Violent Encounters

A Study of Felonious Assaults on Our Nation’s Law Enforcement Officers

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United States Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
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August 2006
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DEDICATION

Each day as law enforcement officers leave their homes to go to work, they also leave wives, husbands, daughters, sons, mothers, and fathers. Officers realize that as they begin their tour of duty, they are potentially risking their lives for the safety of their communities and may be saying a final good-bye to their loved ones.

Daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly officers serve their communities, protecting the citizens without regard to their own safety and comfort. Everyone has read or heard about the physical and emotional toll that this sacrifice can have on law enforcement officers. The stresses of the job can affect their sleeping and eating habits, their social lives, and their job performance. Sometimes overlooked, however, is the effect that law enforcement work may have on officers’ families. In many ways, these family members are the quiet heroes. They offer support and encouragement. They, too, make many sacrifices so their relatives in law enforcement can serve and protect their communities.

Therefore, we dedicate this study to the quiet heroes: the fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, wives and husbands, sons and daughters of law enforcement officers. May you continue to offer support and encouragement. Most of all, may your many sacrifices be rewarded by the safe return of your loved ones every day. Our gratitude and our love go out to each of you.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We sincerely thank the men and women of various law enforcement agencies who agreed to participate in this study and took the time to answer our questions and share their experiences. Without their honest comments—and their commitment to the vocation of law enforcement—we could not have completed the research necessary for our present study. Whatever benefits that may result from this work are due to the contributions each of these officers made. Not only have we learned a great deal from them concerning best practices in law enforcement, we have also experienced firsthand their commitment to their brothers and sisters within the law enforcement family. It is through their personal experiences, private reflections, and occasional struggles with the demons of their violent encounters that they have helped to make our streets safer and to deepen our understanding of tactical law enforcement.

The law enforcement leaders who offered agency case narratives and those who allowed their officers to participate in this study deserve our special thanks. Many of these officials stated that they would most willingly take part in any study or effort that might result in greater safety for their officers.

It is with particular gratitude that we acknowledge Dr. Bryan Villa, the former director of the Crime Control and Prevention Research Division in the U.S. Department of Justice; Mr. Jeff Allison, former chief of the Public Safety Officers’ Benefit Program and currently serving in the Department of Homeland Security as a special advisor to the FBI’s Office of Law Enforcement Coordination; and Mr. James Burch II, deputy director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Without their continued financial support, the collection of data for both In the Line of Fire and the present study could not have been accomplished. We thank them, too, for their sustained interest and encouragement throughout our research.

Violent Encounters is the third and final work in a series that includes Killed in the Line of Duty and In the Line of Fire. Several people played significant roles in supporting the series from inception through completion. These include such individuals as Mr. J. Harper Wilson, former chief of the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program, who supported and encouraged us and, as our supervisor, allowed us to begin examining law enforcement safety, and Mr. John Hall, formerly of the Firearms Training and the Legal Instruction units at the FBI Academy, who continually offered his learned counsel in the areas of firearms and legal aspects of using deadly force. We thank Mr. Robert Chaney, formerly of the U.S. Attorney General’s Office and currently with the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia, who opened many avenues to us within the various components of the criminal justice system. Attending to the procedures of a bureaucracy can cause projects to stall in a quagmire; Mr. Chaney was able to make the process exceptionally manageable for us. Without his assistance, we would have lost a great deal of time doing administrative minutia.

Three individuals unfailingly supported our efforts from very early in our research until the final publication of the present work. They offered suggestions about the development and enhancements of the protocols we employed, and they examined—and recommended revisions to—every chapter. We benefitted from their many years as police officers and their keen insights into law enforcement safety. To these individuals—Mr. Harry Kern, chief of the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy, Mr. Wayne Koka of the FBI’s Critical Incident Response Group, and Mr. Shannon Bohrer with the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commissions—we owe a tremendous amount of gratitude.

We thank Dr. Darlene Howard, Georgetown University, Department of Psychology, for reviewing the chapter on perception and the processing of information. We greatly appreciate her time and comments.
Ms. Bunny S. Morris, associate editor with the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, tirelessly, meticulously, and on her own personal time reviewed every word, examined every sentence, and turned our ramblings into intelligent thoughts. We are greatly indebted to her for the many, many hours she spent editing these chapters. We recognize that it is no easy chore to take three very different writing styles and make them appear consistent, articulate, and clear.

Dr. Stephen R. Band, former chief of the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy, sponsored our research into law enforcement safety, encouraged the publication of these findings, and supported the dissemination of these materials to the law enforcement community. A former police officer, Dr. Band recognized the need for enhanced safety practices within the law enforcement community. His position remained focused on one goal: “If it helps save the life of an officer, it’s worth doing.”

Several members of the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division in West Virginia assisted in various ways. To them, we offer our appreciation and gratitude. These include Mr. Edward Daerr for his steadfast support and encouragement; Ms. Michele Casteel and Mr. Paul McInturf for their support and encouragement; Dr. Maryvictoria Pyne for her continued assistance and interest in ensuring the availability of our previous studies to the law enforcement community; Mr. Larry Deese for his innovative and imaginative use of photography and videography and, along with Ms. Lisa Stout and Ms. Deborah “Lea” Post, on cover design and graphic layout of *Violent Encounters*; Ms. Lorie Doll for her many hours transcribing audio tapes from countless interviews; and Mr. Darrin Moor for the intense and important work of data entry; and Ms. Melissa Blake and Mr. Carlos Davis for their efforts in analyzing and confirming research data.

We also express our sincere thanks to the members of the Training and Systems Education Unit, Multimedia Production Group, the Communications Unit, and the Crime Analysis and Research Development Unit—all of the CJIS Division. Although much of their work occurred behind the scenes, their many dedicated hours ensured the professional appearance of this important information, further enhanced by the many quality photographs strategically placed throughout. We express our gratitude to the personnel from the following agencies who participated in posing for these realistic-looking photographs: Sarasota, Florida, Police Department; Bradenton Beach, Florida, Police Department; Clarksburg, West Virginia, Police Department; Harrison County, West Virginia, Sheriff’s Office; Bridgeport, West Virginia, Police Department; the FBI Police at the CJIS Division; and other CJIS Division personnel.

During the years of research for *Violent Encounters*, as we collected data through interviews and later analyzed the information, several interns from the Behavioral Science Unit contributed their talents. We thank all who assisted us in the many tasks necessary for completing the present work, including literature searches and reviews and specialized data analyses.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Law enforcement officers, charged with safeguarding the nation’s citizens, face potential felonious death and assault daily; they deserve the best possible safety training. The present work, Violent Encounters: A Study of Felonious Assaults on Our Nation’s Law Enforcement Officers, offers insights that may help to improve safety-training techniques. This study concludes a series of research reports on law enforcement safety (see Killed in the Line of Duty [1992] and In the Line of Fire [1997]). The research findings in the present work reveal, in particular, the discrepancy between how officers and offenders perceive the same situation and what might cause such perceptual discrepancies and distortions. Complementing the data analysis, case summaries, and narrative provided in this study are photos of law enforcement scenarios, figures, and tables that help to convey the statistical research findings.

The narratives examined in the following pages can help to make officers aware of perceptual distortions that they might experience in the line of duty. When encounters between officers and suspected or known offenders turn violent and the balance of power shifts in favor of the offender, some facet of the interpersonal dynamic has gone terribly wrong. Close examination of such incidents emphasizes that self-awareness can be critical to survival. What were the officers and offenders expecting, thinking, saying, and doing? What did each of them notice about the situation? Did the officers inadvertently reveal signs of their own lack of mental and physical readiness to meet challenges?

In the data collection phase of this study, the law enforcement community supplied information about approximately 800 incidents of felonious assaults against officers; 40 of the incidents are examined here, involving 43 offenders and 50 officers. All of the available case data, the information gleaned from in-depth interviews with the victim officers and the offenders, and details discovered from visits to the crime scenes are included in the research. Thirty-five of the offenders were interviewed in correctional settings, and 8 offenders within their communities. All 50 of the victim officers, 3 of whom had to retire as a direct result of the injuries they received when feloniously assaulted, chose where they wanted their interviews to take place.

The first three chapters of this study describe the offense incidents (including the surrounding circumstances), the officers, and the offenders—with particular attention to the verbal and non-verbal interactions between officers and offenders within a specific set of circumstances. The discussion highlights areas of law enforcement training that play important roles in officer survival.

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth analysis of weapons-related issues, including types of weapons used and prior weapons experience of not only the offenders but also the victim officers. Commonalities and traits of armed offenders who attempted to kill or did kill law enforcement officers are discussed. The topic of searching suspects who may be armed is particularly important, since failure to notice a concealed weapon can result in a deadly assault. Issues regarding the thoroughness of searches are discussed at length, including being aware of the possibility that female suspects may experience a less rigorous search than do male suspects. How the offenders acquired and used their weapons, how often and where they practiced with them, and their level of accuracy with their weapons—all of these critical issues are explored with reference to the specific incidents examined for the present study.

Besides the three main components of a violent encounter—the offender, the officer, and the circumstance itself—there is a further breakdown that law enforcement officers should understand: the role of perception. Chapter 5 begins with a look at one theory of how humans perceive their environments and then explores some of the real-life mistaken assumptions that can result if one is unaware of certain perceptual pitfalls. Next, case studies provide details about the way in which officers and offenders processed information during actual incidents and, in particular, how their perceptions may or may not have differed. These examples show how perceptual discrepancies involving the dynamic processes of perception, memory, and information retrieval may result in an encounter turning violent and potentially deadly. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the phenomenon of perceptual distortions may affect law enforcement safety training. By incorporating realistic scenarios of violent encounters, training can help to give officers
experience in handling misperceptions and perceptual discrepancies. Such preparation can increase an officer’s chances for survival.

The law enforcement community must continue to examine the phenomenon known as suicide by cop. Chapter 6 explores the topic of suicide by cop and suggests adoption of the following definition: “an act motivated in whole or in part by the offender’s desire to commit suicide that results in a justifiable homicide by a law enforcement officer.” Widespread misunderstanding about this topic has amplified the inherent distress for the people whom such suicides implicate. Prior to 1990, neither the public nor the media commonly used the term suicide by cop when reporting law enforcement incidents that involved the use of deadly force under these circumstances. Although the term is more often used today, a clear and uniformly accepted definition has yet to surface. National standards applying to the incidence of suicide by cop must evolve before the law enforcement community will be able to effectively address the challenges and dangers of offenders who intentionally draw law enforcement officers into the dynamic of suicide. The effects on officers, families, and local communities following incidents where offenders have deliberately compelled officers to use deadly force are both traumatic and long lasting. Officers involved in these tragedies emphasize the need for additional training by law enforcement agencies, an increase in conscious awareness of these incidents within communities, and greater interaction with the media so that news coverage of these incidents is accurate and complete.

Safety training for law enforcement officers is continually improving. The officers and offenders who participated in this study identified what they considered to be important training issues. Chapter 7 includes not only their comments on how lack of training may have affected the outcome of a felonious assault, but also a discussion of the extent to which training and procedural matters—such as written policies and directives—can positively influence the outcome of a violent encounter. Special attention is given to a comparison of physical training and mental training. Topics covered in this chapter include, for example, vehicle stops and pursuits, facing a drawn gun, the use and malfunction of firearms, and using nonconventional weapons. The training issues specific to non-uniformed officers, handcuffing and escape techniques, answering electronic alarms, the myth of one-shot drops, and evacuating wounded officers—these and other topics are explored. Throughout the chapter, scenarios from actual cases demonstrate that training does indeed influence the way that officers behave when involved in a critical incident. A most dangerous time for officers is when they begin to disregard or shortcut their safety training. The chapter concludes with a few suggestions about how best to learn from training sessions.

Chapter 8, includes case summaries of some of the incidents that comprise the current study. The details provided here may help readers better understand what the victim officers experienced during the assaults. Review of these scenarios points toward implications of related training issues, not only for the officers but also for the administrators, trainers, and supervisors.

The major theme that threads throughout this study derives from the concept of the deadly mix. As explained in chapter 9, this term describes an integrative process encompassing all aspects of the officer, the offender, and the circumstances that brought them together at the time of the felonious assault. Conceptually, the deadly mix is a term that can be used to provide some insight into why law enforcement assaults and deaths still occur on an unrelenting basis regardless of technological advances, innovative equipment, and proactive policing strategies.

Ideally, encounters between law enforcement officers and offenders would never turn violent, and the number of law enforcement officers feloniously killed or assaulted would diminish to zero. In practice, however, violent encounters between officers and offenders will continue to plague America, sometimes involving the deadly mix that often results in serious injury or death to those charged with safeguarding its citizens. Only when detectives, use-of-force investigators, supervisors, and administrators examine the various components of the deadly mix will a greater understanding of these encounters emerge. To make an objective assessment of each case, it is necessary to carefully and completely examine all aspects of the incident thus allowing the facts to surface.

It is in the best interest of every law enforcement agency, every officer, every community, and every citizen to take the time to fully and impartially examine the events described in the present study. This combined effort will help America’s law enforcement officers continue to ably protect and serve their communities and their brothers and sisters in the law enforcement family. Most of all, it will help them survive these violent encounters; they will return home to their loved ones each day; and they will lead long, productive lives after fulfilling their roles as society’s guardians.
INTRODUCTION

Violent Encounters: A Study of Felonious Assaults on Our Nation’s Law Enforcement Officers is the final installment of a trilogy that explores many issues affecting the safety of law enforcement officers. First in the series was Killed in the Line of Duty: A Study of Selected Felonious Killings of Law Enforcement Officers (1992), followed by In the Line of Fire: Violence Against Law Enforcement (1997). With the publication of Violent Encounters (2006), an arduous yet rewarding journey comes to an end. As we conducted the investigation and research, compiled the data, analyzed the findings, and wrote the study, we drew upon a rich background in law enforcement. Anthony J. Pinizzotto is the senior scientist and clinical forensic psychologist in the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy. Edward F. Davis is a retired lieutenant with the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C., and an instructor in the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy. Charles E. Miller III is a retired captain with the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C., and the coordinator of the FBI’s Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Program; he is also an instructor in the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services Division. Together, we offer this study to members of the criminal justice system, the academic community, and the general population who are searching for ways to reduce the number of felonious deaths, injuries, and assaults sustained by members of America’s law enforcement profession.

Seeking an Answer

Over 15 years ago in a now nonexistent office of the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, special agents and former law enforcement officers discussed an incoming National Law Enforcement Telecommunications System message that involved a police officer’s line-of-duty death. In time, UCR personnel would record the facts surrounding the officer’s death in the annual Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted publication. The report would include the officer’s age, sex, race, physical attributes, years of service, task being performed at the time of death, weapons used in the deadly assault, geographic area of the country where the encounter occurred, and the type of law enforcement agency that employed the officer. The publication also would contain similar relevant information regarding the offender involved in the incident.

The discussion in this small office, located only two blocks from FBI Headquarters, focused on one question: Why? Why did this particular incident result in the death of an officer? The agents and former officers hoped to find an answer by studying the personal, professional, and demographic facts regarding the officer, the offender, and the incident that resulted in the officer’s death. The narrative of this incident describes an initial offense that was not out of the ordinary: a routine traffic stop. “Routine” because officers perform this task many times a day, every day, for an entire career. But this time, it ended differently; it ended tragically.

Was something unique about this encounter? Was something special about this officer or this offender? Why did this officer, known within the community as quiet and nonconfrontational, turn violent? Why did this particular incident result in the death of this officer? The answers to these questions, however, never surfaced among the stark facts of the case.

Ultimately, these questions led to the development of a special, nationwide study that resulted in Killed in the Line of Duty. The introduction articulates, as follows, the need that the study fulfilled:

Having conducted law enforcement training throughout the Nation and having repeatedly had the unanswered questions posed, the staff of the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program formulated a plan for a project that would combine and study the felonious killings of officers through an interactive and integrative approach. The study would address the psychology of the offender, the behavior of the officer, and the circumstances in which the officer lost his or her life. Clearly, such an integrative study could practically and substantially add to the current base of knowledge on officers’ slayings. While it
would not answer all the “questions” or prevent all future deaths, it would examine the complex situations in a different manner than had been previously accomplished.

A review of these incidents included a thorough analysis of departmental investigative reports, forensic records, and court documents. UCR staff conducted interviews with fellow officers and supervisors of the decedents, as well as the offenders associated with the fatal assaults.

Killed in the Line of Duty was the first study of its kind on a national scale; it analyzed the details of 51 incidents resulting in the felonious deaths of 54 officers at the hands of 50 offenders. Although it raised more questions than it answered, the study revealed a number of factors present during the incidents that influenced their outcomes, and it set forth an intriguing assessment: “In combination, or integratively, these factors combine into a ‘deadly mix’ of an easygoing officer who will use force only as a last resort with an offender of aberrant behavior in an uncontrolled, dangerous situation.”

Reporting the results to various law enforcement agencies throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia, we recognized that having completed the 1992 study, the work actually had just begun. Although one sheriff mentioned that he attributed the saved life of one of his deputies to his having read the study, we felt that too many unanswered questions remained. Consequently, we requested and received funds from the National Institute of Justice to assist in a second study on law enforcement safety.

Further Investigation

When researching the In the Line of Fire study, we used the same methodology that we used in the first study but revised and adapted the protocol so that it pertained to officers who had been seriously assaulted, along with the offenders who attacked them. The victim officers’ comments on the circumstances of the assaults contribute immensely to an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics that operated during the encounters.

The In the Line of Fire study was a collaboration between the Behavioral Science Unit of the FBI’s Training and Development Division and the Training and Systems Education Unit (formerly the Education/Training Services Unit) of the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services Division. Conducted over a three-year period, the study examined 40 cases, which had 52 victim officers and 42 offenders. Nine cases involved more than one victim and three involved more than one offender. As stated in the introduction, “Like its companion, Killed in the Line of Duty, it does not answer all questions. It does take us further in the process of understanding the various threats that face officers as they perform their duties.”

Not surprisingly, there was a striking similarity between the 1992 and 1997 studies in terms of the various threats that officers faced as they performed their duties. Law enforcement officers continued to become unwitting components of the deadly mix. Both studies found that officers often neglect their own safety when performing their duties. The two studies also discovered that many officers fit the following categories of personal characteristics:

- hard working;
- friendly and well-liked;
- fails to follow all the rules, especially in regard to arrests, confrontations with prisoners, traffic stops, and waiting for backup when backup is available; and
- feels they can “read” others/situations and will drop their guard as a result.

When officers received calls for service, as well as when they initiated contacts, their mental and physical reactions were geared toward responding, helping, clearing the call, and returning to service for the next call. They often were thinking about the next call before they cleared the current one. Consequently, they sacrificed their own safety for what they perceived as “the greater good: the safety of the community.” The officers sometimes failed to keep in mind that their own safety must come first so that they remain alive and able to protect the community.

Unlike the Killed in the Line of Duty study, which explored the topic of officers killed in the line of duty, the In the Line of Fire study included officers who survived assaults and were thus able to explain their actions or offer reasons why they chose not to act. The additional insight that we gained from these comments triggered the questions that led to the present book, in particular: How and why do offenders and officers have different perceptions about a situation? Violent Encounters examines this and related issues that help to explain the deadly mix that results in tragedy. (Further discussion of the deadly mix and a conceptual graphic of this phenomenon appear in chapter 8.)
Perceiving Challenges

In the first study, a working hypothesis was that the officers and offenders did not perceive the gravity of the situation to the same degree. It appeared that by the time the officer realized the seriousness of the situation, it was too late. Because of the nature of the first study, it remained an open question. It was, however, tested in the second one, wherein we asked the officers and offenders in each assault case if they shared the same evaluation of the circumstances that brought them together. The discrepancy proved noteworthy. Two-thirds of the offenders stated that they believed the officer did not know how serious the situation had become just before the assault occurred. Without knowledge that these offenders made this assessment, the officers involved in these same incidents said that they were unaware of the impending assault.

What causes these perceptual differences? Even though clearly life-and-death situations, they could not have been processed in a more strikingly opposite manner. What is it in the histories, training, and experiences of these individual officers and offenders that produced such wide discrepancies?

The way officers perceive situations motivates them to act. A common experience within law enforcement involves witness statements. Officers arrive at the scene of an incident and separate the witnesses so they cannot hear or observe what the others say. When the officers compare the statements they wonder whether the witnesses observed the same incident. The statements often contradict one another or contain inconsistent information. Experienced law enforcement officers recognize this phenomenon and are not surprised when it occurs. In fact, they often use special interviewing techniques to obtain accurate statements that reflect the facts of the incident. What does surprise them is that they too are subject to these perceptual distortions and misperceptions. An officer-involved shooting scenario can illustrate this.

After the dust settled, the sergeant asked, “How many times did you fire?” With some certitude, the officer responded, “Twice, maybe three times, but I think only twice.” Upon examining the officer’s magazine, the sergeant found that seven rounds had been expended.

What happened to the officer’s perception of the incident? Is this a rare occurrence? Is the officer’s memory faulty? What about offenders? Do they possess greater or lesser accuracy than officers? Is this normal? What is it in the officers’ and offenders’ lives that affects their perceptions in these encounters? What messages did officers unknowingly and unintentionally send to offenders giving them the sense that they were vulnerable on that particular day? What implications for safety training came about as a result of examining these circumstances?

After we had gathered a significant amount of data for the current study, but before its publication, we began to incorporate the findings into the training offered to law enforcement officers nationwide. Five officers who received the revised training contacted us and stated that the training helped them to become more safety conscious in their daily patrol duties. It made them more alert to danger signals that offenders display. It also made them more aware that they, as officers, emit signals about their own mental readiness to meet challenges—signals that offenders are often able to “read.” In the words of one of the officers: “The training you provided me in your seminar on law enforcement street survival helped me to recognize the presence of a threat and react appropriately. The danger signs were present. I’m not sure I would have seen them and acted on them as quickly as I did if it hadn’t been for your training.” This statement aptly describes our motivation for publishing this three-part series on law enforcement safety. If one officer’s life is saved, all of our work, all of the physical and emotional pain that assaulted officers endured during the attacks and in the later retelling of them, and all of the grief borne valiantly by the surviving families and friends of deceased officers will serve a higher purpose and keep one more dedicated member of the law enforcement profession from succumbing to the deadly mix.
This chapter presents an introductory assessment of the physical, mental, and emotional states of the victim officers and the offenders—and the circumstances under which they encountered one another. Also included here are the method of the officer’s arrival at the scene and several specific characteristics germane to the incidents examined. In an effort to provide the reader with the best possible understanding of the conditions and circumstances that brought the victim officers and the offenders together, this chapter focuses on the circumstances and conditions that immediately preceded the attacks. Subsequent chapters examine the facts and circumstances relating to the victim officers, the offenders, and the assault.

**Condition of Victim Officers and Offenders**

The investigators examined any physical, emotional, or mental condition that could have affected the law enforcement officers and the offenders prior to the incidents. These factors included their age, general health, and lifestyle choices.

**Officers**

The 50 victim officers (49 males and 1 female) who participated in this study had an average age of 35 years. Thirty-five officers reported their general health at the time of the assault as excellent. Thirteen officers reported their health as better than average, and 2 officers reported it as average. No officers reported their general health as below average or poor at the time of the assault.

The average weight of the victim officers at the time of the assault was 197 pounds. The following breakdown of their physiques is based on subjective observation: 11 in the slim/slender range, 25 in the medium/average group, 6 in the muscular category, and 8 in the heavy/stocky group. No officers were in the thin/skinny or obese/fat categories. All of the officers had body weight proportionate to their height.

Twenty-three officers reported participating in running, jogging, swimming, aerobics, weight lifting, or organized sports prior to the assault. Many said that they engaged in two or more of these activities. Twenty-seven officers indicated that they did not take part in any type of physical fitness activities prior to the incident.

Forty-eight of the victim officers reported that they had no physical limitations at the time of the assault. Of the 2 officers who indicated having a physical problem, 1 had a head cold and the other was recovering from a back injury. Neither of these officers felt that their physical limitations negatively affected their performance.

Questions relating to tobacco and alcohol use captured frequency rather than quantity. In response, 13 of the victim officers reported using tobacco products regularly at the time of the incident. Of these, 6 officers chewed tobacco or used snuff, and the 7 remaining officers smoked cigarettes, averaging 1.4 packs a day. Thirty-five victim officers reported occasional, moderate use of alcohol, defined as consuming alcohol on average one or fewer times per week. Of these officers, 4 disclosed consuming alcohol within 18 to 24 hours prior to the
incident. None of the officers had consumed alcoholic beverages immediately before or during their tours of duty in which the incident occurred.

Six officers advised that they had experienced some type of precipitating stressor or crisis prior to the incident. One officer reported the death of a spouse, and 1 reported a divorce. Three officers indicated recent changes in job assignments. All of these stressors occurred 3 to 6 months prior to the assault. An additional officer reported having had an argument with his wife prior to reporting for his tour of duty. None of the officers believed that these stressors or crisis situations contributed to the outcome of the incident.

The 50 victim officers who participated in the study reported having been on duty an average of 5 hours prior to the assault, and 8 of these officers indicated having attended court or having engaged in outside employment or overtime within the 24 hours before the incident. These additional activities averaged 6 hours in length. None of these officers felt that fatigue had any influence upon the outcome of the incident. These officers stated that they routinely worked from 10 to 24 hours overtime a week with no adverse effects on their physical or mental condition. All of the victim officers reported that no physical or emotional reasons existed that unduly distracted them from the demands of their occupation at the time of the incident.

**Offenders**

The 43 offenders (41 males and 2 females) participating in this study had an average age of 26. Forty-one offenders reported that their general health at the time of the assault was excellent. One offender reported that his general health was average, and another reported that his was below average or poor.

The average weight of the offenders was 175 pounds. A breakdown of their physiques revealed 5 offenders in the thin/skinny range, 11 in the slim/slender, 16 in the medium/average, 6 in the muscular, 5 in the heavy/stocky, and none in the obese/fat group. All of the offenders had body weight proportionate to their height. One offender, who assaulted two officers with a motor vehicle, reported having a physical limitation at the time of the assault.

Thirty-five offenders disclosed the use of alcohol once a week or more, with 13 using alcohol daily. Thirty offenders reported using illicit drugs once a week or more, with 20 of them using illicit drugs or narcotic substances daily. Thirty-six offenders reported having used...
drugs or alcohol, or both, prior to committing the assault. (Chapter 3 examines in detail the offenders’ use of alcohol and drugs.)

Twenty-one offenders reported having experienced some type of precipitating stressor or crisis prior to the incident. The majority of these offenders (11) reported multiple precipitating stressors or crises, all occurring 6 months or less before the assault. The most frequent stressors included marriage problems, deaths of close family members, and changes in living conditions.

All of the 43 offenders who participated in the study admitted to having criminal histories prior to the incident of examination. Several had had multiple encounters with the criminal justice system, and some fell within more than one of the following categories: 22 had been incarcerated in some type of juvenile detention facility, 17 had pending criminal charges in the judicial system, and 15 were wanted or believed themselves to be wanted persons at the time of the incident. Overall, 41 offenders stated that they had been incarcerated either as an adult or as a juvenile, or both, prior to the incident.

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<td>3 arrest situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 off-duty/robbery in progress</td>
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<td>1 conducting investigation</td>
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</table>

Incident Circumstances

Figure 1.1 depicts the circumstances at the scene of the incident for the current study and for the previous two studies: Killed in the Line of Duty (1992) and In the Line of Fire (1997). The circumstances at the scene of the incident are based on the criteria that data analysts with the FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program use when categorizing incidents for the annual publication titled Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA).

In an attempt to better understand the individual circumstances each law enforcement officer faced, the current study compiled data on whether officers initiated contact or were dispatched to the scene. A clear majority of the incidents (28) involved victim officers who were attacked after they initiated contact with the offenders. The remaining 12 incidents dealt with officers who had been dispatched to the scene of the encounter. Table 1.1 illustrates in greater detail the specific circumstances at each incident and whether the victim officers initiated or responded to the scene of the incident.

Assault Location

As in the previous two studies, the most prevalent assault location reported for the current study was a highway/roadway/alley (22 cases). Eight assaults occurred in residences/homes/apartments, 4 in parking lots/garages, 2 at drug stores/doctor’s offices/hospitals, 1 at a commercial office building, 1 at a restaurant, 1 in the hallway of an apartment building, and 1 in the courtyard of an apartment building.

Tour of Duty at Time of the Assault

According to LEOKA data, the majority of instances of officers killed and assaulted occurred during the hours of darkness. As demonstrated in Figure 1.2, Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted by Tour of Duty, the tour of duty or shifts the officers were assigned to when assaulted in the current study, closely parallels those in the previous two studies.

Among the incidents examined for the current study, 9 involved officers attacked during periods of total darkness. In 4 of those incidents, officers reported using a flashlight to illuminate the scene. In the first incident, the officer became engaged in a foot pursuit, dropped his flashlight, and continued his pursuit, ignoring the loss of the flashlight. The offender then fired upon and struck the officer numerous times. The lack of lighting did not appear to have been an influencing factor in this incident because the offender stated that he was committed to carrying out the attack regardless of lighting conditions. In the second incident, two officers were conducting a traffic stop of a lone individual. The lights of the patrol vehicle provided artificial lighting; however, the passenger compartment remained totally dark. The officer on the passenger side of the vehicle shined his flashlight on the passenger’s right hand, which revealed the offender holding a handgun. This made the assault upon the approach
In the third incident, an officer was in foot pursuit of an offender who became concealed by darkness in the rear yard of a residence. As the officer scanned the area with his flashlight, the offender fired a handgun and struck the officer in the chest. When asked about firing the handgun, the offender stated, “I fired at the flashlight.” In the fourth incident, an officer who had an illuminated flashlight was chasing an offender on foot. The officer temporarily lost sight of the offender while running through a dark courtyard. Unexpectedly, the offender shot the officer in the chest and leg. When asked if the officer had a flashlight, the offender stated, “Yeah, it was lit up; that’s how I noticed him. He’s easy. For one thing, he’s got a flashlight, and he’s got on black, the word police lit up like a reflector.”

In the current study, no officers used their flashlights as a defensive weapon. In the In the Line of Fire study, however, four officers employed a flashlight in an attempt to defend themselves, each failing to stop the attack or subdue the assailant. None of these officers reported receiving training in the use of the flashlight as a defensive weapon.

Officers’ Arrival at the Scene

Forty-nine of the 50 victim officers who were interviewed for the present study arrived at the crime scene in vehicles, including 2 off-duty officers. The 1 remaining officer was assigned to prisoner control at a local hospital for the entire tour of duty. The victim officers traveled an average of 3 miles to the scene of the assault. Six officers reported engaging in high-speed driving to arrive at the scene. The high-speed driving incidents involved 1 felony and 2 traffic pursuits, an armed suspect call, a bank alarm, and 1 domestic violence in progress.

