

Peace Officers Murdered in California

1990-1991

by Charles B. Moorman and George T. Williams

During 1990 and 1991, nine Peace Officers were murdered in the State of California in the performance of their official duties. Six were feloniously killed in 1990, three in 1991. All but two died as a result of gunshot injuries. The jurisdictions involved were local police and County Sheriff's deputies. No State or Federal officers were murdered in the state in the two year period covered by this article.

The data presented herein has been obtained from interviewing homicide investigators within days of the murder. This article is presented to increase the level of awareness of the individual officer. It is anticipated the officer safety trainers in the state will utilize this information to adjust the format of peace officer instruction to reflect the trends in suspect behavior.

Tabulated Information

Table 1 lists in column form twenty factors dealing with each incident in which an officer was murdered. These factors include the date, time, and day of the murder, the Agency the victim worked for, and the initiating call or incident. Whether the officer was utilizing body armor at the time of the murder is footnoted (*). Additional factors listed are age and race, total years of law enforcement experience, rank and assignment, and the total number of officers on the scene at the time of the murder. Suspect information is listed on their age, race, if the suspect(s) was killed at the scene or soon thereafter (**). Data is listed on the type and caliber of the weapon used in the murder, whether it was the officer's weapon (***),

distance between the officer and the suspect at the time of the killing wound, and the location of the officer's fatal injury.

In 1990, six officers were murdered in the state in six separate incidents (Chart #1) The murders of the officers were spaced throughout the year. Officer murders occurred in January, February, two in June, September and in October.

1991 was remarkably similar to the pattern set in 1990, with the grateful exception that half as many officers were murdered during the year. The three murders occurred in February, September and October.

By day of the week, (Chart #2) 1990 showed a murder of an officer each day of the week, except Sunday. Monday saw two officers murdered in 1991, with the third officer losing his life on Tuesday.

When the time of day is considered (Chart #3), only one officer was murdered during daylight hours. The other eight murders (88%) in 1990-91 occurred during hours of darkness.

By type of agency (Table 1), all of the victims were from local or county agencies. Eight of the nine murders (88%) occurred in an urban setting. The ninth occurred in a rural, northern California county (Shasta) as the deputy was transporting two prisoners to the county jail facility. Los Angeles Police Department suffered one officer killed in 1990 and another in 1991. The remaining officers and deputies were from various police and Sheriff's department throughout California.

Six California peace officers were murdered in 1990. January saw a Stockton P.D. Sergeant slain by a suspect who outweighed the officer by 100 pounds. He killed the Sergeant by striking him repeatedly with the Sergeant's own flashlight. In February a San Bernardino police officer was involved in a struggle with a suspect following a traffic stop. Both of them fell into the roadway and were killed when struck by a passing vehicle. The

next murder of an officer in 1990 occurred in June when, during a narcotics warrant service, a West Sacramento police officer was shot in the head by a suspect from behind a hasty barricade. June recorded a second murder when a narcotics officer from Fullerton Police Department was shot during a drug buy turned rip-off. In September, a Santa Clara County Deputy on a traffic stop was killed by gunfire by the driver. The last murder of the year was a Los Angeles Police Detective who was killed during an off-duty incident in a bar when an on-view 417 P.C./Shots Fired occurred. The suspect, who was armed with a 9mm equipped with a LASER sighting system, shot the officer, who returned fire after he was hit, killing his assailant.

1991 tallied three officer murders. The first occurred in February when a Los Angeles Police Officer was shot in the head when she and her partner were exiting their patrol vehicle to cite a pedestrian for a municipal alcohol violation. September saw a San Diego Police Officer ambushed by a 415-Family suspect upon exiting his patrol vehicle at the location of the call for service. The last murder of the year was in October when a lone Shasta County Deputy was shot in the back of the head with the deputy's secondary service weapon (not his back-up weapon) by one of two handcuffed suspects during transport in a caged unit.

Five of the officers (55%) were wearing ballistic armor at the time of their deaths. This may be misleading as two of the officers who were not protected by armor were involved in activities which precluded the wearing of vests (undercover narcotics buy and off-duty).

