

HISTORICAL MEMORIAL CENTER

Pennsylvania State Police

Oral History Interview of:

SERGEANT THOMAS TRIDICO

March 17, 2005

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. My name is Pete Buchan. I'm at the residence of Retired Sergeant Thomas Tridico. This is tape number one on March the 17th of 2005. Tom, I was here previous and had you fill out some paperwork. Did you at that time give me a consent and release for us to go ahead and video?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yes. I signed the consent and release form.

INTERVIEWER:

Fine. What we're going to do now is have you tell us a little bit about your family, where you were born and raised...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Okay. I was born and raised in Warren, Pennsylvania on October 4, 1925. I was the second of four siblings of Italian immigrants. My father was a Fire Chief. My brother was the Chief of Police and my sister was a Deputy Sheriff. I graduated from Warren High School in June 1943 and one week later, I enlisted in the U.S. Navy at the age of 17-and-a-half. I became a medic corpsman and was assigned to the Marine Corps and I island-hopped across the Pacific during World War II ending up in Japan two weeks after the atom bomb was dropped. I was discharged from the service April 15, 1946 and I joined the State

Police at age 22 on April 1, 1947. At the time of my enlistment, the compliment of the State Police was 1600 officers and during the war years, no troopers were trained from 1943 to 1946, which resulted in many vacancies on the force. As a result of this, double classes were recruited. One class was in training in Hershey and the other class was in training at Troop H Harrisburg at 21st and Herr. I was assigned my training at 21st and Herr Street, Troop H Headquarters in Harrisburg and I spent four months there at 21st and Herr and then after four months I was transferred with nine other recruits to Butler, Pennsylvania where we attended classes in the morning and then we patrolled in the afternoon and evening for two months. On September 16, 1947, I was transferred to Troop A in Greensburg and after my indoctrination in Greensburg by the First Sergeant I was assigned to clean the stables. At that time we had six horses quartered in Greensburg and they were used for strike duty and for parade duties. My training after Harrisburg and Butler -- my assignment in Greensburg, we weren't noticed as cadets. We were student recruits and we were a student recruit and then we -- after we graduated, we became private second class. You were a private second class for three years and then you were

promoted to private first class and then I was assigned traffic duties and no two private second class recruits could patrol together. You had to ride 1P2C which is a private second class with a PFC and that lasted for three years. And after three years if you qualified, you were automatically promoted from private second class to private first class. And this lasted -- and for about nine years I was on patrol duty and then after that I was assigned patrol duties, two-man patrols. And then we worked six days a week. We got one day off a week and it usually was never a Saturday or Sunday, and after the six days a week we worked, three of the -- we got one day off. Three of the five days you worked 16 hours and then you worked 16 hours a day unless you were assigned as that midnight to 8:00 patrol or a 3:00 to 11:00 patrol. I was on traffic patrol for ten years and then I became an R&I (ph) officer for a year. I was transferred from the patrol section to an R&I and we had a pilot program at that time with Cornell University on the use of seatbelts. Seatbelts were just coming into fruition and I -- my job was to go around to the -- all the substations in the troop area for one year and I photographed all the accident -- vehicles that were involved in accidents where people were hurt. Then I forwarded those to

Cornell University so they could conduct a survey as to the feasibility of seatbelts. And after that I became -- I was an R&I officer for a year and then I was assigned to the crime detail. During my time in uniform, I was detached in 1949 for three months to Indiantown Gap during the period when the National Guard was in encampment down there. My duties along with about another 50 to 75 troopers was to control traffic and be on security detail for the National Guard during their summer training. My -- during the entire year of 1950, I was detached to PennDOT. I worked 67 counties on a truck survey detail. I traveled all over the 67 counties with the PennDOT survey crew and weighed and measured commercial motor vehicles. The entire crew stayed in motels and we lived out of a suitcase for a year. When I returned to Greensburg, I was assigned to traffic patrol again and on September 16, 1950, I was married to a girl three years to the day I came to Greensburg. In 1965, I was detached again to the Attorney General's office and transferred to Philadelphia. My assignment along with nine other State Policemen was then the investigation of the magisterial system in Philadelphia. The supervisor of this investigation was a special Attorney General by the name of Arlen Specter who is

now a U.S. Senator. I spent a year on this investigation investigating the corrupt magisterial system in Philadelphia and was quartered at the Delmont Barracks in Philadelphia. I returned to Greensburg and continued my duties on the crime detail. Then in 1968, I was detached again to the Pennsylvania Crime Commission in Harrisburg. I was the officer in charge of the organized crime division and -- which consisted of five other members of the State Police. I remained in this capacity for six months and stayed at Troop H Headquarters on 21st and Herr and then back to Greensburg on the crime detail. It was a short stay because in early 1969, I was detached again and assigned to the Bureau of Criminal Investigation in Harrisburg and my duties consisted of being the officer in charge of the western vice detail consisting of undercover officers. My office was in my home. This duty lasted until August 1970 when I was selected to attend the '86 session of the FBI Academy. I was the ninth member of the State Police to attend the FBI Academy since 1935 and I was the first Sergeant to be assigned. They never took anybody that -- had to be a Lieutenant or above. I graduated from the Academy on October 28, 1970 and returned to the crime detail. When I joined the State Police, my yearly

