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Borr, Burton (Budd) Oral History Interview: History of Law Enforcement in Holland

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Oral History Project 2002
Joint Archives of Holland
Holland Police

Interviewee:
Burton "Budd" Borr
(Edited)

Conducted by:
Matthew Nickel
20 June 2002

ABSTRACT: (Topics Appear in similar order of Transcript)

How Borr became an officer, family, Officer Responsibilities (Alley Beat, Motorcycles, Car), Crime and Violations (Traffic), Problem People, Drowning story, Car Accident Story, Holland and Change, Changes in Police Methods, Chief VanHoff, Station Location, Detective Bureau, Difficulties of people, Giving neighborhood kids a ride on the police motorcycle, Church Robberies, Training, Story of a domestic call, Officer Relationships, Promotion Test, Diversity, Family and the job, Interaction with the Community, VanHoff and policy, Traffic Patrol, Challenges, Rewards, Story of Letting Kids into Football games, Prince Bernard, Shooting Tournaments and Target Practice, Neil Plagenoef, Canine Unit, Reports and Documentation, Aims of an Officer, Car Accident, Polygraph Machine, Alley Beat story.

Oral History Interview
Holland Police
Interviewee: Burton Borr
Interviewer: Matthew Nickel
20 June 2002

Interview took place at the Borr home on their back screen porch

MN My first question is, are you a native Hollander?

BB I lived in Holland all my life. Born and raised in Holland.

MN When did you join the force then?

BB I started July the 7th, the 7th day of '49. 7/7/49. Prior to that I had some time in the volunteer fire department too. The city fire department.

MN How old were you then?

BB When I started at the police department I think I was 19. But, I had to, see I originally was always going to join the Michigan State Police but I couldn't get in because you had to be 21. So, same thing here at the Holland Police, you had to be 21 there also. So I started in the maintenance painting the streets and putting up stop signs and put up barricades and things like that, but I had to do that because I was not 21 years old. Couldn't make out legal papers.

MN So when you were on the force, when you joined, were you younger than most of the officers?

BB Oh yeah, because you had to be at least 21. That is how I could join in there, we did everything right out of the police station. We put up the signs, we painted the intersections, things like that.

MN Was there anything in particular that you, that inspired you or any interest that made you want to become a police officer?

BB I don't know. I always felt good to me. For some reason or another, I can't really tell you what drove me to that, but I did always want to do that type of work.

MN Did you have a mentor along the way?

BB Well, not really. I had an uncle on the police force 15 years before that or something, but I never knew much about that. That's what I always wanted to do.

MN When did you get married?

BB (To Mrs. Borr in living room) Hon, when did we get married?

MB '55

BB September 7th of '55. I wasn't married when I started working there.

MN Do you have children?

BB Yes. Two sons. They are each married and then they each have two children too. One lives around the corner by me (points West) and other one lives right over, just on Alden Court, (points East) right close by. It is kind of nice that they live right close by us.

MN What kind of responsibilities did you have, you said you started out in maintenance, there was paperwork and things, when you started as an officer, what were your duties and responsibilities?

BB Well, in those days, everybody started out checking the alley doors. In back of the stores. You usually started at 8 o'clock at night, till about 4 in the morning I think. You worked that until somebody advanced or somebody moved, but there was a regular routine there years ago. You started out in the alleys and you are in plain clothes. Checking doors, back doors, and stuff like that right in the downtown area. Then you finally move to the front doors, you check the front

doors something like four to midnight. And that is what you did downtown. You rotated around downtown, checking doors and you were downtown all the time walking.

MN Was that only downtown?

BB Yes. You'd sit there and walk in the snow, rain, if it is blowing and you see these guys ride by in the police car and you think 'gee you think I would ever work here long enough to do that' I used to say to yourself.

MB (Mrs. Borr brings beverages and snacks) If you want water or if you want pop...

MN Thank you. [Pause] So as you progressed and got promoted did, how did your responsibilities change?

BB Then you rode a motorcycle, many summers. You worked usually 7 till 3 in the afternoon. Then you would rotate in the wintertime, by rotating that with another fellow and he would work 7 to 3 and I would work 3 to 11. We would rotate that two weeks at a time on one shift and then two weeks on the other shift. Finally, I might be getting it confused, I think we start working on different shifts, like platoon system. Were you worked for one sergeant and he was the sergeant of the particular group that you worked with. When I say group, I mean maybe we only had one or two guys working four to midnight. I remember we only had one car, one man out in the car and he worked four to midnight. We did that for years, four to midnight, one car. Then I would be walking downtown and then at a certain time at night another guy would come and start working, it would be maybe I don't know if it was 10 or 11 o'clock at night. Then he would, they would have two cars for just a short time, but there weren't many cars. I think we

only had a total of three cars in the whole department. We had three cars and two motorcycles. That is all there was. When we walked on those beats, you didn't have a radio with you; they didn't have them when I started. Then finally they bought a portable radio and that came out and I will tell you that that thing was just heavy. Quite heavy, you didn't want to carry that thing around all night. And, even on the motorcycles, when I rode a motorcycle, they did not have radios on there either. They had lights in about three or four different points in town. Red lights. And you could turn that on at the police station, snap that on, and you could, when you see that light when you are riding around town and of course the town was a smaller size then too as well. And then you could see that they wanted you to call in. So you find a gas station and you go down there and call the station to see what they want. Well, if there was an accident or they needed someone else, that is how you found out.

