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Peace Officers Murdered in California 1986-1987

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Introduction

DURING 1986 and 1987 ten peace officers were murdered in California while engaged in their law enforcement duties. This article tabulates the information in table and chart form relating to those killings with accompanying narrative and tactical comments. Included are recommended training guidelines from the 1987 POST study on officer murders.

The data presented in this article has been obtained from interviews with the homicide investigators and reviews of the after-action reports. It is presented here to increase the level of awareness among all members of the law enforcement profession that this job continues to be one where carelessness, complacency, lack of training, or inattention to tactical considerations can be lethal.

California, since 1980 has averaged over six officer murders per year. Six peace officers were slain in 1986 and four murdered in 1987 for a total of ten officers killed in the line of

duty in nine incidents for those two years.

Tabulated information

Tables 1-A and 1-B list in column form, sixteen factors involved in the deaths of the ten officers in the years 1986-87. These factors are the date of the murder, day of week, time of day, law enforcement agency, rank, assignment, years of law enforcement experience, initial type of incident call, the number of additional officers on the scene at the time of the murder, suspect(s)' race and age, the type of murder weapon and the distance from the killer(s) to the victim(s). Additional information is indicated and footnoted if the victim was wearing soft or entry-type body armor (*), if the suspect was killed or committed suicide (**), and if the victim's service sidearm was the murder weapon (***)

In the months of February through April, 1986, four officers were slain, with the murder of two officers in one incident by pipe bomb in February (see Chart-1). June and October saw one officer each murdered, for a total of six officers that year. In 1987, again

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there was one month (March) with two officers slain in separate incidents. June again had an officer killed with one more officer death in December, for a total of four. During 1986-1987, 80% of the officers murdered in the state of California were killed in the first six months of the two years.

By the day of week, there is a significant skewing of events with Saturday-Sunday accounting for half of the ten murders (see Chart 2). Saturday totaled the highest number of officers murdered with three. Sunday, Monday and Thursday in this two-year period had two deaths each. One officer was murdered on a Wednesday.

In the years of 1986-87, 60% of the officers' murders occurred between the hours of 1800-0600 where a lack of ambient light may have been a factor (see Chart 3). The most dangerous period seems to be 1800-2200, with an officer slaying recorded once each hour. In 1986, the 0100-0200 and the 1100-1200 hours were the most dangerous with two killings occurring in each time frame.

By the type of law enforcement agency, all of the victims were from city or county agencies, with one killing being the first murder of an arson investigator in the state (see the tables). All but one of the incidents occurred in urban settings, with six officers belonging to city police departments, two sheriff's deputies, one school district officer and the county fire investigator. The Los Angeles Police suffered three slain in the past two years (two officers were lost in pipe bomb booby trap in 1986). The rest of the officer murders occurred in seven different departments.

Half of the ten slain officers were wearing soft or entry body armor when attacked, but in no case did ordinance penetrate the armor to inflict a fatal wound (see single asterisk footnote in tables). In seven of the ten cases, officers were shot either in the head, in the torso just missing the vest or in the legs. One officer died from knife wounds received above the vest.

The victims were patrol officers or deputies in six cases. The others were a sergeant and an officer assigned to explosive ordinance dis-

posal, a fire department captain assigned to arson investigation and a deputy assigned to a sheriff's tactical unit (STU) team. Five of the victim officers were in plainclothes or special details, and the other five on uniformed duty.

The victim officers' ages ranged from 25 to 51 years with an average of 35.5 years (see Chart 4). By five-year increments, the officers' ages were: one 21-25; three 26-30; two 31-35; one 40-45; two 46-50 and one officer in the 51-55 increment.

In terms of law enforcement experience, the ten officers averaged 8.9 years (see Chart 5). Disregarding the two most senior officers' time in law enforcement, the average drops to just over six years of experience. In five-year increments, the factor of experience is as follows: four 0-5 years; four 6-10 years; one 15-20 and one 20 years. The latter two were LAPD officers with seventeen and twenty two years respectively.

The originating calls to which these officers responded were a suspicious person/vehicle in three cases, 417 R.C. (man with a gun) in two, a warrant service (two officers killed by pipe bomb) possible 5150 (mentally deranged man), an arson investigation and an ambush (see tables). In the majority of cases (70%), back-up or partner officers were present at the time of the attack. In the case of the San Diego STU deputy, over thirty officers were present at the time of his death, which occurred while making entry on a barricaded suspect. In only three cases were there no additional officers present. These were an ambush, a suspicious persons call and the arson investigation.

