

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

## THE GREATEST GENERATION

By Al Lebas, LASD Retired

I recently read, for the second time, Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation", a best seller, profiling a number of truly great Americans, that he described thusly, "They came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War and went on to build modern America - men and women whose everyday lives of duty, honor, achievement, and courage gave us the world we have today".

It occurred to me that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department had its very own "Greatest Generation", and it would be tragic indeed if the current generation serving in the Department were not made aware of the background and accomplishments of at least a sampling of these "common men who made an uncommon contribution" to the growth and development of the Department, post World War II.

The writer apologizes for the limited number of individuals profiled, but opted to restrict his writing to a handful of truly great people that he had the opportunity to work with very closely and knew intimately. Recognizably, there were several hundred young people, returning to, or entering the Department following World War II who would be deserving of special recognition for the part that they later played in developing the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department into an agency that received national and international recognition for excellence.

Hopefully, the following few briefs properly recognize and are representative of the several hundred individuals not reported who comprised the members of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Departments Greatest Generation.

Lt. John Patrick "Jack" Casserly

Jack emigrated from his native Ireland at the age of eight. He, his mother, father, three brothers and a sister settled in Pasadena. Jack attended Pasadena public schools, including Pasadena City College where he was a standout end on the football team. He earned a football scholarship to Oregon State University, where he continued to excel as a star athlete.

Jack left Oregon State during the midst of the great depression, was employed in several less than promising jobs, before joining the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department just before the outbreak of World War II.

Early in 1942 Jack was granted a leave from L.A.S.D., enlisted in the Army and was assigned to the 104th Infantry Division as a buck private. Following the landings at Normandy in the summer of 1944, the 104th fought its way across France, and now Staff Sergeant John Patrick Casserly was awarded a battle field commission as a Second Lieutenant, and assigned as an intelligence officer, interrogating German POW's. A portend of things to come.

At the end of the war Jack returned to the L.A.S.D. and was assigned as a radio car deputy at East L.A. Station. He passed the First Sergeant's exam that he was eligible to take, was promoted to Detective Sergeant and remained at East L.A. Station. Almost immediately he developed a reputation as a master interrogator, handling primarily armed robbery cases.

His expertise was not to be over looked. In 1955 he was recruited to join the elite Robbery Detail of the Headquarters Detective Unit. In short order he gained an enviable reputation as an outstanding investigator and interrogator, working major armed robbery cases with the FBI, U.S. Postal Inspector and virtually every police department in the county.

In 1956 Jack was promoted to Lieutenant and returned to East L.A. Station as a Watch Commander in the Patrol Division. He was a model and a mentor to every young deputy fortunate enough to be assigned to his watch. He was a natural born leader.

In 1958 the Department made a command decision to form a specialized unit within the Patrol Division, a unit highly mobile, capable of immediate response to natural and man made disasters, saturation patrol in high crime areas and any other unusual situation requiring the assignment of highly trained, professional uniformed personnel.

The only individual who was ever considered to form such a unit was Lt. John Patrick Casserly. And form it he did, from the ground up. He was asked one time, "Jack, what kind of direction did you get to form this new unit?". Jack smiled and replied "they threw me a key to one of the vacant out buildings at East L.A. Station, a key to one of the radio cars and told me --- Jack, you know what we want!"

Now, forty-four years later, the "Special Enforcement Bureau" still stands as a tribute to the leadership and organizational skills of Lt. Jack Casserly.

Tragically, this multi talented man concluded his career in the Department at the rank of Lieutenant. This six foot five inch, 250 pound gentle giant, who was born to be a "Cop" and performed any and all assignments in an outstanding manner, had difficulty taking the written portion of promotional exams.

There simply aren't enough superlatives to describe the character of the man that was John Patrick Casserly, but a few certainly would fit; loyalty, commitment, leader, mentor, integrity and professional.

Jack was a distinguished member of our Departments "Greatest Generation", but then he would have been a distinguished member of any generation in which he had lived.

#### LT. EDWARD WILLIAM "ED" KLINGLESMITH

Ed was born and raised in East Los Angeles in a devout Catholic family. His only brother, Joey would later become a priest.