MN So what types of crimes were committed back then or violations?

BB I think the main thing there was traffic in my day. Mostly accidents, and once in a while you would have a house broken into, or a building broken into. But very seldom. You could leave a bicycle on Eighth Street and it would be there for a week, regardless if it was a brand new one. It would be there for a week. The only reason, if I would be walking on the beat, I'd see it sit there for a few days and I would probably take it and ride it down to the police station and put it the garage there and tag it and wait for somebody, till the owner reported it missing, or some kid probably stole it from someplace and left it downtown see? Then he walked home or something like that. But otherwise, you could leave a bicycle

there for many many days before somebody would take it or, stealing wasn't a very big problem. It was kind of nice that way too, because usually you could catch some person doing something wrong, you could handle it right there on the street, either you are going to arrest them, or you are going to let them go and you didn't want to see them here again. That took care of it. You took care of the situation yourself. Unless it was bad enough.

MN Were there any particular individuals or groups of people who were generally responsible for problems in town?

BB No. Racial was not an issue. Not what so ever. You would have certain ones--guys that would drink a lot. Heavy drinkers and they would, and certain people would, I remember one time we had one guy who was as strong as an ox, he was just built like a bull almost, he was strong and boy if he hit you with that fist, I mean, you had [puts fist down on table], so there would be two of us to grab him on each arm at the same time and this guy would just life us right off the ground. You would think oh, don't let go, don't you either, you know what was going to happen, he would go right in and smash you. Basically that was only drunks. Not an awful lot of fighting either. It seemed like the bars in town, if somebody had too much to drink, I have seen the bartender's call the cab and set him in the cab, and pay him and send him home. People just took care of it for themselves they watched each other. But that was pretty much about it, once in a while you have a drowning.

I remember one time we had a flat bottom rowboat and somebody had drowned near the power plant, so we put this boat in there near the windmill island, we had

Windmill Park there on River avenue. The time we got to the area were we had to go; we had to get out of the boat because it was sinking. It was a wood boat and it just sat in the garage when weren't using it and it just dried right out, and we put that thing in the water and we weren't twenty feet away from the dock and we could see the water pouring in and I said, we got to quick row back to shore and get out of that thing, because it was sinking. [Laughter] Finally we complained about it, and they bought us an aluminum boat, which was a much better setup because that didn't rot or you know. [Laughter] I'll never forget that. But you know, I was just talking about drowning here. I can recall a couple of incidents where one little boy, one little Spanish boy was swimming back of the Windmill Island, on the river back in there. Windmill Island wasn't there, but the river was there. And he had drowned and his father was there and we were dragging and dragging, at that time we had long ropes with great big hooks on it. I don't know if you have ever seen one but there is a rod, and then great big hooks, and we were dragging through there and dragging through, and I bet it was hours we'd been dragging for him because we knew where about he was last seen. And finally his father said he might be going home, he says, "Call me when you find him." Sure will. And you know to this day, who hooked him but me. I just felt terrible. I have never forgotten that. I bet that was thirty years ago. And about a week after that, a little kid got hit by a car on Washington avenue and he was laying along side the curb, I just went up to him and there was blood coming out of his mouth, we called the ambulance and stuff like that, but he just went, he died right there in my hands. And that's a week later than when the other thing

happened. I felt so bad. To this day I cannot get over that. It is sad when it happens. From then on I almost, if I found out it was a little kid, hurt in an accident or something, I could not go. Send somebody else, I can't do it. I guess I just couldn't take it. Sometimes you have to do some things you don't want to do but it has to be done I guess. I am sorry, it seems like everytime I think...
[Pause]

MN What did you remember Holland being like?

BB Holland, years ago was a real nice city I thought. You could go away and didn't need to lock your doors, didn't have to worry about anybody breaking in to them, into your house, I guess very seldom somebody would break into it. Just, people were more kind than they are now. It is hard to figure out, it is hard to say...

MN How do you think Holland has changed from the time you were an officer to present?

BB You know, I think now a days it seems like... if you arrest somebody or catch somebody or something like that, it isn't a question anymore of if you did it or not, it is 'how can I get out of it?' And I have seen that attitude more and more. And I don't think that is a good way of thinking about it. We were always taught to tell the truth regardless of how bad it is and get it over with and take your medicine. I have a thing here someplace. [Starts looking through photos / papers] I remember we had, we started that, oh what was that, the downtown Civic Center. We would have, rent a little space, merchants would set up booths in there and things like this And I know I printed up these things to pass out just so people would know what we were doing. And look at here Assaults, 1956 I

tabulated Assaults: 9, I'd like to know what it is today. See drunkenness, you have like 24, it has really changed now. And like the accident calls, this is just for the period of the year. Auto theft: 4, 1. Of course they have joyriding and all the different classifications of theft.

[Tape Stopped while looking at pictures]

BB If we found a door open we would call the owner and have someone lock it up.

MN How long were you on the force?

BB Just about 40 years. I got some credit for I think a month. Actually they were thirty nine years and then I got two years credit while I was in the fire department, so I got two months credit for some of that time, which amounted, ended up, I worked for the city for 40 years. A lot of changes!

MN How did policing change, maybe methods of policing?

