

From surfing at sun kissed beaches in Southern California, to policing the violent streets of Compton. Gang warfare, grisly murders to sexual assaults and gun battles in Compton during the 1980's. A surfer's journey through the chaos.

Compton Don't Surf

By Michael Doyle

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COMPTON DON'T SURF



CRIMINALS DO NOT



Michael Doyle

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TWO ADAM!

(How Did I Get Here?)

Chapter One



“2Adam!” I excitedly screamed into the police car’s microphone.

“2 Adam,” the dispatcher calmly replied in a monotone voice.

2 Adam was our unit designator for the evening patrol shift. Our official unit designation was 1Adam 2. The one meant it was first shift (midnights) and the “A” designated we were a two-man car. Lincoln was the designation for a solo unit, which we rarely had. Two was the sector or geographical area we were responsible to patrol. However, Compton PD did not have overlapping shifts so the “one” indicating we were the midnight shift was not

necessary and was dropped when using the radio. So, our call sign was a very simply 2Adam. Two is our sector and Adam, meaning we are a double unit for the night. It was sometimes necessary to increase the volume in your voice to get over the roaring engine noise and squealing of tires. In the 1980s, we had big V8 engines that were very loud, not the six cylinder, quiet engines we have today.

“2Adam, go ahead.” Dispatchers had a way of being extremely calm, to the point of sounding bored during emergencies. It was their calming voice, and demeanor during chaos that dispatchers were noted for.

“2 Adam, I have a black Mustang trying to evade us.” The black Mustang increased its speed and started to weave in and out of traffic.

My partner and driver, Dave, anxiously said, “Something’s up. They are trying to evade us.” I was the passenger officer that night, and responsible for the radio. Dave was the senior officer, and the driver. He was responsible for what happened during the shift. In Compton, units at night rode two-man cars because of the violence, and for officer safety. Two-man cars have divided areas of responsibility. The driver or senior officer was responsible for the vehicle’s operation and dictating how to get to the call for service. The passenger officer operated the radio and cleared intersections for the driver. He alerted the driver to any obstacles in the roadway, and oncoming traffic.

Dave was the typical Compton cop. He was war torn from the years of battles in the streets of Compton and had

bags under his eyes that signified too many years working midnight shifts. And, he had gray hair to match. Dave was as macho as they came, a chain-smoking Marlboro man who could also drink anyone under the table. He was a true veteran of the streets.

Dave was usually a very level-headed guy, until it came to car chases. A NASCAR fan, he took pride on never losing a car chase. In fact, I almost expected to hear the theme song to Smokey and Bandit play whenever we were in chases.

Now I became even more excited as the vehicles increased their speeds. I screamed into the microphone to the dispatcher, "Run this plate!" I yelled the number. Everyone from the station house, assisting units out in the field, my supervisors in the office, and even the calm dispatchers knew what was happening. They knew Dave and I were chasing a vehicle and now needed immediate information in order to continue to chase the car. If it did not come back stolen or wanted, it was only a traffic infraction, and pursuits were not allowed in accordance with our police department's rules. We could get into serious trouble with our sergeant and lieutenant.

Supervisors hated pursuits. They knew pursuits usually ended up with the suspects crashing either into another innocent vehicle, or into a building. Or the police might end up crashing, and then possibly even officer involved shootings. Either way, they always had tons of paperwork to do after each pursuit.

The dispatcher calmly came back on the air, “2Adam, the plate comes back stolen out of Inglewood.” I instantly keyed the microphone as Dave accelerated and got right behind the Black Mustang. The chase game had started! Let the best man win.

Citizens and suspects always thought police did not want to be in a car chase. It was just the opposite. We loved car chases! That is why we became cops, to chase people!

We were now in full pursuit mode, with emergency lights and sirens. Dave loved it. You could tell by the smile on his face. Dave punched the accelerator even harder and the eight-cylinder Dodge Diplomat surged forward. In fact, Dave had accelerated so quickly that we were on the Mustang’s back bumper. The Mustang was not ready to yield. It immediately accelerated and immediately created a large gap between their car and ours. It seemed like we stood still in time. The Ford Mustang 5.0 was too quick and powerful for our police car.