Of the 12 incidents in which victim officers were dispatched to the assault scene, officers involved in 3 of them stated that they had formulated a plan of action prior to arriving at the scene. In one of these incidents, an officer communicated with another officer who had responded to the same assignment; together, they planned their approach to a residence on an armed suspect call. In another incident, a lone officer on a bank alarm assignment planned his approach based on the location of windows in the bank. In the third incident, two officers decided to employ “contact and cover” prior to approaching a suspect.

Three officers advised that they had been dispatched to the same location for the same type of call for service on previous occasions. In three incidents, the officers reported that they knew the offenders who subsequently assaulted them and had had previous personal contact with these subjects. Officers involved in two of these incidents had arrested the offender on prior occasions.

Offenders’ Arrival at the Scene

In 26 incidents, offenders arrived at the crime scene in motor vehicles. In 6 incidents, offenders walked to the crime scene. In 2 incidents, the offenders were under arrest for another crime when the assault occurred; one of these incidents took place while the offender was receiving medical treatment at a hospital facility, and the other happened while the offender was being transported.
in a patrol wagon. Six additional incidents took place at the offenders’ residences after the victim officers had responded to a variety of circumstances.

In 23 incidents, the scene of the assault was the same location as that of the initial encounter between the offender and the officer. Of the 17 incidents where the assault location differed from the scene of the initial encounter, 8 involved vehicle pursuits, 7 entailed foot pursuits, and 2 occurred after the offender was in custody. Concerning the 15 vehicle and foot pursuits, 5 offenders stated that they deliberately led the officer on a planned route or into a particular area.

Influence of Others at the Scene

In 19 incidents, offenders who were accompanied by other people attacked officers who initially approached them. These attacks occurred in a wide variety of circumstances, including traffic stops, domestic violence calls, robberies in progress, felony and misdemeanor arrest situations, foot chases, and vehicle pursuits. Five of the victim officers reported that they believed the presence of the additional people influenced the offender’s actions in committing the assault. Two of these officers were partners in the same incident. They were involved in the felony pursuit of a vehicle occupied by four gang members, one of whom was shooting at the officers. One of the officers stated that in his opinion, the shooter “could not give up in front of his boys.” In another incident, an officer responded to a robbery-in-progress call involving four suspects. This officer reported feeling that one of the offenders shot at him because “they were all a part of the robbery.” In the remaining two incidents, females accompanied the male offenders. In both of these incidents, the victim officers stated that they felt that the attack occurred because the offender wanted to “impress the girl.” In only two incidents did the offenders’ companions actively participate in the assault.

Presence of Additional Law Enforcement Personnel

In 16 incidents, officers were assaulted while in the immediate presence of additional law enforcement officers. Nine of these incidents occurred with one additional officer present, and 7 took place with two to six additional officers at the scene. These 16 incidents involved offenders attempting to avoid apprehension for other crimes, including 3 stolen motor vehicles, 2 homicides, 2 bank robberies, 2 armed robberies, 2 firearm assaults, 1 felony warrant in another jurisdiction, 1 felony fraud offense, and 1 DUI involving a vehicle pursuit. In the remaining 2 incidents, an individual wishing to commit suicide attacked officers, and a disturbance call at a residence led to the assault of several other officers.

In 14 of the 16 assaults committed in the presence of additional officers, offenders used firearms. In another incident, the offender attempted to run over an officer with a motor vehicle, and, in the remaining incident, the offender attempted to commit suicide by charging at an officer while brandishing a knife. No incidents in the current study occurred where an offender initiated a physical attack without the use of weapons when additional law enforcement personnel accompanied the victim officer.

In each of these 16 incidents, the offender initiated the assault with a deadly weapon, consisting of firearms, motor vehicles, and knives or cutting instruments. In 4 of these incidents, offenders were unaware of the presence of additional officers when they initiated the attack.

Weapons Used in the Assaults

The following is an overview—across all three studies in the trilogy—of the types of weapons and types of handgun cartridges used by the offenders. A more detailed discussion of the type and origin of firearms used by the offenders in the current study will be discussed in chapter 4.

Statistics show that handguns are the weapon of choice for offenders who kill or attempt to kill law enforcement officers. Officers were assaulted with handguns in 29 of the 40 incidents examined in the current study. Figure 1.3 illustrates, across all three studies, the types of handgun cartridges used to kill and assault victim officers.

Data from the Killed in the Line of Duty and In the Line of Fire studies show that offenders used the .38-caliber cartridge most frequently to kill and assault victim officers. In the current study, the offenders’ handguns ranged in caliber from .22 to .44 magnum with the most frequently used being the 9 millimeter. This range also included one 410-gauge shotgun shell fired from a single-shot derringer. When asked how they chose the weapon used in the assault incident, 22 offenders stated that they based their weapon choice on availability, rather than caliber, type of action, or manufacturer’s brand name. Similarly, 25 of the offenders reported that they chose...
the ammunition type based on availability. Four of the offenders assaulted officers with weapons taken from the officer.

In total, 41 of the 50 officers who participated in the current study were assaulted with firearms. Of these, 36 were assaulted with handguns, 4 with rifles, and 1 with a shotgun. Four officers were assaulted with knives or cutting instruments and three with motor vehicles (categorized as “other dangerous weapons” in the LEOKA publications). Three officers were assaulted by the use of personal weapons (hands, fists, or feet) in three separate and unrelated incidents. Two of these incidents resulted in the victim officers receiving critical injuries. The third incident produced serious injury to the offender who unsuccessfully attempted to take the officer’s handgun.

Four incidents involved offenders using multiple weapons to assault the officers. Handguns and rifles were employed by multiple offenders in two incidents. One offender used a motor vehicle and a rifle in the third incident, and another offender employed a handgun and a motor vehicle in the fourth incident.

Forty-one of the weapons used to assault officers were brought to the scene by the offenders. In four cases where the offenders were inside their residences when they attacked the officers, the offenders obtained the weapons from the dwellings. The weapons used in these incidents consisted of a rifle, a handgun, a butcher knife, and a carving fork. None of these offenders had called for the services of law enforcement, and all viewed the presence of the officer as an intrusion.

All but 1 of the victim officers were armed with their department-authorized handgun. One officer removed his handgun and secured it, as required by departmental guidelines, to escort a prisoner into a cell block facility. In addition, 8 officers were armed with shotguns, 14 with night sticks or collapsible batons, 9 with chemical spray, and 5 with backup weapons. All of the backup weapons were handguns that the officers concealed on their person.

**Geographical Variations**

The LEOKA reports of law enforcement killings and assaults follow the same geographic divisions used by the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, which
presents statistics for the nation by region. The regions are the Northeast, the Midwest, the South, and the West. The 2004 edition of LEOKA reported that for the 10-year period 1995-2004, a disproportionate number of law enforcement officers were feloniously killed in the South. During this period, 47 percent of the slain officers were from the South, 20 percent from the West, 18 percent from the Midwest, 9 percent from the Northeast, and 6 percent from the National Territories. The 2004 publication also reported assault rates for each geographic region at the rate of 14 per 100 officers in the South, 11 per 100 officers in the Midwest, 11 per 100 officers in the West, and 10 per 100 officers in the Northeast.

A disproportionate number of incidents examined in the current study took place in the South: 13 of the 40 incidents occurred there. While cases from the South dominated those studied, no conclusions were reached concerning the reasons for the region’s high rate of law enforcement officers who were killed and assaulted. For more discussion on the disproportionate number of officer killings and assaults in the South, see chapter 1 of the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study.

**Conclusion**

In summary, annual statistics from the LEOKA publication and data from all three of the studies suggested that officers were most likely to be assaulted after being dispatched to or observing disturbances, interrupting crimes in progress, or attempting arrests. The officers were most frequently assigned to vehicles, and the assaults occurred on streets, highways, or in parking lots. In contrast to LEOKA data, almost half of the officers in the current study were assaulted at a different location from the scene of the initial encounter. The offenders in this study were most likely to use vehicles for transportation and were not usually accompanied by others.

Not one of the factors discussed in this chapter was, by itself, the cause of the assaults on the officers. However, subsequent chapters will reveal that all of these factors contributed to understanding the circumstances surrounding the assaults. Only after the comprehensive review of aspects concerning the officer and the offender can the integrative nature of these circumstances become clear. The circumstances did not cause the assaults but, rather, contributed to them.
CHAPTER TWO
The Victim Officer

The law enforcement officers who participated in this study did so with the full knowledge that the facts and circumstances of their incidents possibly would be included in this publication and distributed to law enforcement agencies throughout the nation. Therefore, their actions would come under scrutiny from the entire law enforcement community. While the interview process was not always easy for the officers, it proved especially difficult for those with serious and permanent bodily injuries. The investigators questioned the officers in great detail about the facts and circumstances that led to their injuries, their thoughts when they realized the seriousness of these injuries, their actions immediately after the incident, and the aftereffects of the incident. These officers related the effects of the incident on their personal and family lives, as well as with their respective agencies.

In spite of these obstacles, the officers were forthright and candid in relating what may appear to readers as favorable and unfavorable information relating to their assaults. They willingly put aside any personal reservations about participating in the study for a greater cause, the welfare of the entire law enforcement community. At the end of an interview process, one officer stated: “It’s been two years since the incident. I thought I was ready to talk about it, but I can tell you what’s going to happen. The demons will come again tonight.” All of the officers hoped that by sharing their personal experiences, they could prevent their fellow law enforcement officers from suffering the same types of attack. These officers are a credit to their profession, and their contributions to this special study cannot be overstated. Their willingness to participate serves as a fine example of the dedication to duty of the law enforcement officers in this nation.

Background

In examining the background of the victim officers in this study, the investigators looked at family structure, education, and military service. They also asked if the officer had experienced physical confrontations in childhood or adulthood prior to becoming a law enforcement officer. Finally, they asked the officers about their motivations for entering the law enforcement profession. All 50 of the victim officers who participated in this study described their family lives as stable. In terms of their family structures while growing up, 39 officers were raised by both natural parents, 9 by a single natural parent, 1 by adoptive parents, and 1 by grandparents.

Forty-two victim officers attended public schools, and 8 attended private or parochial schools. All of the victim officers graduated from high school. The higher

All 50 of the victim officers described their family life as stable, with 39 being raised by both natural parents.
education for these officers included 1 master’s degree, 12 bachelor’s degrees, and 13 associate degrees. In contrast, among the 52 victim officers who participated in the In the Line of Fire study, 45 attended public schools, 7 went to parochial schools, and 2 did not have a high school diploma or equivalency; 16 had bachelor’s degrees; and 14 possessed associate degrees.

Of the 50 victim officers in the current study, 12 served in the armed forces for an average of 4 years each and were honorably discharged. Five of the officers reported that they continued military service in the reserves. All of the officers received formal weapons training while in the military.

Forty-four of the victim officers stated that their first violent physical confrontation occurred at the average age of 12 or earlier. Six officers reported never having been involved in such a situation. Eighteen of the confrontations were with classmates, 10 with neighbors, 6 with friends, 6 with strangers, and 3 with relatives. One officer could not recall the relationship or circumstances of the violent encounter. The officers described these confrontations as, for the most part, fistfights over minor matters. Twenty-four of the officers reported that they had won the confrontations, variously defining “winning” as having made the other party give up or quit.

Seven officers reported that prior to their employment with a law enforcement agency they had been victims of physical violence during adulthood. Two had been victims of commercial robberies, 1 had received a minor stab wound while attempting to intervene in an altercation, 1 had been struck with a bottle and lost several teeth in an unprovoked attack in a bar room, 1 had been hit with a crowbar in a parking lot after exchanging words with an individual, 1 had been battered with a piece of metal while engaged in a fist fight at work, and 1 had been assaulted with hands, fists, and feet outside a bar for no apparent reason.

When asked to identify their motivations for choosing the law enforcement profession, the victim officers cited various reasons, with some reporting multiple reasons. Nineteen officers reported that they wanted to serve their communities. For example, one officer stated that while in the Boy Scouts, he worked with police officers in a community service program. He was so impressed by these officers that he made up his mind at an early age to serve the community in the same manner. Ten additional officers stated that they wanted to make a difference in their communities. One related that his neighborhood had become run-down and that the quality of life had deteriorated when narcotics dealers took over one of the street corners; he stated that he wanted to help rid the community of such problems. Eight other officers stated that they had wanted to be police officers since childhood but did not cite any specific reasons. Five more officers stated that they became interested in police work through friends who were law enforcement officers, and another 4 considered the profession because their fathers were law enforcement officers. Six officers did not articulate a specific reason for choosing a career in law enforcement.

**Law Enforcement Training**

The 50 officers who participated in this study attended various types of training academies prior to entering law enforcement service. The breakdown by academy type was:

- local police academies (27 officers)
- regional academies (15 officers)
- state academies (6 officers)
- federal academies (2 officers)

The officers averaged 25 years of age when entering the law enforcement academies, which, on average, provided 18 weeks of training.

All of the victim officers in the current study met the standards established for law enforcement certification within their jurisdictions. Thirty-four officers reported finishing within the top one-third of their academy classes. None of the officers reported attending more than one law enforcement academy.
The officers’ training at the law enforcement academy included physical skills, tactics, and lectures to assist officers in surviving a felonious assault. (See Table 2.1.) In the current study, all 50 officers received sidearm and shotgun training while at the academy.

After basic recruit training, the victims’ departments offered ongoing in-service training, as described in Table 2.2.

Twenty-eight officers reported that, in addition to basic and in-service weapons training, they also had an interest in weapons outside law enforcement. Twenty-two were hunters, 2 were competitive shooters, and 4 were involved in noncompetitive shooting.

The victim officers in the current study were asked if their agencies afforded post-academy physical training. Thirteen reported that their agencies supplied a facility for off-duty physical training. Only 3 officers said that their agencies provided an organized in-service physical training program.

Table 2.3 summarizes the demographic attributes of the 50 officers who participated in this study, as well as those involved in *Killed in the Line of Duty* (1992) and

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**TABLE 2.1 Basic Recruit Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>1997 Study</th>
<th>2006 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hours per year</td>
<td>% Affirmative Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side Arm</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotgun</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baton</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Jack</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Agent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxing/Martial Arts</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taser</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon Retention</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-defense/physical fitness</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Intervention</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Survival</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foot Pursuits</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1 officer, 2 hours

**TABLE 2.2 In-Service Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>1997 Study</th>
<th>2006 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hours per year</td>
<td>% Affirmative Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side Arm</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotgun</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baton</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Agent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taser</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon Retention</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1 officer, 2 hours

Basic Recruit & In-Service Training data not available from the 1992 Study.
In the Line of Fire (1997). The victim officers in the current study were slightly taller and heavier than those in the previous two studies. On average, in all three studies, the officers were substantially heavier but slightly shorter than the offenders who attacked them. However, when the offenders were asked if the victim officers’ demographics, such as age, size, race, or gender, influenced their decisions to commit the assault, only 2 of the offenders stated that age had influenced them. In these cases, the victim officers were 16 and 35 years older than the respective offenders who committed the attack. Additionally, two nonwhite offenders stated that the officers’ race (white) served as an influencing factor. These victim officers also were alone when they encountered the offenders. The size and gender of the officers assaulted in the current study did not appear to have influenced the offenders.

The victim officers in this study had, on average, 9 years of law enforcement service at the time they were assaulted, which is similar to the length of service found among the officers in the previous two studies. In the current study, the breakdown of service was 1-5 years (34 percent), 6-10 years (30 percent), 11-15 years (20 percent), 16-20 years (8 percent), and 21 or more years (8 percent). A review of the demographic descriptors from all three of the studies indicated that, on average, the victim officers were older than their attackers, better educated, and more likely to have family responsibilities.

### Agency Affiliations

Figure 2.1 represents the agency affiliations of the victim law enforcement officers for each of the three studies. These agencies varied not only in type but also in size and generally reflected typical law enforcement service throughout the nation.

### Duty Assignments

When examining the circumstances surrounding the assaults on victim officers, the investigators looked at the type of duty the officers were assigned to at the time of their attack. Of the 50 officers in this study, 42 were in uniform and 8 in plain clothes: 5 in casual clothes and 3 in business suits. The offenders did not consider what the officers wore at the time of the assault as influencing their decision to commit the assault. On duty—whether in uniform, a business suit, or casual clothes—the victims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2.3 Demographic Descriptors, Victim Officers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Height</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5’10”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Weight</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188 lbs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 yr. college degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 yr. college degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average years of service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 2.1 Professional Affiliations, Victim Officers

Due to rounding, the percentages may not add to 100.0.

FIGURE 2.2 Type of Duty Assignment, Victim Officers

Due to rounding, the percentages may not add to 100.0.

* No off-duty data available for the 1997 study.
of the current study were perceived by the offenders as being authority figures whose job it was to protect their communities from the offenders.

Figure 2.2 depicts, for all three studies, the type of duty assignment for the victim officers. Although the figure shows that 20 percent of the law enforcement officers participating in the current study were assigned to two-person vehicles, it omits reference to another important observation about officers in two-person vehicles. In three of the incidents, three officers were attacked when they became separated from their partners during foot pursuits. In two of the incidents, two officers were attacked by offenders who were unaware of the presence of an additional officer. In other words, 50 percent of the law enforcement personnel who were assaulted while assigned to two-person vehicles were attacked by offenders who knew—or believed—that the victim was alone at the time of the assault.

Work Performance

Work performance of victim officers was another aspect looked at in all three studies. However, performance ratings are subjective, and criteria for evaluating personnel are not standardized; they vary from agency to agency. It is important to keep this in mind when comparing numbers across the three studies as the numbers may appear skewed. For example in the current study, 9 of the 50 victim officers reported that their agencies did not rate the officers’ work performance or issue evaluation reports on work performance.

Before their felonious deaths, 10 of the 54 victim officers who participated in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study had received a decrease in their most recent work performance rating. Four of the 52 victim officers who participated in the *In the Line of Fire* study reported a decrease in their most recent work performance rating prior to the assault incident. In the current study, only one victim officer reported receiving a decrease in his most recent work performance rating prior to the assault. He cited a poor relationship with his immediate supervisor as the cause for the lower rating.

Thirty-two of the 41 victim officers whose departments rated work performance had received, prior to the assault, the department’s highest-possible rating. In the *In the Line of Fire* study, 27 of the 43 victim officers whose departments rated work performance had received, prior to the assault, the department’s highest-possible rating.

Behavioral Descriptors for Victim Officers

Publishing the results of 10 years of research in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies and providing safety/awareness training to thousands of law enforcement officers in the United States have prompted many officers to ask the investigators, “Do I fit the profile of an officer who may be killed or assaulted?” Their response to this question remains the same: no singular profile of an officer who is likely to be killed or assaulted exists. Because of the variables in each incident combined with other elements that produced the “deadly mix” described in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, only general descriptors have surfaced of those officers killed or assaulted under certain circumstances. These descriptors, first identified in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, resulted from information provided by the victim officers’ peers and supervisors. Information also came from a number of offenders who had observed and interacted with the officers prior to their felonious deaths. In the *In the Line of Fire* study, lengthy personal exchanges with the officers enhanced these descriptors and confirmed the similarity of several of those presented in the first study. Descriptors for the current study evolved through a combination of personal interactions with the officers and information provided by peers, supervisors, and offenders, as well as documentation of the actions taken by the officers during the incident. These observable traits used to describe the officers in the current study, for the most part, reflected the information presented in the previous studies. Certain officers in the current study, however, displayed an additional trait not used in the earlier studies: “Prepared to react.”

Tables 2.4 a–c present the behavioral descriptors that were identified during research for the three studies (*Killed in the Line of Duty, In the Line of Fire*, and *Violent Encounters*). The reader may see striking similarities between the descriptors for the victim officers in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies and those for officers in the current study.

Fifteen years of research, and interviews with hundreds of victim officers, led to the development of the behavioral descriptors for officers killed and assaulted in the line of duty. Under certain circumstances, officers need not exhibit all of these behavioral characteristics to place themselves at risk. Some of the descriptors actually are positive attributes. For example, it is commendable to be hard working, and most people would agree that they
would prefer to be liked than disliked. However, when viewed in combination with the offenders described in this research, such qualities may lend themselves to the probability of the situation developing into the “deadly mix”—a dynamic that was also discussed in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study. Moreover, in a potentially hostile situation, such as an arrest or investigative stop, what may appear (and in fact be) an officer’s friendly attitude might be misinterpreted by an offender as potential weakness. Chapter 5 explores the differences between the perceptions of offenders and the officers they assaulted. An explanation of the descriptors used for officers in the current study follows.

**Friendly**

In the current study, all of the victim officers acted friendly toward all persons with whom they had contact during the interviews. As illustrated in Tables 2.4 a–c, the officers from all of the studies were described as being friendly. Citizens of the community, administrators, and heads of law enforcement agencies desire to interact with friendly officers. While a friendly image does much to promote a positive image for the officer and the department, overly friendly behavior at an inappropriate time may cause some offenders to view this as a sign of vulnerability. In one case, the offender seized upon the officer’s willingness to discuss nonwork-related activities. This appeared to have lulled the officer into a sense of complacency while the offender developed and initiated a plan to attack the officer. Interviewed officers agreed with the basic principle that while officers may appear friendly, they never should let down their guard because no one can know what is in the mind of another person. The officers further agreed that they should maintain a professional demeanor while displaying a friendly manner. As an example, they can smile at a person and exchange a friendly greeting or salutation, but they must remember that the person they are dealing with may be contemplating their assault to effect an escape.

### TABLE 2.4 (a)

#### Behavioral Descriptors of Officers Killed

- Friendly
- Well-liked by community and department
- Tends to use less force than other officers felt they would use in similar circumstances
- Hard working
- Tends to perceive self as more public relations than law enforcement
- Service oriented
- Used force only as last resort
  - peers claim they would use force at an earlier point in similar circumstances
- Doesn’t follow all rules, especially in regard to:
  - arrests
  - confrontations with prisoners
  - traffic stops
  - waiting for backup (when available)
- Feels he/she can “read” others/situations and will drop guard as a result
- Tends to look for “good” in others
- “Laid back” and “easy going”


### TABLE 2.4 (b)

#### Behavioral Descriptors of Officers Assaulted

- Friendly
- Hard working
- Service oriented
- Willing to use force when justified
- Doesn’t follow established rules and procedures, especially in regard to:
  - arrests
  - traffic stops
  - calling for or waiting for backup (when available)
- Feels he/she can “read” situations or persons and will drop guard as a result
- Survivor

*Source: In the Line of Fire* 1997 study.

### TABLE 2.4 (c)

#### Behavioral Descriptors of Officers Assaulted

- Friendly
- Hard working
- Service oriented
- Prepared to react
- Willing to use force when justified
- Failed to follow established procedures especially in regard to:
  - arrests
  - handling prisoners
  - traffic stops
  - calling for and waiting for backup (when available)
- Reads people or situations and inappropriately drops guard
- Survivor

*Current study.*
Hard Working

The descriptor *hard working* was applied to the officers in both the *Killed in the Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies, as well as the current study. Departments often measure work performance by the number of felony, misdemeanor, and traffic arrests effected. Law enforcement agencies also typically heap awards and recognition upon personnel who excel in locating and arresting large numbers of serious and violent criminals. Depriving people of their liberty constitutes a potentially dangerous activity. National statistics verify that numerous officers are assaulted and sometimes killed when attempting to place criminals under arrest. According to the 2004 edition of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program’s publication *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted* (LEOKA), 17 of the officers feloniously killed in the United States (30 percent) that year were slain during arrest situations, and an additional 11,068 officers (19 percent of sworn personnel in participating law enforcement agencies) were assaulted during arrest situations. Hard-working officers whose arrest rates are double or triple the established departmental norm appear more likely to be assaulted. They also are more likely to institute the use of force, including deadly force, in response to these serious and often impulsive attacks.

In 70 percent of the incidents examined for the current study, officers were assaulted when they initiated the contact with the offender. Many of these officers had worked hard enough to receive numerous awards and had been selected for special assignments. Supervisors usually send these types of officers to special-problem or high-crime areas. For example, an officer who participated in the current study had made numerous felony and misdemeanor arrests in his patrol area. He knew the whereabouts of a subject wanted on a misdemeanor warrant. After calling for assistance but being advised that assistance was not immediately available, the officer responded by himself to the offender’s location. The officer attempted to effect the arrest without benefit of assistance because he did not want the subject to escape. As a result, he approached the offender alone and was seriously assaulted.

Service Oriented

Service to the community ranks as the leading reason victim officers who participated in the current study chose a career in law enforcement. Willingness to serve the community is an admirable trait; however, to serve and protect the community, officers must realize that they need to protect themselves first. Officers’ misguided sense of service often resulted in placing prisoners’ comfort over their own personal safety. As an example, in one case from the current study, an offender used the back of his chair to deliberately tighten the handcuffs behind his back. He then began complaining of wrist pain. As the victim officer loosened the handcuffs, the offender executed a well-rehearsed move that enabled him to free himself, grab a weapon, and shoot the officer.

Prepared to React

Thirty-three of the 50 victim officers in the current study did not realize that an attack was forthcoming. In spite of this fact, after the attack was initiated, the majority of these officers immediately and appropriately reacted. Their quick actions more than likely accounted for their survival. In a case that occurred during a traffic stop, an officer did not initially perceive danger. He found himself confronted by an individual who threatened him with a handgun. With no opportunity to draw his weapon, the officer developed immediate verbal communication with the offender, relating information about his own family. Previously discussed during prior training and crisis rehearsal sessions, this action succeeded as the perpetrator opted to escape, rather than shoot the officer. In this incident, the offender corroborated the officer’s failure to detect the attack, as well as his quick verbal response to the situation.
In another incident, an officer was pursuing a vehicle believed to have been involved in a bank robbery. Upon seeing the suspect vehicle pulled over to the side of the road, the officer thought of only two possible explanations: either the offender had wrecked the vehicle or he had exited the vehicle and fled on foot. As the officer slowed his vehicle, however, the offender emerged and began advancing on the officer while firing 14 rounds from a semiautomatic handgun into the windshield of the patrol vehicle. Six of those rounds struck the victim officer. Even though the attack came as a complete surprise, the officer later reported: “I’m thinking to myself, I’m not gonna die here; I’m not gonna let this guy get me.” The officer then rolled out of his still-moving patrol unit, jumped to his feet, and began discharging his service weapon at the offender. The offender retreated and fled the scene in his vehicle. Twenty-four of the 33 officers who acted despite not realizing that an attack had been forthcoming exhibited this preparedness to react to an attack.

**Willing to Use Force When Justified**

Due to the nature of law enforcement work, officers often must react to an attack, rather than initiate one. In the current study, 27 officers who were assaulted with various weapons overcame their attackers without receiving physical injuries in part because they initiated the proper amount of force at the appropriate time. For example, an officer was attempting to serve a misdemeanor arrest warrant on an offender. After the offender answered the door and stated that she refused to be arrested, she ran into the kitchen and obtained a large carving fork to use as a weapon. She began advancing toward the officer, who drew his firearm and ordered her to drop the carving fork. The offender eventually dropped it, and the officer took her into custody without further incident.

In another case, a deputy sheriff effected a traffic stop and then became involved in a struggle on the ground with the offender. Only when the offender partially removed the deputy’s firearm from his holster did the deputy realize the seriousness of the situation. The deputy then used his issued collapsible baton to strike the offender, which incapacitated him and ended the struggle immediately. The deputy retained his firearm and handcuffed the offender. In another incident, several officers had searched an offender and placed him under arrest. The search failed to reveal that the offender possessed a handgun. At the conclusion of a custodial interview, the offender produced the overlooked handgun and placed it to the head of one of the uniformed officers. This officer immediately created a momentary distraction while his partner drew and discharged his service weapon, striking the offender in the head and causing him to immediately collapse on the floor. Upon being questioned about the appropriateness of the officer’s use of force, the offender stated, “The officer had no option but to shoot me because I had my gun to his partner’s head, and I would have shot all of them to escape.”

**Failed to Follow Established Procedures**

Nineteen incidents in the current study involved officers who did not follow established rules and procedures, especially in regard to arrests, confrontations with prisoners, traffic stops, and calling for or waiting for backup when available. In one incident, a lone law enforcement officer attempted to arrest an individual for a serious drug violation, even though assistance was readily available. The offender attacked and seriously injured the officer. The reason the officer gave for not calling for backup was that in the past, he had successfully arrested numerous persons without incident while alone. In a similar incident, another lone officer encountered an offender he described as a “scary guy” because the man was extremely large. Knowing that the offender was wanted on a minor traffic warrant, the officer attempted to make the arrest after ascertaining that assistance was not immediately available. However, the offender physically attacked him and removed his service weapon. The officer stated that he attempted the arrest because he hoped to make the offender afraid of him.

Law enforcement agencies have established the rules that these officers chose not to follow primarily to protect their employees. Paradoxically, some officers have received recognition and awards for breaking these rules. It proves difficult to discipline or take corrective action against the most productive, hardest-working officer. However, supervisors must impress upon all officers the necessity of thoroughly searching every individual that they arrest, requesting assistance prior to making arrests, and calling for and waiting for backup when available. Despite the amount and quality of the productivity of officers who fail to follow procedures, supervisors must remain alert to behaviors that potentially could endanger both the officers and their partners. Corrective
action need not involve written documentation. Rather than focusing on the enforcement of written policies and regulations, supervisors might, for example, tell subordinates that their welfare is of the greatest concern.

Misread People or Situations and Inappropriately Drop Guard

The officers who were featured in all three studies used perceptual shorthand in evaluating persons and circumstances. Basically, perceptual shorthand is a rapid or abbreviated process by which individuals perceive and analyze the elements of their environment and, based on those observations or perceptions, act accordingly. For an extensive treatment of this issue, readers may refer to “Officers’ Perceptual Shorthand: What Messages Are Offenders Sending to Law Enforcement Officers?” (Pinizzotto, Davis, Miller, 2000). Unfortunately, victim officers’ evaluations of offenders often prove inaccurate. Officers fail to recognize that their perception of an incident can vary greatly from the offender’s perception of what is occurring.

The present study demonstrated that the way officers process and perceive the totality of the circumstances of an incident affects how they will act. For example, in one incident, a deputy attempted to stop a motor vehicle when the driver committed a minor traffic violation. The officer perceived that the vehicle occupants were “a couple of ‘good ole boys’ who probably had too much to drink.” The vehicle briefly sped off, but before it came to a complete stop, the passenger fell out onto the roadway. The driver then fled into a wooded area. The passenger rolled about on the road holding his arm and screaming that he needed help. The officer approached the offender with the intention of rendering assistance. The offender then “leg swept” the officer as part of a well-rehearsed disarming technique. Realizing this, the deputy relied on his weapon-retention training and eventually overcame and subdued his attacker. The perceived “good ole boy” actually was a gang member high on illicit drugs at the time of the offense. When questioned by detectives, the offender stated that he had preplanned the attack on the officer and faked physical injury to “draw the officer close.”

