

# DAVID J. KEYSER, SR.

The year was 1941. Gary Cooper and Joan Fontaine were the top money makers at the box office, and "How Green Was My Valley" swept the annual academy awards. The Atlantic Charter had been signed by President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill but war clouds continued to build on the horizon. Adolf Hitler seemed to be moving in all directions with ease.

And in the midst of a world hurtling toward war, the Louisiana State Police was striving to fulfill its mandate to patrol the state's highway and provide for the public safety. With 250 officers, the organization was still in its infancy, barely five years old. Its members would find that the job was often difficult given the predominant influence of politics in the state. In reality, that ever-present, permeating influence should have come as no surprise, since most took advantage of local political connections in scoring the job in the first place.

The young state police organization was really a union of two previous departments -- the Bureau of Investigation and the Highway Patrol. Both had been under the management and control of two separate power structures. Creation of the new agency changed all the rules.

But the organization had managed to flex some political muscle of its own when it sought a degree of independence from the centralization of government offices near the state capitol in downtown Baton Rouge. At the time, state police had been housed in the Department of Highways building. Taking advantage of an abandoned correctional receiving station east of Baton Rouge, LSP administrators successfully parlayed the facility into the new headquarters. It was a move that angered many capitol power brokers. Unfortunately, state police administrators would soon find that it took more than physical distance to insulate an operation from the politicians.

Earl Long, a politician in the purest

sense, had ended his first term as Louisiana's governor and his successor, Sam Jones, was termed a "reform governor." For those in state police, that reform translated into a reduction in pay. Just before Long left, he raised the salaries of troopers in "appreciation for their assistance during the long campaign." Jones returned the salaries to the pre-inauguration levels. Most say Jones didn't introduce a reform administration, he just introduced his administration; the politics didn't change, just the politicians.

David Keyser recognized the necessity of playing the political game,

---

## I remember one of the guys I worked with ran a milk route out of his patrol unit.

---

because at that time it was the only game in town. He readily admits that political connections earned him a job as a trooper. After all, in the days before a classified service, that's what it took.

Keyser grew up as part of the dredgeboat family. Born in 1918, he spent most of his entire life traveling around on the dredge. He attended 21 schools in 11 years and finally finished high school in Baton Rouge, where his family eventually settled down. He graduated in the same year the state police was created.

He later pursued engineering and business administration courses at LSU before opting for a job in a local dime store. Keyser found out he could be hired as a trooper and he jumped at the chance. After all, he figured, the work couldn't be any harder than it was at the dime store. It was a good decision.

David was a pioneer in the law enforcement arena in this state, having spent the majority of his adult life serving one constituency or another. His influence has been far-reaching. After spending more than two decades with state police, David

retired as a captain and signed on to help establish the LSU Law Enforcement Institute. Hundreds of officers throughout the south would eventually benefit from his curriculum and course of study.

In 1965, Baton Rouge's Mayor, Woody Dumas, asked Keyser to serve as the city's police chief and he accepted. It was a particularly sensitive time to serve as chief because the city was moving from segregation to integration on several fronts. But Keyser weathered the storm until 1968 and moved on to yet another law enforcement job. Working for the Louisiana Criminal Justice Com-

mission, David found that he could help chiefs and sheriffs all over the state tap into federal funds. It was a position which permitted him to travel extensively and visit with fellow officers.

Even though David is retired from state police, he says he never felt like he left. "I never met a trooper I wasn't comfortable with," he says. And David has tried to maintain his close ties to the organization.

He has remained active in the Troopers' Association and served for a time as the retiree representative. Like most retired troopers, Keyser longs for friendship and respect from the active ranks. He firmly believes that once you're part of the family, you're always part of the family.

David provides us with snapshots of our early years, the lean years, when things were very different indeed. He talks candidly about the respect citizens had for troopers and the abuses which were endemic to the job. He doesn't polish the image where the shine is lacking because to do so would be an attempt to change our very history. And our history cannot be denied.

*continued*

## DAVID J. KEYSER

### WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT STARTING YOUR CAREER WITH STATE POLICE?

I had been working at S. H. Kress' in downtown Baton Rouge, it was like the forerunner of today's K-Mart, making \$90 a week. It was tough work, too. I lost 30 pounds in my first month. Then somebody asked me, "How would you like to be a trooper?" And when I asked what they paid, he told me \$135. So I went to see J. Y. Sanders, he was a U.S. Senator at the time from Hammond, and he wrote me a note. That's how it was done in those days.

I wasn't really sure about changing jobs so I asked this guy at Kress' how long he had worked there and he told me about eight years and that he was earning \$135. And I said hell, I can go to work tomorrow and start earning \$135. So I really didn't have to give it much further thought.



Keyser, shown here with his young bride, Sybil, was docked a day's pay in 1941 when he took off a day to get married.

I went to work for the State Police in November 1940. I was assigned right here at headquarters. I reported to where the cafeteria is today. That's where they issued uniforms and everything, but they didn't have any that would fit me right away.

I stayed there 3 days, but they sent me up to Camp Claiborne where we had a lot of people assigned. They would give us a check for \$165 and we'd sign it over to the department and they would



Keyser worked many a day without a radio. "They'd send a supervisor to find me." He's shown here with Sonny Wright.

reissue a check for \$135. (Superintendent) Steve Alford would keep the balance for upkeep and maintainance.

You had to find your own transportation to your assignment so I caught a ride with my brother-in-law. On the way up there we got caught in a traffic jam and somebody saw that I was a trooper and came over to the car. They said they had a wreck up ahead that a man had been killed when a train ran over his car and they wanted me to handle it, investigate it. I said sure and went ahead to the accident. There I was, on the job only three days looking at this fatal accident. I said, hey, this is a job for a deputy sheriff, ya'll better call one. And I went on.

We had to use horses and I had never been on a horse in my life. So they assigned me this damn horse and he got bogged down in the mud and I wasn't sure what to do. But I figured the situation was no different than a car so I just got a board up under him and sort of worked him out. Of course when my supervisors found out I got a good ass chewing. They asked me if I was crazy, a horse wasn't a car, he had ribs I could have broken and stuff like that. But I just did the best I could.

