts, your -- whatever.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Well, the only thing I know is -- think about is if you take the FAA, those guys that are with the FAA and we worked hand in hand with them, they had training at least once a year. Well, we had updates, but when -- not -- I remember one time they taught us

how to shoot a machinegun and they allowed you to shoot 20 rounds. Well, that's not even getting the barrel hot and that's (inaudible) and have a physical. Had one physical. Maybe ten years on the job there, another physical, and that's all. Nothing - the guys if they had time -- that's the biggest thing. If they had - every day they had an hour of physical -- doing something that would be good for them. But I know we had rifles. We got out one time and they -- the guy said they shot around corners, you know.

INTERVIEWER:

Shot around...

MR. SKILLMAN:

It's...

INTERVIEWER:

...corners.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Shot around the corners because the -- they weren't sighted in, et cetera. And then a lot of guys never even know how to handle a rifle or how to get the bolts open or shut or a shotgun. And now machineguns, I know -- that's the only thing I know about machineguns. They -- we went from Erie to Butler and one of the corporals, he liked machineguns or something. But I think

there was 20 rounds that you got to fire. It'd go and it was done, and that's the last time they -- and we went down to penitentiary and you had -- went down there on detail. You had -- you carried a rifle and of course you had to see what was going on down there to try to explain it, you know, to the -- with prisoners, et cetera. They could've been on you in five seconds if they wanted to turn on you, but my luck, nobody got hurt.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, Richard, I truly believe that the Pennsylvania State Police is living on past reputation from guys like you and I am so very, very proud to be associated with you.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Oh, thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

INTERVIEWER:

I want to take this time again to thank you for taking your time and consenting to do this interview. Without guys like you, buddy, I don't know where the Pennsylvania State Police would be today. Thank you so very much, Dick.

MR. SKILLMAN:

Thank you, too.