salary was \$1,800 plus room and board and I was promoted to detective in 1962. My salary at that time was \$5,900 a year and then I was reclassified to a Criminal Investigation Specialist IV. I earned a Lieutenant's pay, which was \$11,850 a year. In 1981, I retired. When I retired, my pay for that year was \$30,000. In 1972, the CIS classification was eliminated. I was demoted back to a Sergeant. However, I was never a Sergeant. I went from trooper to detective, which detective rank was the same as a Sergeant, and then I was -- I still drew a Lieutenant's pay because I was in the Lieutenant's pay classification. I retired from the State Police December 31, 1981 after almost 35 years of service to accept an unsolicited position of Chief of the Westmoreland County Detective Bureau in the DA's office. I remained in the DA's office for five years in charge of nine detectives. On September 20, 1986 after leaving the detective's office, I was appointed officer in charge of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation for the Attorney General's office in Western Pennsylvania. I served four years in that position and then I retired from the Attorney General's office on October 20, 1990. On May 5, 1991, I was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Greensburg City Council. This term was for nine months -- there

would have been a vacancy. At the end of this appointment, I ran for reelection and I have been elected four times to four-year terms and I'm still holding that position. In summary, some of my major cases that I was involved in were the turnpike murders in 1953, the prison riots at Western Penitentiary in 1957, a prison murder in 1960, Johnstown Flood in 1977, ten bank robberies committed by Harold Shad (ph) in four-county area 1972, Allegheny County District Attorney Robert Dugan's death in March of 1974, a rape in 1974 on the Amtrak train en-route from New York to Chicago, a (inaudible) investigation in December of 1980. He committed 11 bank robberies in three counties and I caught him in the act of his last bank robbery. The Travaglia-Lesco case in 1980, they went on a murder spree and killed four victims, one of which was an Apollo police officer who was on his job for the first day. In the rape investigation on the Amtrak train which occurred in 1974, on August 18, 2003, I was subpoenaed by the Florida State Attorney General's office to attend court in Jacksonville, Florida. The actor in my rape investigation over the years committed three other rapes and Florida passed a law three strikes and you get life. I testified concerning my investigation and the actor was sent to prison for a life sentence.

In conclusion, I've been marked for 54 years. I have two daughters and four grandchildren. My one daughter is a paralegal for a law firm in Indiana, Pennsylvania and my other daughter is a criminal justice major in college and was a parole officer for Westmoreland County for eight years. My granddaughter is a senior in college and her goal is to become an FBI agent. Some of the other high points of my career other than investigating types, I spent four days with John Kennedy when he was running for president on a security detail. I traveled with him across Pennsylvania while he was running for president. My other highlight was Russian Premier Khrushchev came to Pittsburgh. I forget what date. Maybe in the late 50s, early 60s and I was on the security detail for Khrushchev and I chauffeured his daughter and two KGB agents from the Greater Pittsburgh Airport to downtown Pittsburgh. And also my other highlight was I was on the security detail for President Eisenhower when he came to dedicate Fort Ligonier. I picked him up in -- at the Johnstown Airport and drove him to Ligonier where he dedicated Fort Ligonier. That concludes my almost 44 years of law enforcement.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay, Tom. I noticed that you primarily were working off of some notes that you had written. We're going to go back and try to get a little more detail in regards to your service with the Pennsylvania State Police. Starting with the time that you were assigned to Greensburg, Greensburg was really basically your only assignment and the other assignments you had were detachments from...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I was detached four times from Greensburg, but I was always attached to Troop A in Greensburg.

INTERVIEWER:

How about your uniforms and weapons at the time you were assigned?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, we were clothed in britches and puttees and we carried a six-inch 38-inch revolver. We -- at the time I came to Greensburg, we had five radio cars. I think now they have 50 or 60 radio cars.

INTERVIEWER:

What kind of radios were they? Were they...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

They were the tube-type radios and they were serviced by the Bell Telephone Company and they were like a telephone and the antenna was in the middle of the roof. It had good reception, but they were soon outdated. When I came to Greensburg, they had just gotten the radios. They used to have what they call flag stops. In other words, you had to go to a -- the post offices in different localities and have them sign the -- or stamp their postage stamp the date and the time that you went there and you always had to complete this same schedule and if there was an accident, they knew about where you were and they would call that gas station or the flag stop and they'd hang a red flag out for you and then you knew to call in and find out what assignment they had for you.