The use of a ballistic vest may have prevented only one of the on-duty officer's murder. Wound locations over the two year period were as follows: Five officers (55%) suffered mortal wounds to the head (including the Stockton Police Sergeant who was beaten to death with his flashlight and

the San Bernardino officer struck by a car); four victims died from torso wounds; three of the wounds (33%) were to the chest; and, one (11%) was shot in the side.

By assignment for the two years, six of the peace officers murdered (66%) were working uniform patrol. Five of these victims held the rank of patrol officer or deputy. One uniformed sergeant was murdered. Of the non-uniformed officers, two of the murder victims (22% of the total) were assigned to a narcotics unit at the rank of detective. One detective (11%) was killed while off-duty, acting within his police scope of authority.

Over the two year period, by age, the victim officers were generally over the age of 30 years (88%) with an average age of 36 years (Chart #4). In five year increments, the ages of the officers were as follows: One 21-25 years; four 31-35; two 36-40; one 41-45; and, one officer was 50 years of age.

The experience level of this group of officers varies widely (Chart #5). By five year increments, the factor of time in law enforcement were as follows: three 1-5 years; two 6-10 years; three 11-15 years; and one officer had 24 years experience. The average age of experience for this group averaged almost ten years (9.8) of service.

Seven of the officers (77%) were Caucasian (Chart #6), and the two remaining victims Hispanic. One female officer was murdered, which was the first in the state since a female San Diego Police Officer was shot to death in 1984.

The originating events which lead up to the deaths were varied. In terms of officer murders, low risk traffic stops were the leading circumstance in three of the officer murders (33%) over the two year period. Narcotics related enforcement was the second highest category with two murders (22%). The remaining four murders were one each

initiated by the following calls: In-view Man With a Gun/Shots Fired; municipal citation for drinking in public; Family Disturbance; and, a Civil Dispute/Possible Auto Theft. These two years saw a radical change from the past in the form of additional officers on scene at the time of the murder. In recent years past, as many as 88% of the murders occurred with at least one backup officer present. If the years of 1990 and 1991 are combined, only three of the murders (33%) were witnessed by other officers. In 1991 two of the three officers were shot and killed in the presence of their partner officer.

All nine murders were cleared. The age of the ten male suspects during the two years is significant to the study of these murders (Chart #7). In increments of five years, the suspect's ages were: five 20-25 years of age (50%); four 31-35 (40%); and one 42 years (10%) of age. The average age of the suspects was 29.1 years of age. Their races were: two Caucasian; five Hispanic; one Black; and one Philippino (Chart #8). Six (60%) of the suspects were either killed at the scene, or committed suicide soon thereafter.

The type of weapon used to murder the six officers varied greatly in 1990 (Chart #9). Four killings were committed with handguns, one involved the officer's flashlight, and another involved the officer being struck by a moving vehicle while engaged in a struggle with a suspect.

In 1991, all of the murders involved handguns. If the two years are combined, of the firearms involved, two were revolvers (29%), and five were pistols (71%). Handguns were used in 77% of the murders in the two year period.

Chart 10 shows during the two year period the calibers of the firearms used to murder officers were: one .38 Special (14%); one .357 Magnum (14%); four 9mm (57%); and one .45 ACP (14%).

The distances involved in the killing of the officers were extremely close, with no murder occurring over the distance of twelve feet (Chart #11). Factoring out the non-firearm related murders during the two years, the distance in which the murders took place are: four at 0-5 feet (57%); two at 6-10 feet (29%); and, one at 11-15 feet (14%). With the two non-firearms included (flashlight and vehicle), the percentage of murders within five feet increases to 77%.

Conclusions

1. There is no particularly hazardous or safe time of the day, week or month, or area (rural or urban) of the state. Killings of officers occurred in every geographical area of the state, from Shasta County in Northern California, to Stockton in Central California, to San Diego in Southern California. There is no "safe" area to work in law enforcement in this state. Though the majority of the deaths occurred during times normally associated with darkness, a significant minority of officers were killed during daylight hours. In the recent past, officers have been murdered during times represented by all shifts normally assigned to officers.

2. Firearms training should stress firing during darkness and artificial light circumstances. Current range training practices of so-called night firing with floodlights blazing and the range fully illuminated do not prepare the officer to successfully exchange fire with suspects in conditions of little to no light. Ranges should consist of different lighting schemes designed to familiarize officers with actual lighting conditions experienced in the field.

