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*Charles B. Moorman*  
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## LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA — 1982



**CHARLES B. MOORMAN**

Charles B. Moorman has served over 20 years in local and state California law enforcement agencies, and as a security training specialist with Arabian Bechtel Corporation. He is a life member of the California Peace Officers' Association and is currently the chief for Management Programs at the California Specialized Training Institute, San Luis Obispo, California. Mr. Moorman earned an MS in police administration from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. He holds the California Community Colleges Chief Administrative Officer Credential and life teaching credentials in police science, public administration, sociology, and education.



**RICHARD C. WEMMER**

Richard C. Wemmer is a sergeant with the Los Angeles Police Department, currently serving as a vice supervisor and instructor in specialized schools at the Los Angeles Police Academy. During the past nine years he has researched 116 murders of California peace officers and is widely recognized as an expert in field tactics and officer safety. Sergeant Wemmer is a frequent guest lecturer at colleges and universities, officer safety seminars, regional police training facilities, and is on the staff of the Orange County Peace Officers Police Academy. He received a BS in police science and administration from California State University at Los Angeles and an MS from Pepperdine University in public administration.

### INTRODUCTION

During 1982 there were six peace officers murdered in California, the lowest annual figure California has experienced since 1976 when the total was five. This article tabulates information about the six 1982 murders in table and chart form with an accompanying narrative, while a "learning point"

section addresses some tactical considerations involved.

The authors have compiled the data from interviews with the homicide investigators and review of after-action reports. The information in the report is used by the authors in a number of peace officer safety courses and police academies in identifying contemporary training needs. It is presented here in an effort to expand awareness, to

stress the importance of attention to detail, and to learn significant lessons from past events. Only through constant mental alertness, combined with sound tactics and training, can officers expect to carry out their duties in a safe manner.

### TABULATED INFORMATION

Table 1 lists in tabulated format ten factors involved in the six 1982 murders; they are date, day, time, agency, rank, age, years of experience, precipitating incident, murder weapon, and suspect information. Footnoted explanations in Table 1 will be discussed in the article's "learning points" section and pertain to the presence of a partner or back-up personnel at the murder scene (\*), if the victim was wearing soft body armor (#), whether the murder weapon was the victim officer's or his partner's (\*\*), and if the suspect was killed or committed suicide (##). An additional fact is that all the victims were males.

By month - There were two murders in both May and July and one each in March and November (see Chart 1). The May killings were the result of a single incident. No significant grouping by weekly periods of each month was observed as the killings occurred in all four weekly periods, and no date in the month was repeated. By day of week - Thursday was the most lethal day with half of the year's murders, three, while one officer was killed on Monday, One on Tuesday, and one on Saturday (see Chart 2). The first Thursday death involved a search warrant service for narcotics and the next murder involved a double homicide of two officers serving a failure to appear warrant. No murders occurred on Wednesday, Friday, or Sunday.

By hour of day - No officers in 1982 were killed during the hours of darkness, from 1800-0600 hours (see Chart 3). Four one-hour periods accounted for all six murders, with two killings occurring during 0800-0900 hours, two in the 1500-1600 hours, and one each in the periods of 1400-1500 and 1700-1800 hours.

By agency - Five of the six victims, or 83%, were members of local law enforcement agencies. Two police departments accounted for three of the murders, and two victims were members of sheriff's offices. The sixth victim was a member of a state agency, the California Highway Patrol.

By rank - Four victims were entry-level personnel, one victim was a supervisor, and one was a chief executive (sheriff). The last chief executive (police chief) murdered in California was in 1974. Four of the six victims, or 66%, were on plainclothes

assignment, three of which were involved in warrant service.

By victims' age - The age range was from 30 to 56 years with one victim in the 26 to 30 increment, two in the 31 to 35 increment, two in the 36 to 40 increment, and one in the 56 to 60 increment (see Chart 4). Both ends of the age range, 30 and 56 years, were represented by the two sheriff's offices. The average age of the six peace officers was 37.2 years.

