

Corporal Henry C. "Hank" Brunson

Badge #169
EOW ... February 16, 1987

Henry C. "Hank" Brunson became a proud member of the Missouri State Highway Patrol on June 1, 1968, as a member of the 35th Recruit Class. He and his wife, Judy, relocated from Savannah, MO, where Hank was a lineman for the local rural electric cooperative, to Troop H, Cameron, MO, after graduation. In early 1969, they moved to King City, MO.

Two of the mottos of the Missouri State Highway Patrol are "service and protection" and "ladies and gentlemen who enforce the law." Hank not only followed these, he lived them every day while a part of the King City community. Hank was the first trooper ever to be stationed in the town of 1,000, and established a reputation that is difficult to live up to—even now. Hank was and always will be "King City's trooper." Hank and Judy lived in King City for 16 years, raising a son, Darrick, and a daughter, Amy. Hank was promoted to corporal and moved to Trenton, MO, for a short time before leaving us in February 1987.

As I said, Hank lived the moniker of service and protection 24 hours of every day. When he arrived in King City and got established, he had the alarm system of the First State Bank of King City hooked to his home. Needless to say this immediately garnered instant respect and popularity within the community. Unlike the "Fair Labor Stan-

dard" mandated shifts we are accustomed to today, back then you could work as long as you liked. It was not uncommon to see Hank at all hours of the night and day, long after his scheduled shift had ended, either in his patrol car driving around the community or riding with good friend and next door neighbor, Gentry County Deputy Dick Piper. It appeared he worked all of the time.

Deputy Piper related he never remembers getting a call that Hank didn't offer to go with him, either when Hank was on duty or off duty. Sheriff Gene Lupfer has been sheriff of Gentry County for 25 years. He told me Hank was one of, if not *the* finest law enforcement officer he has ever worked with. He said many times over the years Hank was there to assist him with an investigation or serious event. He could always count on Hank being there with help to the end. Sheriff Lupfer said he occasionally takes out and reads a personal letter of appreciation Hank wrote to him when Hank was promoted to Trenton and left the area. Sheriff Lupfer said Hank was not only a great law enforcement officer, but also a great friend.

Hank gave many more warnings than he gave tickets to the people of the King City area and it reflected in the respect everyone showed him, especially the youth of King City and the surrounding area. If Hank told you to do something, you did it just because that's what Hank told you to do, no questions asked. We all knew Hank would give you a ticket if he thought you deserved one, and most of the time he was right. The ones he gave, we did deserve.



*Hank and Judy Bruns,
1984*

Hank first job — This photo is of Hank at his first job, as a lineman for REC. He held this position from 1966-1967, until he joined the Patrol.

If he wasn't at work, it didn't really matter. If you needed him, he would be there to assist. It was a common custom that if you had a traffic crash, or any incident for that matter, you just called Hank at his house—not the troop or the sheriff's department. If he was not there, his wife, Judy, would make sure he was notified. Hank would show up, in uniform if he was working, or in blue jeans if he

wasn't, and work your crash or handle whatever problem existed. It was not uncommon that even while on vacation, Hank would interrupt what he was doing to provide service to the citizens of the King City area.

Looking back, I would have to classify Judy as near sainthood for the partnership she had with Hank. She had to have been inconvenienced many times because of Hank's brand of service to the people of the area. I can personally recall late one night while home from college getting my car stuck on a muddy road a couple of miles from Hank's house. A friend with me from St. Louis was amazed when we walked to the local state trooper's house at one o'clock in the morning to ask for assistance. That was unheard of in St. Louis. Hank got up and was more than happy to pull us out with his pickup truck. The only price paid for such a favor was years of good-natured teasing by Hank.

Hank not only served the King City area as a Missouri state trooper, he was involved on the Park Board, the Swimming Pool Board, and Boy Scouts. He served as a coordinator of the summer baseball/softball program as well as coached and umpired. During the school year, he was at almost every athletic event and served as team trainer. If there was an injury on the field or court, Hank usually beat the coaches to the injured player.

He was a certified First Aid instructor for Troop H, and used that knowledge in the community not only at the high school, but also by helping as a volunteer to the local volunteer ambulance district and fire department. In addition to all of this, Hank still was a regular at the coffee shop where he was everyone's friend. Hard to believe, but



Hank found time to be a devoted father and husband, rarely missing one of his kid's activities. Everyone knew and loved Hank and his dedication to the people of the King City area. To us, he was the epitome of what the Missouri State Highway Patrol was to the people of Missouri.

Hank not only built a positive reputation with the public he served, he also was a popular law enforcement officer with his peers all over Northwest Missouri. Hank lived in an area that basically bordered five zones within a short distance from his residence. Hank referred to this area as "the Laplands," because it overlapped so many zones. He took full advantage of this geographic quirk. It was a standing joke Hank had no zone assignment. However, at one time or another during his tenure in King City, he was assigned for some period of time to each of the five zones. Hank's attitude toward "service and protection" carried over from the general public to his fellow law enforcement officers. I use the term law enforcement officers, because Hank did not differentiate deputies from police officers or either one from troopers. In Hank's mind we were all in this together, and he would go to the ends of the earth to help another public servant.

