“DUTAI” and other special details

In the Army it's referred to as TDY. In the Marine Corps it's TAD. The state police version is SD - Special Detail.

From time to time, we would be diverted from our routine of battling crime and sent off on a special detail. A teletype would pop out of the machine listing anywhere from one or two members to two hundred and instructing them to report to some temporary location for anywhere from a day to who knows how long.

Some of these special details recurred on a regular basis, to wit: "The following 150 members will report to the Troop K First Sergeant at SP Hawthorne and will be bussed to New York City to participate in the Saint Patrick's Day Parade. Uniform of the day will be blouse and Sam Browne Belt. All leather will be highly polished ....." Hey kids, lets all go to the city and have fun!

One year the teletype actually instructed members to bring issued raincoats in case of foul weather. Years later, when my turn came to issue the orders, I passed the word (although not by teletype) "If it rains, be prepared to get wet, 'cause if you think I'm leading 150 guys and gals up Fifth Avenue on Saint Patrick's Day wearing orange raincoats ....."

Other recurring special details were a bit more substantive and were considered plum assignments. The state fair detail for instance. In 1917 the newly minted New York State Troopers rode on horseback - trooped, I guess - from their training camp in Manlius to the state fairgrounds in Syracuse for their first public debut. The troopers have policed the fair every year since and, as the size of the fair increased, so did the size of the detail.

In 1966 our entire academy class of two hundred plus was sent to the fair - the first recruit class to be assigned since 1917, although we didn't go by horse. We were billeted on the fairgrounds proper. Some of us bunked on the second floor of the police station, an ancient building located in a remote corner of the fairgrounds immediately adjacent to the New York Central mainline. Unless you were

some sort of extreme rail fan, this didn't seem like a good deal compared to the more modern barracks the rest of our class was quartered in at the other end of the fairground, immediately adjacent to the Indian Village. However, as Fair Week progressed and the firewater began to flow in greater quantities, the police station began to look better and better. Our classmates in the newer building reported arrows flying through the windows and embedding themselves in the interior walls with a loud "thunk" at three o'clock in the morning. Meanwhile, I was growing accustomed to the passing of the 12:34, the 1:17, the 2:04, et al.

Some of the Fair Detail post assignments left a lot to be desired. Upper Level Parking for instance. Six troopers were assigned to stand in the middle of an interstate highway for eight straight hours and direct eight gazillion cars into a parking lot with four gazillion spaces. The motorists were not happy. Moreover, entire parking area had been constructed on a plateau made out of the spoils from a nearby chemical processing plant. Some of the troops had violent skin reactions to the dust kicked up by the cars and, by the end of the fair, looked as though they had been locked in a tanning booth for a week or two.

Other fair assignments, such as the C Line (4:00 p.m. to midnight) Midway Detail, were highly sought after. As the evening progressed, the carnies and their patrons would gradually antagonize each other to the point where a series of small brawls melded into a good ole fashion riot. There was a great deal of stickin' and kickin' by the troopers who responded and a good time was had by all, except for those who ended up in the Onondaga County Jail.

By 1970 the size of the fair detail had increased to the point that all of the assignees were put up in a local hotel. The combination of a week away from home, improved quarters, an on-premises bar, a swimming pool and the usual bevy of camp followers made this detail very popular with a certain segment of the troopers. Following a year where the state police fair detail got almost as much media coverage as did the fair itself, some changes were made in the criteria which troop commanders were to use when assigning personnel. Being a volunteer was not necessarily one of them. Having an adjective rating of "Excellent" or "Outstanding" on the last annual performance

rating and being on a current promotional list were high among the requirements. A response of "But sir, I don't want to go to the fair" was often met with "Do you still want to be considered for promotion to investigator (or sergeant)?" Not wanting to go did not mean that one wasn't going, no matter what the answer might have been.

Getting back to special details in general, another series of recurring details were the Indian Details. From time to time things would get a bit out of control on one of the reservations - more often than not the Akwesasni Reservation of the Saint Regis Mohawks on the Canadian Boarder. A flurry of telephone calls from Division Headquarters, followed by teletypes, would dictate that each troop supply 20 troopers, three sergeants and a lieutenant - whatever - for a week long detail. And be there in twelve hours.

Economically and socially, things were not great on the reservations. Most of the tribes depended upon on selling untaxed gasoline and cigarettes and on gambling to win big wampum from white man. There was considerable political discord among the tribal factions as to who should do what, where, with whom. At Akwesasni, the proximity of the boarder added the possibility of cigarette and drug smuggling - not that those things ever happened. The tribal police had their hands full.

