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THREE PERFECT STORMS

Scared cops and unruly young men prove a lethal combination

By Julius (Jay) Wachtel. One can only imagine what was going through officers' minds when, at the conclusion of a wild freeway pursuit, [they were confronted by a youthful driver](#) who repeatedly pointed at them as though he was holding a gun. By the time it was all over LAPD's finest had fired as many as 90 rounds, killing Abdul Arian, 19.

A one-time police Explorer scout who was [reportedly dropped for "disciplinary reasons"](#), Arian was driving a Crown Vic, a recycled cop car. Relatives described him as a law-abiding youth who wasn't into guns or drugs. Yet his Facebook page mentioned a trip to a shooting range. Arian had also been expressing strong fears of the LAPD. One of his Facebook postings, captioned "just always after me," depicts a police car in his rear view-mirror, its red lights on. Another post reads "done crying...tired of trying...yeah im smiling...but inside im dying." During the April 12 chase Arian warned the 911 operator that he was armed and ready to shoot it out. "I have been arrested before for possession of destructive devices, I'm not afraid of the cops. If they pull their guns, I'm going to have to pull my gun out on them."

As it turns out Arian was unarmed. A relative who watched the tape says that what the disturbed youth "pulled" was a cell phone.

When the plainclothes NYPD officer [confronted Ramarley Graham](#) inside the teen's apartment he had no search warrant. Neither had he been invited into the residence. Nor was he there to rescue anyone from an imminent threat.

Earlier that day, February 2, an NYPD street narcotics unit watched Graham and two companions exit a Bronx bodega that was apparently a hot-spot for drug dealing. Officers followed Graham to a nearby residence, where he remained for a brief period. A cop who saw him leave radioed that a gun butt was sticking out from his waistline. Police tailed Graham to the apartment building where he lived (as it turns out, with his parents and grandmother.) Officers couldn't get to the outside door in time to keep it from locking behind the youth. They unsuccessfully tried to kick it in. They were eventually let in by another resident.

As we mentioned in "[Too Much of a Good Thing?](#)" NYPD has been on stop-and-frisk binge for years. Given the observation of a "gun butt" there was enough for a stop-and-frisk. But there was a delay and Graham was no longer in a public place. Whether "hot pursuit" or probable cause/search warrant rules now applied are something that lawyers are still debating. Either way, officers rushed Graham's second-floor apartment and kicked in the door. (If this seems surprising, you're not alone. Your blogger went, "huh?") One cop dashed to the bathroom, where he encountered Graham trying to flush the evil weed. For reasons that are presently unclear, the cop fired, killing the youth.

A baggie of marijuana was in the toilet bowl. And no, there was no gun.

Three things are known for sure. Here are two. On March 24 Pasadena, Calif. resident Oscar Carrillo called 911 to report [that he was just robbed](#) by two armed men. Moments later, police shot one of the suspects dead.

According to the 911 tape (click [here](#) for the audio) Carrillo told the dispatcher that two young African-American men accosted him and took his laptop and backpack. Both, he said, were armed. Officers quickly responded and spotted two youths running away. During the chase, one of the suspects, Kendrick McDade, 19 approached a police car and, according to an officer, reached for his waistband. The cop fired, mortally wounding the youth. Other officers arrested his 17-year old companion nearby.

It turned out that neither suspect was armed. And while the backpack was recovered, no laptop was found. [Police chief Phillip Sanchez said](#) that the 911 caller lied. As Carrillo himself later conceded, and as a security camera reportedly confirmed, the younger teen snatched a backpack from his vehicle while McDade allegedly acted as a lookout. It wasn't a stickup but a theft. Carrillo didn't have a laptop and he never saw a gun. Why he told 911 otherwise is hard to say – maybe he thought an armed robbery would merit a quicker response – but as the chief pointed out, the mention of firearms undoubtedly “set the platform for the mindset of the responding officers.”

These episodes are fundamentally alike. Each was precipitated by petty offending involving immature and in one instance possibly disturbed teens. In the case of Arian, it was reckless driving; for Graham it was marijuana; and for McDade and his companion, theft. What made these events “perfect storms” was that police were forewarned that their adversaries were armed. That information came once from the suspect's own lips, once from a cop's mistaken observation, and once from a victim's lie.

With killings of police a persistent problem ([they rose substantially in 2011](#)) it's no wonder that some cops are quick on the draw. When dozens of hardy LAPD officers converge on a scene and stage a wild, and as it turns out completely one-sided firefight, one cannot but conclude that police are working scared.

What's to be done? It's not just about keeping guns from criminals. As we pointed out in “[There's No Escaping the Gun](#),” ordinary people regularly go on violent rampages. Meanwhile restrictions on gun possession and carry grow increasingly lax. As America's gun makers continue flooding the streets with powerful, vest-penetrating handguns ([more than 500,000](#) pistols in calibers exceeding 9mm. were manufactured in 2010 alone), cops are right to be wary.

One could trot out all the usual fix-its, from more realistic academy scenarios, to more and better in-service training, to educational campaigns that prod citizens to play nice with the police. But we won't. Indeed, it's only because most cops are highly risk-tolerant that dead citizens aren't lining the streets. Still, drawing a weapon preventively used to be considered an overreaction; now it's commonplace. And once a gun is in hand, pulling the trigger is far more likely. But when everyone that cops encounter is apt to be armed, who wants to be responsible for the possible consequences of advising restraint?

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Not me.