

LIFE IN THE BARRACKS PATROL

Recently I mentioned to some young troopers that probably my favorite assignment as a trooper was as a member of the Middletown Barracks Patrol. The term “barracks patrol” was met with blank stares. Same with the term “headquarters patrol”, a somewhat newer synonym.

The terms “barracks patrol” and/or “headquarters patrol” simply refer to the troopers who work out of troop headquarters, but are assigned to patrol duties rather than to some headquarter function such as communications, the traffic section or ID (now known as FIU). The barracks patrol troopers are the guys and gals who would be assigned to that area even if there weren’t a troop headquarters there.

The term dates back to the 1920s. At that time all patrols were, by definition, “barracks patrols”, simply because there was only one barracks in each troop, troop headquarters. There were no “sub-stations”. (Another probably antiquated term from the ‘50s and ‘60s).

About once a week several two man horse patrols would set out from troop headquarters on treks of varying distances and durations to the far reaches of the troop area. The patrols would put up each evening at a rooming house along the way and either telephone troop headquarters or send them a post card to let troop know where they were and where they expected to go the next day.

(Some accounts claim that certain troopers were required to have the postmasters of the villages and hamlets they passed through stamp their arm with that post office’s postmark. Upon return from their circuit, the first sergeant would examine their arm to ensure that they had been where they were supposed to have been. Must have been the first incarnation of GPS tracking.)

If troop headquarters received a complaint and needed to get a hold of one of the patrols, they would telephone one or more designated businesses along the patrol’s projected route. Those businesses would hang out a flag alerting the patrol that they needed to phone troop headquarters.

If the Widow Brown wanted to see a trooper because someone had stolen all of her chickens, I hope she had an alternate source of sustenance, because there wasn't going to be a Code Three response. Unlike in today's 911 dispatch centers, there was no "closest horse" policy.

Getting back to the two man patrols saddling up at troop headquarters for patrol, when I was a young trooper, the only time two troopers routinely rode together was from eleven PM to five AM. The first decision of the tour was, and probably still is, "What car are we going to use?"

"Well, we've got two choices. We can take 6232. It's running great, but I hit a skunk with it last night. Or we can take 6235, which begins to shimmy so badly above eighty miles an hour that you think the front wheels are going to fall off. Your choice."

Did the 1920's troopers have to make similar choices? Probably.

"You gonna ride Big Bertha?"

"Not in this weather. Last week there was a crack of thunder just as we were leaving the barracks. We were half way to Sidney Center before I could get her reigned in....."

In the mid twenties, the concept of all patrols starting at troop headquarters was replaced with sending a pair of troopers to a particular region of the troop, maybe a county, for an extended period of time. They would work out of one location, a boarding house or hotel, and patrol locally. After a month or two they would be replaced by a different pair of troopers, the theory being that individual troopers shouldn't get too friendly with the locals. Also, the steady stream of different troopers gave the public the impression that the force was much larger than it actually was.