By years of law enforcement experience - The range in years of experience of the victim officers was 10 to 33 with an average of 14.8 years (see Chart 5). Again, the two sheriff departments were at opposite ends. By five year increments, three of the victims had 6-10 years of experience, two had 11-15 years, and one victim had 33 years.

By incident - The type of precipitating incidents, by circumstances the victim thought he was responding to were warrant services in half of the slayings, followed by one theft incident, one traffic stop, and one disturbance situation.

By murder weapon - Five of the murders were committed with handguns, one semi-automatic and four revolvers (see Chart 6). All the handguns were .357 or .38 caliber. The sixth victim (Sheriff) was slain with a .30-.30 rifle while responding to a disturbance call.

By suspect description - There was a single suspect in each incident. However, on one occasion a single male suspect killed both officers (see Chart 7). One suspect was a female while the other four were males. The double homicide suspect was the only member of a minority group. The range in ages was from 31 to 50 years with the average being 39.4, approximately two years older than the average age of the victims. Two suspects were 31 years while the others were 41, 44, and 50 years of age.

### LEARNING POINTS

A number of learning points are revealed through the study of the six peace officer murders in California during 1982. As law enforcement officers continue to lose their lives, many issues and questions are raised about the circumstances surrounding these killings. The lessons learned through post-examination of the incidents may be incorporated into training programs to promote officer awareness and confidence under the threat of personal violence. The responsibility of reducing police officer deaths falls on many shoulders — the

individual officers, the training instructors, front-line supervisors, and the agency itself. What steps can be undertaken to prevent future tragedies?

The authors present the following identifiable points for consideration.

1. Law enforcement murders continued to decline in 1982 on a national scale. The 91 deaths nationwide were the lowest figures since 1969. Although this is an encouraging trend, California peace officers must note that their state has led all others in peace officer killings in 13 of the past 22 years, and has not ranked lower than fourth in the nation since 1961. In 1982 the six officers murdered in California placed this state in third place nationally. Since 1970, 136 peace officers have been slain in California, averaging 10.5 per year.

2. In 1982, five of the six, or 80% of the peace officer killings occurred at midweek. This is in direct opposition to the traditional belief that the most dangerous days for police work are the weekends. It is clear from these figures as well as past statistics that there is no safe day of the week for the law enforcement officer. Also in disagreement with expectation is the occurrence of all six of the 1982 killings during daylight hours. Two of the murders took place at the beginning of the day shifts and three near the end. Overall, four of the six, or 66% took place between 1400 and 1715 hours in the afternoon. Thus, law enforcement officers must be as alert and cautious in the daylight hours as during darkness.

3. In 1982 one peace officer was murdered by a female suspect. It is unusual for law enforcement officers to expect deadly violence from women, as well as juveniles and the elderly. It should not be surprising that in the 1980's police officers must be conscious that anyone is capable of violence.

4. Handguns continue to be the weapon of choice for killing police officers. Five of the six officers murdered in 1982 were slain with handguns, and the sixth with a shotgun. Perhaps of prime importance in survival training is the time honored concept to always be aware of the suspect(s) hands.

5. Four of the six slain officers, or 66%, were working plainclothes assignments, and three of the six, or 50%, were serving warrants in plainclothes at residences when killed.

Officer safety, field tactics, and decision making training are frequently directed to uniformed personnel. It is apparent that it is not only the uniformed officer in peril. In addition, new techniques and concepts must be instilled at all levels

of law enforcement regarding building entries. Recent years have seen more and more officers encountering problems inside buildings.

6. Law enforcement agencies stress training the younger and more aggressive officer. As time passes and seniority increases many officers ignore the fact that their field tactics and field procedures may be outdated. This factor may have been demonstrated in 1982 since the more experienced officer made up the larger percentage of deaths.