Well anyway, somebody looked at my record, my education, and of course my politics and they immediately brought me back down to Baton Rouge. I stayed there about a month. They ordered new

---

### I wrote so many tickets they came to me and told me, man you're making us look bad.

---

### WHAT WERE YA'LL DOING AT CLAIBORNE?

Well, there were 3 camps up there at the time. They were building Livingston and they were building Claiborne. They already had Beauregard in position, and we provided security. They would provide the uniform and badge but you had to provide your own gun and ammunition. Lieutenant Kavanaugh was in charge of Claiborne at the time.

We had lots of good men up there and many of those troopers went on to become sheriffs and stuff. Some of those guys up there really made their money on other deals they had going on. Kavanaugh, I think, had the horse contract, he provided the horses for the operation.

uniforms for me and assigned me to New Orleans. In those days they would assign you to an area just opposite from where you lived. If you lived south Louisiana they would send you up north, or wherever, but you never got assigned where you lived.

### SO BECAUSE YOU REALLY LIVED IN BATON ROUGE, THEY SENT YOU TO TROOP B?

That's right, Troop B. The troop was right there at the bottom of the (Huey Long) Mississippi River Bridge. The Captain was J. E. Curry then. Those were really the good old days. I got married about that time, January of 1941, they docked me a day's pay to do it because in those days we worked seven days a week.

**WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING AS A TROOPER IN NEW ORLEANS IN 1941?**

It was heaven compared to now. The State Troopers had the respect of everybody and if you didn't you just shot them. I mean it, I'm not bulling you. Of course you would treat people nice but if they didn't do what you said they had to be dealt with, hit over the head or whatever.

disappear for a while and eventually he'd be back, and we'd finish our trip. You couldn't make two trips on one tank of gas.

Actually the ambulance was nothing more than one of those old station wagons. We'd pull up and get gas with bodies in the back; we had four in there one night, victims of a bloody traffic accident. The accidents along Airline Highway were just all the time. Every

it? Well, he wasn't really interested but I stopped the truck and gave him a warning. After that I started writing tickets left and right. In fact, I wrote so many tickets they came to me and told me, man you're making us look bad. I said what do you mean making you look bad? Well you know, writing so many tickets. But I told them, look out there what's going on out on the roads, it's a matter of self protection.



*Working the State Police ambulance was regular duty in the early days. Keyser is shown here on the running board responding to an accident at a Zachary race track.*

**WHEN YOU STARTED PATROLLING WHAT WERE YOU DRIVING?**

They had some motorcycles sitting under the shed at the troop, eight or ten of them, and I asked if I could ride one. They asked me do you know how and I told them no but I could sure learn. Back then where the troop was at the bridge it was all open country, they had an airport there, a port of embarkation. The area wasn't built up, not like today. So I would take the bike out and just ride around the area until I was comfortable enough to use it for patrol.

It was a Harley (Davidson) that I broke in on but later they bought some straight four cylinder engines, with just a regular clutch on it. The old Harley had a foot clutch, they called it a suicide clutch because if you left it in gear and revved it, it would just take off.

**HOW WERE STATE TROOPERS REGARDED IN YOUR EARLY YEARS?**

There was lots of respect, people

**But in those days everything was political, there were so many tickets that were fixed.**

constantly wanted to do things for you, and of course the times were quite different then too. In those days if you went in to gas your motorcycle up, they wouldn't take the money for the gas. You went in and wanted a meal, say give me a steak and baked potato, they wouldn't let you pay. If you went across the street to the grocery store and picked up some meat, a loaf of bread and milk, they'd charge you a dollar. Back then if you

*continued*

I went down there and I didn't write a ticket for six months. One of the men I worked with, one who broke me in was an alcoholic, always drinking. The other was always hustling women, hustling sex.

But it was tough in those early days, I remember one of the guys I worked with ran a milk route out of his patrol unit. He lived down in bayou country, down where Lafitte used to be, and everyday on the way into work, he'd deliver milk to everybody along the way, right out of his unit.

We ran the state police ambulance for a while, we'd make the Baton Rouge to New Orleans run and stop in LaPlace for about an hour. You know we only had a one-way radio, they could talk to us but we couldn't talk back to them. It was on the 1680 band, the New Orleans Police Department frequency. And we'd stop in this place in LaPlace and my partner would say you want a woman, and I'd tell him no, because I had just recently gotten married and I wasn't into fooling around. Anyway he'd

year we would have a fatality for every mile of road along Airline Highway between New Orleans and Baton Rouge. So if it's 110 miles then every year we'd have 110 killed. I remember sitting there one night on Airline and here comes a guy, he sailed right passed me, had my red light on and everything. Well he ran off the road, flipped the car and we just went over and picked him up. Happened right there in front of us.

**WAS MOST OF YOUR TRAINING ON-THE-JOB?**

The only thing they did was conduct a real brief training school for us while we were waiting in Baton Rouge for our uniforms to come in. It really wasn't much of anything.

But most of my training really came from the job. I remember my first ticket, a truck passed us and we were doing 60. I asked my partner, don't they have a speed limit on this road for trucks? And he said yeah, yeah, yeah, kind of disinterested. And I said well, what is

## DAVID J. KEYSER

wanted to go to the picture show, you just pulled up in uniform in front of the theater and walked in. Even if you tried to pay, which I always did, everybody just wanted to take care of you because you were a trooper.

### **IN THOSE EARLY DAYS WAS DRINKING AND DRIVING A PROBLEM? DID YOU ARREST PEOPLE FOR THAT OR DID YOU JUST SEE THAT THEY GOT HOME SAFELY?**

I put them in jail. They went to jail.

he'd donated \$50,000 to the mayor's campaign, would he go to jail. And I told Woody, if I stopped him, he'd go to jail. I guess that was the right answer, because I later got the job.

