SERGEANT JOHN MACKIE

Life is often referred to as a series of peaks and valleys. In terms of career choices most of us start at the bottom where it does not matter which path you take—all roads lead up. As the path of your career choices peak, you get new choices. You can be content, or you can look for the next challenge. Retired Sgt. John Mackie was one of the lucky ones, he had found his mountain early.

“I was still a kid, working with my father at a car dealership. It seemed like a logical choice for me, most of my family was into cars one way or another and I enjoyed learning from them. Oddly enough, working there is what opened my mind to police work as another option. My father had lots of friends who were police officers and they would stop in. Mostly highway guys and motorcycle cops, but all of them had stories, stories that made an impression on me. I liked their style.”

To take the NYPD exam, young John Mackie went back to finish high school; in the next blink he was a rookie cop working the Manhattan streets. The year was 1968 and the latest in law enforcement theory was called the Tactical Patrol Force (TPF), a unit routinely assigned to foot posts in high crime areas that could be rapidly mobilized to handle major disturbances. From TPF, PO Mackie then did a brief stint in the 17 Precinct. However, his interest in police work was spun from a web of war stories, and when a new unit called the Taxi and Truck Surveillance Unit was created, he eagerly jumped in.

“Back in the early 70s the city was beset by a scourge of taxicab robberies; many cabbies were being brutally assaulted or murdered for a few lousy bucks. The Department created the unit, bought us new taxis to patrol in, and every time a cab was robbed anywhere in the five boroughs we got the information. I was good at analyzing that information and identifying patterns; I spent six years in that unit, and in addition to all my other arrests I also made 18 taxi robbery collars.”

All told, Sgt. Mackie would garner 36 various medals and commendations, including one Medal of Valor. The unit itself, in which he was a founding member, would be the harbinger of City Wide Anti-Crime and then evolve into the Street Crime Unit. Once he got promoted, and after a good stint at Midtown South, his work ethic got him assigned back to Street Crime and eventually hand selected for Narcotics. Unfortunately, just three months into his new position it would all come to an end in an RMP accident. His career terminated in a line of duty injury after 17 years on the job. To some, he was close to retirement, but not to John Mackie, “For me the NYPD wasn’t a job, it was a romance. It was my niche in life and I would have stayed until they forced me out.”

Over the years, the job had become his identity and now it was gone. He tried to turn to his other interests; restoring cars and carpentry. He built his own home in North Carolina and then even tried to prove the doctors wrong by plunging into local law enforcement. But the doctors weren’t wrong; building the house almost killed him, and his injuries just could not tolerate the energetic lifestyle of police work or even support a rigorous hobby such as restoring cars. His next stop was Florida where the warm weather would be good for him, and where he might find the challenge of a new mountain to climb.

“During my career in the NYPD, when lengthy or complex reports had to be prepared, other bosses often came to me for help because they knew I had a way with words. Because of that, over the years I had often thought about writing a book, but didn’t everybody? I had written a chapter here, a chapter there, but nothing consistent. I’ve been told since, that short-story writers can’t write novels and novelists can’t write short stories. So, as part of my move to Florida, and the complete re-invention of myself, I began to work as a serious writer.”

As a writer, serious translates into perseverance. It took 10 years and fistfuls of rejection slips for John Mackie to get his first novel, MANHATTAN SOUTH, published. The series “star,” Det./Sgt. Thorn Savage, has since spawned two more thrillers: MANHATTAN NORTH, and the soon to be released, EAST SIDE. His fourth book, WEST SIDE, is still a year away.

“It is a great feeling when you finally get published, but I would still have rather been on the job. Fortunately, my experiences are a vast pool of knowledge, and I can use those faces and places to write novels and novelists can’t write short stories. So, as part of my move to Florida, and the complete re-invention of myself, I began to work as a serious writer.”

Though John Mackie loves his writing, a big part of his life is still “non-fiction,” and those moments are comprised of visits by his children and grandchildren. John, Dan and Greg, a police officer with the NYPD, as well as his grandchildren, Mathew, Emily, Lauren and Jay.

Today, it’s still hard to tell how high John Mackie’s new mountain is, and though it’s obvious he does miss the old one, he knows that he has risen to a place where he can see it and appreciate the view. In the future, who knows? Perhaps with his new “partner,” Det./Sgt. Thorn Savage, he may even find greater heights than he now sees in the distance. The one thing we do know for sure, is that John Mackie will be up to the challenge.

