

HISTORICAL MEMORIAL CENTER

Pennsylvania State Police

Oral History Interview of:

Mr. Charles Covage

INTERVIEWER:

This is Bob Gerkin, and I'm here at the State Police Academy. It's September the 13th, 2005. It is retired Corporal Charles Covage. Charlie, I want to thank you for being a part of this very special, special day. Can you tell me where you were born?

MR COVAGE:

I was born in Pottsville, Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And what is your date of birth?

MR COVAGE:

May the 3rd, 1923.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, that makes you...

MR COVAGE:

An old man, 82 years old.

INTERVIEWER:

82 years old. Okay. You were born and raised in Pottsville.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, that's right.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you live there for most of your -- how long were you there?

MR COVAGE:

Well, until I joined the Marines.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And how old were you when you joined the Marines?

MR COVAGE:

17.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did you complete high school and then join the Marines?

MR COVAGE:

I got my diploma...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

...and joined the Marines, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Do you remember the year that you joined the Marines?

MR COVAGE:

1942.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And where were you eventually stationed?

MR COVAGE:

I was in -- I went through Paris Island, training there, and then ended up in the Pacific, the 2nd Marine Division, from 1942 until 1945, all the time I was over there in those islands

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And after you were discharged from the Marines, where did you go?

MR COVAGE:

After I was discharged, I went back. First of all, I went out to California for a while, and then I come back and -- into Pottsville, and I worked at Dietna

Steel [ph], and while I was working there, then they started this football team, the Pottsville Maroons, so I played football with them. And then in 1946, when I joined the State Police -- actually, when I joined the State Police, I thought I was too short, and I hesitated about going down there, and I -- because I intended to get married, and I had to -- and in fact, I said -- when I joined the Marines, and my mother said -- when -- and then when I went back to join the State Police, and she was telling me. She said, "Well, why don't you go down and take the examination?" I said, "Mom." I said, "I'm too small." So, anyway, going back over the mountain, I had an old, broken down Ford. I was coming down the -- I had to go into Harrisburg where that -- up on 21st and Herr Street [ph], and

up there, I was late getting in, because the car broke down going over the Blue Mountain, and I had to go down there and thumb a ride into Harrisburg, and Jake Mock [ph], Deputy Commissioner, he says, "Who are you holding up the State Police? Do you know that?" He said, "Do you want to be the State Police or not?" I said, "Well," I said, "if you want to chase me out of here," I said, "I'll just get out of here and go." "No," he said, "you're going down to Hershey." So, he sent me down the old academy down at Hershey in -- down at Cocoa Avenue.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

What caused you to join the State Police?

MR COVAGE:

Well, because I filled out an application. So, that's -- like mother said, "If you don't go down there and take the examination, if you flunk, you know you at least tried." But I was happy enough to get into it, so I seen an old -- Sergeant Wessinger [ph], Al Wessinger was the first sergeant down in the old barracks, and I didn't have any other clothes even to go back up home. I said, "How about if I

go back up home and come back?" He said, "You get up them steps, boy. Don't come down to see me. I'll see you. Okay?" I says, "Okay, Sarge. You're running this outfit, not me." So, anyway, I stayed there. And then I finished up training in Philadelphia, out in City Line Avenue, the old place. I don't know if they still have it there, so -- and other than that...

INTERVIEWER:

Was the State Police something that you thought about as you were growing up that you...

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

...thought you might want to be a...

MR COVAGE:

My brother was a lot bigger than me, and he had an application, and that was always in my mind. And so he was more fit for the State Police than me. But I was always a different kind of person, so...

INTERVIEWER:

But your brother never did join?

MR COVAGE:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

No, he went back in the Navy, and he retired from the Navy, and that was it.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You said your training initially was on Cocoa Avenue.

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Interestingly, today, the State Police is dedicating a historical marker at the old academy.

MR COVAGE:

Oh, that -- yes.

INTERVIEWER:

It's going out to the...

MR COVAGE:

I understand that. Yes. That's wonderful, because that was really home, I'll tell you, because we had all those horses down there and everything else. And Corporal Hoosbar [ph], he was a leading man with the horses, and he kept you going. And Corporal

Grosnick [ph] kept me. He was a corporal at the time, and he kept me down there to work with the dogs, which I did. And I -- now they're broke in all that way, so...

INTERVIEWER:

Tell me about the training during the academy days.

MR COVAGE:

It was familiar as -- almost as much as today as boxing and different things. You had a defense and that -- all that stuff and all different -- you had your pistol range, and that was in the back right behind the old place there. But that was all home there, and we had all the dogs on the outside there and all the horses, and it was a little different than you have today. It's really nice here. Beautiful.

INTERVIEWER:

How long did the training last?

MR COVAGE:

Let's see. It was about the same thing they have today. And I finished up down in Philadelphia, down in City Line Avenue there. And then they called me back for the rodeo for trick riding. That's when I -- because I developed into the horses, trick riding, and the motorcycles and all that stuff.

INTERVIEWER:

Was the State Police Academy your first exposure to horses?

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

Definitely, yes. But I seen them from a distance, but I didn't get around them. It -- they learned the -- we learned to ride them up there.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And I sense that you enjoyed that part of the training.

MR COVAGE:

Definitely. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You say you finished up your training on Belmont Avenue [ph] or...

MR COVAGE:

Um-hum.

INTERVIEWER:

...City Line Avenue...

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...down in Philadelphia. Why did that happen that the remainder of your training was in Philadelphia?

MR COVAGE:

Well, we had to go back up there for extra training on the highways, you know, and take you out on patrol and everything else, and stopping traffic and different things.

INTERVIEWER:

While you were at the training academy, were you being paid at that time?

MR COVAGE:

Well, it was under the government out -- after the service, after being in the service, and they paid for your training.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

And you got paid out of that. And in those days, you didn't make that much money.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you describe to me what a day of training would've been like?

MR COVAGE:

Well, you had to get up early in the morning.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR COVAGE:

You either do calisthenics or something else. And then you had to go down and clean all the stables, because they had about 80 horses down there, and you had to clean them and get ready. And then you had your class work and everything else and straightened out. And then you'd work with the place, cleaning up. It was very different.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, you put in long days?

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And then, while you were in Philadelphia, did you graduate from the academy before you were called back to the rodeo?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yes. Yes. We finished our training.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Were you assigned to a station after you finished your training in Philadelphia?

MR COVAGE:

I was actually supposed to go down to Bethlehem...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

...and Captain Cooper [ph] down there was looking for me all the time, so when the -- they kept me for the rodeo, and, excuse me -- and Major Martin [ph], they kept me there. And actually, John -- Corporal Grosnick, at the time, became Colonel, and he was a great guy. And he just took a liking to me in some way. We -- because of the way I was working with the dogs and everything. And actually, the other dogs -- and later on in life, we even got bloodhounds. I ran the bloodhounds, too, and trained them and all that stuff.

INTERVIEWER:

So, actually, when you graduated from the academy, you came right back and became involved in the rodeo?

MR COVAGE:

Definitely, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And where did you go from there?

MR COVAGE:

Well, Bob, actually, I was mixed up with trick riding with the horses and the motorcycles and all this other stuff and then working with the dogs, and I had a dead dog act. And I don't know if you remember that. I used to fold them in half and everything else. And he would climb up the ladder and go down the other side, and then we'd put him in a cart and drag him off, but the other dogs would drag him back down the other side. It was all comical.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR COVAGE:

And the whole thing actually -- even when I started this bum outfit, you know, I used to change costumes all the time, different changes, and I didn't have enough time. And one -- only a -- one afternoon, I was talking to Major Martin. I says, "Can I see you, sir?" He says, "Come on in." And I says, "Major," I says, "is there any way I can make up a bum suit or something to put on the rodeo?" He says, "This is a State Police show. It's not a clown show." Well, I said, "Major," I says -- he said, "Get out." He chased me out of the office. And later on that afternoon, he called me in, because we were going over to Governor's Day over at the Gap. And that was in 1947, I think. 1947. And he called me back in his office. He says, "Can you make up something fast for the --

to put on? This -- give us the idea of what you're wanting to do." And I did, and the governor liked it even, and he talked to Major Martin, and Major Martin says, "Well, you can do whatever you want." And then we developed it all together and made it what it is today. It's really something. And then I used to trick ride in that old bum outfit, and I'd go down and read the newspaper standing up on -- and on a motorcycle, standing up and laying down on it, a lot of fireworks on it. They'd blow it up. This -- we had a lot of fun with it. It was a great outfit. And everybody just went -- in those days, we didn't stay in hotels. We stayed in armories and colleges in the summertime when they were vacant, and then -- but then later on, they got pretty high class, I guess, in hotels and stuff, but it was funny from the beginning. You had a bunch of good guys. They all were. You guys, too. You know it. You were there.