In the early days of World War II Ed would leave high school at the age of seventeen to enlist in the U.S. Navy. He volunteered for submarine duty, and following extensive training as a torpedo man he was assigned to the U.S.S. Barb. The Barb, based in Guam, made several combat patrols into Japanese waters, targeting and sinking enemy shipping.

On one of its' sorties, the Barb's commanding officer, Lt. Commander Eugene Fluckey, a young Annapolis graduate, had the Barb lay off the mainland of Japan at Karafuto and track the railroad traffic traveling along the coast. Following three days of tracking, Commander Fluckey asked for volunteers to form a "Shore Party". Ed readily volunteered, along with one officer and seven other enlisted men. The crew had manufactured two, homemade, plunger type explosive devices in ten-gallon cans. The volunteers rowed ashore in rubber rafts, planted the bombs, and as they were returning to the sub, a Japanese military train, right on schedule, was blown off the tracks by the homemade bombs.

The officer in charge of the "volunteers" was awarded the "Navy Cross" the nations second highest recognition for heroic action in wartime, and Ed and the other enlisted men were all awarded the "Silver Star" medal for conspicuous bravery.

Nearing the end of the War, Commander Fluckey ordered the "Barb" to follow a Japanese freighter past the submarine nets into the Kobe Harbor, where it lay on the bottom selecting targets. On the second day the "Barb" surfaced and fired what was to become the most destructive salvo of torpedoes launched in World War II. The casualties, three merchant ships and a baby "flat top" aircraft carrier. Unbelievably, the "Barb" escaped, zigzagging out of Kobe Harbor on the surface. Commander Fluckey was awarded the Nations highest award for bravery in combat, the "Congressional Medal of Honor". He later acknowledged that his entire crew should have been the co-recipients of the medal.

At the conclusion of the War, highly decorated, Torpedo man First Class Ed returned home to East L.A., earned a G.E.D. and joined the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

As a radio car deputy at East L.A. Station he distinguished himself as a natural born leader and was the recipient of numerous commendations for outstanding police work.

Early in his career he was promoted to Sergeant, worked a number of assignments, finally finding his most natural niche as a Sergeant in the Headquarters Detective Robbery Detail.

When he was promoted to Lieutenant, the Department wisely assigned him to command his beloved HQ Robbery Detail, where he served with distinction. Everyone who ever had the good fortune to work with Ed Klinglesmith described him as a natural born leader, a “first guy through the door” kind of leader, a great mentor who inspired everyone around him. Tragically, at the age of 39, Ed was diagnosed as having the most deadly form of cancer, and passed away at age 40.

Ed left behind, his beautiful wife Jessica, two beautiful daughters, and a Sheriff’s department that should be eternally grateful for his many contributions as a leader, mentor and one hell of a man, in every respect.

#### INSPECTOR (COMMANDER) LESLIE L. “LES” HAIGHT

Les Haight was born and raised in El Monte. His father was a medical doctor. After attending local schools, where he was a star athlete, he attended UCLA and played center on the football team.

Les graduated from the university in the midst of the great depression and accepted employment where he could find it; pumping gas at a Standard Oil gas station, etc.. until he passed the entrance exam for the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. He was assigned as a radio car deputy at Temple Station, but when World War II broke out he immediately enlisted in the army. With a college degree, Les was almost immediately selected to attend OCS, where he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, Infantry.

Newly commissioned Lt. Haight, desirous of serving where he could be most effective, volunteered as a paratrooper and attended jump school at Fort Benning. Les and his unit served in the South Pacific, and when General MacArthur returned to the Philippines in early 1945, Les Haight’s paratroop battalion was assigned the mission of jumping onto Corregidor and retaking Bataan. In the ensuing battles Les was severely wounded by shrapnel in the right hand and forearm.

Les Haight was not only courageous in battle, he underwent more than a year of several surgeries, repairing muscle, tendons and nerves in his right forearm and hand. He never did regain full use of his right arm, painfully converting all meaningful hand function to his left hand.

Recognizing courage, commitment and desire, the Department wisely allowed Les to return to duty as a Deputy Sheriff. A decision that neither would ever regret.

