

# L.A. SHERIFFS' MUSEUM

By Chris Miller (ret.)  
Los Angeles Sheriffs' Museum

## RESPONDING TO A CATASTROPHE

The latest exciting additions to Norwalk Sheriff's Station could be found safely secured in the enclosed rear parking lot: brand-new 1957 Ford Interceptor radio cars! These fresh-off-the-showroom-floor vehicles had the most modern equipment, including automatic transmission, heater, locking shotgun rack, spotlights on both sides and the latest radio system. Quite a step up the technology ladder from the well-worn 1953-54 stick-shift Fords with no heaters and one spotlight on the driver's side. Bench seats in the front still provided space and comfort as amenities like bucket seats and security screens were still in the distant future.

## PREPARING FOR TAKEOFF

It was 7:07 p.m. on February 1, 1958, when a Lockheed twin-engine Neptune patrol bomber occupied by eight U.S. Navy reservists took off from Los Alamitos Naval Air Station on a routine weekend training flight. Sixty seconds later, a Military Air Transport Service Douglas C118A containing 35 passengers from various branches of the U.S. military, as well as a five-man crew and a female stewardess, took off from Long Beach Municipal Airport bound for McGuire Air Force Base near Wrightstown, New Jersey.

## TERROR IN THE SKY

The planes were operating under visual flight rules (VFR), which meant constant vigilance was the only way to know whether another plane was nearby. Unfortunately, seeing another plane is not as easy as it sounds. While over the intersection of Imperial Highway and Firestone Boulevard in the city of Norwalk, the Navy bomber, still climbing for altitude, came up under the transport plane, tearing off the tail. Immediately losing control and stability, the transport went into a nosedive, leaving a trail of heavy smoke and flames as it plummeted to the ground. The planes had only been in the air for five minutes.

A section of the plane's tail smashed through the roof of a Texaco gas station a short distance away at the intersection of Firestone and Pioneer

Boulevards, across the street from the Norwalk Sheriff's Station, while the main body of the plane slammed nose first into the parking lot behind the Sheriff's Station. Everyone ran out the back door to see what had happened as the sound of the explosive crash resonated through the station. The sight that stopped them in their tracks was the most terrifying thing they had ever seen: A large garage, where four three-wheeled motorcycles and the four new radio cars were parked, was ablaze, crushed under the plane's fuselage. Deputy Jack Savage's brand-new car and the vehicles of four other employees were completely engulfed in flames after having been sprayed with jet fuel.



## DAMAGE TO THE SURROUNDING AREA

Across the street from the Sheriff's Station, Raul Enlow was installing a car's headlight when a customer pulled in to get gas. Just as he walked to the gas pumps, a broken piece of tail section hurtled into the building that he had occupied only seconds before, completely destroying it. Despite being thrown 20 feet by the impact, the gas station attendant was only slightly injured.

A small house next to the Norwalk Station parking lot was demolished and the deputies feared for the lives of the elderly couple who lived there. Fortunately, the residents had gone out for dinner that night, so although they lost their home, they didn't lose their lives.

## CRASH OF THE NAVY BOMBER

The impact with the transport plane left the Navy Neptune P2V Patrol Bomber badly damaged, but it didn't crash immediately. The bomber was being flown by 33-year-old Lieutenant Commander Robert M. Hubenette, a full-time Los Angeles Police Officer as well as a pilot with the Navy Reserve. Crew member Leslie Van Dyke said he was unaware of the mid-air strike, as there was no sense of falling or spinning out of control, but he did notice a flash out the right window, after which the plane began to vibrate violently.

It was standard procedure for personnel on military planes to wear a parachute harness, and Lieutenant Commander Hubenette told everyone to prepare to jump. In order to bail out, all they had to do was hook a parachute to the giant buckles on the front of the harness. Everyone in the back of the plane attached their parachutes and crowded near the escape hatch when one of the men yelled, "Wait a minute! Get back!" He realized that their altitude was too low to safely abandon the damaged plane. Van Dyke sat down but did not buckle his seat belt since he was awaiting the order to jump. The order never came. After gliding for over a mile, the Navy bomber slammed into a clay pit in Santa Fe Springs.

Everyone was thrown violently forward; three were severely injured, and five were killed on impact. Van Dyke was dazed, but when he regained his senses, realized that he needed to get out in case the plane caught on fire. Despite numerous cuts and bruises and a broken ankle, he was able to slip through a gaping hole in the fuselage. Looking around, he saw that they had crashed into a steep-sided pit at least 50-feet deep.