Range training should also stress close, quick situations which force the officer to discriminate proper targets and respond with appropriate force to a fast changing situation. It is only with this type of situational training that officers can be prepared to meet the challenges of life

threatening assaults in the field.

3. Defensive Tactics training should be stressed. On the average, officers were nine years older than the suspects who murdered them. As officers get older, strength and speed decline. Technical competence in a rational, simple system of suspect control is mandatory for older officers. A significant proportion of officers murdered died as a direct result of physical assaults. Practical, defensible systems of personal protection and suspect control are absolutely required by all officers to ensure their safety. Physical fitness and upper body strength cannot be stressed enough. Combining fitness with practice in Defensive Tactics provides officers practical job confidence. Confident officers make sound decisions.

4. Off-duty behavior is a major concern. While the off-duty Los Angeles Police Department Detective acted heroically in the defense of innocent victims when forced into the shooting by witnesses who pointed him out as an officer to the suspect, many officers become unnecessarily involved in off-duty incidents. Consideration of appropriate tactics, limitations on use of force options, a lack of communication, backup, and immediate recognition as a peace officer should temper officer's instincts to become involved in the apprehension of suspects in on-view crimes, except in defense of life.

5. Wearing of ballistic armored vests must be continued to be encouraged. Discounting the two officers who were killed during circumstances which are not normally associated with the wearing of body armor (off-duty and undercover narcotics), five out of seven of the officers (71%) who were killed were wearing vests at the time of their deaths. The vest may have made a difference in at least one of the murders. None of the vests were defeated by the rounds fired at the officers. The wearing of vests cannot be taken lightly by personnel working in the field.

6. Two thirds of the officers were assigned to uniformed patrol. A significant portion of officers were assigned to narcotics. Uniformed patrol and narcotics enforcement continue to be the most dangerous assignments for officers. Patrol officers regularly bear the brunt of assaults due to their high visibility and the very nature of their law enforcement activities. Uniformed officers in the field must constantly guard against the dangers of "routine" calls and activities. Officer Safety should be a constant concern for officers throughout the state.

Year after year, narcotics enforcement continues to claim a significant number of officer's lives. Narcotics officers are cautioned to practice recognized officer safety practices in the service of warrants and the conduct of investigations.

7. The average age of the officers was 36 years old and their law enforcement experience averaged almost ten years. This is consistent with preceding years. Officers in this age and experience level are cautioned to re-evaluate their Officer Safety practices to ensure a proper attitude of caution and respect is displayed for potentially dangerous situations.

8. Race is no indicator of a potentially murderous suspect. The study indicates that many suspect races were represented in the two years. The age of suspects is no indicator to officers of his or her intent.

9. Traffic stops are the largest category, followed by narcotics enforcement, of initiating calls involving officer murders. Again, resistance to the mental trap of the "routine traffic stop" is important to officers' safety in this potentially dangerous situation.

10. The officer murder weapon of choice continues to be the handgun. All of the hysteria over the so-called "assault weapons" does not seem to be borne out by the statistics. Two officers were murdered in 1990 with unusual weapons in unusual events. A police flashlight used to break an

officer's skull in fourteen places, and a passing motorist who was unable to avoid an officer who is wrestling with a resisting narcotics suspect during a traffic stop in the street were the weapons "other than firearms."

There is much an individual officer can do to prevent his or her becoming a statistic in the Officer Murder Studies in the future. Training, regular practice of accepted standards of officer safety, and a "Tactical Attitude" when dealing with calls for service, will increase an officers chances of safely completing a career in law enforcement.