INTERVIEWER:

Were there any major crimes that you were involved in, in those early years? Can you maybe expand on the ones you were involved in? I believe you mentioned the turnpike murders. Was that one of your first ones?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, I wasn't really an investigator, but everybody in Troop A Greensburg was involved to some degree. I patrolled the turnpike. We had three turnpike murders and I patrolled the

turnpike from Greensburg to Bedford midnight to 8:00 and you had to chase the truck drivers that were stopped along the road. They -- because they could only be sleeping in their cab at service plazas. And one of the highlights of that investigation during the turnpike murders after he committed the second turnpike murder, we decided to set a trap for him and he was killing -- he killed two car carrier operators. So we developed a empty car carrier and we parked it up around Donegal and we got a mannequin and dressed the mannequin up a as a truck driver and we opened the doors in the truck and we had his feet sticking out and me and another trooper were laying up in the woods with shotguns. And all of sudden traveling in the other direction was a car carrier of the same company that we had leased from the car carrier and this guy come across the turnpike and he's yelling hey, buddy. Hey, buddy. You can't sleep there. It's dangerous. And I said to my buddy, my other trooper, I said we can't yell at this guy. He's going to run and get killed by a car if he runs across the turnpike. So we shined our lights on us, flashlights on us. We were in uniform of course and then he got the message and we told him to get the hell out of there.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there -- I understand back around that time, there was a incident I believe in Youngstown, Pennsylvania. Were you at all involved in that?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I was on patrol that time and there was a guy that went berserk and I believe he murdered two or three people. A constable went to arrest him and there was a shout and I don't remember the exact details, but there was two or three people killed by this person that they had a warrant for, the constable was going to arrest.

INTERVIEWER:

He -- believe he shot the constable and the justice of the peace...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...and one other person.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yeah. I don't remember the exact details of that.

INTERVIEWER:

How about in those early years, was there -- I don't know if it was before your time. A robbery where they killed a paymaster.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

McFeely (ph) Brickyard murder. Yeah. I was on the job then. Two guys went in there and there was a paymaster, McFeely Brickyard in Latrobe and the guy ran when they approached him and he ran into the little office and they fired through the door and killed him. And the -- one of the suspects in that case was Robert Malloy (ph) and he and I after he got out of prison became good friends. He hated policemen, but he sort of took a liking to me and I had a good rapport with him. He was an informant for me for years.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, those are a few of them that I had thought you might've been involved in.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Another interesting case that I had one time, I was on traffic patrol when I was on traffic duty. I got a radio call that there had been an armed holdup up around Irwin and the dispatcher said you can recognize the getaway truck, pickup truck has a license plate on the front of the truck that says Mighty Mouse. And just after I got the message, I looked in my mirror and there was this truck in back of me and I says -- I called the barracks and I says 10:4. I have the subject in custody, which I didn't but he was

right in back of me and I took him in custody for this armed robbery.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Backing up just a hair, did you have to use the horses at all while you were there?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Every Saturday morning, we had to exercise them. We drove -- we road them down through the woods to Lynch (ph) Field, which was then called the polo grounds. It was a dirt track down over the hill which is now a recreation facility and we had to run them around the track every Saturday morning. And what was unusual, I was happy that I got assigned to 21st and Herr for my training because I had never rode a horse before and I was basking on my laurels that I never had to do horsemanship. But then when I came to Greensburg and saw the six horses in the stables and then there was only -- six horses, but there was only five recruits. So you know every Saturday I had to ride -- I learned to ride down through the polo grounds on the horses.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, when -- I'm going to back you up a little more. I'm going back to your family. You mentioned your dad was a Fire Chief

and your mom was a housewife and your brothers and sisters --
how many are living?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I have one sister living and my mother is 101 years old. She just turned 100 (sic) yesterday and she's still living. She's 101 years old. And my dad was the fire chief. He came here -- age 17 and he was what they call a bunker. They had horse and buggies at that time at the fire department and he had -- he lived at the fire station and his job was to feed the horses and hook up the team when there's an alarm come in. And after he went to World War I when he was discharged, he come back and they had bought motorized equipment and he was the first guy they hired. It was a paid department. They didn't have volunteers. And then after the years, he became the fire chief.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And then you graduated from Warren High School. You had gone into the service...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

One week after I graduated from Warren High School, I went in -
- I joined the U.S. Navy. I was going to be a pilot and then during the time that -- they have a quota every month for pilot training, so after I finished my training, unfortunately the tomato

crop was rotting in Rochester, New York so they sent 50 of us Navy Recruits to bottle -- I bottle Snyder's tomato ketchup for two weeks while I was in the Navy and while I was in Albion, New York bottling tomato ketchup, the quota came in for that month to go to pilot training, but I missed it. And then I went back to the Naval training base and at that time, the next day they volunteered me to go to medical school. I went to Bainbridge, Maryland and I thought well, this isn't too bad. Then I finished my medical training. They assigned me to the Marines, so I was in the 10th Beach Battalion with the Marine Corps and I island-hopped across the Pacific. I was in Okinawa at the Battle of Okinawa and in the Philippines and then we were en-route to Japan just before they dropped the atom bomb. We were going to be the main force to land on the main land of Japan. We had about 28 ships with different types of ships and Marines and soldiers, and as we approached the Sea of Japan, they dropped the atom bomb and then the war was over. So then we hit a typhoon and while we were rolling around for two days in this typhoon, we ended up in a little village of Okayama, Japan. So we went there and we weren't sure they were aware that the war was over, so I went ashore with an interpreter and two other

