

*Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training
Critical Incident Report
May 1, 2006*

*Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department
Active Shooter Incident
Goleta, California
January 30, 2006*

Introduction

Today, law enforcement personnel are facing complicated and difficult tactical situations that unfortunately present immediate and serious threats of great bodily injury and death to the community members who we protect and serve. Consequently, everyone involved in public safety must constantly reassess their response capabilities and training responsibilities. In an effort to enhance peace officer knowledge and skills, the California Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training (P.O.S.T.) has initiated a program that will provide timely information to first responders, decision makers and trainers. These reports have been prepared by law enforcement personnel to provide an overview of the incident, an insight to the decisions faced by the responders, supervisors and managers and the following considerations:

- Public and Peace Officer Safety Considerations
- Tactical Considerations
- Command Post Considerations
- Equipment Considerations
- Investigation Considerations
- Community Considerations
- Media Considerations
- Debriefing Considerations
- Employee Welfare Considerations
- Training Considerations

On Monday, January 30, 2006, shortly after 9:00 p.m., a violent predator murdered six people at a United States Postal Distribution Center. A seventh victim was located at a residence the next day. This report acknowledges the courageous response of Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department personnel to this active shooter incident.

This report was not created to recommend policy or procedure. The report's purpose is to educate law enforcement responders, decision makers and trainers so they can evaluate their readiness and training needs. Ironically, as P.O.S.T.'s law enforcement representatives were preparing to meet Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department representatives, an active shooter murdered three people at a Denny's Restaurant in Pismo Beach, California. This tragic incident occurred on Wednesday, March 15, 2006, 44 days after the Goleta Incident.

Incident

Shortly after 9:00 p.m. on a Monday evening, Jennifer San Marco, 44 years of age, passed through a security station at the Goleta Mail Processing Plant and Distribution Center. Due to San Marco's previous employment at the Center, she successfully defeated the parking lot security gate by following another vehicle into a secured parking lot. No one realized that she had previously killed her former neighbor and was now armed with a 9mm semi automatic pistol and an extra ammunition magazine.

At gunpoint, San Marco took an employee's badge to access the building. As she approached the building, San Marco shot three people (employees) in the parking lot. Using the badge to enter the building, she shot another employee in the lobby. San Marco attempted to shoot another subject when her firearm misfired. San Marco then reloaded with her extra magazine. San Marco continued into the Center where she shot two more victims in the back of the head. Due to the loud noise generated from the mail sorting and distribution machines and employees wearing ear protection, the Center's employees were generally unaware that shooting was occurring. Further complicating this tragedy was a shift change involving approximately 80 employees who were either completing or starting their work shifts. After murdering a total of six employees at the Center, San Marco turned the firearm on herself, taking her life. Tragically, five employees died at the Center from gunshot wounds and two days later, the employee shot in the lobby, died at the hospital.

San Marco's aggressive and violent behavior claimed the lives of her neighbor, six postal workers and herself. If San Marco had not killed herself, there is little doubt that she would have wounded and murdered others, possibly engaging Santa Barbara County Deputy Sheriffs in a gun battle.

Goleta, California

The City of Goleta is located on the coast of California, seven miles north of the City of Santa Barbara. Goleta encompasses 26 square miles with a population of 55,000 and contracts law enforcement services with the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department.

The Goleta Postal Distribution Center - Crime Scene

This site serves as a major mail distribution port in the County of Santa Barbara and is enclosed with a chain link fence on several acres. Large 18-wheel trucks and trailers access the facility where tons of mail are sorted and distributed. The center operates 24 hours a day with approximately 80 employees on each shift. Entry to the Center is accessed using a coded pass card.

Santa Barbara County Fire Station 11 - Witness Evacuation / Interview Site

The fire station is located directly across the street from the Goleta Postal Distribution Center. There are two large doors that enclose the fire trucks inside.

The Home Depot - Command Post Location

This store is located in the Market Place Shopping Center across the street from Fire Station 11 and approximately a quarter mile from the Goleta Postal Distribution Center. Behind the store, is a loading area that is bordered by a grassy knoll with several trees that provide a natural barrier. Due to Home Depot employees working throughout the night, a rear access door was opened to allow law enforcement to use the rest rooms.

Tactical Considerations

Active Shooter Contact Team

A senior patrol deputy was one of the first responders. This senior deputy effectively and immediately organized and deployed a Contact Team. This team properly passed three victims in the parking lot and safely entered the main lobby to contact the suspect. The team located an additional victim in the lobby area, cleared adjoining areas and assumed a position of advantage.

