

Interview with Robert Pernaski- Lieutenant of Negaunee Post of Michigan State Police

MJR: This interview is Tuesday, no Monday, I'm sorry, Monday, February 13, 2006 with
RP: Lieutenant Robert Pernaski and Mary Rosten. We'll start from there.

MJR: Um, I'm investigating mostly on the K.I. Sawyer issue the new crime spree that's
happened in 2003 to 2005.

RP: umm hmm, umm, hmm...

MJR: and I'm trying to find where that actually, where the idea came from for some of the
population shift that occurred on K.I. Sawyer and I'm wondering if you were familiar
with anything, um, to do with the recruitment of "at risk" teens from downstate to be
relocated at K.I. Sawyer?

MJR: and do you have any information about them making any requests for that academy?
RP: No I did not

RP: No, no, that's again the first time I've heard about anything like that

MJR: You never heard of that, hey?

MJR: Does that come up in 1995 in some documentation, um to the Mining Journal, so we're

RP: No, no. trying to find out if the State Police was involved in that decision

MJR: Okay, I have some Mining Journal articles on it and I don't know where, or who was
involved in that discussion

MJR: or if it was just...they are kind of being very vague and... (interrupted)

RP: Oh, sure, sure..

RP: yeah, no I, that's the first time I heard it

MJR: so I'm trying to find that out, um and then also, were you familiar or do you have any
information on the discussions that were going on about putting up an academy? The
State Police academy, moving that to K.I during that time?

RP: (chuckle) yeah

RP: No, that's the first I've heard of that as well.

MJR: and do you have any idea if there was any joint effort of the Michigan State Police with

MJR: Okay, do you know anybody who would have been interested in that? Michigan

University?

RP: Ahh, as far as the academy goes?

RP: so, no, I think, the only thing I, I had any knowledge as far as an academy would be the

MJR: Right. regional academy. you know, the one that a city or county officer would go to. I
think for a while, they, it was actually housed there. Maybe that's what you're talking

RP: I, I have no idea...that's the first time I've heard any, anything like that.

MJR: Okay, and in the State Police, would there be any like, real reason to...the Police Academy,

they were trying to recruit a shift in location, or at least a joint Academy to have two

RP: No, not really no, cuz Lansing's our state capital and that's kinda the central location for
all, all state offices and headquarters, so I, I wouldn't think so, no.

RP: yeah

MJR: Okay. Do you know the percentage of State Police employees that are in the U.P., versus the state on a whole, in terms of numbers?

RP: I really don't, no, not off the top of my head.

MJR: Okay, um do you have any idea what your relationship is as the State Police to the Marquette County Criminal Justice Administration Association, called the MCCJAA?

RP: Yeah, I'm a member of that as Post Commander

MJR: Okay

RP: Yeah

MJR: and ah, do you have any information about them making any requests for that academy?

RP: No, no, that's again the first time I've heard about anything like that

MJR: Okay, that came up in 1993 in some documentation, um to the Mining Journal, so we're just trying to find out if the State Police was involved in that decision

RP: Yeah

MJR: or if it was just...they are kind of being very vague and...(interrupted)

RP: yeah, no I, that's the first time I heard it

MJR: yeah, well (laughs) we're finding a lot of first times...

RP: (laughs) yeah

MJR: um, do you have any idea if there was any joint effort of the Michigan State Police with the training academy that did end up going out to K.I. with Northern Michigan University?

RP: no, no, I think, the only thing I, I had any knowledge as far as an academy would be the local regional academy...you know, the one that a city or county officer would go to. I think for a while, they, it was actually housed out there. Maybe that's what your talking about.

MJR: There were two separate things, and one was the actual Michigan State Police Academy, they were trying to recruit a shift in location, or at least a joint Academy to have two different State Police Academies

RP: yeah

MJR: um, and then one kind of insinuated it was a county um member who insinuated that maybe the Michigan State Police would be willing to cooperate with the Northern Academy for local police forces, so we were just wondering, you know, what the communications..(interrupted)

RP: yeah, no, as far as the State Police Academy, that's the first I've heard of that

MJR: okay, um do you know of anything about the, um, the, ah, crime in terms of population...who it's mostly affecting out at the base, who the perpetrators mostly are; is it a youth-based crime or is it an overall crime shift?

RP: ah, I think it's overall. I don't think it's any particular age group. I really didn't study that part of it when I did my three year study there. It was mainly just raw numbers of complaints, raw numbers of, ah, arrests, raw numbers of basically incidents that we policed out there. And it's clear that there's an increase out there in the last three years and our post alone, I mean you could see it, it's very evident that the crime is on the increase out there. You know, it could be just some things like population. There's more people out there now. You would think with more population, you're automatically going to have more crime, but the problem we're running into here locally now, is the crime is going up out there, but our resources are going down, we're getting less and less officers. So therefore, what we've got left to work with, these, these guys are busy, I mean, they're, you know, they're out there everyday, almost, taking calls so...that type of thing.

MJR: Now, is there a change in the actual crime, or is it just the department that's handling it? Has, has the crime across the board gone up?

RP: Yeah, pretty much, pretty much. And total calls for service have gone up as well, so, but again, part of that's gonna be attributed by the, you know, having more population, but it certainly isn't automatic that it be that way. I mean, you've got places that increase in population all the time and it's not an automatic increase in crime. It's the type of people you have, you know, that type of thing.

MJR: Right. Did you at all, in your study, look at the overall U.P. increase in crime to see how K.I. reflects, and what the difference might be in that?

RP: No I sure didn't. All I did is I studied, like I said, the, the, sure numbers of complaints investigated, sure numbers of arrests made, um, it, it was basically just a quantitative thing. My bosses wanted me to demonstrate to them that, in order to put more resources down there, um, they wanted to see on paper that it was, was in fact an increase.