I talked with several other members who, as I do, fondly remember Hank. Sergeant Larry Bodenhamer worked with Hank for several years in Troop H, Zone 5, Buchanan County. Larry remembers you never knew where you might find Hank, but you could bet if there was a major event while Hank

This photo was taken Christmas 1981 of Hank, Judy (seated), Darrick, and Amy Bruns.



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TAKING PICTURES: Caught in a stationary position, above, Trooper Hank Bruns of the Missouri State Highway Patrol zeroes in on an oncoming car to record his speed with his radar unit. To the right, the reading indicates that the motorist was in violation of the statewide 55-mile-per-hour speed limit. The Patrol car does not have to be sitting still for Trooper Bruns to take a "Good picture," as the officers say. While moving himself, the Patrolman can catch speed violators approaching going away from him. According to Bruns, the state of Missouri has roughly 650 troopers assigned to radar duty. Of that number, about 350 to 400 are on duty at all times. Every mobile unit is radar equipped, he pointed out. Speeder arrests have increased with the lower limit and a larger number of Highway Patrol officers with radar in their cars, he said. (TCN photo - Gillespie)

Smokies Take Fine Pictures

By Bob Cobb
And Sharon Gillespie

Radar units, at least those employed by the Missouri State Highway Patrol, take all the guesswork out of speeder detection. At least, this is the finding of one local "Smokie." The Highway Patrolman Trooper in mention is Hank Bruns who resides in King City but is assigned specifically to Andrew County and other vicinities when radar duty calls.

From his dealings with heavy-footed motorists on interstate and subsidiary highways of Missouri, Trooper Bruns has found the electronic process to be nearly 99.9 percent accurate, counting only a slight probability for error. The state lawmaker should know, because when he's on the prowl so is his radar unit.

It is referred to as a "Type 6" unit. The newest ones, the "Type 8's" can be set at a given speed and will even give an audible warning when a violator approaches. To insure complete accuracy, Bruns checks his unit twice a day with two tuning forks (checking both sides) and continues to check the unit against his speedometer throughout his daily shift.

"Oh, they (the radar units) do malfunction occasionally but instead of giving incorrect readings, they will cease to operate," Bruns informed the News, adding in the five years he has worked with this particular unit, he has had only one malfunction.

His unit records speed of the patrol car, as well as those going away from him. By simply pushing a button, Trooper Bruns can lock in the speed of an approaching vehicle. "Radar works on a collision-type action," he continued, "recording how quickly two objects are coming together, com-

putes information and gives me the ground speed on any approaching or departing vehicle."

The 55-mile-per-hour speed limit has resulted in much more radar enforcement from the Highway Patrol. "I use it every day in some capacity, either in issuing a warning ticket or making an arrest," Bruns divulged. He looks out for speeders mainly on secondary roadways, such as Highway 169 or 48, but occasionally is sent out for duty on Interstate 29.

The interstates, according to the Missouri Mountie, are the hardest to patrol, due to the heavy traffic. Anywhere, the hours between 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. produce the fewest number of warnings or arrests but from 3:30 up to 7:30 o'clock at night the activity picks up.

Because of the flexibility of the newer units, the Patrolman rarely work from a stationary position. They don't have to, "I don't know anybody who hides behind a billboard trying to catch speeders," Bruns quipped. He can be found set up just over a hill

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was working, anywhere in the Northwest Missouri area, Hank would be there. Sgt. Bodenhamer remembered one particular event involving a pursuit that started north of St. Joseph, MO, and involved a stolen vehicle and a possible abduction. The pursuit continued into Troop A and ended somewhere in the middle of Kansas City, MO. Sgt. Bodenhamer said he wasn't sure if Hank was even involved directly in the pursuit, but he can remember watching the news report of the incident on local television and laughing—as there was Hank leading the captured suspect into the Kansas City Police Department. That location could have just as easily have been Princeton, Braymer, Rushville, Tarkio, or any of the far reaches of Troop H.

Retired Sergeant Ray Stufflebean was Hank's zone sergeant in Buchanan County. He recalls that back in that era, assignments were made as to which roads were to be covered during a shift. Sgt. Stufflebean said he never assigned Hank to a particular area, because he knew Hank might end up in Rushville, Cameron, Maryville, or somewhere else other than where he was assigned. He said it didn't matter, because he knew he could depend on Hank to be where he was needed. He described Hank as one of his "pride and joys;" one of the most dedicated officers he ever worked with in his years with the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