### **DO YOU THINK YOU WERE THE EXCEPTION RATHER THAN THE RULE?**

I think the exception, really on anybody arrested. Eventually they put me to work on Gentilly Road in the city limits. In other words, I rode from the Industrial Canal all the way to Slidell

I mean full uniform, motorcycle sitting there and everything.

I guess it was kind of weird in those days, I remember we had one judge in Jefferson or St. Charles Parish, I really don't remember, anyway we'd go up there for court about 9:00 and the judge would be having a beer and you'd sit down and have one with him, then you'd go in and present your DWI case. And he always had the same verdict, "GUILTY, SS." That meant guilty, sentence suspended.

But people didn't always cooperate. I can remember we used to work real close with the sheriff's department down in Jefferson (Parish), they had eight full-time deputies at that time. One night one of our guys got into a fight with this woman they were trying to arrest and I got called over to it. The lady had her daughters with her. We took the daughters back to some neighbors and returned to get the woman who'd been left with another trooper. We took her to the bridge office and when we got there she pulled her dress up and asked, "Will this

---

### **Like the "satchel man," every administration had one who was a trooper.**

---

That was my rule, if you're out there drinking you go to jail. In fact that's what later got me the chief's job (in Baton Rouge). (Mayor) Woody (Dumas) asked me a hypothetical question, if you were out there on patrol and stopped a man because he was drunk and found out that

or where ever I wanted to go and they didn't care so long as I had my radio. In fact, I didn't have a radio for a long time. Many times, if they wanted me they had to send a Sergeant looking for me. I was kind of independent, you might find me in a beer shop having a beer,

## **T-Baker Smith & Son, Inc.**

**550 South Van Avenue  
Houma, Louisiana  
70363**

**504-868-1050**

## **Stone Container Corporation**

**Mill Street  
P.O. Box R  
Hodge, LA 71247  
318-259-4421**

## DAVID J. KEYSER

take care of it?" But we just carted her on over to the jail to be fingerprinted and booked. We had to fingerprint everybody.

When that woman got on the stand she swore that Matherne and I tried to make her (have sex). But I told the judge, what, a drunk woman like that, with kids and all? I was a young trooper and all, but I wasn't interested. I guess he believed us. At least I had a witness to back me up.

Then there was this other guy when I was back up in Baton Rouge I was trying to book and fingerprint. He was using every objectionable word in the book. It was bad because at that time Troop A was located in the Headquarters building and there were all those women in the Bureau (of Identification) hearing what this guy was saying. I ended up breaking his fingers trying to fingerprint him.

### **WAS MAKING A DWI CASE SIMPLER THEN, NO BREATH TEST AND SUCH?**

It was common formula -- noticed subject weaving from side to side, ran off the road several times and when stopped subject was obviously under the influence of liquor. We would have him walk up and down and sometimes the guy couldn't even talk. Those were the kinds of things you'd bring up in court.

### **WHAT ABOUT SPEEDING CASES, YOU HAD NO RADAR?**

That's right we'd just follow them, you know, pace clock them. Later on we got something called a shadow box to use. But in those days everything was political, there were so many tickets that were fixed, taken care of. That didn't stop me of course. I remember giving a ticket to the head of the Department of Highways, actually a commissioner on the Board of Highways. He was going 90 miles per hour, so I stopped him and gave him a ticket.

Shortly thereafter, I got a 10-19 (return to) from Headquarters. I had to drive from New Orleans to Baton Rouge to see Steve Alford, head of state police and he asked me, what'd you give this guy a ticket for. I said, general, he was speeding. And he said, don't you know who this guy is, and blah, blah, blah and I said I'm sorry but I don't make exceptions. He was speeding and he got

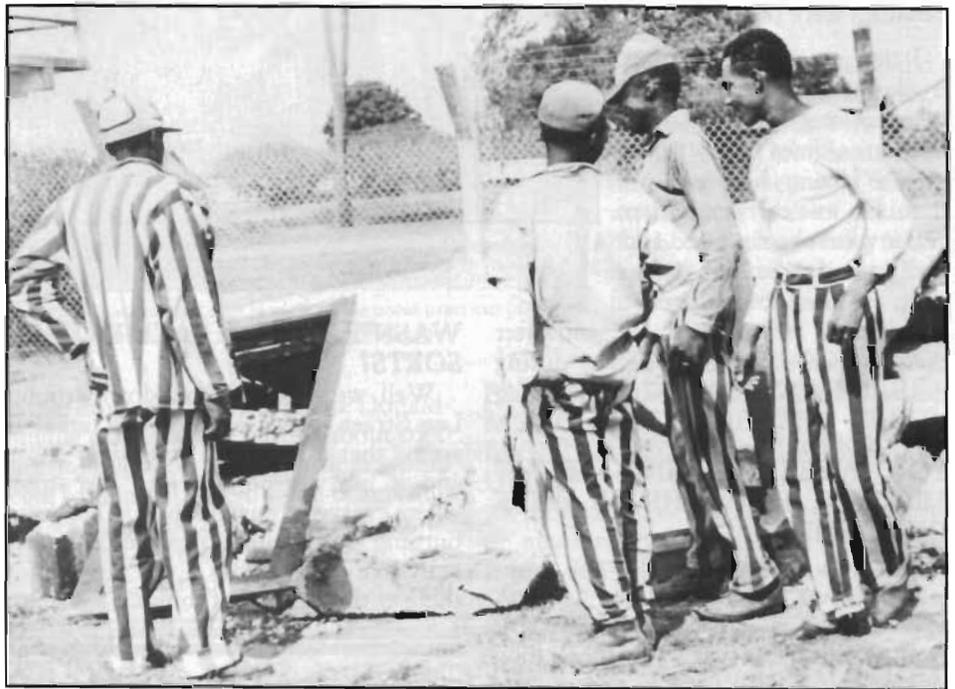
ticketed. If you want to fix the ticket go ahead, and he did of course. In fact even into the 1960's every troop commander had a desk full of tickets that he was fixing.

Other troopers would say why bother writing anybody or putting them in jail if it's only going to be fixed. But we just couldn't let that bother us, we had a job to do, and we were going to do it.