Enter the troops. Envision the Black and Tans versus the IRA, but scripted by the writers of Gunsmoke. The troopers went and did their best to keep peace, but things weren't always peaceful. In A Troop, the troop commander was seriously injured during a confrontation with the dissidents. In B Troop the Mohawks had an M60 squirreled away and would occasionally rake the main drag with it at 2 a.m. just to get people's attention. It did. For the troopers, their off duty hours in a motel or firehouse in Hogansburg, New York were not quite like a week of debauchery at the Northway Motel at the state fair, but I heard little bitching. It was kind of like getting sent to Viet Nam or Iraq or Afghanistan - you didn't want to be there, but you were proud you went.

Other recurring details included an occasional National Governors' Conference, assorted music festivals and various aspects of our own applicant selection process. But most of the special details

were a one time, low profile event. Some of these special details were so secret that seemingly not even we, the participants, were allowed to know what it was that we were doing; a condition which, personally, I was able to adhere to with great credibility.

One such assignment occurred in 1972. A trooper laid a teletype message on my desk.
The following members will report to Colonel W. B. Surdam at Division Headquarters on November 5, 1972:

Captain G. R. Tordy	Troop A
Lieutenant J. J. Strojnowki	Troop F
Sergeant R. J. Brooks	Troop B
Sergeant D. M. Scribner	Troop F
Trooper N. R. Denny	Troop G
Trooper J. A. Young	Troop A

Report to Colonel Surdam?! Jesus Christ! I go out of my way to avoid captains and I'm supposed to report to the number three guy in the Division? To do what?

I looked at the list of names. Oddly enough, despite the geographical distribution, I knew everyone but Captain Tordy - I'd never heard of him - but then he was stationed three hundred miles away. Ronnie Brooks and I had been troopers together in Troop C. Norm Denny and Jim Young had come on the job in 1970 when I was a counselor in the recruit school. (A counselor at the New York State Police Academy is not like the counselor who tells you your marriage will go better if you stop leaving your dirty socks on the floor. Think drill instructor.) Lieutenant Strojnowski had recently been promoted from narcotics in New York City and was now the zone commander of the zone adjacent to mine.

I searched for some kind of common denominator here. Ronnie, Norm and I had all been high school teachers before coming on the job, but what did that have to do with fighting crime? Ronnie was the station commander of the smallest station in the Division, SP Wilmington, compliment

three. I was the station commander of the largest, SP Ferndale, compliment seventy four. (We both made the same money - what was wrong with this picture?) The rest of the guys were wild cards as far as I could tell.

Although all of us were currently assigned to uniformed positions, our orders called for us to wear civilian clothing, i.e. suits. Odd. Oddest of all was that we were to be quartered in an Albany area hotel, rather than at the academy.

Because recruits and in-service personnel were brought in from across the state for training, the academy had barracks, a chow hall, a gym and all the other amenities one being held under virtual house arrest might desire. This made it an ideal, and cheap, place to bring together an assemblage of whoever Division Headquarters felt they needed for the crisis de 'jour. But we weren't being housed there. Why?

On November 5th we reported to Colonel Warren Surdam, a member of Tom Brokaw's *Greatest Generation* if ever there was one. Probably one of brightest, most talented and most personable people to have ever passed through the state police.

He explained our mission: In 1972 the Equal Employment Opportunity Act was voted into law. The state police had been approached by the EEOC Commission advising that our trooper applicant examination did not meet the requirements of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act. Our bosses countered that we would revise the applicant admission process to bring it into compliance. Then the U. S. Justice Department stepped in and strongly suggested that we should just agree to hiring quotas because no employer nationwide had ever even attempted to comply with the guidelines, much less succeeded.

Colonel Surdam's instructions were simple. "Do whatever we need to do to be in compliance with the guidelines. We are not signing a consent decree." As he went on to discuss the provisions of the act, it became apparent that this would be a monumental task requiring a great deal of research,

ingenuity and supporting validation. The ensuing discussion included terms like methodology, validation, threshold deterrents, statistical significance, task analysis. I sat there with the deer-in-the-headlights look. The discussion also brought out some of the qualifications of my new teammates. Several had advanced degrees. Some were also trained as statisticians. Captain Tordy was even an adjunct professor at a Buffalo area college.

At first I was a little confused as to my role in all of this, but, as time went on I figured it out. If the group could dumb down the explanation of their methodology, findings, and the statistical validation thereof to the point where I could grasp it, there was a chance they could sell it to the bureaucrats in Washington. I was the detail's answer to the fool in King Arthur's Court.

We set up shop in a project room at the academy and went to work. In due time Division moved us from the hotel into the academy when they realized that no one at the academy had any interest at all in what we were doing. But the rest of the country was interested. Ronnie Brooks and I traveled to Washington, to the FBI Academy, to Chicago and to a lot of places in-between to address police executives who vastly outranked us. The asked us all kinds of questions about how we did what we were doing and how that was working for the feds. Ronnie did most of the talking.

