

The
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Grapevine

MARCH, 1964

The FIREMEN'S Grapevine

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FRONT COVER

IN MEMORIAM

TO

Assistant Fire Chief Bethel F. Gifford, Division III, L.A.F.D. who passed away on January 18, 1964 while on active duty.

Chief Gifford was recognized as a dedicated, sincere and progressive public servant throughout his career of 35 years as a fireman. He was admired by his fellow workmen and highly respected for his opinions and suggestions by every major manufacturer of fire fighting apparatus and equipment.

This month's "Portrait of a Fireman," is dedicated to Chief Bethel F. Gifford.

Portrait of a fireman



Bethel F. Gifford was appointed to Assistant Chief on June 25, 1956. Chief Gifford commanded Division III (San Pedro) at the time of his passing.

By OTTO FIRGENS

These are the unedited and spontaneous comments made to this writer during the preparation of this portrait of Bethel Francis Gifford, who was born in Garfield, Washington, on October 17, 1899. During his boyhood, young Gifford was raised in the beautiful setting of Lake Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. He lived with his family in a houseboat on the Lake and attended La Cross Grammer and High Schools. An early indication of Bethel's tendency and ability to learn quickly occurred when he was about 11 years old. He accidentally fell off the boat and into the lake, and he had never learned to swim before. Therefore, it was a matter of "sink or swim"—quite obviously he swam!

At 19 Bethel F. Gifford enlisted in the Marines in Portland, Oregon. During his basic training he became a sharpshooter. Soon he found himself on a ship bound for the Philippines, and he had the distinction of being the first victim to ride the new ambulance, which had been transported to the area on the same ship. "Leatherneck" Gifford contacted the mumps on the trip; and because of the crowded conditions on the ship, he slept in the ambulance and rode it ashore during landing operations. After his release from the service, Bethel Gifford worked as an auto electrician in a garage in Pasadena. Four years later he purchased and operated a service station in Pasadena. This business venture did not last very long, because he was appointed to the L.A.F.D. on April 6, 1929.

The scope of his firefighting experience extended from the hills of Hollywood to the waterfront in San Pedro; and it didn't take long for Fireman Gifford to earn an outstanding reputation.

Under the old system of grading at the drill tower, when 2.5 was passing and 4.0 excellent, he received mostly marks of 4.0 and 3.5. "He is a very good worker, takes an interest in everything he does, quick to learn," is a statement in the probationary report written by his commanding officer, Captain Harris Brunton. This conscientious and diligent attitude continued throughout his Fire Department career.

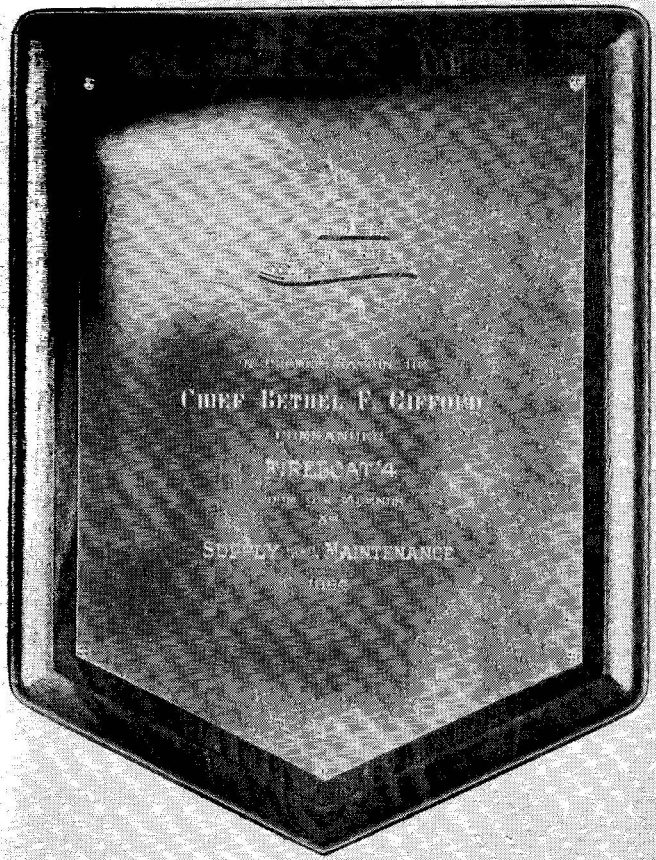
Soon he was promoted to Auto Fireman, and in a short 8 years he was appointed to Captain. After placing number 3 on the Battalion Chiefs list, Captain Gifford was promoted to Battalion Chief in 1944. Shortly thereafter, he was assigned to head the Fire Department Shops and Storeroom. He continued this duty until the Fire Department reorganization in 1956, at which time Bethel F. Gifford attained the rank of Assistant Chief and was assigned to Division 1 in San Pedro.

