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De Jonge, John Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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Digest of Transcript
of Corporal John De Yonge of the
Holland Police Department

January 26, 1977

Ann Helmus

Peter Kuiken

List of Topics Covered

1. His opinion of being a Police officer
2. His job in relation to the court system.
3. Problems in the Holland community.
4. How his day is spent on the force.
5. Family life and the importance of his wife.
6. Motivation leading him to becoming a Police officer.
7. Satisfaction of self and career.
8. Dangers of the job.

Dr. Huttar

English 113

Jan 27, 1977

Interview of Corporal John De Jonge
January 20, 1977
Ann Helmus and Pete Kluiken

*small
5 month
this out
down!*

Ann: What this is for is that we are in an English class and we are out to hopefully write some kind of a conglomeration of interviews and discussions of people in Holland and hopefully try to compile a picture of what kind of people make up Holland and we thought a policeman would make an interesting contribution. We want to make a magazine or something like that. I guess the first question would be

Pete: How long have you served on the police force?

John: nine years this past October.

Ann: Do you enjoy it?

John: You have to enjoy it. It's a hard job with rotating shifts and the court systems and I would find it very hard to leave right now. You have to enjoy it in order to stick with it.

Ann: How close do you work with the courts?

John: With every arrest, unless the person makes an arraignment, this would be a misdemeanor case.. There is normally a pre-trial conference and preliminary examination and then a court trial. Even the officer may be on off duty status it takes a lot of time away from his family and a lot of times he may be working midnights and be at work at 8 in the morning and at a trial at 12. It takes a lot of his time. He's there at ten to work or on his days off. To the job from someone not in this profession, it may look like an easy job... sitting in an airconditioned cruiser

Ann: Are they airconditioned? - *Why this Q, when there are so many "leaders" above?*

John (laugh) There are aspects that you do run into problems maybe small technicalities where you have seconds to make a decision when judges and lawyers with years of experience and all the time

on their hands can sit back and research your decision and make their own decision on whether in that split second you made the right one

Ann: What is the most challenging or toughest part of your job?

John: In this Holland community, our major loss, dollar wise, is due to traffic accidents... the biggest single loss. So in Holland, traffic control is a major function with the department. There we have our primary duties... traffic enforcement... Service ~~connected~~ ^{connected areas} also and investigations, thefts, assaults... general investigations. Our primary duty is traffic enforcement and preventive patrol and to respond to emergency situations and criminal type investigations... also to stand by in civil areas... as peace officers... removal of property... they want a police officer there. Accidents, someone takes off with the wrong property... repossession or somebody moves out and are forced out of an apartment or landlord forces someone... these problems as well.

Pete: They say a lot of the policeman's problems is to try and be in control of the family situations?

John: We initially make contact in family disturbances type calls. We have an agency in the department where all domestic type calls are referred after the initial contact and they have worked out case workers through Hope College. Some of the students have received college credit working as case workers solving problems and crime help. That has reduced our number of repeated disturbance calls where we keep going back to the same house, weekend after weekend. A man comes home drunk, has a fight with his wife. When I started working nine years ago, a dispatch would give the address, you knew where to go... you've been there numerous times before. Now since we have the referral service, community service unit, we don't have to repeat calls as much as we used to. So you aren't as certain as to

who you are going to meet with on most of the times because you dont have to meet with them too often.. Its important that the officers that do ^{at?} work as the initial call, strike up a good repore, *Support* because any calls thereafter with the police might cause problems with the next response.

Ann You mentioned repore, what is the repore of the HPD in Holland?

John I think, as a whole, the HPD is thought highly of. At least we get that impression from the amount of mail we receive thanking officers for their service to the public. I think as a whole, the citizens of Holland are behind the PD I would hope so (laugh).

Pete Do you spend a lot of time in the patrol car or do mostly...?

John My time is split between office duties and patrol. In the road patrol ...or an assistant supervisor for my shift. There is an overlap... The patrol lieutenant ^{sp.} is 95% office...doing police research for different problems where we should be directing our attention. If we have a number of break-ins in an area developing. Theyll do the research for where we have the most problems.

Ann It is a team effort.

John However the officer on the field is responsible. But I am his immediate supervisor and I am responsible for him.

Ann Do you have a family?

John yes, I have two boys, one is 7 the other 4.

Ann Do they want to be a policeman like their Daddy?

John (laughs) Oh yes, both are waiting to become a policeman.

though one is more inclined towards going in the direction of his Uncle whose line of work is a sherriff ^{sp.}-incharge of the E-Unit.

Holland has a very good ambulance service which is probably better equipped than those in G.R. They have a very good response time, and very modern equipment.

Pete During the winter and on icy roads how can the police cars and ambulance have a good response time?

John Each year we have driving tests . None of which are taken place in the snow, but now many areas are starting to put this into effect Usually the officers know how road conditions will be.

Ann Is it tougher to be a policeman in the wintertime?

