HISTORICAL MEMORIAL CENTER

Pennsylvania State Police

Oral History Interview of:

Colonel Rocco P. Urella

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INTERVIEWER:

...2006, and with me today is retired Commissioner Rocco P. Urella. Colonel, I want to thank you for joining me today. And...

MR. URELLA:

It could've been that way, Bob.

INTERVIEWER:

Colonel, can you tell me your date of birth?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, February the 10th, 1918.

INTERVIEWER:

So, that makes you 88 years of age?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And where were you born?

MR. URELLA:

Mt. Carmel, Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you attended school in that area?

MR. URELLA:

Mt. Carmel High School, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. At what point did you decide that you wanted a career with the Pennsylvania State Police?

MR. URELLA:

When I was in high school, actually. My freshman year, I had the occasion several times to see the Highway Patrol cruising around Mt. Carmel on motorcycles, and being from the coal region, there weren't too many opportunities for industrial -- so as I often say to people, you either become a miner, a priest, or a policeman. So, it was during that time that I got the idea I wanted to be one.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, how did you then go and apply for the State Police?

MR. URELLA:

I applied by mail, and when I got the application to fill out, I filled it out, and I put down my age was 21. I was so desperate for employment to become a State Policeman -- 21, it was finally processed, and I was examined physically, mentally, and passed everything, and then they recruited me.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, that when you applied, the requirement was that you had to be 21 years of age, but you, in fact, were 19?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, that was something that I wanted to -- desired so much, and being of -- a Catholic, and he said that in case you don't have your birth certificate, which I told him I didn't have -- baptismal certificate. So, I went to the priest in Mt. Carmel, and I was an altar boy, too. He knew me. I was an altar boy for him. And I said, "Father, I have to have a baptismal certificate." And this is how sharp this priest was. He says, "Well, Rocco, how old -- or what year were you born?" And I said, "Well, 1916." In other words, he made me do the lying. So, he wrote that down, and I sent the application, and it was accepted, had my examination, physical. I passed the mental exam, the written exam, and I was accepted. I went in January the 1st, 1938.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And where did you report?

MR. URELLA:

Oh, Albright College.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. That's where they had the academy at that time?

MR. URELLA:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, it wasn't in Hershey that you did any of your training?

MR. URELLA:

No. No, it was a large class, and I went in with -- they actually hired 500 at one time, and 250 were -- you only taking two classes, 250 in each class. I went in in the first class, and it's too many people for the academy. And incidentally, that's where Don

Cunning [ph] may have gone. Instead of the Albright, he wanted to go into the academy. And that's where I went. I graduated from Albright...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

...in April.

INTERVIEWER:

How long was your training?

MR. URELLA:

Three months.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Can you give me a typical day during your training period?

MR. URELLA:

Yes. You get up in the morning, you make your bed, you go for a mile- or two-mile run, I forget what it was, come back, and you go to class. Then, you take your calisthenics after that, and then, you do a little bit of boxing, wrestling, and then back to studying. It was an all-day affair between studying and athletes -- athletic events. It was a whole day.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. What do you think was the most significant part of your training during that period?

MR. URELLA:

I think I enjoyed the schooling that we got there, criminal law, motor law, and I enjoyed the mile- or two-mile run, which all the other fellows didn't like, but I resumed that every day of my life in high school. I enjoyed all that. I enjoyed all of it.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you had pistol qualifications as well?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, I had that, and I passed that easily. I had no problem with that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And no problem with the physical or mental part or the schooling. I passed all that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. What kind of weapon did you use to qualify when you were there?

MR. URELLA:

A .38.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

In 1938, there was a number of things that occurred that were somewhat significant to the State Police. One was that the commissioner established a medical unit, and the first medic was promoted to the rank of major. Do you recall that?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, I do. In fact, I was examined for a couple years after that by this medical officer. He was a doctor, and we had to -- it's just like the normal examination. You had routine examinations to see if you had Riderone's [ph] disease or something quite wrong with you physically. Yeah, I recall it very well.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Was that medical officer stationed right at the academy there?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, he was. And you -- about that on the physical examination. They would come around to the various headquarters, and they came to Philadelphia where I was at the time, and you had to urinate in a little tube. And there was someone concerned about that, and the fellow used to joke and laugh, because someone used to date around pretty heavily. And one of the fellows, Emri [ph], thought he'd pull a good joke on John Golden [ph], another recruit or trooper. And he said to John Golden, "Will you urinate in this for me, because," he said, "I was out and I'm pretty sure I have a little gonorrhea?" He did that. When he passed it and everything was great, he was going around saying, "Yeah, I saved his job." It was quite a joke. He didn't have gonorrhea, but he wanted to make a joke out of the whole thing, and he did. It was quite a hilarious time.

INTERVIEWER:

A couple other things occurred in 1938, the reorganization into two squadrons. Can you tell me what the squadrons were?

