August 21, 2017
Savannah Marriott Riverfront Hotel
Interviewer: Anna McIntyre
Transcription: James C. Wright

00:01 Introduction to date, persons, and place.

00:45 When Paul was in grade school, he was on the school board patrol. One day in 1952, he saw a Georgia State Patrol car and was impressed by the trooper’s uniform. That was the day that Paul knew he wanted to become a state trooper.

01:15 One of the aspects that Paul loved about his job as a state trooper was the feeling of contributing to society. Protecting and helping people so that they feel safe gives Paul a sense of enjoyment.

01:58 There are several cases that humbled Paul. Some that stand out to him are car wrecks that seem straightforward, but officers later find out a small baby was in the car. Those calls broke Paul’s heart because he wanted to help the baby, but there was nothing he could do.

02:37 The job has affected Paul’s relationships. Among friends, he would be asked questions that he did not want to answer. At home, the question he and his family asked when he would leave for work is will he return? There were times that Paul was called out to car wrecks at night and while he was gone someone would call his home accidentally, which scared his wife that something happened to Paul. Paul’s wife did not tell him about that for several years, so it made Paul “feel funny” to learn about it.

03:45 Paul credits the divide between the public and law enforcement to misinformation. The public tends to blame officers before they have all the facts. Videos of the climax and end of an incident that do not show how events escalated to it are partial information. People base their opinions on the initial facts from the news and do not take in new information, which causes adversity between the public and police departments.

04:32 Technology has helped widen the chasm, especially the advent of cellphone cameras. People only record the end or climax of events and base their judgment on that.

04:52 Technology has changed during Paul’s career. For example, when Paul started working in law enforcement in Savannah in 1963, the department did not have radar. The state patrol office likewise only had one radar, so when a trooper flagged a car he would relay it to other units and hold his position. They also used cables in the road to measure speed over time. Today, most cars have 360 degree radar and equipment that is unbelievable.
The most memorable case Paul has worked was a 15 year-old boy who rode his motorcycle without his parents’ permission. The boy was speeding to get home before his parents’ returned and slid under a moving freight train. It broke every bone in his body. Paul was summoned to obtain the boy’s billfold and give it to the parents, along with notification of the death. Paul was nervous. When he walked into the house he removed his hat, and once the mother saw the billfold she “let out the most blood-curdling scream there ever was.” Paul also had to get the father to sign for receipt of the billfold and accept the body at the funeral home. That was many years ago, but Paul never forgot the hurt of everyone in the house that day.

Paul wishes the public knew more about officers do. Everybody has a different opinion about officers and what they do. The public does not know about the times officers help people, or have to bring blood to the hospital for an injured person. Officers may have to do a “10-5: Relay”, where they transport organs or time-sensitive medicine from one hospital to another.

Paul transported venom vaccine to north Georgia for a child who got bit by a snake. He has also transported a severed leg from the scene of an accident to the funeral home so they could put the body part with the corpse. Yet, the public is unaware of these acts. Officers have also loaned people money to help feed their families, but people do not see or appreciate these events.

Paul was inspired to join the POAG by his friends. In 1970, a close friend of Paul’s was running for President of the POAG in Atlanta. He attended the conference and made a lot of new acquaintances. He enjoyed the comradery, fun, and fellowship.

One of the most successful aspects of the POAG is the Jimmy Waters scholarship. The annual conventions are also good, allowing friends to reunite and make new acquaintances.

If law enforcement changes as much in the next 100 years as it has over the previous 100 years, the direction that new laws and public opinions are taking concern Paul. He wonders if officers will have less power than they currently do, and how much more they will be hindered. Recruitment will also be low because individuals will realize that they make more money in private security than public safety.

To viewers, Paul advises to “learn all you can.” Get an education and be as perfect an officer as you can be. It will be tough and you will think about quitting, but remember that you’re making a difference whether you see it or not.

Paul started his law enforcement career in 1963 and has been working in the field for 42 years. He retired as a state trooper after 29 years, and has been a deputy with the Bartow County Sheriff Office the remainder of that time.
12:47 End of interview.