Survivor

Many of the officers who participated in the current study and had received life-threatening injuries reported that they refused to give up after being injured. A common thought that surfaced in the minds of these severely injured officers was that they felt a strong need to rest. These officers stated that they resisted that feeling, realizing that the rest might be permanent. For example, one victim officer reported that after being shot numerous times and blacking out, he awoke and heard another officer telling the dispatcher, “Officer down, and he’s dead.” The injured officer later reported: “He made me very angry. I wasn’t dead yet, and he’s already buried me.” This officer assisted first responders by placing a tourniquet on his own leg. Several other officers tended to their own wounds prior to the arrival of emergency medical personnel, and one, who was shot multiple times, even drove himself to the nearest fire station to seek available medical help. One officer, with a gunshot wound to the head, reported that on several occasions he reached out and grabbed the clothing of emergency medical personnel during his transport to the hospital. He stated that he wanted to let these people know that he was alive so they would continue life-saving measures. For additional insight into this subject, readers may refer to “The ‘Modern Warrior’: A Study in Survival” (Norcross 2003) and “Surviving Assaults: After the Physical Battle Ends, the Psychological Battle Begins” (Kureczka 2002).

Use of Body Armor

The annual publication Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted reports the number of officers feloniously killed while wearing body armor, as well as the number killed while not wearing such equipment. The key
statistic not captured in the publication, however, is the number of officers who avoided serious bodily injuries through the use of protective vests.

Clearly, several of the officers who survived to participate in the current study might not have done so had they not been wearing body armor when assaulted. Most notable of those was an officer dressed in casual clothes when involved in a drug operation. Many officers have reported that—to blend in with the people with whom they must interact—they will not wear protective vests in such undercover operations. However, research clearly has demonstrated the successful use of body armor by officers who have served in undercover drug operations.

Forty of the 50 victim officers in this study were wearing protective vests when assaulted. Of the 10 officers not wearing body armor, 2 stated that the vest was uncomfortable, 2 said that they were issued only heavy tactical vests and were merely conducting an interview at the time of the assault, 1 reported that the vest was too hot, 1 stated that his department did not issue vests, 1 said that nothing ever happened in his department, 1 was assigned to a school drug prevention program, 1 was a detective and felt that he did not need the vest, and another could not recall his reason for not wearing the vest.

One officer involved in a traffic pursuit was shot numerous times, the last one in the center of the back. He stated, “I’d be a paraplegic if I wasn’t wearing my vest.” This officer also said that in his agency, many officers did not wear protective vests prior to his incident; now they do. The officer went on to recommend the vest as an effective protective instrument against knife attacks and vehicle accidents.

In another case, an officer who was shot in the center of the chest stated:

My first thought after the gun went off is that I might have to go to the hospital and get my chest pumped. I just thought they were apt to crack my chest and go in and get this bullet out and massage my heart. But, when I looked down, I couldn’t see the bullet or marks anywhere. For a minute there,
I just thought it was a bad punch, like he actually just punched me and ran off. But, he couldn’t have just punched though, I’m thinking again because, you know, I went deaf. I just went blank. I couldn’t hear anything.

Some officers in the current study continued to not wear vests—even after the incident in which they were injured. Of those, 3 stated that the vest was too uncomfortable, 3 were detectives who stated that they hoped they would not need to again, and 1 said that he does not wear his vest “out of laziness.” Wearing a protective vest may be hot and uncomfortable; however, as one officer stated, “It’s hotter in hell than it is in the southern region of the United States.” None of the 8 officers saved by their vests absorbing the impact of the bullet ever would think about working the street without wearing a vest. Additional research should be conducted on materials used in bullet-resistant vests to increase the user’s level of comfort. Hopefully, the day will come when all law enforcement officers in the United States wear a vest when they patrol the streets of this nation—and every law enforcement agency in the nation will issue vests to their personnel and make wearing them mandatory. Manufacturers should pursue the development of a lightweight, ballistic-resistant, nonoffensive safety helmet to further protect law enforcement officers. For additional information on this topic, readers may refer to “Accidentally Dead: Accidental Line-of-Duty Deaths of Law Enforcement Officers” (Pinizzotto, Davis, Miller 2002).
The investigators have interacted with many law enforcement officers and officials during officer safety/awareness training they have conducted throughout the United States. Most of these officers expressed the common belief that they probably never would be assaulted. These same officers stated that they possessed a preconceived image of the type of individual likely to assault them if such an incident occurred. During 2003 and 2004, approximately 117,973 law enforcement personnel in the United States were feloniously assaulted. If the reader is one of those assaulted, the investigators pose this question, Did the assailant meet your preconceived concept of what a police assaulter would look like? Based on hundreds of interviews conducted with officers throughout the United States, the investigators have learned that the answer to this question is an emphatic no. Officers’ perceptions of dangerousness usually focus on a subject’s size and other physical characteristics.

The mental mind-set of a person who may assault a law enforcement officer rarely is discussed, or thought about, by officers.

Many of the offenders stated to the investigators that their motivation for assaulting an officer was to avoid going to jail. One offender said, “I told him he’d have to kill me before he catches me. You know, before he locks me up, takes me off the streets.” Another offender related:

And, so I was looking on doing at least eight years in the joint. I had also committed various other offenses while I was on the lam, and so I figured that if I got caught for that, you know, tack another ten or fifteen on top of that. So, I really didn’t want to go to jail.

What is of interest is why and how these individuals’ lives developed over the years for them to ultimately form a concerted decision to feloniously assault a law enforcement officer. As the investigators compared the lives of officers with those of the offenders, they discovered striking differences between the two.

Many complex social and psychological issues contribute to producing an individual who willfully kills or attempts to kill a law enforcement officer. Research for the current study reinforced findings from Killed in the Line of Duty (1992) and In the Line of Fire (1997). Data from these three studies indicate that the preconceived images that law enforcement personnel had about the type of person most likely to assault them rarely proved consistent with the actual offenders. For their own safety, officers must learn as much as they can about offenders who have killed and assaulted officers. Having information about the backgrounds, traits, characteristics, and mind-sets of these offenders can help officers to avoid or survive future deadly encounters.

Offender History

Research for the three studies on law enforcement safety included the investigators’ interviews with hundreds of offenders who had killed or attempted to kill law enforcement personnel.
enforcement officers. The data show that, from roughly 1989 to 2006, many of the demographics of these felons have remained constant. Table 3.1 presents aggregate demographic attributes of the offenders who participated in the three studies. On average, the offenders in all of the studies were predominately male, young (average age 26), white, single, (most offenders in the current study attended high school but dropped out prior to receiving a diploma). Compared to the officers they attacked, the offenders were younger and much less educated—and tended not to have family responsibilities.

**Family History**

Included in the present study is information about the offenders’ family histories and backgrounds—gathered both from interviews with the offenders (each lasting an average of approximately 6 hours) and from available prison documents. No additional interviews or other types of prison records were used to confirm or refute the offenders’ self-reported information.

The family structures of offenders varied widely across all of the studies. Of the 43 offenders participating in the current study, 4 were adopted, 4 were foster children, and 10 never lived with their natural fathers. The remaining 25 offenders were raised by a combination of biological fathers and mothers, grandparents, step-parents, and associates of their mothers or fathers. Thirty-two of the offenders reported their family caretaking environment as stable. In spite of this claim of stability, 16 of the 43 offenders indicated that their fathers left the family at the offenders’ average age of 5 years, and 12 advised that their mothers left the family at the offenders’ average age of 9 years. The reasons that the parents absented themselves varied.

Eleven offenders were removed from their biological family setting during their preadult life. Three of these offenders spent time in an orphanage, 4 in a foster home, and 4 in a mental facility. All of the offenders who spent time in a mental facility stated that the court had placed them there for incorrigible behavior. The average length of stay for all of the offenders institutionalized in their preadult years was 20 months. Commenting on their time in these various institutions, the offenders revealed some information particularly relevant to the present discussion. One offender said, “[It] made me more aggressive; my mom didn’t want me anymore; I was angry; met a lot of bad influences.” Another stated, “I developed a street mentality.” Others related, “Life was much better at

### Table 3.1 Demographic Attributes, Offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>1992 Study</th>
<th>1997 Study</th>
<th>2006 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>26 yrs.</td>
<td>27 yrs.</td>
<td>26 yrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>1992 Study</th>
<th>1997 Study</th>
<th>2006 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Height</td>
<td>5’ 9”</td>
<td>5’ 9”</td>
<td>6’ 0”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Average Weight | 176 lbs. | 170 lbs. | 175 lbs. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>1992 Study</th>
<th>1997 Study</th>
<th>2006 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>1992 Study</th>
<th>1997 Study</th>
<th>2006 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No degree</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>82%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 yr. college degree</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 yr. college degree</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to rounding, the percentages may not add to 100.0.

*14% of the offenders earned GED’s while in prison. Since the assault incident.
home, not so much supervision. I developed a feeling of abandonment, sadness, and indifference.”

Nineteen offenders could not deal with the relationships in their immediate families and chose to run away from home prior to the age of 18. Fourteen of these offenders reported running away on more than one occasion. Upon returning home, some of them were turned over to the police; some faced lesser consequences; others experienced no consequences at all. When asked to comment on parental/guardian reactions, one offender stated, “There was a lot of screaming and yelling but they didn’t do anything to me.” Another said, “I was physically violated, verbally abused, and lost all my privileges.” A third related, “My absence was ignored.”

Nine offenders reported being thrown out of the home prior to the age of 18. On average, these offenders were age 14 when forced to leave home. Some of the reasons for their forced departures included the following:

- “I was thrown out for bringing a girl into the basement for sex.”
- “I was thrown out for arguing and not listening.”
- “Father threw me out for not working and selling dope.”
- “Mom was strung out on drugs.”
- “Mom’s current boyfriend didn’t like me.”

More than one-half of the offenders stated that members of their immediate families had criminal histories. More than two-thirds advised that family members abused alcohol, and more than one-half indicated that family members used drugs. Table 3.2 lists the self-reported social and economic conditions of the offenders.

Overall, the offenders’ classification of their home environments as stable appeared to contradict their own descriptions. Although the majority of the offenders reported their home environments as stable,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3.2 Social and Economic Conditions of Offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong> Variable to hostile and aggressive with:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment by peers or others outside the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instability of family caretaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving involved arguing, shouting, or physical violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socioeconomic status of pre-adult life</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable, average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal but self-sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-marginal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal history present among significant others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism present among significant others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse present among significant others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These totals may exceed 100% due to the observations of multiple social and economic conditions of the offenders.
in actuality most of these offenders raised themselves. As an example, one offender reported a stable, close, caring relationship with his mother. Although his mother may have cared about him and the offender may have felt close to her, she was rarely home to interact in a meaningful way with her son. Besides having an extensive criminal record and a drug habit, she was a known prostitute. An unstable home environment and a lack of appropriate parental observation and control best described the offenders’ family backgrounds and early developmental years.

Criminal History

All of the 43 offenders in the current study admitted to committing crimes prior to the incident of examination. These crimes are self-reported and are not confirmed by arrest reports. The average age for their first criminal offense was 11 years. Twenty-nine of the offenders reported that their first crime was larceny-theft. For 3 of the offenders, burglary was their first crime. Drug violations, vandalism, and arson were each cited as the first crime offense for 2 of the offenders. Robbery, assault, auto theft, receiving stolen property, and underage drinking represented the first crimes of the remaining 5 offenders. The majority (24 of 43 offenders) reported experiencing feelings of excitement after committing their first crime, 10 offenders said that they felt nothing, and the remaining 9 indicated a variety of reactions.

Thirty-five of the offenders thought that they would get away with their first crime without experiencing any consequences. In fact, 25 did. Only 4 of the offenders were arrested for their first crime, and 7 received some form of parental discipline. The mothers of two of the offenders made them return stolen items. The offenders’ criminal activities continued during adolescence, resulting in 22 offenders being confined to juvenile detention centers. The average age at the time of confinement was 15 years. Six of the offenders were below the age of 13 at the time of their first confinement. The length of the confinements averaged 4 months. Reasons for the confinement varied and included such crimes as weapons violations, automobile theft, burglary, and drug distribution. Six offenders reported escaping from juvenile correctional facilities. One escaped by stealing a facility truck, and another used bolt cutters to cut through a fence. The others reported that they simply ran off.

Of the 43 offenders who participated in the current study, only 2 reported that they had not been incarcerated prior to the incident of examination. Of the remaining 41 offenders, 12 had been arrested 10 or more times prior to incarceration, whereas 29 had been arrested between 2 and 5 times prior to imprisonment. Their experiences with the criminal justice system resulted in familiarization with law enforcement practices and procedures and various legal proceedings, as well as the opportunity to observe law enforcement-related behaviors of different officers. Scrutinizing these behaviors helped the offenders learn how to evaluate all officers in general, regardless of the nature of the particular law enforcement activity or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3.3 Criminal Involvement, Offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sex offenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny-theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug offenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorderly conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No criminal history reported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
agency. The offenders evaluated such actions as officers’ response times; types of approaches; and handcuffing, searching, and transporting procedures. Interaction with specific officers and agencies allowed the offenders to observe and evaluate a variety of officers performing their duties under specific circumstances. One offender stated, “I knew who was working which shift, when vice was working, who the lazy officers were, and who the hot dogs were.”

Typically, the offenders experienced little or no penalty as a result of their earlier arrests. For some of the offenders, the earlier arrests served as training for how law enforcement officers interacted with them in various situations. Some lessons learned by the offenders while incarcerated included the following:

- “Crime only pays until you get caught.”
- “Don’t sell to people you don’t know.”
- “How to avoid capture.”
- “Taught me not to give up, that’s why I kept running away.”
- “Killers should be executed.”
- “Learned how to better deceive adults.”
- “They taught me a lot, like stealing cars.”
- “I wasn’t afraid of being locked up anymore.”
- “Joined the gang while in the detention center.”
- “Learned how to fight.”
- “The whole world owed me something.”

Only one offender reported incarceration as a positive experience. He stated, “I received my GED, and I got involved in sports. It made me a better person, and temporarily I had a job for 2 months.”

Self-reported criminal involvement by the offenders who participated in the current study proved similar to that of the offenders in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies. Table 3.3 shows comparisons of data from the three studies.

The 43 offenders in the current study admitted to the following prior acts of violence: 5 murders, 33 aggravated assaults, 1 forcible rape, 5 other sex offenses, 21 robberies, 26 burglaries, 6 arsons, 37 weapons offenses, and 35 drug violations. Fourteen offenders had assaulted law enforcement officers prior to the incident of examination, 2 while being questioned about criminal activities and 12 during arrest situations. Twenty-six offenders reported previously engaging in verbal confrontations with law enforcement officers. One stated that he told an officer, “Someone should stick your gun up your a— and pull the trigger.” Another said that he and the officer argued about the origin of a bicycle in the offender’s possession. He stated, “We pissed each other off, but nothing else happened.”

When questioned about the possibility that they might be killed or injured while committing a crime, 19 offenders stated that they never gave it a thought, 18 considered it somewhat, and 6 believed that they always would come out on top. Significantly, 30 of the 43 offenders in the current study stated that they had made specific plans to take action against law enforcement officers if interrupted, confronted, or stopped by them during the commission of a crime. These plans ranged from a sudden blitz attack to simply resisting by running away.

**Psychiatric History**

The majority of the offenders interviewed for the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study received psychological testing and evaluation by a forensic psychologist who diagnosed most of them with some type of personality disorder; the two largest categories of diagnosis were antisocial personality and dependent personality. For the current study, the forensic psychologist administered the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory 2 (MMPI-2) to each offender; the results were largely inconclusive. Of the 43 offenders in the current study, 28 completed the MMPI-2. The 15 offenders who did not complete the test gave varied reasons for refusing to do so. Nine offenders said essentially that after the lengthy interview, they had had enough and were tired. They did not want to remain in the room any longer. Even though the investigators had informed the offenders at the beginning of the process that the interview might take several hours, the length

*All of the offenders in the current study admitted to committing crimes prior to the incident of examination.*
of the interviews extended beyond the time period the offenders had anticipated. Four offenders did not want any record—including giving answers to the MMPI-2 questions and being videotaped—to be kept that might show that they were interviewed for the present study. Two offenders stated that they had other business to conduct and had to leave.

Of the 28 tests administered, only 11 were valid. It appears that the reason for so many invalid test results was the same as the major reason that offenders gave for refusing to take the test: fatigue. Unfortunately, scheduling did not permit follow-up visits to administer the test when the offenders were well rested. Administration of the test came at the end of a very long, demanding, and sometimes challenging interview. In addition, several individuals could not read well and attempted to conceal this fact from the investigators. This topic is explored further in the section on gangs later in this chapter. All offenders who were interviewed for the Killed in the Line of Duty study were charged with a capital offense, namely the felonious killing of a law enforcement officer. Consequently, they all received comprehensive psychological testing as a routine part of their processing in the correctional system. The offenders in the In the Line of Fire study and the current study did not commit capital offenses and, therefore, did not receive such comprehensive testing.

As a result of the difficulties involved in acquiring valid test protocols for the MMPI-2, no comprehensive analysis was able to be conducted. An analysis of valid test results from only 11 offenders did not offer any substantial insight into the group. Even with the 11 offenders the results are questionable due to test-taker fatigue.

Separately, some of the offenders who participated in the current study experienced psychological difficulties early in their lives. Four offenders reported being confined to a mental institution prior to the age of 16. All of these offenders denied that, after their release from the psychiatric facilities, they received any additional psychological treatment.

Twenty-one of the offenders admitted having considered suicide at some point in their lives; 16 made an actual attempt, averaging 4 attempts each. The average age at the time of the suicide attempt was 23 years, with the youngest offender attempting suicide at age 16. When asked to describe their method of attempting suicide, the offenders replied as follows, with some reporting multiple methods: 7 pill overdoses, 4 wrist cuttings, 3 hangings, and 2 shootings. Several offenders reported attempts to have law enforcement officers kill them during the incident of examination; this phenomenon is often referred to as suicide by cop and is described in chapter 6. The offenders gave several reasons for their attempted suicides, including: “death of my mom”; “to get out of a prison sentence”; “I got depressed when taking drugs”; “I didn’t feel like taking it anymore”; “I couldn’t put up with it.” One offender stated that he was continuing his self-destructive behaviors while in prison by engaging in “bare backing,” that is, having unprotected sex with numerous HIV-positive partners.

Employment History

Twenty-six of the 43 offenders in the current study characterized themselves as having an unstable employment history or being chronically unemployed. Of those, 13 offenders admitted being gang members who supported themselves by engaging in criminal activities that included drug trafficking, robbery, burglary, and various forms of larceny. Of the 16 offenders who said that their work histories were generally stable, 6 listed their occupations as laborers.

The remainder of the offenders indicated that they had held a variety of positions—such as operator, fabricator, administrative support, or clerk—in several occupational fields: for example, the service industry or sales. Six of the offenders interviewed for the current study had been released from a correctional setting and had remained employed since their reentry into society.

Military History

Ten of the 43 offenders had served in the military as enlisted personnel prior to the incident of examination. None were on active duty at the time of the assault. Eight of the offenders had received an honorable discharge, and 2 had a medical discharge. Two offenders reported having been cited for disciplinary infractions while in the armed forces. All 10 offenders had received formal weapons training. Seven of the offenders reported that their service record had been unremarkable, good, or excellent. None of the offenders had reenlisted in the military. Two offenders had attempted to enter military service but had been denied, one for physical reasons and the other for failing to pass the written test. One offender, a former gang member, stated that he had moved from
the area and quit the gang for the purpose of entering the military.

**Drug and Alcohol Use**

The *Killed in the Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies focus on the offenders’ drug and alcohol use at the time of the attack. In contrast, the present study examines the use of drugs and alcohol both prior to the incident and at the time of the assault.

**Use Before Incident**

When the 43 offenders who participated in this study were questioned about their use of alcohol prior to being incarcerated, they reported consumption as follows:

- **daily**—13 offenders (30 percent)
- **at least 3 times per week**—7 offenders (16 percent)
- **at least twice per week**—7 offenders (16 percent)
- **at least once per week**—8 offenders (19 percent)
- **at least once every 2 weeks**—2 offenders (5 percent)
- **at least once per month**—3 offenders (7 percent)

Three of the offenders said that they did not use alcohol, and 10 of those who drank alcohol stated that they consumed only beer. The remainder of the offenders who reported using alcohol drank, variously, beer, wine, and/or liquor.

Collectively, the offenders consumed an average of

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**FIGURE 3.1 Drug and Alcohol Involvement, Offenders**

*At time of incident.*
four drinks per sitting. They indicated that they became intoxicated while drinking on an average of five occasions per year. These bouts of intoxication ranged from once a year to 11 times a year. Fifteen offenders reported having consumed alcohol at the time of the incident that was the subject of the interview. The offenders started using alcohol early in life, and many of them routinely drank alcohol while engaged in social interaction. They continually abused alcohol. Of significance, 15 offenders reported that prior to committing the assault, they had consumed an average of 10 drinks each.

Thirty-three of the 43 offenders who participated in the current study reported that they routinely used illicit drugs. Collectively, they used illicit drugs an average of twice a week. Their drugs of choice consisted of opium, cocaine, marijuana, hallucinogens or synthetic narcotics, and other dangerous drugs, with 22 of the 33 offenders preferring marijuana. Each offender spent an average of $3,600 per year to support his or her drug habit. Two habitual users who claimed to be gang enforcers stated that they never paid for their drugs. Ten of the 33 offenders admitted to committing criminal acts, such as robberies, burglaries, and thefts, to obtain funds for drugs. By committing these crimes, these offenders placed themselves in situations that could result in violent encounters with crime victims and law enforcement officers. These offenders reported that they had committed an average of 16 or more criminal offenses to support their drug habits.

Is it possible that this long-term and expanding substance abuse increased the offenders’ propensity for engaging in violence? Although the offenders acknowledged a preference for a particular alcoholic beverage or specific drug, most indiscriminately abused both alcohol and street drugs, along with over-the-counter medications. The offenders used various combinations of drugs and alcohol, which resulted in widely divergent and often unexpected additive effects. Not even the offenders themselves could have anticipated their individual reactions to these drug and alcohol “cocktails.”

**Use at Time of Offense**

Fifteen offenders reported consuming an average of 10 alcoholic drinks within two hours of the assault examined. Only one offender advised that his alcohol use on this occasion significantly differed from his typical drinking habits. This offender stated that he not only consumed more alcohol the evening of the incident (estimating four more beers than usual) but also took medication that contraindicated drinking alcohol.

Twenty-one offenders reported using illicit drugs within 2 hours of the assault. Only one of these offenders indicated that his drug use at the time of the incident significantly differed from his typical drug pattern. However, the typical drug pattern varied greatly and proved difficult to quantify in terms of the potential reaction of the drugs.

Figure 3.1 compares drug and alcohol involvement of the offenders at the time of the crimes being examined.

**Gang Members**

The FBI’s National Crime Information Center (NCIC) defines a gang as a group that “must be an ongoing organization or association of three or more persons. The group must have a common interest or activity characterized by the commission or involvement in a pattern of criminal or delinquent conduct.”

During their research on violence against law enforcement officers, the investigators interviewed hundreds of offenders. These included offenders housed in various prisons throughout the United States, as well as those who had served their time and had returned to society. The investigators found marked differences among individuals who killed and assaulted law enforcement officers. One of the differences, discussed in the *In the Line of Fire* study, focused on “street-gang mentality”—specifically, cold-blooded and remorseless behavior. Among the other differences between the self-admitted
gang members and the rest of the offenders in the study was the apparent motivation for the assaults on the law enforcement officers. The gang members either inflicted or attempted to inflict injuries on officers with greater severity than appeared warranted under the circumstances. Not only were these offenders without remorse for their actions, but they appeared to take pride in the assaults on law enforcement officers.

Originally, the design of the current study made no attempt to identify gang members. As the study progressed, however, 13 offenders admitted street-gang membership. What these individuals stated caught the attention of the investigators because of the qualitative differences of their information. In an effort to better understand the differences between the nongang offenders and the gang members who assaulted officers, the investigators examined several areas of the gang members’ backgrounds, including education, family history, criminal history, employment history, military experience, drug and alcohol use, names of gang members and their gangs, information about their neighborhoods, and exposure to violence.

All of the gang members in the current study were males. Their average age at the time of the incident of examination was 20 years. However, two were over 30 and the only married gang members in the study. Eight gang members were black and five were white. Ten gang members had children but never had married. The physical appearance of gang members did not differ significantly from nongang members at the time of the interviews—primarily because all were incarcerated at the time of the interview and, thus, required to maintain uniform grooming and dress standards.

**Education**

Formal education meant little to the gang members in the current study and was not a goal recognized by their gangs. None of the members graduated from high school and only 2 obtained a GED while incarcerated for the incident of examination. One gang member reported quitting school after the sixth grade. None reported regularly reading newspapers, magazines, or any type of written news material, nor had they ever used the Internet.

Several gang members experienced problems reading interview documents. One offender commented on his poor reading skills by stating, “I didn’t need to read to sell drugs. I make more money than those people who write books.” Another gang member said, “I didn’t have time to go to school because I was helping to feed my mother and brothers and sisters. They needed stuff, you know.”

**Family History**

All 13 of the gang members in the current study stated that they lacked male role models in their households. Six gang members reported that they never lived with their biological fathers. Seven gang members reported their biological fathers as mostly absent from the home setting. Of these gang members, their average age when the father departed was 3 years.

When reporting the presence of their biological mothers, 9 gang members stated that she lived in the home. However, in these situations, the mother worked full time, leaving the children unsupervised throughout much of their early childhood. Three reported their mothers as present most of the time, and 1 said that she was absent most of the time. Of the 3 gang members who indicated having no mother at home, their average age when she departed was 9 years.

The gang members stated that they often lived temporarily with various people, such as grandmothers, aunts, uncles, and friends and acquaintances of their families. The number of people residing in the households constantly changed. Three gang members reported more than 8 people present in the homes they stayed in, with only 3 being members of their nuclear families.

Of the 13 admitted gang members, 12 reported that 1 or more members of their immediate families had acquired a criminal history prior to the incident of examination. Five gang members said that psychiatric problems affected 1 or more family members, and 9 disclosed that 1 or more members of their immediate families abused alcohol. Twelve gang members stated that 1 or more members of their immediate families abused drugs. In total, only 1 gang member reported no drug or alcohol abuse by his immediate family.

When asked what attracted him to the gang, one member stated:

Yeah, it was like another family. You know, at the time, that was all I had to lean on. My family members wasn’t there. My mom was on dope, you know, and I was staying with my auntie, and she had five other kids she had to worry about besides
me. So, I made my choice to join the gang, and I told myself before I even got into the gang, if I got into the gang, I was going to be in it for the rest of my life and dedicated to it. And, I guess, so far you could say I’ve done that.

Another gang member said that his crew was more reliable than his family. When asked to explain, he stated:

I could rely on the crew because, you know, these are the people that I’m out on the street with everyday, all day. These are the people that got into shootouts with me. These are the people that I saved your life, you save mine. I mean, these are the people that I done put my life on the line for, and they put their life on the line for me, so definitely the crew.

Most children learn to delay gratification, develop appropriate social behavior, and control aggressive action toward others through their interactions with others in two similar, but distinct, settings. The first, and main, interaction is with well-adjusted family members, and the second is with other individuals in various other social arenas, such as day care and school.

Parents teach children not only by what they say but, most important, by engaging in appropriate social behaviors. When their children act outside the parameters of socially acceptable behavior, parents immediately correct them so their children can experience the negative consequences of their unacceptable actions.

As children grow, develop, and move outside the family, they acquire negotiation skills that allow them to function in settings with nonfamily members. They learn social adjustments and incorporate them into their social repertoire of behaviors. The gang members in this study failed to develop these skills because they remained within a system and structure that reinforced relying on and trusting only those individuals within their group. This reliance became intensified when they also learned that anyone outside the gang was perceived as a real and immediate threat to the group’s safety and their own personal existence. In effect, the gang became a substitute for their family. Anyone outside that recognized and easily identifiable group became a target of violence if perceived as a danger to the gang or its members. What conventional society regards as inappropriate or unacceptable behavior that often results in punishment, these offenders ignored, encouraged, or recognized as adaptive for their survival on the street.

**Criminal History**

On average, the gang members committed their first criminal offense at the age of 9 years. Nine reported larceny-theft as their first crime, 2 a burglary, 1 an assault, and 1 a drug violation. From this first encounter, the gang members’ criminal histories escalated. At the time of the incident of examination, 5 offenders had committed murders, 10 had perpetrated armed robberies, and 11 had effected burglaries. All had engaged in drug violations and weapons offenses. Also, all gang members had been confined to juvenile detention centers by the courts. Four reported escaping from these facilities on one or more occasions.

The average age of the offender at the time of joining the gang was 13 years. All of the gang members admitted carrying weapons at an early age, with the average age being 13½. One offender reported that he began carrying weapons at the age of 9. One gang member admitted carrying a knife, and the remainder stated that they carried handguns. Nine of the gang members carried backup weapons; 6 of those were armed with handguns, 2 with knives, and 1 with a shotgun. In addition to carrying other weapons, gang members quickly learned how to effectively and efficiently use their firearms. Further information about the weapons used during the assaults is in chapter 4.

**Employment History**

No gang members were employed in a conventional sense at the time of the incident of examination. Ten of the 13 gang members reported that they were chronically unemployed. The other 3 described their employment history as unstable. Although unemployed in a traditional sense, all of the gang members had specific tasks or jobs within their gangs. Many described their occupations as sellers, hustlers, workers, street workers, jugglers, runners, soldiers, and street soldiers. All of the gang members participated in some way in the street sale of illicit drugs. The terms used to describe these occupations varied according to geographic region; however, all of the job descriptions possessed the same general meaning. All of the gang members participated in the lowest level of gang commerce, such as selling street-level drugs and engaging in various other low-level crimes. Those who served as gang enforcers always carried weapons and stood ready to protect the drug sellers and the gang’s ter-
ritory from outsiders. They also enforced gang rules and regulations, with penalties that were far more severe than those imposed for breaking society’s laws. For example, a petty larceny committed by a gang member would be considered a minor infraction by society. However, the gang would consider stealing from another member as a major infraction, which potentially could result in serious bodily injury or death.

