

CONDITIONS OF SERVICE 1935

Arnold E. Reynolds
Retired Police Officer

I joined the Leamington Spa Borough Police in April 1935, at the age of 24 years. I never applied to join this particular Force, but they knew that I was interested as I had been to the Headquarters several times to be measured and weighed to complete Application Forms for other Police Forces, so when a vacancy arose they sent for me.

I commenced Night Duty, 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. without any training whatsoever. For two weeks, accompanied by a regular Police Constable, I learnt the route of some twelve Beats. These were 'timed' and meant being at a certain place at a certain time. I worked continuous 'nights' for four months, unaccompanied, except for those first two weeks. I can honestly say there was no street in the town that was not seen at least once during the night, and possibly no door knob on shop premises that was not tried.

The conditions for taking your 'Coffee Break' were primitive. Your coffee was brought to you by the man on the adjoining beat, he having received it from the man on the 'Main Street' beat (thank goodness for thermos flasks). You provided your own sandwiches and sat on a public seat bench to partake of this refreshment, If you heard some person of the public approaching you immediately stood up. In wet weather we were allowed to enter the Greenhouse in one of the Town Councillor's gardens nearby. Eventually we were allowed to go into the hallway of a disused Sub-Police Station and sit on the floor! The man on the H.Q. Beat had his refreshment sitting on a shop doorstep, looking into the H.Q. Office, it did not matter the weather, he still sat there.

For a period of thirteen weeks, starting in September, I was sent to the Police Training School, Digbeth, Birmingham, a large upper room over an operational Police Station. The class consisted of thirty men from twenty-seven different Police Forces, including one from Hong Kong. The staff consisted of a Chief Inspector, two Sergeants from Birmingham City Police, a P/T Instructor, a former Circus acrobat, and a Police Constable for Foot

Drill. On arrival you had your hair cropped. You were then given a Police Diary from which you copied some one hundred and one 'definitions' (larceny, false pretenses, housebreaking, etc.) into a small note book. These had to be learnt at the rate of five per night. On completion you were given a ledger type book into which you again copied the definitions with a larger description of their meaning. It was necessary to purchase the book 'Moriarty's Police Law'. We received instruction on Police Procedures, Duties and Powers over the weeks, having a Test each Saturday morning.

We also attended the Law Courts, the Swimming Baths (a must, no dodging this, just the thing to cure a cold) and you were expected to swim two lengths of the baths at the end of the thirteen weeks. After the Test on Saturday mornings it was P/T and Boxing, and the instructor expected to see blood.

I was stationed at a Sub-Station some two miles from school, and travelled in each day. Three times a week after finishing school, from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. you worked a beat with a City Policeman, alternating weekly from the City Centre to where you were stationed. You bought your own meals and made a contribution to the Sub-Station for your accommodation and meals. You were not allowed to leave Birmingham during your training. Nearing the end of the course everyone had his hair back to normal, only to be told to get it cropped again. I remember the class booking a row in the Birmingham Hippodrome and each time the light came up we had to put our hats back on. We were like the 'skinheads'.

I returned to my force, much fitter and wiser. Conditions were the same, a months night duty, a month day duty, the latter being split shifts (6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.) which were worked alternately. One day off per week and only posted a month at a time.

Come 1938 things did improve. In ten years we had six Chief Constables and each one brought improvements. Rotary leave was introduced so we had a weekend off every six weeks. The three shift system, 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. and 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. so that we had twice the day duty

to that of nights. Times Beats were abolished, Police Pillars installed about the town giving better communications between the man on the beat and Headquarters.

To finish, I did attend the first two week course held at the Ryton-on-Dunsmore Police College, also a C.I.D. course, and later made Sergeant.