

# **SURVIVING THE STREET**

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Second Edition

# **SURVIVING THE STREET**

Officer Safety and Survival Techniques

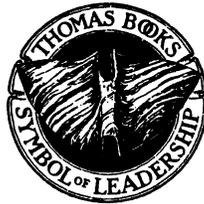
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*Dedicated to  
Those Who Have Gone Before,  
And Shown Those of Us Who Follow  
How to Survive.*



## PREFACE

American law enforcement officers found themselves confronting yet another threat to their safety following the attacks on the Twin Towers of New York City's World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Now, added to the daily threats that officers had always faced, they confronted the hatred of international terrorists, too. But the fact remains that most murdered peace officers in this country are not slain by cowards commandeering airliners or packing improvised explosive devices. Many are being killed by the same kinds of offenders that have attacked symbols of justice for a very long time: drunks, spouse abusers, robbers, and the mentally deranged. And, many times, officers are dying at least partially because of their own safety lapses.

Make no mistake: these officers are not killing themselves. Their personal survival mistakes, no matter how careless, do not cancel out the fact that responsibility for their deaths rests squarely on the loathsome criminals who killed them. These are the individuals who must be punished to the fullest extent of the law. But at the same time we assess criminal responsibility we cannot overlook the truth that too many dead officers helped bring about personal disaster by making themselves vulnerable to their killers. It is that fatal vulnerability that this book is intended to banish.

Today we know precisely how and why officers die. Perhaps more important, we know how to prevent virtually all of those deaths. And that is what this book is about: recognizing and dealing effectively with the very real threats to officer safety and survival that lurk on the busy city streets and quiet country lanes of America. Unfortunately, there is no shortage of real-life examples of these fatal threat scenarios. Each chapter of the text contains true case histories as compiled by the Uniform Crime Reports Section of the Federal Bureau of

Investigation of actual murders of police officers. There are lessons to be learned from these tragic deaths, and from the discussion of fatal errors the book shifts to specific, practical, time-proven tactics and techniques for surviving a potentially hazardous profession. This results in a virtual “how to” of street survival for the law enforcers of America.

From bikers to bombers, barfighters to “boosters” gone violent, *Surviving the Street* equips the safety-savvy officer with common sense suggestions and advice to mitigate or remove many of the dangers of police work. But it is worth remembering that in many cases there are alternative measures that under certain circumstances may work; too. That is the nature of police work. The survival student is certainly free to improve even further on what is set down here. At the same time, however, the author and publisher accept no responsibility for harm to persons or property resulting from the application of tactics and procedures contained herein.

Reading, absorbing and practicing the advice given in these pages can save your life. That is the sole purpose of the book’s existence. Surely there is no more relevant objective for today’s hard-pressed law enforcement professional than *Surviving the Street*.

G.W.G.

## INTRODUCTION

If you are a law enforcement officer today, one of your primary goals can be summarized in very few words: staying alive and healthy to reach retirement in a job that can turn suddenly and violently dangerous. This book is all about helping you reach that goal. The author, a veteran police officer, law enforcement manager and officer safety instructor, presents numerous practical, common sense guidelines for *Surviving the Street*.

Chapter One utilizes actual case histories and statistics provided by the FBI in illustrating the fatal errors officers make. Chapter Two discusses vital preparations for personal survival, ranging from physical preparations to mental and emotional conditioning. Threat awareness, recognition and response are detailed. Next, Chapter Three identifies specific steps to survival for the safety-conscious officer.

Handling the suspicious person or situation assignment is covered in Chapter Four, while Chapter Five examines the dangers and safety measures involved in all kinds of vehicle contacts, including traffic stops. Chapter Six explores the various facets of safe prisoner handling and is followed by an examination of the perils of “under the influence” persons in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight tackles the safe handling of frequently-risky crime in progress calls. Chapter Nine lays out the rules for safely defusing disturbance calls and is followed by an in-depth discussion of the dangers of domestic violence intervention in Chapter Ten.

Chapter Eleven shows the reader how to search a building or other structure for an offender. Chapter Twelve goes into the proper handling of barricades and hostage-takers. It includes a discussion of negotiation techniques. Chapter Thirteen reveals the danger of high-speed vehicle pursuits and offers some advice for markedly reducing the danger level. Chapter Fourteen offers the “how to’s” of safe raids

and warrant service, while Chapter Fifteen provides solid guidance for working with emotionally disturbed people. Chapter Sixteen seeks to keep the law enforcement officer safe while he or she is involved in off-duty activities. Chapter Seventeen dissects the very real threats of today's terroristic groups and offers solid tips for dealing in safety with these people. A myriad of threats to survival ranging from accidents to mental health dangers are scrutinized in Chapter Eighteen. The text concludes with Chapter Nineteen's discussion of police management's responsibilities concerning officer safety that should be of special interest to the current or budding supervisor.