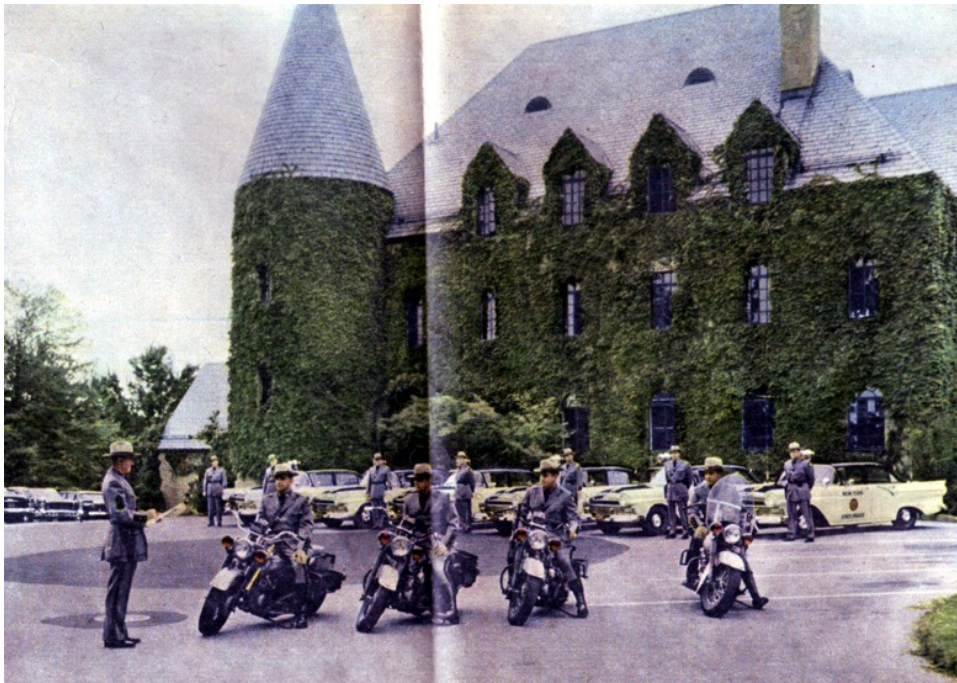
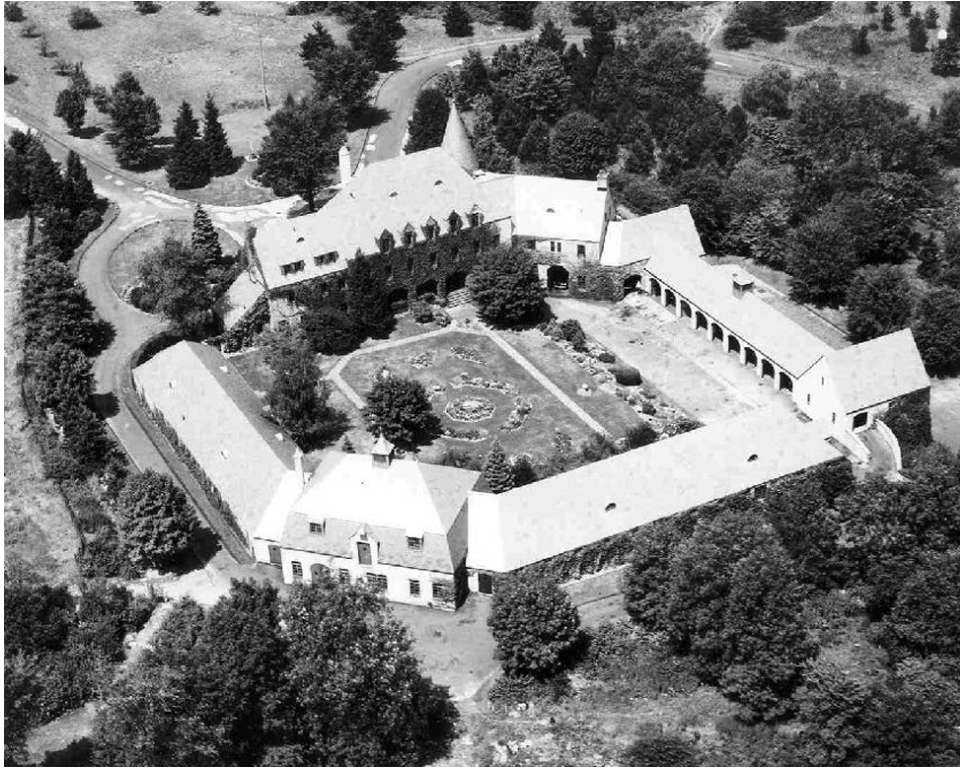
Around 1930 the state police began to rent space, usually houses, throughout each troop area. The practice of having all patrols start at troop headquarters was discontinued except for those which patrolled the posts surrounding headquarters - the barracks patrol.