It was during his 12-year tenure at the Shops that he truly found his niche—the niche in which he contributed im-

In retrospect—

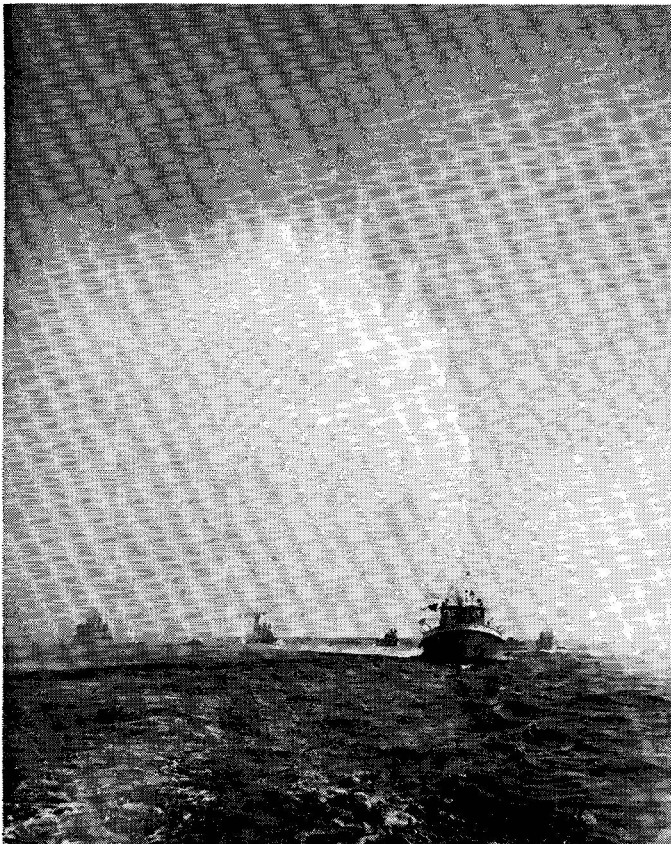
a tribute to Bethel F. Gifford, Assistant Fire Chief

- ... "Efficiency—very good. Obedience—excellent. Sobriety—excellent," was his Marine discharge report at the age of 20....
- ... "Good—very good—excellent," was his drill tower report....
- ... "A very good and willing worker—keen interest, quick to learn—will make a good fireman," was his probationary report....
- ... "He was strict—a man of convictions—you always knew where you stood. However, he was reasonable and always willing to listen. We held him in the highest of esteem," say the men he worked with at the Shops....
- ... "An experienced and progressive individual who was dedicated to the fire service and a true perfectionist," say manufacturers who had contact with him regarding apparatus and equipment....
- ... "An unusually serious man meticulous—quiet—extremely reserved. Highly respected for his ability; likeable and a kind and understanding heart," say his firefighting comrades....
- ... "A wonderful husband, good father and family man," states his wife of 24 years, Frances Gifford....



LAFD PHOTO BY DUNLAP

In commemoration of Chief Bethel F. Gifford, employees of Supply and Maintenance reflect their feelings to their former boss with this beautiful plaque that was presented to his wife, Frances Gifford, last month.



Arrival Day in Los Angeles for Boat 4

mensely to the operations of the Los Angeles Fire Department. It didn't take long for Chief Alderson to recognize this hard-working and progressive fireman. In a memo to Chief Gifford in 1950, the Chief Engineer had this to say:

Once again, Friday, November 10, I had an opportunity to observe how Supply and Maintenance and all of its individual functions operate and how you have integrated your operations with the rest of the operations of this department.

