This edition of the *Journal* is authored by Deputy Director Michael Lindsay. Looking back over his 40-plus year career, Director Lindsay says he has noted many changes in law enforcement but also some important constants that are often overlooked in this impersonal, high speed, seemingly schizophrenic society of today. But Lindsay says, take heart, today’s vacillating standards can be tomorrow’s opportunities to excel.

**History of the Future**

During the time I was contemplating my subject for this article, I had occasion to overhear a couple of veteran officers (both of whom are younger than I) lamenting about how society has changed. They reminisced about the good-ole-days and how “everything has gone to the dogs.” Such episodes of nostalgia are not unusual for those of us who are well into our middle years. This reminiscing caused me to begin thinking about how law enforcement had changed, just in my lifetime.

It also caused me to remember several episodes from my youth that gave me perspective on history, the big picture, and how important these are to a developing profession. One of the most significant of these recollections was my dad taking me to visit my great-grandmother who was 93 at the time.

I am from the generation referred to as Baby Boomers. My great-grandmother was also a Boomer. Not born just after WW II as I was but, astoundingly, just after the Civil War.

Years later, I began to appreciate what a remarkable span of history she had witnessed. She was in her teens during the cowboy days. She lived through the Gay 90s (the 1890s, not the 1990s which eventually gave a whole new meaning to the word gay). She lived through World War I, Prohibition, the Roaring 20s, the Great Depression, and World War II, and she did not pass away until after she had watched (on a strange device called a television) the United States launch a satellite into outer space.

I often regretted not asking her about the famous frontier lawmen like Wild Bill Hickock and Wyatt Earp. We know from newspaper articles that their exploits were widely publicized. Likewise, she would have been familiar with Elliott Ness and J. Edgar Hoover, who brought down the likes of Al Capone, John Dillinger, Bonnie and Clyde and Baby Face Nelson. She literally witnessed law enforcement from the cowboy days to the space age.

In my early years, I remember seeing a family driving a horse drawn wagon into my hometown every Saturday to get supplies for their farm. One of my earliest recollections of law enforcement was seeing the city police using three-wheeled Harley Davidson motorcycles. These machines and officers captured my attention and admiration.

Within my career, I remember beat officers using call boxes to talk to their desk sergeants. I remember solving crimes without DNA, and needing to develop a suspect (before AFIS) to match with a latent print. I remember wheel guns, portable radios with telescoping antennas, and R.A.D.A.R. units with antennas that hung outside the side window of a squad car.

And, I remember having to send correspondence, do research, and conduct background investigations without the help of the Internet!

As much change as I—or even my great-grandmother—has seen in law enforcement, it will pale in comparison to what new officers today will see 40-plus years from now. When one of those officers is writing an article for this website, he or she will talk about a society that is wildly different than today.

Stun devices, portable breath tests and in-car computers will all be antiquated technology. Several years ago, I witnessed the unveiling of a 4 million dollar prototype police car that was—even then—only a micron away from the fictional Batmobile.

My point here is not to lament about how the old days are gone or how everything has changed, but to acknowledge how policing has evolved to handle what needed to be done at the time.

What does all this mean for new officers?

It means that the need for constant training is just beginning to manifest itself. It means that continuous introspection will be necessary. It means that all the elements are now present to transform law enforcement into a true profession.

It also means that new recruits—regardless of what the old-timers say—are, in fact, well suited to be the police officers of tomorrow.

When talking about the future, H.G. Wells once said, “Civilization is a race [… A race] between education and catastrophe.” I believe this will likely prove to be our biggest challenge: keeping society intact, ever while teetering at the edge of anarchy. As grim as this sounds, it provides huge opportunity.

For new officers, rapidly developing technology means that this profession has a bright future IF these new officers recognize that there is also an all-important counter-principle that subtly but pervasively influences the entire system.

This antithetical condition that is so often overlooked but proves to be so crucial is that ever-present human element. Human character is, in fact, the counterweight to advancement. It is the element with which we in law enforcement will be dealing in the future just as we have in the past. The principles that Sir Robert Peel enunciated in 1829 are, in fact, exactly the same as needed today.

As advanced as our technology will become in the next few decades, 95% of our job has been, is and will continue to be dealing with humans and human emotions on the edge.

If there is a danger in our profession today, it is in believing (falsely, I think) that *things* are more important to a profession than people.

On this point, I know that there is a strong feeling among many that the virtues espoused in previous years are irrelevant today. I hear people discounting these standards as archaic. They typically claim that today’s fast paced society does not compare to those biblical times when many of these virtues were first professed.

I beg to differ. The desires to succeed and advance in cultures as sophisticated as those of the Roman or Jewish societies of those days were exactly the same as today. Greed, ego, jealousy and the human need for recognition have not changed. The truth is that biology has not kept pace with technology.

If these drives and emotions are the same, shouldn’t those moral standards of yesteryear be just as relevant today? After all, most of what constitutes really good policing, is human beings dealing well with other human beings.

Unlike some, I am really optimistic about law enforcement’s role in the coming decades. The Knights Templar, besides being renowned warriors, established an international banking system and accumulated great wealth but also created and maintained a code of professional ethics for all of its members. Law enforcement tomorrow can be the rock of stability in a society that believes little is sacred.

I am confident that most officers will easily adapt to the new technologies that will bombard the profession. And, I am hopeful that a few officers will surface to remind all of us that dealing well with our brothers and sisters has never gone out of style. “Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you.” Matt 5:44NKJ

We should not expect to save the world through sensational, superhuman accomplishments like those portrayed in movies, but rather by dealing with one person at a time, realizing all the while that technology is only a small part of the profession.

Charles de Gaulle once commented that “A man of character finds a special attractiveness in difficulty. It is only by coming to grips with difficulty that he can realize his potential.”

Notice the similarities among the concepts of professing a belief, as the Disciples did; adhering to a code of honor, as the Knights did; and the discipline of practicing a profession, as we do. This is no coincidence.

Law enforcement, as an even more critical profession in the future, needs not manifest heroic efforts to assure its permanence. It only needs each officer doing one right thing at a time. More than this, officers need not accomplish.

When viewed from this perspective, the future is not so scary, and the prospects are not so ominous. Do not worry about what will be, only what is. The true question is, are we developing the attitudes today that will serve our society tomorrow?

Albert Einstein, one of the great minds of the modern world, commented about such worries. He said, “I never think about the future. It comes soon enough.” What a surprising but insightful comment from someone who opened the nuclear age and changed our world forever.

As improbable as it may sound, the Great Depression, which was one of the darkest periods in our national history, produced one of the most professional cadre of American law enforcement officers ever assembled.

It should become obvious that neither uncertain economic times nor global political change need impact your personal code of ethics. What is right, *is* right!

“You cannot add any time to your life by worrying about it.” Matt 6:27 “So, do not worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries.” Matt 6:34NCV

So, the moral for those officers practicing today is that it matters not whether we use the sword of a knight, the 45-caliber Peacemaker of the old West or some laser device of the future, we are first and foremost, shepherds of the flock.

As inconsequential as this sounds when viewing the big picture, it is what will create the big picture in the future.

This generation of law enforcement officers faces many challenges. The solution to surviving these challenges and actually thriving is surprisingly simple. Make a commitment to discipline; make a commitment to honesty; make a commitment to people; and make a commitment to God. Strive for service through law enforcement, not to law enforcement. You will then begin to forge a career and understanding a profession.

If you do these things, in 40-some years, you will be able to say—I helped design the greatest profession ever!

-- M. Lindsay