

I Remember When...

By Lt. George Amans (ret.)



This is a continuation of how it was when one trooper started his career, which for Lt. Amans was in 1937. When last we heard from him, he was at Coulee Dam, then under construction.

Quite often in the summer it was common for the Coulee Dam area to be 110°. We never knew what air conditioning was, in the office or cars. We wore the same heavy wool britches and leather puttees, a light blue shirt and four-in-hand black tie.

Our badges and big cap emblem shields for several years were solid sterling silver and often needed polishing. We holstered the large S&W Specials, and the Sam Browne belt was added to the gun belt to hold up the weight.

Our patrol office had a four-cell temporary jail that we used quite often on local arrests until we could get our customers to trial in the correct jurisdiction. Three counties converged at Coulee Dam.

In our office was one-room living quarters for Patrolman Bill Kellogg, a Clark Gable look-alike and very physically capable.

One Sunday afternoon Bill had just come back to his room to change for the swing shift. What he didn't know was that a prisoner had escaped up through the ceiling into the crawl space, came down into Bill's room, rummaged through his personal effects and found a loaded .380 automatic. Bill came into the room and found his gun pointed right at his stomach. He was cool and alert enough to notice the side safety was "on," and he let fly a quick right to the jaw and knocked our prisoner cold.

We were involved in all kinds of crimes and situations, including murder, robbery, gambling, suicides, burglaries and family disputes.

I was involved in one murder investigation, where a 22-year-old man had been stabbed severely and was bleeding badly from a large butcher knife wound. I asked him who did it and he told me the woman's name before he died. She was arrested and tried in Superior Court. I testified he told me who stabbed him, but because I did not tell him he was going to die (a dying declaration) the case was dismissed and she was set free.

One summer night, while patrolling the streets of Grand Coulee about 1 a.m., I observed a '34 Dodge sedan parked all by itself on a lower dark street. I drove down to check it out and found it had Oklahoma license plates and the interior jammed full of sporting goods, including guns and punchboard-like prizes.

We had no two-way radio to check on anything. From a concealed position a block away, the car could be observed. Approximately a half-hour later a man appeared, looked around, unlocked the car and was about to drive away. He declared all the items were his, but could not produce a registration. And he said he was alone.

Later at the office he admitted the car was stolen and that he had a partner, who was picked up. Both confessed to many burglaries across the country, most of which were punchboard prizes.

The next day they directed us to their secluded country hideaway near a nice spring and shaded area.

It took two truck loads of their loot to haul out and hold for evidence.

I was stationed in Everett in 1939 to '42 and worked the "hot" beat on 99 South to the King County line.

After having spent two years at Grand Coulee on lightly traveled two-lane roads and when confronted with the heavy traffic on 99 with long lines of head and tail lights and realizing I'm the one responsible for all this, I was one real nervous patrolman for quite some time.

Our new patrol car was a '39 Ford Panel with what was supposed to be a real "hot" 90-horsepower Mercury Special engine. Eighty-two mph was top speed and the regular Fords outran us. We had only a one-way radio and took our calls from the Everett Police Dept. They'd call twice and hope we got it.

In almost four years in Everett, I caught 32 stolen cars with the drivers. Three of these I'll always remember.

No. 1 was a daytime 82 mph, 12-mile chase of deliberately eluding and he would not stop. He came to the Everett city limits full bore and not able to make the left curve, lost control and slammed into a small grocery store.

When all of this happens right in front of you, it is very exciting. The car was totaled, the store a shambles, and of all things, no one seriously injured. The driver started to run but was a little late.

No. 2 was a midnight chase toward Seattle, a brand new 1941 Ford sedan, with two young men, that would not stop. Again 82 mph and no two-way radio for help. It constantly kept about a two-block lead and I couldn't gain. Finally, near the Snohomish-King County line it whipped off on the right shoulder and I could barely see them jump out and run into the brush and woods. Both doors were left open, lights on, radio playing and engine running.

The logical thing they would try to do would be to hitchhike. I drove north about a mile and stopped the first large truck with good clearance lights. Obviously they, at least for some time, would not "chance" it with just two head lights. I explained the situation to the very cooperative truck driver and just to go slowly when we had a break in the traffic, and he was all for it.

We approached the area at about 30 mph, and it worked. Out of the darkness they both came with their thumbs up high. We stopped, and then ran up to our door; we opened it and said, "Come on in." Suddenly there were four eyes as big as silver dollars.

No. 3 was another late-night pursuit, of a stolen Studebaker we had been on alert for all night.

The war with Japan had started about three months before and, due to this, additional Patrol officers were hired to be bridge guards to prevent sabotage.

One of these guards in Everett was Will Bachofner, who was assigned to the Cavaleras Bridge east of Everett and, as you know, was our chief for 12 years. Will was a childhood friend of mine and was working for Weyerhaeuser Mill. I often took him on routine patrol and he became interested and applied for the bridge guard job and was hired. He was assigned the older bread wagon-type paddy wagon, a '37 Ford and noted for its lean and poor brakes (no hydraulics until '39).

I had completed night shift on the south end by midnight and drove over and contacted Will, parked my wagon and rode with him for about an hour, when we spotted the stolen Studebaker going east on the bridge.

Will was able to make a turn, they saw us and the chase was on, 70-80 plus mph. It had rained slightly before and the road was damp. They had about a two-block lead on us and we couldn't gain, only stay with them. The road had several long dips and hills. When we were at the bottom of one we'd see their tail lights going over the next hill.

After about five of these, at the next hill top we saw nothing but darkness. We were about 70 mph and our lights showed a T- intersection ahead. The right-hand spot light that I was working showed the Studebaker in some stumps and brush dead ahead. Will hit the brakes hard, and we went into a broadside, right up to the edge of the road and slowly over we go on my side. I still had the spot light on them as they were climbing out of the car. Will got out on the upper side of our rig and I followed.

We got both of them before they could run, told them they were under arrest and ordered them to help us push the wagon back up, which they did. We loaded them into the back and took them to jail for car theft.

We thought we'd done a pretty fine job of it all, until the sergeant found out the whole story, and we both darn near got fired -- for the reason of leaving the bridge area.