INTERVIEWER:

Was there ever a time that you were actually out in the field?

MR COVAGE:

Yes, I've done undercover work.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

And I done police work and patrol. I was strictly signed up with the patrol and everything else and, you know, the desk and everything else like...

INTERVIEWER:

What was your first station?

MR COVAGE:

My station? It -- after I -- after then -- get down to Bethlehem, I done that work at Hershey out of there.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So that was really your first assignment was Hershey?

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

And last.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, you stayed right in the area?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And when you say you were assigned to Hershey, was that at the academy?

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, very shortly after you graduated from the academy, you wound up coming back and staying there...

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...to work your career?

MR COVAGE:

Yes, I did. But what we did, we did the patrol work out of there, too, because Hershey didn't have a police department. We done all their police work, and it was something. And the hockey games and all that stuff, traffic in Hershey. But it was a little town, little village at that -- as it was.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. You mentioned that they had a total of 80 horses at the academy.

MR COVAGE:

Yes, two barns full of them.

INTERVIEWER:

And what were they primarily used for?

MR COVAGE:

Well, we had -- in case there was a riot or something and other things. And well, actually, we had -- we were down at Eisenhower's confirmation of -- the President, you know, so we had a parade down there, representing Pennsylvania. We had about 30 or 40 horses down there. And then for Kennedy's inauguration, too, as President, we were down there. It was a change of life, and actually, your astronauts, when they start coming in, we'd patrol them with the motorcycles. But it was a good life for a young man, if I was young.

INTERVIEWER:

When you went through the academy, you weren't married.

MR COVAGE:

No, no. You couldn't get married, because you had to be there for three years before you were in the State Police at that time. They didn't take married men at all. And no women. It was just a different outfit. But it's all different today. It's really big.

INTERVIEWER:

How long were you on the job, then, before you became married?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, I -- 1949, and I was at -- I come on in 1946, so that was after about three years.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And you had to get permission to get married?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yes. Yes. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember who you asked permission?

MR COVAGE:

Who I asked? I asked my wife for permission.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

We grew up together.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

We -- she lived across the street from me in Pottsville, so -- and she used to -- was a good friend of my sister's, so my sister got married, so they asked her and me to be bridesmaid and -- so...

INTERVIEWER:

And who did you have to ask permission from the State Police to get married?

MR COVAGE:

You had to write a letter to the Commissioner, Wilhelm [ph] at the time.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Colonel Wilhelm...

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...was the Commissioner at that time? Okay. And how long did it take before you got a response back as to whether or not they were granting permission?

MR COVAGE:

Well, it wasn't long. Either yes or no. But they investigated the women.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you ever know of a case when someone was denied permission?

MR COVAGE:

To be truthful, I knew of some, but I'd rather not mention it.

INTERVIEWER:

So there actually were cases where...

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yeah. They were turned down if they -- yes.

INTERVIEWER:

How often did the State Police rodeo perform back (inaudible)?

MR COVAGE:

Well, every summer, we went to a different district. Like Philadelphia, we were at Bucknell College and different colleges and a stadium out in Allegheny County Fair. We'd present the show out there. In fact, when I was out there at the Allegheny County show trick riding that motorcycle outfit and that old clown car we had that tilted up, and in fact, Dime Wilson [ph] was one of the clowns with the Ringling Brothers Circus, and he asked me. He says why don't I go with the Ringling Brothers? I says, "Dime," I says, "it's -- I -- that's -- thanks for asking, but I'm eating regular this way." I'm here. And Joe Jackson, did you ever see him take the motorcycle and bicycle fall apart? Well, he was a friend of mine, too, because he would -- become accustomed because of that clown act. But that old bum suit was something else, and it went through a lot. and a lot of places after the show was over in that bum suit, I would go and visit out in Pittsburgh to hospitals with the children in there, that's right, and tried to insist in Major Martin

that the -- they need something like that to break up the monotony of just motorcycles and horses and dogs. And he went along with it, and that was great.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you know how long the rodeo was in existence before you joined the State Police?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, it's been -- years ago, they just had races or something else. It was altogether different. And -- but they put on a good show and their drill team and everything else. And Corporal Hoosbar, he was the old leader out there, and actually, he was -- he served time over in the Philippines in World War I, and he was -- he'd get out there. He'd train us good. He was going (inaudible).

INTERVIEWER:

So, it sounds like you were the first clown for the State Police rodeo.

MR COVAGE:

No, they had some others, but they didn't do it as much as what I did...

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

...because I'd go from one act to the other, right in there. And I'd go out there with the -- in fact, first of all, I'd go out there selling balloons, hollering there were balloons, hot air balloons, you know, and I'd put the whole bunch of balloons down and the dog would run out there and smash them. But I'd have the one balloon that had water in it. And I would go up there, and that dog just loved to jump at that water balloon, and I'd throw it up in the air, and he'd jump and smash, and the water would come down. He liked that. Yeah. But then I'd go out in something else, you know. I had the donkey. I had Sam. And I used to ride him. I had him doing tricks on the boxes and standing and everything. And he was really great. I hated to see him go. And one time down at Pottstown, the Commissioner come in on a plane, on a helicopter, and I was going out on that donkey, riding him out in the middle of the field, and he kicked me right up in the air. He knocked me right off and gave me a hoof. And that was something. So, they say, "You ought to do that regular." I said, "We're not going to do that one regular." Yeah. And then I had that horse. They'd bring me out with the horse, and we'd put a table out there and put some fine food on it, on the -- of -- this is special oats that were -- had for the horse. And he would sit there, and I put a bib on him, and he'd set there

and just eat. And then I'd take it away from him, and he'd chase me around and do things like that. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

You indicated that your first exposure to horses was really through the State Police.

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you go from really being a novice to someone who got involved not only in just the horse drill but you eventually did trick riding?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

How did that all happen?

MR COVAGE:

Well, I just loved it, and I just went from one act to the other. And that old clown car, and then we got that car. They bought that. I think it was about \$50 or something in that -- those days. It -- that old Model T. And then up in them -- a shop in Harrisburg, they just cut it all down. But people used to say well you had electric things in there setting you up and down. It was a bunch of lead in the

back besides us, so when the -- Corporal McGowan [ph] would go out there, and he was a policeman, remember. He'd stop out there in the front of the car there. And then after we start raising heck there on it, and then I -- they fly out -- fall out the back, and they had it all lined up with firecrackers. And that -- they were just cracking around me all -- I was just fortunate enough. But the people got a kick out of it. And I enjoyed doing it. I love to see people laugh. And that was it.

INTERVIEWER:

Had you ever ridden a motorcycle before joining the State Police?

MR COVAGE:

Yes, I did ride a motorcycle.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So that was just a natural transition.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, and then I laid down on the motorcycle, remember, and blew that up.

INTERVIEWER:

Right.

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

I wouldn't -- I would imagine you didn't do any tricks on a motorcycle prior to coming to the State Police, though? You learned...

MR COVAGE:

No, no, no. That was there, yeah, because we had some of the older fellows like -- that were on the State Police for years before, and so they broke me in with them. But I -- about that clown part, that was just part of my life. And I love to see people laugh.

INTERVIEWER:

How long did you actually stay in the State Police rodeo? Until retirement?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, until '72. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. So, you were in the State Police rodeo for all those years?

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Pretty soon after, you joined the State Police until retirement?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

What would you say was the most memorable event, rodeo event, that comes to mind?