MR. URELLA:

The squadron? Yeah, a squadron consisted of several troops. There were four squadrons, if I recollect, the west, east, north, and south. And they consisted of several troops. The Philadelphia squadron consisted of Philadelphia's troop headquarters and Connellsville and Media.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And then Lancaster was another troop headquarters -- or squadron headquarters. They consisted of several troops.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. In 1938, there were State Police vehicles that were referred to as "the ghost cars". Do you know why that expression -- why they termed them "the ghost cars"? They were all white. Is that possibly the reason?

MR. URELLA:

I don't know why. I remember they had that application to it, but I don't know why. I really don't.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

But the cars were all white.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And maybe they'd probably sneak up on people to arrest them, and they called them the ghost car. They didn't...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

...see them until it was too late.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember a time when they actually went and painted the hoods of those cars black?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah. Yeah, I do. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you know why they did that?

MR. URELLA:

Well, I think they wanted to see -- have some cars for the public to be aware of the fact that -- could be all white cars out there.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Also in 1938, the first department newsletter was printed, and it was called "The Bulletin".

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember that?

MR. URELLA:

I remember that, too, yeah. But you're going back a long way.

INTERVIEWER:

Right.

MR. URELLA:

I remember it, though.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. After you graduated from the academy, where was your first station?

MR. URELLA:

Philadelphia.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Were you happy that you were going to Philadelphia or did...

MR. URELLA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And...

MR. URELLA:

No, I was a little coal region boy going to a big city.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

No, I was not.

INTERVIEWER:

So, would you say there was some culture shock there?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, I was never away from home, and there was a little coal region boy in a big city. I felt a little lost, to be honest with you.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Were you stationed initially right at troop headquarters?

MR. URELLA:

I was.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And after you got there and were there for a while, how did you feel about that?

MR. URELLA:

Well, I didn't feel too well about it, because all they ever did was fatigue duty. I was -- frankly, I'm going to say this. I don't know whether or not you want to include it or not. I was the only cadet of the time America was -- in 140 men. And I did a lot of fatigue work as a result of that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And it affected my thinking later on when I became commissioner, which I'll explain to you later, because it's one thing. I didn't want any bias: religious, ethnic, or any other way. It taught me a lesson, and I wanted to be fair with all people...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

...whether it be race, religious, or anything else.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did anybody else from your academy class go with you to Philadelphia?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, another fellow by the name of Joe Packer [ph].

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How long were you at Troop K?

MR. URELLA:

That's simple, I'll tell you why again, Bob. I was there three years and some months, and if you were there four years, you could get some assistance, which means if you live at home, you'd get paid for that. Again, I felt, because of my ethnic

background, being Italian American, when I got my three years and so many months they shipped me out to a substation, and I didn't get that assistance, which I so badly wanted.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Do you remember who the captain was at the time that you were at headquarters?

MR. URELLA:

No. No. It might've been Johnson [ph].

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

You're going back a long way.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you assigned to the patrol unit in Philadelphia?

MR. URELLA:

I was assigned -- first of all, it wasn't -- didn't do anything but fatigue and examining applicants for -- license, which they did in those days then. I didn't do any patrol work for maybe the first year I was there.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And then eventually, you went out on the road and did patrol?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, I did. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Anything that you recall about that experience, being on the road and...

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, I lost my first tooth on that road. It was being a recruit, not too much time on the job. You work all the holidays, and I was working New Year's, and you worked by yourself in those times. And I was out on patrol from midnight to 8:00 in the morning on New Year's Eve, and I found a motorist with four other people in the car urinating on the highway, and I stopped and told them not to do that, because it's not good for the people. And he said, "Well, if you weren't in a uniform," he said, "I'd teach you a lesson." He was, obviously, a little intoxicated, and so was the driver, so I thought I'd take him back to White Marsh Township [ph] to have him examined for drunken driving. When we got to the -- had a little -- it was only a little police station. One room was about the size of what we're in now, 12 by 14. I would call for the doctor. In those days, we had the doctor examine them for drunken driving. And again, he said to me, "Boy, you're lucky you have that uniform on." Well, at that time, I had enough of it,

because I had been -- finished second in the state for a wrestling championship, and I used to run every morning. I was in a heck of a shape. I just couldn't take him anymore, and I was disgusted with the way I was getting treated, too, so I took it off, and we went at it. And he was very good with his fists. He was tattooing me pretty good. And I finally got my hands on him and bounced him on the floor and lifted him up and threw him in the jail. And the next morning, -- State Policeman called me up, and he said, "Hey, will you do me a favor?" And I said, "What's that?" He said, "You arrested a guy and charged him with disorderly conduct." He said, "He's a good friend of mine." Well, I said -- and he said, "Do you know who he was?" I said, "No, I don't know who he was, but he was a smart ass." I said, "He wanted to take me apart." I said, "And I took him apart." He said, "Well, he was the Golden Glove champ in the Navy." I -- and as a result of that, Bob, I remember my one tooth was loose (inaudible). I didn't have any money to go to a dentist, and I finally lost it, but then I had it put in permanently. But that's why I remember (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

When you left troop headquarters, where did you then...