officers as -- I went ashore as the medic with two other officers and we landed in this little village and like I say, we weren't sure they were aware the war was over. However, they had souvenir stands set up already.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you got out of the Navy and came back home, did you work anywhere before you went in the State Police?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I was on the maintenance crew of a commercial bakery. I drove a truck and did some -- I -- maintenance work for this bakery. My reason for joining the -- eventually I was -- as a result of my medic training I was going to be a doctor. So -- but my grandfather had a shoe repair shop in Warren and next door was the Highway Patrol. And I used to see those guys come in on those motorcycles and I thought well, I'm going to be a Highway Patrolman. And years ago at that time there was two outfits, the Highway Patrol and the State Police. The Highway Patrol was in Warren. The State Police was in -- about 25 miles away in Kane, PA, and then when they merged in 1937 or '38, somewhere along in there, they merged together and made one unit. But that's how I got my inkling to become a State Trooper,

when I saw these Highway Patrolmen come in on their motorcycles.

INTERVIEWER:

Where did you first apply?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

In Warren. Warren, PA.

INTERVIEWER:

In Warren, PA?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right. At that time, you didn't have to take a test. You -- it was more or less who you knew and the appointed -- they -- as I understand it, there was 4,000 applications after the war and I was picked in 1947 to go. I was one of -- there was 39 men in my class and I think 20 of us graduated, 19 dropped out first couple months and then when I finished my four months in 21st and Herr, nine of us went to Butler and I think another 10 or 11 went to Philadelphia to complete the next two months of their training.

INTERVIEWER:

So then you actually completed your training at Butler and -- before you...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I...

INTERVIEWER:

...were assigned to...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...Greensburg?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I finished my six months in Butler.

INTERVIEWER:

All right. And we talked about uniforms. Were there two uniforms, a summer and a winter, or was there just one?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

There was just one uniform and we didn't have air-conditioned cars at that time either. We wore the puttees and the wool shirt and wool britches and I can remember when you got white-line detail you had to travel back of the PennDOT crew and you -- after you traveled two or three hours painting white lines, you had to go home and change because you were soaking wet in the summertime.

INTERVIEWER:

How long did it take to get into a summer uniform?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, I just forget -- probably in the late 50s, they switched to the long pants. They got -- they did away with the britches and they got a lightweight shirt. It wasn't a wool shirt anymore.

INTERVIEWER:

But that was strictly for summer?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

No. We wore that all the time. Well, they had changed the shirt in the wintertime, but you didn't wear britches and puttees anymore. You had two uniforms, one summer and one winter.

INTERVIEWER:

Getting back to Greensburg, you said you went into criminal investigations and then subsequently -- tell me a little bit about the private first class, second class because I never experienced that. I -- and I didn't realize how that worked.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

They didn't -- well, we weren't noticed as troopers. We were a student recruit instead of cadets and then after you finished your six-month's training, you became a private second class. You were a private second class for three years and then if you didn't have any disciplinary problems, you automatically were promoted to private first class.

INTERVIEWER:

There was no testing or anything?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

No testing. You -- it was an automatic deal.

INTERVIEWER:

Once you became that, was there any testing procedure to go up the ranks?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, yeah. You had a -- you had to take a test for Corporal and then from there you went of course to Sergeant. But I never -- I took tests for Corporal and I never made the cutoff point. And then at that time I was still a PFC, private first class, and in each troop they had three detectives with a detective rank; a Detective Sergeant and two plain detectives. I was -- there was a vacancy and I was interviewed by a board of three officers plus the Deputy Commissioner at that time who was Jacob Mauck (ph) I believe. And anyway I was appointed detective and I was the detective in the Detective Bureau from -- for Harrisburg, but I was assigned to Greensburg and each troop had three detectives. Well, then when Commissioner Mcketta came aboard, he eliminated detective rank and he started the criminal investigation specialist detail. A criminal investigation I was a

Corporal, criminal investigation II was a Sergeant, criminal investigation III was a First Sergeant and criminal investigation IV was a Lieutenant. And they had several criminal investigation specialists, one in each troop which was comparable to a Corporal. And the reason they did that as I understand it, we weren't getting clothing allowance at that time. In order for us to pay for our plain clothes, they instituted that program and I was a criminal investigation specialist IV for I forget how many years. And then when Commissioner Urella came in, he eliminated that program and reverted me back to a Sergeant. However, I was never a Sergeant. I was a detective and I -- when I left the State Police, I retired as a Sergeant.

