



# Never Surrender



Sergeant JOHN R. MUMMA, Secretary

I've recently noticed a dramatic increase in the tendency amongst the membership to use Internet forums to discuss work-related events. As your legal chair, I am also in the position to see the outcome of the vast majority of serious complaints that are sustained. While there are many trends in this data, one of the most disturbing is the uptick in self-inflicted trouble brought on by the seemingly irresistible urge to use the Internet to talk about things that, in retrospect, are so obviously going to lead to trouble when the Department finds out what you wrote. I say "when" because it seems that we in law enforcement are as prone as any other profession to associate online with others of our own kind. But when the topic is juicy or provocative, an email intended to be between two people invariably becomes an email forwarded to hundreds of other officers or a posting in places you never even knew existed. As the mafia says, two people can keep a secret when one of them is dead.

Before you send that post, email or text, think about whether or not you would stand up in roll call and tell this story, show that photo/video or spout your opinion. If the answer is no, then hit delete. If the photo is one you wouldn't show to your commanding officer and your grandma, hit delete and ask yourself why you took it in the first place. And please, stop sending photos of your private parts to anyone else via any electronic method you may possess. If they wanted to see it/them, they would be dating you!

Lest you think this is all in good fun, remember that we currently have several officers waiting to find out if they will be criminally prosecuted for electronic offenses ranging from releasing mug shots and rap sheets to sexual offenses to criminal stalking charges. Of course, most of them invariably get fired, too. And those photos of your genitalia? They have gotten officers fired. Is it really worth it? Gary Ingemunson has written several times about the dangers the Internet can pose to a law enforcement career. Visit [www.warningbells.com](http://www.warningbells.com) to reread his articles on the perils of Facebook, in particular. What you may have intended to be funny, just a tall tale or simply a sharing of a true professional experience all too often ends up defined as an invasion of privacy, an unwanted advance, an inappropriate use of Department resources or that great catchall: conduct unbecoming an officer.

On the tall tale side, remember that what seems to you so obviously embellished will be taken as true by others, and your attempts to explain that you made it all up will appear conveniently self-serving at best, and false or misleading at worst. Remember also that IA will track down and interview the suspect involved in that caper and ask if you really did do whatever it is you claim to have said or done. What do you think the suspect is gonna say? Yeah, I'm sure he'll back you all the way. Right after he hires a civil attorney. Even if you beat the allegations, remember that they end up in some personnel file that somebody will always remember reading. And if it exists, it can be subpoenaed. LAPD never throws anything away and the Internet never forgets.

On a related note, I've seen much chatter lately about the status of criminal trials of current or former LAPD officers. Remember that anything you post there is being read by somebody at IA or worse. Yes, we all hope these officers are not guilty of the charges against them, but you should be very careful with this. Just because the site requires membership or a password doesn't remotely mean it is not being monitored by people you don't know. And anything can be cut and pasted elsewhere in about two seconds. Remember, too, that showing support for an officer on trial must be done entirely off duty and out of uniform. Your appearance off duty in a court of law isn't likely to help an officer much. But it *will* be noticed and reported by the representatives from Risk Management who attend every single day of the hearings and trials. You can probably be of greater service to the accused and their family behind the scenes and out of the limelight. Help them out, let them know you care but don't endanger your own career just to make a point. Contact me with any questions at [johnmumma@lappl.org](mailto:johnmumma@lappl.org) or (213) 251-4585. ❖