MR. URELLA:

Media.

INTERVIEWER:

...transfer? Media?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

How big a station was that? How many men, would you say?

MR. URELLA:

At Media?

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR. URELLA:

It was 18.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Now, I think...

INTERVIEWER:

And...

MR. URELLA:

...they have about 40.

INTERVIEWER:

What was the rank of the station commander at Media?

MR. URELLA:

Sergeant.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Do you remember who that was?

MR. URELLA:

Yes. Oh, I said “yes” real fast. Sergeant, oh -- Chapman was the Corporal.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

I don’t remember the sergeant too well anymore.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And what were your assignments there at Media?

MR. URELLA:

Patrol.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And how long were -- did you stay at Media?

MR. URELLA:

Well, you had to sleep and eat there in those days. You ate at the substation, and you slept at the substation. You got one night and one day off a week only.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And you spent the rest of the time sleeping and eating there and working. You'd work eight hours in a row, and then you had to put eight hours on the substation on the telephone, too.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember what your pay was, at that time?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, it was $90 a month...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

...which is $3 a day.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Was there any kind of health benefits at that time?

MR. URELLA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you lived at the station, meals were provided to you?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, you got meals, and you got your uniforms and shoes and three pair of socks...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

...every six months.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

It was like Army life, and you got one night and one day off a week. That was all.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

The rest of the time, you were either reserved on the station or doing telephone -- night telephone or patrol.

INTERVIEWER:

How long did you stay at Media?

MR. URELLA:

I was there -- the war broke out in 1941. I went to -- from Philadelphia to Media in 1941, yeah, because -- almost enough time to get some assistance when I went to Media. I was there about -- oh, wait a minute. In Media? I was there for 16 years.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah. In fact, I ended up being sergeant there.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

You mentioned that in 1941, World War I -- or I'm sorry, World War II started. Did that have any impact on the State Police?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, in a degree it had, because we were told to watch the parts, which would be more important for the -- sustaining a good war. Like, we were concerned about the oil companies and the plants, the oil plants, the gasoline plants, places which we felt would be good targets if somebody wanted to do some damage.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Were a lot of our members drafted?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, some volunteered, and some were drafted.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Not too -- you were exempt if you were 25 years of age or over.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And those that weren't exempt, got drafted, but a lot of them volunteered.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you stayed at Media for 16 years?

MR. URELLA:

Sixteen, actually.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did you remain in the patrol division?

MR. URELLA:

They were -- they didn't call it patrol. You were assigned patrol or criminal investigator, either one.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And what did you do?

MR. URELLA:

I did patrol, and then later on, I did criminal work.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

What happened was the -- when I mentioned to you before about the Army and how I didn't want to get out of it, how they were -- I went into the draft, it seemed that I had that opportunity to go in

the Army, and I was concerned that I didn't go. I wanted to go, because I was disgusted. I wanted to get back -- because of the way I was treated. But the day -- we come to the day in our previous conversation with you that I was to go and what happened. I had a -- an escaped convict. Do you want to get into that, too? What happened there was the day I was to report for the draft at 32nd and Market Street in Philadelphia, the first -- or the sergeant, Sergeant Kelly, he was a sergeant, said to me, "You've got to go down to the shipyard," because Andrioli [ph], who was an escaped convict that had shot and killed one of our sergeants many years ago up in the coal region, was sentenced to life in prison, escaped from the Eastern State Penitentiary, and he was seen down around the shipyard. I said to the sergeant, "I am supposed to be drafted, and I have to be -- report to the drafting agency down there at 12:00 noon." He said, "This is 6:00 in the morning I'm saying to go down. 10:00 we'll have you down there, if it's necessary." So, I went out with another, Trooper Lasveski [ph], then we went down to 4th and Morton Avenue [ph], which is the front of the shipyard, Sun Ship [ph], which was employing 60,000 people at that time, and a very busy -- and there was a diner down there and a check-cashing

agency all in one area. So, they were changing shifts. It was around 8:00, and I said to my partner, “Look, I’m going to check the diner here.” Of course, it was crowded. There weren’t seats available. And all they had there was these counter seats with rotating seats, and I saw one guy sitting there that had his hair over his collar and his heels were worn down. So, I told my partner. I said, “Hey, I’m going to go down there and ask him for his draft cards. Cover me.” So, he said, “All right.” So, I went down and asked him, but before I went down, this guy, the only picture they had on him was 10 years ago. He did 10 years in the pen already, and it wasn’t going to look much like him. And I went down and tapped him on his shoulder, and being in the physical shape that I was, I -- it was only rumored that -- to have a knife on him that he got from his father’s -- who was in the tailoring business. I tapped him on the shoulder, and I said, “Hey, buddy. Let me see your draft card.” And he said, “No problem.” And he swung around on the stool, and the next thing you know, I heard my partner say, “Whoa. Whoa. Whoa. Whoa.” And out come this guy with -- hit me right alongside of the face with a .45 automatic. And I couldn’t hear anything. Knocked me on my rear, actually. He hit me with a good blow.

