

## Gray Socks

Recently my wife started knitting socks while watching TV. The first several pair were made of various hues of colorful yarn. Then she went to work on a pair for me. Here's a picture of the finished product:



Who would have believed we would ever run out of them?

When many of us came on the job, the hours were considerably longer, there was no such thing as overtime pay and the salary wasn't all that great. But, no matter how lean the state's budget was in any given year, we always had socks. Come hell or high water, each year the QM delivered to each uniform member a paper bag containing six or eight pairs of gray socks and two purple neckties (which in those days were more maroon than purple.)

And these weren't just any socks, they were top shelf. They lasted forever. (Well, there was that one year the state changed vendors and the socks immediately shrunk to half their original size upon being washed for the first time. Depending on the age of your kids, either the kids or their babysitters immediately received a supply of "worn just once" socks.) The next year the state went back to the original vendor; in the interim each of us was probably still working on our first stash from troop school. They wore like iron.

As a matter of fact, our sock drawers were so full of issued socks that if one went into the Bureau he or she built their entire new BCI wardrobe around items which went well with gray socks - and shiny black shoes.

When I went back into uniform in late 1987 I was issued black socks. My first thought was “What is the Division coming to?”

Anyway, here’s a Gray Socks story which may indicate what a strong part of our culture these simple items became.

In 1984 I was assigned to a special detail which required that I spend two days in each troop headquarters; Monday and Tuesday in one troop, a travel day, and then Thursday and Friday in another troop. To me it seemed like the logical thing to do would be to start at one end of the state or the other and hit two adjacent troops each week. Nope. For whatever reason “the powers that be” decided that the troops would be visited in alphabetical order. This worked OK for some of the combinations such as Troops C and D or Troops G and K. Not so well for A and B or E and F.

The distance from Troop A headquarters in far western New York to Troop B headquarters in the northern most reaches of the Adirondack Mountains was three hundred miles anyway you looked at it. But, hey, they’re giving me a whole day to travel, a car, free gas and paying for my meals to boot. And New York is a beautiful state. Might as well take my time. I wanted the full experience so I left Batavia, drove north to the southern shore of Lake Ontario, then east until I eventually reached the Tug Hill Plateau near the west side of the Adirondacks.

At that point I had a few options, but there was one particular place I wanted to visit - Old Forge. In those days the state police station at Old Forge was a bit of a legend in state police lore. Probably the smallest station in the state - I think there were two guys stationed there - it had one other distinction.

Other than troop headquarters buildings, the state did not own state police stations. Either buildings were leased by the state or, in a few cases, space was provided by a local municipality in buildings they leased or owned. Old Forge was different. The state rented space in someone's home. It was a throwback to the way things were done in the 1920s and '30s. It was almost as though the troopers had a housemother. I wanted to be able to say one day that I had signed through the SP Old Forge blotter.

When I reached the Old Forge patrol area I switched my radio over to car-to-car: "3F1 to the Old Forge patrol." A Troop D car answered up immediately. He didn't get much chance to talk to other cars "car-to-car"; maybe once or twice a week while setting up a relay with an SP Remsen patrol to swap mail and dry cleaning or maybe once in a very great while to a B Troop patrol whose equally rural patrol area abutted his. But to talk to a car from the other end of the state .....

I advised the Old Forge car that I needed to gas up. These days troopers fuel up at a filling station using a credit card. In those days every state police station had its own gas pump - a red industrial model which only had a meter reflecting how many gallons had been pumped - nothing to indicate price. *Patrol Stations* - stations which did not have a member assigned to desk duty - were locked when the patrols were on the road. The electricity for the pump was controlled from inside the building to prevent pilferage. I inquired as to whether the patrol could meet me at the station and turn on the pump. The trooper responded that he was en route to a complaint and couldn't return, but Mrs. Risley would take care of me.

I drove around Old Forge 'til I found the station. Didn't take long. A green and white *State Police* sign sat beside a residential driveway which led to a house on one side and an unattached garage on the other. Sitting next to the garage was a ubiquitous red colored state police gas pump, known by the troops as *The Red Man* .

I backed up to the pump, stuck the nozzle in the tank and flipped the operating lever up. Not surprisingly, nothing happened.

I realize I've gotten a bit far afield; keep in mind that this story is about gray socks.

Recently the state police had started to change over their fleet of officers and BCI cars from full sized Plymouth or Dodge four door sedans to smaller, front wheel drive Chevy Celebrities. I was driving one of the first ones to be assigned to the field. It didn't look remotely like a "traditional" unmarked car. I was wearing jeans and a sweater.

An older woman appeared on the back porch. In my best Sherlock Holmesian manner, I deduced this was Mrs. Rizley. She didn't ask what I wanted. She didn't ask me to walk over to the porch. She didn't ask to see a state police vehicle placard. She didn't ask to see a badge or ID card. She didn't even ask me who I was.

"Show me your socks." I lifted my foot off the ground and tugged my pants leg up, revealing a gray sock.

She reached inside the kitchen door and the pump came to life.