BB Well, like DNA, we used fingerprints all the time then, and that helped on some cases, but I think DNA is really a wonderful thing. They can go back years and years and years with it. Give blood, mold samples and stuff like that. That, it changed with the equipment too. We started with radar that just came out and I am trying to remember just what year that was, when we got the radar even. That would help in the high-speed areas and stuff like this where you have a lot of accidents. That's what our intent always was to work in the areas where we have a lot of accidents, sometimes it is a little difficult to set that unit up there, but even before that we had hoses across the street. And there was a connection, so many feet apart, put them across the street and then there was a timer on there and the car would hit that first hose and by the time they hit the second one it would shut

the timer off. That indicated to the speed of the car. You don't see that anymore. And training is tops, in Holland. You have to have qualifications now; they have schools for that now.

MN So you were an officer under Van Hoff, right?

BB Yes.

MN What was he like as a chief, as an officer?

BB Mostly, his big concern was traffic. He stressed that and that was a big thing at that time, see, as the department grew, it slowly got bigger. He was a nice guy. He was the type of guy who always wanted to have his fingers on everything. And when you get that big you can't do that. When you are getting bigger, you have to delegate some authority out to different people, because you have to. You got to have some authority; somebody has to have some other authority otherwise what are going to do? That is where you have your chain of commands come in. I don't think I have any pictures of him but let me see. ... We were just one little building. You probably never saw it.

MN No. Where was it located?

BB Right there, right where the current one is. Right across from the Sentinel. And then we used to go to a lot of schools, so we were always being sent to different training sessions and schools. ... We would go to pistol shoots. They were always held in Jackson. There were 70 shooters all lined up in a row. Oh there would be hundreds of guys there.

We used to sit out on the highway there all night long, stopping cars from coming in with the snow coming in on them and blowing. It used to be cold. I

remember one time we had some guy's walk in the police station who had knives stuck in their sock. Shortly after we collected them we started checking real close. ... The insurance company bought us our first camera. I was on the Tulip Time Board, I think for 17 years. We were Grand Marshals for Tulip Time, we were on the Tulip Time Board. I was a permanent member on that. ... I was talking about motorcycles, finally, they kept calling and calling and calling, but they didn't see one of the red lights, and there were three of them on in the city. Then finally they bought this motorcycle and they put a radio on it... much better equipment too.

BB Where are you from?

MN I am from the east side of the state, Grosse Pointe, Michigan. East of Detroit.

BB I was in charge of the detective bureau for, a quite a few years. I remember I used to go to the chief here and say we have so many complaints to follow up with, we need some help. Then we pull some guy off the patrol and put him with us too. And what was I saying?

MN The detective bureau, getting really busy.

BB Oh, then Lindstrom finally says to me one day, right after I quit. "Do you remember when you used to come into the office and say you need more help? Would you believe that we are twice as busy now as you were." There is a lot more activity going on. Not like it used to be.

MN Were there any unusual learning experiences, 40 years on the force, was there anything that was really unusual that you learned from?

BB I think, well I don't know if it is that big of a thing, but I do appreciate when someone tells the truth right off the bat, rather than sometimes... We had some assault cases, women assaulted. Picked up and assaulted and then it is hard to determine because you wanted to take them for face value and that just did not happen, and then a long time, a few months later it comes out that it did happen. So if it is bad enough that somebody reports that it happened then you have to determine well is it true or not? That kind of puts you in a bad position sometimes because you want to believe them, but because we had some that turn out that it is not true. I think I was working there at a good time because we hardly had any major things. I mean we had some, my wife found them because we had these at a party, my retirement party [shows posters with blown up news articles and photos]. We built a pistol range, built one north of town and all us guys, we all pitched in and worked on that thing. That was out big thing down there. Of course it used to be years ago, I took, I would always stop at home at noon to eat and then I would have a whole bunch of the neighbor kids by the motorcycle, they were just fascinated by that. "Can I get a ride?" That was the next thing. I used to put them in front of me and take them to the corner and back, but now a days you would never do that, things were easier back then, but I remember one day in the morning and we had eight churches robbed, they broke into safes. That was a big thing. They got caught on their way to Chicago. After those guys got done knocking off safes, we felt that the safe was only to keep the honest people out. Boy they could punch them things open and break into them just like nothing, and then I remember we went around to all the Churches

because they would collect Sunday night and put the money in the safe. Now I think they finally learned to put it in the bank. Put it in the bank and count it some other time, let the bank count them. So you learn by trial and error on some of this stuff.

MN What kinds of training did officers receive?

BB Well, the very first night that I worked with another guy, that was about his first night too. The very first one, we went to a family fight. Talk about comical thing. You didn't go to school. You learned by the guy along side of you. You learn by experience. We would go into this family fight. It was just terrible, I mean I just could not believe that this occurred. It was this guy abusing, who was drunk and his wife cooked a big pot of chili and he took that chili and he threw it all around the whole kitchen, it was just around the whole walls, and the little kids they were all crying and everything. The wife says take him along, get him out of here, I don't want him here. We ended up arresting him out of his house. We took him down to the police station, we told this one guy, our Boss, what we did, and he says you can't do that. So we picked him up and took him back home. Says can't do that, got to take him back. And the guy, I think it was about 20 minutes later, the guy called the police station, begged the sergeant "Please, please let me sleep here anyway tonight." And we go back there and get him and put him in one of the cell blocks and the door is all open and he slept through the whole night, he thanked us the next day for letting him sleep there and that was the end of it. That was our first arrest. What a catastrophe. We didn't know any different and that was our first night out and after that you learn real quick