Being assigned to the barracks patrol in that era had one major drawback. Each day that a trooper was away from troop headquarters he received a per diem payment for meals. Since the annual salary was only \$900, any per diem money not actually spent for meals helped boost the troopers' meager take home pay. But for those who were assigned to troop headquarters, either as headquarters staff or as the barracks patrol, meals were provided at troop, hence no per diem.

By the time I came on the job in the 1960s, per diem meal payments were long gone unless one was assigned to some distant detail like the state fair, but then again, we made a decent salary - not luxurious, but a living wage.

My first exposure to the term barracks patrol was in Troop C. I wasn't assigned to the Sidney Barracks Patrol, but I understood the concept. Then I got transferred to Troop K. When the transfer teletype came out, my senior man, who had once been assigned to Troop K, warned me "Kid, there's the New York State Police, then there's K Troop."

Troop K certainly was different. For starters, it was headquartered in a genuine castle. And the building wasn't some old relic left over from Washington Irving's day. It had been built in the 1920s just for the state police. The main building had a turret. The attached stables, garages and assorted other buildings encircled a courtyard, in the center of which was a large octagonal flower garden replicating the state police shield. I half expected to see the barracks patrol troopers outfitted like the Vatican's Swiss Guard.



To the contrary, I was never able to actually locate any member of the barracks patrol during my eighteen months in the troop. Although it existed on the troop roster, complete with names, the assigned members were seemingly invisible. (Once exception was Paul Paquette. He was a firearms instructor and would appear during the semi- annual firearms training sessions, then disappear.)

My first station in Troop K was SP Putnam Valley. "Put Valley" was strictly a traffic station. We didn't do any complaint work, all we did was patrol the lower fifty miles of the Taconic State Parkway, plus the much shorter Bear Mountain Parkway.

SP Hawthorne - the castle - was located a few hundred yards off of the Taconic near the southern end. The main driveway could only be accessed from the parkway. If there was ever a place "in the vicinity of a troop headquarters which should be patrolled by a barracks patrol", it would be the parkway, at least some portion thereof, which was located at the end of your driveway. Nope. We patrolled the parkway from twenty two miles away, driving right by troop headquarters to get to the southern end of our post.

I don't even recall one of the barracks patrols holding down an accident scene 'til we arrived. And it wasn't as though the barracks patrol was tied up handling complaints. Located in central Westchester County, troop was completely surrounded by municipalities which had their own police departments.

On a couple of occasions I or another Put Valley trooper was dispatched to Hawthorne to perform duties which seemingly should have been the responsibility of the barracks patrol.

One time it was to feed the bloodhounds. They were kenneled in chain link fence enclosure on the perimeter of the complex. Normally they were fed and exercised by the dog handler, but he got weekends off unless there was someone in desperate need of tracking.

I liked dogs and dogs like food; how hard could this be? It turned out that the one thing the two one hundred pound plus hounds wanted more than food was a forty eight hour pass. The larger of the two, Kayo, was particularly insistent. A protracted wrestling match ensued - actually it was more of a tag team match on their part. What if they got out? How does one find a missing tracking dog? Maybe put a leash on a lost kid and troll the neighborhood?

Fortunately bloodhounds are gentle giants, but they slobber and shed profusely. Only the thought of being transferred to Malone for losing two bloodhounds in one shot kept me rolling around the less than pristine kennel yard with them until I was able to get the gate closed. I made a hasty return to Put Valley for a clean uniform.

An other time a fellow trooper was sent to troop was to start the emergency generator so communications could perform the required weekly test. Every station had an emergency generator. Most were mounted on a four wheel trailer and powered by a four cylinder Jeep engine - a pretty decent sized unit. The usual drill was to roll the generator out of the garage, plug in a long cable, fire the generator up and flip a large lever on the side of what looked like a fuse box in the garage to roll over from commercial power to emergency power.