Differences in the names of gangs varied as did the titles of the positions within the groups. However, many similarities occurred in the structures and procedures of these organizations. Lieutenants and bosses oversaw not only the daily operations of the gang, such as the sale of drugs and contraband, but also the resolution of minor disputes among gang members and rival gangs. Original Gangsters (OGs) were original founding members of the gang and were usually vested with overall authority above all other members, including lieutenants and bosses. Generally, these individuals acted as the final authority in settling major disputes among gang members and rival gangs. Delivery men, mules, and transporters conveyed and distributed wholesale amounts of illicit drugs or other contraband from outside sources into the gang area. Burglars and creepers specialized in committing burglaries, usually of commercial establishments, office buildings, and private residences. Creepers often garnered firearms for the gang, typically stealing them during daytime residential burglaries. Drivers possessed a valid driver’s license and sufficient driving skills to transport gang members to various locations for criminal activities. Specialists conducted specific criminal activities for the greater benefit of the gang, such as bank robberies, commercial robberies, and robberies of rival gang members. These individuals, generally older, more experienced gang members, developed their criminal specialties after serving many years in the gang; they were considered masters of their specialty crimes. Lookouts monitored the perimeter of the neighborhood. Their responsibilities involved warning gang members when law enforcement or rival gangs approached. Taggers specialized in performing the gang’s art work, or graffiti, both inside and outside the gang’s area.

One gang member stated that he served as a street worker and occasionally would turn into a specialist when he and another gang member got bored. He said:

Yeah, I mean, we was making a lot of money on the corner. The corner was doing something nice. We were making a lot of money on that corner, but there ain’t nothing like a little extra dough. I mean, you know, you might hear that there’s another drug corner, and they might be making five g’s a day out there. Let’s ride through there and we used to ride through other drug corners and lay like mad people on the ground. You know, anybody get up off the ground, he get shot. There was a time when me and my right-hand man, we lay like ten people on the ground, and out of the ten people, one person got up and started running. He got shot all in his back. I mean, that’s the way it go. We empty the pockets, take the drugs; we take whatever they got on them. The drugs, the guns, the money, the weed, all that stuff. We take it all. Even if it’s a nice leather jacket, we’d take that off his back. He might have a leather jacket on that cost $2,000; we take it all. That don’t mean that we’ll wear it, but we’ll take it and sell it or give it to somebody we know, a friend, a girlfriend, whoever. Pack all that stuff in the back of the car and ride. Go to the next corner. There were times we’d rob corners all night, all night, and go home and have all the stuff and put it all on the bed and basically divide it and after doing all that and putting so much work in, you go to sleep. Get something to eat and go to sleep.

When asked to describe their gang positions, 6 offenders stated that fellow gang members followed their directions. Their answers included the following:

- “I achieved status in jail” [referring to an earlier offense].
- “I was the guy on the street.”
- “Security, people followed my directions.”
- “Vice president, one of the original four members.”
- “Narcotic distribution crew, I was a street lieutenant and had to answer to only one person.”

The gang members charged with specific responsibilities considered themselves experts in their assigned gang-related work activities. They discussed their occupations within the gang with a sense of personal pride. By developing a reputation as a hard worker, a member enhanced his status in the gang. Being a hard worker also increased the amount of money a gang member received. Bringing in more money further heightened a member’s status, often measured by the material assets he acquired,
such as the type of vehicle owned, the type of jewelry worn, and other types of lavish or expensive possessions acquired. An increase in status usually caused an increase in the gang member’s respect on the street. This lifestyle often resulted in a cycle of antisocial and criminal behavior that continued to be reinforced. More violence resulted in the acquisition of more material goods, which, in turn, increased a gang member’s street status and appetite for even more material goods.

Military Service

None of the gang members had served in the military. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, 10 offenders who participated in this study and were not members of gangs had enlisted in the military, where they received training in weapons and other specialized areas. Although the gang members in this study never served in the military, they received training as part of their gang memberships. This informal gang training resulted in the offenders acquiring knowledge with respect to criminal skills, rank structures, use of firearms training, and disciplinary action for rule infractions. This criminal gang training did not place any constraints or restrictions on its members regarding the use of deadly force. Interestingly, in spite of having no military background, nonsupervisory gang members often referred to themselves as soldiers or street soldiers. The so-called street soldiers were expected to behave—in several areas—like formally trained U.S. military personnel, particularly when protecting the gang and the neighborhood. This street-soldier attitude significantly contributed to the development of street-gang mentality and the street combat veteran, as reported in the In the Line of Fire study. Successful service as a street soldier often led to promotions within the gang structure. Promotional titles or ranks mirrored those in the armed services. For example, several offenders described their supervisory rank within the gang as lieutenant. Street combat veteran is discussed further in chapter 4.

Drugs and Alcohol Use

Four of the 13 gang members reported consuming an average of 12 alcoholic drinks each within 2 hours of the assault examined. Eleven gang members stated that they used illicit drugs within 2 hours of the assault. Three gang members disclosed using both alcohol and illicit drugs prior to the incident of examination. None of the gang members indicated that their alcohol or drug use significantly differed from their typical consumption habits.

Of the 2 gang members who did not ingest illicit drugs within 2 hours of the assault, 1 admitted to drinking alcohol within that time period. One gang member indicated no alcohol or drug use prior to the incident of examination. He had just robbed a bank soon after it opened. Although an admitted regular user of illicit drugs and alcohol, he stated, “You can’t afford to be high when you’re taking down banks. You can party later.”

Names of Members and Their Gangs

Of the 13 self-admitted gang members, 2 refused to provide specific information related to their gang, although they readily admitted assaulting law enforcement officers during the incidents of examination. The 2 offenders willingly discussed their family histories, alcohol and drug use, and criminal activities; however, they refused to answer any questions about their gangs. Both of these individuals advised that they could not discuss their gang out of respect or honor for their fellow gang members. They believed that the gang provided the only place that they, themselves, ever received any respect or honor in their lives.

The rest of this chapter will focus on detailed information voluntarily given by the 11 remaining gang members who cooperated with the investigators. Eight of the offenders in this group said that their gangs had given them street names, and they appeared quite proud of the nicknames bestowed upon them. The members had earned these monikers usually through specific actions while involved in gang activity. It was their performance that the gangs memorialized in their new names, such as Quick (for being quick with his fists), Shank (for making and using knives), Baby Spike (in tribute to a gang leader known as Big Spike), and Money (for knowing how to make a lot of drug sales quickly). The gang members appeared to have more pride in their gang names than their surnames, especially if the name was given in recognition of criminal deeds or behavior. Gang names tended to increase a member’s status and reputation within the gang.

Six of the 11 offenders stated that their gang was nationally affiliated and that they belonged to a clique, set, or subset of the nationally known gang. The investigators made no attempt to confirm or disprove the offenders’ self-proclaimed national affiliation. Some offenders
reported membership in the North Side White Pride, Gangster Disciples, Country Boy Crips, Rolling 20s Long Beach Crips, Baby Spades, and Hit Squad. Others stated that they belonged to local neighborhood gangs or drug crews that took their names from the streets or housing developments in the area and claimed no national affiliations. Whether or not the gang was nationally affiliated, all of the members took great pride in the name of the gang and the reputation it had on the street.

When asked to describe their gang’s reputation, 6 members used the word tough in their descriptions. The remaining gang members offered: “Righteous, we’d never back down. We’d carry our weight. We were known to be able to take care of business.” Every gang member interviewed referred to the reputation of their particular gang with terms that portrayed the strength of the organization.

The Neighborhood

All of the gang members stated that the neighborhood where they grew up comprised a large part of their lives. The neighborhood was where the gang members had their first interactions with people outside the family setting and where they had felt safe at an early age.

The particular gang that the offenders joined always was located in the area where they lived at the time. One offender said, “I ran away a lot. They took care of me. They were my friends. I grew up believing what they believed in.” One non-Hispanic gang member reported that the Hispanic gang in his neighborhood chose him for membership and that he eventually achieved a leadership role. The remainder of the offenders lived in areas where the gangs they joined had been running the neighborhood. When questioned about the importance of the neighborhood, some offenders responded with the following:

- “My territory, my domain; I would die for it.”
- “It was all I had, like family, you know.”
- “It’s home, nobody can violate that space.”
- “It meant a lot; I felt like I was responsible, a lot of people died.”
- “I wanted to get it unified.”
- “Very, I lived there, I did business there.”
- “People I loved lived and grew up there. It meant a lot.”

Six of the 11 offenders who were members of gangs stated that their neighborhoods protected and supported them. They gave the following examples:

- “I can run into peoples’ houses for protection from the law.”
- “It looks out for me and watches my back.”
- “It was support when I was on the run.”

These statements demonstrated how important the idea of neighborhood had become for the gang members. It was their home. The investigators visited some of the neighborhoods and found them run-down and littered with trash. They had few commercial establishments, forcing residents to travel long distances to shop for food and other amenities. These substandard conditions remained constant across the neighborhoods of all gangs from city to city, state to state, and urban to rural areas. These neighborhoods looked like places a person likely would
move from, not covet. They certainly did not resemble areas that most people would consider desirable. In spite of this, all gang members in the study were extremely proud of their individual neighborhoods. As one offender stated:

You know, when I was on the street in my neighborhood, I would die for it. I love my neighborhood. I mean, this is where I grew up at; this is where I had all my friends; this is where I made all my money. I mean I love my neighborhood. I will die for it. No questions asked.

When asked what the offenders had contributed to their neighborhoods, they responded:

- “Put us on the map and on the street. I wanted to try to keep our money in the neighborhood.”
- “Schooled the kids on everything, how to steal, break in cars, and steal cars.”
- “Take care of relatives and friends in time of need.”
- “Go to the grocery store for the elderly. We protected everyone in our neighborhood.”
- “I brought heat on the hood.”
- “Looked out for women who could not pay rent, bought kids ice cream and clothes.”
- “Bought kids toys and clothes, bought mothers groceries.”
- “Take kids to the store and buy them things.”
- “Buy kids food and stuff, I would protect my neighborhood.”

Teaching younger members of the neighborhood better ways to steal and break into cars was both a recruiting tool and a way to help the neighborhood residents become thieves. To these offenders, protecting the neighborhood meant keeping outsiders (rival gangs) away from the area.

Every offender stated that rival gang members would enter their neighborhoods and show disrespect. The offenders defined these acts in the following manner:

- “Other drug crews tried to move in on my turf.”
- “They’d come through shooting.”
- “Could get killed, disrespected by attempting to sell drugs in the hood.”
- “They would send people in who would tag us” (i.e., spray paint over the gang’s graffiti, replacing it with graffiti representing the rival gang).
• “They’d come through with rags hanging out of cars or even shooting. We would always retaliate.”

Retaliation to the acts of disrespect helped the individual gang members develop a reputation as tough, both within their gang and by rival gangs. Eliminating competing drug dealers from the neighborhood helped keep the local drug market open, ensuring profits for the neighborhood gang.

Often, a strange mix occurred in the gang members’ responses that reflected a bizarre and fractured Robin Hood fantasy. They reported a love for their neighborhoods, a respect for the elderly who lived there, and a felt responsibility for the youth. Their actions, however, involved incorporating children into a gang that lived by theft and deception; abused drugs and alcohol, rather than dealing with personal or social issues; and used the ultimate amount of force and violence to achieve personal gratification.

Exposure to Violence

All of the gang members came from dysfunctional families. Each member had experienced some form of verbal or physical abuse within the family setting. Outside the family setting, all reported being the victim of at least one physical assault during their early childhoods. All grew up in neighborhoods controlled by the gang that they eventually joined. Prior to belonging to the gang, all reported having property taken from them by persons associated with gang activity. Three gang members were robbed at gunpoint as children.

During their childhood years, all of the gang members had acquaintances who were killed in acts of violence on the street. When describing life in his neighborhood, one gang member stated:

Shoot-outs mostly every day. I mean, it was always somebody got into something with another person or some type of altercation that escalated into a shoot out, you know. Some of these people go to guns all the time. The guns are the problem solvers.

Another offender said:

The neighborhood I’m from, you know, there’s a lot of Mexican nationals, you know, immigration. It’s a pretty violent neighborhood. A lot of drug dealers, gangs. A lot of people getting killed in my neighborhood because of drug deals gone bad,
or you could even look at someone wrong in my neighborhood.

As stated by several gang members interviewed in this study, one reason that they joined the gang was for physical protection.

When asked how many people he personally knew that got shot in the streets, one offender stated:

That I knew? A lot, I mean a lot of people that I grew up with, you know, got shot. People that I grew up around got shot. Then, I knew friends, you know, that I went to see, friends laying in a hospital bed, stomach all stitched up and I knew that I was definitely not gonna be one of them ones that got shot. So, if I even felt as though a person was a threat or any type of flinch or any type of indication that somebody was gonna pull a gun on me or try to pull a knife or try to hurt me, he was gonna get shot first.

When asked if rival gangs would like to see them dead, 8 of the 11 offenders answered yes. One stated, “Two days before I caught this case, a good buddy of mine was killed. I thought I might be next.” Another said, “Sure, for their cause. I was opposite of them.” And, another reported, “Other white gangs, they wanted me out of the way so they could gain strength.”

One gang member, who described his role in the gang as a lieutenant, was asked if he had been involved in a lot of shootings. He responded:

It’s hard to count them. I mean, I’ve been in so much stuff. I don’t even keep track of this stuff. I remember there was times when we used to sit down and look at the news and watch the news to see if who we shot, if it was in the news or see if it’s in the paper. We used to enjoy watching the news to see the work that we put in it. But, it got to the point we were putting in so much work, shooting so many people, I mean, we ain’t even watched the news no more. The stuff didn’t even matter anymore. We were just out there.

Offenders reported taking various actions when rival gang members showed disrespect. Gang members stated that they felt disrespected if a person displayed or flashed a rival gang’s colors, used the hand signs of a rival gang, painted over or marked out their gang’s graffiti (known as tagging), sold drugs in their neighborhood, “gritted” on or “mad dogged” them (stared into their eyes in a threatening manner), or any other type of action that in any way insulted or tarnished the reputation of the gang member, the gang, or the neighborhood.

When asked what type of action they took against outsiders or rival gang members who came into their area and showed disrespect, four gang members stated that they severely beat their rivals. Others said:

- “Pull a gun on them and would shoot them as necessary.”
- “Guys from outside the neighborhood, sometimes we would fistfight, sometimes a baseball bat, sometimes shoot them.”
- “Outsiders set up a crack house, we destroyed the crack house.”

The gang members did not further elaborate while answering this question. Only one offender discussed the shooting of rival gang members. He stated:
Yeah, I mean, in my neighborhood, when I turned 16, that’s when I basically started shooting people, putting in work and all. In my neighborhood, people feared me. They feared me because I didn’t have no problems with taking a life. I mean, you know, you disrespect me or do something wrong to me, you’ll die for it. I mean, my respect, I earned it, and everybody in my neighborhood knew I earned it. They know I put the work in, they know what I do, and they would try me.

Although the other gang members denied being involved in shootings with other gang members during this specific part of the interview, during other portions of the interview, the same offenders made general references to their connections with the shootings of rival gang members.

Seven gang members stated that escape was not the motive for assaulting the officer in the incident of examination. In addition, three offenders admitted that they wanted to kill, not injure, the law enforcement officer from whom they were attempting to escape. One offender who could have successfully escaped chose not to flee and assaulted the officer instead. He stated:

Yeah, I had a chance to get away. I would have gotten away for real. Here it is, anybody, if I give you a 40-yard head start and I fall, ain’t nobody going to catch you. You especially ain’t catching me. I’m a ghetto track star. I’ve been running all my life. He ain’t gonna catch me. If I wouldn’t have waited on him, he would have never caught me. He would have never caught up. So, I say, we’re going to end it right here and see who’s the best man. That was my thought process. I ran around the corner, and I waited on him. He came around the corner; I shot.

Another gang member was asked his views about using violence against law enforcement officers and stated:

Well, I think they [law enforcement] are d—heads. I mean, you know, I’d just be like, f— them. I mean, the police officer don’t get as much work as

Site of an alleged gang related retaliatory arson.
I do. I mean, when it comes to shooting and stuff like that, I do every day so a police officer cannot intimidate me. I mean, look at them guys with a uniform on that’s sometimes, most of them are out of shape. You know, they got stomachs. You know, they can’t run. And, here I am a thug on the street been shooting and killing people all my life and why am I gonna let him do something to me? Lock me up, why am I gonna let him, you know? Why am I gonna have respect for him? I’m not gonna have respect for him because he’s trying to stop what I’m trying to do. I’m out here trying to run this drug corner. Trying to sell these drugs and he’s basically trying to stop that. So, you know, he can go ahead and do his job, but just don’t go overboard ‘cause if you go overboard, then some bullets are gonna come flying at you. Throwing me up against the wall, punching me, throwing me on the ground, especially in front of a lot of people in my neighborhood. In front of a lot of people and I’m basically, I would basically have to do something about it. I wouldn’t be able to sleep knowing that this cop did this to me and I didn’t do nothing about it.” In addition to the issue of disrespect, the offender, when asked what would happen if an officer attempted to arrest him in his neighborhood, stated, “Yeah, we gonna say that’s number one. We gonna say that’s at the top of the list. Trying to take my freedom away from me, you’ll die, you know. Try to take my freedom or disrespect me, either one.

**Conclusion**

The offenders generally had been exposed to more overt violence at an earlier age than had the officers. The offenders were more readily able and more willing to use force, including deadly force, than were the officers. When contemplating the use of deadly force, the offenders also had fewer constraints placed upon them than did the officers.

A sharp contrast emerged between the typical assaulter in this study and the typical officer assaulted. The offenders generally were younger than the officers they assaulted. They were less frequently involved in a stable marriage and family relationships than the officers. Most offenders were much less educated than the officers they assaulted.

Gang members stated that they learned violent gang values at an early age and had them strongly and regularly reinforced. These values included strong, emotional attachment to the gang, the members, and the neighborhood. Rather than the prosocial values taught in most well-adjusted families, the gangs taught and reinforced antisocial values that protected them from outsiders, which included the law enforcement community. In fact, the gangs regarded law enforcement officers as not only outsiders but also threats to their survival.

The goal of every gang member was to achieve status and respect within their gangs. Gang members were respected only when feared. Fear was achieved through repeated acts of physical violence against others, usually viewed as outsiders. Once perceived as willing to use violence without conscience, gang members achieved status. This status usually was enhanced when they directed their acts of violence at law enforcement personnel, including corrections officers.

More important, differences in the mind-sets of offenders and officers were significantly noticeable. Officers’ behaviors were affected by social, legal, and ethical considerations learned in their families, schools, and social encounters. They also were exposed to strict legal constraints on their behaviors by their departments, politicians, and their communities. These ethical and legal considerations regarding their behavior were further reinforced by the potential adverse consequences of bad or inappropriate choices on their part, mainly loss of job, civil law suits, and possible jail sentences. Even errors in judgment, although perhaps understandable or even unavoidable, could have lasting and disastrous effects on the future lives of the officers. The offenders’ behaviors were not so constrained. In fact, from an early age and continuing to the assault under study, most offenders rarely were exposed to many of the social or environmental conditions that assist people in developing prosocial behaviors.

As officers continue to patrol the streets and respond to a variety of calls and subjects, they must be aware of danger signals that situations and subjects display. They must continually reevaluate their views and mental images of the type and appearance of individuals who might assault them.
National crime statistics demonstrate that firearms continue to be the weapon of choice for people who commit homicides in the United States. The 2004 edition of the FBI’s *Crime in the United States* notes that law enforcement agencies reported an estimated 16,204 murders and nonnegligent homicides for that year. Reporting agencies supplied additional detailed information about 14,121 of those incidents and identified firearms as the weapon used in 9,326 of the murders, with handguns accounting for 7,265 of the deaths.

Historically, offenders have used firearms, particularly handguns, more than any other weapon to feloniously kill law enforcement officers. The 2004 edition of *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted* (LEOKA) reports that 57 law enforcement officers were feloniously killed that year. Of those, 36 were slain with handguns, and an additional 2,109 officers were assaulted with firearms. As reported in *Killed in the Line of Duty* (1992), *In the Line of Fire* (1997), and the current study, the majority of officers killed or assaulted were attacked with firearms. Table 4.1 shows the type of weapon used in these attacks.

According to *Crime in the United States, 2004*, second to firearms, knives and cutting instruments were the weapons most frequently used by persons committing homicides in the United States. Offenders employed knives to kill members of the general public more than they used rifles and shotguns combined. In part, this explains why the investigators included knives or cutting instruments in the case selection criteria in each of their three studies. According to LEOKA (2004), knives and other cutting instruments were used to assault 1,121 law enforcement officers. During 2004, 1 officer was killed with a knife or cutting instrument. In their studies, the investigators listed attacks with a knives or cutting instruments in the “other weapons” category. The current study reports that two officers suffered serious stab wounds from a dagger, another was assaulted with a kitchen knife, and one was attacked with a carving fork.

### National Firearm Restrictions

To protect all Americans, the federal government has passed many laws to restrict and limit firearm purchases.¹ The offenders in this research, however, stated that none

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4.1 Type of Weapon Used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992 Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handgun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotgun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Because of rounding totals may not add to 100.0%.
of these laws or statutes deterred them. During interviews for the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, one offender said, “The weapon I used was stolen in an auto burglary. I didn’t worry about any laws. I sawed the stock and barrel off and had never fired the weapon until I shot and killed the officer.” During interviews for the *In the Line of Fire* study, an offender who shot and seriously wounded an officer with a handgun stated, “I stole the gun from a guy who stole the gun in a burglary in another jurisdiction.” This offender also said: “Guns are very easy to get on the street; you just have to know the right people.”

Because offenders in the earlier studies made similar statements, the investigators expanded the protocols in the current one to obtain additional information about the weapons used to assault law enforcement officers. These supplemental inquiries included the origin of the weapons, the offenders’ experience with weapons prior to the incident of examination, the extent of weapons training, the reason for weapon selection, the age when they began to carry weapons, the method of carrying a weapon on their person, the method of carrying a weapon while in a motor vehicle, the storage location of the weapon while at home, the circumstances of carrying the weapon while outside the home, the methods used to employ the weapon, the successfulness of achieving target objectives in confrontations with law enforcement officers, and the means of weapon disposal. The supplemental inquiries also asked whether they gave the weapon to other people to carry for them, how often they practiced with their weapons, and whether they carried a secondary or backup weapon.

### Weapon Experience

Of the 43 offenders who participated in the present study, 16 received some type of firearms training prior to the incident of examination. Ten of these offenders obtained formal firearms training while serving in the military; 2 enrolled in high school shooting programs; 2 attended basic firearms skills courses; 1 acquired firearm instruction from relatives; and 1 went to a state-sponsored hunter-safety program.

All three studies report that the offenders regularly carried handguns at a relatively early age. The offenders who were interviewed for the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study began carrying a handgun at the average age of 18. Those who were interviewed for the *In the Line of Fire* study began carrying a handgun at the average age of 17. The offenders who participated in the current study began to regularly carry weapons at the average age of 17. Sixteen of the 43 offenders in the current study began carrying handguns at age 15 or younger, with the age breakdown as follows: 9 years old (1 offender), 10 years old (2 offenders), 12 years old (1 offender), 13 years old (5 offenders), 14 years old (3 offenders), 15 years old (4 offenders). Eleven of these 16 offenders were self-admitted gang members.

Thirty-seven of the 43 offenders in the current study regularly carried a weapon, that is, most or the majority of the time. Of those, 35 regularly carried a handgun, 1 a knife, and 1 a rifle (in a motor vehicle).

Seventeen of the 43 offenders admitted carrying a secondary or backup weapon. Of those, 1 carried an additional backup weapon only while engaging in criminal activities; 5 always carried a backup weapon; and 11 sometimes had a backup weapon. By type of weapon, 3 offenders were armed with knives, 3 with shotguns, and 11 with handguns. In the current study, offenders used a secondary weapon in two incidents. In the first, a female offender, who had stolen several firearms during a prior burglary, fired two handguns at a law enforcement officer during a pursuit. In the second incident, an offender, who possessed a handgun and a military-style rifle, escaped the original assault after an officer shot at him. Although the offender chose not to use his handgun and fled the scene, he later fired his rifle at another officer who approached him a short time later. The offenders in both of these situations stated that they had not planned on encountering law enforcement officers; they also asserted that the secondary firearms they carried were not intended as backup weapons. Therefore, the current study does not identify any backup-weapon assaults against the victim officers.

### Prior Shooting Involvement

Of the 50 offenders who were interviewed for the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, 18 had been involved in shootings (either firing upon someone or being fired upon) prior to feloniously killing a law enforcement officer. Of the 42 offenders who participated in research for the *In the Line of Fire* study, 24 had been involved in such shootings before they feloniously assaulted an officer. Of the 43 offenders who participated in the current study, 18 had been involved in shootings before they feloniously assaulted an officer.

For the *In the Line of Fire* study, the investigators
coined the term *street combat veteran* to describe certain offenders who reported involvement in numerous shooting incidents. The term reflects the criminal firefight experiences of these individuals. Each street combat veteran had participated in 5 or more shooting incidents within his lifetime. In the current study, 10 offenders had taken part in 5 or more shooting incidents. These street combat veterans came from inner-city, drug-trafficking environments.

Eight of the 50 law enforcement officers who participated in the current study reported involvement in shootings prior to the incident of examination. One of these officers had been involved in 2 previous shootings and another had been involved in 3 shootings. Seven of the 8 officers had killed offenders during these prior confrontations. Their respective departments and legal oversight organizations had ruled that all uses of deadly force by these officers were justifiable.

The investigators asked the officers in the current study if, prior to the incident of examination, they had experienced hazardous situations where they had the legal authority to use their firearm against an individual but chose not to shoot. Thirty-six of the 50 officers responded that they had experienced such events, with an average occurrence of 4 prior incidents each. When asked about the circumstances of the prior situations, the officers cited a variety of reasons for not using their firearms. Generally, they stated that they did not shoot the offenders during these earlier encounters because they did not have to fire. The offenders eventually complied with their commands, dropped their weapons, surrendered, or gave the officers an alternative to using their firearms. None of the officers had been injured during these previous incidents. It appeared clear that none of these officers were willing to use deadly force against an offender if other options were available.

**Offenders’ Selection of Firearms**

In all of the studies, the investigators asked offenders to specify their criteria for selecting firearms. The offenders’ responses were similar in all three studies: availability was the overriding factor in weapon choice, and familiarity was the second-most important factor. In the current study, several of the offenders’ responses that fell into the “other” category for choosing a particular firearm included one offender who hand loaded ammunition to match the caliber of firearm he carried, one who selected the weapon because of its low cost, and one who chose the weapon because he felt it would do the most damage to a human being.

**Firearm Concealment and Storage**

In the current study, when asked to identify their method of carrying a handgun on their person, the 35 offenders who regularly carried a handgun replied as follows, with some reporting multiple methods: 17 stated that they concealed the weapon in the front belt/waistband area; 8 hid the firearm in the groin area; 7 carried the handgun in the small of their back; 4 put it in various clothing pockets; and 1 carried the weapon outside of his clothing tucked in his armpit, making it easy to get to or dispose of as necessary (he exerted pressure on the handgun with his arm to keep it in place). None of the offenders regularly carried their handguns in a holster; one offender, however, occasionally wore a holster when robbing banks. Of the offenders who admitted to regularly carrying handguns, 11 sometimes gave their weapons to another person—most often a female companion—to carry for them.

Figure 4.1 shows the circumstances in which the offenders reported carrying weapons for each of the three studies. The majority of the offenders who participated in the research reported that they carried weapons while traveling or when involved in criminal activity. For the current study, the majority of offenders reported that they also carried firearms when socializing. These individuals stated that they felt as comfortable carrying a firearm during social events as they did when committing crimes.

When asked to identify where they concealed their weapons while operating a motor vehicle, 15 offenders stated that they kept the firearm on their person, whereas 7 placed it beneath the seat, 3 on the seat, 2 in the trunk, 1 in the glove compartment, 1 in the front door pocket, and 1 between the seats. One concealed the firearm inside a door panel, and another hid it in the steering wheel area, replacing the driver’s air bag with the handgun. Five more offenders said that the locations of their firearms varied while in a vehicle, depending on the circumstances; however, they always kept the weapon within immediate reach.

Forty-one offenders admitted keeping firearms at their residences. Twenty-three offenders variously reported the location as under a pillow, on a nightstand, under the mattress, or within immediate reach while in...
bed. Seven offenders kept the firearm on top of their bureau or dresser or in a drawer. Five stored firearms in their bedroom closets, 2 in the kitchen, 1 in the basement, and another in the garage. One offender kept the firearm at a variety of locations immediately within his reach. One juvenile offender hid his firearm in the backyard of his residence to keep his mother from discovering it.

Firearm Practice

All of the 50 law enforcement officers in the current study had to qualify with their firearms at least once each year, averaging 2.5 qualifications per year for an average of 14 hours of sidarm training per year. As reported in chapter 2, 28 officers had an interest in firearms or practiced shooting in addition to their required firearm qualification training. Of those 28 officers, 22 hunted and occasionally practiced with shotguns or rifles. None of the 22 reported practicing with handguns in nonduty-related activities. Two of the 28 officers participated in competitive shooting activities and regularly practiced with handguns (once a week or more). Four other officers engaged in noncompetitive shooting activities and occasionally practiced with handguns (once a month or more).

By comparison, most of the offenders who carried handguns stated that they practiced shooting their firearms. Nine offenders practiced firing multiple types of firearms, including a handgun and either a rifle or shotgun. Of the offenders who admitted practicing with firearms, only two shot at firearm ranges. Most practiced informally at various locations, such as rural areas, wooded terrain, trash dumps, and on street corners in known drug-trafficking areas where gunfire was commonplace.

A further breakdown and analysis revealed some interesting data about the offenders’ marksmanship. In the In the Line of Fire study, 73 percent of the offenders regularly practiced with handguns, averaging 16 practice sessions a year. In the current study, 81 percent of the offenders regularly practiced with handguns, averaging 23 practice sessions a year. The investigators defined “practice” as the actual firing of a handgun or other type of firearm; they did not specify the length of the practice session. Evidently, the offenders practiced firing handguns more often than did the victim officers they assaulted. This practice time may have helped increase

FIGURE 4.1 Circumstances in Which Offenders Reported Carrying Weapons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circumstances</th>
<th>1992 Study</th>
<th>1997 Study</th>
<th>2006 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveling (no specific destination)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveling (specific destination)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in criminal activity</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some offenders reported carrying weapons in multiple circumstances. The population size for each study was 50 offenders (1992 study), 42 offenders (1997 study), and 43 offenders (2006 study).
the offenders’ marksmanship skills and their familiarity with the handling of firearms.

