

John Best

Side 1:

John decided to go with the Police Department after 12 years in the Army because his wife (died 2 years ago) didn't want him to travel but to stay at home. He served with the Asheville Police 1946-1978. He was raised in Haywood County, had lived in Asheville and worked at Enka. His wife was from Asheville.

[33] In 1980, suffering from malaria, he was treated at Oteen.

[36] He found his previous military service helpful when starting as a police patrolman. There was at that time no formal training. He started as a patrolman 2-3 months, then went with an officer in a patrol car. [Cheryl Lunsford]

[61] Before the cut (I240) took heavy traffic around, rather than through town, there was a heavy congestion around Pack Square. This, before the lights were synchronized, necessitated the services of many traffic men. [Carl Hyde, Weldon Weir]

[102] Drugs were not a problem in the city when he retired. The big stores moved to the malls, leaving the center city a "ghost town."

[112] When he was active the patrol cars were restricted to an assigned area. This was later changed so that the cars cruised a 10-mile area. They are going back to the original format, which he favors, because the officers can get to know their area.

[132] Most policemen stay in the force until mandatory retirement - this was 66 years and is now 70 years.

[142] He views the changes in the force for the better. In the past "what was good enough for grandpa is good enough for me" was the philosophy. The force was completely modernized. City Council authorized improvement and allocated additional funds. [Tucker]

[155] Communication system was updated (see enclosure). Licenses could be immediately traced through the Police International Network (PIN).

[167] When he retired he was given a police radio as a departure gift. When he was in service, the Fire Department always received the first call but only went when necessary. Now they are called whenever there is a wreck call - this he considers unnecessary and a waste of money.

[182] Dispatchers in the office call specific cars to specific locations but all calls are heard in all cars.

[189] He considers the relocation of houses and roads during the city renovation a great improvement, though he has difficulty learning his way around now that the Martin Luther King Road and South Charlotte have been opened.

[217] Officers trained in juvenile relations work with school children.

[230] Over the years police training has become more formalized. There is training at A-B Tech and courses are held at the Court House. By attending courses given by the F.B.I. (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and the S.B.I. (State Bureau of Investigation), one is promoted (top three in each class) from Foot Patrol to Sergeant and to Captain.

[257] In 1946 there were about 100 in the police force. When he retired there were about 140.

[262] There are three uniformed shifts of 8 hours which change every month. He was in the Detective Division for one year and later in charge of finger printing. Every group rotates but the detective, unless there is an emergency, does not work after 11pm.

[291] Night clubs and "hot spots" are watched for drunken drivers. Many places with night activity hire private patrols - off duty police as security officers - to maintain peace.

[306] The Municipal Building (where the Police Dept. is now) used to be a jail. Now the jail is on the top 4 floors of the Court House. Suspects are held until tried or released or on bail. The sentenced are sent to the Craggy Prison Camp (which, he said, looks like a tourist court).

[342] The Fraternal Order of Police - a national organization formed in 1953 (not a union) advises the public about police activities. They started a camp for underprivileged boys which was run by the Salvation Army and, he believes, is run by the Asheville Boys Club now.

[354] Since his retirement from the Police Department, he has worked one day a week as a volunteer for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (Post 891).

He said that each Veteran organization (VFW = Veterans of Foreign Wars - started 1899 following Spanish American War; American Legion - started in 1919; DAV - Disabled American Veterans from WWII and American Veterans from Vietnam) has its own representatives. A veteran can belong to any and apply to any. Of the 28 million veterans, only 5% belong. There are 1,636 members in VFW. It is hard to get into a VA hospital and he considers the representative (paid by the Federal Government of Veterans Administration) at Oteen is not too efficient.

[371] Most soldiers, despite advice, are so anxious to be discharged they do not file claims. Years later they make claims that are difficult to document. Last year 110 applications were made and since 1953 he has handled 4,800 claims.

[391] Veterans come to the Asheville VFW office often as a last resort.

[440] At Oteen, veterans can receive treatment for specific service-related disabilities. Up to 15 years ago any veteran could be assisted as they would have been in the service going for sick call. They received the best treatment in the world. Now because of lack of money, 4 wards are closed.

[464] In Washington, DC, there is an 8-story building serving veterans. Appeals can be made all the way to Washington and it is possible to appeal to congressmen and senators to speed up the work. [Terry Sanford]

[530] He tells of cases he has helped when claims for injury go back 50 years.

[549] The word passes among the veterans that help can be obtained in Asheville, because of Oteen and because of the VFW volunteers.

[582] He has a daughter who works in the Court House, and two grandchildren - one a student at UNCA and the other at Appalachian State University in Boone. He works every Wednesday afternoon and handles 20 or more cases a week.