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Codes of Silence

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**PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA IN
VEHICLE-INVOLVED INCIDENTS
1971-1990**

A TACTIC NOT LEARNED...

A LIFE LOST UNNECESSARILY---The Author

In preparation for a recent court case as an expert witness, the Author was asked to give reasons why peace officers practice caution in making traffic stops and vehicle approaches. The following materials were partially presented in the successful defense of the involved officers. This article will expand the data on vehicle-involved murder incidents into a series of Tables, and Charts with the purpose of identifying significant points, and extrapolating learning considerations for application to officer safety training.

DATA

During the 20 years from 1971 to 1990, the number of peace officers murdered in California were 167. Forty-six of those 167 killings, or 28%, were vehicle stops, approaches, or vehicle-involved activities (see Chart 1). In 17 of those 20 years peace officers were killed in vehicle-involved incidents. For the 20 year period California averaged 2.3 peace officers murdered each year in vehicle-involved incidents. There is a significant consistency of 25, and 21 officers murdered in each of the two 10 year periods, 1971-80, and 1981-90, on vehicle-involved incidents; however, even more remarkable is that the percentage of officers murdered in vehicle-related incidents (as measured against the total murders) increased from 24% in 1971-80 to 34% in 1981-90.

Tables 1 and 2 present line-item data according to the two 10 year periods as to month, year, day of week, time, jurisdiction, type of incident, victim's age, assignment, years of law enforcement experience, and the type of weapons used in the 46 murders. The columns which indicates the victims' ages, and years of experience highlights three incidents in which two peace officers were murdered (California Highway Patrol-December 22, 1978; San Diego PD-September 24, 1984; and, Federal Drug Enforcement Agency-February 5, 1988). The 25 victims' average age and years of law enforcement experience was 32.2, and 6.9 in 1971-80. Those figures increased for the 21 victims in 1981-90 to 34.1, and 9.7 years. Footnoted items indicate overall that in 21 cases (46%) the murder victim did not have a partner or backup officer(s) at the scene. Five of the victims (11%) were sergeants. In 10 cases (22%) the victims were killed with their own or another peace officer's weapon or equipment.

Chart 2 lists the murder totals by month for the two 10 year periods. In 1971-80, December, and August were the deadliest months with five, and four murders, closely followed by three slayings, each, in September, October, and November. In 1981-90, September was the most lethal month with five killings, but unlike the earlier 10 year period, the winter months of January, February, and March, with three murders, each, were the next deadliest. When considered over the 20 years, every month accounted for at least one peace officer murder, and September accounted for the most murders-eight. September also accounted for two of the three incidents of double-homicides as indicated by asterisks.

Peace officers murders by the day-of-week is given in Chart 3. In the first 10 year period, Saturday, and Friday with seven, and five killings accounted for almost half of the 25 murders. In 1981-90, Wednesday with five killings was the most dangerous, closely followed by Friday, and Saturday with four murders each. When viewed over the 20 year period, Saturday (11 murders), Friday (9 murders), and Wednesday (9 murders) were the most lethal days, however, peace officers were murdered every day of the week. All three incidents of double-homicides occurred on Fridays.

The 46 murders are listed in Chart 4 for the two 10 year periods by hour of day according to the 24-hour clock, by hours of light (0600-1759), and **hours of darkness (1800-0559)**. The hours of darkness accounted for slightly over two-thirds of the peace officers murdered (31). The 2300 hour was the deadliest with six murders, followed by four murders, each, in the 1800, 2000, and 0200 hours. The deadliest daylight hours were 1200, 1600, and 1700 with three murders, each. In five of the daylight hours, and three of the darkness hours there were no peace officer murders. The safest continuous hours were 0400-0759 with no slayings. Two of the double-homicide incidents occurred during two different hours of darkness, 2300 (San Diego PD), and 0300 (CHP). The double-homicide of the Federal Drug Enforcement Agents occurred during the 1200 hour. One sergeant was murdered during daylight hours (1000), and four supervisors were killed during hours of darkness (one during the 2300 hour, two during the midnight hour, and one during the 0300 hour).