because you know you can't do that. In those days we had a, I went to a situation, where a woman's eyes were half hanging out of her head. Just a terrible terrible beating. The guy just about killed her. And we went to, took her to the hospital of course and the next day they kept her and the next morning we wanted her to sign a complaint, and she would not do it. Here he just about killed her. You can't believe it. I had never seen eyeballs hanging out of somebody's head like that. Now a days they do something like that and you have reason to believe they did it you can arrest them, but it has to be committed in their presence at that time. It is a misdemeanor if the guy just used his fist or hit somebody or something like that. So if a misdemeanor is not committed in your presence, and it was not committed in our presence so we could not do anything about it. She wouldn't complain, and I thought I should worry about it then? So I wonder how many more times she got beat up after that? But that's, it seems that some people like that I guess. We have then already locked them up and the next morning they are there and they want them let out. They beg you all night long to arrest them and take them along, and the next day they want them out of the jail, they just wanted to bring them that night see.

MN It seems like crime has changed.

BB A lot of different incidents, many different incidents that you can't talk about, but once in a while it comes back. I am glad I am out of it now.

MN What kind of relationships were built between officers back then? Were there a lot of friendships made?

BB Yes. You'd have get togethers with them and their wives and kids and picnics and things like that.

MN Sounds like some good times.

BB Yes, it was. Most of them lived in town, you knew them all their life and you know their wife and their kids, some of them would have trouble with their kids, and they, I remember that one guy, his son was kind of a, was on the move always. With girls. But he used to call me in, he says "Bud, talk to my kid, he won't listen to me, but he will listen to you." And I think that was a typical thing sometimes. But we always had nice people, everybody respected most everybody else's thinking. Now everything was, it was not 100% promotion in those days, but most of it was a lot with seniority, but now you take your test with everybody else, it used to be, I don't know what it is today, but it used to be that you had to take them once a year, you had to take the test. If you are after a certain job, you had to request that then you had to take the examine, and maybe the top two or three would get those.

MN Did that test just cover laws?

BB Everything. We'd have a book of policies and procedures and I bet that thing was that thick [Indicates width with hands]. I used to go on vacation and I would sit there and study that book because I knew that test was going to come up. If you wanted an advancement, you had to take it.

MN What was the Holland population like back then? Were there different ethnicities; was it mostly the Dutch community still?

BB I think it was more Dutch. You know I went to school with a kid who was Indian. We never thought of him as an Indian. We never even thought of it, so what. So he's an Indian, who cares? We'd play with him just like everybody else. I don't know about schools now, but I am sure it is a big concern, then we hired some Spanish guys on there, and you get a fellow like Abe Perales here. Good guy, nice guy. You wouldn't offend him in any way, manner or what. I didn't know many of them.

MN What was the job like on the family? Was it a difficult job to have having a family?

BB It is. Because we had three shifts basically. I always figured my wife raised our kids, our two boys, because that was either two thirds of the time I was working. I was either sleeping or working or just a short time off. You rotated them like seven in the morning till three in the afternoon, or three till eleven or eleven to seven. So if you are on one of them shifts you got to sleep. If you are on the midnight to 8 shift, you have got to sleep during the day, or which is quite hard to do, especially with little kids. They and the neighbor kids were playing in the yard. It is hard to rotate. They do things a little different now, I think they do it longer period of times I think. We had to do it every two weeks I think. Very hard to get used to. And everybody did it, you couldn't complain. If you didn't like it then you better quit. I guess so! [Laughter] Not much of a choice in what you wanted to do, that way or no way. It is hard, especially in the summer time when the windows are open, but knew we used to have a fan in the window and

that kind of helped and then I bought an air conditioner in the window and that kind of drowned out the noise. But it is very hard. It is not easy.

MN Was there a lot of interaction between officers and the community members, the citizens in the '50s?

BB I think that everybody knew about everybody. I think that is true, because it was a smaller town, and you knew just about everybody, I had a woman and we went to her school graduation thing last night, and some little old lady came up to me and she says "You gave me my road test." We used to give the driver's licenses there at the police station and I gave her the road test and she says, "Oh was I scared. I was so nervous." And she says you made me park right in front of the police station, and that was the parking stall right there to get in and out of. I didn't remember who that was; I did so many of them. Some people I remember, I remember Ike DeKraker, he gave a road test one time and he called in and he said the driver keeled over and died in the road test, I don't know if he was nervous or what but he died right while getting the test, on Washington avenue he died. I never forgot that. Maybe he had heart trouble or something too. We used to give all of our driver licenses, road tests, everything, written tests right there. We used to do a lot more things than what they do now in regards to that.

MN Did police officers have any sort of special role in the community other than enforcing the law do you think?

BB Sometimes I think years ago you were more thought of. You were expected to be not better than anybody else, but you had to set examples I think. Because you are smaller and everybody knows you. I know Van Hoff; he was more strict on a

lot of the little things. Now a days, you are all protected by the union and if some incident happens while you are not working you can't do anything about. The good I guess depends on what it is, but years ago you had to watch yourself, you had to set good examples, which is true it should be.

MN I am curious about Van Hoff, did he have any particular sayings or inspirational little quotes he used to tell you guys or anything like that?

