

## OBITUARY

### Lowell William Bradford (1918–2007)



Lowell William Bradford was born in the town of Arbuckle, California, on August 30, 1918, his father being the local blacksmith and wheelwright. Although his father had completed only the 4th grade, he developed his own form of mathematical reasoning for designing wagon wheels and barrels. He passed this math on to his son, which allowed Lowell to excel in mathematics at all levels, especially trigonometry and calculus. Lowell attended Pierce High School in Arbuckle, where he played guard on the football team, varsity basketball, and tennis, and also became the valedictorian of his class. An accomplished musician, he played clarinet in the school band. Upon graduation from high school in 1936, Lowell went to the University of California at Berkeley on an academic scholarship. Lowell's decision to attend UC Berkeley was somewhat influenced by his cousin Fred Weyand, who was 2 years older, also played football at Pierce High School, and served as the valedictorian of his class. Lowell followed Fred to Berkeley, and they remained lifelong friends even though the latter was totally absorbed by a 35-year military career, ultimately becoming a 4-star general and the Army Chief of Staff.

Lowell's Chemistry 1A professor at Berkeley was Dr. Paul Kirk, who turned into a lifelong friend and mentor. Dr. Kirk inspired Lowell to enter the field of criminalistics. Lowell lived at the International House and exhibited a strong appreciation for the people and cultures of other countries. He enjoyed interacting with the students there, and many of those friendships endured through the rest of his life. Lowell played in the Cal Marching Band, the Straw Hat Band, was a "hasher" at the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority house where he met his future wife, and participated in the Army ROTC. Although Lowell gave the salutatorian address to the University's graduating Class of 1940, he purposely neglected to take a chemistry course that was required for graduation so that he could spend one more year with Dr. Kirk in undergraduate status. He officially graduated in 1941 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Lieutenant Bradford was assigned to the Presidio of San Francisco as an Ordnance Officer, where he was put in charge of inspections and correcting defects in the San Francisco Bay Ordnance Group (Coast Artillery). His senior supervisor was Lt. General John L. DeWitt, Commanding General of the Western Defense Command and 4th Army, who drew national attention by signing the Japanese exclusion order. As the war in the Pacific Theater peaked, Lowell saw combat against the Japanese in the Aleutian Islands. By the time he was barely 26 years old, Lowell had risen to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In 1944, General DeWitt entrusted Lowell with countering the Japanese balloon bombs which were landing mostly on the West Coast. Lowell consulted with Dr. Kirk for a scientific evaluation of their design and construction. As a result of this collaboration, effective countermeasures were developed to keep the bombs from harming military or civilian personnel or setting forest fires. After the war, Lowell did not stay in the Army, choosing instead to return to civilian life and immerse himself in his first love, forensic science. This said, he felt a lingering urge to serve his country beyond World War II, which led him to join the U.S. Army Reserve 3 years later, rising to the rank of colonel in 1961.

In late 1945, Kirk offered Lowell a job in his commercial laboratory. The state crime laboratory (CII) trumped this long-awaited opportunity by offering Lowell a 6-month contract to work in the lab in Sacramento, which desperately needed help. Always a champion of the criminalistics profession, Dr. Kirk encouraged Lowell to help the state lab get on its feet, but they continued to confer with each other on a long-distance basis. Lowell then returned to Dr. Kirk's laboratory where he remained until his recruitment in 1947 by Santa Clara County's District Attorney to establish a laboratory in the basement of the County Hospital to analyze blood and urine from suspected drunk drivers. It was at this point that Lowell developed the "Bradford Modification of the Kozelka-Hine Method" of determining blood-alcohol levels. He soon was joined by James Brackett, and, for a period of time, they were the only

two employees in that office. In essence, Santa Clara County's original crime laboratory took root in a small room that was little larger than a closet. It had a dirt floor and inauspiciously operated across the narrow hallway from the County Morgue. Lowell and Jim laid a sheet of plywood on the floor to avoid having to stand in the dirt while they worked. Lowell later designed and oversaw the construction of the world-renowned Santa Clara County Crime Laboratory. He remained its Director until 1973, when he resigned and went into private practice. His legacy from managing innumerable criminalistics cases over 26 years was his insistence on unconditional duty of care, for "every analysis you perform and case you present for court action will affect human lives in profound ways."

Lowell was involved in many pivotal activities along the way, such as founding the California Association of Criminalists and publishing countless articles on criminalistics subjects, often with James Brackett as a co-author. In private practice he continued to publish, much of which concerned the subject of questioned documents. In consulting status with the U.S. State Department, Lowell set up the crime labs in Saudi Arabia and at Scotland Yard. In 1978, he received the Roger Greene Award from the CAC for his contributions to the field of criminalistics.

Mr. Bradford was the former Chairman of the Criminalistics Section, American Academy of Forensic Sciences; Assistant

Professor of Police, San Jose State University; a frequent lecturer and faculty member at the University of California, Berkeley; a faculty member at City College of San Francisco; and served for the first 4 years of the CAC as its Executive Secretary. He was a charter member of the Society of Forensic Engineers and Scientists. Among his most prominent cases were the John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy murders.

Lowell Bradford had a lifelong love of the outdoors. He deeply enjoyed hunting, fishing, and photography. In 1996 as the result of an unfortunate medical accident, Lowell was partially paralyzed, confining him to a wheelchair and bed for the last 10 years of his life. He continued to work in the forensic sciences as much as possible, despite his handicap, but died on April 12, 2007 at the age of 88. Lowell was one of the early pioneers of forensic science in California, and his passing is of great loss to the criminalistics community. He is survived by a son, a daughter, and two stepsons. At his request, there were no funeral services or newspaper obituaries.

Paul M. Dougherty,<sup>1</sup> J.D. and  
Edward Peterson<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>P.O. Box 112, Ojai, CA 93023

<sup>2</sup>Santa Clara County Crime Lab  
1557 Berger Drive, Suite B-2, San Jose, CA 95112