Believing the engine noise and siren were drowning out my voice, I screamed into the microphone, “We have a black Mustang, heading eastbound on Alondra, now making a southbound turn onto Willowbrook.” Thinking that I had spoken very clearly in giving the directions, the dispatcher, along with my assisting units, instantly told me to quit screaming into the microphone. They could not understand a word I said. Cops never want to be told that over the air. It was a tell-tale sign of a rookie, not a

veteran. Someone who could not control his voice was losing his composure.

Too late. We were in “hot” pursuit, travelling in excess of seventy miles per hour down a residential neighborhood. Residential streets have a posted speed limit of twenty-five miles per hour. We were flying down the small ghetto street.

Dave was keeping us in the ball game by maneuvering the vehicle between the other vehicles on the road. He was right on their taillights and, at one point, I am sure he gave them a little love tap to remind them that he was the best driver (police cars have front bumper grills that allow us to push vehicles off roadways). It also allowed us to ram vehicles.

We were now travelling so fast that, when I keyed the microphone to give our current location, that location was now in our rearview mirror, long gone. I had to give the information updates for the future, where we were going to be in about five seconds. This time, however, I spoke in a normal tone and my units could hear me.

We were southbound on Willowbrook, approaching Greenleaf St., when the black Mustang finally made a crucial error. It couldn't make the left turn at the end of the street. I saw a large plume of smoke come up from behind the vehicle and noticed the immediate smell of rubber burning. Dave quickly said, “They've lost it. Get ready.” The Mustang skidded for several hundred feet before crashing into Oleander bushes. We temporarily lost sight

of the Mustang due to the smoke. It disappeared into the Oleander bushes. All we saw was taillights.

But, now we, too, were in trouble. Being so close to the Mustang, we had to brake so hard that we also went into a full four-wheel skid. Dave quickly counter-steered in order to miss the Mustang and the bushes. It did not work. As we went into a full brake skid, we slid across the intersection in slow motion. It is funny, when you are about to be in a severe crash, how things suddenly slow way down. You almost have a type of hyper focus where everything inside and outside the vehicle is crystal clear.

As we were skidding toward the stolen car, impact was inevitable. I began bracing for the impending impact by placing both my hands on the dashboard to keep my face from striking it. There weren't airbags in cars during the 1980s. Sometimes, if you push away from the dashboard at the last moment, you can keep your face and head from going forward and smashing into the front windshield.

Dave and I were not wearing seatbelts. Nobody did in those days. Getting trapped in a car while someone was shooting at you brought more fear into a policeman's heart than being launched into the front windshield during an accident.

Somehow, someway, by the grace of God, my partner Dave hung in there, and was able to steer the police vehicle just by the stolen Mustang, missing it by a fraction of an inch. The police cruiser did, however, continue over the curb and into the same Oleander bushes the Mustang disappeared in. I immediately broadcasted that the

suspects had crashed, and the location. Then, I had to get out of the car immediately.

I kicked the door open with my right foot and it only partially opened because of the Oleander bushes pushing back. I realized that I was not going to win the war between the door and the bushes. I instead squeezed out of the crack between the door and the door post. It was a tight fit but, by angling my body one way, and then another, I was able to get out, and duck around the bushes. The suspects were now running into the neighborhood, which was pitch black. The streetlights had been shot out years ago. Streetlights in Compton did not last long since the criminals wanted dark streets to sell their dope, and to hide from the police.

I was able to see the last suspect as he turned the corner of Acacia Street and I took off, running after them. I had my flashlight in my right hand and my handheld radio in my left hand. In the early eighties, technology was not what it is today. Our radios were extremely large and bulky, weighing around one to two pounds. In fact, the radios were so big and heavy, officers were able to use it as a striking device to defend themselves during a fight. The radios were also unbreakable, which I can attest to, having run over mine several times with the police car.