BB Oh yes. He was, like I said, all traffic, he was traffic minded. Boy if you didn't give a few tickets out now and then he would say what's the matter. He'd call you in what is the problem? You have got to ride around there for eight hours and you don't see a violation. Well, he had a point there, but how technical do you want to get? So some guy makes a bad turn or something like this. He had a good policy though, if you had not had a ticket in the last twelve months for speeding or stop sign or something, he could give you, a warning ticket. He would give you a written ticket and you had to take it down to the police station and he would check your record and if you had not had a ticket in the last twelve months it would be a warning and a lot of people never get a ticket and I always thought that was a good thing. They'd appreciated it and never forgot it, but he was really particular about that. We used to joke about, we'd say "A ticket a day, keep Van Hoff away" and we kind of maybe raised it up to "two a day is the Van Hoff way." But he still wanted to keep the quality of the ticket there, but I can tell you I can go in my car and I can see violations just like nothing, but until you ride around on a motorcycle or in a police car or something like this, with the red lights and all this stuff on, people spot you a lot quicker and sometimes it is hard

to get somebody speeding, it is difficult. It happens, I am sure, I see it now when I am in my own car.

MN Did you ever know about, I don't know if you would be too young to remember when Van Hoff became chief?

BB No. I know he was there. He was a good guy, he tried hard.

MN You talked about handing out tickets every once in a while, were there any other expectations of the officer on duty?

BB I can't think of anything. You were expected to do your job, go out there, you had to ride like on a motorcycle, and I am telling you if you ever rode a motorcycle, it is different if you are riding it for fun than if you are riding it because you are working, because you are always under traffic. I don't know if you ever have tried to catch somebody on a motorcycle, but you have to be very very careful because all of a sudden people spot you behind them and they think you are going to stop them and they stop and you come like two inches from the bumper because you can't stop like they can. Dangerous. I am glad they don't use many motorcycles anymore. A lot safer. If you needed, if you go to an accident and you need some equipment down there or something you can't carry it on the bike, on the motorcycle and you always had to call a car to come down and bring some stuff down there for you. Tapes and stuff like that. They always claimed it was a psychological effect, you can put a plain motorcycle on 8th and River and people see that, it's a radial effect, it gets so many people to see that and are aware of that and are careful in that area. They know if you are around there. You could just sit there and not even be on it and I think certain people

would see it. [Pause] There were some good guys on there; I miss them, to this day. But that is the way time goes on I guess.

MN Do you think that perhaps police officers were seen differently by the community?

BB I kind of almost think so. I think you were a little more respected.

MN What did you find challenging about working for the Holland Police?

BB Well, when I was, depends on what period of time you are talking about. I think a lot of times people feel [End Tape 1] Well, I'd gone to an accident and this lady had her car dinged up a little bit and she was crying and crying 'my husband is going to kill me, he was going to kill me when he sees this car' and you say to her, "it isn't so bad, after you could have ended up in the hospital, they are making fenders every day." And this lady has never forgotten that I said that. She says, "You took a lot of pressure off me when you made that statement." Little things like this, it comes back, like this lady last night she said you took me on my first road test, she said "that was really quite something." I don't know much about that, but I am sure you make a lot of impressions on certain people over the years. Kids, kids always look up to you.

MN So there were a lot of rewards too?

BB I remember we always had to work the football games at Riverview Park and there was a certain side of this fence I had to watch, there would be about four or five of us in certain sections and there were always a bunch of kids waiting to crawl in, sneak in, and I said to them, just wait a little while, pretty soon I will go take a walk to the other end, get in there I said, get in there quick, but behave yourselves. And of course my boss, not Van Hoff, but one of the guys who was

in charge of you. I got called on the carpet for that, "You let them kids in there and you did that on purpose." So the chief calls me in and he says, "Buddy, what did you do, let a bunch of kids climb over the fence and get in there?" I said well, yes, yes. But I said, "Wouldn't you rather have them inside the football game than going through the cars in the parking lot." "Yes he said, that makes good sense... try to not let so many of them in there next time." [Laughter] So I am sure some of these kids know that it was me and I knew them too, but isn't that true?

MN Yes, it is.

BB Isn't it better off letting them inside there to play inside there than going through your cars or something. So... you win some and you lose some.

MN Are there any particular big events that you remember from you days as an officer?

BB Well, one time we had, I don't think we have a picture of that, there is one someplace, I had to pick up Prince Bernard from the Netherlands, he flew in to Muskegon and I had to go pick him up. He says to me, all these people as were were coming home through Grand Haven all these people were waving flags and waving to him and they knew we were coming through, all waiting for him to come by. All he said [in Dutch accent] "I'll be damned, I'll be damned, they are all waving for me?" I said "yes!" He was a little surprised that they knew that was him. Well, then finally we had to take him to the Windmill Island and then Hope College and he had a briefcase with him and he says to me, "officer, don't let anybody take this thing, watch it." Yup, just set it in the car right there and I

will stay by the car. And when it was all done he finally said "You are probably wondering what was in this that is so important" there he had about six of them pipes and a bunch of tobacco, he didn't want anybody to steal his pipes and tobacco. [To Mrs. Borr] I was telling him about Prince Bernhard

MB Oh yeah, [in Dutch accent] I'll be damned! Is it too warm in here?

BB No, it's pretty good. Thank you. Nice guy. He was a real common everyday guy.

MN Were there any kinds of controversies with the police?

BB What do you mean?

MN Were there ever any kinds of disagreements, where the community felt one way or another, that the police had not right on something?

BB I can't really think of anything, no. I am sure there was, I just can't think of anything.

MN Probably smaller things than big things.

BB Yes. Nothing comes to mind right now.

