

Some Further Memories of the Irish Land Boundary Patrol - George T Smith

1953 – 1956 Armagh & Aughnacloy

Uniforms:

I moved from DCO in the Longroom at London Airport to APO in the Baggage Hall there in December 1952. I was presented with a used uniform - trousers, blouse/jacket (Eisenhower style) and cap . Later I went up to London for measurement and fitting at a Merchant Navy tailors in the City/East End and shortly after received the full kit of a raincoat (which lasted me for over ten years), great coat (which I gave to a tug boat captain when I was working as a Landing Officer some years later) and the two styles of uniform and a cap of my own. The non-provision of shirts I took willingly unlike a long serving PO I met in Belfast. While training in driving in Belfast I had to do baggage inspection duties in the railway station there on Saturdays. The PO, who was normally on rummage duties – ‘The Black Gang’ - refused to buy white shirts but wore a paper collar and a clip on black tie, then tucked a white handkerchief under the collar and spread it across his chest under his uniform jacket! The end result looked Ok to a superficial inspection. At LAP we normally wore stiff white paper or plastic collars but on the Irish Land Boundary Patrol a high necked pullover was desirable in colder weather.

Cars:

Our first cars, the Austin 16, were rather obvious as they had mainland UK registrations typically MLM 332 though the CPO's car, a Austin Hereford, was OZ 6807. They were considered fast but the fastest I recall was a pursuit at just over 80 mph northbound on the main Newry to Belfast highway.

The opposition, the smugglers, tended to more exotic stuff like a Wolsely 6/80 with a US Ford V8 stuffed under its bonnet or some other souped-up formula. One local smuggler teased us with a Citroen Light 15 whose front wheel drive and independent suspension gave it legs on twisting lanes.

Mobile Terms:

One attraction to the LBP units was the wide availability of ‘Mobile Terms’ or guaranteed overtime. This often meant split shifts or a call out. I recollect being called from bed late one night when an APO at Aughnacloy was shot by an IRA man in Favour Royal Forest and later, more awkwardly, from home where I had carefully dressed myself in evening dress for a local ball. I arrived at the scene of a search in Blackwatertown shoes shined, hair glossy and combed only to find myself pursuing a woman shopkeeper with an apron full of cigarette packages which she threw over the parapet of a river bridge. I ended up on the bank of the river dressed like some early James Bond recovering some evidence from the river yet somehow managed to attend the ball looking cool an hour or so later.