7. Only one of six officers killed in 1982, or 16%, was wearing body armour. The use of body armour should be considered basic equipment no officer can afford to be without. As distinguished from mental and physical survival training, the use of body armour offers passive protection independent of survival skills. Considering the effectiveness of body armour in reducing the loss of lives, why are not more agencies encouraging the utilization of making it mandatory to wear this necessary safety measure?

8. One of the more valuable commodities in police work is experience. Yet in 1982 the six slain officers had a total of 89 years experience with a minimum of 10 years and a maximum of 33 years. Does experience actually deserve such a lofty position in the law enforcement profession? Or must it be recognized that experience breeds complacency, carelessness, and overconfidence.

9. Never underestimate anyone at the scene of an officer initiated enforcement activity. An excellent example is the ability of a 44 year paraplegic to murder two detectives and use one of their guns to do so (May 13, 1982).

10. Today, narcotics enforcement is a very dangerous business. Criminals have taken many steps to arm themselves, to fortify their commercial or residential locations, and possess an attitude of will to protect their business and survive encounters with law enforcement personnel. Any narcotics enforcement officer involved in warrant service should receive updated tactics training and consider utilization of special weapon and tactics teams for certain locations.

11. Any incident involving a firearm or the possibility of one must be treated as a high-risk situation. Officers should carefully weigh any approach to an individual or occupants of a vehicle without first properly removing and controlling them from positions of cover. No courtesies should ever be extended until the officer is absolutely sure the individual(s) is unarmed.

12. Remember, four of the five incidents, or 80%, were officer initiated activities. What should our profession be doing to incorporate the

recognition of danger signs in training? A confident and well-trained officer will be able to use verbal and physical tactics and put "time" on his side.

TABLE 1

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA - 1982

DATE	DAY	TIME	AGENCY	RANK	AGE	EXP.	INCIDENT	WEAPON	SUSPECT
March 25	Thur.	1400	San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office*	Dep.	30	10	Narcotics Search Warrant	.380 Semi-auto. Handgun	FW/31
May 13	Thur.	0850	Riverside P.D.* Riverside P.D.*	Pt1m. Pt1m.	35 36	10 10	Fail. to appear Bench Warrant Robbery Sentencing	.38 Rev.** Handgun	MN/44
July 6	Tues.	1522	San Francisco P.D.*	Sgt.#	35	11	Shoplifting Suspect	.357 Rev. Handgun	MW/41##
July 17	Sat.	1715	California Highway Patrol	Traffic Officer	36	15	Traffic Stop	.357 Rev. Handgun	MW/31##
Nov 29	Mon.	1524	Humboldt County Sheriff's Office	Sheriff	56	33	Disturbance - Travel Trailer Park	.30-30 Rifle	MW/50##

AVERAGE IN YEARS-----37.2-----14.8-----39.4---

\*Two-man unit or back-ups at scene (2 cases - 3 homicides)

#Victim wearing soft body armor (1 case)

\*\*Victim's own weapon was the murder weapon (1 case where murdered partner's weapon was used to kill the other partner)

##Suspect killed or committed suicide at murder scene or shortly thereafter (3 cases)

CHART 1

LAW ENFORCEMENT MURDERS BY MONTH OF YEAR - 1982

JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUN.	JUL.	AUG.	SEP.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0

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## CHART 4

## LAW ENFORCEMENT MURDERS BY VICTIMS' AGE - 1982

26-30 Years	31-35 Years	36-40 Years	56-60 Years
1	2	2	1

## CHART 5

## LAW ENFORCEMENT MURDER VICTIMS' EXPERIENCE-1982

6-10 Years	11-15 Years	31-35 Years
3	2	1



CHART 6

LAW ENFORCEMENT MURDERS BY TYPE OF WEAPON-1982

.380 Semiauto. Handgun	.38 or .357 Revolver Handgun	.30-30 Rifle
1	4	1

CHART 7

LAW ENFORCEMENT MURDER SUSPECTS BY AGE-1982\*

31-35 Years	36-40 Years	41-45 Years	46-50 Years
2	0	2	1

\* Five suspects as one case involved a double homicide