And while I was on the floor, he took another shot at me with a flesh wound to the wrist. And I was trying to get my gun out to shoot him, and by the time we got -- my gun out, he had fired another shot. It went through my jacket and ricocheted around the building. And then I put one in his chest. He had one aimed right at me, and I thought, “Well, I was -- this is probably curtains for me.” So, I put two more shots in him, and I killed the son of a bitch, if you know what I mean. And when I was -- jumped on him, on the floor, he still had -- I said, “You bastard. You nearly killed me.” And he said, “Too bad I didn’t.” And he died -- well, he didn’t die, but he collapsed. But how did I get into this now? Oh, you asked me what was the stuff that happened to me.

INTERVIEWER:

During the war, correct.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah. Okay. So then, after that, I got a day off to get Tetanus shots, and I was on patrol the next day. And I was out on the Baltimore Pike, and -- in the flag station. We didn’t have radios. We had flag stations. They said, “You’re supposed to report back to headquarters or call right away.” So, I called right away, and they said, “The captain wants you in headquarters immediately.” So, I (inaudible) fight with someone or something

happened somewhere. So, I went in there and they told me to (inaudible), and they said (inaudible) guys requested. He said, "We're going to give you a citation for the work you well did out there." Oh, gee. I thought, "Man, this is something." So, I left there, but I soon went out to patrol again. So, out patrolling, the flag station is -- and he said, "What happened?" And I said, "They're going to give me a citation for shooting that bastard going to kill me." He said, "Well, it's in the paper you're getting a letter from Governor Martin [ph] for bravery." Oh, I thought, "My God. No wonder they give me a citation. They find out the governor's going to give me -- he already had sent a letter to me," which I hadn't gotten it yet. It was in the mail, so I -- giving me credit for being a brave officer and bravery -- an act of bravery. Here, they were going to catch up with the governor and give me a citation. The shooting happened two or three days before that. They didn't give me a citation then. But this goes back to, again, why I was not bias against race, religion, ethnic group. I had that feeling, and it was a -- it felt -- it was certain. That's the way I got the citation. I didn't get the -- I got a letter from the governor first and the citation after.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You were at the Media station for 16 years, and you mentioned that you were promoted during that time.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, as a result of that, the -- if you get cited, you get two extra points on your examination score. I scored extremely well and got promoted to corporal. And then, later on, four years later, I -- they had sergeants statewide that were -- and I finished second in the state in the list. I got promoted again. But the reason -- and then, in between all of that, any time that you got a guy with a gun (inaudible), you know. But that was all right. I -- that didn't bother me.

INTERVIEWER:

When you made corporal, were you still in the patrol section?

MR. URELLA:

No, I -- when I was corporal, a corporal and a sergeant ran a substation, and I was doing mostly criminal work and doing administrative work. Corporal and sergeant -- they didn't have lieutenants running the station then. It was corporal and sergeant, sometimes only a corporal.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember any criminal investigations during that period of time that...

MR. URELLA:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, I had (inaudible) criminal investigations. I -- Craig Allison [ph] was the head of the vice squad in the City of Philadelphia and shot and killed himself out here in Delaware County, and the members of the vice squad were very much concerned if he left a dying note or something, I guess. He was being subpoenaed for a Grand Jury investigation on gambling. That was one of them. There were -- I had a lot of (inaudible) gambling investigations. Him (inaudible) gambling raids and (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

Did you like that kind of work?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, I liked criminal work when I was doing it. I really liked it. I continued to do it even when -- I was very active, even as a corporal and sergeant. I didn't have to be, but I went out there and did it myself.

INTERVIEWER:

And then you were promoted to the rank of sergeant.

MR. URELLA:

Sergeant.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you were the station commander.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And how long did you remain there at Media?

MR. URELLA:

About three years, and then I was promoted to first sergeant. They had a first sergeant then. That was before your time. You don't remember first sergeant, but they did, in those days, have a first sergeant. And I was promoted to first sergeant. I took the test and passed, and I went into Philadelphia where you had to be in headquarters to be a first sergeant. And I was there for two years, and then I was promoted to lieutenant. And then, in two more years, I was promoted to captain.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember the year that you were promoted to first sergeant?