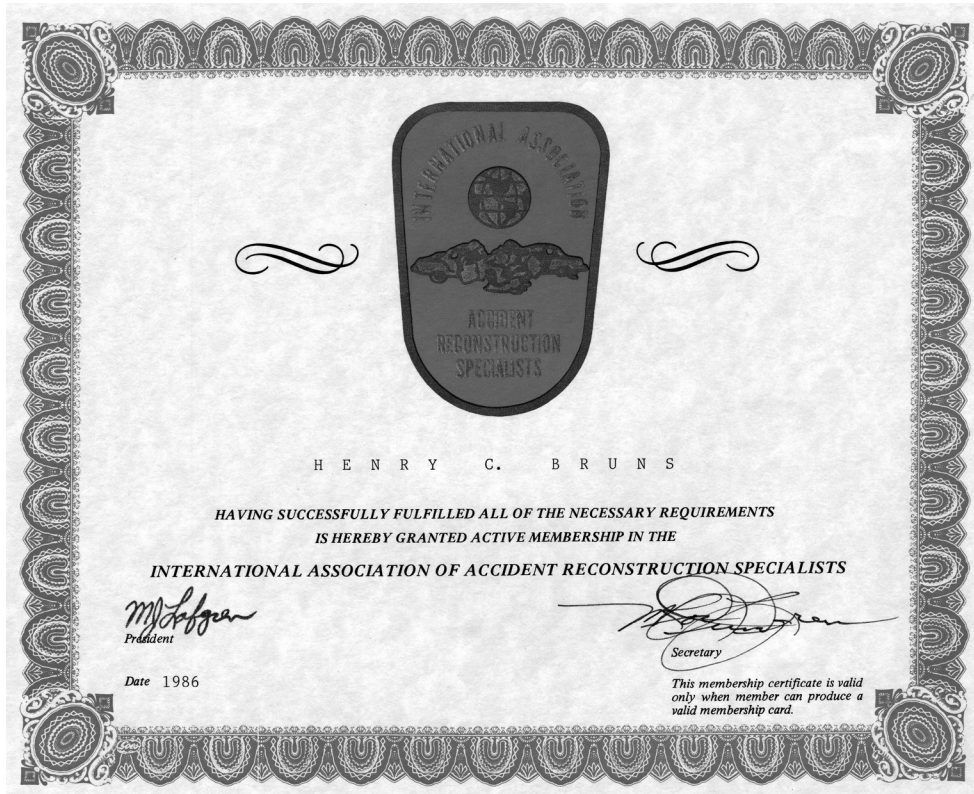
Lieutenant Jim Ripley started his career in Troop H, Zone 1. He recalled when someone was assigned to Troop H, Hank Bruns was immediately your friend. With Hank you didn't have to prove anything to him or earn any respect as a new officer. You had Hank's immediate respect simply because you were a trooper.

One of Hank's long-time friends and my first zone corporal, Retired Sergeant Larry Liebig, recalled Hank as a dedicated and active officer from the first moment he met

him. Sgt. Liebig said Hank was originally assigned to the Cameron zone, and had brought Judy with him to the zone office to introduce them to then-Trooper Liebig, shortly after arriving in town after graduation. During the conversation, a call of an injury traffic crash north of Lawson, MO, on U.S. Highway 69 was received at the zone office. Hank asked Sgt. Liebig if he minded if Hank went with him to help. Liebig said that would be fine and Hank told Judy that he would see her later at home. Hank hadn't even signed in at Troop H as an active officer out of the Academy, and was already en route to his first J-2. Sgt. Liebig remembered Hank was referred to affectionately as the "nomad of Northwest Missouri." He lived in King City, but he was everywhere. Sgt. Liebig ended by saying Hank was a true friend. If you ever needed Hank on duty or off duty, at home or at work, you could count on him being there and doing anything he could to help.

As dedicated to the citizenry of the King City area as Hank was, his special interest was the youth of the King City area. The majority of the contributions and organizations listed in the first paragraph are in some way related to his interest in young people. This dedication proved to be the inspiration to a number of young people in the King City area. After Hank's arrival, starting with myself, there are a total of four individuals from the time frame of Hank's influence, who became troopers on the Missouri State Highway Patrol. If you were to ask any of the four, each would tell you Hank Bruns was a major inspiration in their decision not only to pursue a career in law enforcement, but specifically to become a member of the Missouri State Highway Patrol.

This influence went even farther as at last count there were somewhere in the neighborhood of 10 others from the King City area, including Hank's own son, Darrick, who are now or have been police of-



ficers for various agencies throughout the region. This influence extended to many others who grew up around Hank and stayed out of trouble with Hank's direct assistance and are now successful in lives of their own. Of all of Hank's accomplishments, outside of his family, I feel confident that Hank would be most proud of the fact that he had this much direct influence on the lives of so many young people. Hank truly cared about people in general and young people specifically.

I miss Hank a great deal, as do so many others in the Gentry County area. He was and always will be "King City's trooper."

(Lt. B. Tim Deschler wrote this article in 2005.)

Corporal Henry C. "Hank" Bruns, 41, was killed in a traffic crash on Feb. 16, 1987. The crash occurred on Missouri Highway

6 in Buchanan County when the vehicle in which he was a passenger skidded on the ice-covered road and struck a bridge abutment on the passenger side. Cpl. Bruns was survived by his wife, Judy; his son, Darrick; and his daughter, Amy.

On October 20, 2008, King City, MO, held a highway dedication to rename a portion of U.S. Highway 169 (from the city limits of King City south one mile) the "MO Highway Patrol Corporal Henry C. Bruns Memorial Highway." Corporal Henry C. Bruns was the 15th member of the Patrol to make the Ultimate Sacrifice.