ALL ten murders have been cleared with all suspects being male. By race, 50% of the suspects were black, 30% Caucasian and 20% Hispanic. In four cases the suspects were either killed or committed suicide, and in only one murder was there more than one suspect (two suspects were present in the murder of a Los Angeles plainclothes narcotics officer).

The suspects ranged in age from seventeen

to forty-five years, with an average age of twenty-eight years (see Chart 6). If the three eldest suspects, forty-five, forty-two and thirty-seven years respectively, are dropped from the figures, the average age of the suspects is twenty three years of age. Three of the suspects were less than twenty one years of age when they murdered officers (two were seventeen and one was nineteen). By five-year increments, the suspects' ages were: three 15-20 years, one 21-25 years, three 26-30 years, one 36-40 years and two in the 41-45 year increment.

THE murder weapons in 1986-87 were varied (see Chart 7).

In three cases each, revolvers and rifles were the means used to kill law officers in California.

A semi-automatic pistol, a knife and a pipe bomb were each used once. In two 1986 cases, the officers were disarmed and their own weapons (revolvers) were used against them. None of the 1987 homicides resulted from an officer losing his or her weapon and having it turned on him or her.

The distance between victim officers and suspects when the fatal wounds were struck was an average of sixteen feet. However, 50% of the murders occurred within 0-5 feet (see Chart 5). In five-foot increments, the fatal wound was delivered from 0-5 feet in five killings, and once in each of the following: 6-10 feet, 11-15 feet. Long distance killings resulted in one officer death at 31-35 feet and two occurring at 36-40 feet. Of the long distance murders, one resulted from a semi-auto pistol and the other two resulted from rifles.

Learning points

This discussion is presented to illustrate learning points for tactical considerations in order to decrease future officer murders. The authors present the following points for officer safety considerations.

1. Law enforcement murders suffered a slight rise in California in 1986 with six officers slain in five incidents over 1985's total of four officers downed. 1987 experienced an encouraging decline with four officers

murdered in four incidents.

2. While the years 1986-87 showed a marked skew in the number of shootings which took place during the months of January through June (80%), when averaged into the previous eight years, there is little to show that one month of the year shows an increase in officer safety over any other month. Officers must keep vigilant and alert regardless of the time of the year.

3. No day of the week is particularly less dangerous to officers than others. Monday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday experienced two officer murder incidents each, with Wednesday having one (Saturday had three officers killed in two incidents). The traditional "high activity" expectations of Friday-Sunday accounted for 45% of the incidents and 50% of the officer murders in the two-year total.

4. Over the last two years, 60% of the officers murdered have been attacked during the hours normally associated with darkness or a lack of ambient light. This can be misleading because in 1984, 75% of the shootings took place in the daylight hours. What does this mean to officers in their department and their own personal training? It should mean that the officers and departments should seek diverse training under varying conditions of natural and artificial light in order to enhance line officers' adaptability to a variety of lethal environments.

5. During the last two years, urban law enforcement personnel have accounted for 90% of the officer deaths in California. Agencies in Los Angeles County (three Los Angeles police officers and one Compton Unified School District officer) accounted for 40% of officer killings in the state. While the preponderance of victim officers have worked in the metropolitan areas of the state, it behooves those officers who work in rural areas to maintain their levels of vigilance and observation.

6. Forty per cent (4) of the victim officers were working in a plainclothes capacity. Of these four, two were permanently assigned to EOD duties. These officers were international experts on de-fusing explosive devices. There

The safety training of plainclothes officers, and the tactical considerations used by detectives and supervisory personnel in officer safety principles, should be as complete and thought-out as that of the uniformed officers.

is little, by way of training (as they wrote the book), that could have saved their lives. Two of the victims were supervisors. The safety training of plainclothes officers, and the tactical considerations used by detectives and supervisory personnel in officer safety principles, should be as complete and thought-out as that of the uniformed officers.

7. The age difference between suspects and victim officers was seven years. This illustrates that officers must make concerted efforts to remain in

good physical condition when confronting the much younger suspects who are willing to resist or attack the officers. In only two of the ten murders were the suspects older than the victims.

8. In both 1986 and in 1987, if the total is adjusted by dropping the years of experience of the EOD technicians, the years averaged in law enforcement equalled six. Year after year, officers with between five and ten years consistently make up the bulk of victim officers who are slain in the line of duty. Officer safety and field tactics training must continue at regular intervals throughout the officer's career.

9. In keeping with past trends, suspicious persons/vehicles calls made up the bulk of incidents in which officers were attacked, leading to their death. Unfortunately, also in keeping with past trends, two officers died in separate incidents where they went into a situation knowing there was a man with a gun. This indicates that both the routine call and the "high risk" incident are equally deadly. Officers must guard against complacency and the feeling of "routine handling of calls."