Active Shooter Rescue Team

Due to no additional gunshots or other noises being heard, the Contact Team transitioned to a Rescue Team. The team then assumed and maintained a position of advantage at the doorway to the distribution center.

Active Shooter Paramedic Escort Team

An Escort Team protected the paramedics as they entered the parking lot and moved into the lobby. Consequently, this team of paramedics and deputies were able to assess the medical condition of the shooting victims.

Contacting and Controlling People

While the Rescue Team was in the lobby area, two employees wearing headphones emerged from the main building totally unaware of the incident. The Rescue Team effectively contacted, controlled, debriefed and removed these individuals from the building.

Perimeter Responsibilities

Arriving deputies were met with approximately 80 employees who were fleeing from the Center. These deputies controlled the crowd, determining whether a suspect(s) or accomplice(s) might be among the victims and witnesses. The deputies were faced with a complicated challenge that could be further escalated by the emotions of the fleeing people, the presence of an armed criminal, a compromised shooting background and the potential for the suspect taking a hostage(s) to pursue escape.

Witness / Victim Containment

Approximately 80 people were escorted to Fire Station 11, enabling the deputies to effectively contain the crowd and safely protect them. This enabled responding detectives the opportunity to interview the witnesses, obtaining identity information and tactical intelligence.

Mobile Telephones Being Used by Witnesses and Victims

It was recognized that the people contained in the fire station were constantly using their mobile telephones. Consequently, this telephone usage caused family members and friends to come to the scene. Allowing the use of telephones was viewed as a positive factor in containing and pacifying these individuals, leading to their cooperation. Some witnesses received calls from the press who then released information that the Public Information Officer (PIO) was unaware of or not able to confirm. This caused grief for some of the victim families who heard on TV that their relative may have been a victim before law enforcement could confirm the identities. Additionally, it is recognized that the use of telephones could create additional tactical challenges for the Contact, Rescue, Paramedic Rescue and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) Teams.

Victim Roster / Witness Roster

Creating a roster of who is being detained prior to interviews is essential. Acquiring everyone's name, sex, race, date of birth and mobile telephone number for a centralized roster that is in alphabetical order will greatly assist the investigation's progress and notification process. Simply, taking 26 pieces of paper and placing a single and different letter of the alphabet on the top of each page will immediately organize the people by their last name.

Searching – The Center's Parking Lot

Since San Marco had not been located, deputies were sent to the employee parking lot to search for her vehicle. While searching, deputies discovered a postal employee hiding in a car. Ironically, this individual had encountered San Marco in the parking lot when she first arrived.

Searching with Floor Plans

Although the Center's floor plans were requested from Postal Inspectors, it was found that this information was maintained in areas that had yet to be searched. It is recommended that consideration be given to the availability of selected sites' floor plans for emergency personnel.

Searching – The Center

After the SWAT Team had relieved the Contact Team and while the SWAT Team was staging in the lobby for entry into the Center's distribution area, an employee unexpectedly walked into the lobby. This individual was unaware of the incident as ear protection was being worn due to the machinery's noise.

Access – The Center's Catwalk

Prior to the deployment of two SWAT search teams into the Center's distribution area, it was believed that access to the catwalk was available. However, once inside, the provided key did not allow entry to the catwalk. Consequently, additional time was devoted to gaining access.

High Ground – Advantage, Observation and Intelligence

One SWAT Team utilized the catwalk for a tactical position of advantage. Additionally this "high ground" proved to be a superior observation post, providing effective and timely information to the other SWAT Team that was searching the Center. While the SWAT team was clearing the building, the Sheriff's Department received a telephone call from an employee who was hiding underneath a large piece of machinery. The SWAT Team located and removed this individual.

Command Post Considerations

Command Post Vehicles

The initial patrol supervisors utilized a Special Utility Vehicle for a command post. As the incident became more complicated, the Sheriff's Mobile Command Post Vehicle was deployed. The larger vehicle enabled the incident's decision-makers to use a private area to assess the incident, to deploy resources and to prioritize missions.

Posting Information

Posting information on dry erase boards immediately enabled Sheriff's command and staff personnel to be briefed. Thus, valuable time was not lost by the Incident Commander updating newly arrived supervisors and managers. Also, the boards provided timely information for the PIO.

Posting information throughout the command post creates an efficient Tactical Operations Center (TOC). The TOC concept where information is posted enables managers and tacticians to quickly assess intelligence information and make informed decisions.