It was the same with gambling. That was the rottenest thing I had ever seen. I mean we would go in somewhere and remove slot machines and we would go back the next night and they'd be going wide open, like we hadn't even been there

were a sergeant you had to put up \$100, if you were a trooper, you had to put up so much and so forth. It was mandatory, and \$100 in those days was big money. We didn't think anything about it at the time, that's just the way things were done and state police was right in the middle of it. Like the "satchel man," every administration had one who was a trooper. All good men, they're jobs were just different, they were detailed to pick up the money. If they'd ask me to do it, I would have too. It wasn't considered corrupt or anything, it just had to be done.

Some people they didn't out and out



*A regular tour of duty at Angola was also part of trooper's duties. The characteristic striped pants were common prison attire.*

before. Somebody was getting his share obviously. After busting a place a couple of times you'd finally just leave it alone. You had to listen to your boss. In fact I got fired in '44 because I didn't support the right man for governor.

### **WHO WAS THAT?**

Jimmy Davis maybe, I don't remember. I don't even remember who it was I supported, but I was fired for a brief time. That was common. You know we didn't have Civil Service (protection), but later got it and lost it again under Earl Long. I remember with him he told everybody they had to kick up money for the administration. If you

fire, they'd just move them around, from one end of the state to the other, and you'd have to pay all your own expenses and stuff. Like I was transferred to Troop E in Alexandria when David James was born in 1942, but that was temporary. And talk about a change, the difference between Alexandria and New Orleans were unreal.

### **HOW SO?**

Much more laid back, the whole attitude. Policing was different. A lot of what we did in those days was sell license plates. We'd either give them a ticket and send them to pick a tag up or we'd

*continued*

## DAVID J. KEYSER

actually collect the money on the spot and mail one to them later. I came in off a detail with Ben Ragusa one time and we had \$30,000 in our pockets. You'd collect the fees according to this rate book you carried, it was about a foot long. And you'd check the tonnage of the vehicle and then look at the month to pro-rate the charge and you'd tell them, well you owe such and such. Most didn't have the money. If you wanted you could tie up the vehicle until the fees and penalties were paid.

I tied up one Shreveport trucker right there on the front parking lot. I had caught him three times before and I wasn't letting him go this time. He was carrying butter and it wasn't refrigerated and it all melted right there on the spot. He later got the license problem all straightened out, and after that he always sent me a turkey during the holidays. Now what were we talking about?

### **YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT TROOP E, HOW THINGS WERE DIFFERENT.**

Oh yeah, things were different. I had a Captain up there, I'm trying to think of his name now, it was Houston Green. And at that time we wore these long sleeved shirts and a tie year round. One day in June or July I had just finished investigating a wreck and I was wringing wet. We had no air conditioner and I was just soaked. So, I had taken to rolling my sleeves back one notch and taking my cap off and putting it in the seat. Well the Captain drove by and they radioed me to 10-19 (return to the troop). Man I got in there and he chewed me up one side and down the other. What kind of a college kid did I think I was, out there working with my sleeves rolled up and my hat off, blah, blah, blah.

So in some ways things were more laid back than in New Orleans but in other ways they weren't. They wanted you looking the part for sure.

Then there was the Lee Street Riot.



*In Angola's early days, the only people with guns were the inmate guards.*

### **WASN'T THAT A RACE RIOT OF SORTS?**

Well, we got a call from down around Lee Street, that's an all black area. It seems that a fight had started in a bar and it just spread out into the street where everyone was involved. They were burning and tearing down buildings and stuff like that. It was a big deal. I got there at the tail end of things.

---

### **The guys today have it so good and they just don't know it.**

---

They had the military there and everything. We were called in to assist and there were some but not many deputies. The military did most of the shooting. I know some of the GI's were killed. That was in '42. I left shortly after that and returned to New Orleans for a brief period of time.

### **AND FROM NEW ORLEANS WHAT HAPPENED?**

Well, I had that four month period when I was fired for supporting the wrong person. It seemed like we were always changing bosses and that was

okay. Every time we changed superintendents we got a new little raise.

But anyway I went to work for one of the plants up in north Baton Rouge. The funny thing was even after I left state police for that period of time they kept sending me checks. Turns out I made more money from state poice when I wasn't working there than I did any other time.

### **WHEN YOU RETURNED TO WORK FOR STATE POLICE IN BATON ROUGE, IS THAT WHEN YOU WERE FIRST ASSIGNED TO THE TRAINING ACADEMY?**

No, not right away, but I had more of a formal education than those I was working with. When I finally got into training I couldn't believe that some of our guys couldn't even read or write.

We had one guy from Oakdale and he could do neither, and I asked him how the hell he wrote tickets or accident reports.

He told me that he'd have the violater write their name and address on the ticket and write down whatever violation he was citing them for and he would sign the bottom. He could sign his name. If he'd have a wreck to write, he'd gather all the information at the scene and take it home and his wife would fill in the blanks. We had to give him oral exams in the academy because I didn't have the authority to dismiss him and the boss wanted him to have the job. He was a big old boy, you'd never know he couldn't read or write. Later, he went a little wacky and had a nervous breakdown.

I actually started out teaching first aid in the academy. Back then they were training back over there where Internal Affairs is today, they had these old barracks back there. But actually before I got involved with training I worked the road here at Troop A. I got my first stripes at the Troop.

### **WHAT WAS TROOP A LIKE IN THOSE DAYS?**

Captain Joe Green was Captain at

## DAVID J. KEYSER

Troop A and later Captain Walker. We worked a lot of details, not just at A but B as well. Like the football games here at LSU and Army escorts. We'd go up to Picayune (Mississippi) and pick up a detail on a motorcycle and bring them back down here, escorts.

I broke some people in there at the troop, some good guys, and some who weren't so good. I remember one we had and he turned out to be just a habitual liar. We were working in Baton Rouge out around where they used to have a traffic circle (at Airline Highway and Florida Boulevard). We stopped this black guy driving a furniture company truck and while I was sitting in the car I heard this pop, pop and I wondered what had happened.

