

## **Los Angeles Harbor Patrolman Harold Edgington**

**End of Watch (EOW) September 30, 1979**

**By John Stanley**

On the morning of September 30, 1979, a deranged man stabbed to death Los Angeles Harbor Patrolman Harold Edgington. Responding deputy sheriffs shot and killed the suspect a short time later. The facts amassed at the time of Officer Edgington's murder presented a view of this incident recently shown to be incomplete. In 2014, Elizabeth Bloch, an eyewitness to the incident never interviewed at the time of Officer Edgington's murder, came forward and detailed his heroism that day.

In 1979, Elizabeth Bloch, a young college student recently transplanted from Connecticut, took a job in Marina del Rey helping to teach windsurfing classes. On Sunday, September 30, she left her teaching partners and a handful of students by the water and returned to her van to retrieve a pair of surfing gloves. As she fished the gloves from the van, three men began to talk to her. She considered the men frightening and hastily closed the van and started to return toward her friends. She saw Officer Edgington seated on his three-wheeled motorcycle writing a ticket and quickly headed toward him for safety.

As she approached Officer Edgington, she heard one of the men say, "Where were you when I needed you?" She looked back at the man, later identified as Stuart Schwebel, and saw he had a strange look on his face and carried a knife as he skulked toward her. This caused her to quicken her pace toward Officer Edgington. She noticed Officer Edgington apparently neither saw nor heard any of her confrontation with Schwebel and attributed this to his loud motorcycle and the fact he faced away from her.

Schwebel then called out to her, "Face me, or I'll get you between the eyes with this knife!" He added he knew how to use the knife. At this point, Elizabeth could no longer tell whether the man spoke to her or now began to address Officer Edgington. Either way, Edgington still failed to acknowledge Schwebel's presence. When she ran past the officer toward her friends, Edgington at last turned and saw Schwebel approaching him. By this point she said he and the Schwebel were only about ten feet apart.

Elizabeth said Officer Edgington appeared calm until Schwebel raised the knife above his head and demanded his gun. Schwebel's actions now drew the attention of others and some witnesses claimed Schwebel also yelled out. "Kill me! Kill me! You've got a gun. Kill me!"

Edgington then jumped off his motorcycle, awkwardly drew his weapon and began back peddling as Schwebel came around the cycle and closed on him. Edgington then tripped over the heal of his shoe and as he fell backward to the pavement fired one round at Schwebel which appeared to strike the man in the stomach. Schwebel only

grunted and then became enraged. He threw himself on top of Officer Edgington and Elizabeth remembered seeing “great amounts of blood” as she fled.

After Schwebel stabbed Officer Edgington to death he took his revolver. He briefly appeared to be after Elizabeth and her friends, but they ran from him so he entered an adjacent parking lot. Another witness ran up toward where Officer Edgington lay. He grabbed the radio microphone on the motorcycle and called out that an officer needed help.

Marina del Rey Deputies Alfred Cohen and Dave Cowen arrived first lawmen on the scene. Cowen knew Officer Edgington well and shared coffee with him only hours before Schwebel’s attack. Cowen confronted Schwebel first. He saw the man had rearmed himself with his knife and had Edgington’s gun in his waistband. Cowen demanded he throw down the knife. Instead, Schwebel yelled, “You’ve got a gun, kill me!” He then lunged at Cowen who fired at him twice. Schwebel ran into an adjacent vacant lot where Cowen, joined by Cohen, followed. The two deputies fired an additional five shots ending Schwebel’s life.

Emergency personnel rushed Officer Edgington to nearby Marina Mercy Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead.

The fact Schwebel roamed the streets of Marina del Rey at all menacing Elizabeth Bloch and murdering Patrolman Edgington is another tragedy. On November 4, 1975, Schwebel went on a shooting spree in the same Marina del Rey community where he killed Edgington. Schwebel fired dozens of rounds and four rifle shots at Deputy Sheriff James Fender and an LAPD officer. On that day he surrendered peacefully, but rather than be tried for attempted murder the court deemed him mentally incompetent and committed him to Atascadero State Hospital. On August 5, 1977, the medical staff there released him proclaiming he “will not be a danger to others.” Ironically, Dave Cowen worked as James Fender’s partner in 1975 and Harold Edgington served as one of nearly 40 officers who responded to assist in his arrest.

Patrolman Edgington, 55, was survived by his wife, Donna, and children, Sharon and Gary. Gary would go on to have a long career in law enforcement. At the time of his father’s murder, he just finished his third week in the Los Angeles Sheriff’s academy.

During an interview with Gary in February 2015, he stated his father suffered severe hearing loss working around ship engines from his years in the United States Coast Guard between 1942 and the early 1960s. The noise from his motorcycle coupled with his hearing loss almost certainly explains why he did not hear the commotion between Elizabeth Bloch and Schwebel until they were almost on top of him. Another mitigating factor Gary shared: the morning of the incident, over breakfast, he and his father talked about the recent controversial Eulia Love shooting where LAPD officers shot a woman armed with a knife. Gary said he felt this must have been on his father’s mind when he encountered Schwebel.

Elizabeth Bloch believes Patrolman Edgington presence and intervention likely saved her life. Shortly after the incident she wrote a long journal entry, including a map, detailing the events she witnessed. She gave me a copy of this journal entry. It is tragic that no law enforcement personnel that day interviewed Elizabeth. She did approach one deputy to tell him what she saw, but he turned her away saying they already knew all the details. Only she saw the two other men egging Schwebel on and, absent her statement, no one knew of Harold Edgington's act of heroism by preventing Schwebel from attacking her.

In 1984, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department absorbed the Los Angeles County Harbor Patrol. The personnel at Marina del Rey Station have made sure to keep Officer Harold Edgington's memory alive ever since. One of their patrol boats are named after him, and every year the personnel at Marina del Rey Station honor his memory and sacrifice on the anniversary of his death. This year's ceremony is on Friday, September 30 at 1000 hours at Mother's Beach, Marina del Rey. A reception for the Edgington family will follow immediately at the Del Rey Yacht Club.

[Essential to this article were interviews with Dave Cowen, Gary Edgington and Elizabeth Bloch. The photos of Harold Edgington are from Gary Edgington.]