MR. URELLA:

It would be 1958, I think.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. I'm -- I want to go back a little bit to 1943 when the Pennsylvania Motor Police were changed or brought together

with the Pennsylvania State Police. Do you remember that period?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, they had named -- they said the Motor Police and the Highway Patrol would be merged. And at that time, they called them -- the State Police and the Highway Patrol would be merged and called Motor Police. Then, they merged again later, and they called it State Police. Everything was State Police.

INTERVIEWER:

When the Motor Police merged, was that well received by members of the State Police?

MR. URELLA:

No. No, there was animosity to a degree, particularly the old State Police. They felt they were much above the Highway Patrol (inaudible) and above the new Motor Police, and they did not like that at all, because they had more serious training, and I can understand, looking back over it, they -- ride the horses, which the Highway Patrol and Motor Police did. And they did a lot of strike work. I can understand their animosity, but they finally amalgamated and became one, and it was all right.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. In 1954, the first African American enlisted in the State Police.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you recall that?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, he was stationed in Philadelphia. Yeah, I...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

...remember that.

INTERVIEWER:

How was that person received?

MR. URELLA:

Well, openly, it was all right, but in the back circles and the -- in the individual rooms and whatnot, it wasn't too well accepted then. No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

They didn't like that.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you made first sergeant, were you still at Media?

MR. URELLA:

No, first sergeants can only work out of headquarters.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, you went to Troop K?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, their job, Bob, was to read all the reports from the substations. You were in headquarters, and it was your job to read over all the reports from the substations and see if it was done right. So, Media and Collegeville were substations at that time.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And then, two years later, you were promoted to lieutenant?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you tell me what the promotion process was? Was it written exams and...

MR. URELLA:

(inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

You had to take a written exam?

MR. URELLA:

Yes, written exam and then you were evaluated. It was strictly a written exam for lieutenants and captains.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. There was no oral interview at that time?

MR. URELLA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

No, it was a certain exam, and then if you passed it, you were sent a list, and it was up to the commissioner to promote you from lieutenant to a captain or a captain to a major.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. When you were promoted to the rank of lieutenant, do you remember who the commissioner was at that time?

MR. URELLA:

When I was promoted to lieutenant? Yeah, I think it was McCartney [ph].

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Colonel McCartney.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And where did you then serve as a lieutenant?

MR. URELLA:

I served in Philadelphia first.

INTERVIEWER:

You stayed right in Philly? Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, and then I was sent to Reading, because I was a gambling expert. I was sent to Reading to clean up -- Reading was a real mess, and it had a lot of bad publicity about being a gambling place and the State Police weren't doing much about it. So, Colonel McCartney then promoted me to captain and sent me up to -- to Reading to clean out gambling.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Was that station located on Ken Horse Boulevard [ph]?

MR. URELLA:

It was what?

INTERVIEWER:

Ken Horse Boulevard? Is that where...

MR. URELLA:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

...the station was?

MR. URELLA:

The same place.

INTERVIEWER:

The same place it is today?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. In your gambling investigations, did you work in an undercover capacity?

MR. URELLA:

No, I worked as the captain in the -- in headquarters, the captain for the troop. But I selected the men to do the gambling, and I would -- went on the raids with the men, all of the raids.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

All of the raids, because it was important we clean out, and we did. And if you ever get up to the Reading (inaudible) newspapers up there, you'll find their newspaper board filled with raids that I made. They used to call me, what...

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Rocco's Raiders.

MR. URELLA:

Rocco's Raiders, yeah. We were big up there. In fact, this is a -- something that I don't think they know. (inaudible) State Police. I arrested the biggest bookmaker in the United States, Matt Whittinger [ph], in Pottsville. He was the biggest bookmaker in the United States. So, we had very great success in the raids, and I was given great credit from the newspapers and the (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember any of the troopers that worked for you at that time doing those...

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...types of investigations?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, I do. I remember -- who was that? It was Flannigan [ph]. His sister worked at the substation here. (inaudible). I'm trying to think (inaudible). Oh, shucks. The other guy owns a golf course up there now. What's his name? Yeah, Macanelli [ph] and Holloway [ph].

INTERVIEWER:

Macanelli and Holloway?

MR. URELLA:

And Flannigan.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Okay. Do you remember about the year when that was going on, those investigations?

MR. URELLA:

Well, I went up there as a lieutenant there. Yeah. 1962, somewhere around that time.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

I was there for a couple of years.

INTERVIEWER:

As a captain?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, and then I was promoted to -- I was -- we took a test. All the captains took a test to see who was going to go down to the University of Louisville to a special school down there for international police, and I passed that. I was selected. I had the highest score, so they sent me to the University of Louisville. I was down there for three months, and -- now, this is a matter of

fact. (inaudible) I'm saying. I scored the highest mark they ever had in that school (inaudible). When I graduated, I came back to -- I think I was promoted to major and then headed the inspector units, staff inspector unit.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Do you remember the year that you were promoted to major?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, when was Kennedy killed, shot?

