SENIOR MILITIA

 The year was 202\_, and crime in the United States had skyrocketed to an appalling level.

 Murders, armed carjackings, violent gangs, smash and grabs, group-organized shoplifting, assaults, burglaries, rapes, arson, and vandalism such as obscene graffiti plagued most of America's cities. Some activists had earlier urged defunding the police, and letting convicted felons go free without posting bail or serving parole. Certain urban district attorneys even suggested emptying the prisons of many of their inmates, or advocated blocking the construction of any new correctional facilities. As a result, a large part of the U.S. took on the shocking look of a lawless, fear-riddled Third World society, spiraling out of control.

 Politicians were torn as to what to do. Several state governors wanted their National Guard troops called out, or even pleaded assistance from the U.S. military. Some wanted dawn to dusk curfews instituted for their beleaguered cities. The public blamed a variety of causes for the crime increase: lack of two-parent homes; a porous Southern border with Mexico; drug addiction and mental illness among the growing homeless population; failure of the urban public schools; lack of adequate youth job training and opportunities; the decline of religious morals and values; or the capitalist system itself -- with its increasing gap in income parity. Many families, who were financially able, fled the cities for the relative safety of the furthest suburbs and the rural countryside, settling in peaceful small towns whenever possible.

 Bud Baylor was a widowed, retired pipe fitter living in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Still tough and strong at age seventy, with bristly, steel-grey hair, Bud -- like most of his senior friends -- was fed up with what his country had devolved into. A military veteran and proud ex-Marine, he wondered aloud why he had fought so hard to preserve the traditional American way of life, as well as working for forty-three years helping build his corner of the country up in the oil industry for the benefit of his three grown children and, currently, his six grandchildren. And what made the situation worse, he realized, was that it didn't matter which political party you voted for anymore, because the average Joe was largely overlooked and lost out regardless.

 Tulsa (the second largest city in the state, nicknamed the "Buckle of the Bible Belt," with 414,000 residents) specifically had one of the highest crime rates in America compared to all communities of all sizes -- 60 per every 1000 residents. One's chance of being a victim here of either violent or property crime was 1 in 17. It was a shameful fact for the normal, honest citizens living there.

 One day, Bud had a powerful idea. He shared it with his like-minded friends at the Black Gold Cafe, where the group met most weekday mornings for coffee and jawboning.

 "I've been thinking about history lately, boys, and how out here in the West, men sometimes had to take the law into their own hands when dangerous times demanded it," Baylor began. "When the town sheriff or territorial Marshall was unavailable or incapacitated, the other townsmen had to step in -- to protect the innocent, the elderly, and the women and children. Call it vigilantism or whatever, but it got the job done, and the bad guys soon knew it and stayed away. So I clearly believe that what we need to do is step in again during these alarming times. Now, we here around this table are all responsible, careful gun owners. We are either military veterans or experienced hunters who know how and when to shoot."

 Bud had the complete attention of his seven friends as he spoke.

 "I'm proposing that -- with the legal compliance of state and local authorities, including Governor Lou Stiles and our own law enforcement personnel -- that we organize a kind of local volunteer Senior Militia, to begin waging a total and unprecedented war on crime in Tulsa. We can start out aiming for a 100% No Crime Day, then consider extending it state-wide from there if it's successful. We would be self-armed, and be in constant contact with the local police. We would warn criminals in advance of the special day, and patrol every crime area with as many trained, armed Senior Citizens as we can muster. We would allow any offenders of the ban to surrender, but if they refuse after a serious warning, we would have the legal right to shoot them -- either to wound or to kill, depending on the circumstances."

 Baylor paused for a quick slurp of his dark java, then continued.

 "My friends, I figure we Seniors alone in our community have both the time and the correct training to do this vital job. We will have police back-up -- even as they are regretfully spread thin now -- but our lives will still be on the line. No doubt what I'm proposing is very risky. Some of us could get hurt or even killed in the process of cleaning out our beloved city. But the current collapse of law and order must be stopped as soon as possible, or I'm afraid we're all headed for social anarchy. We are bravely sacrificing ourselves for the common good. Look...we are all old and slowly falling apart..." -- Bud paused to chuckle, as did his nodding buddies -- "...but we can still contribute positively to helping our neighbors and our community. We really have nothing to lose. Think about... O.K. now, who's got some questions, comments or suggestions?"