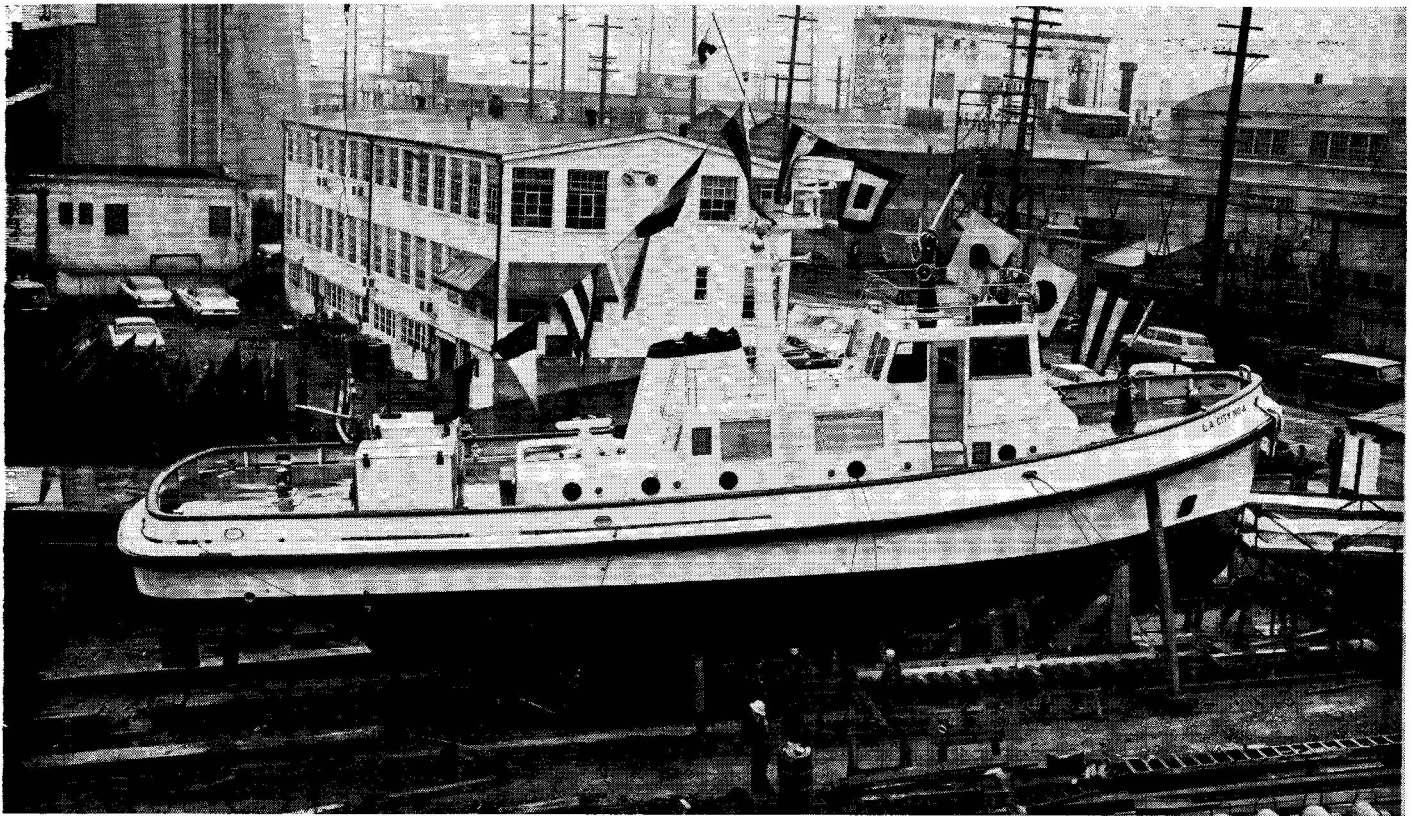
Frankly, of all the improvements which have been made in our procedure for the handling of mountain fires, I think that the greatest credit goes to Supply and Maintenance. . . . Please extend to all of those concerned my personal thanks of every man who worked at this fire. My hat is off to all of you.