INTERVIEWER:

'63.

MR. URELLA:

President Kennedy? Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Assassination.

MR. URELLA:

I was coming home from the school the day that he was shot and killed.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And then you were promoted to major shortly after that?

MR. URELLA:

Major, and I authored (inaudible) Purdy [ph] created the staff inspection unit, the first in the history of the State Police. And he

ordered me to author a book on staff inspection, which I did. So, I authored the first State Police -- first manual for the State Police on staff inspection.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And then I headed that.

INTERVIEWER:

What were the responsibilities of those who worked for you in the staff inspection?

MR. URELLA:

What were...

INTERVIEWER:

What was their responsibilities? What were they expected to do?

MR. URELLA:

To inspect the efficiency and operation and the morale of the State Police. Yeah. And their performance.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

All substations there were. I guess we had 50 substations, headquarters, to -- and to inspect the barracks and the

equipment and everything else. The whole works. All the (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

So, your group traveled around the state and went to various stations, substations and...

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, we covered all of them. All -- the entire state. I traveled to all of them.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. How was that unit received by other members of the department?

INTERVIEWER:

Most of them liked it, because, at that time, there was quite a concern, Bob, about the promotion and transfer system. There were a lot of Siberian transfers, and the promotion system had its glaring weaknesses. They were promoting mostly for academic reasons, so that wasn't accepted too well, and (inaudible) showed it. We had designed a report for each trooper to fill out with a lot of questions talking about , you know, how they felt about the promotion and transfer system, and it showed up very strongly, unequivocally, that there were tremendous opposition to the transfer -- or to promotion and transfer systems.

INTERVIEWER:

How long did you head up that group? Was that called the bureau at that time?

MR. URELLA:

Pardon?

INTERVIEWER:

Was that a bureau of inspections?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, it was a bureau.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah. I -- it was my bureau, the staff inspection bureau. Yeah. I headed it up until most of the -- ’71 and ’72, and then it was terminated because of the impending probe, legislative probe and morale of the State Police.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Before we get to the time that you became the commissioner of the State Police, as you look back at your career, were there any real highlights that you recall?

MR. URELLA:

Well, the highlights, you would like to dramatize the fact that you nearly -- you got wounded and you shot and killed a -- that is all

right, but the big highlight in my career was the appointment of the first females as State Police troopers in the nation.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And that happened during the period...

MR. URELLA:

In ’71.

INTERVIEWER:

...when you were the commissioner?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, that, to me, was a real highlight of my -- because I don’t want to -- I mean, normally, an individual would say, “Well, I was shot and this and that,” but that, to me, was important, because when I was -- I’ve got to go back a little bit, if you’ll bear with me. When

Shaff [ph] came to me and I was a major eating my lunch in a restaurant in City Line and asked me to be a -- he was brought over by the owner of the restaurant, because he wanted to meet with me. And of course, I told the owner before, he -- I didn’t want anything to do with politics, because he tried, on a previous occasion, to have me to go over to see Shaff at a table, and I said, “I don’t want anything to do with politics.” So then, he brought him over to my table. And he said to me, “You know,

I've been reading about you in the paper." He said, "I'm going to run for governor. If I'm elected," he said, "I'd like you to be my commissioner." I looked at him with amazement, because I never met him before in my life. And I said, "You know," I said, "you're talking to the wrong man, because, first of all, I'm not even registered as a Democrat." He said, "Well, that doesn't make any difference to me." I said, "You mean if I were to take the job as commissioner, it wouldn't make any difference to you if I make my selections on a non-political basis?" "Yeah, that's right." I said, "If that's the way it goes, if there's no politics with the job, I'll accept your offer." So, that was the first time he approached me. He didn't get -- the first time he ran for office, he was defeated, so I then went back to the Delaware County, because they wanted me to take a job down there as the head of the CIB, and he was there at the second time that he started to run again for office, and he came to me again. And I said, "No." I said, "If the agreement (inaudible), and I will not be (inaudible) by politics." I said, "But I will accept it." And that is why -- you asked me about the highlights of my career. I'm not going to brag and say, "It's because I shot somebody and he shot me and" -- no. The big highlight was -- and it happened to me after

that. The big highlight was the appointment of the first ladies in the State Police history, of all the states in the United States. That's the truth. That is what I call a big highlight.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

And I -- the second part of that was to tell you how sincere I am about it, I did the same thing when I later resigned and when with the county. They never had a female detective in there in 50 years. Never. And when I got the job, I told Steve McCune [ph], "I want to run it the way I want it." I hired the first woman in 50 years. Here she sits right there. The first one in 50 years. So, these are the highlights. I have other highlights, but I -- you talk about the best, I'm not going to go, "Hey, I shot a man." No, they're the highlights.