MJR: Okay. And were or any member of the State Police that you know of involved in the decision to um, change that way that that was handled? I know Forsyth lost some funding

RP: um hmm

MJR: and weren't able to keep up with the crime out there. Was there any discussion amongst the law enforcement executives, if you will, as far as that shift in service?

RP: Yeah...um, myself, the Sherriff, um then Chief Arsberger, he's on lay-off right now, ah, we had, we had discussed the issue down there that we need to get more recourses down there. The Sherriff's Department, unfortunately, lost some people through lay-off that they didn't anticipate getting them back, Forsyth as well because budget funding lost some people, they didn't, they didn't suspect that they were gonna be getting them back, so those kinda, the ??? was put on us as an agency to step up and that's what were trying to do right now with this mobilization of people.

MJR: okay, and is there any funds coming from the K.I. Sawyer Development that would be attributed to local agencies like the State Police or Forsyth Township for law enforcement of, once that reconversion process completes...

RP: Yeah, yeah, you would think so, but, no...no...basically we're just, we're gonna have to go out there with what recourses we already have locally here, mainly, mainly grabbing people out of our local posts, other officers out of other posts and, and we're gonna try to run like a little task force down there this summer.

MJR: okay, and is there any support on a political level, like from Jennifer Granholm's office, or, or that level to increase funding for law (interrupted)

RP: no, not really, um...there really wasn't any higher up, I guess, um...input, or whatever, it was just treated as kind of a local issue, my bosses said "show me the data, show me there's more crime, show me there's more complaints being taken down there and if you can demonstrate that on paper then we'll give you some help and until that's demonstrated we can't, you know there's nothing we can do for ya"

MJR: Right, and can you discuss at all the shifts in what type of crimes have increased, or, or was it more general in your studies?

RP: It's pretty much general, it's a little bit of everything. Um, it's not one particular crime, per se, it's a little bit of everything.

MJR: Okay, and has there been any public, um, response to this increase in crime on K.I. Sawyer? I mean have you been getting any pressure as a law enforcement agency from 'regular' citizens in reflecting that?

RP: no, not specifically, but I, I think a large number of people out there right now assume we're gonna do something about it just because we have ta, I mean that's, that's what we're charged with. So, specifically no, but I think, um, people are gonna start putting two and two together that, that we're gonna be doing something out there.

MJR: Okay, and recently I saw something on TV6, in regard to, um, this event and the shift in crime, and I'm wondering if, um, you, and I'm kind of just asking you for a hypothesis at this time

RP: um hmm..

MJR: a little theory, but I know as a resident of this area for a long time that the Michigan State Police has a good reputation, and I'll go on record with my bias because my husband's an officer, a sergeant in the State Police, but I know that the reputation has been one of confidence and I'm wondering if you're afraid at all, or have you discussed with anybody the, um, area of potential danger where that reputation can become tainted because of lack of funding in a situation like the K.I. conversion?

RP: oh, I don't know, um I, I think we, we can't rest on our reputation any day. I think we have to build on it and that means going out there and giving very best service and, and ah, dedication to the public that we can, it's an on-going thing and it needs to be tendered everyday and it's ah, I, I don't think something like this is gonna effect that, I think it could help our image if nothing else because we are doing something about it. We, we have recourses. We can draw, you know, troopers from other locations, ah, to do something like that. I think, I think it's only gonna help as far as, you know, general law enforcement, and ours specifically.

MJR: Okay, great. And the other thing I had wanted to discuss a little bit with you is the population of Marquette County, in terms of shifts in population and where, I know that the, the Negaunee Post is the only Michigan State Police post for the, um, Marquette County, but I know, also that you have experience in other areas of the U.P., and I'm wondering how population trends in the U.P. have been forming over the last 5 or so years in terms of where you've needed man-power in the State Police?

RP: Well, Sawyer is definitely an area. I, I mean the population has increased out there tremendously since 2000 even, um, there is no full time organized police force out there, so therefore we've been called out there a lot more than, than, we have in years past. Um, as far as population trends, the County's population went up a little bit over the last 10 years, think it was within about 2-3000 or something like that, but um, off the top of my head, as far as "hot spots" or problem areas, Sawyer's probably the place right now.

MJR: okay, and has there been any talk about creating K.I. Sawyer as it's own township, or is it really just a long term being permanently affixed to the Forsyth area?

RP: yeah, I, I haven't heard anything specifically, and it's actually encompasses three townships out there the community of Sawyer, and it would be a lot easier for us to track crime trends and stuff if the one were its own location er, jurisdiction, but unfortunately, you've got parts of three different townships out there, so, it makes it a little difficult. But, no, no I haven't heard any talk in that regard.

MJR: okay, and um, finally, just as a background, I just need to ask you a few questions of, um, how long you've been in law enforcement, and where you're from, and how long you've served in the position you're in right now.

RP: um, I've been in law enforcement with my prior police time, I was a local officer prior to getting into the State Police, I got 23 years in right now of doin this job. Ah, I've been a post commander for 6 years, ah been at the Negaunee Post for about a year, as the Post Commander, um, what else, what else did you ask me?

MJR: I was just going to...that's basically covers all of the areas... and do you believe that there's any area at K.I. that would need to be investigated futher for the State Police to execute your plans um, is there any specific area that you would like more information on?

RP: no, no, not really, because like I said, they just asked me a quantitative question... show me that there's more crime, show me that there's more incidents being taken out there' and I was able to do that fairly easily, so that's really all they're asking of me right now, so.

MJR: okay, well, thank you very much

RP: thank you, no problem.