MN What was it like going to shooting competitions, I understand you guys were pretty good shots?

BB We were different classes. Like Detroit would shoot against the state police, it went by department size. I think we were in Class C. Somebody was always one or two. We were always one or two in the class. I remember the first time, the first gun when I was hired they gave me. An old .38 colt special. And the sight on that, the front sight was crooked. That is a fact. I would sit there and I got so I would tilt that thing like this [demonstrates how he would hold the gun]. That

was a fact, it was an iron sight permanently like that. I had to shoot that thing like this. We shot against the power plant on 6th street. Out by the old one. There was a board of public works out where the ball diamond sits. I would go with him [points to picture] he was a nice guy, very kind. And I couldn't even, we had a target about this big [shows size] I couldn't even hit the thing. I said the sight on this thing is crooked. He says try mine. I tried his I still couldn't hit it. [Laughter] He says you got to squeeze the trigger, finally I hit a couple of spots on the board. He says, "Just keep it up, when you go home, just practice it. Take your shells out and just learn to squeeze the trigger." He was always a kind guy.

MN What was his name again?

BB Neil Plagenoef. And finally after a while we would go the next week and he would make me hit the thing three or four times. "You are getting better" we had to shoot a certain amount. Finally it all came in there. Then we finally had to get new guns and they must have been World War I or older caliber things though, I couldn't hit the broadside of a barn. But he was always our night captain. And in the old police station we had a big counter when people walked in the front door and he was always quite bald, hardly had any hair, just a little bit and some guy came in there one time and started saying to Neil, now he is a very fine guy, I mean he'd say, this guy started giving him a hard time and says "you bald headed so and so" and Neil, he leaned right over the counter and he got arms on him like this and lifts him up like this and he says "Now I am going to give you about two minutes to get out of here, less than that if you don't hurry" and out he went. But a very nice guy. He would, we'd pick somebody up for maybe drunk driving and

we had to take them before him, "What do you think Neil?" And we had to give them a test. Walk forward and so forth. And he would always say "lock him up or take him home" and in them days we didn't have a breathalyzer test. Either that or finally they got some chemist who would take a blood test. Years later, otherwise we never had anything but our test, put your finger on you forehead and stand on one foot, and he made that judgement. Take him home, It had to be bad before he would say lock him up. [Laughter] One or the other, a good guy. Easy going, but he could get mad if you rubbed him too hard. Nice guy. He was in a nursing home in Plainwell for a few years and then we had a platoon party and we invited him. And another guy and I went to Plainwell and picked him up and we knew he had a daughter here in town and we asked her if that was alright and she says "oh yeah, I think he'd like that." And we got there about four o'clock and the nurse said to us, he has been sitting in that chair waiting for you guys all day, he was so anxious and so waiting, he had tears in his eyes.

MN Oh that is so great.

BB So we had a little hamburger fry out at the FOP. But of course he died shortly after that, nice guy. Met a lot of nice guys over the years and from different departments that you know, from Muskegon and Zeeland and the Sheriff department. I always thought, if I didn't do any good that day, I did something good for him because, and then we took him to his daughter afterwards and then he stayed there all night, but the nurse says he has been sitting there waiting for you guys all day. He said "I got to be ready, I got to be ready." He knew we were coming till about four or after, but he was there all day sitting there waiting

for us guys. We had a retirement party in the day, I see that another guy is retiring, Chuck Caulkins, and we just had one with Earl Scholl, "Doc" Scholl, and man there are a lot of old retiring guys there. Good turnout. It felt nice to see each other again because we had not seen each other in a long time.

MN Did you ever remember, I knew they have a canine unit now, but do you remember having a canine unit back then?

BB Yes. Two of them. Two dogs. This guy here had one, Russ Hopkins had one and Bob Ryzanca had one. And Ryzanca had a mean one, his was meaner. I didn't even dare get near him. That one you would pet, but you didn't want to make a habit of going up to him. I know that Ryzanca's dog he had him in the fence in the back of his yard and then he says, one night, Neil was there, Neil was a dog lover. He always had Beagle hounds. But then we had these two German Shepherds. Then one of Ryzanca's you didn't even want to get in the same room with him. He says watch out Neil he says, "oh he bit me" and he had him in this fence back by his house there and he says "don't go over there he just grabbed me, watch out." Neil says, "let him go, let the dog come up." "No Neil he says, don't do it, the dog is going to bite you" "No he won't, no he won't." And I tell you, this guy always had dogs, smelled like a dog, he took out his knife, jackknife and he looks in that dogs ears and he says he has got ticks in his ears, cause they get them from the south I guess. And they get that, and he took out his knife and cuts that tick right out of that dog's ear. And I was sitting there, "oh that dog is going to nail you" and that dog sat right there and he says you got another one too, and "we'll take that one off too" he sits there with that jackknife and he takes