The property, owned by Dickie's Clay and Pipe Company, was surrounded by a large security fence. Slowed by his injuries, Van Dyke managed to climb up the side. When he reached the top, he saw several houses on the other side of the street and began yelling for help.

## EYEWITNESSES

This mid-air collision was one of the most widely witnessed in history since many Southern

Californians were watching the sky expecting to see the appearance of the Explorer 1 satellite.

After hearing the explosion, Edith Hernandez, a 23-year-old housewife, rushed out of her house to make sure her kids were safe and was severed in half by a piece of falling metal.

At the time of the accident, several members of Pals and Tabs, a boys and girls club, were standing on the front lawn of the Nazarene Church waiting to attend a potluck dinner. Upon hearing the explosion, they looked up to see that two planes had collided. Instead of rushing to the scene of the crash, the stunned teenagers walked quietly into the church, where Reverend William Howard led them in prayer. They prayed for the victims, whose lives were wiped out, and for God to give comfort to the relatives who would never see their loved ones again.

## THE FIRE DEPARTMENT RESPONDS

Prior to 1970, law enforcement officers in California were the first responders to all calls for medical assistance. It was not until the Paramedic Act was signed into law by Governor Ronald Reagan on July 14, 1970, that fire paramedics were permitted to provide advanced life support in medical emergencies.

Captain Tom Barbre and Firemen Ray Fahnestock, Ellery Crabbe and Jack Garrett responded from Los Angeles County Fire Station 17, which was across the street from where the Neptune P2V went down. When they shined a light on the plane, crew member Van Dyke, who had escaped from the mangled wreckage, wandered out and yelled, "Get my buddies out!" The firemen grabbed the injured survivor, wrapped him in a trench coat and then placed him in the back of their fire rig. There, they waited helplessly for medical personnel to arrive.



## TRAPPED

Deputy Kermit Kynell and his partner Deputy Lester Ping were patrolling in Whittier Narrows

when they saw the planes collide 5 miles away over Santa Fe Springs. Hitting the lights and siren, they drove Code 3 to the crash site where they ran to the shattered plane looking for victims. Of the eight crew members, only three survived. Van Dyke had escaped, but Raymond Willard McCafferty and Stanford Fenton were still trapped inside.

The fuel tanks, which had been filled prior to departure, had ruptured and were now filling the plane's fuselage with highly flammable jet fuel. The severely injured, semi-conscious tail gunner could not be immediately extracted. He was pinned low to the ground, and if his head weren't kept above the jet fuel rising steadily around him, he would surely drown.

Deputy Kynell took immediate action! Lowering himself into the volatile lake, he raised the gunner's head to prevent him from drowning. His partner, Deputy Ping, went out to the crowd of bystanders and deputized two of them. Ping then instructed his new deputies to assist him with holding the crowd back and, especially, keeping anyone from lighting a cigarette, which would surely set off an explosion. He then contacted the dispatcher over the radio and requested an ambulance and doctors to respond to treat the trapped crew members.

As radio cars, with lights flashing and sirens blaring, began to arrive, Kynell continued to support the gunner's head with his hands. Shocked to see the flammable jet fuel filling around the two men, people began yelling at Kynell to get out because it could explode at any minute. Telling the deputies to get back, Kynell said that he wasn't leaving and if the gunner died, he would die with him. All but one of the other deputies moved a distance away into the street.

## ON-DUTY DEPUTIES RESPOND

Deputy Donald Cannon and his partner Kenneth Swenson were taking a GTA report in the city of Lakewood just after the crash occurred. As Swenson talked to the victim, Cannon sat

in the car and monitored the radio. All at once, a broadcast came out about the crash in the Norwalk Station parking lot. Cannon called to his partner

and they responded Code 3 to the station. When they arrived, Cannon saw that his personal vehicle had been slightly burned, but Swenson's Porsche, parked only 20 feet from the plane wreckage, was smashed flat. The brand-new 1957 Ford Interceptor radio cars had been destroyed as well, which meant the deputies would once again be driving the old 1953 Fords, but there was no time to lament the damage to their cars. Instructed to respond immediately to a house a quarter of a mile away from the station, they found the body of Hernandez, who had been cut in half from a piece of metal that had fallen from the damaged transport plane.