T.S.

ACTIVELY RETIRED

By PrAA Cheryl Smith & PO Trae Stratton

John Mackie still misses “the job,” but there is no doubt he has met with great success reinventing himself as a novelist.
SERGEANT HARRY W. LOVE

his past October 18, retired Sgt. Harry W. Love celebrated his first octogenarian birthday with family and friends. It was a festive day, a good day. But as it had been for the last 60 years, it was also a day of reflection, with his thoughts often turning back to his 21st birthday in 1944. On that day, Harry Love was a United States Air Force (USAF) bombardier navigator with the 390th Bomb Group aboard the “Silver Meteor,” a B-17 aircraft flown out of Framingham, England and headed for Germany. The plane was shot down and literally exploded over the German skies. Five of the nine USAF crewmen on board were killed in the blast. The four survivors, including Love, were captured several days later by Nazi forces and imprisoned at the German prisoner of war (POW) camp, Stalag Luft III in Sagan.

In January of 1945, during one of the coldest winters in German history, the prisoners were evacuated out of Sagan and forced to march in the bitter cold for weeks to another POW camp in Moosburg, Stalag 7A. Many of the men died on the treacherous journey, and host of others suffered severe frostbite.

“It was a birthday I’ll never forget,” said retired Sgt. Love. “We remained in the POW camp until General George S. Patton’s Third Army liberated us on April 29, 1945.”

Everyone on that fateful air raid received a Purple Heart, the oldest military decoration in the world still in use today. The combat medal is awarded to U.S. members of the military injured by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy and posthumously, to the next of kin of those members killed in action or who died of wounds in action.

Upon returning to civilian life Harry Love decided to take the exam to become a New York City Police Officer. He was a carpenter prior to joining the USAF, but jobs in post-World War II New York City were hard to come by, and so he rationalized that a rookie in the NYPD wouldn’t be much different from a private in the USAF. Job security also played a big part in Harry’s decision since he and his wife Irene, were expanding their family.

After completing his rookie training in February 1947, Patrolman Harry Love was assigned to the 23 Precinct where he spent the next twelve years on foot patrol along Madison Avenue in the area known as “Spanish Harlem.”

“Always on the street and in uniform, you were highly visible and easily accessible. It helped that I learned a little Spanish to be able to communicate. At that time, police officers were paid $66 twice a month, but morale was high and life was simple. You made your arrests and went to court,” said Love. “This was the era of ringing the station house from call boxes and tapping the ground with your nightstick when you needed help. Strange as that may seem in this age of technology, for a foot cop in the 1940s this was what worked for us.”

Proof of his accessibility appears courtesy of a 1950 photograph and article in the Daily News showing Ptl. Harry Love at Metropolitan Hospital with his partner, Ptl. Hugh O’Donnell, and the baby they had just delivered. It was Love’s 39th baby delivery as a patrolman. Love also recalled the day he and the late actor Yul Brynner went for an unauthorized tour.

“Yul was on a break from his first run in the Broadway show, The King and I. He was a police buff and loved visiting the precinct when he had the chance. It was a breech of protocol and it happened so long ago I doubt any of the brass around back then are still here today, so I guess it’s safe to tell the story. One day he asked to go on patrol with us and we obliged. I think if he wasn’t an actor, he would’ve been a cop. He absolutely loved it,” said Love.

In 1959, Love was promoted to sergeant and assigned to the 7 Precinct where he remained until his retirement in 1968. Shortly thereafter, he was offered a position as Director of Security and Internal Affairs with Sears Industries’ Consolidated Laundries, a division encompassing several companies. Throughout his career with the NYPD and Sears Industries, Love maintained his status in the USAF Reserves. Once he retired from his second career in 1986, Love also retired from the USAF with the rank of Major.

“The NYPD and USAF are equally important to me, but I felt it was time to retire and enjoy life,” Love said. The former NYPD Sergeant, Purple Heart Recipient and ex-POW remains active in several fraternal NYPD and USAF Associations and is currently the President of the Reserve Officers Association—Queens Chapter New York. He has been their president for 10 years.

Harry Love and his wife of 58 years, Irene, are the proud parents of three adult children: Alan, now deceased, who served as a Colonel in the United States Army; Robert, a Colonel currently serving with the United States Marine Corps; and Shelley, a teacher at Mount St. Mary’s College in Newburgh, New York. The Loves also have seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, and spend much of their time traveling the country visiting family and friends.

C.A.S.