Chart 5 indicates the peace officer murders by type of jurisdiction as to municipal police, sheriffs, highway patrol, or federal agencies. Police departments experienced 28 of the 46 murders (61%), sheriffs departments eight murders (17%), California Highway Patrol seven murders (15%), and federal agencies three murders (7%). The California Highway Patrol reduced their number of murders from six to one for the two 10 year periods, while sheriffs department murders increased from three to five slayings. City police, California Highway Patrol, and federal agencies each experienced a double-homicide incident. One sergeant was murdered in 1971-80, however, this figure increased to four sergeants in 1980-90. Three of the slain sergeants were city police (Calipatria, Inglewood, and Stockton), and two were sheriffs departments (Lake, and Sacramento Counties).

The type of activity the victims were involved in at the time of their murders is given in Chart 6. Also, the activity is identified as to the two 10 year periods, and whether it occurred during hours of light or darkness (night). The activity that accounted for the greatest number of the 46 killings was traffic stops with 17, or 37%. Suspicious vehicles murders totaled nine or 20%. Stolen vehicles, and drunk drivers accounted for three killings, each, while traffic pursuits, vehicle assists, gun-in-vehicle, robbery pursuits, and narcotics sales had two murders in each category. Four peace officers were murdered handling calls of an assault-with-deadly weapon, disturbance, vehicle burglary, and the purchase of illegal alien labor. The Chart reminds us that over two thirds of the murders occurred during hours of darkness. All seven suspicious vehicle murders, and both gun-in-vehicle killings took place during darkness. Twelve of the 17 traffic stop murders (71%) occurred at night. Both of the robbery pursuit, and narcotics sale murders happened during daylight hours. Two of the three double-homicide incidents took place at night. Four of the five sergeants were murdered at night with the

categories of traffic stop, and suspicious vehicle accounting for two killings, each. The sergeant killed during daylight hours was during a robbery pursuit. In comparing the two 10 year periods for traffic stops, the victim numbers was reduced by almost half, from 11 in 1971-80, to six in 1981-90. However, this trend was reversed for suspicious vehicle incidents with the numbers increasing from two to seven.

Chart 7 lists information on the 46 victims' ages in five year increments beginning with 21-25 through 51-55 years. Overall, the average age was 33 years with the average for the first 10 year period (25 peace officers) being 32.2 years, and the second 10 year period (21 peace officers) rising to 34.1 years. As expected from the averages, the 31-35 years increment contained the most victims, 14 or 30%. This was closely followed by the 26-30 years increment with 12 victims or 26%. Among the six double-homicide victims one was in the 21-25 year increment, three were ages 31-35 years, and two were in the 51-55 year increment. Two of the sergeants were age 31-35 years, and one, each, were in the 36-40, 41-45, and 46-50 year increments.

The victims' assignment as to uniform patrol, motorcycle patrol, detective (plainclothes), special enforcement, or off-duty at the time of the murders are given in Chart 8. Thirty-two or the 46 peace officers (70%) were assigned to uniform patrol. The second greatest number of killings occurred within the category of detectives with eight murders (17%). Three motorcycle officers, two off-duty officers, and one special enforcement sergeant accounted for the remaining murders. The other four slain supervisors were three uniformed sergeants, and one detective sergeant. Two of the three double-homicide incidents involved uniform officers, and one involved plainclothes officers. In comparing the two 10 year periods, the changes were a reduction in uniform officer deaths from 19 to 13, off-duty officers from two to zero, and an increase in detective murders from two to six.