INTERVIEWER:

So actually what you're saying is if you were a detective, you automatically became a Sergeant...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right. It was the same...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible).

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

It was comparable. It -- the detective was comparable to a Sergeant as the CIS IV was comparable to a Lieutenant. And

after I became a CIS IV, I never took the next promotion test for -
- promotion test to be elevated to an actual uniformed
Lieutenant. I figured well, why -- you know, why should I take a
test? I'm already getting Lieutenant's pay and I didn't want to get
transferred. I didn't want to get assigned to another detail.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's back up then. You were in Greensburg. You had to ask
permission to get married, but you had to be single how many
years?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Three years. You couldn't get married for three years and then
you had to ask permission to get married and I still have the
letter of request for me to get married, and one of the paragraphs
on that request to get married, you had to -- I can remember
verbatim. You had to state "My marriage will in no way interfere
with my duties as a Pennsylvania State Policeman."

INTERVIEWER:

Was your wife investigated?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yes. You had to give her name and address and where she was
from and they checked into her. And if you got married before
the three years was up, you automatically were stricken from the

force because I had one member of my class who got married. He had about a year on the job and he tried to keep it a secret and they found out and he had to leave the force.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You were -- well, you were single, but you stayed in the barracks (inaudible)...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I lived at the barracks except when I was on detached service for all those times.

INTERVIEWER:

So then you actually traveled all over the state in the various details that they assigned you to. The PennDOT survey crew and then the...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I was on that...

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible) study.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I was on the PennDOT crew for a year and I traveled to all 67 counties. Stayed in motels, got \$5 a day expenses for food.

INTERVIEWER:

What was the purpose of that study? What were they trying to find?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

They were -- well, they were measuring commercial vehicles to see how much weight they could put on the roads and how much they had to resurface the roads and...

INTERVIEWER:

Did that have anything to do with the height also...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...in regards to moving military vehicles?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yes. They measured...

INTERVIEWER:

(Inaudible)

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

...the trucks and they weighed the trucks. They had to get the measurements and the weights. Not only loaded trucks, but empty trucks. We weighted every -- we weighed every -- and measured every truck.

INTERVIEWER:

Is that how the federal government come to regulate the -- all bridges must be 14-and-a-half feet (inaudible)?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I would imagine that. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

That was so that they could get the tanks through?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

The other study that you did for Cornell, that was on seatbelts prior to seatbelts coming...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...out?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right. There was two pilot programs as I understand it. Pennsylvania was picked and we did it in Greensburg and I think they did it Lancaster and I had to do it for a year and I went around like I say and I photographed every vehicle where anybody was in an accident that got hurt, exterior and interior, and they would evaluate whether or not seatbelts would've

helped or if they didn't have seatbelts whether they would've got hurt or not.

INTERVIEWER:

So then that -- basically that was the study that eventually led to the use...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Of seatbelts.

INTERVIEWER:

...of seatbelts?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yeah. It was Cornell University that conducted that study. The students up there conducted that study.

INTERVIEWER:

We covered your training and the turnpike murders. I believe you told me you had some -- you still had some paperwork from that.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, yeah. Matter of fact, I gave the waiver at the extradition and the warrant and the New Mexico State Trooper that arrested John Wesley Wable in New Mexico after he committed a robbery. I had those -- the -- all that paperwork and I gave it to the museum.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. A question on Commissioner -- who was Commissioner when you entered?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Wilhelm was the Commissioner and Jake Mauck was the Deputy Commissioner.

INTERVIEWER:

And how many Commissioners did you go through until the time you...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh...

INTERVIEWER:

...retired?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

...my. I went through all of them. From Wilhelm up to the present day -- well, I wasn't there when Jeffrey Miller became Commissioner, but I was -- and one of the Commissioners I trained. He was a -- on my detail as a criminal -- Glenn Walp who was a Corporal. When I was in charge of criminal investigations at Troop A, he was on the criminal detail in Kiski Valley and -- yeah. I was a supervisor and he ended up becoming Commissioner.

INTERVIEWER:

I believe you also worked with another Commissioner in...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

The Deputy Commissioner was -- George Evan was a Deputy Commissioner. He was in my class. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

We graduated from the Academy together.

INTERVIEWER:

And I believe John Schafer.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

John Schafer, I was his boss when he was a young trooper assigned to the criminal detail in Greensburg. I was his supervisor.

INTERVIEWER:

And you also worked for Jim Barger?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Barger and I -- when he was a detective, he had a detective rank in Butler and I can remember we jointly made a big raid on a gambling joint in Sharpsburg in an old brewery in Sharpsburg. He brought a detail down from Butler and I brought a detail from Greensburg and we raided this big gambling joint in Sharpsburg.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you get involved a lot in the gambling operations?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, I was in charge of the vice detail out of my house when I was detached to the BCI. Yeah. I had ten undercover agents and then also I was on the vice squad in Allegheny County with Detective Al Fout (ph). We ran the vice squad in Allegheny County which primarily was numbers, gambling and prostitution.