Table 1

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN CALIFORNIA - 1990 and 1991

Day/Date & Time	Agency	Victim *	Type of Incident	Victim Age/LE Exp Rank/Race	Victim Assignment	Add. Off's at Scene	Sus. ** Age/Race	Murder Weapon *** Type/Cal. Distance	Location of Fatal Wound
1990									
Mon. - Jan. 22 0055 Hrs	Stockton PD	Timothy White	Traffic Stop	32/10 Sgt/C	Uniform	0	20 B	Sgt's Flashlight *** 0-5'	Head
Sat. - Feb. 10 2050 Hrs.	San Bernardino PD	Robert * Shultis	Traffic Stop	33/5 Officer/C	Uniform	0	23 **K C	Vehicle	Head
Fri. - June 15 1830 Hrs.	West Sacramento PD	James * McKnight	Narcotics Search Warr.	39/15 Officer/C	Narcotics Task Force	6	42 **K H	Semi-Auto/9mm 0-5'	Head
Thu. - June 21 1520 Hrs.	Fullerton PD	Tommy DeLarosa	Narcotics Buy	43/11 Det./H	Narcotics Unit	0	34 **K H	0-5'	Upper Torso Side
Wed. - Sept. 12 2320 Hrs.	Santa Clara County SD	Paul Bush	Traffic Stop	37/12 Dep./C	Uniform	0	22 **K H	Rev./38 0-5'	Upper Torso Front
Tues. - Oct. 9 2130 Hrs.	Los Angeles PD	Russell Kuster	Off-Duty Man-With-Gun	50/25 Det./C	Plain-clothes	0	37 **K C	Semi-Auto/9mm 6-10'	Upper Torso Front
1991									
Mon. - Feb. 11 0028 Hrs	Los Angeles PD	Tina * Kerbrat	Alcohol Viol. Public Drink.	34/1 Officer/H	Uniform	1	32**K C	Rev./357 6-10'	Face
Tues. - Sept. 17 0518 Hrs.	San Diego PD	Ronald * Davis	Family Dist. Man-With-Gun	24/2 Officer/C	Uniform	1	34**S P	Semi.Auto./45 11-15'	Upper Torso Side
Mon. - Oct. 21 0300 Hrs.	Shasta SD	Ken * Perrigo	Auto Theft	32/9 Deputy/C	Uniform	1	23/24 H	Semi-Auto/9mm *** 0-5'	Head

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN 1990 = 6

PEACE OFFICERS MURDERED IN 1991 = 3

* = Victim wearing body armor: 1990 = 2 1991 = 3

** = Suspect killed (K) or committed suicide (S): 1990 = 5 1991 = 2

*** = Victim's weapon/equipment was the murder weapon: 1990 = 1 1991 = 1

RACE

C=Caucasian

H=Hispanic

B=Black

P=Phillipino

#1. Peace Officer Murders by Month 1990-1991

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1990	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0
1991	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0

#2. Peace Officer Murders by Day of the Week

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
1990	0	1	1	1	1	1	1
1991	0	2	1	0	0	0	0

#3. Peace Officer Murders by Time of Day

Day	0600	0700	0800	0900	1000	1100	1200	1300	1400	1500	1600	1700
1990	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Night	1800	1900	2000	2100	2200	2300	0000	0100	0200	0300	0400	0500
1990	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1

#4. Peace Officer Murders-By Victim's Age

	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	45 plus
1990	0	0	2	2	1	1
1991	1	0	2	0	0	0

**#5. Officer Murder Victim's
Years of Law Enforcement Experience**

	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20 plus
1990	1	1	3	0	1
1991	2	1	0	0	0

#6. Murdered Officer's Race

	Caucasian	Hispanic	Black	Oriental
1990	5	1	0	0
1991	2	1	0	0

#7. Peace Officer Murder Suspects By Age

	20-25	26-30	31-35	40 plus
1990	3	0	2	1
1991	2*	0	2	0

* Two suspects were involved in a single incident

#8. Murder Suspect's Race

	Caucasian	Hispanic	Black	Philippino
1990	2	3	1	0
1991	0	2	0	1

#9. Type of Weapon Used to Murder Officers

	Handgun		Shoulder Arm		Other	
	Revolver	Pistol	Rifle	Shotgun	Flashlight	Vehicle
1990	1	3	0	0	1*	1
1991	1	2	0	0	0	0

#10. Caliber of Murder Weapon

	.38	.357	9mm	.45
1990*	1	0	3	0
1991	0	1	1	1

* In 1990, two officers died as a result of non-firearm assaults in separate incidents

#11. Peace Officer Murders-Distance from Suspect

	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21 plus
1990	5	1	0	0	0
1991	1	1	1	0	0

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