Chart 9 lists the victims' law enforcement experience by five year increments beginning with 0-5 through 21-25 years. The overall average years of experience for the 46 victims was 8.1 years. The average for the first 10 year period was 6.9 years, which rose to 9.7 years for the second 10 year period. The 0-5 year increment contained the most victims with 17 murders (37%), closely followed by the 6-10 year increment with 15 murders (33%), and the 11-15 year increment with 10 murders (22%). Three victims had 16-20 years experience, and one victim had 21-25 years experience. The most significant differences in the two 10 year periods was the reduction from 13 to four victims with 0-5 years experience, and the increase from three to seven victims in the 11-15 year increment. The six double-homicide victims were represented with one in the 0-5 year increment, two with 6-10 years experience, two with 11-15 years experience, and one with 21-25 years experience. The supervisors ranged from one, each, with 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 16-20 years experience, and two sergeants with 11-15 years experience.

The type of weapons used in the 46 murders are identified in Chart 10. Firearms accounted for 41 killings (89%), while the cause of death was vehicles in three cases (Los Angeles PD, Kern County Sheriff's Department, San Bernardino PD), the sergeant's flashlight in one case (Stockton PD), and a knife in one case (Hayward PD). Handguns were used in 36 of the 41 firearms murders with the majority of the handguns being revolvers (29). Seven

semi-auto loading handguns were also used as murder weapons. Three rifles, and two shotgun incidents accounted for the remaining firearms murders. Three of the six double-homicide victims were killed with revolvers, and three were murdered with semi-automatics. The five sergeants were killed with revolvers (two), semi-automatic handgun (one), rifle (one), and flashlight (one). Ten of the victims (22%) were murdered with their own police weapon or equipment. Nine of those peace officers weapons were service revolvers, and one was a flashlight.

SIGNIFICANT POINTS

1. Forty-six peace officers out of 167 murdered (28%) in California from 1971-1990 were killed in vehicle-related incidents.
2. Murders of peace officers in vehicle-involved incidents increased 10% in the period 1981-90, when compared to 1971-80.
3. An average of 2.3 peace officers were murdered each year in California on vehicle-involved incidents.
4. Over half of the peace officers murdered (54%) on vehicle-involved incidents had a partner, or backup(s) officers at the scene.
5. Six of the slain officers were murdered in three double-homicide incidents.
6. Five of the slain victims (11%) were sergeants.
7. Ten of the murder victims (22%) were killed with their own police weapon, or equipment.
8. While peace officers were murdered every month of the year, the months of August, September, and December were the deadliest.
9. Peace officers are murdered every day of the week, but Saturday, closely followed by Wednesday, and Friday were the most lethal.
10. Over twice as many law enforcement officers were murdered on vehicle-involved incidents at night as compared to daylight incidents.
11. All seven moderate-risk suspicious vehicle approach murders, and both high-risk man-with-gun incidents occurred during hours of darkness.
12. Peace officers from jurisdictions at the local, state, and federal levels are murdered on vehicle-involved incidents in California.
13. Traffic stops, and suspicious vehicle approaches are the leading killers of peace officers (57%) on vehicle-involved incidents, however, an assortment of other incidents involving vehicles accounted for peace officer murders when dealing with suspects in, and around vehicles.
14. The low-risk vehicle incidents of traffic stops, drunk drivers, and assisting disabled motorists accounted for 22 of the 46 murders (48%).
15. Peace officers average 33 years of age, and 8.1 years of law enforcement experience that are murdered on vehicle-involved incidents.
16. The majority of victims, 32 or 70% were assigned to uniform patrol, however, eight victims (17%) were assigned to detectives or plainclothes.
17. Easily concealed handguns were utilized in 36 of the murders (78%), and five killings were committed with shoulder firearms.

LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS

1. We must continue emphasizing good, traffic stop, and vehicle approach techniques (maintain position of advantage, observation techniques, cover and concealment), and practical application of those techniques in training exercises.
2. We must continue emphasizing communications, and coordination with partners, and backup officers (have a plan, know what to expect from

each other, stay close enough to help one another, use silent communications as applicable).

3. Vehicle-involved practical application training exercises must include supervisors, and not only from patrol, but from detective, and other sections of the agency.