Sergeant Ken Cable was working as the field sergeant at Firestone when he received a radio call to respond to a plane that had crashed into the Norwalk Station parking lot. Approaching Norwalk Station, his Code 3 roll came to an abrupt halt as traffic slowed to a complete standstill. Since fenced yards weren't as common at that time, Sergeant Cable drove his radio car over the curb and across the front yards of the homes along the street in order to get past the traffic jam.

Finally reaching the station, Ken saw firsthand the incredible damage. The whole scene was surreal. The maintenance garage was on fire and boxes of road flares had ignited, causing a huge flare-up. A short time later, members of the military arrived and so began the grim task of digging through piles of debris and carnage. Workers spent hours sifting through the charred rubble removing bodies and body parts. When a body part such as a knee, leg or head was located, it would be placed in a cardboard box lined with waxed paper.

The news media reporting of the disaster only exacerbated the problem. Although people were warned to stay out of the area, they were also told that if they didn't go look, they'd miss out on one of the most unbelievable sites they'd ever see. Thousands of curious people descended into the streets around Norwalk Station, leading to complete gridlock.

*continued on page 14*

Crime scene tape to place around an area to restrict access didn't exist in those days. Instead, Sergeant Cable began pushing the spectators back and used ropes tied from lamppost to lamppost to secure a perimeter. He then instructed the deputies where to block traffic and divert it out of the area.

## OFF-DUTY DEPUTIES RESPOND

Deputy Dale Havlovic was 2 miles from work in his personal vehicle when a news alert came over the radio that a plane had crashed in the back of Norwalk Sheriff's Station. Rushing to the station and parking on the street, he reported to Acting Lieutenant Rudolph Wiggins, who was the watch commander that night. Wiggins told him that there had been several reports (which turned out to be erroneous) that military personnel had bailed out of the damaged planes and were hanging from their parachutes on power lines. He instructed Deputy Havlovic to get a radio car and go see if he could find anyone who bailed out of the plane. Making his way through the decimated parking area, Havlovic saw the charred bodies of the crew still inside the plane, stacked one on top of the other due to the nose-first impact of the crash. One wing was extended over the gas pumps into the apartments next-door, where fortunately, no one was home and, miraculously, there were no injuries on the ground in the station parking lot.

Deputy Leo Chaney worked day shift at Norwalk Station on the day of the plane crash. Getting off duty at 5 p.m., he picked up his wife and kids and then went to dinner with a friend. On their way home, a flash of light in the sky caught Chaney's attention. He thought it was illegal fireworks until he saw a huge ball of flame plummet toward the earth. Realizing that a plane had crashed, he told his wife that he needed to get to work, so he dropped her and the kids off at his brother-in-law's house, which was only four blocks from the station.

Deputy Chaney fought bumper-to-bumper traffic as people jumped in their cars and drove to see the plane crash, and he was two blocks away when everyone came to a dead stop. Parking his car on the side of the road, he walked the rest of the way and, as he approached, saw that the new gas pumps, maintenance building and briefing room, whose construction had just been completed that day, were now fully engulfed with flames shooting up over 100 feet into the air. Chaney went inside the station and didn't even have time to change into his uniform before he was sent out to the back parking lot entrance to keep anyone from entering who wasn't authorized. Fortunately, the huge underground fuel tank which was connected to the gas pumps and had been completely filled that day did not catch fire or explode.

Deputy Earl Guier lived 2 miles from the station and had just arrived home after working day shift. Changing out of his uniform, Guier went into the backyard to feed his dog when he heard a loud explosion. Looking up, he saw flames and realized that two planes had just collided. It appeared to him that they were going to crash into the Norwalk Metropolitan State Hospital. Hurrying inside, he told his wife that there was a plane crash and that he needed to get to work. Putting on his uniform, Guier drove toward Metro State.

Guier had gone only a short distance when he got stuck in four lanes of traffic on Pioneer Boulevard. Since the parking lane on the right was empty, he began driving there when he saw a fire engine coming up behind him rolling Code 3. Parking his vehicle, he waved them down and jumped aboard. As the fire engine neared Norwalk Station, the streets became so crowded that they were nearly impossible to drive. Guier could see flames coming from the back parking lot, so he jumped off the fire engine and walked the last 300 yards to the station where a sergeant told him to keep the crowd back from the Pioneer driveway entrance.

Guier was asked to help remove some of the bodies from the wreckage. The remains looked like scorched meat, and when he attempted to lift one, it fell apart. After removing two bodies, he was ordered to respond to the site of the other plane crash, which he found to be in a large clay pit surrounded by a chain-link fence. The fence was an ideal perimeter, as it made it easy to keep out the many bystanders and photographers. When several photographers broke through the line, Sergeant Jim Olson ordered Guier to move them back. Fuel was spilling everywhere, and he didn't want it ignited by the photographers' flashbulbs.

