

A Troop F First?

In connection with some recent state police research, I got to thinking about the early days of Troop F.

Although I didn't get a letter of censure or time on the beach, I think I may have been the first trooper to have been disciplined by a Troop F Commander, and that was even before the troop was in service.

In mid 1967 I was transferred from SP Dover Plains in Dutchess County to SP Middletown in Orange County. At that time Middletown was the westernmost outpost of Troop K, not the troop headquarters of Troop F. We were quartered in a one story house which was located on Crystal Run Road, about where Chili's is now. The area was still pretty rural. There was a neighboring house on the north side of the barracks and woods across the street. Everything else in sight was pasture, complete with Holsteins. Just to give you an idea of how rural it was, there was a balcony running across the south side of the building above the garage doors. Some of the more firearms oriented guys used to shoot from the balcony. I don't think there was a woodchuck living within range of the barracks.

Back to the early days of Troop F. Sometime in 1967 construction of a new troop headquarters started in the pasture behind the old SP Middletown. Early in 1968 Major John Monahan, who had been the troop commander of Troop K, was sent over to SP Middletown to begin the process of establishing a new troop. He was accompanied by a first sergeant, Blake Muthig, and three zone sergeants, Don Pinto, Richie Raush and Ed Whalen. Together they commandeered a couple of bedrooms in the back of the old Middletown Barracks and began the process of hiring civilian employees, establishing files and all the other requisites for standing up a new troop. It must have been an overwhelming job.

For those of us who were assigned to SP Middletown, their presence didn't have much of an impact; a few more phone calls to answer and some additional mail to sort.

One day while assigned to the desk I was standing by the station file cabinets distributing mail into various mail folders. The major came out into the main office about the time I came upon a personal, handwritten envelope addressed to him. He appeared to be looking over my shoulder and I thought he was looking at the letter, so I held it up by my shoulder. He said "Put it on my desk", which I did.

A little while later Zone Sergeant Pinto came out and said words to the effect of "I'll take the desk. The major wants to see you." I don't recall exactly how he phrased it, but I got the idea the Maj wasn't inviting me in for a cup of coffee. I checked my buttons and gig line, walked down the hall, centered myself on the hatch and, although the door was open, knocked three times on the door frame. The major motioned me in. I centered myself in front of his desk and said "Trooper Scribner reporting to the major as ordered, sir." (I couldn't say "... to the Troop Commander as ordered." At this point he didn't have a troop, he was sort of a man without a country.)

The major did not advise me to stand at ease and I didn't. Although he didn't use the word "maggot", he did an otherwise very credible job of blistering me. I believe the major had been a Chief in the Navy during the war and it showed. The gist of his advice was the next time I had something for him, advise him I had something for him and ask whether he would like me to put it on his desk.

I replied "Yes, sir." (I figured "Aye-aye, sir" would have been pushing it) and he told me to get out. I had already saluted him once that day, but figured another couldn't hurt. I took one step backward, saluted, executed an about face and bolted out the door. (For those who weren't / aren't in the state police, but were in one of the Naval services and are therefore confused, we do salute indoors, uncovered. Maybe it's because we're under arms.)

I don't recall ever having to ask the major thereafter what he wanted me to do with his mail. I probably just hid it until he was gone - they hadn't invented shredders yet.

Apparently my faux pas wasn't the kiss of death. I did get a couple of "atta-boy" letters from the major before he got shipped out. (I don't recall what he did, but he got shipped to A Troop. Talk about "taking a ride". Furthermore, he arrived in Troop A in time for Attica. Bad timing.)