Interview for John Long

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POAG Conference at Savannah Marriott Riverfront Hotel
Interviewer: Anna McIntyre
Transcription: James C. Wright

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

00:44 John grew up in Gumbranch, a small community in western Liberty County, Georgia. His father was a farmer by trade, but also a deputy with the Liberty County Sheriff's Office. John was never sure which job was full time and which job was part time for his father because he kept them well balanced. That made an early impression on John.

01:18 After graduating high school, John worked for the LCSO as a radio operator. That was his introduction into law enforcement.

01:40 John’s favorite aspect of being a law enforcement officer is the ability and opportunity to interact with people. When people have problems or need help, John enjoys being able to help assist them immediately if he can.

03:14 In general, some situations that invite humility to John are when he answers a call and it turns out not to be what he thought it was. The worst tragedies are the ones that happen unexpectedly. Coming upon wrecks, John finds people in very dire situations. It forces John and other officers to reflect upon their own lives. Officers and other citizens can find themselves in similar circumstances if they are not careful.

04:38 John never considered quitting law enforcement. He retired from the Georgia State Patrol in 2009 and then began working for the Sheriffs Office (Long County?). John felt fortunate that he never dreaded going to work in the mornings. He always looked forward to arriving at his job.

05:15 The most traumatic incident that effects John was losing a fellow trooper in 1984, “Ronnie Oddie” (Ronald E. O’Neal). He was killed in a chase in Liberty County. He was only 39 years old, but O’Neal was a good mentor to younger troopers. John thought about O’Neal everyday since his death. John considered how a similar event could happen to himself, but not so much that he ever thought about quitting.

06:30 His law enforcement career has effected John’s family and friends. When an officer joins law enforcement, they must choose their friends differently than when they were younger. John has occasionally met his childhood friends, which was not always pleasant. However, John’s family was very supportive of his career, despite his missing some family and special events.
During the days of Civil Rights, troopers were summoned for events across the state. John reported to Forsyth County for the Civil Rights March in the mid-late 80s. The March was peaceful. Troopers were also summoned as security for Ku Klux Klan rallies with the orders to protect the public in the same manner as Civil Rights meetings. John found those orders conflicting at times, but felt that everyone has a freedom of speech that needs to be protected.

John remembers the violence in Atlanta after the Rodney King verdict. Troopers responded to protect property. Events such as these are what stand out the most.

John is not sure what caused the divide between the public and law enforcement, but it is a sad situation. Both parties seem to have a difference of opinion. John graduated high school in 1973, so he recalls the turmoil of the 1960s. The Vietnam War protests were the beginning of social unrest. The public and law enforcement have always had a difference of opinion, but the war protests brought them out. Teachers, college professors, and politicians fueled it. John believes the protests reinforced a chasm of communication, which has widened to today. He thinks that parties should be able to communicate better.

Technology has tremendously changed in law enforcement. When John started his career, there were two-way radios in the car and no telephones. Soon after he started, teletype allowed officers to communicate with other agencies. Then came computers, which altered John’s report writing from typewriters to digital text. John remembers the carbon paper, which was difficult to correct mistakes on. Communication is now faster and easier, especially with email. Long distance phone calls are also no longer an issue.

Extra baggage, such as social media, have stolen the “personal touch” of interpersonal communication. People used to know one another better when they were forced to communicate face to face.

Technology has assisted the public divide to an extent. The loss of interpersonal communication has had an effect on the public. Social media has emboldened people to display negative feelings that they otherwise would not have shared in person. It is also more difficult to apologize or correct yourself when the mistake is in writing.

John’s most memorable case was a drowning in Long County. A family was swimming in a lake when one daughter went too deep, a second daughter tried to rescue her and became a victim, then a third daughter tried to rescue the first two and also became a victim. All three girls drowned. John personally recovered two of the bodies. He found the situation excessive tragic.

Other cases that haunt John are severe car wrecks. Some family members die while others survive, and helping the survivors is always difficult too. Trying to help people make sense of tragedies while also being professional is a challenge.
16:22  John wishes the public knew that officers are real people. They have their own wives and tragedies too, but when they don the uniform they try to leave their issues behind and worry about everybody else. Law enforcement is present to help people.

17:09  John still recalls the metal POAG sticker on the back of his dad’s car; it was always present. John felt it was natural for him, like every other officer, to join the POAG organization. He has been a member for over 30 years at the time of this interview.

17:57  John believes the most successful aspect of the POAG is the training. Networking and renewing relationships is also a good experience. The tradition of pulling officers from all agencies, and of all ranks, is praiseworthy.

18:50  The rise of technology makes predicting the future of law enforcement difficult. How society moves and operates will be different. Law enforcement will need to evolve with technology and society in order to maintain control (of crime) and order.

20:12  To other law enforcement viewers, John advises to never forget where you came from. Never forget who you are and what you are a part of. This is a noble profession that concentrates on helping people, which you should never lose sight of. Keep the purpose of the field in mind.

20:44  To public viewers, please understand that officers are human beings. They make mistakes, but can only serve with the help and support of the community. Safety is a joint effort.

21:16  End of interview.