them, and that dog never did a thing. And I swear if I had gotten near him he would have taken my arm off that dog was so mean. You put them in that car, in that station wagon and I am telling you and he'd growl. In some way it was nice cause then we would find a, I remember we found a garage open and it used to be right here up on Washington avenue, he would announce, "Anybody in here come out now because I am going to let this canine dog loose in here. He'd let that dog run around in there and he'd sniff it all up, and I am sure if anybody was in there he would nail them. I was always scared of dogs anyway, any dog complaint we'd have. People would go away for like a day or something and these dogs would get all tied up in the chain and they would bark all the time and the neighbors would call and complain about it, and I says I am not going to untangle that dog, no way I am going in there. I would go sit in the office and he would go down and untangle the dog. I wouldn't do that. There was another guy here, John DeJonge, he is another guy that is not afraid of a dog that walks. If he wasn't around we'd get him too. He'd take care of that dog too. Some guys are not scared of the dogs and the dogs know that. We had two of them, I wonder about that when we bought two together, they take a lot of training, you have got to take the dogs out every so often and at a weeks time, and you have to plant drugs some place and try to find it. You always have to train those dogs. Unless it is busier now than what I know about, if you had one in the county and you could use that jointly I think you would get more use out of them. I don't know, maybe it is a need now. But we had them, scared stiff. He was mean. I don't know what happened to them. I think they got a bone in his back or his hips or something

went out. So they finally got rid of them. But they used to keep them by their house, but I don't think Rysanca thought that was too good. [Laughter] He grabbed him and that was it. But Neil could do it.

MN Was there anything in particular that you can think of that was different working with the police in say the fifties than in the later years? From early on to later?

BB I think everything now days is more documented. Everything is. You have got to cover everything you do, make your report on it. If you stopped some kid for doing something, get his name, write it down or something, don't let me catch you again, and I think that took care of the problem. And now, you'd stop and probably get a call from his parent and they'd say "how come you stopped my kid?" Well, didn't he tell you what he did? Yeah, but he says he didn't do that. Well I wouldn't have stopped him if he didn't do that. You got to make a report on practically everything now, and it all takes time and above all you have it documented I guess. I know that is a big thing. Creates more work, more reports. We just have more problems now. You didn't have so many problems. You have drugs, drugs entered it, and the detective bureau, we finally, what was it, crack cocaine, we finally stumbled onto that. We didn't really know what that was till we started having to, every once in a while we'd find a joint, pretty soon they formed WEMET and we got more involved in marijuana by the bag full. And then we always kept it in the police station and it was stored there and then after the case was closed, anything in the evidence room I had to dispose of. We thought we would just dig, and sometimes it would just be a marijuana joint or two, and we would throw it in the toilet and flush the toilet. You know, let it go.

Now the chief finally said hey, you better have a witness to dispose of it so get somebody else to sign the paper, and we had a big incinerator too, we got a call one year and we had a burlap bag full of marijuana and then the case was solved and we had a big burner that would burn that stuff and that smoke from the police station went right over the town and they said,

“Are you guys burning grass around here.”

We said yeah, you should see the whole big fire burn full of it and you have to get rid of it and we had a gas burner on it but they could smell it downtown. When I first started, we had bikes, pick up a bike downtown. It had been sitting there a week or something. Finally someone calls, and that was when they started using bicycle license. The guy would say keep it, I got a new one from the insurance company, and we didn't have the facilities to keep a lot of that stuff, originally. Then Van Hoff would say to some little kid, poor kid, who had nothing, who couldn't afford anything either would have a bike and let them use that, “use” that bike, that one. That was his way of giving it to him. Then we were able to get rid of it. Now a days everything has a sale and documented. Everything is, a much better way of doing it, but in them days we didn't. Who cared? Nobody cared. Those kids would have a bike and that way we got rid of it. And now it is all by ordinance, and all documented. We had a lot of stuff in that evidence room. Some of that stuff we kept on, there was a gal who was murdered at the hotel here. All that stuff was bagged and tagged, “Keep Forever” marked on there. It has been there, I put it in there and I think it is still there. So you can end up with a lot of evidence, don't know what it's from quite often, a lot beer, wine and

whiskey and stuff like this. And years ago we just took it and went to the drain and poured it down the drain floor and got rid of it. I found out about the correct way of doing that is to call the liquor inspector down and he has got to come down and inspect it and record everything, and then pretty soon he comes back the next day and we dispose it all the same way I did it before. [Laughter] But that is the legal way. Talk about work, because you had to log everything and type it all up and there would be a few cases of beer and sometimes Hope College would have a few ponies sitting around there, kegs of beer and we had to get rid of that, but it is all properly legally done now, the right way. But at that time we would just dump it. What else? Old lost and found items there, and billfolds, I remember we found we had some billfolds with some money in it, and the guy's Social Security Card in it. That was all the identification that was in there. So I called the Social Security office and I give them that number, I told her that I have a billfold with some money with that and she says I can't give that information out. And I think it is one thing to protect your identity, but, well fine. I ended up giving that to City Hall. But that is all documented. But sometimes you think that is a little above the call too.

MN I am curious, if I could ask you if there was something you would want somebody to remember about the Holland Police or your career there that may have been covered or may not have been covered, what in particular would that be?

BB I think I always tried to be honest and fair, and maybe sometimes I may have been wrong, but I would try to do what was right. I think that is all in all, you try to do

the best you can in the time you have. I know you make mistakes, but all in all that was my aim.

MN That is a good aim.

BB And it went really fast too. You are a young guy too so you had better make the best of things right now. [End Tape Two Side A] We used to work, I used to work, here, overtime, and to work overtime I had to work for 50 cents an hour less. Now you figure that out. You never had overtime and a half or anything like that, I said to the councilman or the mayor or something one time I said how can this be, I said when we work overtime we have to work for 50 cents hour less and that is a different pay scale than the special pay scale. He said I don't know, I can't figure out what is happening. It took a long time before that changed. We only made like 32 dollars a week to 36 I believe. Pretty good pay.

