

How to Write a Headline Without Telling the Whole Story

SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES KILL VISTA MAN IN HOUR-LONG STANDOFF NEAR CAMP PENDLETON

a fusillade of shots; on the air, a perfume
black powder & orange blossoms. with one arm
held
perpendicular,
rapid fire flashing
bounce of summer sun on the crests of the Pacific,
bright & blinding gold as all five points on a sheriff's badge:
to serve & protect. slurred speech & a bobbing hand
*—up & down with an aggressive pointer finger—*meets fear &
deadly summer swelter, angry heat & trigger finger, sweat-soaked khaki
& a short fuse.
one strike—no matter how small—
is all it takes to light a match & a lit match is deadly when the pilot light's
already on, seeping invisible gas into the atmosphere & just begging for a flame
to set everything alight. these badges were meant to keep us safe:
how is it then, that a man can stumble his way through the last rites in
what little Latin he remembers from his days as an altar boy made a ghost
through the complicity of hands? how is it that those same hands
touched all manner of holy books & vowed protection,
instructed in the language of violence each phoneme a staccato
cracking the sound barrier in a fusillade of gunfire?
how does a man go nameless & die surrounded by all the bounty
of this Golden State a perfume of orange blossoms entwined with the salt
of the Pacific no way to tell

this five-pointed star of a badge,

that what he is most frightened of

what he fears most

is this very end:

nameless,

hands outstretched for something

just out of reach