

X-File

Retired Master Trooper Steve Rodina Not Resting on Laurels
Now Serves as State Command Sergeant Major for Kansas Army National Guard

If you ask Steve Rodina (X-K351) what attracted him to the Kansas Highway Patrol when he joined back in 1972, he doesn't hesitate in answering, "I wanted to be a part of the elite law enforcement organization in the State of Kansas." Rodina had been an MP with the Marines and a deputy sheriff with Wyandotte Co. prior to joining the Patrol.

Rodina, now 51, pursued a military career that ran parallel to his years with the KHP. He joined the Kansas Army National Guard in 1974, becoming part of the 69th Infantry Brigade's military police platoon. He was assigned squad leader and platoon sergeant. Among many other posts, Rodina served as first sergeant with the 35th Infantry Division's Military Police Company and later as Provost Marshal's operations sergeant major. He was appointed command sergeant major in 1988, and became the state command sergeant major by appointment of Major General (KS) Gregory B. Gardner, the adjutant general, effective Oct. 1, 2000.

A Vietnam veteran who has earned many awards and decorations, Rodina retired from civilian law enforcement in January 2000 at the rank of Master Trooper with 28 years of service. His career included serving with Troop B in Topeka, on the Turnpike, in Auto Theft, and Statehouse Security.

While he has many memories, Steve says his most memorable event had to be the Sept. 23, 1977 shootout and chase with three men who robbed the Fidelity State Bank with grenades and guns. The chase, which reached speeds of 110 to 120 mph going eastbound in the westbound lanes, came to an end after Steve bumped the getaway car a couple of times and it finally ended up in the ditch. Steve helped apprehend two of the suspects at the accident scene; the third was rounded up a short time later. Memorable, I should say!

The robbery made banner headlines in Topeka, and an editorial appeared the following week praising the KHP, local law enforcement, and Rodina in particular, for bringing the matter to a swift conclusion. "The Kansas Highway Patrol and local law enforcement agencies deserve credit for the rapid capture of two bank robbery suspects Friday following a wild, careening highway chase and brief shootout.... Rodina exhibited courage and demonstrated the quality of the Kansas Highway Patrol as he attempted to force the car off the road.... Rodina finally chased the car into a gully, where the suspects' car stopped. He and officers of the Shawnee County Sheriff's Department exchanged gunfire with the suspects, finally capturing two men."

Rodina says he looks to three individuals as mentors from his days with the Patrol: Bill Moomau, Howard Docker, and his training officer, Terry Scott. High tribute from a very accomplished officer!

When asked what he perceived to be the greatest obstacle facing today's troopers, Rodina answered unequivocally, "The greatest obstacle is trying to make a career in such an honorable profession with such poor compensation. Particularly for a trooper trying to support a family. It will be difficult if not impossible for the Highway Patrol to maintain its elite standard if the low pay is not addressed."

At the close of our interview, I asked Steve if he had any words of wisdom for the men and women of the Highway Patrol. He said simply, "Treat people the way YOU would want to be treated in the same situation. You will be okay."

Message from Colonel Brownlee

By the time you read this article, the 2001 Legislative Session will have come to an end. And with it, for the first time in recent memory, the Patrol has been given serious consideration regarding salary increases for its troopers.

As you all know, attracting new hires has become extremely challenging as we have been forced to compete for them with other employers in an "employee friendly" job market. Our ability in this regard was recently enhanced when Governor Graves adjusted the state pay plan by eliminating its first three steps. This change instantaneously increased the annual starting pay for troopers from \$26,020.80 to \$27,996.80. In addition to changing the pay plan, the Governor recommended a 5% increase in pay for troopers that would, if passed by

the Legislature, go into effect on July 1st. This additional increase would place starting pay at approximately \$29,400.

Unfortunately, just prior to the Legislature's normal break, which takes place before their wrap-up session, state revenue income for the next couple of years was projected to be about \$185 million short. As a result, it is unclear what the future holds regarding the Governor's recommendation for increasing trooper pay or the Patrol's operating budget for that matter.

Although we have reason to be concerned about the state's fiscal predicament, we can take comfort in the fact that considerable favorable attention has been given to our salary issue by the Governor and a multitude of Legislators. I am confident that if the legislative body determines that there are inadequate funds to pay for a salary increase this year, it will be strongly considered in the very near future.

I want to tell you, as members of the Kansas State Troopers Association, how much I have appreciated the professional manner in which you have conducted your lobbying activities this year. I am convinced that the approach you have taken has been instrumental in garnering the positive attention the issue of trooper pay has received.