When the trooper got back to the car I asked what happened. He said that the guy had gotten smart-mouthed with him so he knocked the hell out of him. And I said, did you arrest him and he said no. Well I didn't want any part of this deal so I drove straight to where Captain Walker (the Troop Commander) lived. The trooper asked what I was doing and I told him I was going to make a report to Captain about what happened. And sure enough the driver called the troop the next day to complain.

And it wasn't just the way he dealt with people, his whole damn attitude was bad. I remember he'd just race the engine on the car wide open, out of gear, or run our unit ragged. One day I just had enough and I told him, pull over. I went around to the driver's side and yanked his door open and told him I was going to whip his butt. He never did understand that he had a bad attitude. But those cars were used by everybody, they weren't personally assigned like today. We put 10,000 miles on one in one weeks time and never changed the oil.

### WHAT OTHER THINGS AT TROOP A WERE YOU INVOLVED IN?

We were always doing headlight details. They'd send two units with four



Perhaps this photo of a young Lieutenant Keyser made the point about what was important in State Police in the 1950s -- politics. It is signed by Governor Kennon.

people down to somewhere like Donaldsonville and we'd work from about 6:00 until midnight or so when things would begin to thin out. We'd write tickets and give warnings for people with no lights, tell them to get them fixed in three days or five days, that sort of thing.

---

## We had to teach our guys how to make a stop and always to pull in behind the violator.

---

Then about the time we'd finish, the local firehouse would have a feed ready for us or the police department. I used to work those things with Champ Yarbrough (later Troop L commander) and he could eat more food than anybody I've ever seen. The next morning we would have to come in for our regular shift. Just like the football games, you'd work the detail and have to do your regular shift as well, none of this comp time stuff. You had to work you just didn't have a choice.

The guys today have it so good and they just don't know it. What leave you did get you'd lose in 45 days if it wasn't

used. Nobody would take a vacation, hell that costs money, so they'd just wipe the time off the books. And sometimes the boss wouldn't let you off anyway. Some were better than others.

### WHAT SUPERINTENDENT DID YOU ADMIRE THE MOST?

Grevemberg was the best, and I'll tell you why. He was straight down the line. If he told you something, he meant it. I heard Murphy Roden was a good man but he had a hard time making decisions just like Atkins.

Now (Tom) Burbank did the most to get us facilities, to improve where we worked. And (Don) Thibodeaux did the most for the men; I didn't work under him of course, but he did a lot for the men. And Bo (Garrison) was good for the men too.

### BEFORE WE GOT TOO FAR AFIELD FROM ENFORCEMENT, WHEN DID THE STATE BEGIN TO REQUIRE A LICENSE TO DRIVE?

About 1946 or so. There wasn't a test or anything, you just filled out some forms and mailed your money in to

Headquarters here. I remember there used to be boxes of applications just stacked up on the second floor of the main building there. Seems like Joe Green was in charge of that at the time. Anyway, the purpose was just to raise money for the state, but they just couldn't process all of them. The inmates made off with a lot of the money.

The inmates then were housed right back of the main building in the jail (now the Armory/Public Affairs Office). I don't think they had over 20 or 30 at the most. Then there was a firing range over near where the garage is today,

*continued*

## DAVID J. KEYSER

actually a big mound was there to shoot into. After a bullet bounced off something in the mound and went through a house nearby, we stopped using it.

The main building here at headquar-

right against the wall right were everybody ate breakfast. And the populations were segregated at that time too, black and white.

We had one guy who was in charge

top. Those were just the rules in those days. It was something.

The red cap gang handled the internal patrols.

### WHO WAS THAT?

That was the group of guys who were real bad, the hardened convicts. They had separate living quarters, they were all white. Or at least I don't remember any blacks in the gang. The "dog (team)" sergeants were actually convicts. The guards didn't have guns but the convicts did. It was the strangest damn arrangement I have ever seen. I later worked as a training officer for corrections and rewrote all the crazy policies like that.

### NOW LET'S GET BACK TO YOUR MOVE TO HEADQUARTERS.

When I came back from Northwestern (University's Traffic Institute) in 1954 Grevemburg placed me in charge of Traffic Records and Statistical Section. And it's a common source of amusement that before I got there one person was handling the whole operation and when



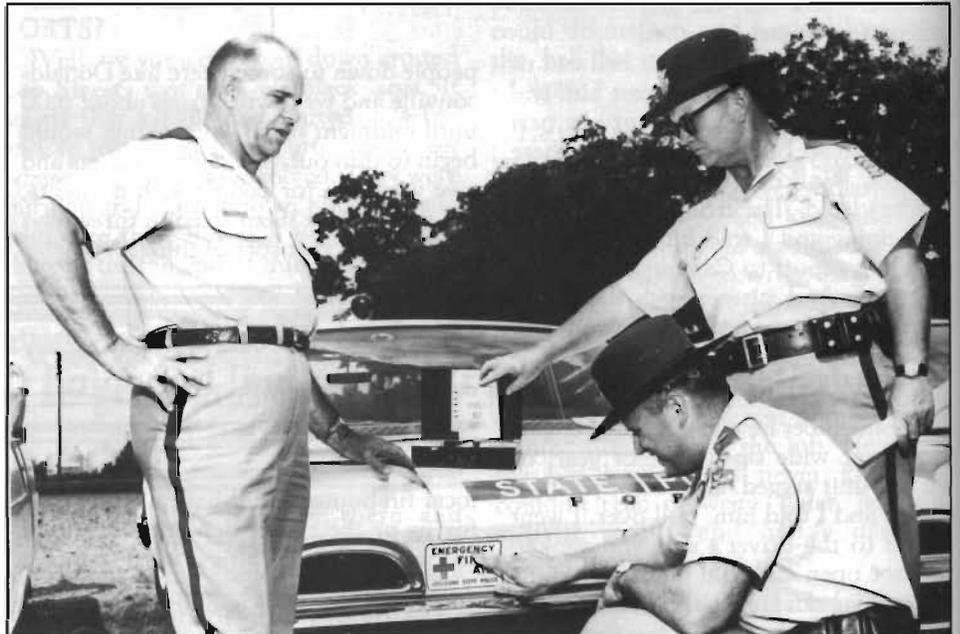
Keyser was the first LSP graduate from Northwestern University's prestigious Traffic Institute. He is shown here receiving his certificate in 1954.

ters used to be the old penitentiary. When I first moved to Baton Rouge, Florida Boulevard ended at 22nd Street and there was nothing but this little trail leading out to the penitentiary. The old Highway Patrol was housed in the Peabody Building down by the Capitol. There wasn't much out here at headquarters but pecan trees.

