

A career policeman reflects on his job

By George Evasuk
Herald staff writer

Although it took him 19 years to earn the right to wear them, Staff Sgt. John Barratt of Halton Regional Police wasn't paying too much attention to the crowns on his shoulder epaulets the day after his promotion came through.

But during an afternoon lull at District 1 Headquarters, Georgetown, the 35-year-old policeman was willing to talk about his police career.

He began in 1957 as a cadet with a 100-man force in Wolverhampton, a semi-industrial city in England's Midlands where he learned police work "from the bottom up," he said.

As a cadet he worked in a training capacity in all branches of the force including a stint in the police garage. Getting up to your elbows in grease teaches you respect for equipment," he said.

After patrolling a beat with more experienced policeman for 18 months, Barratt joined the force when he turned 19 and took 13 weeks of basic training. During this same time, he was involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Outwardbound program, which he remembers fondly as "30 days living in the wilds of Welsh mountains."

With the end of basic training he was given his own beat to patrol and two years later was transferred to the vice squad. He took refresher courses in 1961 and again in 1962 before transferring to the crime squad.

He emigrated to Canada at the end of 1964 and early in 1965 joined the police force in Guelph where he was for almost two years. Then, after 10 years as a policeman, he decided to try something else.

While he was a cadet, he attended the English equivalent of a Canadian Community college and for three years studied photography. "I tried it as a job," he said, "but I couldn't stand being cooped up." He joined the Georgetown police force. "I had been out 12 months almost to the day." That was November, 1967.

It took him only three months to rise to the rank of second class constable. In 1968 when Georgetown established a criminal investigation branch "I was it, as a matter of fact," he said.

Later he was joined by Henry VanderSluis, now deceased, "God bless him," Barratt said. "Henry did the identification, I did the administration and we both did investigations."

During this time Barratt took courses in police science at Humber College, at Ontario Police College in Almyer and in-service training sessions in the Halton force. He also studied MOI-methods of in-



Staff Sergeant John Barratt

stolen, you had to go through your book to see if you had the number, he said. "Now we have the CPIC terminal and you can get an answer in eight seconds."

He saw the telex system of communication introduced in England but discarded in Canada.

In almost 20 years of police work, the biggest change has been the public, Barratt believes. Today, the public is better educated and despite nostalgic memories of the cop on the beat, Barratt believes the public would not tolerate the kind of simple rough justice those cops dispensed. Nor would today's cop do now what the old cop on the beat used to do, he said.

Barratt also believes that police service "is probably the last stronghold of conservatism." That's because of the policeman's place in society, he said. "By the very

nature of our position we must be the last to change. We'll be the last people, for example, to legalize pot."

Any policeman in the course of 19 years gathers a number of anecdotes but Barratt refused to mention any. "Any experiences are either personal to me or to the people involved," he said. Although in camaraderie of the squad room other police may find the experiences amusing and humorous, outside, should the knowledge become public, "the people involved may find them embarrassing."

Barratt went on to say that "the biggest bugbear of being a cop is the fact that the media seems to be able to publish what is news, and it must."

But what the media forgets are the persons involved in an incident, the victims. The story is "a three-day wonder then forgotten but the people involved hurt for a long time."

And like any other person a policeman has many facets, Barratt said, because he has to deal with a situation facade-almost uncaring," Barratt said, "but it's almost the only way he can operate."

In a bad accident or perhaps a tragic incident involving a child, "you can't gag or cry... You just act but others seeing you see only one facet, just the police officer function."

Barratt felt that the public would be unable to ever really know a police officer "unless they met under entirely dif-

ferent circumstances. Your private life has to separate from your public life," he said. "If you don't, the result is disastrous."

Incidents where a policeman is discourteous to the public often stem from the officer's private life spilling over into his working life, he said.

And finally, even though Barratt didn't want to make too much of a fuss about the crowns added to his sergeant's stripes, he was nevertheless proud of them.

PLOWING MATCH
The 1977 plowing match will be held in Halton Hills on Oct. 22, the Halton Plowmen's Association news letter announces.

struction. But in the mix of skills necessary to advance, one was missing so in July, 1975, Barratt asked to be transferred to the uniform branch to gain command experience. For 18 months, he was a platoon sergeant "until out of the blue, I got promoted," he said.

As staff sergeant his job is to make everything runs smooth for the sergeants who head the platoons, he said. "Everything, ideally, is geared to assist the man on the road," he added, stressing "ideally."

He in turn reports to the staff inspector, in this case Ray Anderson who is one step below Superintendent Floyd Schwartz. The chain of command rises up to deputy chief and chief and down to the constable on patrol. "It's like a big bucket brigade," Barratt said.

And as a staff sergeant, Barratt no longer investigates crimes directly. "Criminal investigation is really not my function," he said. "We've got a CIB (Criminal Investigation Branch) to investigate crimes. Where I'd get involved is more in an advisory capacity because I've been up through all the steps."

Asked what is the biggest change he has noted as a policeman for 19 years, half of them in England, Barratt said: "That's an impossible question. The technological change alone is staggering. When he started on the beat in Wolverhampton, policemen carried a key to open a telephone box located on street corners to get in touch with the station. "Now the guys have radio."

Also, the police then carried notebooks in which they would copy the numbers of stolen cars as given to them by a senior officer. If you saw a vehicle you suspected as

Complex issue tabled for review

Roy Booth wasted no time tabling the controversial municipal complex issue Tuesday night, but was opposed in his bid to resolve the dispute by 12 other councillors who insisted that the five new members be given a chance to review the matter.

Coun. Booth was the sole proponent of a new bylaw that would rescind bylaw 76-41, authorizing a \$900,000 expansion to the town's Trafalgar Road headquarters.

The new members of council, he argued, were all asked for their opinions on the matter prior to the Dec. 6 election and are all well aware of the pros and cons involved.

Coun. Mike Armstrong's assertion that the new members should have at least two weeks to study the debate was endorsed by Coun. Peter Marks, newly elected in Ward 1.

Coun. Marks suggested that the new members could learn more about the issue during a special orientation session of council scheduled for Friday afternoon.

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