

“Always On-duty and Ready to Serve”

Periodically, we read about some heroic police officer that stops some heinous criminal act while off duty – usually while he is trying to take care of the more urbane/pedestrian tasks, such as grocery shopping, that plague us all. Most police departments encourage their officers not to take police action when off duty unless doing so is necessary to save their life or someone else's. We encourage them to be the best possible witnesses for the on-duty officers who will arrive shortly. But, ultimately, the decision to revert to an on-duty status when the situation demands it is theirs to make.

The psychological make-up of the people who become police officers is fundamentally inconsistent with the notion of inaction in the face of danger. Accordingly, most cops don't sit idly by when criminals victimize innocent people. That's not why they got into the business of policing in the first place. Over the course of my career I have encountered many, many instances in which the heroics of off-duty officers were the key to saving innocent victims and apprehending criminals. Each of these instances has made me proud to wear a badge.

Recently, a friend and professional colleague of mine displayed this dedication in the apprehension of a felony hit and run driver. George Karcher is a San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Deputy Sheriff assigned to the department's Aviation Division. He is a helicopter pilot and flies some of the many helicopters we see over our great city as he and the other deputies of the Aviation Division help protect Redlands.

George was on his way home after another grueling day of flying and I'm sure the last thing he had on his mind was getting involved in more police action. And on the ground too! But being the great cop that he is, he had his police radio turned on and tuned in to our frequency. He heard Redlands PD dispatchers broadcasting the description of a car that had just been involved in a very serious accident near the University of Redlands and whose driver had fled the scene.

Several miles from the accident scene George saw the suspect vehicle still driving away from the accident. It was obvious the driver had no intention of fulfilling his moral and legal responsibilities to remain at the scene. The driver clearly didn't care about the other driver severely injured in the accident. George radioed in the location of the car and stopped it before the driver could hurt anyone else. He held the driver until our officers got there and took custody of the suspect.

George Karcher typifies the heroes that make up American law enforcement. He frequently flies in hazardous conditions to rescue injured hikers or accident victims, drops water on brushfires and keeps a watchful eye on us “ground pounder” cops. I know most of us “in the business” think the flying cops have it made, and their jobs are easier than ours, but bouncing around in a flying contraption that seems to defy all rules of physics (sorry George, I meant the *Eurocopter AS 350B3* helicopter), is physically demanding and frequently very dangerous. I, for one, truly appreciate everything George and his colleagues do for us and am grateful cops like him have chosen the careers they have. As I have previously written, air support for ground officers is invaluable and the professionals at “Sheriff's Aviation” prove this every day.

Like most cops, I have been involved in many off-duty incidents. Most of the time they don't involve my personal life much. But a few weeks ago I found the off/on-duty equation directly connected how my wife and I spend our time together.

As you may be aware, my beautiful bride is a very talented certified *master gardener* (which of course makes me a *master laborer*, but that's an entirely different story) who specializes in school gardens. I periodically help her in her projects. This, she says, is really a constructive way for me to repent via "community service" for all the things I did in school that managed to escape detection. (Hey, I don't actually call getting swats from my PE teachers "escaping detection!") As part of my "training" as her dutiful assistant, she makes me – I mean – I willingly accompany her on the many (and I do mean many!) garden tours in the region.

Normally, I try to convince her I have some pressing work thing to do and that the "garden thing" is really distracting me from protecting the public. This never works.

On this particular wonderful Sunday afternoon, we had just finished viewing the gardens at Lugonia Elementary School. I told her how beautiful the gardens were, and that I was looking forward to the next garden foray she had planned, and we parted company. OK, maybe I didn't exactly phrase it that way. But I meant to....

As I watched her drive off to another gardening adventure I heard an emergency call go out on the RPD radio system. Because I was just leaving Lugonia I was in the right area, at the right time, to be of assistance to the RPD patrol officers who were investigating a suspicious vehicle.

The suspect in this incident ultimately led the officers, and the supporting Sheriff's helicopter crew, on a high-speed pursuit. I was able to stop traffic at one point, which avoided what appeared to be a sure collision between the suspect's vehicle and that of several innocent motorists. The suspect was subdued and arrested a short time later due to the excellent police work of RPD officers.

When I next saw my wife, Emily, I couldn't wait to tell her that her aging police chief-husband had actually engaged in some "real" police work! She then pointed out, that, had it not been for the garden tour (you can see this coming), my contribution to policing would continue to simply be in the form of moving paperwork around on my desk (ouch!). At a rate close to the speed of light, she constructed the principle of "garden tour-husband attendance prevents crime." Essentially, the premise of this comprehensive theory is that as long as I accompany her on garden tours, I will continue to be where public safety needs me to be to fight crime. Not only will the public be safer, but also my life, and career, will be more fulfilling! I'm pretty sure she also intimated my life expectancy would increase commensurate to the degree of my spousal cooperation.

My love then accurately pointed out what I truly believe is the hallmark of both smart husbands and dedicated police officers – we are always on-duty and ready to serve!

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