## PRISONER SECURITY

Lakewood Sheriff's Station had not been built yet, so prisoners from that area were booked in at Norwalk Station. The intense heat from the inferno raised concerns that the station might catch on fire and they didn't want the inmates to burn to death in their cells. Deputy Chaney and several other deputies removed the 40 inmates and escorted them across the street to the truck scale at the granary, but there was such a shortage of deputies that no one was available to stay behind to watch them. The prisoners were instructed to stay there and that they would be brought back when it was safe. They were also told that if anyone left, they would face felony charges for escaping. All 40 inmates sat there all night long and not one of them left.



## DAMAGE TO THE SURROUNDING AREA

Debris fell over several blocks. One of the wings of the transport plane landed in the driveway of a nearby apartment building, while a propeller plowed through the sidewalk and traveled 4 feet into the ground. A body fell out of the transport plane, striking and knocking off the gable end of a house, and a radio crashed through the roof of the Sheriff's Station into the Detective Bureau, landing on a detective's desk.

## A TRUE HERO

The night sky was aglow from the intense fire burning in the Sheriff's Station parking lot. Vehicles flooded into the area as residents rushed to get a glimpse of the disaster. Within a very short time, the streets around both crash sites were completely clogged. A patrol car was eventually able to maneuver through the heavy traffic and deliver several doctors and nurses to the Neptune's location.



Deputy Kynell steadfastly held the gunner's head above the pool of jet fuel until medical personnel arrived over 40 minutes later. First aid was administered to the injured crewmen as they were carefully cut from the mangled wreck. Once extricated, the victims were transported to Carobil Hospital. Although it was only 2 miles away, trying to maneuver through the heavy traffic was very time-consuming. The plane crash occurred at 7:13 p.m., but crewmen McCafferty and Fenton didn't arrive at the hospital until 9:15 p.m., two hours and two minutes later. Unfortunately, McCafferty was pronounced dead on arrival.

Once the victims had been transported, the firemen hosed down Deputy Kynell to prevent him from bursting into flames if a spark happened to ignite his fuel-soaked uniform.

### SECURING THE SCENES OF THE WRECKAGE

Firefighters with hoses could only stand by and watch as the chemicals in the de-icing system of the transport plane burned for seven hours. There was confusion everywhere. People wandered into the streets and across lawns while others climbed up on rooftops to get a better view of the carnage. Everywhere one looked, there was smoke, fire and frightened people. Women were screaming and men were yelling as deputies waved flares attempting to keep the crowd back. Fifty reserve deputies from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department along with an unknown number of military police secured the two crash sites. Norwalk Sheriff's Station Captain Sid Jolivette said that the area was swamped with as many as 10,000 spectators. Officers from Long Beach, Los Angeles and the Highway Patrol worked with sheriff's deputies and firemen to control traffic, fires and the huge crowds of bystanders. All night long, under the bright glare of floodlights, searchers recovered charred remains from the burnt wreckage. A field morgue was set up in the Sheriff's Station parking lot, where disaster workers spent hours trying to identify victims' bodies from the blackened dog tags around their necks.

Members of Knights of Dunamis, an Eagle Scout honor society, rushed to the scene and helped carry bodies out of the wreckage and, once identified, move them to the Coroner's hearses. While this was taking place, numerous officers and deputies had their hands full keeping thousands of sightseers back as investigators tried to determine the cause of the crash.



Notifying relatives of the military members killed in the plane crashes was difficult since many were en route to new assignments and were carrying personnel records, that contained their home addresses with them.

Inspector Claud Smith arrived at the same time as the old bakery truck, so he set it up as a mobile command post and began coordinating the operation.

### THE NEXT DAY

The next morning, Deputy Chaney reported back to work and was assigned to prevent unauthorized persons from entering the back-gate entrance to the parking lot where the crash had occurred. Chaney's brother-in-law, Harold Reis, who was also a deputy, showed up with his new 8mm camera and asked if he could film the destruction. Chaney let him in, and as he began filming, Reis was able to capture historic footage of Sheriff Biscailuz, along with the division chief and the captain of Norwalk Station, walking through the horrible site. Six months later, Deputy Reis was chasing a speeder after handling a prowler

call and was killed when his patrol car was broadsided on Beverly Boulevard in Pico Rivera.