 Harv Lamar spoke up first. "I think it's a great concept, Bud. I'll ask my good Osage friend, Peter Red Cloud, who y'all know is Tulsa's Chief of Police, to come to our next meeting. He'll probably be able to add some further ideas for your proposal."

 Hank Ryman was next. "I read recently that one out of six Americans is now age sixty-five or over. We're talking millions of supporters and volunteers to boost this message! If Bud's idea works out for ultimately taming Tulsa, maybe we could expand it statewide...just think: All of Oklahoma crime free! Maybe then Texas, or Kansas, or Arkansas would join us...hell, maybe later, the whole damn country would wake up! I'm seein' a national crime-stopper crusade, boys, with senior brigades popping up all over the land..."

 "Let's invite Tulsa Mayor Les Arnett too, Bud," Gabe Hernandez added. "He's also a lawyer, so he can fill us in on our legal rights and responsibilities with your concept. We don't want any lawsuits or charges of racism or the like to tie us up down the road in court."

 Bud agreed with all three men's input. "I'm glad you brought up the topic of racism, Gabe. I want to make it perfectly clear that we are aiming to stop crime coming from any source, and that means any skin color -- black, brown, red, white or yellow. Most crimes are committed by -- and fill our nation's prisons with -- unmarried, unemployed men ages 18-35, and most crime is centered in poor, inner-city areas, as you well know. Most of the folks, however, living in those places are good citizens who are afraid of the neighborhoods they're stuck in. That majority would absolutely welcome any relief from the burden of roving gangs and other criminals. Bottom line: We intend to treat everybody fairly and with respect. Our job is simply to bolster law enforcement and detain or take down the perpetrators, and never to hurt the innocent."

 Tulsa's Mayor and Chief of Police came to the meeting at the Black Gold Cafe the following week. Afterwards, Mayor Arnett set up an appointment at the end of the month for Bud and a small delegation of his supporters to meet with Governor Stiles at the state capital in Oklahoma City.

 "I admire your bold idea, Mr. Baylor, and it's certainly worth a try," the Governor agreed. "So let's begin in Tulsa, as you have outlined. If your plan works, we can try it in our other cities and maybe even totally statewide. Set up an exact No Crime Day date, and we'll inform the public through the media -- internet, television, radio, newspapers -- as well as from church pulpits and from door-to-door handout sheets using volunteers. You'll coordinate with local law enforcement all communications and strategic necessities. Keep me informed, naturally. I'll address the state live on television the week before the No Crime Day launch, and give final assurances to all our Tulsans. I thank y'all for coming, gentlemen. I pray everything will work out safely yet effectively."

 Bud Baylor and his friends eagerly went to work, recruiting and organizing hundreds of capable, armed Senior volunteers. Screening interviews for assessing mental and physical fitness for the important upcoming task was carefully undertaken. Tulsa neighborhoods were sectioned off on a map grid, with teams assigned to patrol, in four-hour shifts, based on the twenty-four hour schedule. Local businesses in the city donated enough money to purchase Day-Glo yellow vests for the volunteers to wear, with the big words POLICE PARTNER printed on them. The Tulsa Police Department also purchased -- using a Go Fund Me site -- hundreds of extra pairs of handcuffs for the volunteers to use if needed.

 Baylor next came up with a list of rules for each volunteer to agree with and sign:

 "Each Senior Militia member must provide his or her own firearms (pistol, rifle, shotgun) and ammunition. Personal tasers and mace are also acceptable tools to help subdue the unruly or uncooperative suspect(s) in making an arrest.

 Always stay in communication while on duty with the local police.

 When on duty, always patrol in pairs of two.

 Bring a two-way, portable police scanner radio to wear on your belt. If you need to purchase one, do so and save the receipt, and our organization will reimburse you later.

 If you witness or are investigating a crime reported to be in progress, tell the criminal(s) to stop and surrender. If they have a deadly weapon, order them to drop it and then lie flat on the ground with their hands behind their head. Handcuff them next, and read them the usual Miranda Rights, after radioing the nearest roving police patrol for help.

