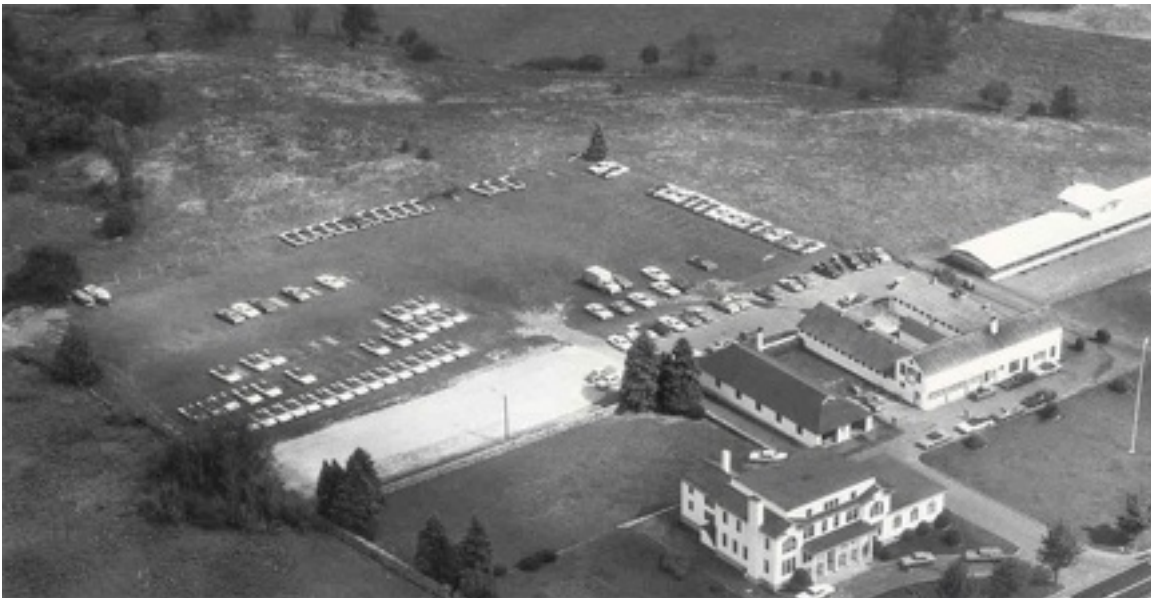


SP Malone - The First Troop B Headquarters

This isn't so much a story as just some recollections about how things once were a half century ago.

Recently, long retired Trooper Richard Sherwin posted the following account of his early days in Troop B. It kindled recollections of the first of many forays I made to B Troop, which follow Dick's account.



At the time that Troop B Headquarters in Malone was built, Troopers were required to live at their assigned station. The second and third floors of the building were dormitories with bathroom and shower facilities. In addition to office space, the main floor had kitchen and dining facilities and the Troopers ate their meals at the Barracks.

Vacancies were only filled as the State Legislature approved the funds to do so. I was one of the last two to be hired under that system, in March of 1961. I was assigned to Troop B, which was fortunate for me, as I was born and raised in North Bangor.

Under that system, you did not attend a session of the New York State Police Academy until enough Troopers had been hired to make up a class. On day one, we were issued all of our equipment and were officially New York State Troopers. The other Trooper that was hired with me, Jim Dyer, and I spent two weeks at Troop B Headquarters. During that time we received some basic training in the Police aspect of the job from Sgt. Walter Dixon and did some detail work under the supervision of Cpl. Eber O Donnell.



Walter Dixon as a Trooper - 1931

One of the things that we were assigned to do was to tear out the kitchen facilities so that area could be turned into office space. That included the vegetable storage area in the basement, which was to be put to other use. About that time, the second floor dormitory space was turned into office space.

Part of the equipment we were issued was an Order Book, that contained every order ever issued by the Troop Commander. The only one that I can remember after all these years, and I don't remember the Troop Commander who had issued it or the year, read as follows - "In the past month I have received three requests from members of this Troop for a day off to get married. I will put an end to this foolishness right now. If God had wanted you to have a wife, He would have issued you one when you were born". At the time that Order was issued, even if you were married, you still had to live at the station and could only go home on your pass days.

After my two weeks at Troop B Headquarters, I was assigned to the Keeseville Station. While I was stationed there, the hiring practice changed and due to there being so many vacancies, enough new recruits were hired to hold a session of the State Police Academy, which was held in Troy. The State housed us at the Henry Hudson Hotel and our classroom was on the second floor of the Masonic Temple. This was a mixed class, about half of us had been on the job for some time, and the rest that went straight to the Academy, as is done today. Upon completing the Academy, I returned to Troop B and was assigned to the Canton Station for a month. then to Watertown, which was part of Troop B at the time, for a month, then Tupper Lake for a month, then Port Henry for a month, then St. Regis Falls until that Station was closed in Sept. of 1962, then to Malone, then to Canton, back to Malone until the Headquarters was moved to Raybrook, and I finished my career at Raybrook.

During my career, which started about seven years after Trooper Sherwin enlisted, I had the good fortune to have bunked at one time or other in eleven troop headquarters buildings including two of the original five 1920s era headquarters (Batavia and Malone) , at the Hawthorne Castle, at the two 1950s era headquarters (Loudonville and Sidney) and at all six of the 1970s era headquarters.

