

## **SERGEANT GEBERTH AND THE TACTICAL PATROL FORCE TAKEDOWN OF THE SAVAGE SKULLS CLUBHOUSE**

In the early 1970s, violent street gangs held large sections of the Bronx in a state of fear. Organizations such as the Black Spades, Savage Skulls, Savage Nomads, and Ghetto Brothers fought bloody turf wars, transforming abandoned and semi-abandoned buildings into fortified strongholds. Entire blocks became battlegrounds where residents lived under the constant threat of violence.

On the sweltering night of June 12, 1972, the South Bronx's 41st Precinct—known throughout the city as "Fort Apache"—was alive with tension. The sounds of blasting music, bongo drums, shouting, and sirens echoed through the streets. Police radios crackled nonstop with calls of assaults, robberies, and shots fired. The neighborhood was one of New York City's most dangerous, and everyone could feel it.

Among the most feared gangs operating in the area were the Savage Skulls. Their members openly flaunted their colors, intimidated residents, and routinely challenged police authority. They had established a reputation for violence and retaliation, leaving many residents afraid to walk the streets after dark.

In May, Sgt. Geberth and his Tactical Patrol Force clashed with the Savage Skulls at Seabury Place and 172nd Street. The gang had ignited garbage piles on an abandoned building's stoop for "Ghetto Entertainment," ambushing arriving firefighters with bricks and bottles. Geberth's units joined the 41st Precinct to clear the area, moving onto the roofs to disperse the gangbangers. To cut off their escape, Geberth requested NYPD aviation support. As helicopters swirled overhead, his TPF cops moved in on the gang, who were armed with rock-salt-loaded Molotov cocktails aimed at the police below.

Determined to break the gang's grip on the neighborhood, the NYPD deployed three Tactical Patrol Force (TPF) squads into the area under the command of Sergeant Vernon Geberth. Their mission was simple: dismantle the gang's infrastructure and restore order to a community living under siege.

The Savage Skulls' headquarters was located in the basement of an apartment building on Intervale Avenue. Although they neither lived there nor had permission to occupy the premises, gang members had effectively seized control of the basement through intimidation and threats. Residents and the building superintendent were too frightened to challenge them. The clubhouse itself had become notorious. Reinforced doors, barricades, armed lookouts, and gang enforcers turned the basement into a fortress where weapons and narcotics were stored and gang business was conducted.

Sergeant Geberth using the legal principle that these gang bangers had no "reasonable expectation of privacy" under the Fourth Amendment and were basically squatters Sergeant Geberth authorized a Tactical Patrol Force operation to breach and secure the clubhouse.

Sergeant Geberth had developed a plan designed to overwhelm the gang before they could react. After coordinating with the 41st Precinct and positioning patrol units to secure the perimeter, he briefed his TPF squads. The operation would rely on speed, surprise, and overwhelming force.

## **The Breach**

The operation was launched with ruthless efficiency. At the designated time, unmarked TPF vehicles and patrol cars converged on Intervale Avenue from multiple directions. Tires screeched as the vehicles came to a stop in front of the building, instantly sealing off the block.

The order sent heavily armed TPF officers pouring from the vehicles. The first wave immediately neutralized the gang's lookouts, preventing any warning from reaching the clubhouse. Seconds later, the breach team moved in. Sledgehammers crashed against the reinforced basement doors. One crushing blow followed another. Wood splintered. Hinges ripped free. The barricaded entrance collapsed under the assault.

The Tactical Patrol Force surged through the opening. Caught completely by surprise, the Savage Skulls never had a chance to organize a defense. Officers flooded the basement, securing every corner and forcing gang members to the ground before they could react.

There were weapons everywhere. Shotguns, handguns, knives, and machetes lay scattered throughout the clubhouse. Narcotics sat in plain view on tables. What had been the gang's fortress only moments before was now completely under police control.

Within minutes, the operation was over. Twenty-eight Savage Skulls were under arrest. Handcuffed together in a daisy chain, the gang members were lined up inside their conquered headquarters.

Sergeant Geberth then delivered a symbolic blow to the organization's authority. One by one, gang rank patches and insignia were removed from their jackets. Stripping them of their colors, Sgt. Geberth informed them that they were no longer in charge of the neighborhood.

"The Tactical Patrol Force is our gang," Geberth told them, "And our gang is bigger than yours."

The message was unmistakable: the Savage Skulls no longer controlled these streets. Sgt. Geberth then directed that all the clubhouse furniture and materials be dragged out and piled on the curb for immediate removal by the Sanitation Department. Their forced eviction was meant to be permanent.

As the prisoners were marched from the building and loaded into waiting police transport wagons, the people living on Intervale Avenue realized this was more than just a successful police operation. Residents emerged from their apartments to witness the scene. Many applauded; others cheered loudly as the gang members who had terrorized their neighborhood were led away in custody. It was a public demonstration that the streets no longer belonged to the gang. For one night, at least, the Tactical Patrol Force had taken them back.

In the aftermath, the Savage Skulls attempted to strike back legally. Claiming the police had intentionally ripped their denim jackets, they filed official Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) charges against Sgt. Geberth and the TPF officers. However, Sergeant Geberth brought a copy of the **"Two Horse Pull" advertisement and trademark for Levi's jeans** as his defense against the allegations showing that he and his men couldn't possibly "Rip" the gang banger's jeans and were ultimately found to be unsubstantiated by Civilian Complaint Review Board Director Sterling Johnson, who was thoroughly impressed by the team's decisive gang cleanup actions.