INTERVIEWER:

Did that -- were you involved at all in -- I believe there was some problems with Allegheny County Police. Tony Grosso (ph) was a big numbers man and...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, yeah. When -- no. I wasn't involved in that investigation, but when I was in the Crime Commission, I had a couple informants of course and when I was in the Crime Commission, I was in charge of the Organized Crime Unit and I had informants from Pittsburgh that were getting me information. And it ended up I was accused -- I'm going -- I was accused falsely of being on the take with the numbers people in Pittsburgh and they made an investigation and cleared me because I looked like one of the county detectives that was really on the one -- on the tape. And

the FBI made the investigation and I believe the only reason I went through the FBI Academy, the FBI wanted to rectify a wrong when they accused me of being on that take, which was false when I looked like the guy that was (inaudible) on the take who was a county detective in Allegheny County. So that's why they appointed me to the FBI Academy and I wasn't going to go. The only reason I went I thought well, they're going to have to do a background investigation on me. So they did that and that sort of cleared me with all the suspicions that I was on the take.

INTERVIEWER:

Any significant humorous, serious-type incidents, assignments or people that you run into?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yeah. I can think of a couple. We had a rash of (inaudible) thefts up in the Ligonier area and we had a suspect, but we couldn't prove it. So I had him in the car with another trooper and at that time, we had four frequencies on our radios and a different colored frequency on every radio. And so I asked this guy -- he wasn't wrapped too tight -- if he would take a lie-detector test and he said he would. So I determined -- I showed him how it worked and I had the transmitter in my hand and I says now if a red light comes on, that means you're lying. And I

says -- it was in July or August. I forget what it was. And I asked him it's -- is it snowing outside and I told him to answer yes and I said it wasn't. So he said yes and I said well, that's a lie and I pressed the transmitter button and the green light come on and then he confessed. He says yeah. He said -- and another incident I had, I had a bunch of petty thefts at the St. Vincent College and I knew who did it but I couldn't prove it. He was stealing money out of the different dorms. So one of the monks there dabbled in a lie detector and he had a little lie detector. Not the type that we use. And he says do you mind if I give him a lie-detector test and I says yeah. Give it to him, but I says don't tell him the results. So the next day, I left the college and the next day I went back and the first guy I run into was this suspect coming down the hall and I yelled at him. I said hey, I want to see you and he says yeah, I figured I couldn't beat that lie test. He says I did it. Those are the couple humorous -- another time one of the troopers almost shot me. There was a escapee from the State Hospital who stole three or four cars over the weekend and I was on patrol along with another trooper who was in another car in the Irwin-Herminie area and I spotted the last car that he stole coming towards me. So I tried to box

him in and he got around me and I radioed the other trooper to -- he was coming towards him because I knew he was a couple miles away. And we chased him down the road and the first thing we know, we went up a dirt road and I see the other trooper's police car in the ditch one side and the stolen car in the ditch the other side, but there was nobody around. And then I heard gunfire, so I ran around the one barn and as I come around the one end of the barn, the other trooper was shooting at this guy and the bullet went right over my head. It missed me of course and we caught the guy that stole these cars.

INTERVIEWER:

What kind of reporting system did you have for -- say when you first came on the job as it progressed?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, my. We had to write everything in narrative form, always typewritten. Initial reports were typewritten. Every accident, traffic accident you made, you had to type an accident report, a big long eight-by-eleven accident report -- or arrest report. Your accident investigation was all narrative form and then you had to make special reports and then I can remember when I first came to Greensburg my first duties other than stable duties was midnight guard. You had to wash six cars and you had to feed

the horses every morning and you had to make a report what cars you washed and what horses you cleaned the stables out.

INTERVIEWER:

Way back then, they had I believe a daily report of activities...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

You had to make a daily report...

INTERVIEWER:

...which they did away with some time in the future, I understand.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

It was modified several years later and you made one out for every ten days. But daily, you had to make a report and matter of fact, I still have reports -- daily reports I have for the whole year the first year of my job. And another interesting aspect, we used to have a payroll escort. They used to pay the mines, the coal mines in cash and once a month or a couple times a month, we had to escort the paymaster to several mines where the paymaster would pay the miners in cash. So there were times we had \$152,000 in the car with the paymaster to pay the miners.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you involved in any strikes, per say?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, yes. I was involved in several strikes; Homer City, coal mine strikes. And I can remember one coal-mine strike up in Salemville (ph) outside of New Alexander, we were on the picket line and there was a lot of pickets and I grabbed this one picket, a little Italian fellow and I says why are you striking. He says me don't know. He says boss says strike, we strike. You know who that was? That was Joe Rodey (ph), our maintenance -- he became a maintenance worker at the barracks. Joe Rodey.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned that you were involved in the Johnstown Flood?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

That was in...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

1977. I rode the helicopter with Major Red (ph) for six weeks every day from six o'clock in the morning to dark every night for six -- seven days a week searching for bodies. I think there was something like 68 killed and we found 60 bodies. Eight we never found.

