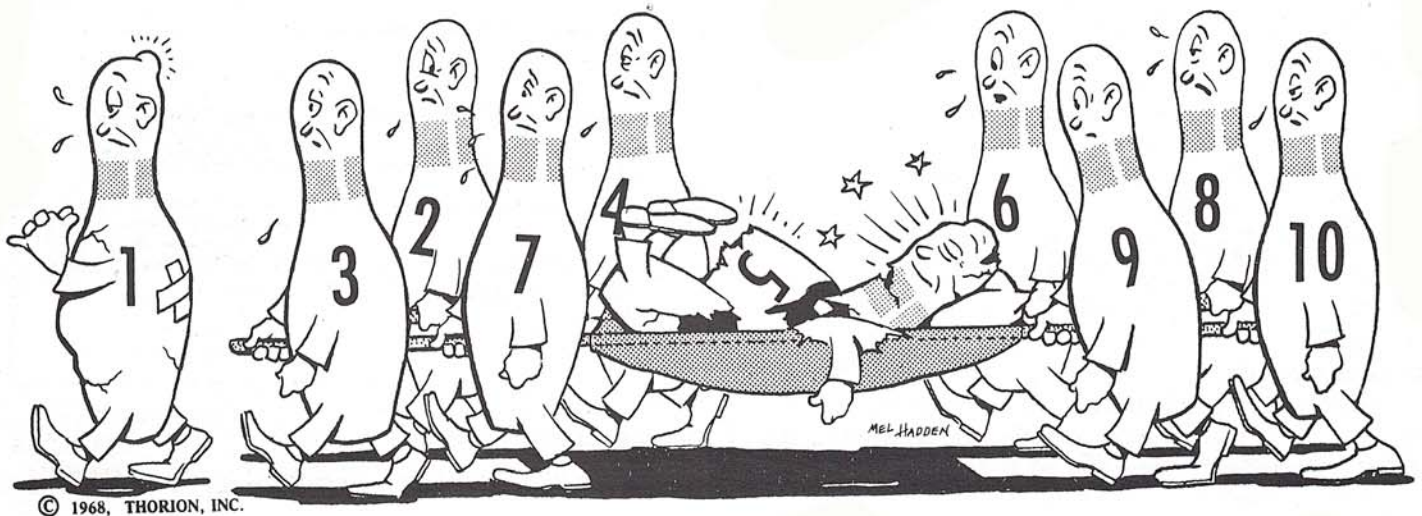


# DEATH OF A TENPIN



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By V.A. Wapensky

It was six o'clock, the pins have been scrubbed and cleaned, and they now stood on the lanes with a fresh clean look, like children after their bath.

These pins were not ordinary tenpins, they were professionals. They had been through many bowling seasons. They had participated in a number of major campaigns, having seen action in both city and state tournaments. They had started with the spikes and had their share of the automatics.

They were happiest when they were working with the automatic pinspotters. They loved being tumbled about and enjoyed the ride on the conveyor belt that dropped them into their assigned positions in the machine. They would pretend that they were paratroops (although they were all foot soldiers) when the machine lowered them to the lanes and occasionally one would get overenthusiastic and tumble like a real trooper when he hit the landing. This would always entitle them to another free ride to the machine without being knocked about by the flying black balls.

They were a strange crew, these 10 pins. The King Pin and undisputed leader carried himself with great dignity as he stood alone in front of his men, challenging the enemy to fire. He seldom spoke, but when he did, the others listened and obeyed without complaint or comment.

His two lieutenants, the 2- and 3-pins, were completely devoted. They took great care to insure the King Pin's orders were carried out to the letter. The number two pin was the stronger of the two and often distracted the enemy's fire when the 3-pin began to show battle fatigue.

The 4- and 6-pins were the platoon's practical jokers. They were usually the ones who did the paratroop roll or who, despite orders to fall when hit, would remain standing along with their fellow pins, the 7 and 10.

The oldest member of the organization was the 5-pin. He had seen more service than any of the others and would have been promoted long ago had it not been for his physical condition. He carried more wound stripes than any pin in the history of the game. He had been advanced to the number three position but after a tour of duty at the ABC Tournament, he was returned to



his present position. The high command had tried to retire him for physical disability, but he refused to accept retirement. As a result of his outstanding record and long service, he was allowed to remain. The King Pin, assisted by No. 3, always tried to reduce the speed of the ball before it reached him. The 5-pin's nervous condition often caused him to move off-spot and, as a result, he often found himself standing alone.

Seven and 10 were known as professional rear rank privates. They had long service but failed to take advantage of the many opportunities to advance. They disobeyed orders openly and, despite repeated threats of disciplinary action, failed to improve. Often, when early retirement was desired and orders were issued to drop for the slightest reason, they both or singularly would remain standing and delay the platoon's departure. At times when the 4 or 6 were ordered to remain standing, they too would refuse to fall, thereby antagonizing the enemy as well as their leader. It was not unusual for either of them to report fully intoxicated. Their colleagues often watched with disgust as they stood wavering after all others had fallen as ordered.

The recruits of the organization were pins 8 and 9. Nine was a playboy of a sort whose only desire was to get through his night's chores so he could meet one of the many dolls he was courting. Eight was a serious youngster who one day hoped to command; his actions had already earned for him many commendations.

The evening's action was about to begin and all the pins moved into their assigned positions. The 5-pin appeared to be quite pale and, under questioning by the 2-pin, admitted he was not feeling up to par. Seven and 10 were passing a bottle and No. 8 noted with contempt that they would soon be up to their usual mischief. Aware of the condition of the old-timer, the front pins gave him as much protection as possible and carried him along as they fell. Their most feared enemy faced them today in the form of a 230-pound human who fireballed straight shots right down the middle. This action made it difficult to protect No. 5 as the front pins often flew by, unable to carry him along.

The battle had been underway for half an hour when it happened. The enemy had blasted nine of the pins to the pit, but No. 5, in his nervous wavering, had been left standing alone. He stood his ground, displaying the same courage he had shown in days of old. It was obvious to all that he was fully aware of the fate that awaited him. His comrades found themselves unable to restrain their emotions and many hardcore professionals wept openly as they watched, awaiting the final attack. The suspense was unbearable. The silence deafening. A few started forward to offer protection, but a stern glance from the King Pin held them back.

At last it came! A roaring blast that gathered momentum as the charge bolted forward. All eyes were on No. 5 as he stood there proudly awaiting its arrival. Just as the ball was about to reach its target, he drew back his shoulders, thrust out his chest, and faced it squarely. It hit with a thundering explosion and the 5-pin seemed to disintegrate. Parts flew in every direction, leaving scattered debris that resembled the aftermath of an atomic blast.

The end had come. He had gone in battle. It was the way they knew he had wanted to go. He went bravely. He would soon become a legend, and tenpin parents would tell of him to their duckpin children. He would be the hero of many men yet unborn. They would teach about his courage in the tenpin

military schools where the cadets would argue the pros and cons of his actions.

He was buried with full military honors. A long solemn parade marched to his final resting place. It is also worthy to note that the 7- and 10-pins remained sober for the ceremony.

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*V.A. "Chief" Wapensky, who recently retired as executive director of the Bowling Proprietors' Association of America, was the first editor of BOWL Magazine, in which this article first appeared in February 1968.*