Being a troop headquarters with lots of buildings, it made sense that Hawthorne needed a larger generator, but how much different could the overall procedure be? The trooper was directed into a garage below the stables. The generator, which apparently dated back to the '20s, was fixed, one didn't need to roll it outside. Good thing. Based on its size, it reportedly looked like someone had dismantled a bus in one of the garage bays. It was hard wired, so one didn't have to worry about connecting a cable. But, where we were used to seeing a gray, enclosed electrical box with a lever on the side, there was instead an open, triple knife, double throw 1920's era switch affixed to the concrete wall, and you had to stand in an inch of water on a concrete floor to reach it. Dr. Frankenstein would have been proud to have had this setup in his lab. (Think: "Give my creation life!") There was a terrifying bright blue flash when the switch was thrown. Then it had to be done all over again when the test was over. I suspect that at some subsequent date a Troop K whistle

blower mailed photographs of this evolution to his congressman, which then became the impetus for the formation of OSHA.

I left Put Valley a few months later for the more bumpkinly, but also much more enjoyable, Dover Plains, still not having sighted a member of the elusive Hawthorne Barracks patrol.

Fast forward to the summer of 1968. I was stationed at SP Middletown, the westernmost outpost of Troop K. It was a great station; good guys, good bosses, really busy and serious crime beat almost to a standstill.

(You may wonder how a station could be busy, yet not have a great crime problem, both at the same time. In the 1960s there was no Child Protective Services, no Adult Protective Services, no Animal Control Officer, no County Fire Investigators, no medical technicians, no code enforcement officers, etc. In many townships, aside from the highway department guys and maybe the town clerk, troopers were the only full-time paid government employees of any kind. When people couldn't figure out who to call for the crisis de jour, they called the troopers. We responded, whatever the problem. The days went quickly.)

In the later part of 1967 construction began on a new troop headquarters in the backyard - or, more accurately, in the back pasture - of our barracks. A new troop, Troop F, was to be carved out of portions of Troops C, G and K.

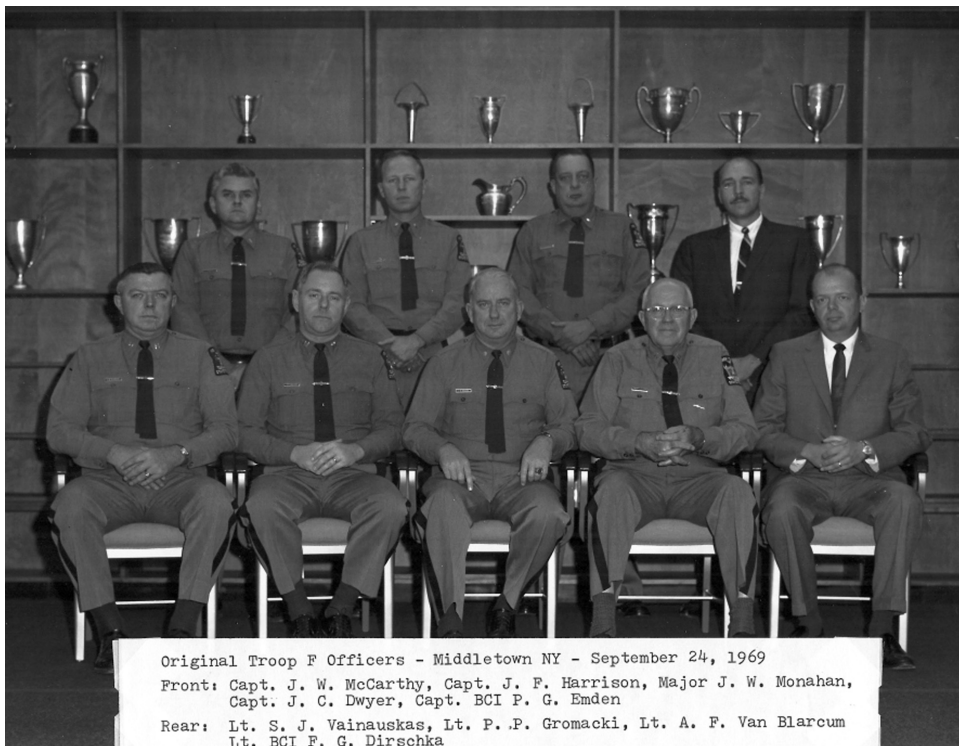
On August 8, 1968 I was working an A line (which actually began at 11 at night on the 7th.) Charlie Fallon and I departed on patrol from our old barracks and eight hours later we returned to our new one. A quick change of collar ornaments and, bingo, we were the Troop F Barracks Patrol.