I had quite a head start, and easily separated from my partner, Dave, because he had to turn the vehicle off, and make sure the vehicle was locked and secured. Otherwise, we would return and our car would be stolen or stripped of our gear.

I was then chasing the suspects by myself into a very dark neighborhood where all their other gang friends live. Why chase? We chased gangsters in a stolen car and may have damaged our own. We were not going to go back into the station empty-handed. If we were going to get punished, at least we would have a suspect to take with us. Dumb, but that was our reasoning.

Trying to control my breathing while chasing bad guys is very tough to do. I had to consciously breathe through my nose, and through my mouth. It was called "Combat breathing." After about forty yards, I was no longer combat breathing, I was sucking so much air into my lungs as possible through my mouth. Luckily for me, the suspects decided to run together instead of splitting up. If they had split up, I knew to go after the driver. But which one was the driver in this case?

I had been fortunate enough just to catch a glimpse of the slowest suspect as he rounded the corner of the intersection. Was he the driver? In LA, the prosecutors would not file charges against the passengers; only the drivers of stolen vehicles. That is why it is imperative to chase the driver.

I entered the dark neighborhood alone and in foot pursuit of the suspects. I decided running down the middle of the street was my safest option in case something happened to me. By being in the middle of the street, I could react to any threats and not be ambushed by the suspects. Plus, my partner would be able to locate me.

I was running as fast as I could, while trying to shine my flashlight on the suspects to keep them in view. It was not working. My flashlight moved where my hand and arm went, which was up and down. I looked more like a running strobe light than a disciplined cop chasing bad guys. The suspects, being well-versed in being chased by the cops, made an immediate turn toward a house, and began climbing over the side fence into the backyard. I foolishly continued the chase and began scaling over the same fence.

Foot chases, or foot pursuits, were one of the most dangerous aspects of police work. You are by yourself and the suspects normally know the area. I have been to many police funerals for officers killed by suspects during foot chases. But you are young and you feel invincible. Oh, and by the way, cops did not have bullet proof vests in the early eighties. At least not in Compton.

Climbing over a fence with all the equipment we carry was no easy task. It was awkward and cumbersome but, being only twenty-three years of age, it was easier only because of my youth. Also, my adrenaline was peaking about then.

When suspects scale fences, and disappear from your view, police officers cannot just fling themselves over the fence. Often, suspects are on the other side, waiting for you, either armed with a gun or a large object to strike you. A police officer must first poke his head over the fence, make sure there is not a suspect waiting to ambush him, then slowly climb the fence, pausing while on top of

the fence for one last check, and finally jumping into the backyard. This is time consuming and awkward, but safe.

I entered the backyard and, suddenly, I heard an immense sound of an engine. It had a high-pitch sound to it that I did not recognize immediately. But, then again, I was breathing so loud and could have muffled a jet engine. Along with the sound, the entire backyard suddenly lit up as if it was daylight. I stopped, and looked, half believing an alien ship was about to land on top of me because the noise was deafening. I could feel the wash from the rotor blades against my face and body. The bushes and plants were waving as if in a hurricane.

What I saw was simply astonishing. A Los Angeles County Sheriff helicopter was right above me, hovering just over the telephone wires. It had come to assist us in the foot pursuit, and was now directly over my head, stopped in mid-air. The loudspeaker from the helicopter announced that the suspects had continued into the next backyard and I was clear to follow. My guardian angel had arrived.

I placed my flashlight into my back pocket, took off running, and climbed the next fence into the backyard of the house south of my location. I continued running while the helicopter followed me and illuminated my path. It was like running in daylight. I felt so secure, like big brother was watching over me. The helicopter announced the suspects had run eastbound on the street and were hiding under a car. They did that to avoid being detected by the helicopter.

As I neared the vehicle suspected to be hiding the individuals, my backup units arrived on the scene. Above me was the helicopter, still illuminating the area, and telling the units the suspects were underneath the Chevy truck. I arrived out of breath, and indicated, by pointing my flashlight, to direct the units to where the suspects were hiding.

Fortunately, one of them was a canine unit that came running up the street frantically, waving to everyone to back off. He began yelling, "I'm letting the dog go!"