INTERVIEWER:

Did they -- that Johnstown Flood, was that about the same time there was also I believe a tornado or something that hit Latrobe?

Was that the same...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

The -- well, shortly after that the tornado hit Latrobe and Major Evan (ph) and I who was the Major for the District went up in the helicopter and we had to survey and count all the houses that were -- and buildings that were damaged, and he submitted a report to that effect on...

INTERVIEWER:

What was that report called, the ones you had to submit on those?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, it is...

INTERVIEWER:

(Inaudible)

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

It was a special report. It wasn't any specific...

INTERVIEWER:

I believe an after-action.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

After-action report. But it was -- no special format. It was all narrative.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you were in Greensburg as a detective and on the criminal unit, you had another function I believe you passed onto me when I got there was every year you had to do an organized crime update. Go out and obtain the data.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right. Yeah. We had to -- you had to make a narrative form of all the organized crime people and it was quite lengthy because at that time, Allegheny County was part of Troop A and we had to do Allegheny County at that time. And then they eventually transferred Allegheny County to Troop B Washington and...

INTERVIEWER:

What happened to that data that was collected?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, it was funneled through Departmental Headquarters. Matter of fact, I still have a copy.

INTERVIEWER:

And then did the Attorney General publish a organized crime booklet?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right. The Attorney General gathered that -- some of that information and he -- and as a matter of fact, when I was in the organized -- or when I was in the crime detail, Pennsylvania Crime Commission, I was in charge of the organized crime detail and I developed a lot of the information and it was published in the book. Major Shulenburger (ph) at that time was detached from the State Police. He was in charge of the State Police Unit in the Pennsylvania Crime Commission.

INTERVIEWER:

We were also involved in intelligence gathering at that particular time that I recall. Were we not? Did we...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I wasn't really directly involved in that. We had a CI Officer, Criminal Intelligence Officer at that time who gathered all the information on convicts; what kind of cigarettes they smoked, where they lived, where they worked and all that. It was called a criminal investigation file.

INTERVIEWER:

But was that eventually done away with?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yes. Eventually. I don't know what year. It was eliminated because it wasn't too productive.

INTERVIEWER:

But I can remember I believe Corporal Botlock (ph). You used to...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Botlock used to be the CI officer, then Steinhagen (ph), Trooper Steinhagen took over after he retired.

INTERVIEWER:

Because all I can remember was a roomful of files. I got assigned there once for about...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...five, six days and all you did is file cards and data, and then all of a sudden it disappeared.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Another...

INTERVIEWER:

The...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

...interesting situation I was involved in, I was on duty down around West Newton. I got a call. They dispatched several cars because the sheriff was trying to repossess a car from a contractor (inaudible) and the contractor starting firing at the

sheriff, who was trying to serve this repossession order. I was the first trooper on the scene. As I got out of my car, the suspect fired over my head and then it was a standoff for about three, four hours and then we had to gas him -- teargas him out of the house. And then at that time, the Troop Commander who was Captain Shrin (ph) ordered me to go in the house and see -- search for the guy. So I climbed in the window -- it was full of teargas -- and searched the whole house. His family was in the bathroom with a tubful of water. He had a couple of kids. His wife was in the bathroom and they had wet towels all around the door so the teargas couldn't come in. We searched the house and at first we couldn't find him. Finally I looked at the -- he had a stone fireplace and he had two big pillars on the end of the fireplace and he was standing in there with the lid on top of the fireplace with a couple of rifles in the fireplace and we took him into custody without incident.

INTERVIEWER:

Talk about a few unfavorable or favorable things, like policies the State Police had, policies that you felt weren't necessary or were good.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, when I was in traffic detail, I was on a weight detail and you had to arrest people with a pickup truck that was overloaded and I thought that was ridiculous. Here's a guy that had a piece of machinery on a pickup truck that maybe was six or 700 pounds over the weight limit and we had to arrest him and I felt bad about having to do this. And another incident I can remember humorous to a degree. When the Parkway first opened up we used to patrol out of Greensburg and the radio contact wasn't that great. But if they needed us, it -- the Parkway -- Penn-Lincoln Parkway only went from Churchill Borough to Bate Street and if the barracks needed -- we used to patrol out of Greensburg. They would call the tunnel and they'd hang a red flag out for us. So anyway, this one night we had a sleeping -- we had a bedroom upstairs of the tunnel. So the trooper and I that was patrolling at that time, he didn't feel good and he wanted to know if he could go up and catch a couple hours sleep and I says go ahead. I says I'll cover for you. So I'm coming down the Parkway and I see this subject walking along the berm around Churchill Borough. It's three o'clock in the morning. So I jumped out and grabbed him and I gave him a shakedown. He's got a flashlight, a pair of pliers and a

screwdriver and some tape on him and so I give him a quick pat-down, put him in the car, took my gun off and put it underneath my left foot -- or left leg and drove him to the tunnel. And I don't know why I searched him again, but I searched him again inside the tunnel where it was light and he had a banana knife in his belt which I missed at the time and here he had just gotten out of prison for -- he served seven years for a bunch of burglaries and he just got out of prison the day before. So I turned him over to the Pittsburgh Police.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there any working conditions that you found good, bad or...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, we got a lot of fatigue -- you want to turn that off?