If you were the type who didn't like to be near commissioned officers, the barracks patrol was not for you. If you were assigned anywhere else in the troop, you had one officer to deal with, your zone

commander (who was at that time a uniform lieutenant.) Depending on where in the zone you were stationed, you might see him anywhere from once every few days to once every few months.

There were nine officers in the troop. Three zone lieutenants out in the field and, at troop headquarters, a major, three uniform captains (not all in one tour), a BCI captain and a BCI lieutenant, all of whom had to be saluted once a day, everyday. (Unlike the Naval Services, troopers salute indoors and uncovered, even if the saluter and/or the salutee are in civies.) Hell, I got into it; I think I even threw a few highballs at the UPS guy just to be on the safe side. But aside from the saluting thing, the officers didn't seem to bother us much, if at all.

Over time, we learned that officers, a segment of the state police we hadn't had much exposure to up to this point in our careers, were decent, if sometimes not warm and fuzzy, people. The BCI officers just kind of waved when you saluted them. The major, John Monahan, was a bit more formal, but occasionally grunted at me in response to my "Good morning, sir."



The captains were a bit friendlier. Captain Jack Harrison, a state police legend and really decent guy, walked in the back door of the lobby one morning while I was sitting the desk. I popped to my feet to salute, not realizing that I had earlier closed the bottom of my tie in the desk drawer. Just as I approached fully standing up, my breakaway tie and tie clasp broke loose, throwing me off balance so I fell across the desk. Captain Harrison laughed, but with me, not at me.

A more terrifying event occurred in the garage. Captain John Dwyer was an old timer by anyone's standards, especially those of a twenty something year old trooper. He had come on the job in the 1930s.

The state-of-the-art Troop F wash bay was equipped with a newfangled invention, the electric pressure washer. Unlike today's pressure washers, the wand on this unit had no trigger; if the unit was on, pressurized water came out of the wand. For some reason I turned on the unit without having the wand in hand. It came to life like some sort of agitated serpent, flailing up and down and side to side. Just then Captain Dwyer walked around the corner of the wash bay. The stream of water blew his bus driver's hat off and hosed him down thoroughly. I was thinking "B Troop here I come!" Captain Dwyer thought it was the funniest thing he had ever seen?! He retreated to his bedroom, put on a fresh uniform and returned to the garage. Before he rounded the corner to the wash bay, he called out "You done washing your car?"

It wasn't hard to settle into barracks patrol life. When we were assigned to patrol posts, i.e. out on the road, nothing was much different between our previous life at SP Middletown Troop K and our new assignment. The one difference was more relays, which I'll get to later.

When we were assigned to desk duty, it was different, but mostly in a better way. True, the phone rang a whole lot more, but that was better than sitting on your hands at the desk waiting for someone to call in the crime of the century.

One new duty we did incur when assigned to the night desk was touring the entire barracks two or three times a shift to ensure it was secure. We would get one of the troopers from communications

to cover the phone and we would walk every hallway, plus the garage and the exterior. On the first circuit of the evening we checked to make sure all the office doors were locked. The reason? If one of the night patrols brought in a prisoner for processing and he somehow bolted while being fingerprinted, he wouldn't be able to duck into some door off of a hallway, resulting in an extensive room by room search. Instead he would discover that the exit door at the end of the hallway was locked and close behind him were some extremely unhappy troopers.