Now, we had German shepherds as our canine dogs. They were huge and became fur missiles. If a canine handler instructs you to step back because they are about to release the dog, you follow their directions immediately. If you don't, and suddenly move, you now become the target. The dog does not care who he bites. Either way, he is getting a treat. You do not want to become a treat.

The dog quickly disappeared underneath the truck. All we could hear were the screams of one of the suspects as the dog began re-emerging from underneath the truck. Even with a helicopter hovering overhead, sirens, and the canine handler yelling at his dog, we could all hear the suspect's screams. It was a high pitch sound that drowned everything else out. We then found out why. The dog had the right arm of the suspect in his mouth and was shaking it from left to right as fast as he could, which is typical of what dogs do when they are trying to wrestle a chew toy away from you. The suspect was screaming in agony, and fighting the dog, trying to free his arm. We

stood frozen, not moving an inch, fearful the dog would let go, and come after us.

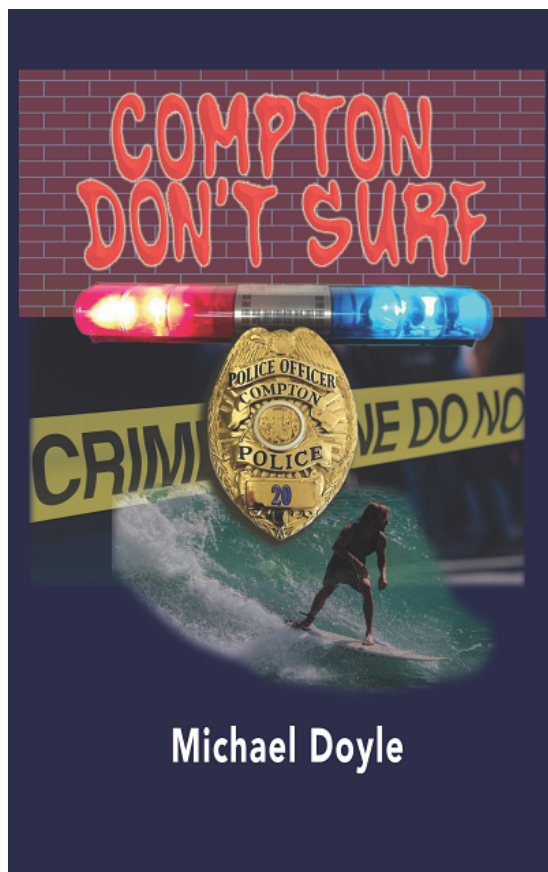
The canine handler shouted commands in a foreign language. German shepherds learned their commands in both German and Dutch. The dog handler used this language to communicate with his dog without interference from the public. In other words, a private citizen or suspect could not yell at the dog to stop. The canine handler then pulled the dog away from the suspect. Upon seeing the torture his friend had just gone through, the second suspect immediately gave up. Both suspects were arrested.

As I stood there among all the confusion and chaos, I calmly reached into my shirt pocket, retrieved my pack of Marlboros, and lit a cigarette. I drew a long cigarette puff while I was taking in the whole chaotic scene. A helicopter was hovering overhead, the search light was scanning the neighborhood, the pilot/observer was yelling over the loud speaker for the residents to get back into their homes, fire department personnel were attending to the dog bite suspect, my sergeant was barking orders to the troops, and the neighbors were screaming profanities at us. All this was a typical Compton police chase into a gang neighborhood.

I took another puff of my cigarette, blew the smoke out in a steady stream from my mouth and nose, and thought to myself, how did I ever get into this line of work? Why was I in the worst ghetto at night, climbing fences after car thieves, and risking my life? Why and how did I ever start

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smoking in the first place?! But, most of all, why was a white, Orange County surfer chasing black gang members in Compton?



From surfing at sun kissed beaches in Southern California, to policing the violent streets of Compton. Gang warfare, grisly murders to sexual assaults and gun battles in Compton during the 1980's. A surfer's journey through the chaos.

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