One offender in the current study admitted practicing two to three times a week with his firearm. When asked why he practiced so regularly, he replied:

Once I got out of the penitentiary, I started carrying a gun every day. Not just for my safety, you know what I’m saying, because I’m in the gang, too. We got drive-bys jumping off and people trying to kill you. Plus, I’ve got both spectrums of the criminal life. I’m a criminal. I’m doing dirt over here; I’m robbing people; I’m stealing; I’m selling drugs. And, I’m over here and I’m gang banging, too. So if I’m going to be a — out with me. I made it my business to be a little more professional with my handgun because I know I’m dealing with professionals. Any time you dealing with a professional, you have to remain professional. That was one of the things I learned in the penitentiary. Any time you deal with a professional, he going to handle you in a professional manner. If you’re dealing with an officer, he’s going to have a professional manner if he’s a professional. They go to the range two, three times a week. They practice arms so they can hit anything. So that was my object. I ain’t got no range, but I got the backyard, and we got some forest back there. I’m going to put some targets up, and I’m going to see what I can hit. After about two or three months, I was very good. I can hit on the fly, on the draw; I can come from anywhere, on the ground. But, that was training I taught myself.

This offender fired 12 rounds at a police officer, striking him 3 times. During this confrontation, the officer fired 7 rounds, none of which struck the offender. The offender’s self-proclamations of facility and accuracy with his weapon appear supported by the evidence.

**Shooting Style**

The investigators asked the offenders to describe the method in which they used their firearms, specifically target acquisition and aiming. Twenty-six of the offenders claimed to be instinctive shooters, which they described in various ways that involved the act of pointing and firing the weapon without consciously aligning the sights.

The offenders who described their shooting techniques as instinctive included those who regularly practiced with their firearms and those who claimed the incident of examination was their first shooting experience. In seven of the cases that involved instinctive-oriented shooting, the offender pointed a weapon at an officer with the stated intention of discharging it, but, for a variety of reasons, did not. Eighteen offenders claimed involvement in prior shooting incidents with law enforcement or other criminals before they assaulted the officers. Seventeen of these offenders stated that they were instinctive shooters and used this method when discharging their firearms in their prior shootings, as well as in the attacks in the current study.
All 10 of the offenders who were described as street combat veterans were instinctive shooters. When asked how he used his weapon, one gang offender from the current study stated:

How do I use it? It’s basically being able to seal your opponent. I mean, we out work; we’re not working with no marksmanship. I mean, we ain’t working with that, all that aim and shoot and all that. We not working with that. We just putting it in your direction, you know. We bust off a couple of shots, and we do it from there. We not gonna pull out a gun and try to aim it. Say, like I wanted to kill somebody, I pull from the waistline and I just aim it right at you. It don’t matter as long as it’s in the area, as long as it’s gonna hit you. You don’t matter if it’s up at your head or your chest, down at your legs whatever, you know, I’m gonna squeeze. Once I squeeze and you fall, then if I want to put the finishing touches on it, if I want to execute you, then I could go from there.

Although not eloquently stated, this offender’s comments indicate his familiarity with and willingness to use a handgun to take a human life. This information proved consistent with the findings reported in the *In the Line of Fire* study.

Offenders interviewed in the current and previous two studies opined that in street confrontations with other armed individuals, they simply had no time to aim the gun’s sights. In the current study, one offender said, “You point and you shoot; that’s all you do.” Another offender reported in the 1997 study, “There’s no time to sight up the gun. If you hesitate, you’re dead. You have the instinct or you don’t. If you don’t, you’re in trouble, on the street anyway.”

**Firearm Success Rates**

In the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, only 15 percent of the slain officers discharged their firearms during the attack. In the *In the Line of Fire* study and the current study, 42 percent and 58 percent of the assaulted officers, respectively, fired their service weapons. In an attempt to explain why some officers survived deadly encounters and others did not, the investigators considered an officer’s success of achieving target objectives once deadly force measures were initiated as a possible influencing factor in whether or not the officer survived. Of the officers who used their firearms, how successful were they in hitting their target? In an attempt to answer this question, the investigators conducted a literature search for national statistics about law enforcement officers’ success in achieving target objectives. As of 2006, no known databases collect this information nationally. Numerous law enforcement agencies throughout the United States capture departmental information of this type for internal analysis and application. The criteria, however, used by these agencies vary, thus making comparisons difficult.

In *Justifiable Use of Measures in Research on Deadly Force* (1989), Fridell relied heavily on a study conducted in 1980 and 1981 by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). The IACP study reported that “incident rates vary from city to city, just as bullet and individual hit rates differ. The information sources seem to be producing the same total patterns of variation across cities.” Fridell also referenced six studies conducted in the 1980s indicating that in general, police shootings resulted in 48 percent hits; that is, where the intended targets were struck by gunfire.

In *Deadly Force: What We Know* (1992), Geller and Scott reported on data from various city and state law enforcement agencies analyzing multiple years of data. Firearm success rates (measuring how many times the intended targets were struck by gunfire) ranged from 19 percent to 60 percent.

Table 4.2 shows a rate comparison of victim officers and offenders hitting their intended targets as reported in the *In the Line of Fire* study and the current study. The studies made no attempt to calculate a hit-miss ratio by reflecting the number of rounds expended in each incident. In some instances, the offenders fled the assault scene, and the actual number of rounds fired by the offenders remained unknown. Therefore, the investigators rated the offenders’ and officers’ firearm success by examining whether or not the intended targets were struck by gunfire, regardless of the number of rounds expended.

In the current study, offenders discharged firearms at victim officers in 26 incidents, which involved 23 handguns, 4 rifles, and 1 shotgun and included three incidents where offenders fired multiple firearms. The officers discharged firearms against their attackers in 23 incidents, which involved 26 handguns and 2 shotguns and included three incidents where two or more officers fired handguns. In another case, officers fired a shotgun and a handgun. The table lists the success rates, reflecting data from the *In the Line of Fire* and current studies, of...
The data in Table 4.2 require several points of explanation. The In the Line of Fire study showed that officers were fired at on 39 occasions. During 38 of these, the offender fired first. In the single incident where the victim officer fired first, the offender was struck and wounded. When the officers were struck by gunfire, the average distance between the offender and the officer was approximately 14 feet. By the time the officers (having been wounded in 91 percent of these confrontations) returned fire, the distance increased to an average of 21 feet because the officer, the offender, or both had changed positions. Therefore, the offenders enjoyed a distinct firing distance advantage. The In the Line of Fire study also reported 7 incidents where a struggle ensued between the officer and the offender for possession of the officer’s handgun. In each case, the offender disarmed the officer, fired at a range of 0 to 3 feet, and wounded the officer.

The closeness of these shootings may have significantly increased the offenders’ firearm success rates.

In the current study, 29 incidents occurred where an offender used or attempted to use a firearm against an officer. In 26 of these, the offender fired first at an average distance of 15 feet. This average is somewhat misleading, however, because several incidents involved offenders firing at officers from lengthy distances. For example, two offenders being pursued for armed robbery fired handguns at officers from a distance of approximately 70 feet; none of the shots hit the officers. Moreover, 15 incidents took place where offenders fired at officers from a distance of 10 feet or less. Of those, 8 incidents involved shootings where offenders fired at officers within 0 to 3 feet. The offenders successfully hit the targeted officers in 12 of the 15 incidents. After the exchange of gunfire, the average distance between the officer and the offender increased to 25 feet.

There were 13 incidents where uninjured officers...
fired at offenders. Of those, the officers successfully wounded their attackers in 8 incidents.

Of importance, 10 of the total victim officers had been wounded before they returned gunfire at their attackers. Therefore, the offenders enjoyed a definite advantage due to distance and officer impairment. Their advantage also was more pronounced than reflected in the overall averages listed in Table 4.2. In these cases, the closeness of the encounters may have increased the offender’s firearm success rate.

In three incidents, the officer fired first. All of the officers successfully hit and incapacitated the offenders who pointed weapons at them but had not yet fired.

**Weapon Acquisition**

In the current study, the offenders’ most frequently admitted law violations involved drugs, followed by weapons. Authorities often find illegal drugs and illegal guns together. Many individuals involved in various criminal activities steal, trade, swap, rent, and barter guns. However, firearms trafficking most commonly occurs with drug trafficking. Many offenders in the current study said that it was just as easy to obtain an illegal firearm as it was to obtain drugs. Many involved in drug trafficking reported that firearms were necessary for conducting business.

Thirteen of the 43 offenders readily admitted membership in street gangs connected with drug trafficking. They stated that they freely exchanged firearms within the gang and viewed them as a necessary tool not only for their criminal activities, but also for protecting their territories. None of these particular gang members obtained their weapons legally. Generally, they obtained the firearms by illegal street purchase, trade, swapping on the street, or as the proceeds of theft, such as burglaries and larcenies.

Four officers were assaulted with handguns taken from them. In one incident, a lone officer attempted to make an arrest for a misdemeanor warrant when the offender effected a “spin move,” removed the officer’s service weapon, and shot him in the chest. In another incident, a lone officer escorted a prisoner for hospital treatment when the offender attacked the officer, removed his service weapon, and attempted to shoot him. After the victim officer engaged in a lengthy struggle, additional officers arrived and disarmed the offender. In a third incident, an offender used his fists to knock an officer unconscious and then removed the service weapon and pointed it at the officer’s head. Before the offender could fire, an onlooker shouted at the offender, who stuck the weapon in his belt and fled the area. In the fourth incident, an officer dropped his department-issued handgun in a dark area after receiving a very serious gunshot wound. In an effort to defend himself, the wounded officer drew a backup handgun, which the offender grabbed and attempted to discharge several times. Because its safety mechanism was engaged, the handgun failed to fire. The offender then fled the area. As in the two prior studies, when unarmed offenders removed service weapons from officers, they shot or attempted to shoot the officer in every instance.

Two incidents occurred in which offenders unsuccessfully attempted to remove officers’ service weapons from their holsters. In the first incident, an officer struggled with an offender who had partially removed the officer’s holstered weapon. Realizing what was occurring, the officer struck the offender with a collapsible baton, ending the struggle. In the second, an offender used his fists to beat an officer unconscious. As he tugged on the officer’s weapon in an attempt to get it out of her holster, he saw a citizen approaching and fled without the firearm.

Of the 33 handguns used to assault the officers who participated in the current study, 32 (97 percent) were obtained illegally. Eighteen of these were purchased or...
traded from other individuals; 6 were obtained during burglaries; 4 were taken from the victim officers during the incidents of examination; 2 were stolen during larcenies; 1 was stolen during a homicide; and 1 was illegally purchased from a firearms dealer in a store (straw purchase by a female associate). The weapon that was legally obtained was purchased from a firearms dealer in a store. The handguns consisted of 18 semiautomatics, 14 revolvers, and 1 derringer. In the incident where the handgun was legally purchased, a 50-year-old male with no prior criminal convictions purchased the handgun. Years later, he became involved in a neighborhood argument and murdered two neighbors. When an officer responded to the homicide scene, the offender pointed the handgun at him. The officer shot and disarmed the offender. A subsequent investigation revealed that the offender had purchased the weapon legally but at a later date, his psychiatrist had advised him to dispose of any and all firearms in his possession.

In the current study, offenders used 4 rifles and 1 shotgun to assault officers during separate incidents. The offender using the shotgun to attack an officer obtained it during an illegal purchase or trade. One of the rifles had been acquired during a homicide, while another was an illegal purchase or trade. The 2 remaining rifles were legally purchased from licensed firearms dealer stores. None of the rifles, shotguns, or handguns connected with this study were obtained from gun shows or related activities.

Many of the offenders who participated in the current study admitted to possessing more than one handgun. Only four offenders claimed that they never had owned a handgun. Thirty-nine offenders owned handguns prior to the incident of examination; collectively, they had possessed a total of 365 handguns throughout the years. Ten offenders reported possessing more than 20 handguns each. These figures include 13 gang members who regu-
larly exchanged handguns (all illegally obtained) with other gang members.

When asked about the ease of obtaining firearms illegally, one offender in the current study said:

All these politicians are screaming about more gun laws, more gun laws. F--- the gun laws. I never gave a sh--- about the gun laws that are on the books. And, the 8,000 new gun laws would have made absolutely, whatsoever, about me getting a gun. Why? Because I never went into a gun store or to a gun show or to a pawn shop or anyplace else where firearms are legally bought and sold and picked up a gun, ever. Because I’m a felon, I couldn’t pass a background check, you know. And, that’s just common sense, and I think most felons know that. I’m not going to pass a background check, and I’m not even going to try. Why? Because I can break into Joe Blow’s house down the road here. And, if you do your burglaries in the right places, the chances are very good, I’d say 80 percent or better, that these people are going to have a handgun of one form or another. You can then take that handgun and sell it privately. Of course, it’s not a legal sale. Of course, it’s under the table because you’re probably selling it to another felon, you know, and make money off it or swap him for a better piece. But, that’s the most proficient way that I’ve found to do it, was just break into a house where it was relatively likely they were gonna have a piece and search the motherf--- from top to bottom until you found your gun.

The investigators then asked this offender how difficult it would be to illegally purchase a gun on the street. He responded:

Sure, the black market, quote, unquote. You can get everything from a cheap little .22-caliber Saturday night special that’s gonna maybe fire two rounds and fall apart; you can buy anything from that to a .50-caliber Desert Eagle, you know, that retails for twenty-two hundred bucks. You can find everything in between. You can find Rugers, Glocks, Colts, H and Ks, Browning, whatever you want to get a hold of.

The investigators asked another offender if he normally purchased handguns from a store. He stated:

No, we ain’t going to no store to buy them. I mean, you know, you got everybody out there doing their thing as far as being a criminal. You got guys out there that sell drugs. Guys out there that do burglaries and all that stuff. So, there is some gun sellers out there; so, when it comes down to getting the connect, it’s not difficult at all. I mean, there’s somebody selling guns. I mean, it’s easy. I want to say it’s almost easy as being able to find drugs. Somebody knows somebody who sells guns.

Such statements are representative of the offenders interviewed. The offenders admitted committing numerous criminal acts of violence prior to the assault incident of examination. When questioned specifically about prior handgun offenses involving murder and assault, all of the offenders reported obtaining the handguns illegally.

The majority of the offenders stated that they disposed of their firearms in the same manner that they usually obtained them: illegally selling or trading them to other individuals. One offender stated:

We sell it. If I got a body on my gun, what I do is sell it. But, if it was a body that I thought, you know, was something, I really needed to get rid of the gun, then, you know, might do it the old way and toss in into the river or go bury it. But, you know, we basically sell them and let them go into somebody else’s hands. Sell them to somebody I don’t know.

**Traits of Armed Individuals**

National statistics have shown that firearms, specifically handguns, are the weapon of choice for offenders who kill. This remained true for the offenders who participated in the three studies. Offenders in the current study regularly carried firearms when traveling, socializing, and conducting criminal activities. In fact, numerous incidents occurred where the offenders produced handguns and caught the officers unaware. Nine offenders had handguns concealed in their waistbands at the time of the assault, including 1 offender exiting a motor vehicle, 1 entering a commercial establishment, 1 exiting a commercial establishment, 1 being investigated for drugs, 1 rapidly walking away from a citizen who was yelling at him and chasing him, 1 entering the front door of his home during an ongoing investigation, and 3 offenders who ran from officers under varying circumstances. Two
offenders had handguns concealed in their crotch areas. During unrelated incidents, both offenders were arrested and searched; however, the handguns were overlooked. After significant interactions with the victim officers, both offenders produced their handguns and assaulted the officers. (For a detailed discussion about training issues related to searching offenders, see chapter 7.) Another offender exited a motor vehicle with a handgun concealed beneath a denim jacket draped over his forearm.

In 3 incidents, offenders produced handguns while inside motor vehicles. In 2 of these incidents, the officers were unaware of the presence of the handgun until it was used against them. During the third incident, however, the officers suspected a handgun might be present and took the necessary precautions to ensure their own safety. Since these officers were able to perceive that they were dealing with an armed subject, could other officers do the same? Did the gunmen display specific traits that warned the officers of potential danger? After reflecting on the hundreds of law enforcement felonious deaths and assault incidents that they had examined, the investigators concluded that they could answer both questions with a qualified yes. They decided to include some suggestions to help law enforcement officers improve their skills in detecting firearms and observable traits of armed individuals. Recognizing these potential warning signs should help law enforcement officers articulate the justification necessary to make lawful stops and frisks so they can better protect society and themselves from these potentially dangerous situations.

**Officer Behavior**

First and foremost, law enforcement officers must remember that wherever they are, so is a handgun. Whether in uniform, business attire, or casual clothes, the on-duty officer always is armed. Many police officers also carry a firearm when off duty. As most officers are keenly aware, they are not the only person legally—or illegally—carrying a weapon. What factors can alert an officer to the presence of another armed individual? What observable behaviors can an officer detect when someone carries a concealed firearm? One way for officers to begin answering these questions is to reflect upon their own behaviors. Law enforcement officers carry weapons under a multitude of circumstances, not just when in uniform. Other work-related situations can include plainclothes, detectives, old clothes, and tactical assignments, as well as undercover operations. Also, there are many nonduty-related circumstances in which law enforcement officers may carry weapons. These include such activities as grocery shopping, travel to and from work, picking up laundry, and attending social functions with family members. How do officers act under these and similar circumstances when armed?

Officers usually carry their department-issued handguns to and from work. When not in full uniform, officers typically carry their firearms concealed under a jacket, shirt, or other article of clothing and almost always in a holster. Although most off-duty officers do not purposely intend to become actively involved in a hazardous law enforcement incident, they always should be prepared to act appropriately if such a situation suddenly arises.

The three investigators collectively have carried concealed firearms for more than 75 years throughout the United States. Their handguns have ranged from small-framed revolvers to large-framed semiautomatic pistols. When investigating cases for their special studies, they always dressed in civilian attire, always were armed, and frequently were in the neighborhoods where the felonious killings and serious assaults on victim officers took place. In all cases, no law enforcement officers ever stopped and questioned them about the presence of their firearms. This anecdotal information conveys a basic principle: no one knows more about carrying a concealed firearm than do experienced law enforcement officers.

Sometimes, officers become so complacent about carrying a weapon that they may overlook obvious signals indicating that others around them also may be armed. To understand, recognize, and articulate traits of armed individuals, officers can begin by asking themselves certain questions when observing the behavioral traits of potentially armed individuals. Officers who work plainclothes assignments, and those who carry handguns off duty, primarily are concerned with firearm concealment, accessibility, and security. Are these matters not the same for other armed individuals, including criminals? By reflecting on their own behavior, awareness, and training, and by refining their powers of observation, officers can enhance their skills in detecting the presence of armed criminals.

Officers should not only examine their own behaviors but also observe fellow armed officers not in uniform. Do such officers dress in a certain manner that enhances concealment of their firearms? Would offenders not dress accordingly? When officers stand, sit, walk, run,
or change body positions, do they exhibit specific traits indicating that they possess a firearm? Would armed criminals change body positions similarly? Officers also must temper their observations by accounting for major differences between their own experience and that of people who are not law enforcement officers. By regulation, most officers carry handguns in agency-approved holsters. In contrast, the offenders in the three studies did not use holsters. This may have made their actions more exaggerated and noticeable, or it may have affected their behaviors in varied but related ways. Also, if stopped and questioned, officers display their identification and usually continue on their way. Offenders who carry illegal handguns realize that if a law enforcement officer stops them, they may face arrest and a possible jail sentence. Because the stakes are considerably higher for armed criminals, could this increase their anxiety and cause them to act differently?

Many officers realize that some of an offender’s behaviors may result from a need to conceal a firearm. Officers also know that carrying a concealed weapon over an extended period of time may produce certain body movements or gestures, which may be performed without conscious thought. Could offenders who have carried handguns for a long time also display such unconscious actions? Knowledge, awareness, clear thinking, and finely honed observation skills may give officers an advantage when confronting armed criminals who may exhibit specific and unique signals indicating the presence of a firearm.

Female Offenders

In the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, two female offenders killed victim officers with handguns. In one instance, a female murdered an officer with a handgun that had previously been given to her by a male co-offender. In another incident not included because it occurred prior to the dates selected for the study, a female used a handgun to kill two officers. In the *In the Line of Fire* study, three female offenders assaulted officers with handguns. Twelve percent of the male offenders in the same study reported giving their handguns to females to carry for them when approached by law enforcement officers. For this reason, the investigators expanded the protocols used for the current study to capture more-detailed information regarding female offenders and their involvement with handguns. The following discussion focuses on the firearm-related behaviors of female offenders from all three studies.

Officers who participated in the research for the three studies, regardless of gender, have stated that they once considered female offenders less of a threat than males. This perception changed dramatically, however, after the officers experienced being assaulted by female offenders. As one officer stated:

> It’s possible that we don’t view females as being as much of a threat as a male. I learned something from this. Female prisoners, they’re no different from other prisoners. They are capable of killing you just like their male counterparts. Just like juveniles, they’re capable, and some do have the desire to kill you, and they will try. They should not be dealt with any different than any other prisoner.

In one incident, the officer was transporting a female offender to a detention facility when she produced a handgun and ordered him to pull the vehicle to the side of the road. A gun battle ensued with no shots taking effect. After numerous backup units arrived, she surrendered. When the offender had been processed, the officer had a conversation with her. The officer said:

> I actually went to the jail later that night to speak with her, just her and me. Just me talking to her to find what happened. I think she was very open and candid with me. She showed me exactly where she had the handgun. And, probably a month earlier, she had given birth to a fourth or fifth child. So, she had a lot of loose skin on her belly and lower genital area, I guess. She showed me where she had the handgun placed, right in front of her just below the waistband inside of her pants. She described how the officer (a female) searching her didn’t look around but was feeling around in that area. She felt around her stomach but because of the configuration of her stomach and the loose skin, that it kind of blended in. She just felt over it. She never really reached inside or ran her hand around that area.

One female offender reported carrying a handgun in a shoulder holster, whereas another carried her handgun in the small of her back. The remaining females stated that they carried handguns tucked in the waistband of their pants or fully concealed in the crotch area.

When driving, two female offenders carried hand-
guns under the car seat. The remainder kept their handguns on their person. None of the females gave their weapons to another individual to carry for them. One female offender stated that beginning at about 17 years of age, she regularly carried a handgun in the small of her back while conducting street drug sales. She said:

I would usually carry my gun in the small of my back. I needed protection when I was out there selling drugs. When I wasn’t selling drugs, I would carry the handgun in my bra because I didn’t need to get to it as quickly. I have been removed from cars several times by male and female police officers. On two of those occasions, I had a handgun in my bra, and the police patted me down and failed to find it. One time, it was a male officer and the other it was a female. I wasn’t worried about the male officer. There was no way he would touch me in the breast area, and I knew it. If he started to try, I could make a big deal of it, and I’m sure he would have backed off. When the female officer patted me down, she did stick her hands in my armpits and waistband. I was more worried about her. It never even occurred to her to touch me in the area of my breasts. They just don’t want to get that personal, I guess.

After arresting and searching a female offender, an officer was transporting her when she produced a small caliber handgun hidden in the crotch area of her pants. The officer stated, “Even though I knew it was a safety issue, I also knew the political climate. At the time, I believed it just wasn’t acceptable to search a woman’s private area as thoroughly as I would a man’s.”

The following sections present characteristics of male offenders who carry handguns. These characteristics equally apply to female offenders. But, according to both officers and offenders interviewed in all three studies, one major difference exists: officers remain reluctant to adequately search the genital area of female suspects.

The meanings we place on various stimuli can offer a much distorted perception of what is in the environment. When did you perceive the gun?
Concealment Characteristics

Of the offender’s in this study who admitted to carrying handguns, ninety-two percent reported regularly carrying handguns in the middle torso area of their bodies. Given this information, but not ignoring other possibilities, the discussion will focus on this part of the body.

While examining the clothing characteristics and behavioral traits, officers must consider the individual location, surroundings, and circumstances inherent in each encounter. They also must remember that no single observation or trait discussed will suffice to establish reasonable suspicion or probable cause in detaining, frisking, or searching an individual. Because observations and traits are merely indicators, readers must take into account the totality of the circumstances surrounding each observation. The goal is to assist officers in ensuring their own safety. When observing people, officers must ask why a subject is dressed in such a manner, moving in a particular way, or shifting body positions. Addressing these self-initiated questions within the totality of the circumstances can lead a reasonable and prudent officer to an educated and trained suspicion that the person might be armed.

However, officers must bear in mind another obvious difference: law enforcement officers usually obey the law and criminals generally break it. This implies that laws, administrative procedures, or moral ethics rarely constrain criminals. As a result, they can be more inventive and devious when concealing illegal firearms. For example, in a case investigated but not included in the current study, officers arrested an offender with a firearm concealed inside an occupied baby’s car seat. Therefore, the absence of traits and characteristics does not suggest that officers can let their guards down in any type of law enforcement situation. They never can assume that a criminal is unarmed until they have thoroughly searched the person and the surroundings themselves.

Clothing Indicators

Specific observations regarding a person’s attire may indicate that the individual may be armed. These may include, but are not limited to, what individuals are wearing during warm versus cold or inclement weather conditions, as well as accessory items that they may carry and unconventional weapons designed and manufactured for concealment.

Warm Weather Conditions

Is the individual dressed inappropriately for existing weather and temperature conditions? A person who attempts to conceal a weapon may wear or carry additional clothing other than that required or appropriate for the existing weather conditions. This suspicious behavior is particularly observable in warm weather conditions. Why would an individual wear a jacket, sweatshirt, sweater, raincoat, or overcoat on a bright sunny day when others are dressed in short-sleeved shirts? Is the individual wearing multilayered clothing, such as two shirts or a pair of sweatpants over a pair of jeans, during weather and temperature conditions that make such layered attire inappropriate, uncomfortable, and excessive? Similarly, if a man is wearing a dress shirt, dress pants, and dress shoes, why would he have his shirttail hanging out? Less obvious are individuals dressed casually but also with their shirttails outside their pants. These inappropriate garments can possibly cover areas of the body where criminals frequently conceal firearms. However, alert officers may notice a slight bulge or protrusion that raises their suspicions.

Obviously, officers can visually detect firearms easier on individuals dressed appropriately for warm weather. Officers should look for unnatural protrusions or bulges in the waist, back, and crotch areas. They also should watch for less obvious cues, such as shirts that appear rippled or wavy on one side of the body while the fabric on the other side appears smooth. Many offenders in the three studies revealed that they purposely transported weapons in their crotch areas. They did this because of the reluctance of officers to thoroughly search this location. As a result, officers should pay close attention to protrusions or bulges indicative of a foreign object in that region of the body.

Cold and Inclement Weather Conditions

Are individuals with a coat, raincoat, or jacket draped over their arms unnecessarily exposing themselves to the elements? What about those wearing a hooded jacket or coat in the rain or snow without the hood covering the head? One offender in the current study stated that he had several friends who carried firearms in their jacket hoods. Also, in periods of extremely cold weather, why would people not fasten their jackets or heavy coats, thereby exposing themselves to the elements? Could it be that
they want quick accessibility to a firearm?

When individuals have on jackets and coats, are these pieces of clothing visibly weighted to one side, giving the appearance of an unusually heavy object in the pocket? Normally, personal items, such as wallets, keys, pagers, and cell phones, do not weigh enough to cause a pocket to hang substantially lower than the one on the opposite side.

**Accessory and Other Items Carried**

In cold weather conditions, individuals may have a hand warmer attached to their clothing or person in some manner. If these people appear to have been outside for some time, why are they not keeping their hands inside the hand warmer? If they have on gloves, why do they need the hand warmer? Does the hand warmer exhibit ripples or waves in the fabric, giving the appearance of containing a heavy object?

What about individuals carrying such items as purses, knapsacks, soft briefcases, gym bags, folded-over newspapers, or paper bags that appear out of place? Do these articles display a protrusion? Is the outline of the frame of a handgun or a partial contour, such as the barrel or butt, visible?

If an individual is wearing a fanny pack, can a wallet be seen in a pants pocket? If so, what is in the fanny pack? Does it appear weighted with a heavy object? Most types can conceal a handgun and may include a drawstring or a quick-release closure method added for rapid access.

**Unconventional Firearms**

Officers need to remain vigilant for a separate class of firearms designed and manufactured for concealment. Generally manufactured without sights, these weapons, referred to as “belly guns,” are usually inaccurate unless fired at a very close distance. Manufacturers also have produced handguns intentionally disguised as other objects, including pens, pagers, cell phones, belt buckles, and wallets. Offenders have related that they possessed such weapons to use against law enforcement officers who may overlook them during arrest or transport situations. The use of a hand-held magnetometer can assist officers in detecting these types of handguns and other potentially dangerous metal instruments, such as knives and razors. The chapter on training discusses the use of magnetometers.

**Behavioral Traits**

In the three studies, the offenders who carried firearms did not use holsters. They reported frequently touching the weapon with a portion of their hands or arms usually to assure themselves that it remained hidden, secure, and accessible. These acts become most observable whenever individuals change body positions, such as standing, sitting, or exiting a motor vehicle. Their unholstered handguns have a tendency to shift, requiring them to adjust or reposition the weapon to its original position. Walking with a concealed, unholstered handgun requires individuals to occasionally use a portion of their hands or arms to prevent the firearm from moving or to adjust the weapon after it moves. When people run, these actions may appear more pronounced and may involve maintaining a constant grip on the handgun to maintain control.

Law enforcement training teaches officers to keep their gun side away from individuals during street contacts or interviews. “Blading” the body makes the weapon less accessible to the offender. Armed criminals do the same in encounters with law enforcement officers to ensure concealment and easy access to their firearms. As an interviewed offender said, “If they’re on that side of me, they can’t see it. I can also get to it quicker if I need to. Because they can’t see what I’m reaching for, I get that extra second.”

**Stopping Armed Individuals**

Basic principles of safely stopping suspected armed individuals should include some primary considerations. Not intended as a comprehensive, stand-alone checklist, this information reflects the personal insights of the investigators and other law enforcement officers who have studied or interacted with armed criminals. These insights, based solely on observing universal behaviors displayed by armed individuals regardless of age, sex, race, or ethnicity are neither mutually exclusive nor all inclusive. So, when the investigators discuss, for example, the importance of lighting conditions during a traffic stop, they are in no way diminishing or neglecting the importance of securing adequate and protective cover. Rather, their recommendations highlight the safety of the officer and the community, along with the adequate and sufficient force necessary to effect a stop and possible arrest of an armed offender. Officers must carefully evaluate the facts and circumstances of each individual incident and weigh the risks versus the rewards of making the stop.
Officers should effect the stop of a pedestrian or vehicle in a manner that affords the officer the maximum tactical advantage and the maximum opportunity to have sufficient backup assistance present.