MR COVAGE:

Right off hand, Bob, there's quite a few by seeing these children, you know, laughing, and I'd go up by them and talk with them and everything else and have a lot of fun. Yeah. And I ran the bloodhounds, too, I told you, you know. And I do catch some people with the bloodhounds. And they were really something else. And like in the old academy here, before it was rebuilt to what you have this mansion here, I mean, I would take the bloodhound, turn him loose with me. I'd go down there, and the other dog and Sam, the donkey, I would go with him, and I'd get my horse, Numbers, I used to call him. Actually, he -- I called him Numbers, because he was an old horse that was released from the Army, and he would -- had tattoos on his -- numbers were on his neck, and I would call him in the barn there, and he'd just come over and just take my -- actually, when the cadets would ride him after up here, I could call him out of the crowd. I said, "Numbers, let's go." And he would -- he'd come over. He would want to go. But we would go up over the hills in the back here, and there was a dog up in the Pat's Hill [ph] right in the back here. Do you

remember that place here? And there was a dog, and every time we'd go up there, I had the dogs loose in the what you call it, and there's that dog. And he used to be barking like heck. And Sam got mad at the dog barking one day, and he went over and kicked this dog out. Yeah. Yeah. It was a great life.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you learn to train the dogs, not only the dogs for the rodeo, but the bloodhounds?

MR COVAGE:

Actually, there was a trainer coming up from down around Philadelphia, and he was telling me all about this and -- training. And we got these dogs, and we had them down here, and we were taking care of them, and we were -- so we were around them all day. And the kids -- we'd get the kids, and they were good kids. And they'd come up and they'd hide in the bushes, different places, and we'd go find them with the dogs. And that was it. They were something.

INTERVIEWER:

Was it difficult to train the dogs for the rodeo?

MR COVAGE:

No. No. No, it was wonderful working with them? And this -- they -- we'd -- and then we traveled around the state in the different

schools and put these dog shows on, just little tricks, going across the street, telling the kids how to cross the street, and the dogs would pick up the different signs and everything else.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you describe how you moved from location to location, especially during the summertime when the rodeo was going, to the different locations around the state?

MR COVAGE:

Well, they had -- different places had horses, too. Like Wyoming had horses, and they had those old big trucks years ago. And then later on, they got better ones, but they had these old big trucks, and they'd move them from one place to another.

INTERVIEWER:

How many people would they usually call back for the rodeo? How many troopers?

MR COVAGE:

Well, they'd call quite a few out of different troops, what they can spare, and they'd be with us.

INTERVIEWER:

So, would you say there was at least 100 troopers that were involved in the rodeo? Is that accurate?

MR COVAGE:

All together. It should be about that many, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And they would come in...

MR COVAGE:

Because they had their drill teams and everything else.

Remember them? You should.

INTERVIEWER:

So, they would come in each summer, and what would happen when they would arrive at the beginning of the summer?

MR COVAGE:

Well, we would train and get some of these acts together and everything else, and it took a lot of movement, too. But it got down.

INTERVIEWER:

Some of the tricks that you and others did during those shows were obviously pretty dangerous.

MR COVAGE:

Well, we used to do that -- I used to do that shoemaker's delight. I used to run behind the horse and go in down there. And I'd jump off the back and hold on to two straps there and just run along behind him. And -- oh, yeah. You had to be careful.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you ever recall being hurt?

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Seriously hurt?

MR COVAGE:

No, not seriously, but I had a collarbone broke. Major Martin said, "Let's put an Annie Oakley act in here." He says, "You get up on your horse Numbers there, and they'll release the balloons -- be in front of you, going down. And you will be shooting at them. So, I got a 22. He gave me one of the old 22s. I'd get out there. So, I was standing up on the horse, and I had my two feet in the stirrups in the back, a little -- on the back of the saddle, it had two straps there that -- and I was dragging. And I took the shot at the one balloon, and the dog -- and the horse threw me right back down, and I was laying down behind his head just bouncing -- between his legs there, bouncing my head there. And I had a collarbone broke. But other than that, I said, "We're not going to do that one again." And he was shell-shocked, that horse, I know he was after that. He didn't like that shooting. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember anyone else being seriously hurt?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, the horses kicked. And so some of the horses were mean, and they -- yeah, I know a few of them got their legs broke or something.

INTERVIEWER:

How about on the motorcycles? Any serious...

MR COVAGE:

Not seriously, no, but they did have some clashes crossing in a four-way crossing. And I had that little Papoose that I used to go between them when they were coming up through. I'd go between them with the little Papoose that was -- come from England. They got it for me from England. And the other trick riding -- and actually, one -- remember the old trick ride we used to do on motorcycles? Put 14 men on a motorcycle, that old Indian. And I was the 14th in the back, and I used to drag behind it, hanging on. But I was -- that should've been investigated to see if that was any -- a record in that, because that was something.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you describe the motorcycle drill?

MR COVAGE:

Threw me.

INTERVIEWER:

Can you describe how the motorcycle drill was conducted? How many motorcycles participated in that drill would you say?

MR COVAGE:

Well, actually, I wasn't mixed up in too much. I think there was about 18 mixed up in that, and they were crossing and everything, you know.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum. Okay. What was the four-way crossing?

MR COVAGE:

That was difficult. We come in -- the four-way. You had to know your timing, you know, through there.

INTERVIEWER:

So, there was motorcycles coming from...

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...four corners of the room...

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...and crossing in the middle?

MR COVAGE:

That was almost like some of the horse tricks, you know, they taught those old horses going through, crossing.

INTERVIEWER:

Explain to me what that caboose was, the motorcycle that you said that you...

MR COVAGE:

Papoose.

INTERVIEWER:

Oh, Papoose.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, it was made by the Brockhouse Brothers [ph] in England.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And what did that look like?

MR COVAGE:

It was just a -- they -- in fact, they had it over at the 100th anniversary. They had it over there, and I was just looking at it. And it -- actually, the guy has that down in York, Bob's Indian Motorcycle. He had one of those trick motorcycles down there. And he'll bring them up to you. He's very nice. And he had the other ones there, too.

INTERVIEWER:

And what would -- what did that one look like that you rode?

MR COVAGE:

The Papoose?

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah.

MR COVAGE:

That was just like a little motorcycle, and it was something. And I'd go through crossing, too, with them.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. If I remember correctly, you were the last one coming through.

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

What kind of motorcycles did they have when you first joined the rodeo?

MR COVAGE:

They had old Indians, and they got some military motorcycles, too, and they were a little too heavy for trick riding on it, so they didn't use them too well. But they had the old Indians. And they stripped them down to make this -- put stands on them where we could stand on them or something.

INTERVIEWER:

At what point did they change motorcycles for the main drill?

MR COVAGE:

Well, when they'd come up here in 1960, that -- when they started up here, and then they had -- they got the Harley Davidsons.

INTERVIEWER:

So, that's when the academy moved from the previous location on Cocoa Avenue...

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

...up through the present location?

MR COVAGE:

Um-hum.

INTERVIEWER:

During the regular year when the rodeo wasn't practicing of performing, you were still stationed here at the academy?

MR COVAGE:

Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

And what were your responsibilities here, in addition to the patrol...

MR COVAGE:

Well, and helping in class work, too. Some of the classes, they -- and then we would put on, like, searching teams, like put a bunch of guns on me at all different places, I don't know if they still do that, and all this stuff, and like the instructor would be talking there, and then I'd walk in, and I said, "Hey, Mack. Do you need anything from Harrisburg? I have to go up there." He said, "Wait a minute, Chuck." He said, "Wait. Wait just a minute." He said, "We're going to have one of these guys search you." I said, "No. What -- search me for what? Why are you going to search me? I don't have nothing." He said, "Well, just wait here a couple minutes." I said, "No, I'm going to leave." And then he asked. I -- he said, "Stay." So, then I did stay there. And then he'd get someone up to search me. So, while the kids were searching me and -- I was, "I don't know what you guys are looking for." And then sometimes, they'd walk away, and then I'd take all the guns that I had all over me and put them on the table, and I said, "Now, I'm leaving."

Yeah, it was...

INTERVIEWER:

So, you participated in the training of the cadets?

MR COVAGE:

Sure.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you enjoy that part of the...

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yeah. Yes. And then I -- and then actually, when they were going to get rid of the dogs when Rocky Rello [ph] come in as Commissioner, and he had me in talking about this. I says, "Commissioner." I says, "One of the best things that you do is go around these schools in Pittsburgh and different places putting on these shows at the school and telling them about -- teaching them about safety." Well, he said, "Do you think we ought to keep the dogs?" I says, "My passion is with those dogs, believe me, because they do wonderful work." And he said, "Okay. That's the way it's going to be." But like I said, it was good public relations.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you enjoy working with the dogs more than the horses or...

MR COVAGE:

I loved all of them. Loved it all. That little donkey was the funniest thing, too. Yes. Yeah. I had about four or five dogs that I trained.