### WEREN'T TROOPERS REQUIRED TO ROTATE DUTY AT THE STATE PENITENTIARY AT ANGOLA?

Yes, they used troopers to patrol the facility, the grounds. I made more arrests of personnel there than I did prisoners, guards coming in with liquor and stuff. God, what an assignment. Angola's just on the other side of nowhere. I actually had two tours of duty there. My father-in-law was a warden there, R. C. Lawrence. That was under one of Earl Long's administration.

Conditions were very brutal there, it was tough. If someone escaped, when they were caught, and they were always caught, we would stand them up naked



Keyser, as the state's primary first aid instructor, helped initiate the campaign to put first aid equipment in every unit.

of one of the camps and he was nicknamed "Hosepipe." You can figure that one out. I mean he would beat those people with a hose and it would just make you sick. Or they would put them in the hot box, which was nothing but a concrete box with a pipe running out the

I took over I immediately had to have two secretaries. But to do things right, that's what I needed. We had an old IBM machine that you ran these coded cards through. They were building a new academy building at the time, the two story red brick building that currently

## DAVID J. KEYSER

is situated up between the Motor Vehicle and State Police buildings.

Everybody around thought I was an old so and so. I was hard nosed, and I know it. The colonel had a friend working here on the compound who liked the ladies and he had a habit of taking 45 minute coffee breaks, if you know what I mean. Well, he came in one day and was headed into one of the secretary's offices I asked him what he was doing. He said he was going to take her for a cup of coffee. And I told him, no, you're not, not my clerk. We can go see the boss about it if you want to. I had to maintain some control around there.

I'll never forget another time I had been out on a chase for three straight days with Joe Green and returned to headquarters covered with mud. This same officer jumped me about how I looked and I told him, I had been gone for three days, hadn't even had a chance to go home. And that was common in

---

### I'd like to see state police have their own entrance examination.

---

those days. We once had to go down to Grand Isle and spend a week because of a submarine scare. You could be sent here or there, didn't even have a chance to call home or anything, and you might be gone for days at a time.

Sometime after I had been in the records job, Grevemberg walked in one day and threw the keys to the training academy on my desk and said, well there you are Lieutenant. He promoted me that day, Champ Yarbrough and I were promoted the same day.

But in those days we had both a Superintendent and a Director of Public Safety, both positions appointed by the governor, and that caused some problems. Shorty Owens was the director at the time and we had a guy named Middleton who was supposed to be in charge of the academy, but he never showed up for work. So that's why Grevemberg put me in charge of training.

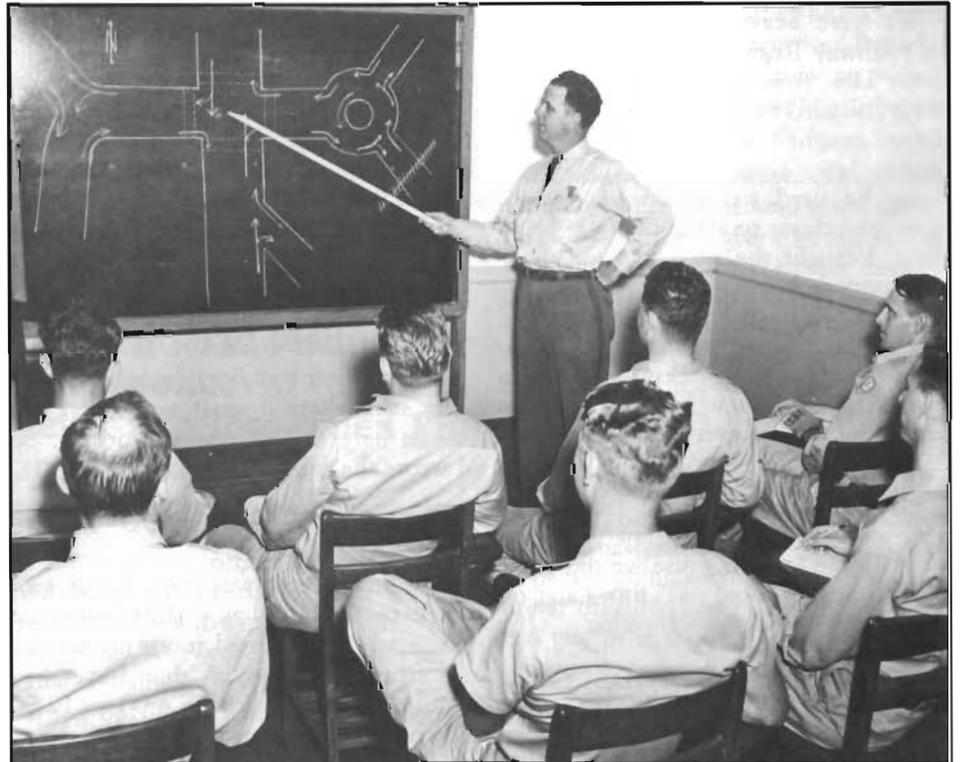
Director's were always sticking their noses in State Police business, always have I guess, I remember when John Nick

Brown was the Superintendent and we had a class going on. Near graduation we were supposed to take a photograph of the class and the director always liked to be included in the photograph, I don't know why, but that's the way it was.

