

L.A. SHERIFFS' MUSEUM

By Chris Miller

Los Angeles Sheriffs' Museum

LADY DEPUTY PATROL PROJECT, PART 2

Female deputies working for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department were not required to wear law-enforcement-type uniforms until June 9, 1942. The first female uniform consisted of a white shirt tucked into a green skirt, along with suntan nylon stockings and black shoes. Since they didn't wear a Sam Browne gun belt, they didn't carry a baton, and they used a purse to carry their gun and handcuffs. Because they were not dressed or equipped to perform the job in the same way male deputies were, females were placed not only at a disadvantage, but in danger as well.

THE WHITE BLOUSE

The white blouse worn by female deputies had no identifying patches, only a cloth strip with two grommets on the left side where the badge was attached. The deputy's name tag was pinned on the right side. Since the blouse was made of such thin material that a bra could be seen through it, a full slip or top half-slip was required. The white color also presented a safety issue, as it was easily



First Patrol School graduation, August 31, 1972

visible at night. To mitigate this, the deputies would cover the blouse with their green jacket.

THE GREEN SKIRT

In the late 1960s, high school girls across the country began challenging the long-standing

rule requiring them to wear skirts or dresses. In many cases, and in many climates, pants were far more practical. Times were changing and girls demanded the right to decide what type of clothing best suited their needs. Decades-long dress codes were changed, and women in pants became the



Deputy Barbara Kashino



Deputy Jean Miles interviews a victim.

norm. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, however, found itself behind the times. While LASD women were still wearing skirts, some police agencies had been allowing their female officers to wear uniform pants and Sam Browne belts since around 1970.

In August 1972, the first female deputies to go to patrol wore green uniform skirts with the hemline below the knees and nylon pantyhose. If they became involved in a foot pursuit, they had to pull the skirt up above their knees so they could lengthen their stride and keep up with the suspect.

Male deputies could easily climb over chain link fences without their pants getting caught, but when females tried, their skirts would sometimes get snagged. If they were wearing pants, they could get over without any problem. Deputy Elaine Minnis was involved in several incidents where her training officer would use their radio car as a makeshift ladder, pulling it alongside a fence they had to climb, or placed his baton in the knothole of a wooden fence to use as a step to get over. When Minnis followed, her skirt got caught on the fence, pulled her off balance and left her hanging upside down, exposed to the world. After experiencing the same embarrassing situations, some of the female deputies began wearing short pants under their skirts. One went so far as to purchase material with her own money to make culottes, which are actually shorts that look just like a skirt.

HIGH-HEEL SHOES

The two-inch heels these women were required to wear also made it difficult to run. The shoes slipped on, so they were easy to slip off, which was handy since the only way they could realistically chase a suspect was barefoot.

PURSE WITH HANDCUFFS AND REVOLVER

The women were required to carry a black purse containing their gun and handcuffs. A large flap folded over the top of the purse, covering two more flaps, one of which concealed a compartment with a holster that held their revolver. The other flap covered their handcuffs. Occasionally, a female deputy would jump out of the patrol car in pursuit of a suspect and forget her purse. Other times, the purse's shoulder strap would catch on the door handle and yank her back. Many of the women tucked their handcuffs in their waistband and removed their gun from the purse prior to arriving at a call. All of this could have been avoided if they were wearing a gun belt. Realizing that carrying their gun in a purse was unsafe, many soon began wearing a belt with a holster concealed under their jacket. They also replaced the heels with the same lace-up-type shoes worn by the men.

OTHER EQUIPMENT

Without a gun belt, the women couldn't carry a baton, so many did the next best thing and carried a flashlight. Less-lethal weapons, such as pepper spray, stun-bag shotguns and the Taser, had not yet been invented, so there were very few alternatives to subdue violent or uncooperative suspects.

FEMALE UNIFORM DIFFICULTIES

Deputy Gerry Minnis knew that the uniform worn by women in patrol was impractical. It was unrealistic to expect someone to hold a purse during a fight or try to remove their gun or handcuffs during a confrontation. Taking four of the female trainees to a uniform store, he helped them assemble a proper gun belt. Being designed for men, the Sam Browne was far too wide to fit a slim woman's hips. Also, because a woman's waist was much smaller, the accessories that fit on the belt were crowded together.

Most of the women on training would wear their authorized uniform to briefing each day, then go out to the radio car and place their purse in the trunk. They would attach a handcuff case with their handcuffs, along with a holster holding their revolver, onto their uniform belt. They continued to wear the white blouse and green skirt, but exchanged their slip-on heels for lace-up dress shoes. Others would change into pants while on patrol and then change back into a skirt when they returned to the station. Some of the sergeants looked the other way, but others would take the deputy into the lieutenant's office, where she would be scolded. Occasionally, a female deputy on patrol training was photographed or filmed by the news media wearing something other than the authorized uniform. When the Sheriff saw this, he was very upset and threatened to fire them.