Command Post Security

Due to the incident's magnitude, numerous community members and leaders, local, state and federal law enforcement personnel, public officials and media representatives arrived throughout the incident. This included family members, friends, loved ones and relatives of the Center's employees and victims. These people all had different concerns and questions for the person in charge, including the victims' medical condition and location.

Consideration should be given to the volatile nature of family members facing this tragedy. Consequently, traditional yellow banner tape – "Police Line Do Not Cross" will not be an effective barrier to deny access to command post areas and crime scene locations. Sometimes, these locations will require posting uniformed personnel to prevent unauthorized access. Occasionally the use of red banner tape has created a more significant controlling factor.

Casualty Information

Initial reports to the Incident Commander provided different information on the victims' locations and medical conditions. This information included two victims dead in the Center's parking lot and two victims at the hospital. One of the victims at the hospital was dead and the condition of the second victim was not known.

Incident Commander's Priorities

Although not reported in order of importance, the Incident Commander established the following priorities:

- Determine where the deputies and outside law enforcement personnel were deployed (location, name, agency, unit designation). It is also recommended that the mobile telephone number of the deployed peace officers be gathered to enhance the effectiveness and timeliness of communication.
- Establish a Response Team at the command post to deal with community issues or tactical concerns.
- Develop a tactical plan to enter the Center and to respond to emergencies, i.e. a hostage situation.
- Consider that off-duty sheriff personnel of various ranks may respond to the incident after hearing news reports or receiving telephone calls.
- Evaluate the need for additional ambulances and paramedics from adjoining jurisdictions. It is recommended that the Fire Department evaluate and coordinate emergency medical response.

- Appoint a PIO to deal with the massive media response.
- Assign a lieutenant to the Sheriff's Communications Center to assess service calls, dispatching priorities and staffing needs.
- Relieve outside law enforcement personnel from traffic control perimeter duties as soon as possible. Although all peace officers present worked effectively as a team, once the tactical situation has ended it becomes a pressing need for the assisting agency supervisors to return personnel to their assigned responsibilities, i.e., California Highway Patrol, Santa Barbara Police and University of Santa Barbara Police personnel.

Restroom Facilities

Fortunately, the Home Depot and the Fire Department Station provided convenient restroom facilities throughout an extended time period. However, consideration should always be given to requesting portable facilities as soon as possible.

Investigation Considerations

Although San Marco was dead by her own hand, the incident was far from over. Investigators were facing numerous external and internal inquiries, requiring an immediate assessment of investigative priorities and staffing requirements. The Investigation Officer-in-Charge established the following priorities:

- A team of detectives was assigned to the hospital to determine the condition of victims and to consider the possibility of a dying declaration.
- A team of detectives was assigned to the murder scene. These detectives conducted the investigation and interviewed the witnesses.
- A team of detectives was assigned to assist the crime scene investigators.
- A team of detectives at Sheriff's Headquarters was directed to gather information and intelligence. Thus, this team obtained a Ramey arrest warrant for San Marco before the SWAT team was able to enter the Center. If San Marco had been stopped in a vehicle, a fellow law enforcement officer would have known that she was "armed and dangerous." Also, another investigative team responded to San Marco's last known address in Goleta and established surveillance.
- Due to the possibility that an officer-involved shooting may occur, the emergency on-call Officer Involved Shooting Team (O.I.S.) was notified.

Personnel Relief / Rotation

Detectives and crime scene investigators were required to adjust and extend their duty hours to handle this incident and to be available for other emergency call-outs.

Perimeters – Crime Scene and Crowd Control

Due to the crowds and the large number of law enforcement personnel, it was necessary to establish inner and outer perimeters for an extended time period. The outer perimeter enabled law enforcement ingress and egress while the inner perimeter protected the crime scene. Additionally, a Crime Scene Log required everyone to provide their rank, name, agency and serial number prior to entering the crime scene. Thus, the crime scene's integrity was protected.

Due to the Center being a federal facility, numerous Postal Inspectors had responded to the command post, offering their assistance and support. Consequently, the Incident Commander effectively deployed the inspectors to facility perimeter control, enabling other law enforcement personnel to return to their assignments.

The Incident Commander and the Investigation Commander Officer-in-Charge also recognized that the Center's building and parking lots were secured by fencing. This fence enhanced perimeter control, crime scene protection and media management, reducing the number of posted perimeter/security positions.