Meanwhile, back at the desk, in place of the five or six button phone we had in the old barracks, we now had this giant, and probably antiquated, switchboard with cables that one plugged into various sockets to connect calls. Remember "One ringy-dingy, two ringy-dingy" from Laugh-in? That was it.

As I mentioned previously, Troop F had been formed from portions of Troops C, G and K. The melding of these disparate groups of troopers into a new troop did not occur overnight. As members of the barracks patrol we took it upon ourselves to expedite the bonding. Sometime around four in the morning, when the respective deskmen in the troop had completed their many administrative duties, we would pick two stations at random, say Leeds (formerly of G Troop in Greene County) and Stoney Point (formerly of Troop K in Rockland County), plug in cables to both tie lines and ring them both simultaneously. Then we would listen in.

"Leeds, Trooper Peterson."

"Stoney Point, Trooper Cashin."

"Whatta you want?"

"Whatta you mean, whatta I want?'," the f***** phone rang and I answered it! Whatta you want?"

We would listen in as their conversation developed into a screaming rant between two increasingly insane people. Once in awhile, however, it turned out the two deskmen knew each other from troop

school or some previous assignment. “Hey, how you doin’?” They would chat for an hour, never realizing that neither had initiated the call.

An immediately apparent advantage of being assigned to the barracks patrol, particularly if you were assigned to the A Line desk, was not having to send teletypes. The people in communications did that for you.

One of the banes of night desk duty in most stations was sending car repair teletype messages to troop headquarters, attention: the AAMI (assistant automotive maintenance inspector, a civilian position). State Police cars were usually maintained by vendors, mostly dealerships. Every so often each car had to go in for routine maintenance, the extent of which was dictated by the total milage on the vehicle. The garage or dealership would submit an estimate (I suspect the work had already been done) listing detailed information about the vehicle, an estimate of the labor costs and a detailed list of the parts involved, followed by how much of a discount, down to the cent, the state was going to receive on the list price of each part.

The formatting of these messages was a nightmare; lots of indenting and columns (there was no Tab Key), plus the numerical content was all justified at the decimal point. Prior to the early computerization of the teletype network, the system was like a giant party line; if you were halfway through sending your car repair message to troop headquarters and someone at a different station didn't realize it and started sending some other message, your message was irrevocably destroyed - a mishmash of two overlapping texts. Were stations closer together, such events might have resulted in duels at sunrise - and we were armed. For those of us in the barracks patrol, the AAMI's office was down the hall. We had only to throw the repair estimate in his mail drawer; no TT required.

As for the other administrative messages the A Line deskman had to send, we now only had to assemble the content, usually from the blotter and the Pers. 29 - the sign in/sign out sheet which reflected status of and hours worked by every member assigned to the station for the entire day. Once the info was assembled, the folks in communications formatted it and sent it out.

In our case, the information was sent to SP Monroe, our zone headquarters, which then consolidated our information with that received from the other Zone Two stations and sent it back to Middletown - not to the barracks patrol, but to the First Sergeant. For those of you who weren't in the state police, sending information to someone else so they can send it back to you may not make much sense, but, hey, we're from the government, specifically the Department of Redundancy Department.

As for the rest of the teletype messages which had to be sent routinely by all members, most of the time, troopers are generalists. Even though the New York State Police is one of the largest full service police agencies in the country, the members are so spread out that it's more like being many small police agencies.

A trooper assigned to investigate a crime, say a residential burglary, might process the crime scene himself, conduct all the necessary interviews and take statements, gather evidence and submit it to the lab or the ID Section, fingerprint and photograph the defendant, draw up the accusatory instrument, send all the associated teletypes, then present the case to the district attorney's office, testify in court and type up the report.