**Stop Location**

One factor frequently within the officer’s control is the location chosen to effect the stop, which does not have to be the site of the initial observation. Knowledge of the surrounding area is extremely important in initiating a safe stop. Officers should think ahead and consider the worst-case scenario whenever contemplating making a stop. They should consider possible escape routes and the danger presented to other law enforcement personnel and the public should a foot or vehicle pursuit take place. Officers also should take into account the possibilities of a firefight occurring. Of course, officers should attempt to effect the stop in a location that affords minimum exposure and risk to themselves and innocent bystanders. Most important, although officers usually can control where they initiate the stop, they cannot depend on subjects necessarily stopping at the chosen site. When offenders fail to comply with the stop, they may be attempting to select a more beneficial location for themselves, considering options of escape and tactical advantage, or deciding whether to use their firearm against the officer. All of these factors may increase the potential for danger.

**Lighting Conditions**

Because, historically, most law enforcement line-of-duty deaths and serious injuries have occurred during hours of darkness, the preferred approach and stop location should include optimal available lighting conditions that favor the officer. When possible, officers should position themselves to see the offender’s hands better. Where low-light conditions exist, officers should attempt to stop the subject where they have the maximum amount of artificial lighting available. Officers also should consider shining light sources, such as flashlights, headlights, spotlights, and takedown lights in the suspect’s eyes to temporarily blind the person. Officers working in tandem can prearrange that one officer concentrates the light source on the subject’s face, while the other illuminates the hands or torso area.

**Available Cover for Officers**

Officers should assess the availability of cover and attempt to take advantage of any that exists. If they effect a stop without benefit of protective refuge, officers should know the location of the nearest available shelter. Officers also should consider potential cover that the subject might seek whenever selecting a stop location. Officers always should select areas that afford the subject the minimum availability of cover and themselves the maximum.
Additional Elements

Officers rarely need to effect pedestrian stops instantly or in a threatening manner. Instead, they can conduct their approach and stop of pedestrians in a way that keeps subjects from realizing that they are about to be stopped for questioning or that they are under criminal suspicion.

Subsequent to the stop, officers can make additional observations about the subject, including evaluating the person’s demeanor, actions, movements, and responses to inquiries and scrutinizing the individual’s clothing characteristics. Officers can accomplish this by using a matter-of-fact, nonthreatening conversational tone.

Depending upon the totality of the observations and circumstances that led to the encounter, in some cases, officers should consider approaching the subject in a variety of inventive ways that can include, but not be limited to, using diversions, distractions, or subterfuges. As an example, an officer approaches a group of three people, one of whom he suspects is armed. The officer deliberately makes continual direct eye contact with one of the individuals he does not believe is armed while keeping the one he suspects within his peripheral vision. When the officer gets within an arm’s reach of the subject he is looking toward, at the last moment, he changes direction and confronts the possibly armed individual. In these types of stops, officers should not make unassuming conversational requests of the suspected gunman, but, rather, issue direct verbal commands that are clear, concise, and unambiguous.

Officers must take into account the location, surroundings, and circumstances of the stop. Other than unmistakable knowledge that a subject is definitely armed, no single observation or trait discussed will suffice to establish reasonable suspicion or probable cause to detain, frisk, or search an individual. Instead, these observations and traits are merely indicators, and officers must consider the totality of the circumstances surrounding each of them.

Wearing inappropriate clothing could be completely explainable depending on the circumstances and surroundings where the observation took place. For example, a traveler who just arrived from a colder climate may have on an overcoat on a warm sunny day. One possible explanation may be that the person has to carry luggage, making it necessary to temporarily wear the coat. This person may be in the vicinity of an airport, train terminal, bus station, or subway or in the process of hailing a taxicab. Under these circumstances, the observation of inappropriate clothing for existing weather conditions probably would not be a clear indicator that the person may be concealing a firearm because such behavior may be completely understandable.

In contrast, an officer patrolling near an exclusive restaurant on a warm, sunny summer day may know that patrons are required to wear a jacket and tie at this establishment. The officer observes a shabbily dressed man hurriedly exit the restaurant and walk away at a fast pace. He is wearing a heavy raincoat, and, while walking, keeps his right arm pressed against his waistline. The observations made under these circumstances may indicate to the officer that the subject possibly is armed and may have robbed the restaurant.

By focusing on observing traits, behaviors, surroundings, and the combined context in which they occur, law enforcement officers should be able to articulate justification sufficient to effect citizen stops and frisks whenever reasonable suspicion or probable cause are present. Moreover, officers must constantly remind themselves that a recovery of a weapon from a suspect never should prohibit the continued search of the violator for additional weapons. After all, the identification of armed criminals, the safe confiscation of their illicit firearms, and their arrest and conviction are of paramount importance in ensuring the safety of law enforcement officers and society in general.

Conclusion

What can the law enforcement profession hope to learn from offenders? Do they provide information that may assist officers in protecting themselves? Can offenders accurately describe how a shooting happens?

This research has identified certain unique commonalities and characteristics of armed offenders who have killed or attempted to kill law enforcement officers. Nearly every offender the investigators interviewed freely admitted their lengthy criminal histories, which included a prevalence of violence. Many of them became familiar with weapons and began to regularly carry concealed firearms at an early age. Slightly less than one-third of the offenders gave the weapon to another person to carry for them (usually a female) under a variety of circumstances. Over one-third of the offenders carried a backup
weapon. It became evident that the interviewed offenders developed a dependency on firearms to provide them protection, not only while committing crimes but also when they socialized, traveled, and engaged in other noncriminal activities. Hence, to better prepare themselves when encountering suspected armed criminals, officers should keep the following findings in mind:

- A firearm always is at the scene when an officer is present.
- The majority of offenders who attacked officers with firearms used handguns.
- Illegal firearms and illicit drug activities frequently were connected.
- Offenders selected firearms based on availability more than any other criteria.
- The vast majority of the offenders obtained and disposed of their firearms illegally.
- Most offenders carried firearms in the waistband area without use of a holster for maximum concealment and accessibility.
- When operating motor vehicles, offenders most frequently carried handguns on their person, underneath the seat, on the seat, or in the door, all within easy reach.
- While at home, the offenders mostly stored handguns in the bedroom (when the offenders did not carry the handgun on their person.)
- Offenders regularly and informally practiced with their firearms.
- The majority of offenders were instinctive shooters.
- Offenders typically displayed no moral or ethical restraints in using firearms. In fact, the street combat veterans survived by developing a shoot-first mentality.
- Shootings unfolded extremely quickly.
- With practice, training, and concentration, officers can better observe telltale traits and characteristics that will enable them to detect the presence of concealed firearms.

The law enforcement officers participating in the current and the In the Line of Fire studies have clearly demonstrated that they were capable of surviving a gunshot wound during incidents in which firearms were initially undetected or overlooked. It is hoped that information presented by these survivors will help reduce the occurrence of such tragic events.

Law enforcement managers must provide the necessary leadership in developing progressive training to assist officers in improving their observation skills, recovery techniques, and approach techniques when they detect armed criminals. Law enforcement trainers also are encouraged to incorporate the material in this chapter as part of officer safety curricula. Finally, law enforcement officers must remain constantly vigilant and appropriately trained to better protect themselves from armed criminals.

Endnote

For an example of the laws restricting firearm purchases, see the language on Part 1 of the Over the Counter Sales Form, from the Department of the Treasury, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Transaction Record. It states that for a firearm purchase to be legal, the purchaser must meet the following requirements: The firearm “must be purchased by the actual buyer and not on behalf of another person”; the buyer cannot ever have been “convicted of a felony or any other crime for which a judge could imprison the person for more than one year”; the buyer cannot be a “fugitive from justice”; the buyer cannot be an “unlawful user of or addicted to marijuana or any depressant, stimulant, or narcotic drug or any other controlled substance”; the buyer cannot ever have been “adjudicated mentally defective (which includes having been adjudicated incompetent to manage your own affairs) or have been committed to a mental institution”; the buyer cannot have been “discharged from the Armed Forces under dishonorable conditions”; the buyer cannot be “subject to a court order restraining them from harassing, stalking, or threatening their child or intimate partner or a child of such partner”; the buyer cannot ever have been “convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence”; the buyer cannot have “renounced United States citizenship”; the buyer cannot be “an illegal alien”; and, finally, the buyer cannot be a “nonimmigrant alien.” These are the minimum restrictions, and states may impose more stringent guidelines.
As an integrated part of understanding the three main components of a violent encounter—the offender, the officer, and the circumstance itself—there is an additional aspect that law enforcement officers should understand: the role of perception. This chapter explores the ways in which officers and offenders process information during an encounter and, in particular, how their perceptions may or may not differ.

The present discussion is not an exhaustive review of the cognitive and emotional aspects of perception. Rather, its purpose is as follows:

• To give an overview of a current theory about the way in which human beings perceive their environment.
• To explain how the perceptions of the officer and the offender at the crime scene may have affected the ways in which both acted.
• To discuss the implications of these findings for law enforcement training.

Processing Information: Perception, Storage, and Recall

This section examines a particular case in order to explore how different people may process information in different ways, including their perception, storage, and recall of details. How often do law enforcement officers observe suspects and immediately know that they possess a weapon or illicit drugs? On such occasions, why are some officers frequently unable to articulate which observational building blocks they linked together to identify indicators that led to a perception of reasonable suspicion or probable cause? Equally important, why do they sometimes have difficulty explaining what factors caused them to react in appropriate ways to prevent an assault, make a justified and successful arrest, or save an innocent life? A close look at the circumstances of one case—the officer’s perceptions of the encounter, the community’s perceptions of the encounter, and additional examples of similar cases—can help answer these questions and highlight specific interactions during violent encounters.

Case Review

On a warm summer evening in a large city, narcotics officers working the 4 p.m. to midnight shift began a buy-bust operation at an intersection known as an open-air drug market. Approximately 50 to 60 persons, many presumably involved in drug trafficking, had congregated on the sidewalk. Five minutes earlier, two undercover officers had walked into the area and purchased illicit drugs from several street dealers. Both officers left the intersection and broadcast the drug dealers’ physical descriptions to arrest teams, which consisted of three unmarked vehicles with three officers in each car. The arrest teams canvassed the vicinity to locate the suspected drug dealers.

As the unmarked police cars approached the targeted street corner, the crowd immediately began to disperse. At this time, an officer observed a subject matching the description of one of the drug dealers and instructed the driver to stop the vehicle. The doors of the unmarked police car swung open, and the crowd began to clear the area more hurriedly. The officer who first saw the alleged dealer shouted to his fellow officers to indicate the person he intended to stop. Simultaneously, another officer exited the cruiser and pointed to a different individual approximately 30 feet farther down the sidewalk. The second officer began calling out to the others, as well as broadcasting on the radio, to “get the one in the red shirt;
he’s got a gun.” The man in the red shirt ran down the sidewalk after he saw the plainclothes officers approach him from both sides with their weapons drawn. Although ordered to show his hands and lie flat on the ground, he ignored the command and continued running. Two officers grabbed the subject and attempted to gain control of his hands while forcing him into a prone position. He continued to resist both officers by trying to stay on his feet and keeping one hand pressed against his waistband as if reaching for a weapon. As a result, one officer struck the man’s arm with a collapsible baton, causing him to fall to the ground and release his grip on the handgun. One officer then safely removed a .357-caliber handgun from the subject’s waistband, placed it in his own waistband for the purpose of temporarily securing the weapon, handcuffed the subject, and placed him under arrest. The remaining members of the arrest team continued to canvass the area until they located, identified, and arrested the alleged drug dealers.

Officer Perception. While the officers were in the station house processing the prisoners and completing the necessary paperwork, the officer who originally identified the alleged dealer turned to the officer who had spotted the gunman and asked, “How did you know he had a gun?” The officer who noticed the gunman hesitated for a moment and then replied, “I’m not sure why; I just knew.” He finished processing his prisoner and sat down to prepare his statement of facts for presenting the case to the prosecutor’s office. As he began to recall the circumstances of the incident, he made a conscious effort to remember every detail that led him to conclude that the suspect possessed a handgun. First, the officer recalled that when they drove up to the scene, he saw the male in the red shirt sitting on a curb. As the officers exited their vehicles and the crowd began to scatter, the man stood up and adjusted his waistband. Next, the officer remembered that, although the weather was extremely warm, the subject had on a long-sleeve dress shirt with the shirttails hanging out. Finally, he recalled that immediately after the man stood up, he turned the right side of his body away from the officer and began to walk in another direction, grabbing the right side of his waistband as if securing some type of object. The combination of these factors led the officer to correctly believe that the individual in the red shirt was armed.

The officer made these recognitions so rapidly that he experienced an instantaneous recognition of danger. Yet, he could not articulate these detailed and specific reasons to his fellow officers until long after the incident was resolved and, then, only after he had made a conscious effort to recall every detail that led him to develop, process, and act upon his observations.

Community Perception. Several citizens sitting on their front porches witnessed the arrest teams approach and apprehend the male armed with a handgun. None of the citizens knew that he had a firearm. One later filed a complaint against the officers involved and stated, “There were a lot of young men standing on the street corner. The police pulled up, and all of the young men began to disperse as they normally do. There’s a lot of drug dealing that goes on over there. We’ve seen the police jump out on the drug dealers many times. But, this was different. They immediately pulled their guns out and were pointing them at this young man. They were also hollering something at him, although we couldn’t hear what they were saying. They didn’t give him a chance. They just grabbed him, beat him with a police club, and hauled him away. They didn’t stand him on the corner for a while like they do all the other dealers. They just beat him for no reason and took him away.” Why did these witnesses not see the danger signals that the officer perceived?

Additional Examples. Far from the metropolitan area where the drug deal described above occurred, an incident took place involving shots fired—two chilling words that can interrupt the momentary quiet of an officer’s radio. Scores of officers responded to the location that the dispatcher had broadcast. What began as a calm midnight tour of duty quickly changed into a frantic gun battle. Afterward when asked how many shots he had fired, the officer involved responded, “I only got two shots off....” When his weapon and magazine were examined, however, it became clear that six shots had been expended.

In another jurisdiction, an officer became involved in a shooting after a suspect had shot at a fellow officer. The officer fired his service shotgun once, striking the suspect in the chest and causing him to fall to the ground. Although wounded, the suspect continued to move his hands toward his weapon that he had dropped on the ground. As the officer was about to fire another round at the suspect, he noticed something in his peripheral vision that made him stop: it was the foot of the second officer kicking the suspect’s handgun away. At that point, his vision opened up, and he saw the second officer standing to the right of the suspect. As the shooting was unfolding,
the first officer did not see the second officer approach as the suspect fell to the ground, dropping his weapon.

Questions to Answer. Some officers can identify with these scenarios. When involved in a serious, life-threatening situation, tunnel vision, auditory exclusion, the inability to recall details—even very important details—may occur. Why and how does this happen? Why do some witnesses of an encounter and even some well-trained and experienced law enforcement officers report what appear as conflicting and contradictory accounts? Answers lie in our unfolding knowledge of how we perceive what is happening in our environment, how we process and store that information in our brains, and how we then recall that information.

Mistaken Theory: The Brain as a Video Camera

The following is a discussion of several assumptions that stem from a now-discredited theory that humans process information in the same way that a video camera captures information. Over the past few decades, cognitive scientists have gained a better understanding of how perception, storage, and retrieval of information occur in the brain. They have studied not only the global aspects of perception, but also specific areas of the brain that contribute to the perceptual process. Only recently have researchers dispelled the theory that the brain works like a video camera. That theory generated the following mistaken assumptions:

Mistaken Assumption #1: Everyone sees what really occurs. When people reflect on their own experiences, they quickly see how erroneous this assumption is. It takes nothing more than attending a sports event. The referee throws the penalty flag. As quickly as it hits the ground, spectator opinions of what really happened during the controversial call fill the air. With equal certainty, opposite sides defend their positions. It is very clear to each person what happened in spite of the fact that these explanations contradict one another. It could not have occurred the exact way each person recalls: either the penalty took place or it did not. Until viewing the instant replay in slow motion, however, all spectators believe that they saw and know what happened. Only the instant replay can reveal the true events that took place.

Mistaken Assumption #2: Everyone sees everything that occurs. If this were true, it would not matter where in relation to an incident a witness was standing or whether the witness was tired or fully alert. If the mind recorded all stimuli as does a video camera, then a person would need only to recall the specific information. Research experiments, as well as personal experiences, show that the position (standing or seated) of witnesses will affect the quality, quantity, and accuracy of their perceptions. Something as simple and yet as dramatic as depth perception is affected greatly by a person’s location in reference to the incident. For example, the perception of how quickly an object was moving oftentimes depends on the viewer’s position vis-à-vis the object in question. Watching the flow of traffic can easily demonstrate this. Looking at oncoming traffic from various angles will result in seeing the vehicles appear to move faster or slower depending on the angle of view, even though they are moving at the same speed.

Mistaken Assumption #3: Everyone processes incoming information the same way. One of the investigators offers a story to exemplify how this assumption is inaccurate. During his college years, he and a friend decided to play a set of tennis and then go into town to do some shopping. At the prearranged time and place, they met. One was dressed for tennis, the other for shopping. Each “knew” they had decided to do both: play tennis and shop. However, they “recalled” the order of those events quite differently.

Mistaken Assumption #4: Everyone remembers exactly what occurred during an incident. In a previously discussed case, an officer involved in a shooting recalled that he had fired only two shots. In fact, he had fired six. Even after he saw the evidence of six spent cartridges in his weapon, he still was certain that he had fired it only twice.

Mistaken Assumption #5: Memories stay the same, maintain accuracy, and remain consistent over time. During the 1970s, journaling was very popular. Many individuals recorded events that occurred and various reactions they experienced during them. Upon reading those journal entries years later, many people are surprised at their recorded entries and reactions. Their current recollection of these circumstances sometimes prove quite different from what they wrote two or three decades earlier.

Mistaken Assumption #6: Because their memories are recorded in their brains as events happen, people can replay those experiences with accuracy and in
As will be explained later in this chapter, this misunderstanding of how perception and memory work has led some judges to refuse to allow witnesses to testify in cases where their memories may have been contaminated.

**Interviewing Witnesses**

Neuroscientists’ realization that the brain does not work like a video camera resulted in a new understanding of how witnesses remember crime scenes. Law enforcement personnel now recognize that during interviews and interrogations they can no longer rely on the assumptions generated by the theory that the brain processes information like a video camera. For example, an old interview technique included informing witnesses that because the brain records experiences just as a video camera does, they can recall, in detail, the events that occurred in their presence, even if they were not paying particular attention to them. Because witnesses fully expected to remember details, many times they would recall those specific details that the officers asked about. Law enforcement personnel now know that many of those so-called remembered details were confabulated, or made up. Witnesses were not intentionally lying; they very much believed that what they recalled happened in the way they described it. In many cases, however, the details that the witnesses remembered during the use of these interviewing methods were blatantly incorrect. Unfortunately, although these recollections were clearly wrong, they became embedded in the memories of the witnesses and were resistant to change. It seemed to the witnesses as if the events as recalled were, in fact, the way they took place. This is one of the major reasons that witness information has traditionally been regarded as questionable.

A witness’s misconception may lead to an incorrect recollection of an incident.

This inaccurate understanding of human perception and memory was most clearly demonstrated through some inappropriate forms of hypnosis used to refresh supposedly the memories of witnesses or victims. These individuals were told that their minds recorded events in detail, much like video cameras, and that they could use their mind’s imaginary remote control device to play the event. They also were informed that they could rewind their mind’s video tape and even zoom in on details of what someone may have been doing or wearing that their conscious minds could not remember. Although this may be a reasonable technique in some therapeutic settings, it is misleading and inappropriate in forensic matters. Again, if given the suggestion that they will recall exact
details of events (that they may or may not have actually observed), people may imagine witnessing specific details, even though these never occurred or never actually were observed. Many of these details might well be confabulated. The result of using this inaccurate model of human memory and the sometimes faulty and confabulated information it produces has led some investigations far from the correct path to the offenders.

These same principles apply, of course, when law enforcement officers are interviewed following the use of deadly force. As this chapter unfolds, it will become clear why some officers could not recall the specific number of shots fired or see certain events that occurred, such as an approaching officer, during incidents involving the use of deadly force. To come to a better understanding, a review how the brain works will prove helpful.

**Current Theory: The Brain’s Processes and Constructs**

This section introduces cognitive and biological scientists’ current understanding of the way in which the brain processes information. The first principle for understanding how perception occurs is that the brain processes events and various stimuli in the environment, not merely records them. This process operates in a slightly different way for each person, and law enforcement officers often observe the effects of this difference. When an incident occurs on a busy street, it is common for officers to separate witnesses and to interview each one individually. Routinely, each witness’s rendition of the occurrence offers very slight to very major differences. Are they lying? In most instances, the answer is no. Rather, each person perceived the incident somewhat uniquely and then processed and recalled that information in different ways, thus rendering contrasting accounts.

How does this various processing of information occur? Why do three people present at the same event describe it differently? The answers lie in combining three components: biology, environment, and psychology.

**Biological Aspects**

Currently, cognitive scientists consider that the way the brain processes material can best be understood as a multitasked operation. This has not always been their understanding, even among biologically-based scientists. For example, a discarded theory of how the brain works once explained that for every experience a specific brain cell recorded and responded to that particular event. This theory was often colloquially referred to as “the grandmother cell” theory, based on the principle that for every experience (including that of one’s own grandmother), a corresponding cell existed in the brain. When that particular cell was triggered, the appropriate image (grandmother) would appear in the individual’s mind. Clearly, this is not how the brain actually perceives stimuli and processes and recalls events. After all, if the brain really worked this way, the vast amount of experiences that a typical adult has in a lifetime would require the brain to be the size of a small building.

The brain processes all incoming stimuli, assigning certain responsibilities to its various parts. An estimated 1 billion stimuli are sent to the brain every second. These include sounds (such as noises from air ducts, sounds of animals, and movement of air and wind) and light (areas of the room that receive more or less light and shades of lighting, such as flickering candles and the rays of sun on glass). Of these multiple sensations, only about 100 are sent on to be processed. For example, when you hear the word apple, what do you think about and what image comes to mind? Ask several people to respond to the word apple and you will quickly hear a variety of answers. Some will say, “red,” “juicy,” or “grandma’s apple pie.” Others will offer “yellow” or “tree.” Why so many different first responses?

No single cell in the brain is exclusively dedicated for collecting all apple-related data. So, how does the image of an apple become displayed in the mind? Perception and memory are segmented and stored in various parts of the brain. Color, size, shape, taste, and texture are all experienced and stored in different parts and areas of the brain. When people hear the word apple, they call upon their own individual experiences with apples, and, based upon these, their personal image of an apple comes to mind. The mental exercise of filling in the blank or sentence completion also can demonstrate this constructive aspect of the brain. When presented with the sentences “Men are like _______” and “Women are like _______,” individuals draw from their own vast experiences and associate the missing information with an answer consistent with these experiences.

**Effects of Environment and Psychology**

Scientists currently believe that the brain constructs
memories by linking together pieces of information. An example of this process involves what happens when people think about an apple. They associate this image with some of their experiences, all equally idiosyncratic. When asked to articulate what they are thinking, some people may discuss a recent grocery shopping experience; some may relate a particularly fond memory of a teacher as far back as elementary school; and some may speak of a time in childhood when they went to an orchard and picked apples.

Some perceptions and memories, then, are the result of or are influenced by various related pieces or bits of information, such as size, shape, color, and texture, coming together in the brain at a point in time. Memory especially is affected by past similar occurrences and can be looked at as a chain made up of links associated with one another. When there is a critical mass of such information, one link attaches to a related link and these attach to yet other links, ultimately forming a memory chain. One person might say, “The word apple makes me think of growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania, which leads me to think about my summers when we were out of school. One of our chores was to pick apples from the trees on our property. These apples were used to make cider, dumplings, and pies. The pies were most enjoyable, especially with the cinnamon that flavored them. But, cinnamon was great in the winter, too. We would put it in our warm apple cider after coming in from sledding.” And, the story goes on from there. That same initial image, however, could lead another person into quite a different direction.

People construct memory links based on their particular experiences, biases, and expectations. They retrieve memories by associating a memory segment to another closely related one. For example, a witness might say, “The man I saw was tall, about 6 feet tall. I knew this because he walked by my girlfriend, who is only 5 feet tall. The suspect looked a foot taller than my girlfriend. I guess that’s what made me focus on his hair. His head became so prominent when he walked by my girlfriend. His hair was the same color as my girlfriend’s, dirty blond, but hers is short and straight. His was very curly and long, at least over his collar. Oh, and the collar was white; it really stood out on the blue shirt he was wearing.”

Upon examination, the statement quoted above demonstrates that one piece or bit of information led the witness to recall another associated piece of information. Most interviewers know that open-ended questions—allowing witnesses to talk and recall on their own—achieve a greater amount of accurate information. By asking questions during witnesses’ initial recollections of the events, interviewers may inadvertently interrupt their recall and send them off on some tangential road. Interviewers should ask questions regarding particular statements made by witnesses after taking the initial verbatim statements.

So far, the present discussion has focused on perception and memory as they pertain to nonthreatening and nontraumatic circumstances. What happens to perception under exceptional conditions of high stress and anxiety?

**Impact of Emergency and Trauma**

Physiological conditions can affect the way that the brain processes information. High alert or high arousal produces intense and specific physiological reactions. One of the most important effects of intense stress, dichotomous thinking, separates materials into contradictory or mutually exclusive categories. Officers move from driving down a peaceful street on a clear evening to suddenly hearing shots ringing out from an alley they are approaching. As an armed suspect runs toward them, they have no time to engage in a group discussion to debate what their response should be. In such situations, humans have only two viable options (fight or flight) with which they are biologically wired to react. They can either run away from the threat or attack it head-on. Another physiological reaction is the “freeze response” (discussed later in this chapter). The brain reduces its functioning to one purpose: preservation.

Several specific and intense physiological reactions typically take place during moments of self-preservation. People who face life-threatening events are bombarded with stimuli from all sides. By focusing on preservation, the brain directs all of its forces to those activities needed to survive. Many brain functions that are not necessary for immediate survival become less active, and those areas that are needed to promote survival become dominant. This includes the body’s blood flow during conditions of extreme physical or emotional shock. During life-threatening situations, the body shunts blood to the brain and heart, the two most important organs for survival. This process results in many of the seemingly odd and exaggerated experiences officers have during use-of-force
situations, namely auditory exclusion, time distortion, and tunnel vision. Each of these sensory experiences can be very adaptive, albeit confusing both to the officer experiencing it and to those who later hear of it from the officer. For those listeners who have had similar reactions during highly dangerous circumstances, they respond with, “I know just exactly what you’re talking about.” Those listeners who have not experienced similar situations or otherwise lack an understanding of such normal reactions under stress may doubt the officer’s truthfulness or judgment.

**Perceptual Distortions**

Why do perceptual distortions take place, and why are they biologically adaptive? Some officers related that when gunfire erupted during a violent encounter, they heard only popping sounds—not at all similar to sounds they had heard on the firing range or even while hunting. Others noted that they did not hear police radio transmissions or even the raised voices of other officers during the encounter. In these cases, their brains were attempting to reduce the amounts of what are perceived as distracting stimuli by filtering out as much noise as possible to allow the officers to focus intensely and almost exclusively on the perceived threat.

During an extreme situation, time often appears to slow down. What took only 3 to 5 seconds to occur may seem to the officer involved as having taken 10 to 15 minutes. It is as if the brain is putting the brakes on, trying to slow down what is happening. Overwhelmed by the vast amounts of information coming in, the brain slows its processing down in an attempt to collect information, to rapidly make sense out of the material, and to control what is happening. During such occasions, some officers may see movements of people and objects in slow motion. One officer stated that he could actually see the ejected shell casings tumble from his pistol as he fired and could read the words on the bottom of them as they slowly passed in front of him. In another incident, an offender fired at an officer seated behind the wheel of his police vehicle. The officer said:

As I told you earlier, it was like things just, all of a sudden, everything went into slow motion, at least for me. The bullets are hitting the glass and breaking through the windshield, and I can, I know people probably think I’m lying, but I can actually see the projectiles coming through the windshield at me. I throw my hand up in a defensive reaction, and I catch one of the projectiles. It hits me in the finger and goes through my arm. And then, when I was firing at him, it seemed like I was throwing mud balls because I’m watching as the bullets are leaving the barrel of my weapon. It’s like it’s going in slow motion at him. When I’m shooting at his car, I am trying to lay these bullets into the back window. It’s like I’m throwing mud balls. You see them arching, and they are going into that window. You can see the window exploding, and it’s all going, it’s like it’s in such slow motion.

Another officer explained that he believed he benefited from having veteran officers tell him that slow motion can occur. In this incident, an offender had initiated a gun battle. The officer related, “During my slow-motion experience, I felt very aware of what was happening. I felt a strange calmness and confidence in my ability to take the proper action, which was to shoot the b—.” He attributed his reaction to having been trained to expect these sensory distortions to occur in a highly charged situation.

Many officers spoke of experiencing tunnel vision. This occurred when they focused on an extremely small, narrow, and limited area. They could not recall seeing surrounding or peripheral movement or activity. Their brains were attempting to limit and restrict the amount of incoming information necessary to develop strategies

Because of tunnel vision, many officers were unable to recall seeing surrounding movement or activity.
for self-preservation. The brain does this by reducing the field of vision to what is perceived as the most dangerous threat. In an incident from the current study, an offender pointed a .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol at an officer’s head. The officer advised:

> When I saw the gun, I didn’t know what caliber it was, but it looked like a 12-gauge shotgun barrel. I knew that couldn’t be because the guy was pointing a handgun, but it sure looked like a 12-gauge barrel to me. When the confrontation was over and I got on the radio, the dispatcher asked me for the description of the subject. All I could tell her was that it was a white male and he was armed with a handgun. Thank God she had the tag number of the vehicle. At the time, all I could remember was his face and the barrel of that handgun pointing directly at my head.

Other officers similarly stated that they could relate in detail the description of the weapon they faced but had greater difficulty describing their assailant. This is both understandable and adaptive because the officers immediately perceived the weapon as presenting the most dangerous and instantaneous threat to them and, therefore, the primary focus of their attention.

