

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MURDERED
IN CALIFORNIA – 1980 – 85



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PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA
1980-1985

Introduction

The author has studied the murders of peace officers in California for fifteen years, reporting the data surrounding those cases on an annual basis. This is the most comprehensive of those reports in that it covers a six-year period and the slayings of forty peace officers. As in past reports, this data has been collected from homicide investigators and reviews of after-action reports. I present the information in this format in the belief that more substantial conclusions and learning points can be drawn from a population base of forty compared to the four slayings in 1985 alone. These conclusions and learning points are a sound basis upon which to direct our peace officer safety and survival programs of which the author regularly instructs. The data, in tabulated form, will be followed by learning points and conclusions.

Tabulated Information

Tables 1-A through 1-F in annual chronological order list by column and footnote form, eighteen factors involved in the forty murders on a year-by-year basis. The columns list the date of month, day of week, time of day, law enforcement agency, rank of the victim, assignment, age in years, and years of experience, the type of initiating incident, suspect(s) gender, race and age, type of murder weapon and distance from the suspect to the victim. Additional footnoted information indicates if the victim was wearing soft body armor (*), if there was additional peace officers at the murder

Friday with five murders each (see Chart 2). The two lowest days were Monday and Tuesday, accounting for three killings each. Saturday of 1981 was the worst day in the period totaling five murders, with two of those being a double homicide of San Diego city police officers. Thursday was the next most lethal day, not only with the total of eight for the period, but with three officers murdered in 1982 and 1983 respectively. Again, a double homicide, Riverside city police plainclothes officers, contributed to the Thursday total in 1982. As might be expected, the year with the greatest total murders, 1983 (nine), saw peace officers murdered every day of the week but one, Saturday; however Saturday was the one day over the six-year period you would most expect an officer to be killed.

Chart 3 lists the six-year period of slayings by one-hour segments of the twenty-four hour clock. On a full year basis, the hours of light are given as 0600-1759 and hours of darkness as 1800-0559. Twenty-seven of the forty peace officers (68.5%) were slain during daylight hours. It shows the daylight hour 1700-1759 was the most lethal with six killings closely followed by five officers slain in the 1600-1659 hour, and four murders in the night time hour of 2300-2359. Three peace officers were slain in each of three one-hour time segments - 0800, 1200, and 1400, with an additional two murders occurring in each of the five one-hour periods of 0900, 1500, 1800, 2000, and 0300. One peace officer was killed in the six one-hour segments of 0600, 1100, 1300, 2100, 0000, and 0100, while seven one-hour periods were void of any killing. Three years, 1980-81-82 had the widest spread with officers slain in each of seven one-hour segments, while the year with the lowest total murders, 1985 (four), as expected, had the smallest spread of three one-hour periods accounting for all its slayings. Note that the time period of 1600 had the greatest number of multiple figures

slain peace officers were female, one from San Diego Police Department, and one from the U.S. Secret Service.

By rank the large majority of the victims were entry-level peace officers, thirty-five of forty (87.5%), while four slain peace officers were Sergeants, and one was the County Sheriff (Humboldt, 1982). Two of the murdered Sergeants were from city police departments (San Francisco and Redwood City), and two were from sheriff's departments (Lake and Los Angeles Counties). Two Sergeants were murdered in 1981, and one each in 1982-83. The first of the footnoted data, "victim wearing soft body (*)," is flagged in the "Rank" column, and indicates that sixteen of the forty slain peace officers (40%) were wearing body armor. That figure included fourteen of the thirty-five entry-level officers, and two of the four Sergeants. Thirteen of the fourteen entry-level officers wearing body armor were city police, and one was a Los Angeles Deputy Sheriff. One of the two sergeants wearing body armor was the San Francisco City Police Sergeant, while the other was from Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. One of the peace officers murdered in each of the years 1980-82-85 was wearing soft body armor. Three of the eight slain peace officers in 1981 were wearing body armor. Five peace officers wearing soft body armor were murdered in 1983 and five more in 1984.

Assignment refers to patrol, plainclothes (detective, investigator, agent), special detail, or administration as the victims' job assignment at the time of the murder. By assignment twenty-seven of the forty peace officers (67.5%) were uniform patrol, while thirteen were assigned other duties. Six of the seven murdered in 1980 were uniformed patrol and all six peace officers slain in 1984 were uniform patrolmen. In 1982 four of the six victims were other than uniformed patrol. Nine of the forty (22.5%)

enforcement activity or event the officer was responding to. By single type of event, there were three equally lethal activities, robbery (robbery in-progress, or apprehending robbery suspect), traffic stop (including drunk driving stop), and approaching a suspicious person or vehicle accounted for six murders each (see Chart 6). Five officers were killed apprehending narcotics suspects, four were slain responding to disturbance calls, and three peace officers were murdered by ambush, while three others were killed responding to man-with-gun calls. Seven additional peace officers were murdered during a variety of activities, most notable of which were two double homicides, serving a fail to appear for sentencing warrant (Riverside Police, 1982), and issuing a citation for contributing to the delinquency of a minor (San Diego Police, 1984). Others were slain attempting to apprehend a murder suspect, serving a non-support arrest warrant and apprehending a shoplifting suspect. The "Incident" columns in Tables 1-A through 1-F contains the footnoted information on whether a partner or back-up units were at the murder scene, which there was in twenty-six of the forty-five murders (65%). Those twenty-six slayings ranged from having a partner or single back-up officer, to as many as fourteen additional officers at the scene.