INTERVIEWER:

How did it happen that the donkey became a part of the act?

MR COVAGE:

Well, first of all, for years, Francis Looba [ph], he had a donkey by the name of Jerry, and he was funny. He used to have him on the -- in the rodeo. So then, this other one came along, and I got this one. They gave me him to train. So I trained him, and he was really good. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Was the donkey a little more difficult to train than the horses or the dogs?

MR COVAGE:

No, but you've got to just watch his back feet there. Yeah, that's funny. But I -- yeah. It -- I enjoyed putting that bum suit on, that clown suit. And it had been all over. And like I said, it's falling apart. And...

INTERVIEWER:

So, basically, you had one suit that you wore for all the...

MR COVAGE:

That's the only one, yes, and it's been sewed by every place we go somewhere, because of the stand-around work and they're -- falling out of that clown car and everything, rolling off that motorcycle.

INTERVIEWER:

How many rodeo shows do you think you've participated in?

MR COVAGE:

Well, there's 25 years. Twenty-five years.

INTERVIEWER:

How many shows did you usually put on during the summer?

MR COVAGE:

Sometimes -- well, we went to different stations in the district, and maybe about four or five shows at one area, and another area.

We'd move to another area and put it on.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you travel throughout the state through the summer, or did you -- just stayed in one location, like the east, the central, or the west?

MR COVAGE:

Well, the different district out of a different year, then it would be the west and then the north.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

And it was interesting.

INTERVIEWER:

Again, let me ask you, is there a time that you think was most memorable? A show that stands out in your mind?

MR COVAGE:

Well, there was one incident I'd like to say about the bloodhound. They -- this here over in around Linglestown there, they called one night, and it was getting late. And the little girl was missing, and they called me and says, "Get over and take a bloodhound over." His name was Storm. "Take Storm over and see what you can do." And where the girl was last and everything else, you know, explaining things. So, I went over and I had one of the cadets there with me, you know, just to be with the -- and this little girl was missing, and they showed me right where she was and everything else. And I don't know. And I said, "The bloodhound lost interest." And he wanted to go in this house. And I said, "Don't." I said, "Storm," I said, "come here. Let's get back on the ball here." And I took him over to some other places. He wasn't interested. So, I went back to that house, and he wanted to go back in there. And the lady said, "She's not in here." I said, "Ma'am." I said, "Will you go in and check your house real good?" And we finally did. I said, "Because I'm going to take the dog in the house if you don't go in there." Here the child was under the bed. It was rest time in this neighbor's house, and she was laying under the bed sleeping. That was very nice.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you often had successes?

MR COVAGE:

With the bloodhounds, yes, I did.

INTERVIEWER:

Um-hum.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, up in Wilkes Barre there, we got a criminal, and got -- and me and the dog, we worked this area. And lucky the guy wasn't shot, because actually, it was hunting season, and this guy had run off the patrol car and took off, and I got some clothes. I got a scent and went out and had this dog follow all the way through, so it was starting to get dark. And one of the parts around Beaver Creek or something, that -- one of the places out there, they seen somebody go down over a -- one of those stripping mines, a bank. And I said, "Well, before it gets real dark," I said, "I'll go and check that if he can pick up a trail there," which I did pick up a trail. And he come down, and he got over to a railroad track, and there was an undercover in there, and he stopped, and well, you could tell -- the wrinkles always come down in their face, and that's where they keep their -- the scent, right in there. And anyway, this -- he wasn't under there. The guy left. He was under there originally, but he went -- so, then, he went out on the highway. I said, "Storm," I said, "you're kidding me. I know you're kidding me. Now, let's go.

Get on the ball again.” So, he went down this highway, and here was a little crossing of a creek. And here, I looked down there, here’s this guy down there washing himself, and he was all foamed out from the mouth from running and everything else. And he had a gun on himself and -- yeah. I said -- I got my pistol out, and I said, “You make a mistake,” I said, “you’re going to pay.” And I said, “Get up here.” And he come up. And I made him pet the dog. He said, “Not only being caught, now I’ve got to pet that thing.” I said, “That’s right. That’s why he’s so happy.” Yeah. Yeah. I done a lot of work up through that area.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you called to respond any place in the state?

MR COVAGE:

Yes. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

So, you’d pack up your dog, and you’d go to the location that...

MR COVAGE:

Um-hum.

INTERVIEWER:

...requested your assistance?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Now...

MR COVAGE:

When they were shot on the turnpike, remember when the -- what's his name was shot. Herps [ph] was shot there. I was over there. And I got that guy with the bloodhounds and the pistol. And what you call it was -- just happened to have a -- and he was laying down under the log. And he got up. I made him up, and they got him, because we had a big search party out after him, you know, so we got him. And about a week or so after, they -- from Lancaster, they were on that search. And they said they had -- would I take them back out and show where the guy was. And I took them -- I took out back -- showed them the position where the guy was and everything else. Here, there was a loaded shotgun down there. He could've had me, too. But he already shot two guys. Remember? But Herps was a friend of mine, too. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

So, being stationed here at the academy, you got to know, probably, more people than most who are members of the State Police, because during your career...

MR COVAGE:

My hometown.

INTERVIEWER:

Yeah. And everybody came through here. Yeah. Now, what was the thing that you used to say when you'd meet someone new?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah. Well, I'd say, "Where are you from?" And they'd say, "Well, I'm from Erie." "You're kidding. I'm from Erie, too. You had an uncle that played ball, didn't you?" And the guy would say, "Yes." He says, "Yeah." And he said, "Did you know my uncle?" I says, "Oh, yeah. Sure." I said, "We went to school together." And we always had a lot of fun with it. And then somebody -- and actually, it backfired a couple of times, because if I -- the guy would bring his father down and say, "This is the guy that knows you, Pap." And we'd laugh about it.

INTERVIEWER:

So, no matter where anybody was from...

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, I would...

INTERVIEWER:

...you indicated that you knew...

MR COVAGE:

That was my hometown.

INTERVIEWER:

That was your hometown.

MR COVAGE:

Because actually I had been around a lot of those places. I did know some of them. And actually, I used to have a little contest in the school with the dogs. And we were down. I think it was Pottstown or somewhere in that area. And so I had a little contest after the dog show, after they'd pick up the signs and how to cross the highway and everything else and doing this and doing that. and one day, after I had this contest with the one that had the dog pulling the dead dog position and stay there, and the boy can go over and clap his hands as many times as he wants to, that dog wouldn't get up. But if a little girl walked over and just one tap and the dog would get up. So anyway, this -- I picked up the boy -- one of the boys in the audience. I said, "Who wants to come up here?" So, this one boy said, "I'm -- I want to come up. I want to come up." And I said, "Okay. You come up." And so they got -- put the dog down in the position, the dead dog position. And he was trying to get him up, and he wouldn't get up at all. And so the little girl came over and got him up. And the principal come and said, "Am I glad you've picked him." He said, "I was worried he was going to call you a name, because he's a funny little boy." And he said, "If

he gets mad, he says something else.” So, he said, “You really made a nice boy out of him.” Yeah. It was wonderful.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you train the dog to...

MR COVAGE:

Oh.

INTERVIEWER:

...respond to the girl and not to the boy?

MR COVAGE:

Well, I -- just -- he'd watch me, and I just nodded or -- you know, the head or something, and he'd get up.

INTERVIEWER:

So, he was waiting for your cue?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

How many dogs do you think you've worked with?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, quite a few, Bob. Yes. Well, Grosnick was in charge of the dogs, and he's the one that actually kept me at the academy.

INTERVIEWER:

And what was his rank at that time?

MR COVAGE:

Corporal.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. And he was stationed here at the academy?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

And Jesalotski [ph], Sergeant Jesalotski. He's -- he was -- used to be in charge of the trick riding at one time. And Leon Roana [ph] and all of...

INTERVIEWER:

How many Commissioners did you work for during your career?

MR COVAGE:

There's quite a few, Bob.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

And I couldn't put them in order.

INTERVIEWER:

So you saw a lot of changes over the 25 years?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, definitely. Yeah. Well, actually, I had 31 years with my State Police -- I mean, with my Marine time. But I enjoyed every part of it.