Promotions came rather easily to Les and in 1955, Captain Haight was assigned to command Norwalk Station. At the time that Les took command the Department was

contracting for police services with one newly incorporated city, the City of Lakewood, being served out of Norwalk Station (Lakewood Station had not yet been built).

In the short span of two years, with an explosive increase in population in Southeast Los Angeles County, one after another newly incorporated cities, a total of seven, opted to contract for their law enforcement services with the Sheriff's Department.

Over the years a number of persons have taken credit for the success of the "Lakewood Plan", its expansion to more than forty cities, and the ultimate salvation of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. If, however, you were to single out one man, more than any other who was responsible for the success of the "Lakewood Plan", you would have to select Les Haight.

Les was a giant of a man in every respect. He was six foot five, weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and presented an outstanding command presence. Perhaps more impressive than his physical appearance, was his professional demeanor, personal ethics and his outstanding leadership ability. Those qualities impressed his "troops" and certainly impressed the city councils of the newly incorporated cities in the Norwalk service area.

As an Inspector (Commander) in the Patrol Division Les continued to have a strong influence in the growth and expansion of contract law enforcement countywide.

#### CHIEF ROBERT KENNETH "BOB" WEDDLE

Bob Weddle was born in the foothills of his beloved Maryland, and worked along side his grandfather as a village black smith before moving to California as a young adult.

The great depression was on and Bob considered himself extremely fortunate to have found employment with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. In less than three years however, his newfound career was interrupted by the events of December 7, 1941.

Bob Weddle immediately enlisted in the Army, was selected to attend infantry OCS at Fort Benning, Georgia and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant. He served with General George S. Patton in his march across France, and during the closing months of the war in Europe he was decorated for conspicuous bravery while he and his unit were crossing the Rhine River at the now famous Remagen Bridge.

Infantry Captain Bob Weddle returned to the Sheriff's department in 1946 and resumed his career as a peace officer, assigned to Patrol at Malibu Station.

Several varied assignments, and two promotions later, Bob was selected to serve as the Commander of the Sheriff's training academy, where he served with distinction. While still assigned to the Administrative Division, Bob was credited with being the principal

architect of the Department's new "Manual of Policy and Ethics", a document that helped guide the Department through a period of unexcelled growth.

In a "star-studded" career, spanning more than thirty years, Bob Weddle will undoubtedly be best remembered for his long tenure as the Station Commander at Firestone Station, "The Stone"; unquestionably the Department's toughest, most challenging field assignment. His leadership, compassion and great sense of humor endeared him to his "troops". They would have followed him anywhere.

Deservedly, Bob retired as a Chief, overseeing the Corrections Division.

#### ASSISTANT SHERIFF WILLIAM J. "TONY" ANTHONY

"Tony" Anthony, a native of Massachusetts, joined the U.S. Marines Corps as a teenager soon after the beginning of World War II.

Late in the War, Marine Corps Tank Commander Sgt. "Tony" Anthony, found his unit pinned down by enemy fire on one of the many beach heads and landings the Marines had been involved in fighting their way across the Pacific toward Japan.

"Tony" received the "Silver Star" for conspicuous bravery during that landing and the ensuing battle. Paraphrasing, "Tony's" citation indicated that "without regard for his own safety or well being he had lead his rifle company off the beach and secured the beach head".

Somewhat typical of "Tony" Anthony, he rarely talked about or boasted about his Silver Star. In a proper setting he might smile and indicate that it "was no big deal", and in describing the incident he would relate, "there we were pinned down on that damned beach by heavy enemy small arms and mortar fire. I looked at my tank and the Pacific Ocean behind me and amazingly concluded that the tank couldn't swim. I followed the only alterative available, I move forward and my rifle company followed".

At the conclusion of World War II and his release from the Marine Corps, "Tony" opted to take up residence in California instead of returning to his native Massachusetts.

"Tony" joined the Pasadena Police Department as a "Rookie" patrolman, but soon recognized that career opportunities were far more attainable in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. Welcome Deputy "Tony" Anthony.