Suspect information contained in Tables 1-A through 1-F indicates that all but two of the forty-five known suspects were males. In only one case was the suspect(s) unidentified. The letters C, N, L, A, and F indicate the suspects were Caucasian, Negro, Latino, Asian, and Filipino, of which twenty-six were Caucasian, eleven Negro, five Latino, three Asian, and one Filipino. The two female suspects were Caucasian. Footnoted information in the Tables identifies that fifteen of the 45 suspects (33.3%) were either killed or committed suicide at the peace officer murder scene.

shoulder guns were used within 0-5 feet in three slayings and within 6-10 feet in one double homicide. These were disturbance calls (three murders), an ambush, and a shotgun takeaway from a U.S. Secret Service Agent by a robbery suspect.

Chart 10 tabulates information as to the location of the fatal wounds to peace officers. Locations of wounds listed are head shots (sixteen), upper torso (twenty-three), and below the waist (one). The upper torso wounds are further identified as to front (ten), back (four), and side (nine). Special note is made of the fact that sixteen slain officers were wearing soft body armor, with the majority of those sixteen victims, nine, suffering head shots in which case the armor was not a consideration. The upper torso-front shot (1982) struck the peace officer in the center of chest and the rifle round penetrated the armor, while the two upper torso-back shots were cases in which armor was not across the back area. The upper torso-side soft armor killings were shots fired through the side vent panels.

TABLE 1-B

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA-1981

DATE	DAY	TIME	AGENCY	RANK *	ASSIGN.	AGE	EXP.	INCIDENT**	SUSPECT***	WEAPON****	DISTANCE
May 2	Sat.	0015	Lake S.D.	Sgt.	Patrol	34	13	Suspect/Veh.	MC/38 FC/27	.357 Rev.	0-5'
May 8	Fri.	1230	Redwood P.D.	Det. Sgt.	Plain Clothes	39	7	Robbery Sus**	MC/36***	.38 Rev.	0-5'
June 6	Sat.	1623	San Diego P.D.	Off.(2)*	Patrol (2)	32 34	2 2	Distrib. **	MC/39***	.30-06 Rifle	6'-10'
June 27	Sat.	1757	Oakland P.D.	Off.*	Patrol	30	9	Man With Gun**	MN/25***	.357 Rev.	26'-30'
Aug. 1	Sat.	0925	San D.A. Office	Invest.	Plain Clothes	32	5	Non-Support Arrest Warr.**	MC/38***	.357 Rev.	0-5'
Oct. 1	Thur.	1450	Cal. Highway Patrol	Traffic Off.	Traffic Motor	33	8	Unprovokrd**	ML/35 ML/35	.357 Rev.	16'-20'
Nov. 15	Sun.	2315	Parlier P.D.	Off.*	Patrol	34	7	Man with Gun**	ML/36***	.25 S/A	6'-10'

* Victim Wearing Soft Body Armor (3)

** Two-Person Unit or Back-Up Officers at scene (7)

***Suspect Killed or Committed Suicide (5)

****Victim's or Another Officer's Weapon was Murder Weapon (0)

TABLE 1-D

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA-1983

DATE	DAY	TIME	AGENCY	RANK *	ASSIGN.	AGE	EXP.	INCIDENT**	SUSPECT***	WEAPON****	DISTANCE
Jan. 3	Mon.	1215	Santa Cruz S.D.	Dep.	Patrol	40	10	Sus. Person	MC/44***	9mm S/A	16'-20'
Jan. 11	Tues.	2045	Oakland P.D.	Off.	Plain Clothes	25	2	Sus. Person**	MN/41	.32 Rev.	0-5'
Feb. 20	Sun.	0109	San Diego P.D.	Off. *	Patrol	26	3	Ambush	MC/16	.38 Rev.	6'-10'
March 3	Thur.	1607	Alameda P.D.	Off. *	Plain Clothes	33	10	Narc. Search Warr. **	MC/21	.223 AR-15 Rifle	11'-15'
March. 18	Fri.	1130	L.A. S.D.	Dep*	Patrol	38	16	Sus. Person**	MN/36	.38 Rev. ****	0-5'
April. 14	Thur.	0610	L.A. S.D.	Sgt.*	Special ENE.	40	17	Narc. Search Warr. **	ML/52***	.38 Rev.	16'-20'
Jun. 2	Thur	1740	L.A.P.D.	Off.	Traff. Motor.	35	14	Traffic Stop	MN/25	.38 Rev.	0-5'
Aug 31	Wed	1220	W. Covina P.D.	Off.*	Patrol	26	3	Sus. Person	MN/29	12 GA Shotgun****	6'-10'
Oct. 19	Wed	1649	Kearn S.D.	Dep.	Patrol	33	8	Robbery Sus**	MC/21	Pick-up Truck	0-5'