INTERVIEWER:

What do you think was the most dramatic change that you saw over your career?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, something like this. I'll tell you, this is something else. And when they moved up here in the hill, the old place was old home, the homestead. We had ball teams, and we had hockey playing sometimes and different things. And -- but when they got up here on the hill, it just changed. Yes. It was a great life.

INTERVIEWER:

Good. Okay. I think we're done, Joe. That's good.

MR COVAGE:

Bob, it's been a pleasure seeing you again.

INTERVIEWER:

A pleasure to see you.

INTERVIEWER:

Charlie, you mentioned earlier that, at the age of 17, you joined the Marine Corps.

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

And you were in the Marines from 1942 to '45.

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

Then you also said that when you left the Marines, you went to California.

MR COVAGE:

I did go to California. My brother and I went out to California. We just went out for some -- you know, taking some vacation time.

INTERVIEWER:

So, a little R&R?

MR COVAGE:

He was in the Navy, and I was in the Marines, and of course, my little brother was in the Army, and he was captured by the Germans. And he had passed away, and I -- both of them passed away now, and I'm the only one, the only Marine left.

INTERVIEWER:

All right.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

When you were in the Marine Corps -- or before you went into the Marine Corps, had you anticipated joining the State Police?

MR COVAGE:

No, no idea, but my brother had an application, and he was twice as big as me. And he would've made a good State Policeman. But I never had no idea that -- but after I had come back and I was playing football with the Pottsville Maroons, and I went all the way through with all this stuff, and -- well, and Clara and I were supposed to get married when I went down to join the State Police, because they had this application and everything and I passed all that stuff. And I -- going over the Blue Mountain, I had an old Ford at the time. I bought this Ford, and going over the Blue Mountain, I got stuck, so I left the car there, and I thumbed it all the way into Hershey there where the headquarters used to be, and Jake Mock, Colonel Mock was in there. And he says, "I don't know who you think you are holding up the State Police." I said, "Well, Colonel." I said, "I want to tell you. I had a tough time getting over here, and so I got -- finally got here." "Well," he said, "do you want to be a State Policeman?" And I said, "I'd like to try it." He said, "Okay. You're going down to Hershey now, because we're starting another

class right now.” So, I got down there, and I asked the first sergeant at Wessinger. I says, “Sarge.” I says, “Can I get up to Pottsville some way to bring -- get some clothes? I didn’t bring nothing.” He said, “Boy.” He said, “Get up them steps. Don’t you ever come down and ask me. You -- I’ll call for you when I want to talk to you.” I said, “Well, thank you, Sarge.” Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

You said your brother would’ve been a good State...

MR COVAGE:

State Policeman, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Did he ever tell you, once you became a State Trooper, that he wished he had made that choice?

MR COVAGE:

No, he went -- after I joined the State Police, then he went out and he jumped -- went back into the service again. And first, he was in the Marines at one time and come out, and this was in peacetime. and then, this situation turned out about going back in the service again, and he went and he made the -- a career out of it, the military, and then he was on quite a bit of the islands and different places. He was a lot bigger than me, so he could do it pretty good.

INTERVIEWER:

When you first went to the academy, you referred to it as the “old academy”, that was on Cocoa Avenue...

MR COVAGE:

That's right.

INTERVIEWER:

...is that correct? Can you describe that building to us a little bit?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, really, you can. Yes, definitely. Well, I -- actually, with this, we had about 80 horses at one time down there, the two barns, and when you got on the -- like, the midnight shift, like from 12:00 to 8:00 in the morning, you had to go feed the horses out there, and you would answer the telephones, because you were the only person up in that place. And the door was open. And sometimes you'd come back in there, somebody would be sitting and they're all bloody or something and they got in a fight or something or else, their car broke down or something. You'd walk in there. And then you had to go out and feed the dog and different things. And even -- Major Martin had a goat down there, and we used to milk that goat, because he had different problems with his stomach and that situation. But it was really home. A good place. I mean, really miss it. And the kids -- well, actually, the reason they had to get rid of it because they built all those schools in the back, all those

schools and everything else, and remember our old -- I don't know whether you remember the range down there. And they were just down there at that flat part. And the -- some of the bullets would fly off somewhere, so they got us out of there then. But remember we used to march up the street into the community building to take a swim and to safeguard, you know, conditions. So, it was really a home. Really, it was an old building and everything else, and you had to go open the cooks in the morning and get the stoves going for them, old gas stoves. And one of our guys, I don't -- you should remember George Andercise [ph]. He used to be in charge of the motorcycles. And we called him "Slick", because he never lost any more weight. You could -- he was thin anyway. So, one morning, he went down the stove -- went to turn the gas on, but then the -- somebody -- the phone was ringing out in the office, so he comes back out, but the thing wasn't lit. So he went in and threw a match into it. He come flying back out. Oh, my. I tell you. It was some experience down there. Really good. But -- and the horses are -- sometimes you'd go out there, and you'd find yourself with these old -- a couple of old horses that would really kick bad when they were feeding and raising heck, because they were anxious to, I guess, feed -- get fed. So that's about it, but it was a -- really fun.

And the -- all the kids used to come down there and walk around. We'd walk the dogs and different things. And when we were practicing for the rodeo and everything, so...

INTERVIEWER:

Do you remember about how many motorcycles they had down there, at that point?

MR COVAGE:

No, because the only ones -- we had the old Indians, because we didn't have Harleys at that time. And we used to make trick riding motorcycles out of them, because they were bought by the civic association, and so -- but that's about it. And the blacksmith that -- the first big (inaudible) was a blacksmith, and he'd make all different things in there with the horses and everything else. One time, I -- Clara and I were home up in Pottsville, and I didn't know my horse was sick. And so he was down. They couldn't get him up. Old Numbers. I used to call him Numbers, because he had numbers printed on his neck initialed right into his neck, and he was a reject from the military. And so -- and they got me at home and called -- because I just got home in Hershey, and -- excuse me. And I said -- they called me down to the stable right away. They couldn't get the horse up. The veterinarian was there and everything else. And I walked down there, and no (inaudible)

Numbers around two old good -- two buddies, too. And I say, "Numbers, hey, pretty boy. Pretty boy, come on. Let's go. We're going." And that horse got up. And the veterinarian said, "I can't believe it." He said, "I don't believe it." He said, "We tried all day to try to get him up, and we couldn't get him up. But," he said, "here you do this." So then we put him up in -- remember Colonel -- Corporal Hoosbar? He was our leader and the horses and everything else. And we had a special stall for our horses, sick horses. And I had to go in that stable there and put him in that bin, that horse place -- special horse. And Clara was with me, and I would look at the horse, and he was laying down. And every time I'd move and try to get out and Clara would be there, he wouldn't let me get up. But -- I'll tell you. And he and I -- me and that horse, we had a lot of fun together. And I trick rode on him. And one time Major Martin said, "We've got to -- we're going to try an Annie Oakley act." I says, "What do you mean, Major?" He says, "Well, somebody's going to go ahead of you and you're going to have a gun and shoot balloons from the -- standing up on the horse." And my feet were in -- locked in the back, and so I said, "Okay." I said, "I'll try it." Well, I'll tell you one thing, Bob. I shot one shot out of that gun, and the horse threw me right down. I was real -- between

his two legs going down the field. And I'll tell you, that was something. I said, "I don't think we better try that again, Major." He said, "No, we won't do that one." So, I had a collarbone broke and everything, so -- but it worked out.

INTERVIEWER:

Let me go back to your time in the academy while you were a cadet. Do you remember how many cadets were in the class at that time?

MR COVAGE:

Really, I don't recall to be exact, Bob, but we had the -- there were two classrooms going, so -- and we had a good group.

INTERVIEWER:

You also mentioned earlier that you had training down at City Line Avenue in Philadelphia.

MR COVAGE:

Oh, definitely. Yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Is that part of a -- the cadet class?

MR COVAGE:

Yes, part of our training.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you wind up in Philadelphia (inaudible)?

MR COVAGE:

Well, actually, part of us went to Philadelphia. Some went out to Greensburg and different places. And a few of us were down in Philadelphia there, and we had our training down there. And after - - that's when they called me back for the rodeo, because they knew my ability, what I had done before how things -- I was in pretty good shape at that time. Not now. Pretty good then. But anyway, it was a lot of fun down there. And one time, this -- the first sergeant had Bob Borke [ph] and I had to clean out the basement in the old building. That old building was there. And just about the time that we were coming up, almost finished, and I slammed the shutters closed and broke the windows. The first sergeant stuck his head out the window. He said, "Do you know how to fix the windows now?" I said, "No, but I guess I'm going to learn fast." He said, "You better." He said, "Get up here." Oh, yeah. That was First Sergeant Davis [ph]. He was a great guy. And then he brought me down to Hershey, and that's where my stay lasted with the whole rodeo.

