

GUN SMUGGLED in a Typewriter

By Deputy
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Photos provided by Los Angeles
County Sheriff's Museum

The Onion Field

On the night of March 9, 1963, LAPD Officers Ian Campbell and Karl Hettinger were working in an unmarked "felony" car. While patrolling, a little maroon Ford coupe with Nevada plates drove past. Its occupants were dressed in matching leather jackets and leather caps and had the gaunt, skeletal look of drug addicts. Everything about the car and its occupants just looked wrong.

Campbell and Hettinger pulled over Gregory Ulas Powell and Jimmy Lee Smith because the Ford's rear license plate light was out. They didn't know that the suspects were armed and had recently committed a string of robberies.

Officers Campbell and Hettinger approached the vehicle, with Campbell on the driver's side and Hettinger on the passenger side. Powell, the driver, exited the vehicle and pulled a gun out of his waistband. He quickly stepped behind and jammed the gun into Campbell's back. He kept Campbell at

gunpoint as they moved around to the passenger side of the car. At the same time, Smith exited the passenger side of the car. "Take his piece," Powell told Smith, nodding toward Hettinger.

Hettinger immediately drew his 6-inch service

revolver from his cross-draw holster, pointing it alternately at Powell, who was hiding behind Campbell, and then at Smith.

Campbell told Hettinger, "He's got a gun on me. Give him your gun."

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LAPD Officer Ian Campbell



LAPD Officer Karl Hettinger

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At that time, there was no policy or training on whether to give up a weapon or not. While there had been several other officer kidnappings, the officers involved had been released unharmed.

So Hettinger handed over his weapon. The officers were held at gunpoint and forced into the suspects' vehicle. With Campbell driving and Hettinger sitting on the floor of the backseat, they drove to an onion field near Bakersfield.

It might have ended differently if Powell hadn't mistakenly thought kidnapping was a capital offense. Had he known that kidnapping was only a capital crime if they demanded ransom or harmed the victim, the pair might not have fatally shot Campbell.

As Campbell was shot in the face and fell to the ground, Hettinger took off running, tearing out on a frantic, zigzag dash through the field. Powell fired at Hettinger and ran after him, but lost him in the dark. Smith took off in the Ford, ostensibly to look for Hettinger. Instead, he abandoned Powell and drove toward Bakersfield. Powell had Hettinger's flashlight and searched on foot, sweeping the light back and forth across the field. He finally gave up, stole a car from a nearby farmhouse and headed back to L.A.

Hettinger ran nearly four miles to a farmhouse, where he was able to call for help.

An all-points bulletin was issued for Powell and Smith. Powell was arrested by the California Highway Patrol that night. Smith was captured the next day. Smith and Powell were transported and confined to the Hall of Justice Jail during their trial.



Suspects Smith and Powell are escorted by deputies to the onion field.

The Trial

Powell and Smith were tried together. Each day they were taken to the ninth floor to be transported to court located on the eighth floor by Deputy Duane Preimsberger and two other deputies. There were rumors that the pair planned an escape, so extra precautions were taken, including handcuffing the inmates into wheelchairs. Instead of using just one pair

of cuffs, each inmate had two pairs attached – one to each wrist.

The wheelchairs were then rolled into the jail elevator and taken to the courtroom. When they reached the courtroom lockup, the inmates were uncuffed. One of the deputies would move to the court hallway and meet with a female deputy from the Sybil Brand

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Institute (SBI) to search all of the spectators, respectively to their gender, who were about to enter the courtroom. Law enforcement officers and attorneys were not searched.

Once court proceedings were ready to begin, the two deputies who had remained with Powell and Smith escorted the pair into the courtroom and waited until they sat at the defense table. The third deputy and female deputy joined the two deputies to provide security in the courtroom. Also in the courtroom were at least two undercover Metro deputies who sat with the spectators.

As the trial progressed, the deputies heard the gut-wrenching testimony of Officer Hettinger. He described in painstaking detail the horror that he experienced the night Campbell was killed. He went through the incident minute by minute, second by second, describing his fear and panic as he ran through the onion field.