INTERVIEWER:

Let's go back to your appointment as the commissioner of the State Police. Can you tell me, like, your first days going to Harrisburg, realizing that you are now the commissioner of this organization?

MR. URELLA:

Yeah, I -- it weighed heavily on me, because there were a lot of things I wanted to do that was not justifiable in the days that I was a trooper (inaudible), and I thought, “I’m going to do things that I think I want to do right, because I guarantee I could do them,” and I did. When I got in there, the fist thing I wanted to do was I wanted to lengthen the course of training, cadet training, from three months to six months, because three months was inadequate for training for a trooper. So, I lengthened the period of training from three to six months. And then, I thought -- I wanted to implement a lot of things, and I knew it would take time to do them. I wanted to get credit, college credits, where somebody would earn their cadet training, so I brought in professors, college professors, so the cadets going into the academy can get college accreditation. And then, after that, my budget, at that time, was over $100 million. I knew well enough that the future commissioners had to come from lieutenants and captains, majors. I thought -- I set target dates for lieutenants. Before you can become a lieutenant, you had to have an associate’s degree. And to be a captain, you had to have a baccalaureate degree. But I made targets. They’d give them, like, three and four years in which you (inaudible) get. So, these

are the things that I wanted to do. And then I wanted to -- another important thing, you know you had a lot of (inaudible) captains and majors and lieutenants and (inaudible). If they (inaudible) to the captain, they got promoted where they wanted to go or transferred to where they wanted to go. I wanted to end all that stuff, so I -- as soon as I became commissioner, I ordered all the troop commanders to bring in the representative president of the FOP in each troop to all troop commanders' meetings. I didn't want to hear this stuff of -- all I wanted to hear was good out in the field. I wanted to hear what was bad. So that was an order of mine, too. I did that right away, ordered that. Those are things I wanted. And then, I also put out an order that (inaudible) anybody that had any racial, ethnic, religious bias, and it goes back to what I was telling you previously, I felt it, I wanted to make sure it was not happening during my tenure. These are the things that bothered me, and I wanted to do something about it.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me how it came about that you decided that you wanted to bring women into the State Police.

MR. URELLA:

(inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

How did that all start?

MR. URELLA:

Oh, that -- very easily. First of all, it was -- women were committing more crime. And we -- you can't -- first of all, you should remember this, too. If you had a female prisoner, you couldn't search her. You had to get a -- you had to get somebody to search the prisoner for you. And I felt very strongly that the social way of life was changing, that women were becoming more and more a factor in drug business, drug-related crime, and murders, robberies, and it was an -- becoming more frequent, and I could see it. So I -- to have them. Pardon me.

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about...

MR. URELLA:

That's what...

INTERVIEWER:

...the process.

MR. URELLA:

That's what led me into it. It was the social and economic changes that forced me -- or not forced me, but created my thinking that women should be needed. And it happened the

same way in the county level. Gees. Fifty years with no female detective. And you know, Bob, I'll pursue that a little bit more. The women, in a lot of cases, exceeded the men in their examination scores. And this is very important. You know. Everybody, like you, when you were (inaudible) 5'9", 5'10", however, that doesn't mean anything. Today, power is intelligence. That's what it is, and ladies can do that just as well as the man. Power is intelligence. Okay. I -- I'm not getting off. You're getting me into a lecture on this, and...

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me the process. How -- what was the first step to bring women onto the State Police?

MR. URELLA:

The first step was, of course, the recruit, get out the notice that we were going to take them. And it didn't take long to get a tremendous response. We got a tremendous response from the females of the troopers on the job, too, because they wrote in and told me I'm losing my mind. Are they going to play patty fingers [ph] in the car together and so forth? But that didn't sway me any. I went ahead with it.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you have to clear that with anybody? Did you have to...

MR. URELLA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

...tell the governor or...

MR. URELLA:

No. I want this very clear. And I told the women this. And it's on that disk that you gave him. Absolutely. I went in and the first month I was in office, I said to -- and it was -- in front of anybody, I called him governor, out of respect. I said, "Milt [ph]," I said, "I want to put some women on the job." Well, he was aghast at first. And he said, "They don't have women in the State Police." I said, "Yeah, we need them." I said, "You told me I could do what I wanted to do." And he said, "Hey," he said, "I'll keep my word." He said, "You know what you're doing?" I said, "Yes, I know what I'm doing." Absolutely, that was my idea. It was not a political move or anything else, like somebody tried to say a couple of times, it was good -- for a political move. It had nothing to do with it.

INTERVIEWER:

So, based on that, you started a recruitment effort.

MR. URELLA:

I started the recruiting, and we got good selection for the first class. I thought it was an excellent selection.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you involved, at all, in the interview process of those...

MR. URELLA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

...first women?

MR. URELLA:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember any...