The Potential for Additional Victim(s)

Due to the unpredictable and violent behavior of San Marco, the potential for an additional victim(s) was possible. Unfortunately, this was confirmed the next day when the seventh victim, San Marco's neighbor was found murdered at a home in Santa Barbara. This additional homicide investigation required a detective response from homicide investigators who had already been working extended hours. Assigning investigative call-out responsibilities to other detectives who have not been sleep-deprived is a consideration.

Crime Scene Re-creation – State Support

Sheriff's detectives requested the California Department of Justice to assist with diagrams of the crime scene.

Crime Scene Forensics – Federal Support

Due to the incident occurring on federal property, a Federal Bureau of Investigation Forensic Team assisted the investigation.

Autopsies – Neighbor County Support

The need for immediate autopsies became a priority. Thus, the Ventura County Coroner assisted the Santa Barbara County Coroner with the autopsies. Ventura County is located south of Santa Barbara County.

Follow-up Investigations – Accomplice(s)

Sheriff detectives were relentless with follow-up investigations and traveled to New Mexico (to investigate San Marco's last known residence). Detectives pursued numerous leads, trying to determine if San Marco had an accomplice(s) or received any support to commit these horrific crimes.

Decision Considerations

Should a law enforcement agency have to respond and manage a similar incident, the following issues are identified for evaluation:

- Where would you put the victims' family members?
- How would you respond to the victims' family members who are inquiring/demanding to know their loved one's medical condition and where they are located?
- What would you do if the family member is not satisfied with your answer(s)?

Training Considerations

In the months prior to this incident, Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department personnel completed "Response to an Active Shooter" training. Additionally, on the day of the incident, the Department's command staff and specialized personnel participated in a training exercise that assessed their skills in managing a tactical situation using the Incident Command System.

The aforementioned proactive training actions provided Santa Barbara County Sheriff personnel with timely knowledge to hone and improve their peace officer skills. Due to this training, various Sheriff's personnel acknowledged that their confidence level and state of readiness provided the background and skills to respond and manage this dangerous and difficult incident. Ironically, no one knew that their training exercise would be repeated that night with this tragic event.

Equipment Considerations

Firearms

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's patrol cars are equipped with a shotgun and AR-15 rifle.

Additionally, equipping shotguns and rifles with slings and tactical lights is advantageous to the effectiveness and safety of police personnel.

Lighting – Command Post/Crime Scene

Portable outside lighting for the command post and the crime scene is essential for incidents that extend into darkness.

Media Considerations

Investigation Impact

The media was relentless in their efforts to provide live and up-to-the-minute “Breaking News” coverage. Before Sheriff's investigators could leave Santa Barbara and go to New Mexico for follow-up Investigations, they were receiving information that the news media was already interviewing subjects in New Mexico.

Information for Media Briefings

It is essential that a Sheriff or Chief of Police have comprehensive information for his/her media briefings. Additionally, the presence of a Chief or Sheriff on television provides comfort to the community, as the organization's leader is present and involved.

Employee Welfare Considerations

Trauma Support

Law enforcement personnel experienced a wide variety of emotional responses to this critical incident. Requesting the immediate and off-hour response of the Department's Chaplains, Crisis and Peer Counselors and Psychologist can provide necessary assistance and support to peace officers and community members.

Criminal History

Jennifer San Marco had a history of irrational behavior. Apparently, her emotionally disturbed personality led to her retirement in 2003 from the United States Postal Service after six years of employment. At one point and prior to her termination, San Marco had to be physically removed from the Postal facility by Sheriff's Deputies due to a report of her talking about committing suicide. This led to a four to five day psychiatric hold and later a medical retirement from the postal facility.

After this termination, San Marco moved to a rural area of New Mexico. News reports indicated that in 2004, she attempted to start a publication, “The Racist Press.” However, she did not have a license to publish. Other people recalled that when she attended meetings, she sat and mumbled to herself in a way that sounded as if she were two people arguing. Additionally, people became concerned with San Marco's behavior when she would stare at people, and when she showed up at a local service station unclothed.

Those who knew her recalled her hostility toward minorities. Neighbors also saw her regularly shooting a handgun that she had purchased from a nearby pawn shop in her backyard. In fact, San Marco had increased her shooting practice the week before she left New Mexico to drive to Goleta, California. Investigators also discovered a car wash receipt in her vehicle which showed that she had been in the Los Angeles area, the day prior to the shooting.

Community Considerations

Community Resources

The Sheriff's Department received different offers from community organizations. The following organizations were involved.

- Red Cross
- Religious Organizations – Clergy, Sheriff Chaplains, etc.
- Restaurants - local eateries provided food.