Everyone in the courtroom witnessed Hettinger's struggle. Courtroom spectators were overcome with emotion listening to him describe the pain he felt when his partner was shot in the face, and the fear he felt as he ran for his life, zigzagging and dodging bullets. The tension in the courtroom was almost unbearable as Hettinger described how he hid in a tangle of tumbleweeds and watched Powell's flashlight sweep back and forth, just a few feet away.

At the end of each court day, Deputy Preimsberger and the other two deputies placed inmates Powell and Smith back in the wheelchairs and handcuffed each of

their wrists to the wheelchair arms. They transported them by elevator back to the ninth floor of the Hall of Justice Jail.

One day, an LAPD detective, who was in court for the case, told Deputy Preimsberger, "You guys are doing a great job. Don't let these murderers escape!"

Deputy Preimsberger later recalled that he couldn't wait to get out to patrol, not only to take criminals like Powell and Smith off the street, but to share the knowledge he gained from watching this trial. He felt that the most important message was to never give up your gun. This knowledge could keep deputies from living through a nightmare like Hettinger's and at the same time keep themselves alive.

Both Powell and Smith were convicted and given the death penalty. However, their sentence was overturned, and they were granted a retrial in July of 1967. They returned to the Los Angeles County Jail for their retrial in 1968.

Resentencing Trial

During the resentencing trial, Powell was permitted to act as his own attorney, which granted him pro per status. This gave him privileges that were not available to other inmates, such as access to the law library. It fit in perfectly with Powell's never-ending attempts to escape.

During that time, pro per inmates were housed in Module 2500 of Central Jail. This was due to the location of the law library, which pro per inmates needed to research

their cases. In 1968, there were no computers or word processing programs. All legal documents had to be typed on a manual or electric typewriter. Since the jail did not provide typewriters, pro per inmates had to arrange to have a typewriter brought in from the outside. Powell decided that he was going to smuggle in a gun, hidden inside a typewriter, and use it to escape. Each day, Powell was driven to court in an unmarked car by two deputies. His plan was to smuggle the gun into the jail, and as he was being transported to court, he would execute both deputies and escape.

The Plan

Powell was known by other inmates as a jailhouse lawyer and many of them went to him for legal advice. Powell made friends with another pro per inmate named Bayer, who was in jail for petty theft with a prior, which made it a felony. Powell decided that if Bayer's legal runner brought in the typewriter, it wouldn't be scrutinized as thoroughly since Bayer was in for such a low-level crime.

Powell's legal runner, a woman who was apparently smitten with him, concealed a gun and ammunition inside the typewriter and delivered it to Bayer's legal runner, who happened to be Bayer's girlfriend. She had no knowledge that a gun was concealed in the typewriter when she took it into the Attorney Room. But an informant had already ruined the plan, warning deputies ahead of time.

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On June 7, Deputy Ridenour was working at Central Jail in the control booth of the Attorneys Room. He was responsible for checking identification and preventing contraband from getting into the room. When Bayer's legal runner brought in the typewriter containing the gun, Deputy Ridenour took it into the control booth and requested tools so he could dismantle and search it. He took it apart piece by piece. As he looked into the interior of the typewriter, he found a gun along with ammunition, concealed under the cover and on top of the keys. The gun was wrapped in filter material from an aquarium to prevent it from rattling around and making noise. The ammunition was wrapped separately in the same filter material. Bayer's legal runner dropped off the typewriter and left, so she wasn't interviewed about the gun until later. The typewriter and gun were taken outside security to the Administrative Offices to be checked for fingerprints.

Deputy Jack Jaquess, who was assigned as a latent print deputy, dusted Powell's typewriter and gun but was unable to get any fingerprints.