Anyway, the director at the time, Forest Pendleton, was on his way out and the Colonel told me not to include him in the picture, because he was going to be replaced soon anyway. So I did what he told me and shot the picture with the class and the Superintendent but without the director. Pendleton found out and tried to demote me. We had to shoot the picture over again with Pendleton in it, but we didn't use it.

the guys working and all. We had to teach some skills because that just hadn't been done, you know the right way to do things. Some guys didn't even know how to stop violators, they'd pull up along side a car and blow the siren, and immediately, what's the driver going to do, put on his brakes right? And there the trooper is with his car in front. We had a trooper shot just that way, pulled in front of a violator. We had to teach our guys how to make a stop and always to pull in behind the violator.

And there were other things too. Remember John Hoover, well, I worked with his dad. You know how he made sergeant? Hoover had picked up this



An academy class from the 40's is conducted in an upstairs room in the Headquarters building. Francis Moore is the instructor.

That's how petty things could get between the Superintendent and the Director.

But Pendleton was one of the finest men around. That's who the LSTA Pendleton award is named for. It was just difficult with a Superintendent and a Director, both appointed and everything.

### WHAT WAS ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS YOU DID WHEN YOU TOOK OVER THE ACADEMY?

Well, I knew that we had some work to do because I'd been out there with

hitchhiker over on the other side of the Mississippi River one day. The hitchhiker was wanted and the guy grabs Hoover's gun and tries to shoot him, but the gun is so damn dirty that it won't fire. He'd have killed Hoover if Hoover's gun had worked. This minister called us later and said that the job was too dangerous for Hoover so we ought to make him a sergeant. And they did. He should have been suspended but they promoted him instead.

Another time we were chasing a stolen  
*continued*

## DAVID J. KEYSER

car on Airline Highway and I told Hoover to get the shotgun out. We had it in a pouch those days. So he got it out and I told him to shoot the tires out. But he didn't know how to shoot a shotgun. I just couldn't believe it.

### WHAT KIND OF CADET SCHOOL DID YOU PUT TOGETHER?

We were heavy on Highway Regulatory Law, license law; (Colonel) Berthelot taught the license law, poor thing, he used to put the class to sleep. I taught the regulatory law and

first aid. In fact I was the first aid instructor trainer and I had to go throughout the state and instruct a man in each troop, renew his card for him so he could renew everybody elses.

It was a basic academy that would put a man on the job. Basic things like firearms, first aid and the law. We even taught game laws, because we did game warden stuff in those days too. Later on we made the academy six weeks.

### THEY GAVE YOU WIDE LATITUDE TO RUN THE ACADEMY AS YOU SAW FIT?

Grevemberg did. We had that guy who was Insurance Commissioner for so long in one of our early classes. After he failed the first week's test, I warned him that his politics might not be able to help him if he couldn't pass the academy. But he didn't care, he was cocky, he knew he had plenty of politics. Well, he failed the second week and the third week. The colonel sent for him one day after that and sent him walking. Grevemberg didn't care about the guy's politics, if he couldn't pass the class he wasn't going to stay. I liked that about Grevemberg.

I also wrote the first rules and regulations for the department while I was in the academy. That happened when I



When the first training academy was built during Colonel Grevemberg's administration, firearms qualifications were conducted in the basement. Keyser is shown on the far left.

had this girl who kept coming in late all the time and I wanted to suspend her. But one of her buddies here at headquarters said where does it say you've got to be here at 8:00 every morning. So I wrote the rules and regs.

### IS THAT WHERE YOU MADE CAPTAIN?

Yeah, but that was later. I was sent back to Troop A as a shift lieutenant for a while. I learned more my second go around at Troop A than I ever had before. I ran a shift, the 4:00 to 12:00 shift. I had six men working for me there.

### ARE YOU AMAZED THAT THE ACADEMY IS NOW 14 WEEKS LONG?

Yes, but I think one of the biggest assets that the commandant has today is that he's able to recommend dismissal. When I was there I couldn't do anything like that. You knew a guy just wasn't right for the job and I would recommend that he be dismissed, but most bosses let them stick it out. My hands were tied. The amount of training they get is great, I think they need every hour of it.

### DID WE KIND OF PAY FOR THOSE MISTAKES LATER ON? DID WE PAY FOR SOME OF THOSE

### PEOPLE WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN LET GO BUT WEREN'T?

Sure did. They got one of my boy's robbing a bank over there in Lake Charles, with a State Police gun.

### YOUR TRAINING JOB HERE ACTUALLY PREPARED YOU FOR WHAT YOU WOULD DO WHEN YOU RETIRED TOO, DIDN'T IT?

Yes, I left State Police and set up the LSU Law Enforcement Training Institute. We started a three month program based almost entirely on the core that we

taught at the training academy. Billy Joe Booth was head of the Bureau of Identification and I brought him with me because he had the criminal investigative experience. I did some of that too, but he helped to round things out.

We had two FBI Academy graduates in the first institute we conducted and both told us that our program was better than the FBI's Academy at the time. They were from Alabama and they both believed we had a great program.

### YOU KNOW WE DON'T SEND ANYONE TO NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY'S LONG NINE MONTH PROGRAM ANYMORE - - MANY OF OUR SUPERINTENDENT'S WERE GRADUATES OF THAT PROGRAM -- BUT FEW AGENCIES SEND ANYONE NOW, HOW HAVE TRAINING NEEDS CHANGED?

Northwestern no longer even has the nine month program I don't think. But there was a time that the only training offered was the academy. We had to send people out of state to get further training, more specialized stuff. But today state police conducts its own specialized training, they have to. You've got haz(ardous) mat(erial), narcotics, acci-

dent reconstruction, all those are specialized areas and state police does its own training in those areas. It's gotten to where you almost need a drunk driving specialist to make a drunk driving case.

Look at Joey Booth, Billie Joe's son, he's got a law degree and he's putting that to good use for state police. That's great. I was big on education myself when I became chief (in Baton Rouge) later and I encouraged people to go to school. I finished my degree while I was with state police. (Colonel) Burbank let me go to school, I went at night and finished; I'm proud of that.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE TWO YEAR LAW ENFORCEMENT EXPERIENCE OR SIXTY HOUR COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT?**

I would hate to see employment tied to college level only. When you say two years of college do you mean two years from any institution or what? Two years is very different at different universities. Two years at LSU in Baton Rouge is real different from two years at LSU in Alexandria or LSU in Shreveport. So I'd hate to see just the college requirement.

