

I Remember When...

By Lt. George Amans (ret.)

This story is one of many personal experiences by our retired troopers in bygone days. Lt. George Amans was commissioned on June 21, 1937, with the 8th trooper cadet class.



My first contribution: Class of 1937

The selected class of 28 members began Aug. 16, 1937. Until that time this was the largest class ever in the history of the Patrol. The reason for additional personnel was the new driver licensing law: Everyone was required to take written, eye, reactometer and driving tests, with results entered on a permanent driving record.

The fee was \$2 for each year. The State Patrol was selected to give these exams, and certain patrolmen were selected to conduct the tests. Also included were traveling examiners to the outlying areas throughout the state.

The WSP Academy was in the basement of the Old Capitol Building in Olympia. We had five different experienced patrolmen and sergeants as instructors for a short period of time.

The third week we were each issued a .38 Special S&W revolver and a box of 50 shells, with instructions: Go out to some garbage dump and learn how to shoot. No instructor was appointed. We were advised to get a large cardboard box and use that for a target.

As I remember, I hit the box 5 times out of 50. Every shot was jerked.

Later on, our driver training was riding with an experienced patrolman for a few shifts in the old bread wagon-type paddy wagons of that period, capable of speeds of almost 75 mph.

The siren was mounted under the hood on the engine and operated by pulling a wire cable which swung the siren pulley down onto the fan belt. The engine had to be revved up good to make the siren loud.

The 1936-38 wagons had "brake rods." hydraulic did not appear until '39. The rods were very unpredictable. You could never be sure which way it would swerve or dive. On a fast corner, you'd swear, by the lean of the high old rigs, they would tip over.

One of our instructors was Jim Kuntz, a real character. He was asked one day how far was it from Olympia to Everett. After a slight hesitation, he replied, "Oh, about one and a half cigars."

About the second week I was allowed to have a '37 Harley, to commute solo to Lacey. No instructions were given on how to ride, except go out and get some experience somewhere.

About the third week the whole class was taken to the old one-mile dirt horse racing track in Lacey to learn to ride motorcycles. This lasted about three days and that was it. Two patrolmen could not make it; one had never even ridden a bicycle.

Just before graduation and being commissioned, seven of us were selected to take additional training to become state border greeting station officers, a new Patrol function.

After four or five days they discovered we didn't know "beans" about our state, because half of us had never ever seen the other side of the state. So a wise decision was made: To bring in some veterans who know something, and to ship us out somewhere.

I went to Grand Coulee Dam, which was half-built. I became No. 7 patrolman there. After one month I finally got my uniform.

Since I was "the kid," 22 years old and not known in the area, I was often selected as the undercover in civvies to get into the bootleg and girlie house after-hours joints to make a buy and get info on how many were working and which ones were operating. The same night, after several joints were "made", search warrants were issued and raids all at once began. The main operators were booked, bailed out and many, the same night, were back in business. The raids were conducted by city, county and liquor board officers.

You might call it a "legal payoff" game. Our regular working shift was 12 hours, six days a week and \$125 a month. We were allowed one week of vacation.

We at Coulee Dam had free board and room from the company building the dam. It was a big help to the existing conditions. The workers on the dam came there from all over the world to work because the wages were considered the best, \$5 per day.

In 1938 John Holl and I were assigned temporarily to traveling driver license examiners in the Wenatchee, Okanogan and Omak areas. We often ate large thick T-bone steak dinners that included everything plus coffee and dessert for a total bill of 75 cents. Motels or hotels averaged \$2 to \$3 per night. Ethyl gas (Red) was about 12 to 14 cents per gallon.

I once sent in an expense account for dinner of \$1.20 and immediately got it back to re-do because it was too much.

The latter part of 1938 I worked out of Coulee Dam. We had one '37 paddy wagon, three solo Harleys and the sergeant's '37 Ford sedan. We had a 24-hour operation that included one graveyard shift.

In spring and summer in good weather we would occasionally ride the bikes. The favorite leisure patrol was Coulee Dam, Coulee City, Wilbur and back to the dam, about 90 miles. In that distance we would see only about 50 or 60 vehicles during mid-day.

Grand Coulee, up on the hill, was a wild 24-hour town with lots of taverns and dance halls and upstairs after-hour joints.

We worked in pairs and often with the city police, driving and even walking the streets, even into the taverns and dance halls to weed out the drunks.

The dance hall taverns always had a loud noisy band and taxi-dance girls. They came there from all over and even wore formal, beautiful dresses. The men customers would line up and buy dance tickets, 10 cents for each dance.

When the taverns closed is when the upstairs joints, girls and bootleg booze began to thrive. We often assisted the city and liquor inspectors in slowing down that situation.