

The Night Sergeant Geberth TPF Called for an Air Strike In the 41st Precinct Fort Apache The Bronx

The concrete on Seabury Place radiated heat like a furnace on that steamy Saturday night. In the heart of the South Bronx's 41st Precinct—notoriously known as "Fort Apache"—the air was thick with the stench of burning garbage, cheap wine, and raw tension. Bongo drums and blaring salsa music echoed off crumbling tenements, punctuated by the sharp crack of distant gunfire.

It was an unusually hot and busy Saturday night in the South Bronx's 41st Precinct known as "Fort Apache." This was a high-crime area notorious for homicides, robberies, and rampant drug use. There were also many belligerent street gangs fighting among themselves for control of their "Turfs."

Two of these gangs **The Savage Skulls** and **The Black Spades** congregated on street corners wearing their "Colors" and assemble in make-shift club houses that they constructed in abandoned buildings. They would openly challenge the police and threaten retaliation for any law enforcement arrests and/or intervention. The Tactical Patrol Force Command had assigned three squads to the area to supplement the uniform patrol officers of the 41st Precinct. TPF had been brought in to neutralize some of the gang activities and back-up the local precinct police to take back the streets from the thugs so that the citizens of the community could go to the stores and be free from the non-stop violence. Sergeant Geberth was supervising these three squads assigned to the area and working with their uniform counterparts from the 41st Precinct to effectively patrol and control the crime.

Sergeant Vernon Geberth sat in the front seat of his marked TPF cruiser, supervising the units. The police radio barked a non-stop stream of chaos. It was already an extremely hectic shift. Tonight, the streets felt like a powder-keg and it was about to get much worse.

You could literally feel the tension in the air as the sounds of yelling voices permeated through the tenements and streets. The police radio was active with

calls for back-up and reports of shots fired as well as the many 9-1-1 calls for service.

At about 7:00 P.M. that evening The FDNY had responded to a fire on Seabury Place and 172nd Street. The locals had ignited huge piles of garbage bags on the front stoop of an abandoned building for “Ghetto Entertainment.” While extinguishing the blaze the firemen were suddenly showered with bricks and bottles thrown from the nearby rooftops.

They requested NYPD assistance. Firefighters were ducking behind their engines as a deadly hail of bricks, heavy bottles, and chunks of concrete rained down from the rooftops.

Sergeant Geberth and his units joined the 41st Precinct officers as they cleared the area by taking to the roofs and physically dispersing the gangbangers who were taunting the firemen and responding cops. The scene was pure bedlam.

This was a heavy gang area where these rival gangs would meet and fight with each other with knives and guns. It was a hot evening and tempers were flaring as the police officers provided cover for the firemen and their equipment to vacate the area. This proved to be difficult because the fire trucks were blocked in by the configuration of the streets.

The location where the fire had been set was at the intersection of Seabury Place and 172nd Street off of Boston Road. This V-shaped intersection provided the gangbangers with an excellent opportunity to attack both the police and their rival gangs from the rooftops of the various buildings. Due to the configuration of that intersection the fire department had difficulty maneuvering their ladder truck and engines in and out of that neighborhood.

There were a number of abandoned buildings in the area occupied by squatters and drug addicts, which provided the gangs with multiple areas of egress and ingress throughout the neighborhood. They could quickly emerge in large groups to threaten or harass police officers who were making an arrest or taking police action and then strategically disperse through the abandoned buildings and alleyways as back-up and police reinforcements arrived on the scene.

This was an incredibly dangerous area and situation for the police to be in. Anything could have happened and an officer could have easily lost his or her life. It was, indeed, a fucking war zone.

At about 7:30 P.M. after the police had cleared that location of trouble makers a radio call went out reporting, *“A Man with Gun”* at the same location where the Fire Department had been bogged down and under attack. Vernon and the 41st Precinct Patrol Sergeant got on the radio and ordered *“No RMP’s to respond.”* Another report then came over the radio reporting, *“Police officer needs assistance at the corner of 172nd Street and Seabury Place.”* The gangbangers were obviously trying to bait the police into a trap by making anonymous 9-1-1 calls. Apparently, these gangbangers had retaken the rooftops at that intersection. Vernon notified Central that no units should be dispatched to this location until further notice.