I'd like to see state police have their own entrance examination. I know it would be expensive to produce, but a mandatory entrance exam just for that organization would tell you a lot about a person and he wouldn't even have to have college.

**DID YOU FIND THAT YOUR COLLEGE COURSES HELPED YOU ON THIS JOB, WAS YOUR EDUCATION BENEFICIAL TO YOU?**

Oh, sure. My engineering and business background came in real handy. Like that foot long book we used for determining license tag rates. It was a breeze for me to figure out because of my math background. And when I got into skid marks it was invaluable, drawing those damn curves and things engineering really helped. It assisted me greatly.

**HOW LONG WERE YOU WITH LSU?**

From 1965 to '68. I left in about July '68 and went to work for the Department of Corrections for about a year. When Governor McKeithen created the Commission on Law Enforcement I went over

there as a planner. That was a job I enjoyed more than any other.

We had several "desks" over at the commission. We had a corrections desk, a training desk, a general planning desk and a police planning desk. We were operating with about 90% federal money and funneling the money to local agency needs. We were later criticized by **Reader's Digest** for permitting a sheriff to buy a Lincoln Continental. But that wasn't the way it was. We would put up money and the agency would have to match it. We didn't care what kind of car an agency bought, so long as the formula was followed.

I had one sheriff come to me and said he needed some money for boats. But I had to explain to him that we were "crime oriented", he had to tie the purchase to fighting crime like protecting the camps along the river or something. We did a lot of good there. We helped a lot of agencies get equipment they desperately needed.

---

**I have no bad feelings for state police at all. I'm never at a loss when I'm around troops.**

---

We had one other sheriff we gave money to and we could never get the paperwork showing how it was expended. We wrote letters and everything. Finally we had to go see him. It turned out he had just put the money in the bank letting it draw interest. We had a hell of a time getting the money back.

**AND YOU STAYED AT THE COMMISSION UNTIL . . .**

Until the change in administrations in 1972. The Governor just came in and changed all kinds of stuff. The new director he appointed was nothing but political. They even fired the student worker, just a two bit part time student worker. They didn't have to do things like that. But those politics always seemed to be around, not just at the commission but at state police too.

It always used to infuriate us in the troop when a promotional opening

would come up and somebody who'd been at the governor's mansion would slip in and get the permanent promotion. That's not right, it's just not fair. I remember I told (Wiley) McCormick about that one night at Troop A, but he didn't agree. Hell, that's how he made rank was at the mansion. That's how I ended up on his list.

**WERE YOU SUPPORTIVE WHEN YOU FOUND OUT YOUR SON WANTED TO JOIN STATE POLICE?**

Oh, sure. I told him if he needed any help to let me know, but he didn't. Maybe they recognized the name or whatever. I'm proud that he did it and of course he's retired now too. But when he was growing up he grew up with an intense respect for law enforcement because I had that respect.

David probably remembers me using the state police car around town. In fact, there were time when I would call the boss and say I've got a square dance to go to in Jackson (Mississippi) and they'd tell me to be careful. But we were always on the lookout for the best interests of state police when we were using those cars. I wonder about that today sometimes.

I recall when some of the troopers would come through the LSU Institute in years past, they would say things like, "I'm not going to fool with any drunk driver off duty, or I'm not going to stop this guy or that guy." And I told them that was just crazy, that's how we justified that program or at least (Colonel) Thibodeaux did to begin with. I would tell them, you ought to preserve that right to use that car. Sometimes they'd listen, and other times, well . . .

**LOOKING BACK OVER IT ALL, WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENT, DO YOU HAVE ANY REGRETS?**

No. I always tried to be as non-political as I could be and that was tough, but I did it. I had to work with some people whose credo was it's not what you know it's who you know. Now I realize that the superintendent has got to have his own men in key places and all for the purposes of trust. I understand that. But it's when the politics interfere with the operation in general. *continued*

**DAVID J. KEYSER**

Like when David Treen was Governor, he didn't care a bit about state police. He put Don Bollinger in as head of Public Safety and Don didn't know a thing about police work, but he was a good general administrator. But the Governor wouldn't even speak to a trooper or a retired trooper. He didn't appreciate who troopers were or what they did.

I think we need to depend on retirees more; I think they have a lot to offer. You know its been suggested that we have a reserve force of retirees, they'd have to do training and they'd volunteer for

certain duties, I think that would be a great resource. I started the reserves for the Baton Rouge City Police and it's worked well.

Some retirees really have bad attitudes. You know they think it owes them something. Well, it doesn't. Like some feel it's their birthright to drive as fast as they can and not worry about the troopers and that's just plain wrong. I was headed up there for the commission and was sitting on about 95 (mph). I got a ticket, but I deserved it.

Anyway, I have no bad feelings for

state police at all. I'm never at a loss when I'm around troopers, I feel right at home and comfortable.

And like the reserve idea, you've got some retirees who say, I don't want anything to do with that uniform, I've put in my time, I don't want anything else to do with those people. But to hell with them I loved this job and the people. I was proud to be a trooper and I'm still proud today. Sometimes I wish the regular guys would listen to us more. They need to, one day they're going to be one of us.

**All Star  
Pontiac-GMC Inc.**

1180 East Napoleon ★ Sulphur, LA 70663  
Telephone (318) 527-6391

 **Dairymen**

**FARMER OWNED AND OPERATED**

Louisiana and Mississippi Divisions  
P.O. Box 667 • FRANKLINTON, LA 70438



FLAV-O-RICH INC  
Subsidiary of Dairymen Inc.

Compliments  
of

**GRACE  
OFFSHORE  
COMPANY**

**New Orleans**

We Support Our State Troopers  
Keep up the good work!

**Stone  
Container  
Corporation**

P.O. Box R

Hodge, LA 71247

318-259-6681