INTERVIEWER:

Was that quite a change going from Hershey to Philadelphia?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, my, yes. Yes. We were pretty busy down there in Route 1 going down there and everything.

INTERVIEWER:

You indicated earlier that you had never ridden a horse or a motorcycle, for that matter, until you came into the State Police, is that right?

MR COVAGE:

Well, I did -- that's right. I -- that was about the fact of it, but when they put me in the motorcycle act and that thing there and trick riding on it, and then I -- with the gang. They said, "Well, we're going to make a trick rider out of you on the motorcycle." So, okay. And then I done all those tricks on that motorcycle, and then I'd come in last on the back, standing up, reading a newspaper. That motorcycle was going down, and then I'd go out later on laying on it, long on that motorcycle. And it had a lot of fireworks on it. And they were all laughing. The kids would be laughing, you know, going around, falling asleep on that motorcycle. And then I'd fall over with it. And all those fireworks would go off and almost blew the whole thing up around it. We had a lot of fun.

INTERVIEWER:

At one point, you -- I heard that while you were a member of the State Police, you went to jail. What can you tell us about that?

MR COVAGE:

I did. I got a -- I done a good job getting into jail, too. We were up there then. They wanted some information out of the York County Jail, so they got a hold of me and said about putting me in jail. I says, "Okay." I said, "Well, let's do this thing up good." So, we were up in New Cumberland there, and these two State Policemen with civilian clothes brought me in at a district justice. And I made believe I was drunk, and I was just fooling around with them. And I was giving them a lot of baloney, and that judge was getting madder every minute. And I kicked the chair out from underneath. He said, "Take him away down to York County Jail right now." So, I got in there fast. I didn't have to do too much. So, I overacted, and they put me in a dark room for two days, kept me in there and just peep in there to see if I was still alive. And then I got in and got the information that they needed, and they got me out. But my wife didn't know where I was at the time, either. Don't laugh, Clara. Yeah. And she didn't know where I was. But I was there.

INTERVIEWER:

So, they sent you there in an undercover capacity?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And do you remember what kind of information you were trying to get while you were there?

MR COVAGE:

It was minor, not -- it wasn't a great big thing, not murder or nothing else. It was just something that they wanted to get. Some gambling was going on and something. They wanted to find out what the situation was, and that was it. I mean -- and actually, I was right in with that gang. They liked me. They said, "There's the guy that was in that dark room there for two days by himself." So...

INTERVIEWER:

So you were able to get...

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yeah. I watched those guys making -- getting some (inaudible) things, different things. It was -- I was in with them pretty good. They liked me.

INTERVIEWER:

You also indicated earlier that you were involved with the bloodhounds. How did that come about?

MR COVAGE:

Actually, we got two bloodhounds, Bob, and few of us were training the bloodhounds, and I had worked with them, with these bloodhounds, and I had gone and -- different things. Actually,

when -- in the morning, when I'd leave the old -- the new barracks up there where you guys were up there, and I'd have the donkey. I trained a donkey and then my horse. And then we would go up over the fields in the back. And there was a dog up in the hill there. He'd come out barking at the donkey every time he'd go past. And the donkey didn't do nothing. He was loose, you know, and he'd -- they'd just follow me and the other -- the dog and the donkey and everything else. And he run over and kicked that doghouse, and that dog didn't come out anymore. Yeah. And that -- and then I took him out. I was called on different cases up around Wilkes Barre, and I had -- they had called me up one time. I was supposed to take the dogs out and train them, you know, back in the -- back behind Hershey there, and we'd take the kids from families, you know, and they'd have them hidden in the woods there, and then we'd try to find them. And we done a good job of finding them, you know, and done things, everything else. And so one time, up in Wilkes Barre, they had this guy who was wanted for robberies up in the area there, and he had run the State Police off the road and cracked the car up, and so -- and he took off and -- in over the mountains, you know, where the coal dirt and everything else. And I had gotten up there with the bloodhound. And I was

up. It was right in hunting season, too, and it's a wonder that the guy didn't get shot by somebody else. But anyway, I had gone out there and the dog done good during the trailing, you know. And the funny thing about the thing, if anybody got out in front of us, he wouldn't do too much, you know. He would just -- but the amazing thing about the bloodhounds, they would get this scent, and they'd keep it right in their nose, and they'd be right there with it, then. And I had this guy, and I was going pretty good with him. But then, all at once, we lost the trail. So about this -- it was almost getting dark, and they said they seen this -- seen a guy coming over the coal bank, and it might be him. It was down by -- it was a highway down below near the hospital, the Veterans' hospital up in that area down there. And anyway, this guy come down over this, and then we got -- the dog and I got the trail. So we got it, and they're going down the railroad, and it was like a cover, like a grove in there in that area there. So, the dog looked, and he just stood, you know. And I said, "Come on now. No kidding. Is he there?" Because I was running with him. So, I got out in this road. He wasn't there. But he got on the road. I says, "Handsome." I used to call him handsome or -- and he was something else. Storm was his -- really name. It was really something else. And anyway, then I got

out on the highway with him, running down the highway, and all at once, we got to what -- there was a little bridge going over this part of the road, and the dog stopped. He just stopped, and I looked down there. Here's this guy down there. This guy. He got a pistol. And then I got him up there. I said, "Go ahead. You move," I said, "you had it, too." And I got him up there and made him pet the dog. And then McGowry [ph], remember? He used to be a colonel. And then they all come down there, and we got this guy that they wanted. And I made him pet the dog. He said, "It's bad enough that he catches me. Why do I have to pet him?" I said, "That's for my protection. He liked you." Yeah, that was a lot of -- something.

INTERVIEWER:

And would you say that that was the first time that the State Police started using dogs?

MR COVAGE:

No, at one time, remember, there was one of the famous dogs that they had, but not like that. With the -- and then we got two more bloodhounds, and then we had to go up to New York to get them. We were in the train then. And then, in the meantime, my dog had died. They had stomach -- they get -- they're so big, and they used to turn around and flip around, and they had a -- they had the trouble with the stomach. So then, he died, the poor bugger, and

he was really a wonderful dog. And we had a lot of fun. And then we had to get rid of the dogs, and that was one of the worst things we'd -- that happened.

INTERVIEWER:

The clown outfit that you referred to as your "bum suit", how did that really develop>

MR COVAGE:

The way we developed it, Bob, was really something else. I remember Colonel Grosnick. Colonel Grosnick. He used to be in charge of the dogs and I, so he -- I always worked with him. And so then, I'd go from one act to another, changing outfits. And I says, "Hey." He was corporal at the time. I says, "I wonder if we can -- I can talk to the major, Major Martin about making a bum suit up, something for the rodeo to put on, because you've got a lot of kids sitting up there and everything else and watching it, and it was really an interest." And he said, "It's a State Police show. It's no clown show." He said, "No way. Get out." And he chased me out. But later on, in the evening -- and he come back, and he called me up in the office. He said, "What do you have in mind, Charlie? What's the situation?" I says, "Well," I said, "we're going over to Governor's Day," at that Gap at that time, and they used to have a Governor's Day on Saturday, "and put the show on for him." And I

said, "Well, I can make something up real fast." He said, "We'll try it. Okay." He says, "Go ahead and do it." And I did, and the Governor liked it. Major Martin liked it. He said, "You're on your own." And it was a really rough job that I had. It didn't really -- so it goes -- not like this outfit I made up later on. And then I went on with that. And after that, he says, "You're on your own." And he left me make all those ideas up on it, too, and make that outfit. I got a -- when my buddy, I -- his pants was a size 50. I played football with Harry John [ph] back in Pottsville. And they're Harry Jonathan's pants. And they were 50-some around the waist, and they used to hang down over me. And that was really something to see all together. Well, the people will see it when the -- in that museum when they have it. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

So the outfit actually evolved over a period of time and it kept changing?

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

I remember that on that outfit you had a lot of pins and patches.