### CHANGES

The 1958 Norwalk mid-air collision was, at that time, considered the worst in Southern California history. The crowded skies prompted a congressional probe urging the Navy to ban low-altitude flights from Los Alamitos over the densely populated surrounding areas. The cause of this crash was blamed on pilot error as a failure to follow visual flight rules of "see and avoid."

*continued on page 16*



**HAVING IT ALL**

Deputy Kynell seemed to have everything going for him. He was very well educated, having earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Stanford University, and he taught criminal evidence classes at Long Beach State College and the Sheriff's Academy. He was very handsome and looked sharp in uniform. Everyone respected him and said that he was not just a great deputy, but also a hero. All of the deputies working with him at Norwalk Station said that they would never have placed their lives in peril as he had done — it was just too dangerous!

Appearing on the TV quiz show *Twenty-One*, Kynell won \$25,000. Years later, it was determined that the producers of *Twenty-One* had secretly provided some contestants, including Kynell, with answers to the questions that they would be asked. In 1994, the movie *Quiz Show* came out exposing the cheating scandal in the game show industry.

Kynell was promoted to sergeant on November 5, 1958, and transferred to the Detective Bureau working the License Detail. Within the next four years, he transferred to the old Malibu Station on Pacific Coast Highway, where his wife worked as

the supervising secretary, and, shortly thereafter, promoted to lieutenant.

**THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA**

It's difficult not to imagine the terror on the passengers' faces as the plane plunged to earth; then the explosion as the body of the plane slammed into the station parking lot — everything was burning. This was the overwhelming sight that met the eyes of Sheriff's personnel as they came running out of the back of the station. Shock and grief take different forms, and the person who may seem happy and successful on the outside may be shattered and bleeding on the inside. Four years after Deputy Kynell saved the gunner's life, he took his own.

**DEALING WITH TRAUMATIC EVENTS**

Visible injuries can be treated; invisible injuries are best left ignored. After all, if you can't see it, it doesn't exist. Psychological injuries can't be seen, but they can still cause pain. Sometimes the issue can be resolved without professional help, other times it can't. The airplane disaster occurred in the days before the Sheriff's Department had psychological

counseling, and psychological issues were not something that was generally discussed.

In the 1970s, it was not uncommon for soldiers returning home from the Vietnam War to be spit on and called "baby killers." Many of these former soldiers were hired by law enforcement agencies, including the Sheriff's Department. Over time, it became apparent that the latent effects of trauma were affecting their ability to do their jobs as deputy sheriffs and that psychological counseling was needed to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder.

In 1973, the Sheriff's Department formed Psychological Services. This new unit provided psychologists to counsel Department members on how to cope with traumatic events on the job as well as stresses in their personal lives. Today, there are many services available, including counseling for alcohol abuse, marital issues and job-related events, such as shootings. Peer counseling offers support and guidance by those who have experienced the same challenges. It is important for people to know that whatever type of crisis they are facing, there are others who have faced it before and are ready to help them. They are not alone. ☆



**WILL AND TRUST ATTORNEYS WANTED FOR SRA PANEL**

The Sheriffs' Relief Association invites will and trust attorneys to join its panel for members seeking legal referrals. Attorneys interested in applying may call Bill McSweeney or Leo Norton at the SRA office, (800) 544-4772.

**L.A. County Retired Marshals Lunches for 2018**

ALL LUNCHESES ARE SCHEDULED FOR 12 NOON

<b>March 7</b> <i>Marino's Italian Restaurant</i> 17126 Bellflower Blvd. Bellflower	<b>August 1</b> <i>El Pescador</i> 1125 West Covina Parkway West Covina
<b>April 4</b> <i>Villa Tepeyac</i> 2200 E. Garvey Blvd. West Covina	<b>September 5</b> <i>Black Bear Diner</i> 7005 Knott Ave. Buena Park
<b>May 2</b> <i>San Antonio Winery</i> 737 Lamar St. Los Angeles	<b>October 3</b> <i>Marino's Italian Restaurant</i> 17126 Bellflower Blvd. Bellflower
<b>June 6</b> <i>Lazy Dog Restaurant</i> 8800 Apollo Way Downey	<b>November 7</b> <i>Yang Chow</i> 3777 E. Colorado Blvd. Pasadena
<b>July 11</b> <i>Matt Denny's</i> 145 E. Huntington Drive Arcadia	<b>December 5</b> <i>Villa Tepeyac</i> 2200 E. Garvey Blvd. West Covina