Those highly trained officers on "tactical units" should note that one of the victims was a specially trained full-time member of a

special enforcement detail. He was wearing hard armor, and was shot along with another deputy as they made entry on a barricaded suspect armed with a 5.56mm rifle. Great care should always be exercised in any tactical situation.

10. Back-up officers were present 70% of the time when a police officer was attacked and killed in the years 1986-87. Even when the special units calls in which officer murders were experienced (thirty and ten officers in the immediate area respectively) are dropped from the average, multiple officers were present in four of seven killings (56%).

This leads to two conclusions: first, overconfidence may result and cause the officer to relax, knowing his back is covered by the additional officer; second, the murders of the officers may also result from factors unrelated to the number of officers involved. Be that as it may, officers should concentrate on communication, coordinating movements and tactics, and covering each other.

11. If the pipe bomb explosion is factored out, the distance from which officers were fatally attacked can be categorized as occurring at less than fifteen feet or between thirty-five and forty-feet. This indicates two training needs in relation to firearms. The need for training and realistic tactics that address the close-attack needs of officers cannot be emphasized enough. It also shows that an area of training now held in wide disrepute, that of distance shooting, is still a necessary skill for those few occasions in which it is still needed. The death of a Hayward police officer by knife wounds also demonstrates the need for a realistic knife defense system.

FOR 1987, it is encouraging to note that for the first time since 1984, no officers or deputies died from suspects turning the officer's weapon on the officer. This is a trend which will hopefully continue, but training cannot be relaxed in weapon retention and takeaway techniques. (The Los Angeles Police Department reports an average of three attempts per month by suspects to take the officer's weapon).

These learning points vary little from the past lessons learned from officer murdered studies. Mental alertness and recognition of danger signals are keys to the safe resolve of potentially lethal situations. This data reinforces the notion that coordination and communication between primary and backup officers is essential to handling hazardous calls. Training officers should emphasize that officers in the field maintain the initial position of advantage, seek and use existing cover, and use all available resources. These are lessons that all officers should be thoroughly versed in.

California Commission on POST Guidelines for Law Enforcement Officer Safety

These training guidelines were published in 1987 by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) as the direct result of a study mandated by the California legislature on police officers murdered in California in the years 1980 through 1986. These guidelines are meant to suggest to departments changes in and strengthening of training programs to accurately reflect street officer's safety needs. We present these guidelines to provide a wider distribution of these vital training recommendations for officer safety.

Guideline #1: Each agency should reinforce, through directives, internal training or POST-certified training courses, the need for officers to follow accepted safety procedures and tactics when responding to hazardous situations. The training and tactics should do the following:

- provide planned responses to hazardous situations, including conditions for delayed responses
- define and standardize the actions of primary and back-up officers
- minimize risks
- be tailored to the needs of the agency, reflect current knowledge, and protect the officers and the community

Guideline #2: Each agency, when providing direction on the response to hazardous calls, should know the field situations that pose extraordinary hazards to officers. The

study identified the following hazardous situations:

- dealing with intoxicated or mentally ill persons
- disturbances
- robbery-in-progress incidents
- serving arrest and search warrants (particularly narcotics related)

Guideline #3: Each officer should understand the extraordinary hazards posed by persons who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol or are mentally ill, and should receive training in techniques to deal safely with such individuals.

Guideline #4: Each officer should understand the increased dangers involved in disturbance cases and robbery-in-progress calls, and should receive special training in the response to these high hazard incidents.

Guideline #5: Officers assigned to a team for the purpose of serving an arrest or search warrant should receive special training in this high risk activity.

Guideline #6: Each officer should understand the increased danger when dealing at close range with suspicious persons, and should receive training that reinforces safe methods of handling suspects at this range.

Guideline #7: Each officer should be required to demonstrate proficiency in techniques to prevent the handgun from being taken from him/her by a suspect.

Guideline #8: Each officer should understand the responsibilities of the first officer at the scene and the tactical objectives of delayed response in hazardous situations. Delayed response considerations should include:

- waiting for a back-up officer or special team
- waiting for more appropriate equipment
- implementing a high hazard response plan

Guideline #9: Each officer should demonstrate knowledge of the different responsibilities of, and the teamwork required by, the "primary officer," and the "back-up officer."

Mental alertness and recognition of danger signals are keys to the safe resolve of potentially lethal situations.

Guideline #10: Each officer should receive training in the use of available cover to reduce the potential for injury in a hazardous encounter.

Guideline #11: Each officer should understand the advantages and limitations of body armor.