* Victim Wearing Soft Body Armor (5)

** Two-Person Unit or Back-Up Officers at scene (5)

***Suspect Killed or Committed Suicide (2)

****Victim's or Another Officer's Weapon was Murder Weapon (2)

TABLE 1-F

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA-1985

DATE	DAY	TIME	AGENCY	RANK *	ASSIGN.	AGE	EXP.	INCIDENT**	SUSPECT***	WEAPON****	DISTANCE
March 31	Sun	1815	San Diego P.D.	Off.	Patrol	27	6	Sus.Veh.Stop**	MN/23	38 Rev. ****	0-5'
July 29	Mon.	0930	San Jose P.D.	Off *	Patrol	33	11	Drunk Driving Suspect	ML/42***	41 Rev. ****	0-5'
Aug. 25	Sun	1731	Solano S.D.	Dep.	Patrol	41	14	Traffic Stop Littering	MC/17 MC/18	12 GA. Shotgun	11'-15'
Oct. 31	Thurs.	1740	L.A.P.D.	Det.	Plain Clothes	42	13	Ambush Off. Duty	MN/30	9mm Auto	11-15'

* Victim Wearing Soft Body Armor (1)

** Two-Person Unit or Back-Up Officers at scene (1)

***Suspect Killed or Committed Suicide (1)

****Victim's or Another Officer's Weapon was Murder Weapon (2)

CODING LEGEND TOTALS:

*Victim Wearing Soft Body Armor (16)

**Two-Person Unit or Back-Up Officers at Scene (26)

***Suspect Killed or Committed Suicide (15)

****Victim's of Another Officers's Weapon was Murder Weapon (6)

CHART 2
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY DAY OF WEEK

	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
1980	1		1	2		1	2
1981	1				1	1	5
1982		1	1		3		1
1983	1	1	1	2	3	1	
1984	1			1		2	2
1985	2	1			1		
TOTALS	6	3	3	5	8	5	10

**CHART 4
PEACE OFFICER MURDERS BY VICTIM'S AGE**

	21-25 YEARS	26-30 YEARS	31-35 YEARS	36-40 YEARS	41-45 YEARS	46+ YEARS
1980		3	2	1		1*
1981		1	6	1		
1982		1	2	2		1**
1983	1	2	3	3		
1984	1	1	3		1	
1985		1	1		2	
TOTALS	2	9	17	7	3	2

*AGE 49
**AGE 56

AVERAGE AGE 34.1 YEARS

**CHART 6
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED BY TYPE OF INCIDENT**

	ROBBERY	NARCOTICS	TRAFFIC STOP	DISTURBANCE	MAN WITH GUN	SUS. PER. OR VEH.	AMBUSH	OTHER
1980	3	1		1		1		1*
1981	1		2	2	2			1**
1982		1	1	1				3***
1983	1	2	1			4	1	
1984	1	1			1		1	2****
1985			2			1	1	
TOTALS	6	5	6	4	3	6	3	7

***Murder Suspect**

****Non Support Arrest Warrant**

*****Fail to Appear for Sentencing warr. (2), and shoplifting sus.**

******Contributing to delinquency of minor citation (2)**

**CHART 8
PEACE OFFICER MURDERS BY TYPE OF WEAPON**

	HANDGUN		SHOULDER GUN		OTHER
	REV.	S/AUTO	SHOTGUN	RIFLE	
1980	2	2	1	2	
1981	6	1		1	
1982	4	1		1	
1983	5	1	1	1	1*
1984	2	2		2	
1985	2	1	1		
TOTALS	21	8	3	7	1

***P/U TRUCK**

**CHART 10
LOCATION OF FATAL WOUNDS OF
PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED**

	HEAD	UPPER TORSO			BELOW WAIST
		FRONT	BACK	SIDE	
1980	2	3		1*	1
1981	3**	1	2	2*	
1982	1	1	2*	2	
1983	4***	3		2**	
1984	3***	1*		2*	
1985	3*	1			
TOTALS	16	10	4	9	1

***EACH ASTERISK INDICATES SLAIN OFFICER WEARING SOFT
BODY ARMOR (16)**

killings were narcotic related and two were traffic stops. Even the quiet days, Monday-Tuesday, recorded three slayings each. There is no 'safe' day!