"Tony" served in a number of assignments while climbing the promotional ladder; Sgt. in Corrections, Lieutenant in the Personnel Bureau, Captain in the Information Bureau, Inspector (Commander) serving as Executive Assistant to Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess, Division Chief in Corrections and ultimately as an Assistant Sheriff overseeing the custody and corrections responsibility of the Department.

William J. “Tony Anthony was another of those individuals responsible for leading the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department into a new era. He was a leader, with excellent people skills. He mentored a number of younger talented people who went on to attain the highest promotional grades in the Department.

#### UNDER SHERIFF THEODORE H. “TED” VON MINDEN

“Ted” was born in Los Angeles of German immigrant parents, raised in East L.A. and attended Huntington Park High School, where he was a star football and baseball standout.

“Ted’s” dad passed away when “Ted” was just an infant. He was raised by a single parent, his loving, but tough German mom. So much for young people being raised by a single parent not having a chance of success.

“Ted” Von Minden was one of the younger members of LASD’s “Greatest Generation”. He just missed serving in the military during World War II due to his tender age. He did, however, serve in the U.S. Army and the occupation of Europe immediately following the war.

At the earliest age possible, twenty-one, “Ted” joined the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. his career was interrupted with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, and his recall to active duty and a second tour in the military.

Upon his return to the Sheriff’s Department, “Ted’s” rise in the Department was meteoric. He passed every promotional exam with ease; Sgt., Lieutenant, Captain, Inspector (Commander) and Division Chief. Although he was assigned for brief tours in the Detective Division, “Ted’s” real forte was in the Patrol Division, where he excelled as a Field Commander. his outstanding performance in the 1965 riot in South Central L.A. affectionately earned him the title of “Field Marshal”. His command presence in the field, coupled with his “Junker” surname and unmistakable teutonic features, supported the “Field Marshal” title. One of “Ted’s” closest friends once quipped, “the only thing he lacks is a monacle and a saber scar on his cheek”.

“Ted’s” talents were not limited to field situations. He was a natural born leader in every respect. He was inspirational, lead by example and demanded and received the very best that his “troops” had to offer.

As a Station Commander at Lakewood Station, “Ted” did an outstanding job of delivering police services to the several contract cities in his jurisdiction. Mayors, City Council members and City Managers in his area all agreed that Ted Von Minden was the epitome of what a professional law enforcement administrator should be.

“Ted” served with distinction as Chief of the Patrol Division, and as one of the two Assistant Sheriff’s, before being asked by Sheriff Sherman Block to serve as his Under Sheriff. Sherman Block could not have selected a more talented, qualified individual to serve as his Executive Officer. “Ted” enjoyed the respect of the Board of Supervisors, the County’s Chief Administrative Officer, other County department heads, law enforcement administrators statewide, and most importantly the men and women of a great law enforcement agency that he was totally committed to.

If there is a down side to the life and career of “Ted” Von Minden, it would have to be that dirty trick that “father time” and fate played on the residents of L.A. County and the men and women of the Sheriff’s department by having “Ted” born twelve to fifteen years too soon. If the timing had been right, Theodore H. “Ted” Von Minden, aka “Field Marshal”, would have been an outstanding elected Sheriff, one the good people of Los Angeles County and the men and women of the Sheriff’s department could have been justifiably proud of.

## EPILOGUE

If World War II had to happen, our great nation was fortunate in that it had a “pool” of 12 - 14 million young Americans that it could call into the military. Young people, products of the “Great Depression, who were mentally and physically tough. Typically, they were off springs of a father who had served in the military in World War I, and a God fearing mother who insisted that they go to church on Sunday. They were loyal, patriotic and highly disciplined, even before their service in the military.

In his book, Tom Brokaw observes “This generation was united not only by a common purpose, but also by common values - duty, honor, economy, courage, service, love of family and country, and, above all, responsibility for oneself”.

Some have described the generation as a phenomenon; the time, the place in history and a myriad of other factors, all contributing to the development and characters of a rare breed.

Whatever the rationale, there is little disagreement that this great country, and more specifically, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department were extremely fortunate to have this generation come along, “The Greatest Generation”.