As with those assigned to desk duty, a trooper assigned to the barracks patrol who was returning from his post had only to rough out the requisite information for any required teletype messages and give it to someone in communications. They took care of it. Life was good.

One thing the deskmen on all tours did miss was being able to listen to the troop radio, which was now handled by the Communications Section. A good deskman kept track of what all his patrols were doing, plus he monitored any activity in the surrounding stations' patrol areas that might somehow impact the local patrols - perhaps a stolen car or a high speed chase. Eventually the bosses listened to our complaints and a speaker was wired up to the front desk area.

There were lots of other things at troop which made life easy. Out in the troop, if you needed something from the quartermaster you filled out a QM-16 and dropped it in the sergeants' basket.

If you were lucky, the item appeared sometime in the next two weeks when the quartermaster made his regular rounds.

In the barracks patrol you just walked around troop with your completed QM-16 in hand until you found a sergeant to sign it, then headed back to the quartermaster shack. The quartermaster, Eddie Sienko, was a civilian employee. Unlike previous quartermasters we had encountered in other troops who were not civilian employees but members, Eddie didn't act like he was paying for this stuff out of his own pocket. If he had it, you got it. If you were going to get a re-issued uniform item, you got the pick of the litter since you were there to view the selection.

Investigator Don Trotta, the troop polygraphist, was always willing to assist us with a case, no matter how insignificant it seemed. For him it was a chance to polish his already great technique. For us, essentially junior troopers, it made us feel like we were playing in the big leagues. (We were, we just didn't realize it.)

In the garage there were mechanics working on the weekdays who could, and did, fix minor problems like a flat tire, a burned out lightbulb or whatever. If there was a raging snowstorm at the beginning of a tour, you could bring your troop car into the garage and clean off the snow. If tire chains were required, you could throw the car onto the lift and mount the chains nice and snug without having to roll around on your back in the snow.

Out in the backyard was, among other things, a bone yard of wrecked troop cars. Sometimes in the dark of night you could "exchange" some little piece of tin you had inadvertently bent with one from a car which was mostly bent already. Having the First Sergeant suddenly appear during the process, which did happen from time to time, had varying results depending on who you were and how you had bent what ever it was that you bent. It worked out for me the one time I got caught with my hand in the cookie jar. Or, more accurately, with my socket wrench behind the taillight assembly.

Relays. In the state police, the vast majority of paperwork was moved around by troopers. Perhaps not the most efficient way to get stuff from one place to another, but cost effective in that we were

out there anyway. Being at the hub of most relays, the barracks patrol troopers were involved in more of them than the rest of the troop.

First relay was that of moving the mail to and from the Middletown Post Office, which was about four miles from troop headquarters. When we were in the old barracks what little mail we got was delivered by the rural delivery guy. Now the volume of mail dictated direct delivery and pick up.

The barracks patrol put out five post cars. The busiest post, Post Two, consisted of the Town of Wallkill in its entirety. Troop Headquarters was located in the town. At a set time, maybe 9:30 or 10:00 AM, the post two guy had to break off whatever he was doing and patrol to the post office to pick up the mail. If it wasn't all sorted yet he had to wait until it was. Meanwhile the complaints were backing up. Worse, if the major was expecting some special piece of mail, he wasn't happy about the delay. If the major wasn't happy, the first sergeant wasn't happy. If the first sergeant wasn't happy, ain't nobody gonna be happy. It didn't matter that it was the post office's fault. The postmaster wasn't standing in front of the first sergeant. The messenger was.

The next type of relay only occurred every two weeks. On Wednesday afternoon Division Headquarters would send out the word that the paychecks were ready. Those for the southern end of the state were picked up a Thruway patrol.

The checks were larger than your average personal check - physically that is, not monetarily . Definitely not monetarily Additionally, there was a stub of equal size attached to one end of the check. There were probably about 350 to 450 checks for each troop. The checks were shipped out wrapped in brown paper, resulting in a semi-rigid brick-like package about three inches by three inches by twelve inches for each troop or detail.