MN Was the community supportive of the police?

BB Usually. And you can tell that now too. They get pretty much things that they want or need, and it maybe was a little bit hard in that day and it took longer and money wasn't there, taxes were cheap, they didn't have that much money.

[Tape Stopped while looking at pictures down in the basement]

That was a radio we gave away ... They send you to a lot of schools. They do believe in training. ... Crash scene, and that is Richard Bonge.

MN Investigating a crash, I saw him this morning.

BB He is starting to look a little feeble doesn't he, getting weak.

MN He is getting old now, he is 84 now.

BB Is he? I didn't realize he was that old. I am wanting to think that this accident, do you know Paul DeBoer?

MN I have heard the name.

BB I think this was his Dad or Mother, and one of them got killed in there, and this guy, he had some kind of sleeping sickness and he was going north on North River avenue and he fell asleep and hit on into her and killed him. I think that was Paul DeBoer's dad. Nice guy. Every year you had to write out a promotion request, I told you before. I did a little photography at that time. I remember when, the first camera we got from the insurance association bought us a new camera. I always had a feeling I should say, that they didn't want us to have a camera for evidence, I am sure, I might be totally wrong with that. A picture is worth a thousand words you know, even with accidents. When you get to court, sometimes the lawyers are prone to, they can't muddy up the scene if you have the picture right there, it shows you right there, they can distort things so easily when you don't have a picture, and then we had that nice camera, and we had several pictures.

MN With all those little things, even cameras seems, it seems interesting how as you got cameras and radios it changed how Holland was policed.

BB We even had a little lie detector thing.

MN Really?

BB I don't know whatever happened to that thing. You put the thumbs on the things and it had a little meter thing and it could tell. I don't know if it was always that great of a thing, but you could psychologically on a person, sometimes you could

tell the way they were squirming, and then you knew he was lying to you. That was a little tool to help crack them quicker. Then we had a little gadget box and you would put them on your fingers. But I have had it already with lie detector, wonderful tool again, and 99 times out of a 100 it is right on, but once in a while it can be off. We used to take them over from Rockford and then to Grand Rapids first to Kent county then over to Paw Paw. Paw Paw State Police post there. We used to have the old radio, the old police station, anytime we had a registration of a car, we would have to call Paw Paw, then they would look it up for us and then they would call it back and tell us who the car and license number was registered to. We could have local ones because we would get that from the local license bureau, but if it would be just out of this area, we were done. We always had to call Rockford or Paw Paw, either one who ever we could get, sometimes the radios didn't go that far. Then we had radios in the police cars and once in a while some tube would go out of it, and we pretty well knew which tube it was and then we had extra ones at the police station. Then we would lift open the radio, and replace the new tube and stick it right on there and boom, it goes right back on. We got so we knew how to fix them radios myself. You tell that to these guys now and they all have portable radios on and we never had anything, you were on your own. If you were in trouble you had better get yourself out of it, or in a predicament. Some nights you would have little scary situations, walking between the back of the alleys at 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning, you hear some noise. You hear bang, bang, bang, and you think somebody is breaking into someplace and you sneak around there and you look and you crawl

around there to look at what it is and you had no radio so you could not call for help, you could walk the two blocks away and call in or something and then here it was always just the snow was falling off the roof onto something boom, boom. At that time in the morning there is no noise so you can hear it a little better, and it makes your heart beat a little bit. I remember one time I was checking the back of the doors in the back of this one store and they had a well, and the steps went up like this and down here they had more windows in the basement, and great big wells, window wells, deep, they had to be this high, and nobody had a light on, nobody put lights on in the parking lot, you didn't have anything, it was pitch dark. I slipped one time and I fell down in that hole and I thought holy smokers how am I going to get out of this thing. Fortunately there were some other wood down in there too so I managed to get a hold and crawl out of the thing and to holler was the only way you are going to get some help. Like I said, you are on your own. A lot different than what it is now. [Pause] Well my boy, I probably talked too much.

MN You can never talk too much, thank you so much for sharing your stories.

BB I am sure there are plenty more. It was good in a way, and it went fast, too fast. I remember when we finally got a new police station and I thought that was really something and now they are going to tear all that out down there and put a new one in. But you have different types of troubles now that we didn't used to have. With the policing, the neighborhood policing, knocking on the doors and meet the people and ask any problems or concerns, good PR, I would think, but it all went too fast for me. [End of Tape]

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THE HOLLAND, MICHIGAN

Borr Named Lieutenant Of Police

Sgt. Burton J. Borr, a 24-year veteran of the Holland Police Department, has been named Lieutenant of the uniform division effective Aug. 5, it was announced today by Chief Charles Lindstrom.

In his new position Borr will



Lt. Burton J. Borr

be a ranking command officer responsible for the operation of the department's patrol and traffic units. His duties will include coordinating the efforts of the units with the rest of the department, scheduling, assigning of duties and providing direct supervision of the uniformed supervisory staff.

Lindstrom said the new posi-

tion was authorized by City Council to reduce the span of control between the supervisory staff and the department's administration. No new personnel are involved, Lindstrom said.

Borr, who began his career as a patrolman in 1950, has handled the planning for traffic control of Tulip Time and serves on the department's Community Relations task force. He was promoted to corporal in 1962 and was made patrol sergeant in 1968.

Borr is a member of Christ Memorial Reformed Church and lives at 321 Wildwood Dr. He is married and has two sons.