Each chapter includes real-life examples of police killings culled from the studies of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports Section. Every chapter ends with a quick summary and a helpful "Street Survival Checklist" for the law enforcement practitioner. Resources for additional survival reading are listed following the last chapter.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The wisdom and experience of a great many law enforcement professionals is represented in this book. Indeed, so many police practitioners have contributed so much that it would prove unwieldy to name them all. Many are instructors; suffice to say that all are experienced street cops. All have something relevant to say about staying alive on streets that can turn suddenly deadly.

Sadly, other officers referred to in the text were the ultimate casualties of officer safety errors. While they will not be named nor their agencies identified, many have paid the highest price for perhaps a moment's inattention, a missed recognition of a warning sign, a poor decision (or no decision) in the face of danger. They have given their all in service to their respective communities, and we salute them. Their very personal tragedies will be illuminated in these pages in the near-perfect vision of hindsight in hopes that others who come after them might avoid their missteps—and live. To all of those who have gone before, dead or alive, we are grateful.

A special debt of gratitude is tendered the Uniform Crime Reports Section of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The statistics and anecdotes published by the Section in the annual *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted* reports provide much raw material for discussion in this book. In addition, the Anti-Defamation League is thanked for the contribution of up-to-date information on hate groups in this country. Today as always, the dangers posed to law enforcement by armed, extremist haters are all too real. What their hatred can do has become painfully obvious since September 11, 2001.

Finally, every law enforcement officer owes a special debt to the late Pierce R. Brooks, the Los Angeles Police Department homicide detective turned author who is sometimes referred to as “the father of offi-

cer safety training” in the United States. From this thoughtful and wise teacher the present writer first learned the critical importance of *Surviving the Street*.

G.W.G.

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# **SURVIVING THE STREET**



## Chapter One

### WHAT'S DANGEROUS ABOUT THIS JOB?

In the Northeast, a 37-year-old officer was off-duty and out of uniform when he stopped the driver of a vehicle he observed going the wrong way on a one-way street. The driver produced a .380-caliber handgun and shot the officer fatally in the chest. The killer, who was missed by the officer's return fire, reportedly had been involved in a minor traffic accident minutes before and was looking for the other driver when stopped by the officer.

A veteran police officer was slain during the attempted robbery of a fast-food restaurant at about 8:40 P.M. The officer, who was off-duty and in plain clothes, was sitting at a table with an acquaintance when a male subject entered, brandished a .25-caliber handgun and ordered patrons and employees to the floor. The officer's acquaintance apparently moved too slowly and was shot. The officer then drew his 9 mm handgun and a gunfight resulted. The officer chased the robber outside but was hit with five rounds, one of which caused a fatal chest wound. The killer escaped.

On the East Coast, a 29-year-old patrolman entered a shopping center at approximately 8:45 P.M. and contacted several males. He then returned to his patrol car and was seated in the vehicle when he was shot once in the head and once in the jaw with a .380-caliber weapon. Four young males were subsequently arrested for the officer's murder.

Shortly after midnight in a suburban city in the Midwest, a 39-year old police sergeant was killed after stopping a vehicle driven by a robbery suspect. The sergeant and a backup officer took the driver into custody. The sergeant then went to the rear of the suspect's car and opened the trunk. A second male subject, concealed in the trunk, shot the 14-year veteran in the head and neck with a sawed-off rifle.

**T**hirty-five years ago, a uniformed patrol officer responded alone to a disturbance call at a residence. As the officer stepped onto the porch and approached the closed front door, he was killed by bul-

lets fired through the door from inside the house. Recently, another uniformed patrolman approached the front door of a residence while answering a report of a domestic dispute in progress. Before the lone officer could knock at the door, he, too, was slain by rounds fired from inside the residence.

Two American law enforcement officers, dying violently with almost four decades separating their deaths. Beyond courage and a willingness to serve, what did the two officers share in common? Tragically, they both made critical mistakes, fatal errors that allowed a violent criminal opportunist to get the upper hand, with deadly consequences. The errors they made were identical. Both committed to action without awaiting backup help. They both positioned themselves poorly by remaining in front of a closed door, oblivious to what might be on the other side. They both may have assumed things that they didn't really know for fact. Namely, they apparently assumed that the situation they were facing did not represent a serious threat to them. Both were wrong. Both perished.