As understandable and adaptive as slow-motion reactions are from a strictly biological perspective, they also can be very maladaptive in the law enforcement world. Neuroscientists have a growing understanding about why and how these reactions occur. Current studies explain how blood supply to various parts of the brain is enhanced while that to other parts of the body is reduced during traumatic and emergency situations. Perception, memory, and recall are all constructive; they come about from various parts of the brain working together to produce an experience. If particular areas of the brain receive a reduced supply of blood, very little activity occurs there. On the other hand, where the blood supply is enhanced, more focus and attention may take place. And so, if the stimuli are not perceived to begin with, they certainly cannot be recalled at a later time.

These findings have immense implications for law enforcement. They not only may affect officers’ perceptions for the purpose of future testimony but also may be responsible, in part, for whether officers avoid harm, sustain serious injuries, or even die during an emergency response. It also is very important to recognize that not all officers will experience the same sensory perceptions or distortions as other officers on the same scene. The degree of emotional intensity each officer experiences during an encounter will vary as well. These variations in reaction, perception, and recall should not be considered in and of themselves as pathological, unnatural, or attempts by officers at distorting what actually occurred. An example can help explain this:
An officer responded to a call for an armed holdup in progress. As he approached what he knew from the address to be a small restaurant, he turned off his siren. As he got closer, he also turned off his emergency lights. He parked his vehicle several yards from the restaurant to avoid being seen approaching. Before entering the restaurant, he noticed the waitress at the cash register and someone standing in front of it with his back to the door. The officer knew something was wrong because the waitress never cashed customers out, only the owner did that. The officer realized that this was very likely a robbery in progress. As he approached the door, he noticed that all of the patrons were seated and looking down either at their tables or at the floor. He opened the glass door to the restaurant and told the person at the register, whom he assumed to be the armed suspect, to remain where he was and to extend his arms up and away from his body. As the suspect extended his arms, the officer saw the suspect’s weapon, a handgun. As the officer moved toward the suspect, he heard a pop and felt a burning sensation. He recalled having difficulty breathing and then falling to the ground. The officer never saw the second holdup suspect at the end of the counter. He remembered that as he opened the door and commanded the suspect at the register to extend his arms, his attention and focus became fixed on that suspect. When he saw the suspect’s weapon, all he remembered from that point was seeing the outline of the suspect in front of him. The officer experienced tunnel vision and auditory exclusion. Even when he was shot, his later recollection was only a burning sensation, not a slam to his side as the bullet entered his body between the vest panels at his armpit.

In the example described above, the officer’s biological reactions to the immediate stress affected his perception of the other dangers present in the restaurant and influenced his response to being shot. These reactions also influenced what he could recall of the incident and what other information he did not perceive or could not remember. Some of the details that the officer did not perceive were later provided by certain patrons and workers in the restaurant and further corroborated by other witnesses.

**Training Concerns**

Law enforcement training must take into account the biological reactions to acute danger that officers experience and then help them to deal with these reactions. Most officers know that witnesses and victims experience such reactions but may not expect to be affected themselves. Officers should know that they or their partners might experience such reactions during an extremely stressful situation. Law enforcement training must educate officers to understand the nature and cause of biological reactions, to recognize them when they occur, and to help develop psychological protections to reduce their negative impact.

Police supervisors, training officers, citizens, and prosecutors must become aware of the biological reactions to stressful, emergency situations. They must also understand the psychological effects of these experiences. Following a traumatic incident, the statements of witnesses, victims, and police officers may reveal some confusion regarding observed details. Conflicting statements made by police officers may result from the same type of biological and psychological reactions that influence witnesses and victims of violent crimes.

Social science research, including the investigators’ findings (Killed in the Line of Duty [1992], In the Line of Fire [1997], and the current study), seem to indicate that training can make a significant and important difference in dealing with these reactions. Officers interviewed for the current study indicated that during a traumatic or life-threatening emergency situation, they “heard the voice of my instructor at the academy” telling them to expect cer-
tain reactions. It appeared that knowing that they might experience these stressful reactions minimized the intensity of them. Only 2 of the 50 officers in the current study actually recognized the reactions they were having and attempted certain interventions that seemed to minimize the effects.

Case Review

As an example, several officers responded to the closing of a large night club, which usually contained 300 to 400 patrons, and was well known for attracting local drug dealers. Numerous shootings had occurred at closing time in the past. Eight uniformed and four plainclothes officers were assigned to the area. As the large crowd emerged from the building, a sergeant and an officer, both in uniform, were in the street attempting to keep traffic moving. Numerous pedestrians wandered into the roadway. After successfully moving them onto the sidewalk, the officer and sergeant turned their backs to the crowd and stood shoulder to shoulder facing the roadway. A male emerged from the crowd and walked up behind them. From a distance of approximately 2 to 3 feet, he aimed a .38-caliber handgun at the back of their heads and discharged one round. The officer related:

I was standing with my back to the crowd when I heard an explosion. It was so close to my ear that it blacked me out. It was near the Fourth of July and I thought, 'who's throwing cherry bombs at us?' As I leaned over to clear my head, I heard the sergeant holler, 'Gun.' I then noticed that the sergeant was down on his knees with his hand to his head. I immediately knew that he had been shot in the head from behind. I then ran back to check on the sergeant. I was sure he was dead. But, when I got back to the original area of the shooting, the sergeant was not there. Neither were any other officers. I began to panic because I knew the sergeant was in serious need of medical attention, and I wasn’t sure if anyone was looking after him. I then saw him walking towards me from the direction that I had just come. I was amazed that he wasn’t hurt.

When asked about the same incident, the sergeant replied:

We were standing in the street when I detected movement behind us. Then, I saw the glint of a gun barrel coming towards our heads. At the same time, I heard it go off. I temporarily blacked out, fell to the ground, and grabbed my ear. I wasn’t sure if I had been shot or the gunman missed. I hollered ‘gun’ to the officer who had been standing next to me. The officer immediately went into a crouch and spun to face the gunman while simultaneously pulling and extending his service pistol. The gunman was backing away from us, and the crowd behind him began to run in all kinds of directions. He looked like he was trying to make a decision whether he was going to run or fight. When he saw the officer’s handgun being pointed in his direction, he began to run. I looked at my hand and there was no blood. I then realized that the gunman had probably missed both of us. I got...
up and began to run approximately 10 to 15 feet directly behind the pursuing officer. There was a lot of traffic in the roadway, and I saw numerous citizens jump out of their cars without putting them in park. They were also running in numerous directions. The gunman ran past the unoccupied vehicles. Cars were now colliding with one another. He stopped, turned, and brought his handgun up in our direction. When the gunman stopped and began to turn, the officer in front of me went into a classic academy shooting stance. It was a textbook shot. The officer fired before the gunman could get the weapon fully raised. I know the officer’s round struck the gunman because when the bullet hit him, he was knocked backwards, which caused him to spin and fire directly into the air. He spun and stumbled a little bit, but he continued to run. The officer who fired the round began to come out of his shooting stance, and then I heard another shot. I didn’t see where it came from, but the gunman fell into the street. Several of us approached the gunman cautiously as we could see he still had the handgun in his hand. We positioned officers behind and on both sides of the gunman before we started our approach. As we approached the gunman, he attempted to raise the weapon again. The officer positioned behind him shot him in the head. That shot put him down for good. We removed the handgun from him, handcuffed him, and waited for the ambulance. I then walked back down the street in order to secure the area where the shooting started. I ran into the officer who was standing next to me when all this began. To my surprise, he had returned to the scene to render first aid to me. He was very glad to see that I was okay.

The officer and sergeant were clearly involved in this incident in its entirety. Both recalled specific details that were basically the same; however, there were some major differences.

- Why did the officer not recall drawing his service weapon while turning to face the offender?
- Why did he not remember seeing the offender stop, turn, and raise a gun in his direction?
- How could the officer not have seen the offender’s gun discharge into the air?
- Why did the officer believe that he was running when he fired the shot?

Case Review

An officer chased an armed offender attempting to flee the scene of a shootout with several other police officers. The offender ran through the yards of several residences, and the officer momentarily lost sight of him on several occasions. The officer stated that he experienced tunnel vision; he concentrated his vision on the offender, in particular his hands. The officer rounded the corner of a residence and caught a glimpse of the offender as he fled into a wooded area. The officer remembered his instructor’s words, “Pay attention to your surroundings and where the bad guy is leading you.” The officer said that he paused and considered the possible consequences of chasing an armed suspect into a large wooded area unfamiliar to him. The officer advised:

It was clear that this guy was willing to kill a cop. He had already tried to do so. He could ambush me from a variety of locations in those woods. I knew nothing about this area, and it occurred to me that the suspect might be trying to lead me into a trap. I decided it wasn’t worth the risk. The suspect was apprehended later without incident. We’ll never know what would have happened if I had entered those woods, but I believe, I believe, I did the smartest thing at the time. He was caught later and nobody got hurt. I’m sure it was a good decision, and I have my training instructor to thank for that.

Case Review

In the dark, an officer chased an offender who fled from an automobile. The offender ran into the rear yard of a residence. The officer stated:

An officer in my agency had been killed several months earlier in a foot chase just like this one. I have been involved in several shootings, and I didn’t want to instigate another. This incident seemed like it was occurring in slow motion. When that happened to me before, I had a tendency to try to make things go faster. I had recently received
in-service training on conducting foot pursuits. Our trainers made sure we were fully aware of the dangers of going around blind corners, especially in the dark. So instead of rushing to get this guy, I let the sensation of the slow motion continue. I refused to get in a rush, and I simply took my time. I stopped at the corner of the house and listened. After several seconds, I heard the suspect climb over a fence. It was only then that I proceeded into the rear yard, when I knew it was safe to do so. Your safety comes first in these situations.

The offender was apprehended without incident several minutes later in possession of a handgun. When questioned afterward, the offender stated that he had waited for the officer several times during the foot pursuit and had planned to shoot him. When the officer did not appear when and where the offender anticipated, he attempted to escape. The officer stated, “That s— was waiting to ambush me. He probably would have been successful, too, if we hadn’t received that training.”

Schemas as Filters of Experiences
To understand perception, recall, and memory it is necessary to consider not only biology, but also environment and psychology. If humans functioned only at the level of biology, on the level of their evolutionary primitive brain, they would have no control over their experiences, no understanding of why they experience circumstances the way they do, and certainly no way to mitigate some of the biological forces that affect their experiences. There would be little difference between human brains and those of horses, cows, cats, and dogs. That, however, is not the case. Humans have a layer on the top of their brains—the cerebral cortex—that most other organisms do not, at least not one as well developed as it is in humans. It is in the cerebral cortex that biology, environment, and psychology interact; this interaction will determine, to a large extent, whether biological, environmental, or psychological factors will take precedence during an encounter.

The brain attends to only about 100 of the 1 billion stimuli per second that it receives. Moreover, because of the interplay between environmental factors and the person’s psychology, the brain actually processes only about one-half of those 100. The following paragraphs describe how, according to some scientists, this process takes place.

Social scientists use the term schemas, which are the kinds of filters that the brain uses to collect and make sense of information. As multiple stimuli of sights, sounds, smells, and feelings enter the brain, these filters try to collect information consistent with a person’s experiences, training, hopes, expectations, and biases. People
make sense of the various stimuli by pulling together those that they need for their own preservation (especially in highly charged emergency situations) and those that are consistent, or that can be made consistent by how they perceive them, with what they already know.

Social scientists also have shown that these schemas, or filters, assist us in trying to make sense out of these millions of stimuli by assembling or constructing them in ways consistent with expectations, hopes, biases, and experiences. The brain can be thought of as a large, complicated maze. The materials found in this maze are the incoming stimuli from the environment: the waves of light hitting the retina, the length and duration of sound waves that create pulses within the ear, and the smells that trigger olfactory sensations. When people put together all of these sounds, sights, tactile sensations, smells, and various tastes, their brains attempt to make sense out of the environment (that is, to perceive and understand in an orderly way what is happening). However, they must recognize that perception is not a final product with which the brain makes sense out of those stimuli. The final product is a perception endowed with meaning. The meanings people attach to their perceptions produce the final perception. The meanings that they place on the various stimuli can be helpful and accurate or misleading and inaccurate; or they can offer a much distorted perception of what is in the environment.\(^{15}\)

A couple of examples can help explain how this may occur. As discussed earlier, the brain filters out vast amounts of information during a fight-or-flight set of circumstances. By focusing on the most immediate threat, the brain can exclude other stimuli available in the environment. Although this undoubtedly was a great help to the caveman fighting a saber-toothed tiger, it also may have been the cause of his genes being taken out of the gene pool if another tiger was just around the corner. This example has real meaning for the law enforcement officer. As described in a case reviewed above, an officer was shot by a second, unnoticed offender in a restaurant. By focusing only on the immediate threat and allowing the normal and natural tunnel vision to dominate, the officer missed the second, even more dangerous threat. This second threat was more dangerous because the first robber had his back to the officer, making him less threatening than the second.

In the earlier example of the two people who decided to play tennis and then shop (although one of them thought they were going to shop and then play tennis), each of them recalled what they hoped to do first. They processed the information in a way consistent with their respective wants and desires. There was only one conversation, and both of them were present for it. How could they come up with two very different conclusions from the same conversation? Their own personal desires affected the way they perceived and recalled that conversation.

**Personality Traits and Schemas**

In the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, 22 of the 50 participants who were interviewed and killed a police officer, were diagnosed as having antisocial personality disorders (ASPD). As explained in that publication, an individual with ASPD sees the world as a hostile, threatening place. People with ASPD experience their environment through this hostile or threatening filter or schema. This is no defense for their actions or behavior, but it does give some understanding about why they sometimes are so dangerous. The theory is that if the world is so hostile and dangerous and everyone is out to take advantage of me or harm me in some way, I will make a preemptive strike and protect myself. This, of course, represents only part of the equation. One of the other salient points about individuals with ASPD is their sense of entitlement. Whatever they want—whether it is the other person’s property or the other person’s life—they often feel entitled to have it.\(^{16}\) Not only do they simply take what they want, but they do not consider the act as stealing. Many would pass a lie detector test if asked about stealing, even when their criminal histories show multiple arrests for theft. These schemas of entitlement, that the world is hostile, that everyone is out to take advantage of me, and that everyone is out to get me, all contribute to the reason why many people with ASPD present threats to society, especially to law enforcement officers.

Of the individuals diagnosed as ASPD in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study shot and killed an officer because, in the mind of the killer, “something bad was going to happen.” He related to others in the car, “I’m going to shoot him.” When another passenger asked him, “Did you say you’re gonna shoot him?” He responded, “Yes, I’m going to kill him.” During his interview, the killer stated, “If the officer didn’t stop me, he’d be alive today.” Interestingly, he blamed the officer for his own death. Essentially, he saw the officer as simply an obstacle in his path that needed to be removed.
In the current study, an offender attacked an officer with a handgun during a pursuit. After emptying the magazine in his handgun and striking the officer numerous times, the offender reported:

I thought it was done. To tell you the truth, I didn’t even really think about it. I was just, I didn’t think about killing or not killing. It was the target that I needed to stop from chasing me. And, after I emptied my clip, I assumed it was done. Like I said, he was chasing me and he needed to be stopped and so I did. I mean, I didn’t think about him as a person or a police officer. He was just an obstacle.

An offender who critically injured an officer later discussed what he was thinking at the time of the incident. He stated, “I didn’t want to hurt the officer. It was not about me and the officer. It was about me and a lifetime of nothing in a cell—in a jail. It wasn’t about the officer. It wasn’t nothing personal to the officer; the officer was just making a routine stop. For me, it was my life. It was the end of my life as I know it.” During a video session, the offender later advised the investigators that he wanted to apologize to the wounded officer. When given the opportunity to do so, the offender stated:

I can’t take it back. I feel like I’ve done all I can possibly do. If I could see that officer right now, I would probably ask for forgiveness from the officer. I’d also pray that with God’s help, the officer could find some kind of way to forgive me sometime in her life. I have to live with this the rest of my life whether I’m in the penitentiary or not. I’ve paid a price. They’ve given me sixty years. The officer is still walking around living her life. I’ve lost my wife, my children, and my life. I have to live with this everyday. I wouldn’t ask this kind of torture on anybody.

The investigators found five descriptors of officers that remained constant throughout all three of their studies: 1) friendly, 2) hard working, 3) service oriented, 4) did not follow departmental rules and procedures, and 5) felt that they could “read” others and situations. The investigators also determined that each study revealed specific descriptors not common to the other two. In the 1992 study, Killed in the Line of Duty, three distinct descriptors emerged: 1) tended to use less force than others felt they would use in similar circumstances, 2) tended to look for good in others, and 3) appeared laid back and easygoing. In the In the Line of Fire study, the additional descriptors of officers involved their willingness to use force when justified and their survivor mindset. In the current study, the descriptors included the two additional ones from the In the Line of Fire study and being prepared to react.

Many of these descriptors reflect superior qualities that are exactly what law enforcement agencies want their officers to possess. It is good to treat citizens with respect. It is a very positive and sought out characteristic to be hard working. It also is a fine quality to be friendly. However, when these qualities mix with being laid back and easygoing, combine with looking for good in others, and merge with feelings of being able to “read” others and situations and cause officers to drop their guard when they perceive good in others, this can become—and, in fact, did become—the recipe for disaster. In several cases, it appeared that the officer, looking for good in others, perceived cooperation by the suspect as indicative of a lack of threat. But, all the time, the offender was planning to overpower the officer and escape. In the current study, this became evident in a number of encounters.

Case Review

An officer, seriously assaulted while guarding a prisoner, described the inmate as “a male subject in his thirties who was sitting very quietly and passively in the cell area.” After removing the prisoner from the cell and accompanying him to different treatment areas in the hospital, the officer stated:

He never said a word. The only conversation we had was, I gave him commands like go here; do this; stand here; sit here. He complied without saying a word. He was completely cooperative. This is what we would call a model inmate. They do what you want them to do. They’re compliant.

Law Enforcement Schemas

As seen, schemas affect the behavior of offenders. But, law enforcement officers have schemas, too, that can assist them in their duties. However, these schemas also can affect the way they perceive or do not perceive threats in their environment. Certain descriptors have been consistent throughout the Killed in the Line of Duty and In the Line of Fire studies, as well as the current one. These descriptors are part of the fabric that builds each officer’s individual schema.
I made the assumption that I’m not going to have any problem with this guy.

The prisoner said that the officer was:

A nice guy and I didn’t have anything against him personally. He sits me in a chair for about ten to fifteen minutes. He unhandcuffed me so I could get some X-rays. I had been thinking about escape for about twenty days. He then walked me down this hallway and there wasn’t no one around, no one, no police or other people. And, it was just me and him. The gun was on my side between me and him where it’s easy for me to grab and get a hold of. Once he took the handcuffs off me and walked me around and stuff, I was seeing how things were getting more relaxed and easy to adapt to. You know, to get away, escape, whatever. I went for it. I was going to shoot him and get him out of the way.

Case Review

An officer failed to wait for assistance before attempting to make a misdemeanor arrest. The offender removed the officer’s handgun and shot him numerous times. The officer later reported:

I assumed he was nonviolent.” When asked to give a further assessment about how he formed this opinion of the offender’s dangerousness, the officer replied, “He was considerably smaller than I was. I believe that he was resigned to the fact that he was going to jail. He just kind of looked down, put his head down, and that’s when I opened the door and told him to step out, which he did. I didn’t feel he was a major threat. I thought I could handle him. I then reached for my cuffs with my left hand. As I was bringing the cuffs out, he raised his right hand back up, kind of raised it up, and said, ‘Wait a minute.’ I instantly pushed his arm back down, forced it back behind him, and started pushing him more into the truck. Kind of almost simultaneously, he spun around and grabbed for my gun with his left hand. As I saw the attack coming, I grabbed his left hand with both my hands and pushed it back and somewhat turned my hip away to get my gun further away from his hand. As I did that he came around my back with his right hand and just snagged the weapon right out of the holster.

The offender related:

I didn’t want to go back to jail if I could help it. I had violated probation in another state. When the officer turned me around, it helped push me to the edge. As I was turning around, I looked and saw his weapon holstered and noticed it was a button-buckle type set up where, to open it, you would have to pull on the button and it would pop off, and you can release the weapon. And, for some reason, I knew in that moment that I could disarm this officer. I unbuttoned the holster and, with my free arm, I reached around him and that’s when I pulled his sidearm out from behind him.

Investigators’ Comments

The officers’ schemas in the situations described above involved seeing those who eventually assaulted them as being essentially nonthreatening or good people. The officers based this perception on either the offenders’ compliance or their general appearance. The officers’ perception of this quality of goodness was confirmed in their minds when they saw the suspect cooperating. Consequently, the officers allowed their guard to drop because they perceived the person and the situation as less than dangerous. The conviction that this schema is accurate is further fed by the officers’ belief that they can accurately read people and situations.

Academy and in-service trainers should assume that recruits possess schemas about the community they serve and the various individuals who comprise it. Their individual schemas may be accurate, inaccurate, partially accurate, or partially inaccurate, but they do exist. Trainers should assume that officers can benefit from having their schemas challenged to ascertain if any would negatively impact their job performance, their partner’s safety, or their own safety.

When officers suddenly and without warning must face immediate, critical decisions, their brains respond with dichotomous thinking: do I stand my ground (fight), or do I run from the danger (flight)? This is where sound, realistic law enforcement training becomes critical and lifesaving.

Reactions to Trauma and Emergencies

Officers who have the opportunity to learn from high levels of stress that they experience during training benefit in many ways. Functions of the human cortex can influ-
Muting the Effects of Schemas

Psychological and physiological reactions to emergency situations appear to be wired into the human system. Although officers cannot exclude all such reactions, they can learn to recognize them, work with them, and, most important, use them adaptively to their advantage. Knowing that high-arousal and very intense situations can result in perceptual distortions, such as time distortion, tunnel vision, and auditory exclusion, officers can practice special breathing techniques and relaxation exercises to reduce the cognitive and emotional distortions that inevitably occur. Exposure to stressful, anxiety-producing scenarios in training allows officers to learn to reduce stress-related over- or under-reactions. By thus learning to reduce their levels of tension and anxiety, officers can become better able to appraise the entire situation. An officer trained in this way is prepared to avoid focusing solely on only one potential threat; he will scan the environment and maintain vigilance in the event that a second or third suspect presents additional danger.

Mental, emotional, and physical preparation makes it possible for officers to consider appropriate options. For example, such training will help them realize when tactical retreats constitute the most intelligent and appropriate reaction. They will recognize, as did several officers who participated in interviews for the current study, the circumstances in which continuing a vehicle or foot chase would place them in too much danger.

The use-of-force continuum can help officers develop appropriate options in a high-stress situation. To decide what level of force to use, officers need to correctly perceive what is occurring in the environment. The appropriateness of their response to a threatening situation will be in direct proportion to the accuracy of their perception of the threat level. Overreacting or under-reacting could not only endanger members of the community but also cost the officers their lives.

In an incident that occurred during a traffic stop for a speeding violation, an officer approached a driver who stated that he did not have his driver’s license, insurance papers, or registration. The officer removed the motorist from the vehicle, conducted a pat-down search, and recovered a driver’s license from the man’s rear pocket. The officer then instructed him to reenter and remain in his vehicle and to try to locate his registration and insurance papers. The officer returned to his police vehicle and began writing a citation when he noticed the motorist standing beside his window. The officer exited his patrol unit and was subsequently assaulted. The offender lied about not possessing a driver’s license and did not comply with the officer’s order to remain in his vehicle. Should the offender’s initial behavior have indicated potential danger?

In another incident, an officer stopped an offender for speeding. The offender told the officer that he lived in another jurisdiction instead of the one displayed on his driver’s license. A computer check revealed that the offender had an outstanding traffic warrant. The dispatcher advised the officer that the offender had a history of armed robbery. In further conversations with the officer, the offender stated multiple times, “I can’t go to jail today.” After discovering illicit drugs in the offender’s vehicle, the officer ordered him to place his hands on his vehicle. The offender complied, but not completely. He placed one hand on the vehicle and partially turned around to question the officer. When the officer moved...
closer, she was seriously assaulted and sustained life-threatening injuries. Should the information provided by the dispatcher, the statements made by the offender, and the offender’s lack of compliance have alerted the officer to the offender’s potential resistance to the arrest?

Training and mental and physical preparation can help officers effectively process incoming stimuli, develop appropriate options, and act efficiently and safely. The effects of proper training and mental and physical preparation can be seen in the case of another traffic stop where officers observed that the offender did not immediately pull over. When he finally did, it was in a very dark, deserted area. The offender dipped his right shoulder as if placing or retrieving an item prior to the officers’ approach. The offender did not comply with verbal commands given by one of the officers. Both officers were alerted by these behaviors and employed a contact-and-cover approach to the vehicle. When the offender attempted to raise a handgun in the direction of one of the officers, the second officer shot and incapacitated him. The officers correctly recognized the indicators of the potential dangerousness of the situation. As a consequence of their observations and tactics, the officers reacted properly and eliminated the threat with the appropriate amount of necessary force.

How Offenders Perceive Officers

Many offenders mentally prepare themselves for battle. The scenarios that follow are offered from the offenders’ perspectives. The investigators neither agree with the offenders’ assessments of the officers nor suggest that they are accurate. The offenders’ words are presented verbatim. What the investigators found important was the offenders’ perceptions of their reality, not necessarily because of the accuracy of them but because their perceptions motivated their behavior either to attempt to assault or not to attempt to assault the officers.

The first incident portrays an offender who had made up his mind that if confronted by the police, he would engage in gunfire. Because the offender had made this decision, his perception of the officer only slightly affected his behavior. During a foot pursuit, the offender ran around the corner of a building, pulled his handgun, and waited for the officer to appear. The offender later reported:

I wasn’t going back to the penitentiary; that was my mind-set. I had made up my mind to use whatever violence I had to. I wasn’t going back. It was going to be either me or you. It was real simple. If it was a situation where I can see an out, I’ll squeeze out any kind of way I can get out. If I got to shoot somebody, kill somebody, whatever. If I’m trying to get away, then get out of my way. It’s real simple, just take me out. Take me down or I’m going to take you down. That was my mindset. I run around the corner and I waited on him. He came around the corner, and I shot one time. He hollers, ‘Oh,’ and then he starts shooting. He starts shooting again; I start shooting again. He went down; I went down with him. I’m shooting at an angle. He’s still shooting. I run out of bullets. I pop another clip. He’s still shooting. I get up and go back to the hotel.

The offender in another incident described the officer who stopped him for a traffic violation as follows:

He seemed very lax, very bored. He didn’t seem like he was keyed in on doing his job. It was just, you know, playing a role, just kind of going along. Because this is the thing he does from 9 to 5 or 7 to 11. It just didn’t seem like it was something he really, really wanted to do. He showed very little, if any, enthusiasm that I recall, very little vigor. Like I said, it was just like plodding along. I don’t remember observing that he was alert in any way. He, it appeared to me that he approached the vehicle like, ‘There’s no way this guy’s going to do anything other than exactly what I tell him to do. Not because I’m in control of the situation but because it’s just the way it is.’

The offender in the next incident used the skills he developed assessing his robbery victims to assess an officer. He advised:

The uniformed officer, his uniform, there were a lot of things about him. Immediately, being an armed robber you have to assess the situation of any armed robbery that you do. So, when I meet a person, maybe it’s the con man in me, maybe it’s the criminal in me, maybe it’s a lot of things, but I assess people, I just do that. His uniform actually looked like it was freshly pressed. That tells you John Wayne syndrome, okay? You’ve got to look at a guy and see what you’re dealing with. I figure this guy is packing a backup piece just simply because of the way he’s standing, his stature.
Why Preparation Matters

It is extremely difficult to control one’s biological, psychological, and emotional reactions to life-and-death circumstances. But it is even more difficult to do so without adequate, realistic, and prior training—along with proper mental and physical preparation. This kind of training is offered in many high-intensity situations, and it appears to be helpful. Students, for example, are taught how to respond to fire alarms. Research seems to indicate that in real-life situations, the people who perform the best in emergencies are those who have practiced frequently. The leaders in such situations appear to be the people who can override their emotional reactions, evaluate the situation, and respond effectively. In another example, among individuals feeling symptoms that make them think they are experiencing a heart attack, those who remain calm, move slowly, and seek medical assistance have a much greater probability of surviving than those who panic. The panic itself intensifies the symptoms and can result in exacerbating the attack.

Training often determines which persons survive and which ones suffer injury or death. Training that is realistic, repetitive, understandable, and believable potentially reduces the nonadaptive effects of evolution. In preparing for a highly charged emotional event, effective and realistic training can reduce its intensity (levels of arousal), allowing higher cognitive functioning to prevail.

Perception and Effects of Pain

Pain sensation is a complicated neurological and psychological experience. The discussion provided in this section is not intended to oversimplify the experience but, rather, to offer some insight into the intricate processes related to pain to explore some implications for law enforcement training.

The scientific literature pertaining to the study of pain points to several theories that attempt to explain how humans perceive and react to pain. One theory incorporates the three factors discussed above: biology, environment, and psychology. Simplistically stated, according to this theory, the pain stimulus moves from the source of pain (hitting a finger with a hammer) to the brain. The brain then sends this impulse back, resulting in the feeling of pain. Any tear, cut, bruise, or other trauma to the body produces certain hormones that act on pain-sensitive nerve fibers. Interestingly, however, two people who receive very similar external injuries may respond quite differently. Pain thresholds differ from person to person. The amount of pain—or, in some cases, whether someone actually feels any pain—depends on such aspects as genetic predisposition to pain (number and quality of pain receptors); physical condition; emotional state, including the effects of alcohol and other drugs; and, importantly, concentrated focus of attention.

Psychiatrist John J. Ratey offers an explanation of how elements of biology, environment, and psychology come together to influence the experience of pain. He uses the example of professional boxers to describe the dynamic. When experienced and trained boxers are in the ring and focused on the fight, they often report not feeling the pain of the many hits they receive. However, when the fight has ended, whether they win or lose, boxers begin to feel the pain of the trauma they endured. For these boxers, the actual feeling of pain is delayed because of the combination of physical and mental conditioning; focused attention; and expectation of receiving punches to the head, neck, and torso. It is as if the body has more important matters to be concerned with during the fight and has closed off, if only for a time, feeling pain. Boxers consider it more important to focus on their movements and those of their opponents than to be distracted by pain. Part of the reason that boxers spar when they prepare for a real fight is to feel what it is like to hit and to be hit. They must be trained to take a hard punch and to keep fighting. Untrained and inexperienced boxers often experience shock and pain after being hit, thus causing them to lose focus. Once their focus is lost, defeat frequently follows.