Guideline #12: Firearms training should emphasize proficiency with all weapons normally available to the officer and conditions commonly encountered in the field. Judgment and proficiency should be demonstrated under conditions that include shooting under stress, in limited and artificial light, and from different positions and types of available cover.

Guideline #13: Each officer should receive training, using realistic scenarios, in observation and search techniques. Training should emphasize close observation of suspect's hands and actions, and areas within vehicles where handguns can be concealed. Training should emphasize the possibility

that a suspect may have concealed more than one weapon.

ANY questions or comments concerning the POST guidelines for law enforcement officer safety and recommendations should be directed to the California Commission on POST's Management Counseling Services Bureau at (916) 739-3868. If you wish to obtain a more detailed copy of the guidelines, call the POST Library at (916) 739-5353.

Questions or comments in reference to the 1986-1987 murders of California peace officers, or the California Specialized Training Institute's Officer Safety and Field Tactics program/schedule should be directed to the authors at CSTI, P.O. Box 8104, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403-8104 or phone (805) 549-3344.

Chart 1
Peace Officer Murders By Month of the Year

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1986	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
1987	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

Chart 2
Peace Officer Murders By Day of the Week

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1986	2	1	0	0	1	0	2
1987	0	1	0	1	1	0	1

Chart 3
Peace Officer Murders By Time of Day

Day	0600	0700	0800	0900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700
1986	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
1987	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Night	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200	2300	2400	0100	0200	0300	0400	0500
1986	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
1987	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Chart 4
Peace Officer Murders By Victim's Age

	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	45 plus
1986	1	0	2	0	1	2
1987	0	3	0	0	0	1

Chart 5
Officer Murder Victims' Law Enforcement Years Experience

	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25
1986	2	2	0	1	1
1987	2	2	0	0	0

Chart 6
Peace Officer Murder Suspects By Age

	15-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45
1986	0	1	2	0	1*	1
1987	3**	0	0	0	1	1

* one suspect in the murder of two police officers

** two suspects in one police officer murder

Chart 7
Type of Weapon Used To Murder Officers

	Handgun		Shoulder Arm		Other	
	Revolver	Semi-auto	Rifle	Shotgun	Pipe Bomb	Knife
1986	3	0	1	0	1**	0
1987	0	1	2	0	0	1

** Two peace officers killed in single pipe bomb incident

Chart 8
Peace Officer Murders-Distance From Suspect

	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
1986	4	1	0	0	1*
1987	1	0	1	0	2**

* Shot at 40 feet

** Shot at 35 feet and 36-40 feet respectively

Table 1A Peace Officers Murdered in California 1986

Date	Feb 8	Mar 3	Apr 17	Jun 8	Oct 5
Day	Sat	Mon	Thu	Sun	Sun
Time	1130	0136	1609	2110	0130
Agency	Los Angeles PD	Rialto PD*	Lorrance PD*	Santa Clara SD*	Orange Co. Fire Dept
Rank	Sgt. Officer	Sgt.	Officer	Deputy	Arson I.
Assignment	E.O.D.	Uniform	Uniform	Uniform	Plainclothes
Age	46 43	31	25	35	46
Years Exp.	22 17	10	4	7	5
Incident	Search Warrant	Susp. Person	Disturb/Man with a gun	5150-Mentally deranged	Arson Investigation
Officers on scene	10+	0	8	3	0
Suspect Age/Race	36/Black	26/Black	22/Hisp**	28/Cauc**	42/Cauc**
Weapon	Pipe bomb	.357*** revolver	M-1 Carbine	.357*** revolver	.357 revolver
Distance (ft)	0-5	0-5	40	0-5	6-10

Table 1B Peace Officers Murdered in California 1987

Date	Mar 9	Mar 25	Jun 22	Dec 5
Day	Thu	Wed	Mon	Sat
Time	1900	1837	2015	1002
Agency	Compton Unified School District	Hayward PD*	Los Angeles PD	San Diego SD*
Rank	Officer	Officer	Officer	Deputy
Assignment	Uniform	Uniform	Plainclothes	Sheriff's Tactical Unit
Age	51	29	28	29
Years Exp.	7	4	5	8
Incident	Ambush	Susp. Person	Susp. Person	Disturb/Man with a gun
Officers on scene	0	2	1	30
Suspect Age/Race	17/Black	45/Hisp	17,19/Black	37/Cauc**
Weapon	.22 rifle	Knife	380 ACP	.223 AK A2
Distance (ft)	11-15	0-5	36-40	35

* Victim officer wearing soft or hard body armor

** Suspect killed or committed suicide

*** Victim officer killed by own weapon