3. A reversal of most traditional tactical considerations was found in the time of day factor, in that over two-thirds of the murders (twenty-seven) happened during daylight hours (0600-1759 hours). However, the 1700-1759 hour, which immediately precedes the first hour of darkness, contained six murders. If those six murders had occurred one hour later, the figures for hours of light versus hours of darkness activity would have been almost equal. This is a reminder to emphasize both day and night time shooting courses. The two consecutive hour segments, 1600 and 1700 hours did account for five and six murders respectively, or slightly more than one of every four killings. A major point to be considered here is the peace officer's frame of mind, fatigue versus alertness, as that two hour time frame falls squarely in the traditional "change-of-shift" period from day to evening shifts. It bears repeating that the 1600-1659 hour contained a double homicide in 1981 (disturbance call), two more killings in 1983, and that the 1700-1759 hour, including two more disturbance calls and three traffic related matters, had the greatest frequency factor with murders every year except 1984.

5. All ranks and special detail personnel need safety/survival training periodically as evidenced by the fact that four sergeants, eight plainclothes officers or detectives, two traffic motorcycle officers, and a Sheriff were murdered during the six-year period. These fifteen personnel accounted for 37.5% of the total slayings and confronted the following situations: robbery, narcotics arrest, suspicious person, disturbance, theft suspect, traffic stops, arrest warrant service for failure to appear for robbery sentencing, an ambush, and an unprovoked attack - all officer safety/survival training topics in which firearms were involved in every case. No rank or special detail should be exempted from periodic officer safety/survival training.

6. The absolute requirement for continued, periodic safety/survival training throughout the officers career is in evidence again when examining the age and years of law enforcement experience of the slain law enforcement personnel. Victims ranged from the very young and inexperienced (age 24 years and one year experience) to the very mature and experienced (age 56 years and 33 years experience). Mental alertness and physical conditioning must continue to play prominent roles, considering the average age and years of law enforcement experience for the forty slain officers was 34.1 and 9.3 respectively - during the approximate middle years of a law enforcement career. Routineness must be

8. The tactical advantage of having a partner or backup officer(s) at the confrontation scene is favorable only when the position of advantage, cover and concealment, and other operational considerations are treated with the care they deserve. Perhaps we tend to hurry, feel overconfident, or "cowboy" the situation when we have assistance at the scene? Whatever the reason, in the majority of the forty murders (twenty-six) there was a partner or backup(s) at the scene. This was true in five of the six robbery slayings, three of the six suspicious person incidents, and all three of the "man-with-gun" murders.

9. Law enforcement officers give away approximately five years of youth to their average killer if we eliminate the skewing effect of the three oldest suspects. Physical agility, and endurance must continue to be emphasized, along with mental alertness and tactical considerations. Twelve of the forty-five known murder suspects were younger than the youngest murder victim, with seven of that number being teenagers. In six slayings the victim was confronted by two or more suspects, and in only one of those slayings was another officer at the scene.

10. While females may be overlooked during enforcement actions, they can also be killers. A female served as a distractor at a suspicious vehicle incident, and a female was the shooter in a narcotics search warrant slaying.

range firing at close range when we consider approximately 25% of the shootings took place during hours of darkness or inside building? Are we providing close range, target discrimination, and cross-fire alertness discrimination range conditions considering the number of times a partner, back-up officers, or others may be at the scene? And are we providing shotgun range training with the factors of close range, target discrimination, hours of darkness included?

13. The issue of soft body armor warrants review to ensure we provide adequate protection for the officer if he/she is struck in the torso area by shots. Five murder victims, while wearing body armor, were killed by shots fired through the side or vent area of the armor. There are many, uncounted cases of soft body armor saving officers lives, but the armor is no substitute for the earlier discussion of using good tactical techniques. In sixteen murder cases the victims were wearing body armor, but the officers were struck in the head. We need reminding that we are not invincible simply because we are clothed in body armor, yet we need to remind ourselves that it does certainly save lives and should be a regular part of the uniform officers survival tools, as well as plainclothes officers when the circumstances warrant (i.e., warrant arrests, searches, or response to robbery/crime in progress).

In order to continue reducing the number of law enforcement officers killed in California, we must continue our training efforts and reinforce positive, tactical considerations such as communications, coordination, and control. We must reinforce mental alertness, not paranoia. We must review case-by-case assaults and murders to draw out the positive and negative learning points. We must continue to critically examine our "tools-of-the-trade," such as soft armor, weapons and vehicle equipment, range training, and use-of-force options. And, perhaps most importantly, never approach any situation with the frame of mind that it is simply a "routine" action!