

William Scott served longest as Placer County sheriff

By Robert D. Dávila, Sacramento Bee

William "Bill" Scott, an innovative lawman who was Placer County's longest-serving sheriff, died March 27 of lung cancer, his family said. He was 88.

Sheriff Scott was a war hero and Auburn police chief when he ran for Placer County's top law enforcement job in 1954. At 29, he became the youngest elected sheriff in California history. He was re-elected five times before retiring from office in 1979.



William Scott served at Placer County's sheriff. Photo/Sacramento Bee

He modernized the sheriff's department, which was closed at night and had only 11 sworn officers and no patrols or in-house communications when he took office in 1955. He organized patrol beats, introduced radio communications and improved training for detectives. He added the coroner's duties and introduced forensic pathology to the sheriff's department.

In 1960, Sheriff Scott was in charge of security for the Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley. He established patrols in

unincorporated communities and a substation in Tahoe City.

“That really opened up the mountains to skiing,” Placer County Sheriff Ed Bonner said. “They used to have just constables up there.”

Sheriff Scott, who helped arrest one of the FBI’s 10 “most wanted” suspects near Colfax, was widely known in law enforcement. In 1965, he was elected president of the California State Sheriffs’ Association. He belonged to the California Peace Officers Association and the California State Coroners’ Association.

“Sheriff Scott wasn’t provincial,” Bonner said. “He was always out meeting with law enforcement officials around the state for ideas and best practices to bring to Placer County.”

William Alexander Scott was born in 1924 in Auburn. He was the second of four children born to Ethe and Robert Scott, an opera tenor who gave up a performing career in the Bay Area to sell cars and raise a family in Auburn.

William Scott graduated from Placer High School in 1942 and served in the Army in France, Luxembourg and Belgium in World War II. Injured in the siege of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, he received two Purple Hearts and two Bronze Stars.

He attended Placer Junior College and became an Auburn police officer in 1946. He joined the Placer County Sheriff’s Department as a criminal investigator in 1951 but returned to the Auburn Police Department as chief in 1953.

He lived in Auburn and had four children from two marriages. His 47-year marriage to his second wife, Jean, ended with her death in 1999.

Sheriff Scott “loved the men and women of law enforcement for their dedication and sacrifice,” son-in-law Jim Lott said. He was believed to be the only California sheriff to be

photographed by the Soviet TASS news agency.

“During the Olympics, they wanted a picture of the head of security,” Lott said. “Bill didn’t wear a uniform. So he had to go out and get a plaid shirt and cowboy hat, and he stuck a couple of revolvers in his belt, so they’d have a photo of a real Western sheriff.”

He was born June 14, 1924.

Sheriff Scott is survived by children, Sharon Lott of Placerville, Richard of Pocatello, Idaho, Kim of Sacramento, and William Jr. of Antelope; 13 grandchildren; nine great-grandchildren.

Services will be at 10am April 12 at Parkside Church of the Nazarene, 3885 Richardson Drive, Auburn.

Donations may be made to the American Cancer Society or to the Placer County 10-35 Foundation, a nonprofit assistance group for law enforcement officers.