 If the suspect refuses to comply with your orders, you are legally allowed to fire a warning shot in the air with your weapon. If they still refuse to comply, or attempt to run away, you are authorized to shoot them in the leg to stop them. However, if you are attacked by the criminal -- or criminals -- with a deadly weapon, and you are absolutely certain that your life is in mortal danger, you are formally authorized to shoot to kill.

 Take any pictures and/or videos you deem important -- using your cell phone cameras -- to record any pertinent situational activity.

 Therefore, I solemnly swear to act in the finest professional manner while on patrol duty, and will obey any directives from my unit commander and the police. I freely accept total responsibility for my actions, and will not hold the Senior Militia organization to any unforeseen liability." [Signed]

 Word of the bold project quickly spread throughout Tulsa's senior community. It was met with an outpouring of enthusiasm and support -- both as volunteers and with generous monetary donations. Even dozens of armed married couples and widowed women signed up. After screening was completed, Bud Baylor had a total of 3816 eager and dedicated helpers, to augment Tulsa's force of 474 policemen and policewomen. The date for No Crime Day was set for Sunday, November 2nd, for a full 24-hour period beginning at midnight. Governor Lou Stiles made the announcement on a live television address a week earlier. All during the next several days, the word went out across the city of Tulsa as planned. Bud was, of course, busily interviewed by both the local, state, and national press. Fully half of the queries seemed favorable with the proposed unique social experiment, while others were either critical or derisive, or took a cautious 'Let's wait and see' attitude.

 Baylor calmly and capably answered such media questions as:

 "By 'no crime', does that include arrests for public intoxication, or jaywalking, or investigating the usual domestic disturbances that call 911 for help?"

 *"No, sir. Our intent is to focus on the more serious crimes, or crimes-in-progress, that threaten the safety and security of the public at large."*

 "What about organized crime, like the Mafia, Mr. Baylor? How can their underground activities be curbed for 24-hours? You know...the usual stuff like illegal gambling, loan- sharking, prostitution, 'protection' extortion, and the typical 'skimming' of goods off of delivery trucks?"

 *"I'm afraid that is beyond our ability and intent, even though every criminal enterprise is a foul cancer upon society. I believe that someday, it must -- and will -- be excised."*

 "Forgive me for asking, Bud, but do Senior Militia members have the mental and physical reaction skills to correctly assess and then deal with these various dangerous potential crime situations? I mean, doesn't most crime take place late at night, when most retirees are already asleep by 9:30 p.m.?"

 "*Our men and women volunteers are fully screened and experienced for the task at hand -- and I can assure you that each and every member is ready, willing and able to assist the police in dealing with the criminal element, either day or night. And furthermore, you should know that I usually go to bed at 11:00 p.m."* [crowd laughed.]

 No Crime Day in Tulsa came at midnight on November 2 and concluded twenty-four hours later, to the amazement of the public and law enforcement, and the disgust of any potential criminals. When the final statistics were tallied, crime had gone down 92% compared to an average Tulsa day. There were only 64 total arrests, with none for murder, gang shootings, or rape. The majority of those arrested were wanton teenagers caught committing burglary or vandalism -- most likely egged on with a dare by their peers. No Senior Militia members were hurt or harassed, and no shots needed to be fired. Bud Baylor's idea was a success!

 Bud later reported an incident to the press that he himself experienced on No Crime Day:

 "It was with a nervous, jittery young man -- his race really doesn't matter -- probably on drugs like meth, whom my partner, Leroy Jefferson and I confronted about 8:45 p.m. The youth was packing a .45 automatic, and was attempting an armed robbery for the purse of a terrified elderly woman. I told him to freeze and drop his weapon. He refused, saying he wasn't going to obey some f\*cking old man giving him orders.

 I replied, 'Look, son. I don't want to shoot you, but I will unless you do exactly what I say. I'm an old man, it's true, but my life is winding down and I've got nothing to lose. I'm an ex-U.S. Marine, and I've killed men in combat. You, on the other hand, are just starting your life. You don't want to get killed tonight or spend the rest of your life in prison for killing me. My partner here is armed and ready to shoot too. He's going to call for police backup on his radio in a few seconds. So DROP YOUR WEAPON and get DOWN on the ground NOW and put BOTH HANDS on the top of your head! DO IT...NOW!'