MR COVAGE:

Everywhere, because they were always getting ripped when I would go down trick riding on that horse and everything else. And then the one act, we had put this table out with the horse, and the table would put -- have this food on the table for the horse, and I would go out and give this stuff to -- the good -- I'd get special grain. I'd get it for him, and he used to like that. So, I would have him sit down, made him sit on thigh and feet, you know, sit down. And then I'd take the thing away from him, and he would chase me around until he got it back.

INTERVIEWER:

You spent a lot of years in the rodeo.

MR COVAGE:

Twenty-five years.

INTERVIEWER:

And during that time, Troopers came and went. They did a stint sometimes for a year, sometimes for three years, sometimes longer.

MR COVAGE:

Uh-huh.

INTERVIEWER:

How was your rapport with these people that were coming and going all the time?

MR COVAGE:

Well, it was really interesting, because I knew -- when a young fellow was coming in there, I didn't -- and I was -- I'd travel around the state with the dogs in different places, Pittsburgh and all over Philadelphia and different places. And so I would know the areas most of the time. And they'd say they were from Philadelphia or some other place, you know. I said, "Well, I remember your dad. Your dad was a good baseball player, wasn't he?" He said, "No, that was my uncle." He says, "That was my uncle." So, we'd kid along, you know. And so we would always -- because I'd know the area, and I'd say, "Where are you from?" And then they'd say, well, maybe Hazelton or some other area. And I said, "Oh, I remember. Your mother went to school with me." Different things. You probably remember some of those days.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm going to ask you a question that I already know the answer to, but I want you to tell us anyway. Was there any comradery among the rodeo team?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, definitely. Yes. We had to help one another. And you know, the setting of the whole situation, Bob, we used to stay in tents when we'd go out in the rodeo. In tents and colleges and even

different high schools that were closed for the summertime. But then, we got new guys on, and they didn't want to do this stuff. And they wanted to stay in those hotels, and that's probably what knocked the -- most of the thing out. It was costing more money and everything else and the situation. But we had more fun when we were staying in the hotel and in the -- not the hotels, the armories, different armories, like up in Wilkes Barre, the armory we stayed in up there. And I remember one night. Remember you -- do you remember Sergeant Dean? Sergeant Dean. And he was Major Martin's right-hand man. And the old man was laying down, and he got caught in the springs. He was -- because he just took a shower, and he was caught in the springs there that -- his leg was caught in the spring, and he was hollering for Dean, "Dean. Dean. Dean." So, Dean come over. He said, "They're trying to sabotage me." No, we had a lot of fun together in those old places. And it would've been going on, I guess, if they hadn't hit those hotels and everything else. It cost a lot of money.

INTERVIEWER:

Have you always considered yourself to be a funny person?

MR COVAGE:

Yes. I done the same thing in the Marines. Done more comedy stuff in the Marine Corps, too, and some -- took some awful chances.

INTERVIEWER:

Were you the class clown in grade school? This was just...

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

...part of your nature?

MR COVAGE:

No, no. They -- I had a buddy, too, and he passed away. He was 13 years old. And we used to -- excuse me. We used to always act up and different things. We'd go to see a movie or something, you know, and then come back and start acting up. And I still remember that buddy. And I think of a lot of times and how we used to act up. And this was always in my mind and we'd see these circuses and different things. And that's about it. I mean, I just wanted to do that, and I -- and it eliminated me from changing clothes all the time. That baggy outfit just saved me, for one thing.

INTERVIEWER:

So, that was just a natural progression for you to become a State Police clown in the rodeo?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yeah. Even when we were playing football and everything else. I'd come jumping out of that huddle. I was a center, and after the -- after you got the play, I'd come jumping out of that huddle, right over that ball. And then I played offense and defense. And I would give everybody a pat on the back, "Come on. Let's go get them good." So, it was really something. I enjoyed it from junior high school all the way up to high school. And then when I was -- went in the Marines, I was elected the captain of the team, and I had to get permission from my mother to join the Marines. And I had talked to the principal. I said, "My mother said I can't go in the Marines unless I get my high school diploma." "Oh," he said, "Charlie." He said, "See me tomorrow." He said, "We'll talk it over tomorrow." I said, "Okay." So, I asked him, and he said, "Well," he says, "are you determined to go in the Marines?" He said, "I'll see that your mother gets your diploma." I said, "Thanks a lot." When I got in the Marine Corps, I wish I never would've got that, but I went over there in all that stuff. I had a lot of fun in the Marine Corps. I done the same thing.

INTERVIEWER:

Were people still able to take you seriously when you weren't wearing the clown outfit?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yes. Yes, they did. And after, like out in Pittsburgh or something, after the show was over, they used to take me down to the children's hospital there and walk and talk around the kids and everything. And so -- and I remember one funny thing one time in Hershey. I was on the -- on guard, and they called me down to a house in Hershey, or some woman said somebody was in the house. So, I went down and I checked it out, and they couldn't find nobody. So, one of our guys come down, and he come down there. And I was standing there talking to this woman and her husband, and he almost -- he said -- well, he pulled his pistol out. He said, "Who is that guy, Charlie?" He said -- I said, "Joe, everything's okay." He said, "Well, I'm just checking him out to make sure that everything's okay." I was -- oh boy.

INTERVIEWER:

How was your family involved when you were in the rodeo? Did they come to the shows?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

On a regular basis?

MR COVAGE:

Yes, I had a lot of friends come. And even my whole old football team used to come up. Pottsville. We'd put it on up there. And they would come. And it's all over. They really enjoyed it. And it -- I'll tell you. The people really -- and after, they were coming over, you know, and things. It was great.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you decide where you were going to go? What locations for a specific summer?

MR COVAGE:

Each area, like Williamsport and Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and Villanova stadium when we had put that show on down there and different places. They had -- each one had a different year. And Wilkes Barre.

INTERVIEWER:

So, one summer, you may have been in the east. The next -- and the central the next, then the west?

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

Is that how it would rotate?

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Did your family travel to see you when you were, for example, out in the western part of the state? Did they come to see your shows?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, my wife would come out with our son. He was small at the time, and he'd come out there to Latrobe or Pittsburgh. We was training there at the same time out there. So...

INTERVIEWER:

How do you think your son felt about his dad being "Weary Willie"?

MR COVAGE:

He never said too much about it. He could -- he used to like to come and get in on that old car, though, and he really enjoyed it. No doubt about it. But he was just a little boy, and he just -- and a lot of kids we had in those -- that car, and we'd give them a ride every once in a while. And you know, the people that knew about that car and some of these Staties [ph] said, "Oh, we know how this all works with all -- by electric and motors and different things." But actually, it wasn't. When we needed more weight in the back, we put lead in the back, and then Rich was our mechanic, and he used to set that with all the fireworks on and everything. Then water would come out and then flames would come out and

everything. And we'd chase around that field there. It was good.

And all the fireworks on there.

INTERVIEWER:

So all the modifications to that Model T were actually done by States?

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

When you traveled around with the rodeo to the different locations, you would return there at least every three years.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Did you get to know people?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, yeah. Different...

INTERVIEWER:

(inaudible) people?

MR COVAGE:

Different people would come down and talk to us, yeah, and the -- we were up in Bucknell University, and we had done -- just done putting the show off, and this little boy come down there. Well, he

was a -- he come down. He must have been about 13 or 14 years old. He says, "Willie." He says, "My mother and father said you can come up and eat with us if you want to." It was really nice. I said, "No, but I have" -- I was too busy at the time, but I said, "Maybe some other time I'll go."

INTERVIEWER:

So, you actually befriended people from...

MR COVAGE:

Definitely. Yes. All over. Um-hum. And some of the people in the -- like, in the dining rooms that served (inaudible), they would come to see the show, and we'd go in and eat and everything else. They were very friendly.

INTERVIEWER:

You also mentioned that there was a move from the old State Police training school to the new academy, which you referred to as "the mansion".

MR COVAGE:

Definitely.

INTERVIEWER:

Did that impact the rodeo in any way?

MR COVAGE:

No, it didn't, because we brought the horses up, and it was really a nice place up there. But the other place was really home, because when you get used to a place like that and then you had all that stuff, and then they started cutting down the horses and everything else, so...

INTERVIEWER:

How difficult was it just to move the academy from Cocoa Avenue up to the...

MR COVAGE:

Oh, there was a lot of stuff to move, Bob, because you had all those saddles and everything else and all the stuff that we used in the rodeo, that old clown car and all the horse trucks and everything else. And so it was a big move.