Although we would much rather have been out in the field, the detail members were happy to be out of the hotel and in the academy, where we were among family. In my humble opinion, one of the things which made, and makes, the New York State Police Academy an outstanding educational institution is that there is no instructional staff, per se. The vast majority of the instructors come from the field. As opposed to the old saying "Those who cannot do, teach", instructors at the academy teach what they do everyday. Nevertheless, although there were few people permanently assigned to the academy, one tended to see the same five or ten percent of the 3,500 members over and over. Some were in for a teaching stint, some were there for a special assignment, a few were working on their masters or doctorate at the state university next door. The best of the best.

As the detail forged ahead on its assignment, Captain Tordy would receive our daily work product and rewrite it, changing all the two syllable words to three or four syllable tongue-twisters, many of which I had to look up in the dictionary. The captain was an interesting guy. He was a genuine tough guy, incredibly strong and one of the "Old Breed" troopers. Dubbed "The Hulk" due to his strong resemblance to the *Incredible Hulk* (with a touch of Ernest Borgnine thrown in) he was an incredibly intense guy. In the late '50s he had worked with my troop commander, Ray Kisor, when they were both troopers in the Finger Lakes. One day a curious sheriff drove through a crime scene where the two were working. Not a deputy sheriff, the sheriff. Young Trooper Tordy took exception to this and cornered the sheriff as he attempted to make a U turn in a cul-de-sac. The terrified sheriff locked his car door and Tordy tore the door handle off the car trying to get in.

Sometime after that, the captain found religion in the form of education. Since he could no longer vent his frustrations on passing sheriffs, he took to weight lifting.

The captain had a reputation for being a really tough boss in A Troop, but he could have not been a better, more solicitous boss when it came to our detail. Nevertheless you could see the pressure building inside. After a morning of rewriting our stuff, he would disappear into the weight room and bench press pianos. After dinner I think he switched to Volkswagens.

One staple of academy life for the cadre was the *Daily Jumble*. Since only one copy of the *Times Union* was delivered to the academy, it was the duty of the night desk man to xerox off copies for the assorted *Jumble* aficionados. One night, Frank Strasser, a trooper and doctoral student, working through the night, painstakingly disassembled and reassembled the Jumble with a razor blade and glue so that none of the combinations of letters formed any known English words. The finished product was xeroxed several times to obscure any traces of tampering, then distributed as usual. As one walked by various offices the next morning, the occupants could be seen sitting at their desks with dictionaries in hand and balled up scrap paper littering the floor.

The members of our detail to quickly figured out the source of the problem, so we took to copying the letters directly from the newspaper to a blackboard in our project room rather than relying on the xeroxed copy.

To digress for a moment, Colonel Surdam would stop over weekly to see what we had accomplished, what we had planned and what we needed. Some of the stuff we were doing was pretty complex and he grasped every detail of it instantly.

Colonel Surdam's number two, Assistant Deputy Superintendent Robert Sweeney, was an old timer. He had come on the job before World War Two, left for the war and returned when he got out of the service. He had been a night captain in Troop K when I worked there. Despite the well deserved reputation all the old timers had of being tough taskmasters, then Captain Sweeney understood the essence of working with people. In the front seat of his car he had a book listing personal information about every member of the troop including the names of everyone's wife and kids - even their dog's name, no shit. When he pulled up in front of a barracks at 2 a.m., he would look though the window and see who was on the desk, then check the book for pertinent information before entering the station and asking about the family. Some of the guys made jokes about it, but, as a young trooper with barely a year on, I was pretty impressed that he even knew who I was.

Lieutenant Colonel Sweeney definitely didn't have a handle on the nuances of what we were doing, but he did understand that the Division had taken us from our homes and shipped us to Albany for six months - and there didn't seem to be any end in sight. He would stop by two or three times a week to inquire as to what we were doing, how our families were, whatever.

One day as he was passing through, he looked at the blackboard in our room. It was covered with some citations of court cases, some formulas for calculating statistical significance and - in one corner - the vestiges of the *Jumble*, the letters D U T A I. (Which, in case you're working on it, turned out to be "audit".)

The colonel inquired as to what Dutai meant. As solicitous of our well being as he was, none of us thought he would appreciate our working on such frivolous things as the Jumble when we were supposed to be making the world safe for truth, justice and the American way, much less saving the Division from wayward liberals.

One of the guys was a quick thinker. "It's our motto, sir. We thought that our detail needed a motto, so we adopted the motto of the Pretorian Guard. 'Dutai'. It means 'Duty'."

Captain Tordy's eyes got as big as saucers. He looked like he was going to have the big one. This was going to be a two Volkswagen night.

Colonel Sweeney's eyes welled up with tears. He was genuinely overcome. "God, where do we get men like these. We take you away from your loved ones and all you can think of is duty."

Thereafter, Colonel Sweeney would occasionally run into us in the noon chow line. He would glance furtively to the left and right to see that we weren't being observed, then strike his heart with his right fist, wink and proclaim "Dutai".

We were stuck with it for the rest of his career.