4. Weapon retention techniques, restraining holds, and good handcuffing techniques must be emphasized in dealing with suspects being taken into custody in all types of physical resistance encounters.

5. Techniques, practical application exercises, and field training officers must emphasize the added dangers in dealing with potential and actual suspects during the concealment of darkness hours.

6. Vehicle-involved encounters from the obviously high-risk (gun-in-vehicle, robbery pursuit) to the mundane traffic stop must be approached with mental alertness, observation of details, and attention to danger signals.

7. As peace officers advance in age, and experience, they must diligently remind themselves of attention to details, and avoid being bound by "routine" actions, and "routine" thinking.

8. If handguns are easily concealed upon a person, be aware how much easier it is to conceal a handgun, or other firearm in a vehicle. Keep subjects/suspects hands in sight, survey the vehicle's interior, and do not let subjects return to the vehicle during investigatory processes, unless control objectives are overriding.

9. Whether the situation is low, moderate, or high-risk, we must continue to emphasize, and teach management of the incident utilizing lawful, reasonable, and safe techniques.

10. The Department's Training Officer, and Training Division must include the Field Training Officers in the development, and maintenance of all aspects of field tactics training, and practical exercise scenarios.

Chart 1

**TOTAL NUMBERS OF PEACE OFFICER MURDERS IN CALIFORNIA V. NUMBER
MURDERED IN VEHICLE-INVOLVED INCIDENTS: 1971-1990**

	Total Murders	Vehicle-Involved Murders
1971-80	105	25
1981-90	62	21
TOTALS	167	46

TABLE 1

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA ON VEHICLE-INVOLVED INCIDENTS 1971-1980 (25)

Date & Time			Jurisdiction	Incident*	Victim			Weapon ***
Month/Year	Day	Time			Age	Assign**	Exp	
July 30 '71	Fri	1640	San Francisco PD	Traffic Stop*	33	Patrol	7	Revolver
Oct 25 '71	Mon	1640	Los Angeles PD	Traffic Stop Pur	26	Patrol	3	Revolver
Aug 3 '72	Thu	0310	Calipatria PD	Traffic Stop*	45	Patrol**	5	Rifle
Aug 5 '72	Sat	0201	Cal Hwy Patrol	Drunk Driver ..	24	Patrol	2	Revolver***
March 9 '73	Fri	0800	Cal Hwy Patrol	Drunk Driver*	30	Patrol	8	Revolver
April 21 '73	Sun	1530	Martinez PD	Stalled Veh Asst*	29	Patrol	5	Revolver***
May 23 '73	Wed	0235	Oakland PD	Traffic Stop*	24	Patrol	2	Revolver***
June 21 '73	Thu	1800	Los Angeles PD	Traffic Stop*	36	Motor Cycle	14	Revolver
Aug 3 '74	Sat	1215	Sacramento PD	Stolen Veh	37	Detective	9	Revolver***
Nov 13 '74	Wed	1010	Riverside PD	Traffic Stop	31	Motor Cycle	8	Revolver
July 6 '75	Sun	2015	San Bernardino SD	Disturbance-RV	36	Patrol	10	Rifle
Aug 23 '75	Sat	2330	Sonoma SD	Stalled Veh Asst	32	Patrol	3	Revolver***
Sept 12 '75	Mon	1815	Los Angeles PD	Stolen Veh	28	Patrol	5	Vehicle
Oct 22 '75	Wed	0959	Exeter PD	ADW Sus	27	Patrol	1	Shotgun
Dec 4 '75	Thu	2200	Cal Hwy Patrol	Traffic Stop*	35	Patrol	7	Revolver
Dec 13 '75	Sat	0255	Long Beach PD	Sus Veh*	28	Off-Duty	2	Revolver
Oct 15 '77	Sat	2220	Los Angeles PD	Veh Burglary*	21	Off-Duty	1	Pistol
Nov 25 '77	Fri	1930	Los Angeles SD	Sus Veh	36	Patrol	8	Revolver
Jan 14 '78	Sat	0230	West Covina PD	Traffic Stop Pur	29	Patrol	5	Revolver
Nov 4 '78	Sat	0110	San Diego PD	Traffic Stop*	30	Patrol	4	Revolver
Dec 22 '78	Fri	0350	Cal Hwy Patrol	Traffic Stop	51/35	Patrol	21/12	Revolver***
Sept 26 '79	Wed	2305	Los Angeles PD	Traffic Stop*	23	Patrol	1	Pistol
Dec 13 '79	Thu	1930	Whittier PD	Stolen Veh	31	Detective	11	Revolver
Sept 7 '80	Sun	2215	Cal Hwy Patrol	Traffic Stop*	49	Patrol	19	Revolver