Housing the Victims' Families, Friends and Loved Ones

A Sheriff Chaplain offered to care for the victims' families, friends and loved ones at his place of worship. This church was nearby and enabled people to gather in support of each other. Additionally, the Red Cross assisted the chaplain's efforts at the church.

Funerals

The victims' funerals attracted significant attendance, ranging from 1,500 to 2,000 people.

The Memorial Service

Two weeks later, a memorial service was scheduled. This event required the Sheriff's Department to assume numerous responsibilities for crowd control and public safety. Additionally, this memorial service created the potential for people expressing themselves with various emotional responses in unpredictable manners. Planning for predictable behaviors involved a wide range of public safety considerations and the possibility that someone not on the agenda could have the opportunity to speak if they wished to express their feelings. This potential range of responses may also include comments regarding the murderer, San Marco.

Communication Considerations

Tactical Language – Building Side 1, 2, 3 & 4

Clear identification of a building's sides is critical in a tactical incident. Goleta is a coastal community where the roads frequently change directions. Referring to the front door side of a building as Side 1 and then rotating clockwise to Side 2, Side 3 and Side 4 is clearer than saying north, south east or west. This is especially valid when law enforcement officers from other jurisdictions are responding and not familiar with local directions. This system enables everyone to more easily understand tactical communications when building sides and entrances are identified by common terms.

Mutual Radio Frequency for Various Agencies

The ability of neighboring law enforcement agencies to communicate on a mutual radio frequency is critical. This enables successful and timely communications.

Radio Frequencies – Calls for Service/Tactical Communications

Sheriff personnel effectively utilized multiple radio frequencies to manage calls for service and tactical communications. This also included a frequency for intelligence purposes.

Mobile Telephones

At all levels within the Sheriff's Department, mobile telephones played a vital role in effective communications. This was especially advantageous for detective personnel as radio frequencies were crowded due to the ongoing tactical situation that involved various missions.

Telephone Rosters – Preprogrammed on Mobile Phones

The ability to immediately reach department personnel is a vital ally to the effectiveness of communication. Preprogramming the telephone numbers of key department personnel will significantly assist the incident commander and other department supervisors and managers. The preprogramming process should also include periodic review and update.

Hostage Negotiator

Even if the hostage negotiator is not needed, the availability of a hostage negotiator at the scene is beneficial.

Debriefing Considerations

Due to the incident's extended duration and personnel rotation, it was extremely difficult to conduct debriefings in a timely manner for all involved personnel. Consideration should be given to how an agency would handle debriefings that involve everyone deployed to the incident.

Specialized Teams Debriefings

This incident required the staffing of different teams for various responses, i.e. Active Shooter Contact, Rescue and Paramedic Escort Teams. Additionally, other teams within the organization were deployed, i.e. SWAT. These teams need to be debriefed as soon as possible to ensure that lessons learned are identified and most importantly, the welfare of personnel is evaluated.

Personalized Debriefings

In the days that followed, the Incident Commander undertook a personal responsibility to meet with the teams and individual deputies. This action provided an outstanding opportunity for personnel to provide feedback, to offer suggestions and to have their questions answered.

Aftermath

This incident attracted nationwide attention as San Marco had committed the largest number of homicides by a female murderer in the United States. The lives of eight families, numerous postal employees and countless law enforcement deputies, dispatchers and peace officers on local, state and federal levels were forever scarred by this tragedy.

Acknowledgements

Santa Barbara County Sheriff Jim Anderson acknowledged the bravery and courage of the men and women of his department who responded and handled these terrible crimes. Additionally, Sheriff Anderson expressed his deepest appreciation to fellow law enforcement officers from the following agencies for their assistance and support to the community and the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department.

California Department of Justice
California Highway Patrol
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Santa Barbara Police Department
University of California at Santa Barbara Police Department
United States Postal Inspectors

The Commission on POST personally thanks Sheriff Jim Anderson, Commander Dominic Palera, Lieutenant Gary Kitzmann and the men and women of the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department for their candid comments and efforts in preparing this report.

The Future

It is difficult to predict when the people of California will experience the next violent crime. Unfortunately, there is no doubt that something will occur that will require the immediate, effective and safe response of California Peace Officers.

Readers of this report are reminded that this is not a comprehensive examination of the incident. This document is an overview of community and law enforcement issues that were encountered that evening and in the days that followed. No one should interpret that the aforementioned words find fault or direct criticism. These comments simply describe considerations that one may face. Hopefully, this information will be used to better prepare law enforcement officers when responding to similar incidents.