John Oh yes, there are more accidents and road blocks and other types of emergencies that require us to be outside for a long period of time We've had a number of policemen with frostbite.

Pete Do you have any relatives in the Holland area?

John Yes, I have a brother-in-law in Ottawa county and my father lives in Zeeland.

Ann What motivated you to become a policeman?

John Oh there are a lot of things. I was brought up in Zeeland and There is a policeman in Zeeland that probably influenced me to quite an extent. He was a man on the beat- he knew what was happening. He had a good repore with the kids. ^{I idolized him.} And in another area I had some contact with a police officer in another agency that gave me a negative viewpoint...that too made me decide...seeing both types I think I could make a contribution as a police officer...to be a service to the community as Police officer and not to be the negative type.

A

Ann Now that you are a police officer are you satisfied with yourself?

John Yes, I am very pleased with my performance thus far. Of course promotions are rare and there are times when you are held back from a level- I am not speaking for myself. And so it is a great honor to move from a lower to a higher rank, from road patrol to an officer with responsibility. I think, the initial step from a road patrol officer to a supervisor capacity sometimes if an

officer really wants to get a head, a guy has to die or retire before he's going to be promoted or a new job created in the department. Or he's going to have to quit. Of course some officers, that's all they want is to be a road patrolman. They don't want the supervisory duties. They perform great out on the road on their own as individual units. They are very important to the department as well. They can't all be supervisors, not all supervisors make good patrol officers. I think you have to like what you are doing to enjoy the job.

Ann What variety is there as a policeman?

John I am quite independent. I can come in the station and do paper work and yet, if I feel claustrophobic I can go out on the road. I can be in or outside; whereas the guys on the road are really ... stay out there- they know they are going to stay out there. They are probably going to be out on the field more than myself, unless stress situations call for a supervisor, then I'll go out there. Like the day I am not going to wear long underwear. I am going to have to dress according to the day's job... either inside or outside. If they are outside for a long duration of time, they'll be cold no matter what they are wearing.

Ann Besides the variety of policework, what else do you like as a policeman?

John There is a certain amount of suspense connected with the job, playing with life or death situations. An officer never knows what is going to transpire, what he's going to run across. So he's always geared up, looking for that something, that unexpected something. I think that also adds to the stress of the job. There is a high divorce rate. Also I don't know the exact percentages but there are, I would say, a lot of suicides.

Ann What is that due to?

John That is due to both. In my particular case, I am quite fortunate. My wife came from a family where the father had a rotating type shift. I got sworn in ~~the police department~~ in the morning and married that night. That's all she's ever known as far as married life is this type of shift. If it got better (laugh) if the hours got better, I think for a lot of officers coming in from other areas of employment- salesman, factory workers coming in with a 7-4, or a 6-4, punch the clock, 5 days a week, and that's it. It would probably be a harder adjustment for their family than for myself. My married life and career life began on the same day.

Ann Your wife must be important. she can't help but be involved. How do you handle that?

John A wife of a policeman has to be quite independent. She has to be a mother and a father image in the father's ^{sp} absence. She plays a big role in... If you get a wife that's loving and considerate that will start your day off on a right step, so to speak, you don't come to work with any problems at home- it makes your job easier here. I think some officers come in don't always come in with their wives full backing this is where it creates problems. Not only with the officer's performance but also in arriving where he might be into danger/ I think an officer has to make sure his home life is in order no other things that are bothering him. The job calls for 100% alertness for driving a motor/vehicle, for observations of what is going around him. A wife is a big part in a police officer's overall performance. My wife when I leave for work, we leave on a note that I may not be home at the end of my shift. We might not ever be together again

Ann Is there that fear?

John I think so; you never know what you are going to run into. You

could be injured in a motorvehicle accident, you could be blown away, you dont know. So you make sure everything is in control in case it does happen. She feels too, shed hate to leave on a sour note. Like, shed have guilt feelings if something happens to me after some problems. We are like everyone else, we do have problems but we resolve them as soon as we can and always before I go to work. When I leave for work it is never on a sour note.

Pete Do your boys realize this?

John I dont believe they have the feelings that my wife does or that I do, the uncertainty. When their home they are to see daddy off to work and greet me on the morning after the night shift.

Ann What are some ideals or goals the HPD have for this community?

John Our goal for the members in the police department is to be the best PD that money can buy and ~~to~~ perform the services that are needed. And to and we arent going to eliminate crime but suppress crime. Crimes against property, crimes against people and also reduction of accidents through rigid traffic enforcement programs.

Pete How large is this force?

John The total is 53 Squad personel.

Ann Is that adequate?

John I think it is for the services the city requires.

Pete Do you live in the city?

John I live outside the city. Close to half live outside the city.

Pete How many Latinos are on the force?

John We have three Spanish-Americans on the force- try to have one per platoon. Which helps the LA community when the need arises for interpreters.

(17)

End of Tapes
End of interview