32.2 Ave

6.9 Ave

* = Alone at Time of the Murder (12)

** = Sergeant (1)

*** = Murdered With Police Weapon (7)

TABLE 2

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA ON VEHICLE-INVOLVED INCIDENTS 1981-1990 (21)

Date & Time			Jurisdiction	Incident*	Victim			Weapon ***
Month/Year	Day	Time			Age	Assign**	Exp	
May 2 '81	Sat	0015	Lake SD	Sus Veh *	34	Patrol **	13	Revolver
July 17 '82	Sat	1715	Cal Hwy Patrol	Traffic Stop *	36	Patrol	15	Revolver
Jan 11 '83	Tue	2045	Oakland PD	Sus Veh	25	Detective	2	Revolver
June 2 '83	Thu	1740	Los Angeles PD	Traffic Stop * ..	35	Motor Cycle	14	Revolver
Oct 19 '83	Wed	1649	Kern SD	Robbery Sus Veh	33	Patrol	8	Vehicle
Sept 14 '84	Fri	2315	San Diego PD	Sus Veh	32/24	Patrol	6/1	Pistol
March 31 '85	Sun	1815	San Diego PD	Sus Veh	27	Patrol	6	Revolver ***
July 29 '85	Mon	0930	San Jose PD	Drunk Driver *	33	Patrol	11	Revolver ***
Aug 25 '85	Sun	1731	Solano SD	Traffic Stop *	41	Patrol	14	Shotgun
March 25 '87	Wed	1837	Hayward PD	Sus Veh	29	Patrol	4	Knife
Jan 21 '88	Thu	2300	Sacramento SD	Sus Veh	36	SWAT **	11	Pistol
Feb 5 '88	Fri	1220	Fed Drug Enf Agency	Narco Sale	52/34	Special Agent	12/9	Pistol/Revol
March 31 '88	Thu	1035	Inglewood PD	Robbery Veh Pur	46	Detective **	20	Revolver
June 22 '88	Wed	0056	East Palo Alto PD	Gun-in-Veh Sus *	26	Patrol	6	Revolver
Sept 3 '88	Sat	2025	Los Angeles PD	Gun-in-Veh Sus	30	Detective	6	Rifle
Sept 6 '89	Wed	0130	Fed Immig & Nat Ser	Illegal Alien Sale	42	Agent	18	Pistol
Jan 22 '90	Mon	0055	Stockton PD	Traffic Stop *	32	Patrol **	10	Flashlight ***
Feb 10 '90	Sat	2050	San Bernardino PD	Traffic Stop *	33	Patrol	5	Vehicle
Sept 12 '90	Wed	2320	Santa Clara SD	Traffic Stop *	37	Patrol	12	Revolver

34.1 Ave

9.7 Ave

* = Alone at Time of the Murder (9)

** = Sergeants (4)

*** = Murdered With Police Weapon (3)

Chart 2
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY MONTH *

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1971-80 (25)	1		1	1	1	1	2	4	3*	3	3	5
1981-90 (21)	3	3*	3		1	2	2	1	5*	1		

* = Double Homicides (3)

Chart 3
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY DAY *

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1971-80 (25)	3	2		4	4	5*	7
1981-90 (21)	2	2	1	5	3	4**	4