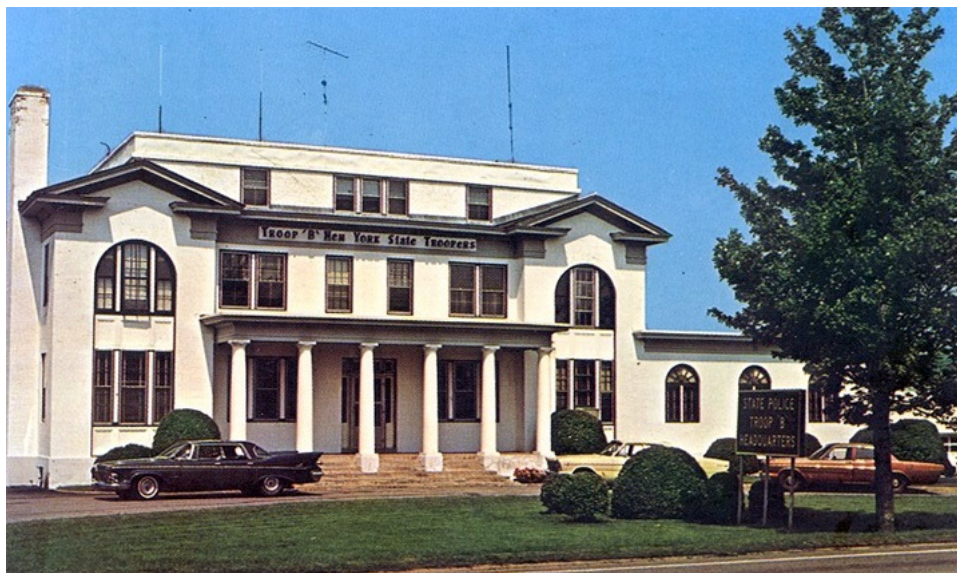
Trooper Sherwin's recollections of his early days in B Troop brought to mind my one and only stay at the original Troop B Headquarters in Malone.

In late November 1970 I was assigned to the Middletown Barracks patrol but was doing a short teaching gig at the Academy. On November 21st Investigator Jack Cotter was killed in a troop car accident. Jack was assigned to Troop F, but he and his family were from Troop B and the funeral was going to be held in Malone. I knew Jack and received permission to attend the funeral. The day before the funeral I finished my teaching assignment, had a quick dinner at the Academy and headed up the Northway.

I stopped at SP Plattsburgh to gas up. Having heard about the differences between working in Troop F and Troop B, I have to say I was really surprised and impressed by how busy the C Line desk was.

Some of that might have been attributable to the many phone lines which “rolled over” to Plattsburgh from distant patrol stations, but the activity generated by the most densely populated area of Troop B, by the personnel assigned to the Plattsburgh Air Force Base and by the students attending SUNY Plattsburgh probably had an impact too.

The deskman aimed me towards the Military Turnpike and I somehow ended up at SP Malone without wandering into Canada. (At least I don’t think I did - the border was a bit more porous in those days.) I parked out back and went to the front desk. The desk man was aware I would be arriving and directed me to the dormitory on the third floor.



I made up a vacant bunk and sat down to work on my leather. There was a small television sitting on a nearby dresser so I flipped it on and watched a Plattsburgh channel until it went off the air around midnight. By fiddling with the rabbit ears I was able to find a Montreal channel which was still broadcasting. To say that the film they were showing was rather risqué would be a gross understatement. I didn’t speak French, but even so quickly figured out with my steel trap mind that the film definitely wasn’t anything you’d see on TV in the states (even today). I opted to work on my leather later and instead decided to take this educational opportunity to pick up a few French colloquialisms. .

At some point I heard a car door slam in front of the barracks. I was expecting to be joined by a friend and fellow trooper from the Middletown Barracks patrol, W. G. "Bill" Sprague, and I looked out to see if it might be him. It wasn't. Instead there was a light green police car and two guys wearing green uniforms. I'd never seen anything similar and it took me a minute or two to figure out that they were Border Patrol personnel - something I'd never run across in my tours in C, K and F Troops.

Eventually I hit the rack (probably when the film ended and I was sure there wasn't another one following). When I got up in the morning I discovered Bill had arrived at some point in the night and we went in search of breakfast. The deskman gave us directions to a place on the main drag. Behind the counter were cabinets containing liquor which were now secured with locked mesh doors. Apparently the place was a diner by day and a bar during the evening hours.

While we were eating breakfast the short order cook put a plate of bacon and eggs on the counter in front of an empty stool next to us. A minute later a guy walked in, sat down, ate his breakfast, put some money on the counter, then got up and left. No words were exchanged. I guess if he didn't show up one morning they sent someone over to his place to see if he was still alive.

I don't remember a great deal about the funeral other than it was, as one would expect, a large detail. Also, as one would expect in B Troop, it was brutally cold and snowing. Back then we were still issued the knee length woolen overcoats and they were certainly appropriate and appreciated that day.



A Typical Troop B Winter Day

When it came time to return home I opted to go by way of Saranac Lake and Lake Placid, just to get the full B Troop experience. En route I stopped at the Saranac Lake station and, if I recall correctly, the front desk area even had a fireplace which was in use. Tough life.

As I passed through Lake Placid it was nearly time for school to be dismissed. (In subsequent assignments to Troop B I learned to use the Old Military Road to avoid downtown Lake Placid.) I was kind of wondering what exactly what would have to happen weather-wise in order for school to be cancelled. The janitorial staff was clearing the sidewalks using tractors with rotating brooms rather than plows and they certainly seemed to do a much better job than anything I'd seen in southern New York.

Despite the slippery roads my descent into Keene and the rest of the trip was uneventful. In the coming decades there would be many other assignments to Troop B and I've never tired of that view.