Sgt Geberth once again advised central that The TPF Commander and 41st Precinct Supervisor were on the scene. At approximately 8:00 P.M. Sgt. Geberth radioed central, identifying himself as TPF Commander at the scene and requested that the Aviation Unit dispatch NYPD Helicopters to fly over the building’s rooftops at this location due to the gangs gathering on the roofs who were armed with bricks and bottles.

At 8:30 P.M. two NYPD Helicopters flew over the area with their distinctive Thwomp, thwomp, thwomp, thwomp, sounds of the blades and their spotlights illuminating the roofs. It was like something out of an action movie. The pilot reported a number of individuals on the roofs who had scattered as the helicopters flew over. The chopper remained in the area for about 30 minutes making sure that the roofs were kept clear of any individuals. This provided Sgt. Geberth and his troops who he had assembled at Boston Road and Seabury with the necessary cover and time to allow his men to infiltrate the area. Sgt. Geberth had his troops use their practiced *“Building Assault”* operation at 1520 Seabury Place. They were able to surreptitiously secure all of the roofs and alleys in the immediate area.

Once they were in place at 11:30 P.M. Sgt. Geberth again requested Aviation to have the NYPD helicopters to fly over the same rooftops where the gang bangers had previously reassembled. The helicopters once again flew into the area with the distinctive sounds of the spinning blades and their spotlights.

As they hovered over the rooftops, the gangbangers tried to escape but were trapped by the TPF officers who had secured the roof access and fire escapes on the buildings. Three of the main suspects were arrested for possession of Molotov cocktails and their underlings were issued summary justice by members of his squad. Geberth and his men seized 24 Molotov cocktails, 5 Gallons of gasoline and a bag of rock salt which they had put into the Molotov bottles.

These burning pieces of rock salt would have been dispersed at the explosion causing additional burning injuries. As soon as TPF had the rooftops and area secured Sgt. Geberth called for additional patrol units to flood the area. Sergeant Geberth then notified central to have the Bomb Squad respond to handle the incendiary devices. By this time with all the department radio traffic requesting helicopters and the bomb squad personnel a TPF Captain from Manhattan arrived on the scene. He asked Sgt. Geberth where the Lieutenant was and who had ordered the Special Operations Division response. Sgt. Geberth told him, "There is no Captain. It was me." The Captain just shook his head muttering to himself as he turned around and went back to Manhattan.

The three suspects denied that they were going to use the Molotov cocktails on the police. Of course, that was all bullshit. They had tried to lure the police in with the bogus 9-1-1- calls. They'd seen what had happened to their fellow gangbangers who were issued summary justice on the roof. The perpetrators finally confessed stating that they were actually "*protecting the community.*" A lot of these gang members who were drug users and street criminals had served in Vietnam.

They were well acquainted with war time tactics and incendiary devices. Some considered themselves neighborhood vigilantes. They also were constantly fighting with each other for control of the drug trade in their neighborhoods. They claimed that they were preparing the Molotov cocktails to retaliate for the death of one of their members which had occurred that Saturday morning. They were going to attack that night and stated they wanted to clear the area of all police and firemen. They were charged with possession of incendiary devices.

News Media

The news media, which had been monitoring the police radio transmissions from the Bronx, covered the event as if it was a major police operation. Of course, Sgt. Geberth couldn't resist exaggerating a bit as he described that his TPF personnel had rappelled down from the higher building fire escapes to secure the neighborhood roofs and captured the suspects as they made their bombs. The next morning the print news and radio stations were reporting on the TPF Raid in the Bronx which involved helicopters, The Bomb Squad and TPF cops rappelling down the building fire escapes. Sergeant Geberth and his troops all got a good laugh out of that.

Sgt. Geberth wasn't laughing the next day when he was summoned to The Manhattan Headquarters of TPF to explain his actions to his Commanding Officer. Sgt. Geberth explained about the gang-banger's attempt to lure them into a trap and that by calling on Aviation he had avoided injuries and possible deaths of members of the service. As a result of his actions, it was determined by Headquarters that in the future the on-scene supervisors could directly request Special Operations Division Units to respond to an ongoing incident. They improvised, adapted, and overcame.