MR. URELLA:

No, I had -- the lady -- I had a lady and a man involved in interviewing. Both.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember anybody that was on that interview board?

MR. URELLA:

No. No. I didn't select anybody.

INTERVIEWER:

Could former Major Cunning [ph] been -- have been involved in that?

MR. URELLA:

It’s very possible, because I would be leaning towards somebody like him who...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

...was not abrasive. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

So, the first class consisted of 14 women. And how long was their training?

MR. URELLA:

The same period. Six...

INTERVIEWER:

Six...

MR. URELLA:

...months.

INTERVIEWER:

...months. Okay.

MR. URELLA:

Yeah. They did -- everything was the same. They took all -- ran, boxed, wrestled. Everything. And when they were -- and of course, everybody in that school knew -- in the academy, knew that I didn't pull any punches with the troop commanders. I said, "Hey," I said, "anybody messes up or does any harassing," I said, "they better pack their gear and get the hell out." And they never had any.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You mentioned earlier that the rank-and-file was somewhat concerned initially when they learned that women were going to be on the job. What kind of things did you hear about that?

MR. URELLA:

Well, that wasn't too bad, frankly. I think the -- by that time, you accepted it. You know, Bob, when you're a commander and you achieved your rank, if you have the guts, you're going to speak out and tell your -- the -- for instance, you brought another thing up about that Norristown affair. This has a relevancy to it. I'm not just skipping over it. I told -- when that happened, there were 15,000 men -- or strikers going to be in Norristown. All the people in Norristown, the judges and everybody else concerned that they're going to riot and take over. I told all -- I said -- I got

half the troop, half of what we had. I had 1,500 men go there, and I said -- I told all the troop commanders, “You’re going to be there. You’re going to lead your men.” I said, “If you’re not there and I find out you didn’t lead your men,” I said, “don’t pack your gear. Just go home. You’re through.” And they were all there. And that was what I said about the men and women. I said, “They’re here. They’re going to be here. They’re going to do the job. And anybody that” -- truthfully, Bob, they knew when I said something, I meant it. And that was maybe not doctorial, but I was firm, because I went through a lot, and I didn’t want to have anybody else to be harassed. And I was dead serious about it. I guess I got off on it a bit. You got me -- relates to why I’m so devoted toward not being bias and making sure people are -- when I was first sergeant, one of my troopers was arrested by the Philadelphia Police, not arrested, but -- it was in the movies, allegedly, with another man. And right away, they thought he was a homo -- it could not be. But he was brought up to the Belmont barracks. I didn’t deal with it. Whoever the lieutenant or captain (inaudible), so I think they had a liaison man, who was also with the -- from the State Police. It was in the City of Philadelphia then. He was the liaison for any contact (inaudible),

and he was the one that said that the Philadelphia Police said this guy was a homo. They brought him back to the barracks. Now, I was told all this. I did not say he was a homo. But they brought him back, and they said that pending the investigation, he's restricted to headquarters. It was sort of the saddest thing that had ever happened, in my opinion. Everybody -- you -- he had to live, eat, and sleep there. Everybody shunned him. I was a first sergeant. I used to talk to him. "Calm down. How you doing?" I'm so happy I did, because I tell you, he was only in there a week or two, and he killed himself. That was what I went through, and maybe you think I'm fanatical, but I'm not. I can't stand anybody with religious, ethnic -- when you go through it, you can -- you know, Bob, when I was a trooper, I was on first reserve a lot, which means midnight to 8:00 in the morning, because I was Italian, right. All the broadcasts come out, "A holdup and robbery, 5'8", ruddy complexion, probably Italian." I -- you know, after a while, Bob, it gets to you. Really, it does. And one more thing. When I was a rookie in Belmont, we were carrying bureaus in from the Eastern State Penitentiary. They were made there. Carried them into the barracks. They were made with wood. We had to carry them in. One of the guys -- I

was carrying my share in. He said, “Hey, you dago [ph], you better make sure you carry your share in.” Oh, I mean, Bob, I was running the mile every day, climbing -- I could climb overhand 35 feet with no problem. I was (inaudible). I turned around. I said, “Hey, you ever call me a dago again, you better squat or I’m going to knock you on your ass.” The son of a bitch was a coward. He ran in and told the lieutenant. I didn’t know this at the time, but I found out later on, he and the lieutenant were training together. So, the next thing you know, the lieutenant calls me in and says, “Hey, McCabe [ph] told me you were going punch him in the mouth.” I said, “Yes, sir.” I said, “He called me a dago, and I told him not to do that again.” He said, “You’re restricted for the weekend to paint the porches.” I said, “He called me a dago.” He said, “Two wrongs don’t make a right.” Now, can you see why I’m so intense? The intensity from me -- and when it’s black, homo, anything, you’ve got to be a human. And Cunning’s a human. He’s a humane individual. I like him for that reason. I’m sorry. I go on...