According to Don Brittingham and Frank McGeeney who worked for Chief Gifford the entire 12 years, the following are only a few of the accomplishments that can be directly attributed to the personal efforts and persistence of Chief Gifford:

- The Crown high-pressure wagon was designed by him;
 - He designed the two heavy utilities;
 - Responsible for more powerful (Hall Scott) engines in the Seagraves;
 - Developed the small crash wagon;
 - Improved the 1941 Mack tank wagons;
 - Developed Squad 9's wagon;
 - Proposed and worked with Brittingham on spec's for Boat Number 5;
 - Helped in developing the three Mack salvage wagons;
 - Instrumental in directing the installation of the remote transmitters at Mountain Patrol and in Elysian Park and the two-way radio system;
 - Insistence of specified and adequate components for material, thereby preventing any possible inadequate or under-powered chassis for apparatus;
 - Years of research in planning, designing and developing specifications for Boat 4—then under his watchful eye, the building and testing of the vessel, and finally, under personal supervision, the delivery of the Department's newest fire boat;
 - While at Supply and Maintenance, Chief Gifford made many friends within his own Department, and many outside of it.
- Red Willmore, General Manager of Crown, and a great admirer of Chief Gifford, told me, "we have been in business since 1950. I must say that the company owes a large portion of its success to Bethel Gifford, namely through his insistence of not sacrificing quality for a price. He was a dedicated man and a true perfectionist with a progressive attitude. You might say that through his guidance, experience and faith in our company, we got started on the right track. Crown owes its present high reputation in the field of manufacturing fire-fighting apparatus to this man."

Jack Ruggles, President of Seagrave Pacific Corporation and District Manager of Seagrave Fire Apparatus, Division of F.W.D., was extremely cordial and pleasant in stating his feelings to me—"I considered Chief Gifford a very close, personal friend and the most unselfish individual I have ever known. He was highly intelligent, and I felt a tremendous admiration and respect for him.

"Gif was my right hand and guiding light in the Atomic



Fire Boat #4 is shown on the ways at the Albina Boat and Machine Works as she was being readied for the launching ceremony. Beth Ann Tapert, 7, granddaughter of Chief Bethel Gifford officially

christened the ship with a bottle of champagne on December 27, 1961. Boat 4 left Portland for Los Angeles on February 14, 1962 with Chief Gifford aboard for the entire trip.

tests at Mercury, Nevada, during which civil defense and fire equipment participated in the testing.

"I have never met anyone equalling his knowledge about Fire Department equipment. His ideas contributed greatly in making Seagrave equipment better."—

I contacted Joe Yankie, President of Yankee Walter Corporation, who in his own words had this to say: "Over a period of years, it was my pleasure to work with Chief Gifford as a vendor of specialized fire apparatus and to enjoy him as a close friend. Giff was a man whose own solidity and interest in the job to be done stood above the myriad details of the specs he wrote, and placed a requirement on manufacturers to meet the spirit of the specifications, and not just the letter of the requirement. His influence resulted in the Los Angeles Fire Department receiving the manufacturers' best effort."

Horatio Bond, the then Chief Engineer of the National Fire Protection Association, in a letter (printed, in part) to Fire Chief John Alderson in 1950 had this to say:

. . . *Battalion Chief B. F. Gifford* kindly looked over the list of equipment shown in Appendix I of the former edition and gave us some excellent suggestions. On the basis of his review, we have decided that the list published is perhaps not exactly the one to use and so we have decided to leave Appendix I out of the revised edition.

I hope you will thank Chief Gifford and you might say to him that his suggestions were particularly helpful to Mr. Warren Kimball . . . Mr. Kimball reports that these

suggestions were most helpful and that they stimulated a further review of the recommendations of these standards.

A directive from the Board of Fire Commissioners to Fire Chief Alderson in 1955 resulted in the following commendation:

On the presentation, this date, of specifications for the bids and eventual purchase of five triple combination pumping engines, the bids were reviewed very carefully by the Board of Fire Commissioners. There was, eventually, considerable discussion with respect to the expert manner in which these specifications had been prepared and particularly the fact that practically all of California and many other portions of the United States and even departments outside of the United States are looking to the Los Angeles Fire Department for advice on specifications and copies of our specifications.

This, of course, means that you are doing an outstanding job in the preparation of these specifications and the City of Los Angeles and the Fire Department will benefit for many years to come. I was instructed by the Board of Fire Commissioners to address a letter to you and compliment you and commend you on the excellent job you are doing not only on the specifications but with respect to your entire responsibility in Supply and Maintenance.