 Well, fortunately, the young man made the right choice, and we cuffed him and called it in. The elderly woman gradually calmed down, and explained that she was trying to return home after an evening church service when she was accosted. We escorted her safely back to her apartment once the police arrived."

 Tulsans cheered the experimental result of No Crime Day with an outpouring of support. Let's expand it to a full week, then a full month, some demanded. Governor Stiles quickly addressed all Oklahomans on television, praising Baylor and his brigade.

 "I call on the leaders in Oklahoma City to similarly organize a No Crime Day, based on Mr. Baylor's successful model. If that likewise proves fruitful in stopping the scourge of lawlessness plaguing our fine state, I propose to institute a state-wide No Crime Day, then even take it further -- for a week, a month, or for however long it takes to turn the tide."

 Meanwhile the Federal government was shocked, but helpless in curbing the Oklahoma initiative. After all, it was a solid legal case of States' Rights. Furthermore, if Governor Stiles wanted to call for martial law -- with a dusk to dawn curfew, seeing as most crimes were committed at night -- or enlist the help of his National Guard to help the squads of Senior crime-stoppers, he could do it. Stiles could also run an emergency ballot referendum to gather the probable clear majority backing of the voters on any dramatic actions he might propose. Polls already indicated massive public support.

 Over the next several weeks, No Crime Days and Weeks swept across the state, and crime plunged in Oklahoma. But the downside was that criminals apparently fled to operate in the neighboring states of Texas, Kansas, Arkansas, and Missouri -- all of which reported a sharp uptick in their crime statistics. Governors there soon responded with inaugurating their own No Crime Days and Weeks using volunteer Senior Militias in their now very willing cities and towns.

 Mark Zuckerburg, head of Facebook, however, decried the growing movement of having armed citizens assisting the police in fighting crime. Much to the applause of some anti-gun activist groups, he banned any mention of Senior Militias or any fundraising for them on his social media platform. But Elon Musk, owner of the rival internet media platform **X**, took the opposite and solidly supportive stance. He donated substantial money to needy communities to provide both Kevlar safety vests and helmets for any Senior Militia members -- several of whom had unfortunately been wounded earlier in the five member states, while performing their dangerous anti-crime volunteer duties over the last ten months.

 "Our Founding Fathers wisely gave us the Second Amendment in our Bill of Rights in the Constitution for just this purpose: to help honest citizens protect the public safety and security for everyone in a lawful manner," Musk announced, firmly defending the Senior Militia concept.

 As more time passed, still more states joined the movement, seeing how crime substantially dropped in states whose police forces were assisted by volunteer Senior partners.

 But human nature being what it was, those ever-present outlaw members of society eventually learned to become more crafty, emboldened, and dangerous. A tragic handful of Senior Militia members in each locality ultimately continued to get wounded -- and a few, sadly, even got killed -- in ambushes and gunfights which occurred before police backup could arrive. These Senior heroes naturally were lauded and memorialized for their courageous sacrifice protecting the common good. Dozens of criminals, likewise, were wounded or killed in violent confrontations of their own making.

 Despite these developments, the dedicated Seniors were undeterred in their service goals. Quite often, they were met with cheers, simple gifts, cups of coffee, or home-baked treats from the grateful neighborhood residents they helped guard whenever they showed up for their duty shifts. Some inner-city residents especially claimed that it was the first time they could walk the streets safely in years, or could finally go out at night unafraid, or take their children to school or church without being attacked by roving gangs or other thugs.

 The national War on Crime would be a continuous effort, of course. If Senior Militias ceased to exist, crime would certainly return with a vengeance over time. Organized crime, and its underground economy, unfortunately, was still in business, though increasingly out of sight. But the U.S. President and America's lawmakers had at last seen something new that worked well in protecting law and order -- something that bolstered the nation's peace and security. Should it spread nationally, with Federal encouragement and funding? The vast majority of the public insisted: yes!

 Would the Senior Militia movement one day become as indispensable to America's communities as their police force, fire department, paramedics, and similar emergency responders?

 Time alone would tell...

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

 October 28, 2023