UNIFORM CHANGE

During the first few months, the women participating in the program would meet with Department executives to discuss their progress. The top complaint was always the unrealistic uniform and lack of a gun belt to secure their revolver and handcuffs. The women, along with their male partners, petitioned Sheriff Pitchess to allow female deputies to wear uniform shirts, pants, Sam Browne belts and lace-up shoes while working patrol, pointing out the dangers to the female deputies and their partners. Although this continued to be a concern, the Sheriff was adamant that he did not want women wearing a gun belt. At times, he even threatened to fire the ones who altered the uniform, but was talked out of it.

The Sheriff was out of the county on business for a short period during the pilot program, which allowed Division Chiefs Ted Von Minden

and John Graham to convince Undersheriff James Downey to change the female uniform, allowing them to wear pants and a Sam Browne belt. When Downey talked by phone to Pitchess, the Sheriff disagreed and insisted the uniform be changed back. Chief Von Minden took up the women's cause and argued his point, eventually changing the Sheriff's mind. Nonetheless, changes to the female uniforms came slowly. In the mid-1970s, tan shirts began replacing the plain white blouses. The patches on these shirts were smaller than those worn by the men, but at least they identified the wearer as a Los Angeles County deputy sheriff. Sally Browne belts, complete with holster and baton ring, also came into daily use.

Even though the female uniform was now identical to the male version and solved the issue of wearing a skirt, it created other problems. The shirt and pants being worn by women were designed for men; hence, they didn't fit properly. The shirts were made to accommodate longer arms, larger ribcages, and flat chests; the pants had a long rise for straight, narrow hips. It required extensive tailoring for women to look professional in these ill-fitting clothes.

It took time, but uniforms were eventually designed specifically to fit the female body.

The first women's pants were made of 100% polyester, which, on the positive side, didn't fade or wrinkle, but also didn't allow for airflow, which led to yeast infections.

Sheriff Pitchess still wanted his female deputies to look like ladies by wearing uniforms that showed their curves. Hence, the first pants designed for female deputies were tight with no pockets, as the pockets on the men's pants stuck out and this detracted from the women's shapely figures. When the women were allowed to wear wool pants designed for the men, they were required to sew the pockets closed.

The female version of the Sam Browne gun belt, called a Sally Browne, was narrower to better fit a woman. Since the women's belts were much shorter to fit their narrow waists, it was difficult to accommodate all of the same accessories that fit on the Sam Browne.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Some male deputies were very accepting of women working patrol. Fully aware that lives depended on their knowledge and ability, they tried to teach the women everything they could. Others made rude comments and didn't treat them like fellow deputies. Some deputies and supervisors were so strongly against women in patrol, they did everything they could to make the pilot program fail.

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One of the first female deputies on patrol

As if it wasn't difficult enough for the female trainees to learn everything they needed to know, being watched and criticized by male deputies and supervisors who didn't want them working in the field made it that much harder. An Early Morning patrol sergeant at East L.A. Station would come into work four hours early and follow Deputy Mary Francis Baker and her partner around, hoping

to catch her doing something wrong in order to justify why women shouldn't be in patrol.

Deputy Baker was ordered to work overtime on Early Morning Shift, but when her partner refused to work with her, she was assigned to the desk. This created a lot of commotion. The station supervisors were upset, asking how they could have female deputies working patrol when they

couldn't put them in the field. Eventually, after seeing how hard they worked and how they could be depended upon for backup, more male deputies began to support women in patrol.

TRANSPORTING PRISONERS

Security screens between the front and back seats of radio cars did not yet exist, so when a prisoner was being transported, the booking deputy would ride in the back seat to make sure the prisoner didn't spit on, kick or attack the driver. Some men didn't mind being arrested by a female deputy, since they got to ride in the back seat with them on the way to the station. When Deputy Baker was going to arrest a man, she would ask, "Do you want to go in the back seat with me? Just put your hands behind your back so I can handcuff you." Many fights involving female deputies were with other women, not men.