Chief Bethel Gifford achieved his greatest personal satisfaction, and no doubt the greatest single contribution to the operations of the Los Angeles Fire Department with the development and final delivery of Boat 4. Chief Gifford actually

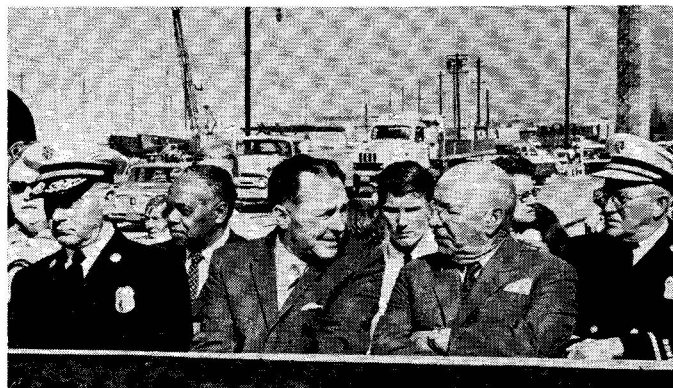
spent untold thousands of hours dreaming, breathing and living Boat 4 while laying its plans. Even before he actually started to draw up the design and specifications, Bethel spent many hours of his own time in research, reading, talking and asking people about fire boats—even to the extent of spending many hours of his vacation time while traveling, visiting and talking to people who could enlighten him in any way on these kinds of boats. Chief Gifford was personally responsible, throughout this entire project, for researching, planning, engineering, building, outfitting, testing, and finally for the ultimate delivery of the boat in the Port of Los Angeles, San Pedro, where it was accepted by the Mayor and the Fire Department on February 22, 1962.

The Boat 4 project, from its formative stage to its delivery, took about 3 years. Chief Gifford made at least 15 trips to San Francisco and Portland, visiting Norgard Architects and the Albina Engine and Machine Works during the architectural and construction phases of the Boat.

On the trip to Portland, for the christening, the Chief took his little granddaughter, Beth Ann Tapert, 7, who smashed the red, white and blue-wrapped champagne bottle against the bow of Boat 4 as she slid down the ways and into the river on a very rainy day, December 27, 1961.

On February 14, 1962, Chief Gifford started the final phase of his pet project—the trip of the boat under her own power from Portland to Los Angeles for delivery to the City. According to Gifford, "this was one of the wildest boat rides I have ever experienced. As we were passing Astoria in high seas and foul weather, we experienced 15 to 20-foot waves, and I decided then and there that if we got through this, the boat was capable of anything. We made it in 8 days and two stops. One in San Francisco and the other in Port Hueneme." Engineer Sam Le Doux of Boat 4 and a crew from Albina also made the exciting trip.

The official acceptance ceremonies for Boat 4 occurred on Thursday, February 22, 1962, at a dock next to Boat 2's quarters before a large and enthusiastic gathering of citizens who had also witnessed the new boat's arrival. Many City



From left: Chief William Miller, Commissioner O'Bryant, Mayor Yorty; and, extreme right, Chief Gifford are shown on the Speaker's stand on February 22, 1962 during the official acceptance ceremonies for Boat 4. Mayor Yorty gave the official acceptance address.

officials, including Mayor Yorty, attended, and the Mayor gave the official acceptance address.

Assistant Fire Chief Bethel F. Gifford, a veteran firefighter with almost 35 years of service, passed away while on active duty on January 18, 1964. The preceding comments by the people who knew and worked with him are a great tribute to the sincere, respected and understanding man who dedicated his life to the betterment of the Los Angeles Fire Department. He served the Department, the City and the community well. Chief Gifford was a Mason and a Shriner. His only hobby was photography, and the Chief owned a dark room at his home which he built and used to develop his own pictures. Indirectly, Chief Gifford will be praised and thanked many times by members who operate Department equipment that is first-class in its operation, efficiency, power, endurance and reputation throughout the fire service because of the efforts and energies of this man.

Although he fought the idea of naming Boat 4, it seems to this writer that it might be proper and fitting and certainly worthy of dedicating the memory of this Assistant Chief by affixing the name of Bethel Gifford to the Super-Structure of Boat 4.

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