* = Double Homicides (3)

Chart 4
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY HOUR (24 Hour Clock)*

Hours of Light (15)												
	0600-0659	0700-0759	0800-0859	0900-0959	1000-1059	1100-1159	1200-1259	1300-1359	1400-1459	1500-1559	1600-1659	1700-1759
1971-80			1	1	1		1			1	2	
1981-90				1	1 ^S		2 [*]				1	3
Hours of Darkness (31)												
	1800-1859	1900-1959	2000-2059	2100-2159	2200-2259	2300-2359	0000-0059	0100-0159	0200-0259	0300-0359	0400-0459	0500-0559
1971-80	2	2	1		3	2		1	4	3 ^{* S}		
1981-90	2		3			4 ^{* S}	3 ^{SS}	1				

* = Double Homicides (3)

S = Sergeants (5)

Chart 5
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY TYPE OF JURISDICTION *

	Municipal Police	Sheriffs Departments	Highway Patrol	Federal Agencies
1971-80 (25)	16 ^S	3	6 *	
1981-90 (21)	12 * ^{SS}	5 ^{SS}	1	3 *

* = Double Homicides (3)

S = Sergeants (5)

Chart 6
**PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY TYPE OF ACTIVITY AND
HOURS OF LIGHT V. DARKNESS ***

		Traffic Stop	Sus Veh	Stolen Veh	Drunk Driver	Traffic Pursuit	Veh Assist	Gun-in Veh	Robbery Pursuit	Narco Sale	Other * *
Light Hours (15)	1971-80	2		1	1	1	1		2 ^S		1 ^a
	1981-90	3			1					2 *	
Dark Hours (31)	1971-80	9 * ^S	2	2	1	1	1				2 ^{b c}
	1981-90	3 ^S	7 * ^{SS}					2			1 ^d
46	TOTALS	17	9	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	4

* = Double Homicides (3)

** = Other (4): One, each, ADW Sus ^a, Disturbance ^b, Veh Burglary ^c, Illegal Alien Buy ^d

S = Sergeants (5)

Chart 7
PEACE OFFICER VICTIMS' AGES *
(Average Age 33 Years)

	21-25 Years	26-30 Years	31-35 Years	36-40 Years	41-45 Years	46-50 Years	51-55 Years
1971-80 (25)	4	8	6 *	4	1 ^S	1	1 *
1981-90 (21)	2 *	4	8 ^{**S}	3 ^S	2	1 ^S	1 *

* = Double Homicide Victims (6)

S = Sergeants (5)

Chart 8
PEACE OFFICER VICTIMS' ASSIGNMENT *

	Uniform Patrol	Motorcycle Patrol	Detective (Plainclothes)	Special Enforce	Off-Duty
1971-80 (25)	19 ^{* S}	2	2		2
1981-90 (21)	13 ^{* SS}	1	6 ^{* S}	1 ^S	

* = Double Homicides (3)

S = Sergeants (5)

Chart 9
PEACE OFFICER VICTIMS' LAW ENFORCEMENT EXPERIENCE *
(Average Experience 8.1 Years)

	0-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-15 Years	16-20 Years	21-25 Years
1971-80 (25)	13 ^S	7	3 [*]	1	1 [*]
1981-90 (21)	4 [*]	8 ^{**S}	7 ^{*SS}	2 ^S	

* = Double Homicide Victims (6)

S = Sergeants (5)

Chart 10
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY TYPE OF WEAPON *

	Handgun		Rifle	Shotgun	Vehicle	Flashlight	Knife
	Revolver	Semi-Auto					
1971-80 (25)	19 ^{* (7)}	2	2 ^S	1	1		
1981-90 (21)	10 ^{*SS(2)}	5 ^{***S}	1	1	2	1 ^{S(1)}	1

* = Double Homicide Victims (6)

S = Sergeants (5)

() = Victims Murdered With Their Own or Another Officer's Weapon (10)