

Articulate Police Chief

Thomas Reddin



He represents "the new breed of cop"
(Chief Reddin at a news conference yesterday)

THOMAS REDDIN, the police chief of Los Angeles looks a bit like Hubert Humphrey and is as articulate as most politicians. The 6-foot-4-inch policeman, whose calm, measured words were the nation's main link with the facts yesterday as the shooting of Senator Kennedy unfolded, was born in New York 51 years ago and grew up in Denver. He ran a gas station and served four years as a seaman in the Navy before becoming a policeman in Los Angeles in 1941.

Man
in the
News

While working his way up on the Los Angeles force, he studied law at Los Angeles universities and represents what might be called the "new breed of cop" in urban America. One of his first moves, he said when he became chief last year, would be to reorganize the department so that it could apply current scientific and technological knowledge to police work.

Chief Reddin, a beaming, 210-pound giant of a man, moved into one of the world's toughest law-enforcement jobs after the death last July of William H. Parker, the 64-year-old police chief whose policy of holding his men at a distance from Los Angeles blacks was blamed for precipitating the race riots in Watts in 1965.

As he demonstrated for a nationwide audience while he was being questioned by newsmen after the assassination attempt, Chief Reddin is not easily flappable. A round-faced man with dark eyes, he breaks into a wide, thin smile every few minutes, under normal circumstances. Even while replying to confused questions about the shooting, he did not lose his composure.

The chief, the son of a New York millionaire who lost his fortune while drilling for oil in Oklahoma, was forced to drop out of the University of Colorado during the Depression, in 1933.

Charges of police brutality and highhandedness have not been eliminated in Los Angeles under the Reddin regime. Last September the American Civil Liberties Union filed a suit against the department charging that

the police deprived antiwar demonstrators of their constitutional rights during President Johnson's visit to the city in June, 1967. Beating of several demonstrators "with billy clubs" was also alleged.

Last July, 100 of Chief Reddin's men stormed a Black Muslim mosque to search for a reported arsenal. They did not find one, and the chief joined Mayor Samuel W. Yorty at a news conference during which they admitted, "We were misled. We made a mistake."

However, Chief Reddin's tack has generally been conciliatory. Although he proclaims that "crime in the streets" is his first priority, he has called for improved relations with slum dwellers, whom he refers to as "our first defense against riots." At the same time, keeping an eye on all contingencies, he can express interest in buying for the force a 20-ton armored vehicle costing \$35,000. Designed as a barricade crusher, it carries 20 men.

Because of its sprawling vastness, Los Angeles presents special problems, and Chief Reddin's \$28,000-a-year job is regarded as one of the most difficult in the nation. New York with three times as many people as Los Angeles, last year had five times as many policemen. As a result, almost all patrols in Los Angeles are made in prowl cars, which not only cuts down the efficiency of the police but severely limits the policeman's opportunity to know the people under his protection.

The police in Los Angeles, however, have the highest pay scale in the nation, starting at \$641 a month, compared with New York's \$586. But the pay scale has proved inadequate to lure enough good men into the force, and Chief Reddin began pushing for across-the-board increases and overtime pay as soon as he took charge. He deplores what he calls the poor image that policemen have in the United States.

"Actually, it's exciting, stimulating, gratifying, well-paid work, and we've got to get this across. We've got to change our own attitudes," said the man with 27 years of police experience.