

The 1940's

In the late 30's and early 40's there was a great migration to California from the Midwest. This was due to the dustbowl that plagued the once rich land that supported so many. People who had lived there for generations left for California. Reading the papers and court records for the 30's and 40's, the city was experiencing a large influx of people without jobs or means of support. It was especially noticeable in the 1942 court records as vagrancy filled just about every page. The people who had migrated had nowhere to live and jobs were at a premium. Other offenses that were new on the books were illegal taxi operation, drunk driving, and cruelty to animals.

The year 1941 showed the police were very busy. They had 9,559 arrests. That was an amazing jump from the previous year's total of 2,998. In an article in the Tribune of January 7, 1942, Chief B.J. Epperly stated there were 16 officers on the force at that time and of the 9,559 arrests made during the previous year, 4,695 of the perpetrators were found guilty. The breakdown of offenses was:

- 1567 For Drunkenness Within The City
- 5002 Parking Violations
- 4 Burglary Arrests
- 1 Homicide
- 18 Grand Larcenies
- 14 Auto Thefts
- 4 Assaults
- 2 Forgeries And Counterfeiting
- 1 Carrying Weapons Illegally
- 5 Prostitution
- 185 Disorderly Conduct
- 238 Vagrancy
- 27 Gambling
- 139 Drunk Driving
- 1266 Road And Driving Violations
- 832 Other Minor Traffic Violations
- 511 Miscellaneous

Considering there were only 16 officers that was a lot of arrests! In spite of the list above, on February 11, 1942, Police Commissioner W.H. Brazil stated that he wanted more work from the officers and listed ten points in which improvements were desired. Per the Tribune article entitled "Commissioner Spurs City Police," Brazil indicated that it was not a criticism of the department but that the public desired higher efficiency. The ten points listed for immediate attention included:

1. Get rid of the prostitutes walking the streets in such numbers that they are becoming a public nuisance
2. Better enforcement of speed laws, such as speeding on the less important streets, boulevard stops, and vehicle code in general. I know you have accomplished a lot to curb such violations, but the public demands better results
3. Enforcement of the ordinance pertaining to the stacking of vegetables and produce for unnecessary lengths of time
4. Absolute enforcement of the bicycle ordinance, especially riding on the sidewalk
5. Systematic checking of all taxis and music machines, as I know that some taxi companies are bringing in extra cars
6. There are numerous complaints against gambling
7. I would like to suggest that there be two men in the police cars, especially at night, as a matter of safety to the officers themselves. I hope you can arrange your schedule so that this may be accomplished
8. I believe you will agree with me that the front office is not a rest room, meaning that officers who are off duty and the general public alike should not clutter up the office
9. Could you so arrange, if you think it a good idea, to have the men write their reports at the close of their shifts instead of at all hours of the day, by doing so they will be able to devote more time to active police work
10. Better enforcement of jaywalkers against traffic lights.

On November 18, 1944, tragedy struck the department. Vincent Munch, 38, had been a motorcycle policeman for the department for five years. He was killed at 1:10 PM when his motorcycle collided with a fire truck at Broad and Higuera streets. Officer Munch was responding to an emergency fire call at the time of the accident. His death was the first fatality in the history of the department.