The Thruway post cars began the long process of relaying the checks south, post by post (roughly thirty miles per post). Naturally each time a patrol rendezvoused with the next one there would be the obligatory exchange of scuttlebutt as the paychecks and probably other relays were exchanged. Once every year or two one of the receiving troopers would get distracted and drive off with the

paychecks on the roof. They didn't stay there for long. Apparently the brown paper packaging wasn't strong enough to withstand a sixty mile per hour impact with the pavement. By the time the trooper realized what happened - and I don't know how long this took or how he realized it - the Thruway was covered with paychecks.

Thankfully I have no firsthand knowledge of exactly what happened then, but there undoubtedly would be much scrambling to recover them. I'm surprised they didn't shut the Thruway down. Maybe they did, unofficially.

There was another pay check relay faux pas which occasionally occurred. Once the checks had reached the designated troop and were being relayed towards troop headquarters, a relaying trooper might realize that if he were to remove his check now, he could get it to the bank before three o'clock and replenish his precariously low balance before he bounced any checks.

He didn't realize that once the checks arrived at troop headquarters the first sergeant had a carefully choreographed procedure wherein the checks were carefully sorted according to their respective destinations by the first sergeant's minions while he ensured all were accounted for. One was missing. The first sergeant would call Division payroll and read them the riot act, only to eventually learn that it was he and not they who were wrong. First Sergeants don't like to be wrong. The offending trooper would be lucky if he wasn't subsequently transferred to the end of the earth.

I've saved the most routine relays for last, since we in the barracks patrol turned them into an art form.

Surrounding the front desk area were counters, beneath which were drawers which were used to sort mail, reports and various other items which were headed out to the zones. Two or three times a week the night patrols would package up the items to be relayed and head out on patrol. Our counterparts in the three zone headquarters would do the same. After things had slowed down, one or the other of the relay cars would contact the other by radio and arrange to rendezvous at the border of their respective patrol areas.

As time went on we discovered that those who weren't stationed at troop headquarters believed that we who were had some inside track on what was going on. Like the troop commander invited us to stop by his office to discuss who should get promoted or what discipline to hand out in a particular case. Wrong.

But, where there's a will, there's a way. We would arrange to get to the meeting point fifteen minutes early, then rummage through the relay and pick out the #10 envelopes which emanated either from the troop commander's office or from Division Headquarters. You could tell the ones from the troop commander's office because the addressee's name and rank were not abbreviated and there was a full address. Most of the other envelopes in the relay just had a name, rank and "SP Wherever." Envelopes from the Superintendent's office were real easy to pick out; they were of a higher quality paper and the typewriting and the logo were purple.

Each uniform troop car had a spotlight affixed to the pillar between the windshield and the left front door. Some cars had one on both sides. We discovered that if you gently squeezed the top and the bottom of the envelope towards each other, the tri-folded letter inside would bow out so the center third of the letter was up against one side of the envelope. If you aimed the spotlight into the car, you could hold the envelope in front of the intense beam and the center portion of the letter - the meaty part - could be read. (If there was quite a bit of text, the rear view mirror might come into play also.)

A bit later our counterparts would arrive and we would exchange cartons full of mail, reports, fingerprint cards and assorted other stuff. Then we performed the requisite exchange of scuttlebutt.

Them: "Who do you think is going to make the Bureau this time around?"

Us: "Well, Smitty's name has been bounced around, but you can put your money on Jonesy. But you didn't hear it from us." (Nor did you know we just read the letter to him announcing the promotion about two minutes before you got here.)

Same thing with disciplinary proceedings.

“Whatta you thinks going to happen to Brownie for losing that prisoner last week?”

“Again, you didn’t hear it here, but we figure he’s looking at a letter of censure and a week on the beach.”

After this happened about once a week for a month, they knew that we had the inside track, despite our protestations to the contrary.

Life was good in the barracks patrol.