INTERVIEWER:

Some of the equipment that was used back when you first started in the rodeo was far different than it is today. And as you come up the hill to the academy and we see some of the modern equipment that...

MR COVAGE:

Do you remember the old dog act when he would play dead, my old dog? He would play dead, and then they would have this little wagon come out, the ambulance, and you know, the other dogs

would bring it out, and they'd put him in that wagon, and then we'd take off. Well, what we did, we modernized the whole thing. What we did, we went over to Cumberland, and we got an old Army tank, not actually the tank, an extra gasoline tank, you know, they used to drop off when they had it. So, we cut that out and put a little motor in it and put wheels on it. And we modernized it. And I don't think -- I would get on the back with that dog, and he'd be sitting in there coming out of the ambulance, you know. And then we'd take off in the field and go.

INTERVIEWER:

So, as far as all the equipment and care for that, that was the responsibility of the academy's staff or those Troopers that came back for the rodeo each year?

MR COVAGE:

Oh, they would help out and everything. Sure. It -- that was -- it was really wonderful work with those fellows, too, because they stayed out. But then they -- but part of the thing, too, I guess, helped to cut it down, too, because some of the fellows were missing from their station because they were -- went to the rodeo. And then they would have trouble going back to the troops. They would sort of pick on them a little bit. "Hey, you had a nice summer for yourself."

INTERVIEWER:

And probably as responsibilities increased in the troops, it was more difficult to send...

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...Troopers to the rodeo.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah. Well, and then we used to perform up at the farm show, you know, the opening night at the farm show. And that was always something. We changed different acts and different things. And we had a -- we made a cannon. I don't know whether you remember that cannon. And we made this big -- out of a tank, one of the -- one of those tanks we cut down. And we put a guy in there, and then we'd -- had wheels on it and everything else. We'd push it up, and then we'd make believe we were going to all huddle around. "Let's get this. Let's shoot this cannon off." And then he said, "No, no, no, no. Don't put me in it. Don't put me in it." And then we have -- and then the guy -- we put him in there, and we had a cover on, and we had smoke come out of it and -- just like it fired. And we -- fireworks went off and boom. And then a guy come out on the other end all -- chasing down there with a whole

tore-up outfit there, like he was shot out of the cannon. And they enjoyed it. Then we had a driving act in there that you had that Road Hog and the Speedy and all the different things. And one guy was dressed like a woman, and he was crossing the road when the car almost hit him. And then he had this suitcase with him, and the suitcase opened up and all this -- and there was an old woman's girdle in there or something, and we start pulling it back and forth, back and forth. And then I flipped over, you know. And it was just a funny thing, like all this suitcase falling apart.

INTERVIEWER:

You also stated earlier that you love to see people laugh.

MR COVAGE:

I do. I always did. Yes. Yes. It makes me happy. And you -- when you have those kids up there and laugh and do different things, it's really -- it was -- I don't know. I guess I always had a way to go.

INTERVIEWER:

Somewhat contrary to what people would think of a State Trooper.

MR COVAGE:

Well, I was different then when I was on the road. I saved a few lives. Yes. And one time I was over at -- in fact, I was on patrol, and Jerry Catina [ph] was on the desk. And I was having supper,

and he says, "Charlie." He says, "Get over here fast. There's a guy over at -- by Stoverdale [ph], and there's a car there, and there's a guy in it, and his hose is going into the car." And I got in the car and went over, and I had a recruit with me and -- "Let's go over here real fast." I get over there, and I got the guy, and he was out. He was done. And I told him. I says, "Call the fire -- Hershey Fire Department." And he said, "They -- I can't get him here." I said, "Move out. Take the car up to the hill and get him." And I brought the guy out, and I kept on working on him, working on him, and working on him. And he finally came to. And I mean he was sick. So then, we took him down to doctor's, and he said, "Well, you saved his life." And another time, up in -- going up to State College, going up there in Millersburg, is Millersburg up there? It's right there. And this -- there was an accident, and there was a father with his -- trying to get his son. The son was pinned in the truck. A little boy was pinned in the truck and couldn't get out, and he was -- and there was a lot of people getting around smoking and everything else, you know. And that's -- and I was telling the kid that was working with me. I said, "Now, you get these people out of here. Get them out." And I got a crowbar and different

things and worked and got him out. And I got a citation from the Commissioner on that, too. I saved that boy.

INTERVIEWER:

You also stated that the Wyoming troop had horses.

MR COVAGE:

They did.

INTERVIEWER:

Was that a common thing for other areas in the state, other troops in the state to have horses?

MR COVAGE:

Well, they used to do that when they -- and Harrisburg used to have horses, too, at one time. And then we'd get them for the summer. They'd get them down. And Wyoming had their own high school act. The high school horses. And they would come down and join us for the summer. And they -- there were -- just joined up with them.

INTERVIEWER:

So the horses up in Wyoming, were they used for anything other than acts? Did they...

MR COVAGE:

Trick and then the -- actually in emergencies, too. Like when we go out to Erie, when the rubber company was having the strike, a

big strike, and they were having problems, and we had the horses in there to break up -- and to help Philadelphia. We were down there when they had problems and had the horses down there, and they used them, too. So -- and then they did come in for different acts, not just for joy. It was something good about the whole thing.

INTERVIEWER:

You said that you were at the Eisenhower inauguration.

MR COVAGE:

Definitely, yes.

INTERVIEWER:

Could you tell us about that?

MR COVAGE:

Yes, we had that Eisenhower, and actually, they had the one birthday for him in Hershey, too, and they had the -- up at the hotel, and we had guard for him. And down there -- and we were also on the Kennedy. We had our horses down there for his parade. And that was a cold day. I'll never forget that one. That was really cold. And I had a new horse. And I think half the way, I was on the sidewalk. Well, he was really something.

INTERVIEWER:

So for the inauguration of these two Presidents, they actually asked the State Police...

MR COVAGE:

We were -- we represented Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER:

Were there other states that also had a mounted detail there?

MR COVAGE:

Yes, there was. There were a few, but not as many horses as we had.

INTERVIEWER:

There was a case that the State Police was involved in, and for the longest time, there was a lot of photographs and things that were recovered from this case in one of the display cases in the academy, and they referred to this as "The Mountain Man".

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, that was the guy that kidnapped that little girl. Yeah, that -- they have his bicycle over there and different things. "The Bicycle Man" they used to call him. Yeah. And he was shot in Carlisle I think it was after -- they found him down in Carlisle, and they tried to -- he was shot.

INTERVIEWER:

Were the bloodhounds used in that case?

MR COVAGE:

No, we didn't have them.

INTERVIEWER:

You didn't have them?

MR COVAGE:

We didn't, no. We were going -- had to get rid of them before that happened.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay.

MR COVAGE:

Yeah, and that was up around on the -- along the highway, the turnpike. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

Charlie, we're here at the Historical Educational Memorial Center on the grounds of the State Police Academy, and we have discussed throughout this interview the infamous "bum suit". And that is now being displayed here in the Memorial Center in a case behind us. I'm sure that this bum suit brings back many memories.

MR COVAGE:

I can laugh about it.

INTERVIEWER:

Yes, you can. Probably nobody better to laugh about it than you, because you provided laughter for a lot of people. As you look at this, as you continue to refer to it as the bum suit, do you have any idea how many times you put that on?

MR COVAGE:

Bob, I couldn't count them, believe me. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER:

And of course, during that period of time, you often had to patch and repair. And that's very evident by looking at the suit as it's being displayed here now. Was there ever any major changes that you made to it?

MR COVAGE:

No, Bob, I just keep adding extra patches all over the place.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Now, you indicated that the pants were a size 50 waist from somebody that you had...

MR COVAGE:

Right.

INTERVIEWER:

...played football with. Were those the original that...

MR COVAGE:

That's the original.

INTERVIEWER:

Okay. Charlie, I'm sure I know the answer to this question, also, but I'll ask you. Looking back at your career, is there anything else that you would have rather done than be a member of the Pennsylvania State Police?

MR COVAGE:

No, Bob. I couldn't think of nothing better. Believe me. All those good years. We made a lot of people happy.

INTERVIEWER:

Charlie, it's been a pleasure to interview you. Thanks very much.

MR COVAGE:

Bob, believe me, thank you. You've done a wonderful job.

INTERVIEWER:

Take care.

MR COVAGE:

Thank you.