

LT. LAWRENCE GORDON COLLETT

YEARS OF SERVICE | 1955-1975

This quarter, we reflect on the work and many innovations of Lieutenant Lawrence Gordon Collett during his 20 year tenure at the Norman Police Department.

COLLETT'S BEGINNING IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Lieutenant Lawrence Gordon Collett was born on March 27, 1921 in Norman, Oklahoma. Collett volunteered to serve his country as a member of the United States Navy. Collett was assigned to the Navy-Seabees, the U.S. Navy construction battalions for building naval shore facilities in combat zones. In April of 1945, Collett spent time in Eniwetok, Okinawa as a third class machinist's mate and equipment operator. Collett received a Victory Medal and Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal while in the Navy.

COLLETT'S TENURE AT NPD

Lt. Collett began his career with the Norman Police Department later in life at the age of 34 on September 16, 1955. He became the department's first motorcycle officer in the late 1950's or early 1960's. During this period, the motorcycles were used for dignitary escorts, traffic enforcement, and responding to emergencies in high traffic areas like OU Football games. Throughout his time as a motor officer, Collett had the opportunity to escort many United States government officials.

Collett's daughter Wilma, shared a story of great pride for her father. Collet often stated that he had a great radar detector. One time while working traffic enforcement his radar picked up an extremely high speed. Collett looked around and did not see any vehicles in the immediate area. Collett then looked up and observed an airplane flying by above. Wilma explained that he always joked his radar was great because it picked up the speed of airplanes.

Collett also became the department's first K-9 officer in the mid-1960's with the department's first dog named Queenie. He was the first police officer to purchase, train, and utilize a police dog for police service in Norman. Collett used a series of whistles that would indicate to Queenie when he wanted her to stay or heel. The pair walked the streets of downtown Norman on a nightly basis checking buildings and alleyways. Collett even trained Queenie to jump on doors to check to see if they were secure.





When Collett was moved from foot patrol to vehicle patrol, Queenie was loaded into the back of his patrol car and would drive around with him in his assigned beat. Queenie would often check around dumpsters and outbuildings, loading docks and stairways, and other places that it were difficult for Collett to get to.

Collett was promoted to Sergeant, a first line supervisor, in October 1963. He was then promoted to Lieutenant in April 1969. After a successful 20 year career at the Norman Police Department, Collett retired on March 15, 1975.

COLLETT'S CONTINUED IMPACT

After retirement, Collett was awarded a Norman High School diploma and attended the University of Oklahoma taking courses in police supervisory and criminology, as well as classes at Southwest Christian College in Dallas, Texas. He lived in Sulphur, Oklahoma until his death on August 19, 2004.



"LIEUTENANT COLLETT WAS VERY DEDICATED TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AND THE CITY."

- Phil Cotten, Retired NPD Chief of Police



MEMORIES FROM THOSE WHO WORKED ALONGSIDE LT. COLLETT

RETIRED NORMAN POLICE CHIEF | PHIL COTTEN

My memory of Lieutenant Collett goes back way before I joined NPD. During my teenage years, we lived on east Eufaula and he lived on east Comanche. He occasionally attended Immanuel Baptist Church, which then was at 800 E Eufaula, in uniform. When I was 14, I bought a motorcycle and two of my friends who also had cycles came over. We tested my new one around the block a few times until Gordon called NPD on us. A NPD Motor Officer came and warned us to slow down and me to go get my license. Fortunately, we were not on the street when he arrived.

I went on to work for Lt Collett on Patrol some. I always found him to be a nice guy and very dedicated to law enforcement and the city. I think he was the night shift lieutenant when I was an officer on that shift. Back in the early 1970s, almost no businesses had alarm systems. You were expected to check every business, especially the alleys, by spotlighting the doors and windows. I think Gordon was the one who would stick up papers on windows and doors that he expected you to find unless it was a very busy night.



RETIRED NPD LIEUTENANT | JIM SPEARMAN

Lieutenant Gordon Collett was the afternoon shift patrol supervisor. After dusk one evening in the summer of 1971, Lieutenant Collett was stopped for a red traffic light at Main Street and Berry Road. He spotted a vehicle traveling south on Berry Road at what appeared to be high rate of speed. He followed the speeding vehicle and deployed his emergency lights. When the suspect vehicle stopped, he put his patrol unit in park and started to exit. As he began his exit, the suspect vehicle drove away. He re-entered his patrol unit and got behind the suspect vehicle again with his emergency lights still on. Much to his surprise, the suspect vehicle stopped but drove away again as he was exiting his vehicle. He got behind the suspect vehicle a third time, and just as before, it stopped. This time, however, the suspect vehicle did not drive away. When he approached the suspect driver, he discovered that she was the wife of one of his patrol officers. The embarrassed woman explained that her husband was on-duty, and she thought it was him stopping her as a prank. Lieutenant Collett knew the woman and her family. He allowed her to leave without taking any enforcement action because he thought that the embarrassment was sufficient.

When the shift was over and afternoon shift officers were at the station, Lieutenant Collett called out the officer in front of his peers and said that he, the officer, needed to talk to his wife about traffic laws.