In the "old days" of law enforcement, hardly anyone discussed the mistakes officers made that helped get them killed. Because of the family, because of their peers, because it was "too late," the dead officer was praised for his bravery, buried with full honors and eventually forgotten by all but his loved ones. Perhaps out of "respect for the fallen," the officer's errors generally were not dissected and discussed at all. And so the next week or the next month or the following year another officer went out and made the same mistakes. Then, that officer died, too.

The mistakes that fell peace officers have changed little over the years. The very same safety errors that killed deputy U.S. marshals riding the backcountry of the last century are still being made—with the same dire consequences—by the big city cops and suburban and rural officers of the twenty-first century.

This chapter will not dishonor fallen heroes. What it *will* do is identify these deadly errors and discuss how they happen. Later chapters will detail how to avoid these critical mistakes and keep yourself safe and alive on the job.

Thanks to the long-term information gathering efforts of the Uniform Crime Reports Section of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, we know a great deal about how and why American peace officers are dying on the job today. What those efforts can teach the living is the next topic for discussion.

### **WHAT THE STATS SAY**

Annually the Uniform Crime Reporting Section of the Federal Bureau of Investigation compiles statistics on peace officers feloniously killed in the line of duty in the United States during the preceding year. The Section also reports on the circumstances under which the officers died, and who killed them. During the year of 2003, for instance, 52 law enforcement officers were murdered in 46 separate incidents in 25 states. Of the officers slain in 2003, 28 were employees of city police departments, 19 worked for county agencies and 5 were employed by state law enforcement organizations.

The average age of the 52 officers killed in 2003 was 38. Fifty of the victims were male. Some 41 of the murdered officers were white, 8 were black, 2 were Asian/Pacific Islander and one was an American Indian/Alaskan Native. Statistics compiled on the 2003 deaths indicated that the average length of law enforcement service for the victims was ten years. Two of the victims had served for less than a year; 19 had over 10 years on the job.

Data reported to the FBI by the employing agencies of the dead officers revealed that 14 were killed during vehicle contacts or pursuits. Eleven officers were killed during arrest situations. Ten were slain while handling disturbance calls, while another nine were murdered in ambush situations. Six officers were killed while investigating suspicious persons or circumstances and two more were murdered while handling or transporting prisoners.

Of the 52 officers murdered in the sample year of 2003, 41 were assigned to vehicle patrol. Of those, 24 were assigned to one-officer vehicles and were alone at the time of the fatal attack. Twelve were assigned to one-officer vehicles but were assisted by other officers at the time of the tragedy. Five of the victim officers were assigned to two-person vehicles. Nine of the murdered officers were assigned to other duties, such as undercover details. Two of the victims were killed while they were off-duty but acting in an official capacity.

In 2003, 34 officers were killed with handguns while 10 were murdered with rifles and one died from a shotgun blast. Eleven of the murdered officers were killed with their own weapons. Six of the slain officers were intentionally struck by vehicles and one was beaten to death with a police baton.

Who were the murderers who killed peace officers in 2003? Fifty-eight assailants were identified in the 46 separate, murderous incidents. Of these, 38 were arrested, 12 were justifiably killed by someone other than the victim officer, six committed suicide and two were justifiably killed by the victim officer. Fifty-seven of the 58 identified offenders were male. The average age of the suspects was 29 years. Three of the suspects were under age 18; seven were over 40 years of age. Racially, the alleged killers were broken down as 31 white, 26 black and one American Indian/Alaskan Native.

### THE FATAL ERRORS

It was L.A.P.D. homicide detective turned officer safety expert Pierce R. Brooks who first spoke convincingly of distinct errors that always seemed to be present—sometimes in profusion—nearly every time an officer died at the hands of a criminal. Based on his many years spent investigating cop killings, Brooks identified a core of dangerous officer mistakes that became the focus of his 1975 book, *Officer Down, Code Three*. (See *Additional Officer Safety Reading*.) That text remains as pertinent to officer safety today as it was when published 30 years ago.

Since the beginning of modern officer safety education in the mid-1970s, other law enforcement safety writers and survival instructors have added, deleted and revised, to one extent or another, the original set of “survival sins” cataloged by Brooks. A library of books, magazine articles and video tape presentations have resulted from this welcome and overdue focus on fatal mistakes and how to avoid them. While the lists vary somewhat from one safety expert or instructor to the next, one or more of the following key errors are generally found in evidence when a law enforcement officer is slain:

1. Missing the danger signs
2. Failing to get needed help
3. Making dangerous assumptions
4. Following poor weapon retention practices
5. Failing to watch their hands
6. Inadequate searching techniques
7. Poor handcuffing practices