(Hearing resumes)

INTERVIEWER:

Any of the working conditions prior to this interruption we had that you were going to talk about that were good or bad?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, we worked at least 70, 80 hours a week, never got a holiday off. As a recruit, you never usually got Saturday or

Sunday off and you were restricted on what vacation you could take. And then like I say, somebody figured it out one time because we worked 70, 80 hours a week, we made about 28 cents an hour back then years ago. That's based on actual pay. Of course we got room and board. Just the pay, we made about 28 cents an hour with all the hours we worked.

INTERVIEWER:

So really it progressed as you got older on the job...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Yeah. But the thing is when I left the job in 1981, I -- as a Lieutenant's pay, I was only getting \$30,000 a year. Now a trooper starts in the mid-40s, I think.

INTERVIEWER:

How about the overall best and worst, State Police of your years that you...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Oh, the best is the prestige that you had. You had a lot of respect. I can remember -- and another story -- that one time me and another trooper, we had two or three years on the job and there was a riot at a barroom in Avonmore, PA. We went up there midnight to 8:00, two or three o'clock in the morning and these 30 or 35 coalminers who all knew one another got in one

hell of an argument and they started fighting with another, tore the place apart. And I can remember we went in there. There was two troopers and quelled the whole thing and had everybody saying yes, sir, no sir, giving us an -- their ID and we arrested every one of them. Not physically arrested but took their names down and today if that would happen, it would take 100 troopers probably to arrest 30 guys.

INTERVIEWER:

So that's the best and...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

That's the...

INTERVIEWER:

...the worst?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

...best and the worst. One of the other worst, I caught pneumonia years ago. My interviewer, Retired Sergeant Pete Buchan was on the vice detail at that time and he got word from an informant there was a plane-load of marijuana -- landed it in the field up in New Florence, PA. So he called me and we went up there and we found the plane, but it was empty of its cargo. So we laid in the woods all night in the summertime. It was June or July, and the next day I'm in an air-conditioned car and I got

pneumonia and I ended up in the hospital thanks to that stake-out with Sergeant Buchan.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, we did end up confiscating the plane eventually.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

We had the plane confiscated, but we never did find the people. Now as I understand it, he had 25-gallon cans that he had gasoline in so he wouldn't have to stop. He could refuel nonstop from Columbia to Pennsylvania when he unloaded his marijuana.

INTERVIEWER:

Right. That brings us up then to the worst and the best. Then you retired when?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

I retired December 31, 1981. I was 56 years old and the only reason I retired, I was solicited -- approached to become Chief County Detective. I was going to -- my plans were to stay until I was 60 with the State Police. However, when I was 56, there was an opening -- the new-elect District Attorney approached me and wanted me to become his Chief County Detective. So as a result, I retired from the State Police prematurely and became the Chief County Detective for Westmoreland County for five years.

INTERVIEWER:

Well -- and we know from your chronological notes then what you did basically...

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...(inaudible).

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, after I retired from the County Detectives, I was going to retire altogether. I was at that time 62 years old I believe and at that time I didn't have enough quarters in Social Security. So I was approached by the then Attorney General Zimmerman, Leroy Zimmerman through his director of BCI and ex-New York State Trooper Tom Gallagher (ph) who I knew. He approached me and wanted me to become the Western Supervisor for the Borough of Criminal Investigation, and then I decided well, yeah. I was -- I'd take that four-year term in order to get enough quarters for my Social Security to add to my pension. So I stayed with Leroy Zimmerman two years and then when Ernie Preate became the Attorney General two years later, then after two years that I worked for Ernie Preate, I decided that I had

enough after 44 years of law enforcement. Then I retired altogether.

INTERVIEWER:

So now you're faithfully serving a Greensburg City..

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well...

INTERVIEWER:

...Councilman and enjoying it?

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Well, I'm not really enjoying it. I went to -- I was approached by the mayor and a couple of council people. There was a vacancy on the council as a result of one of the councilman resigned and they asked me to become a councilman and I indicated I was no politician. I was anti-political and I didn't want to do it and they pressured me and I served the nine months vacancy and then they pressured me again to run for reelection and I didn't have any opposition, and I've been elected four times for -- and I've -- for four-year terms and I've been a member and I'm still a member.

INTERVIEWER:

Well, I guess that brings up to right where you're at now and I want to thank you very much for the interview.

SERGEANT TRIDICO:

Very good.