Deputy Max Chance from the Robbery Detail was assigned to investigate the attempt to smuggle the gun into Central Jail. During the investigation, Powell's legal runner was questioned by Deputy Chance and a sample of her hair was obtained. The sample hair was compared to strands of hair found on the aquarium filters that were wrapped around the gun and ammo. The hair found on the filters matched the sample. The woman's home was searched, and the aquarium filters found in her home matched those used to



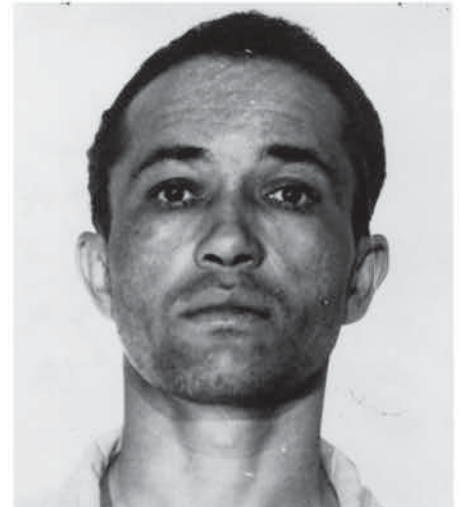
Gregory Powell

smuggle in the gun and ammo. She confessed and was charged.

Inmate Bayer was extremely upset when his girlfriend was arrested and blamed Powell. The next time he saw Powell, he attacked him. He beat him with a chair and had to be restrained by deputies.

Bayer was charged with assault with a deadly weapon for attacking Powell with the chair. The charges against Bayer and his girlfriend were dropped in exchange for their testimony against Powell at his sentencing trial. The pair gave damaging evidence, which was a factor in Powell receiving the death penalty a second time.

In the end, Smith was sentenced to life. He was paroled in 1982 and continued to commit low-level crimes until his death on



Jimmy Lee Smith

April 7, 2007 of an apparent heart attack. At the time of his death, Smith was 76 years old and confined at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Pitchess Detention Center for a parole violation.

Powell's sentence was commuted to life in prison in 1972 when California outlawed capital punishment.

On October 18, 2011, Powell was denied compassionate release after being diagnosed with prostate cancer. Powell died on August 12, 2012. He was 79 years old.

Deputy Preimsberger later transferred to Firestone Station, where he continued to share his experience of the trial and his commitment to keeping himself and other deputies safe.

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What has never ended is the battle to keep contraband and weapons from entering the Los Angeles County jails. Inmates are constantly looking for new ways to escape and to smuggle weapons into the jail system. Deputies and custody assistants must be constantly on guard, following rules and conducting thorough searches to prevent weapons from getting into the jail, and doing everything they can to keep Sheriff's personnel safe.

A Landmark Case

The murder of Ian Campbell and the subsequent trial and retrials of Gregory Powell and Jimmy Lee Smith had far-reaching effects that no one could have predicted.

The pair were initially tried together and sentenced to death. But their sentences were reversed in the wake of several legal decisions: the 1964 case of Danny Escobedo, whose sentence was reversed by the U.S. Supreme Court because he confessed *after* asking for a lawyer; and the 1965 decision that reversed the murder conviction of Robert R. Dorado, in which a California court ruled that the police have a duty to inform a suspect of the right to remain silent and the right to council. And finally there was *Miranda*, the 1966 U.S. Supreme Court decision in the appeal of confessed kidnapper and rapist Ernesto Miranda. That decision applied the same guidelines nationally as the *Dorado* case had in California. The result was that Powell and Smith would be retried.

The case had a significant impact on officer survival training. In the days after Campbell's death, Hettinger was sent to roll-call after roll-call and asked to recount his experience. The result was a policy change directing officers to never give up their guns.

The case also marked the beginning of an awareness about how law enforcement treats its own, especially after the kind of trauma experienced by Hettinger. At the time, there was little understanding of the kind of help that officers who had suffered extreme physical or emotional trauma might need. A psychiatrist involved in the case

addressed it for what may have been the first time. He wrote: "To assume that a man can just resume a normal way of life after such an overwhelming episode is asking too much of most of us . . . I urge that very careful consideration be given for the prevention of mental and emotional disturbances arising from trauma in the line of duty."

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