HAZARDS OF THE JOB

One of the first 12 female patrol deputies to participate in the pilot program was Charlene Rottler. Deputy Rottler began her training at Altadena Station on September 1, 1972. Just two



Deputies Kathleen Wade and Ronald Dietrich in patrol



Deputy Charlene Rottler in Patrol

months later, on November 5, Rottler and her training officer, Deputy Doug Oberholtzer, were responding to a battery just-occurred call when a drunk driver ran a stop sign and broadsided their radio car. Newspaper reporter Bonnie Clary, who was writing a story about the first female deputies in patrol, was riding in the back seat. Oberholtzer broke a bone in his hand and Clary fractured her leg, but the impact was on Rottler's side of the car and she suffered catastrophic injuries.

Rottler's skull and the front of her face were crushed in the collision. Responding paramedics left her for dead as they helped the other victims, but once they realized she was still alive, they rushed her to Huntington Memorial Hospital, where she endured 20 hours of surgery, receiving 350 stitches in her face alone. The impact had thrown Rottler around violently, rupturing all of her internal organs and fracturing her back in multiple places, but the most extensive damage was to her intestines. Doctors said that if the injuries didn't kill her, infection from her ruptured organs would. She spent the next month in a coma.

Rottler survived, but the extensive injuries forced her to retire in April 1974. Over the rest of her life, she endured 55 major surgeries attempting to repair the damage suffered in the traffic collision. At the time of her death on January 3, 2010, she had to attach herself to a feeding tube each night to ensure she received enough nutrition, as she only had one foot of small intestine left.

When it was determined that Rottler would be unable to return to work, alternate Deputy Judy Shepard Evans took her place at Altadena Sheriff's Station.

CULTURAL CONCERNS

In some countries, women were, and still are, required to be obedient and submissive to their husbands. The man would speak for the family. Women were not allowed to speak, or even look someone in the eye. In some cases, they

were not even allowed to drive. Needless to say, occasionally some men would refuse to talk to a female deputy. This could make handling the call challenging.

Historically, the Hispanic culture is patriarchal. Although protective of women, the man is the head of the household and does not take orders from a woman. The first time a female deputy became involved in a physical confrontation and was hit in the face, it occurred in East L.A.

When women first started working in patrol, sometimes the sheer shock value would defuse the situation. Family members who were in the middle of a fistfight were so fascinated at seeing a female deputy, they would stop fighting and ask what she was doing in a patrol car.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE RESERVE COMPANY

The Administrative Company was composed of full-time Ph.D. educators, medical doctors, engineers and scientists. In their free time, they volunteered as reserve deputies to work on special projects for the Sheriff's Department.

Sheriff Pitchess contacted Reserve Captain Ward Jenson, who was assigned to the Administrative Company, and ordered him to conduct a study on female deputies in patrol. The report was to include both the benefits and detriments. Jenson called Reserve Deputy Frank Barnes and asked for his opinion. Barnes said that a sampling of less than 30 women would not provide valid results. When Jenson informed the Sheriff of Barnes' opinion, Sheriff Pitchess told him, "You got 20, do the job."

THE STUDY

The study was supervised by Jenson, while Reserve Deputy Robert Hazlewood interviewed most of the female deputies involved in the pilot project. Hazlewood also created a statistical analysis from the information he gathered. Since Barnes had the most knowledge of the

responsibilities of patrol deputies, he went to the stations, read reports written by the female trainees and gathered data on their effectiveness. He then compiled this information and included it in the final report.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF WOMEN IN PATROL

Jenson and Barnes conducted a study of the first 12 female deputies on the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department to work patrol. Their observations indicated that women had a calming effect in some situations. They didn't have to immediately take charge as some male deputies did. Instead, they would just listen to people, which often solved the problem.

The patience, empathy and tact shown by female deputies made them very effective at resolving domestic issues. When victims of sexual assault were interviewed, they were much more willing to discuss the incident with another woman.

The women often had a calming effect when they arrived at a location or made a traffic stop. Men were far more likely to become confrontational with a male deputy than with a female one.

Since women had not previously worked patrol, both men and women were shocked when a female deputy arrived in a radio car. The surprise at this unusual sight was sometimes enough to completely defuse a situation.

THE FINAL REPORT

In the final report, Jenson and Barnes recommended that the female uniform be changed from the white blouse, green skirt and heels to shirts and pants. Sheriff Pitchess was not happy with the final report and the reserves were told to make some minor changes. Although Pitchess did not like the conclusion, he eventually accepted it.

This story will be continued in the next issue of *Star News*.

Edited by Jan Jenkins (ret. LASD). ☆

L.A. County Retired Marshals Lunches for 2019

ALL LUNCHES ARE SCHEDULED FOR 12 NOON

November 6

Yang Chow Chinese Restaurant
3777 E. Colorado Blvd.
Pasadena

December 4

Villa Tepeyac Mexican Restaurant
2200 E. Garvey Ave.
West Covina