One way to understand the process of a delayed feeling of pain is to think back to childhood experiences. During childhood fights, some individuals responded like boxers in that they did not remember the pain of the actual hits received during the fight. It was not because they were trained athletes that predisposed them to blocking out the pain. Their brains, just like a boxer’s, needed to focus on the immediate threat. Such a threat puts the body on full alert. The fight-or-flight mechanism engages as the hormones rush through the system. The changes that occur on a neurochemical level, as a result of these hormones racing through the body, affect the way the person perceives an event, encodes it, and then later recalls what occurred. At this point, if the physical and emotional sensations are too great, the system can break down. Even the fight-or-flight mechanism can be
overwhelmed. The result is that the organism freezes, “plays dead,” or passes out (e.g., the fear response of some animals and some humans who become motionless during an overwhelmingly frightening experience).

In emergency situations, the organism can react by fight or flight or by completely shutting down. There also are various emotional and physical experiences in the middle of these two extremes that someone in an emergency situation might feel. What follows are statements by officers and offenders that include their descriptions of the felonious assaults. The differences and commonalities in their responses to pain stimuli are noteworthy.

In one incident, an offender shot an officer in the chest and fled the scene on foot. Before the offender could escape, the officer and his partner shot him approximately 10 to 13 times. The officer stated:

I was running and my leg buckled and kind of gave out on me, but I just kept running. You know, your leg buckles, but you’re confused and you don’t know why. I mean, I figured I was shot then, but there wasn’t any pain. I was so nervous and scared that I’m just trying to get away. My mind wasn’t on the pain or none of that.

The offender eventually reached a friend’s home and recalled his friend’s reaction, “He screamed, ‘You’re bleeding,’ and was real hysterical about it and told me to lay down. I laid on the floor because I didn’t want to get blood on their furniture.” When asked about feeling pain from these multiple wounds, the offender related that he did not experience pain until he arrived at the hospital.

The officer who had been shot in the chest stated:

My first thought after the gun went off is that I might have to go to the hospital and get my chest pumped. I just thought they were apt to crack my chest and go in and get this bullet out and massage my heart. But, when I looked down, I couldn’t see the bullet, not the marks anywhere. For a minute there, I just thought it was a bad punch, like he actually punched me and just ran off. But, he couldn’t have just punched me though, I’m thinking again because, you know, I went deaf, just went blank. I couldn’t hear nothing.

Still unsure about the extent of his injuries, the officer began to pursue the offender and emptied a magazine from his service handgun in an attempt to stop him.

In another incident, an offender attacked several officers and was shot in the chest six times with .38-caliber service ammunition. One of the officers advised:

The suspect became very agitated. Meanwhile, we find out later on that he’s high on heroin, PCP, and cocaine. You name it, and he was doing it all. He was like unstoppable. I started discharging rounds at the suspect. I struck him probably six times. Maybe three times in the face before he went down, and he still tried to get up. I remember running over to the suspect and screaming, ‘Stay down,’ until he expired on the scene.

In a third incident, an officer was shot six times. He continued, however, to function in spite of receiving these wounds. He drew his service weapon and returned fire. He stated, “I felt no pain at all, and I made the bad guy change from offense to defense. It got him off me and going the other way.” The officer’s ability to function after having been hit six times prevented the offender from returning and, in the officer’s words, “finishing me off.”

A highly intoxicated offender who attempted to commit suicide by cop related, “I can remember being shot the first time. Where the rest of the rounds went, I had no idea because I was enraged by them. The mere fact that shooting me was all it took.” He recalled thinking at that point, “Now the party’s over. Everyone’s gonna get it now. And, I just started walking toward them.” He went on to say that he neither heard the shots nor felt the pain from four additional .45-caliber gunshot wounds he received. He stated that the bullets felt like bee stings. During the incident, he remained standing until he was arrested, although he did drop his weapon.

In numerous other cases examined for the current study, officers and offenders reported being shot and not feeling pain. However, in the following case, the very misperception of having been shot actually debilitated the offender. The offender, seated in a police transport vehicle, produced a handgun and exchanged gunfire with the transporting officer who had sought cover behind the vehicle. The officer discharged a round that entered the transport vehicle’s trunk compartment and lodged in the rear seat that the offender was leaning against. The round penetrated the seat; however, it did not go entirely through. According to the offender, she felt the bullet impact the seat and push her arm. She believed that she had been struck with gunfire and immediately surrendered.

These scenarios indicate that there is no clear way to predict how an offender will react when shot. Law
enforcement training should address and correct the unrealistic expectations and assumptions promoted by Hollywood regarding what occurs when individuals are struck by gunfire. The news media, too, often propagate these misperceptions. In cities throughout the country, it is not unusual for the news media to emphasize—and criticize—the number of rounds that officers fire at offenders. In situations that call for the use of deadly force, however, officers must be willing and able to use the necessary force sufficient to protect themselves and others until the threat is eliminated.

Law enforcement training should reinforce the fact that officers can receive gun shot and other serious wounds yet continue to fight and function and, importantly, survive. This chapter includes many examples where officers who participated in the research for the current study and the In the Line of Fire study realized the necessity to use deadly force when confronted by an armed offender. This appropriate use of force enabled the officers to survive the felonious attacks.

**Summary and Conclusions**

Perception, even under the best circumstances, is a dynamic process. People process stimuli found in the environment on multiple levels before such stimuli become bits of meaningful information. This process involves the effects of biology, past experiences, current expectations, biases, hopes, and medical and psychological conditions. Most people have encountered humorous, as well as serious, consequences resulting from the differing perceptions of a single event that friends, relatives, and coworkers experienced.

When an emergency arises, the complicated process of perception can result in confusion, fear, and chaos. Experiences, even when recorded on video and reviewed at a later time, can be remembered quite differently from the behaviors actually displayed. Individuals may focus on one important aspect of the emergency and neglect to perceive or recall many other significant or less important details. Auditory exclusion, tunnel vision, and time distortion are all normal biopsychosocial responses to anything that intensely threatens a person’s life or livelihood.

Appropriate training can help to mitigate the effects of the biopsychosocial aspects that may lead to misperceptions and false memories. Training that incorporates realistic, timely, believable, and understandable scenarios of officers surviving violent encounters—and narratives of real-life experiences wherein officers survived during dangerous situations—can reduce the degree of misperception and false recollection. Such training can serve to prepare officers for violent encounters and can increase greatly their chances for survival.
Endnotes


What is suicide by cop? Why is the law enforcement profession unable to measure this problem on a national basis? To help answer these questions, an examination of law enforcement crime reporting practices prior to the development of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program can provide a starting point. In 1927, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) established the UCR Program to enable the law enforcement community to understand and quantify the nature and extent of crime in the United States. For example, what one state reported as an automobile burglary, another reported as a larceny from an automobile. To remedy this, the IACP developed a reporting system that included standardized definitions of offenses for law enforcement agencies to use when reporting crime statistics. Today, the UCR Program functions under the management of the FBI with support from the IACP and the National Sheriff’s Association.

Suicide by cop is not the first phenomenon to arise requiring law enforcement to amend this national reporting process. In the 1980s, law enforcement agencies throughout the United States began to collect information regarding crimes motivated by hate or bias. Once again, the definition of a hate- or bias-motivated crime lacked uniformity when varying jurisdictions attempted to measure the frequency of these acts. In 1990, the UCR Program expanded to include the category of hate crimes. A standardized definition of a hate crime came about through the cooperation of local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, along with various human interest groups. A model policy then developed that included recommendations for law enforcement agencies to consider when investigating and submitting hate crime statistics to the UCR Program, which began compiling and distributing the data to law enforcement via an annual publication. This marked the first time that the UCR Program asked law enforcement agencies to examine offenders’ motivations for committing a crime.

Currently, the UCR Program does not capture information on suicides. However, reports of suicides and sui-
Suicide attempts usually exist at the local law enforcement level. The American Association of Suicidology provides national statistics regarding suicidal behavior. Its most recent publication reports that 30,622 people committed suicide in 2001. This equates to one person committing suicide every 17 minutes. Males commit suicide four times more frequently than females. Suicide ranks 11th as the cause of death in the United States, while homicide ranks 13th. Because there is no official national data on suicide attempts, the association has developed a formula indicating that 25 attempts occur for every suicide death in the Nation. Applying this formula results in the staggering statistic of more than 765,550 attempted suicides in 2001.

In a 1998 report published by the American College of Emergency Physicians, H. Range Huston, M.D., and others examined all deputy-involved shootings that occurred in the jurisdiction of the Los Angeles County, California, Sheriff’s Department. They found that suicide-by-cop incidents accounted for 11 percent of all deputy-involved shootings and 13 percent of all deputy-involved justifiable homicides. The report concluded that suicide by cop constitutes an actual form of suicide. For the purpose of their study, these researchers defined suicide by cop as “an incident where a suicidal individual intentionally engages in life-threatening and criminal behavior with a lethal weapon or what appears to be a lethal weapon toward law enforcement officers or civilians specifically to provoke officers to shoot the suicidal individual in self-defense or to protect civilians.”

A strong relationship may exist between incidents where subjects killed or seriously assaulted law enforcement officers and those where offenders actually intended to commit suicide by deliberately forcing officers to use deadly force. Although complete statistics are unavailable, the limited data that do exist indicate the need for further study. UCR statistics show that from 1991 to 2000, 62 offenders who feloniously killed a police officer committed suicide during the same incident. However, no national data have been collected on the number of individuals who committed suicide subsequent to an incident where the law enforcement officer was killed or assaulted. Of the 62 cases noted, moreover, no data conclusively determine whether any of the offenders attacked the officers in an attempt to commit suicide by cop. The 2004 edition of Crime in the United States reported that law enforcement officers justifiably killed 437 offenders. Of this number, it is unknown how many committed suicide by cop. The UCR Program defines justifiable homicide by a law enforcement officer as “the killing of a felon in the line of duty.” Of these 437 cases, the same question arises: Did any of these people have the intention of using the officer as a means of committing suicide?

**Uniform Definition**

Before 1990, the term suicide by cop was not a common expression used by the public or the media in reporting law enforcement incidents involving the use of deadly force. Today, however, law enforcement personnel, the media, and the general public frequently employ it. The media has publicized occurrences of suicide by cop, and numerous articles have appeared about them. A clear and uniformly accepted definition, however, has yet to surface. Therefore, just as with hate crime, the adoption of a national definition of suicide by cop, criteria to determine what constitutes such acts, and a reporting mechanism to record these incidents must occur to enable the law enforcement community to effectively address the challenges and dangers brought about by this phenomenon.

If an offender points an unloaded firearm at a police officer who, in turn, kills that person, what facts and circumstances must be present and reported to enable agencies to determine that the incident was a suicide by cop? Did the offender deliberately point a firearm at an officer knowing it was not loaded? Or, was it merely an oversight and the offender meant to kill the officer? Obviously, an incident of this nature needs a thorough investigation to arrive at an accurate determination. To respond effectively to inquiries by the general public and the media, law enforcement administrators must have the tools for defining and measuring the frequency of suicide-by-cop incidents.

For more than 15 years, the investigators researched law enforcement’s use of deadly force, including cases in which some elements indicated a possible suicide-by-cop incident. In the course of this research, they developed a definition of suicide by cop based on UCR guidelines. They also established criteria for recognizing and reporting these incidents (see “Suicide by Cop” [Pinizzotto, Davis, Miller, 2005]). Their definition of suicide by cop is “an act motivated in whole or in part by the offender’s desire to commit suicide that results in a justifiable homicide by a law enforcement officer.” In addition, to better understand the magnitude of the suicide-by-cop
phenomenon, law enforcement agencies must examine, investigate, and collect data regarding attempted suicide-by-cop incidents. Therefore, the investigators defined an ‘attempt’ as “an act motivated in whole or in part by the offender’s desire to commit suicide that was intended to result in the death of the offender, but did not. This includes both the use of deadly force and the use of less lethal force by law enforcement.”

Investigative Procedures

As with any other serious crime, incidents that may meet the criteria for a suicide by cop or an attempted suicide by cop must be thoroughly investigated. A two-tiered procedure can help agencies to identify and investigate these incidents.

• First Tier: Reporting Procedure. The officer on the scene of an apparent suicide by cop or attempted suicide-by-cop incident forms an initial determination that the motive of suicide is suspected. The officer makes a notation on the original report indicating that the incident is a suspected suicide by cop or suspected attempted suicide by cop.

• Second Tier: Classifying Procedure. An officer or unit having expertise in incidents where deadly force is used makes the final determination of whether a suicide-by-cop or attempted suicide-by-cop incident occurred. Never should an incident be classified as a suicide by cop or attempted suicide by cop until the investigation is fully completed and the facts and circumstances reveal the probable motivation of the offender.

Responding Officer’s Responsibilities

In addition to complying with established departmental directives regarding the use of deadly force by law enforcement personnel, the responding officer should include in the initial offense report specific elements that may have been present at the scene. It is important to note that some scenes may not contain any of these elements, and the motivation of the offender may remain unknown. The responding officer’s report should include, but not be limited to, the following elements:

• Statements made by the offender, including the names of witnesses to the statements.
• The type of weapon, or weapons, possessed by the offender.
• The offender’s specific actions that resulted in the use of deadly force.
• Conduct that the officer deemed bizarre or inappropriate on the part of the offender.
• The circumstances indicating that the offender’s motivation may have been suicide.

In many incidents, the offender’s motivation may not be readily apparent to the responding officer at the time of the initial reporting of the incident. Thus, follow-up investigation will be necessary.

Second-Tier Responsibilities

Whether an agency classifies an offense as a suicide by cop or attempted suicide by cop rests with the second tier of the investigative process, the final decision-making body. Therefore, the people making the final determination must have special training in deadly force matters and suicidal behaviors. Whereas the responding officer identifies any indications that the offense was motivated by the offender’s desire to commit suicide, the second-tier investigating officer or unit must carefully sift through the facts and circumstances using stringent criteria to determine if the incident probably was motivated by the offender’s will to commit suicide. The second-tier investigation should include, but not be limited to, the following criteria:

• Notes left at the scene, in the residence of the offender, or at any other place the offender frequented. These should include recent correspondence, such as e-mails and other computer files.
• Detailed and verbatim statements from family members, friends, and associates, as well as follow-up statements of witnesses.
• The appropriate documentation of other pertinent investigative facts or evidence, including in-car or security cameras.
• The appropriate documentation of forensic evidence pertinent to the investigation. For example, if the offender used a firearm, was it loaded with proper ammunition or capable of firing ammunition?
• Personal history of the offender, including medical and psychiatric information; credit reports; insurance policies; employment records; history of significant relationships; prior suicides
of family members; prior attempted suicides, particularly attempts that involved confrontations with law enforcement officers; and criminal history, including sentencing information, presentence reports, psychiatric evaluations, and prison records.

In addition to recording specific acts committed by the offender, second-tier investigations also should focus on the subject’s motivation for committing them. Included in the listed criteria are indicators that will help establish motivations and behavior patterns of the offender.

Stress and depression often are precursors to suicide. Their causes can vary from person to person; however, stress and depression frequently relate to work, financial issues, changes in relationships, and patterns of living. With this in mind, officers should include a full retrospective investigation of the offender’s background and behavior, as well as information obtained from relatives, friends, associates, coworkers, and neighbors, as well as from police records. Each possesses different perspectives and different information that may shed some light on the potential motive of the offender. Information should include potentially relevant statements made by the offender, such as “I can’t stand it anymore”; “You’ll be better off without me”; “I won’t see you anymore”; “I want to die”; “I want to be with [a deceased loved one]”; “I can’t live without drugs.” Other potential indicators include additional verbalized intentions indicating an interest in self-destruction; longings or interest in death; prior attempted suicides; prior medical or psychiatric care; death of a spouse, significant other, or friend; substantial loss of funds or outstanding and pressing debts; divorce; pending or actual loss of a job, including retirement; imminent arrest of the individual or of a close friend or associate; and health problems. Because individuals sometimes commit suicide on or around anniversary dates, officers also should review what transpired in the offender’s life the year before the incident. Finally, they should ask all interviewees, “What else should I have asked you to better understand the offender?”

In some instances, insufficient facts and circumstances will fail to conclusively corroborate or refute the suicidal motivation of the offender. In these cases, the investigation may not substantiate a motivation of suicide as the cause for the offender’s death. Therefore, officers must consider the incident as unsubstantiated and should not classify it as a suicide by cop or attempted suicide by cop. No single behavior or piece of physical evidence usually will suffice to establish the motive of the offender. Instead, officers must take into account the totality of the physical evidence and behavioral indicators collectively to obtain an accurate assessment.

Case Studies

In In the Line of Fire (1997), 12 of the 42 offenders reported making an attempt to commit suicide prior to their assaulting or attempting to assault a law enforcement officer. In the current study, 21 of the 43 offenders indicated that they had contemplated suicide, 16 advised that they actually had attempted suicide prior to the incident of examination, and 6 reported that they had attempted to force an officer to kill them at some point during the incident of examination. Following is a thorough review of the facts and circumstances surrounding three of these alleged attempted suicide-by-cop incidents wherein the offender survived. This discussion should provide a better understanding of these incidents as reviewed through the eyes of the offender, as well as the officer. The cases disclose specific behaviors exhibited by the offender and the interpretation of those acts on the part of the officer. They also include the facts and circumstances provided by the second-tier or follow-up investigation, along with the determinations made regarding their classification as attempted suicide-by-cop incidents.

Case #1: The Officer’s Perspective

Two officers were dispatched to an apartment building in response to a woman yelling for help. Upon arriving at the location, they observed a female standing on the front steps. She waved them inside and then entered the apartment, leaving the door open behind her. As the officers approached the doorway, they could hear a man yelling and then saw him standing in the kitchen area. As the male observed the officers enter the apartment, he produced a large butcher knife. He held the blade of the knife firmly against his stomach with both hands and appeared highly intoxicated, agitated, and angry. The officers drew their service weapons and ordered the man to put down the knife. The offender responded by stating, “F—you, kill me.” The officers gave several more verbal commands, which the man ignored. He turned toward the kitchen counter, put the handle of the knife against it with the blade touching his stomach, and grabbed the counter with both hands as if to thrust himself fully
He stated that the incident demonstrated that theelements of an attempted suicide by cop were present.

While standing in the kitchen, he observed two police officers enter the apartment. The mere presence of the officers further enraged him. When asked later if he wanted the officers to end his life for him, the offender replied, “Quickly, I figured when they seen the knife that would have been enough. It would have been all over. But, it didn’t end up that way.” When asked about specific thoughts during the confrontation with the officer, the offender stated, “I never thought about suicide. Never in my wildest years. I’d take a beating before I’d commit suicide. But, at the time and at that point, the pressure was so great; the common reality wasn’t there anymore. It was gone. I didn’t care. I didn’t care about nothing that was standing before me. I just wanted out.” After advancing on the officers, he was shot five times. Three bullets struck him in the chest, one in the groin, and one passed through his hand and struck him in the groin. The offender stated that the first several rounds that struck him “felt like bee stings” and only tended to enrage him. But, by the time he reached the front door of the apartment building, he became incapacitated. While being transported to the hospital, the offender stated that he still wanted to die and told emergency medical technicians, “Let me die; don’t try to save me.” He pled guilty to several counts of assault on a police officer while armed and was sentenced to a short prison term.

Case #1: Second-Tier Investigation

The facts and circumstances of the incident were corroborated by interviewing the offender, witnesses, and family members. The investigation revealed the following points:

- The offender possessed a weapon capable of inflicting serious bodily injury or death.
- He used the weapon to seriously injure himself.
- He attacked the officers with the weapon.
- During the attack, he demanded that the officers kill him.
- He told emergency medical technicians that he wanted to die.
- Interviewed by investigators at a later date, he confirmed that he was attempting to commit suicide.

Investigation of this incident demonstrated that the elements of an attempted suicide by cop were present.
Therefore, the case would merit the appropriate classification as an attempted suicide by cop.

CASE #2: THE OFFICER’S PERSPECTIVE

In this case, the officer learned that an offender wanted on a misdemeanor warrant for writing bad checks was at the storage lot of a private towing company. The officer responded to the location, properly identified the offender, and placed him under arrest. As the officer attempted to handcuff the offender, a struggle ensued. The offender gained possession of the officer’s service weapon and immediately fired one round, which struck the officer in the chest. The officer attempted to flee the area, but the offender fired four more times, wounding him in the thigh, arm, leg, and back. The officer fell to the ground. The offender ran to the front of the premises where he previously had parked a motor vehicle occupied by his girlfriend and her small child. As the offender neared the vehicle, a second officer, with his service weapon drawn, came around the corner of the building. The officer repeatedly told the offender to drop his gun. The offender responded by placing it in his mouth. Shortly thereafter, the officer removed the gun from his mouth and pointed it at the officer who continued to repeat his earlier commands. Upon hearing numerous sirens converging on the crime scene, the offender dropped the handgun and was arrested without further incident. The first officer was transported to the hospital and eventually recovered from his wounds.

CASE #2: THE OFFENDER’S PERSPECTIVE

The offender went to the storage lot to retrieve his motor vehicle when he was approached by the officer. He felt relieved when the officer advised him that his arrest concerned a misdemeanor because he believed that authorities in another jurisdiction wanted him for a felony parole violation. He willingly went along with the officer because he assumed that he could post bond for the lesser offense. He stated that he had no intention of harming the officer, but, when he asked the officer to let him go to the front of the premises and tell his girlfriend where he would be taken, the officer refused. This made him angry because he had been under a lot of pressure. He recently had lost his job and had fallen behind on his bills. As a result, he had moved out of his apartment and in with a friend. He had incurred a lot of debt, and his car had been repossessed. Further, he had violated his probation by leaving the jurisdiction where he had been convicted. He left the area believing that his parole was going to be revoked for failing to make restitution as ordered by the court. He said that his financial problems had created a “snowball effect,” and he felt like he was in a “no-win” situation. He also stated that the arresting officer seemed “not to care about me,” which caused him to become very angry.

After taking the officer’s weapon and shooting him four times, the offender attempted to flee. He intended to escape the shooting scene but encountered the second officer who pointed a handgun in his direction and began yelling commands. The offender ignored the officer’s command to drop the weapon, describing the confrontation as a stand off and stating that he felt the officer would shoot him if he complied. At that point, the offender knew that he could not escape the scene. He was very confused and later said, “I knew the officer out back was going to die. I thought I have nothing to live for now. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life in jail or the death penalty. I’ve thrown everything away that I’ve tried so hard to build, and I put the gun in my mouth. And, I was going to commit suicide at that point.” The offender realized that his girlfriend’s small child could see him. The child and her mother were both crying and asking him not to commit suicide. The offender stated that he could not bring himself to commit suicide with a small child looking on. The offender removed the gun from his mouth and pointed it at the police officer who still was telling him to drop the weapon. The offender stated, “I was convinced that as soon as I went to do that I would be shot. But, to this day, he didn’t shoot me, and I don’t know why.” The offender started walking backward when he heard numerous sirens closing in on the scene. He stated that he felt an escape would be impossible so he laid his handgun on the ground and surrendered.

CASE #2: SECOND-TIER INVESTIGATION

The facts and circumstances of the incident were corroborated by interviewing the offender and witnesses. The investigation revealed the following information:

- The offender possessed a deadly weapon capable of inflicting serious bodily injury or death.
- He used the weapon to attempt to kill an officer and flee the scene.
- While attempting to flee, the offender was confronted by another officer.
- The offender stated that he wanted to end his life. He placed the gun in his mouth, but, before
he could squeeze the trigger, his girlfriend convinced him not to commit the act.

- He stated that he was unable to take his own life in the presence of the child and opted to point a loaded handgun at the officer. These actions were consistent with an individual who wanted to commit suicide.
- When questioned, the offender stated that he wanted the officer to kill him at that moment. This was a very quick decision made by the offender when his hopes of effecting an escape had decreased greatly.
- When the offender’s chance of escape further diminished by the approach of additional police units, he just as quickly changed his mind and decided that he wanted to live. He then surrendered.

Evidence of ambivalence often occurs in both completed and attempted suicides. Hesitation cuts, surface wounds, and ingesting insufficient volumes of medication or poison all commonly occur. In this case, both the offender’s decision to commit suicide by cop and his desire to live took place within an extremely brief period of time, each triggered by the circumstances of a quickly unfolding series of events.

This represented a complex case. The offender initially considered only fleeing from the first officer. However, when escape became impossible, he wanted to end his life. Without statements from both the offender and his girlfriend, officers could not have determined or even recognized that this would constitute a properly classified attempted suicide-by-cop incident.

**Case #3: The Offender’s Perspective**

Two officers effected a traffic stop of an offender speeding and operating a vehicle in a reckless manner. One of the officers knew the offender as he had arrested him several months before on another traffic violation. An NCIC check revealed that the offender was wanted on a felony warrant in another jurisdiction. The officers searched the offender, handcuffed him behind his back, and placed him in a transport car equipped with a cage. While in the prisoner compartment, the offender managed to slip one leg through the handcuffs and was straddling them with one hand in front of his body and the other in the rear. Having kept the offender under direct observation, the arresting officer called for a patrol wagon. Upon arrival of the wagon, officers placed leg shackles on the offender and once again handcuffed him behind his back. They transported him to a central cell block facility where numerous other transport vehicles and police officers were present. After securing his gun belt containing his service weapon in the trunk of his police vehicle as required by regulation, the arresting officer opened the rear door of the patrol wagon. The offender asked the officer a question regarding extradition procedures. As the officer finished answering the question, the offender produced a .22-caliber revolver and immediately fired, striking the officer between the eyes. The officer managed to maintain his balance and attempted to wrestle the handgun away from the offender. During the struggle, the offender shot the officer once more in the hand. The officer experienced difficulty seeing because blood from his forehead wound dripped into his eyes. As the officer attempted to retreat and seek cover, the offender fired an additional round, which struck him in the back. The officer became disoriented and fell to the pavement. The offender then exited the patrol wagon, and multiple police officers fired at him with no rounds taking effect. The offender retreated back into the wagon where he remained for several minutes. He eventually emerged from the wagon, laid his weapon on the ground, and surrendered without further incident. The wounded officer was transported to the hospital and recovered from his injuries.

**Case #3: The Officer’s Perspective**

On the night of the incident, the offender intended to commit suicide because he was depressed. The main cause for his depression was an abortion his girlfriend recently underwent. He believed that he was the father of the child, and the abortion made him feel like a murderer. After illegally obtaining a handgun, he drove to a public park to kill himself. On the way to the park, the officers stopped and arrested him. After being placed in the back of the cage car, he slipped his legs through the handcuffs. At that point, he intended to remove the handgun concealed in the front of his pants and kill himself. The arresting officer noticed the handcuff maneuver, advised the offender to stop, and continued to directly observe him until the police wagon arrived. When that happened, officers shackled his legs and handcuffed his hands behind his back. Then, they transported him to a central cell facility where he was to be detained. While en route to the cell block facility, he again slipped his legs through the handcuffs and positioned his hands in front of him. He removed the handgun from his pants and...
attempted to kill himself by placing the handgun under his chin and pulling the trigger. He pulled the trigger of the handgun three times, and each time the handgun failed to fire. After arriving at the cell block facility, the arresting officer opened the rear door of the wagon. The offender raised the handgun and aimed for the officer’s shoulder. He did this hoping the officer would shoot him. The officer moved as the weapon discharged, resulting in the round striking the officer in the forehead. The officer did not recall firing two additional shots. The officer fell to the pavement, and the offender approached him with a handkerchief in one hand and the handgun in the other. He intended to render aid to the officer. He stated, “Like I said, once I realized what was going on, I kind of snapped back into reality and when I realized this man was hurt, and I tried to render aid, I started coming to my senses more or less, and that’s when I discovered that I was holding a handgun.” Other officers began to fire multiple rounds at the offender, with none taking effect. He reentered the wagon for a brief period of time and then exited it, laid the handgun on the ground, and was taken into custody.

CASE #3: SECOND-TIER INVESTIGATION

The facts and circumstances of the incident were corroborated by interviewing the offender, the officer, and witnesses. The investigation revealed the following aspects:

- At his trial, the offender’s lawyers initially entered a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity. Subsequent examination of the offender by several psychiatrists determined that the offender was mentally competent to stand trial.
- The offender changed his plea to not guilty. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to a lengthy prison term.
- The offender did not take the witness stand in his own defense. A suicide-by-cop defense was not asserted.
- Several years after the conviction, the offender alleged an attempted suicide by cop had taken place.
- An examination of the forensic evidence report revealed that the offender was armed with a 5-shot revolver. It indicated that the offender fired three rounds from the revolver that discharged. The offender then attempted to fire two additional rounds that failed to discharge. It was at that point that he surrendered the weapon.
- Subsequent investigation and examination of statements given by the offender to other inmates revealed the offender’s true motive for his criminal acts. After shooting the officer, it was the offender’s intent to commandeer a police vehicle and effect an escape.

Other than the offender’s claim that he was attempting to commit suicide, no facts or circumstances corroborated his assertion. This incident would not meet the necessary elements to be classified as an attempted suicide by cop.

Conclusion

Presently, the law enforcement community does not know the depth or breadth of the suicide-by-cop problem. In the past, some of these cases have been overlooked because of the lack of both a clear definition and established reporting procedures. Other cases have remained below the radar screen because suicide attempts are immediately removed from the criminal process and placed within the mental health arena, causing the law enforcement investigation to stop. This can result in law enforcement failing to identify a potential threat to its personnel, their families, or to other members of the community. The identification and proper classification of these incidents will raise the awareness of the law enforcement community to develop the necessary tools to deal appropriately with issues of training, response, media involvement, and officer safety.

The information in this chapter provides the law enforcement community with definitions of suicide by cop and attempted suicide by cop that it can adopt. The chapter also presents a two-tier investigative process to thoroughly examine such incidents. The two-tier investigation provides an objective process that establishes whether the officer who employed deadly force was, in fact, an unknowing victim used by the offender to commit suicide. The two-tier investigative process can help establish whether the officer’s use of force was justified and whether the motivation for suicide was present.

As with all crime and incident data, this information can serve individual departments and agencies by clearly identifying these incidents; reporting them to their local communities; and responding to the training, tactical, and emotional needs of the officers involved. Additionally, if these data were incorporated into the existing UCR Program, they would provide reliable statistics for use
by law enforcement, criminologists, sociologists, mental health practitioners, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and the general public.

One of the cases examined during this study, but not included, involved an officer compelled to use deadly force against an offender. Unknown to the officer at the time of the shooting, the offender brandished an unloaded handgun. The officer saw the weapon and commanded the offender to drop it. Witnesses supported this. The offender turned in the direction of the officer and drew his arm up from his side, pointing the weapon at the officer. Witnesses also supported this. Faced with this dangerous threat, the officer fired two shots from his weapon. The rounds took effect, and the offender fell to the ground and died.

When the media reported the incident, the stories stressed only the offender’s weapon being unloaded and failed to describe the offender’s behavior that made him appear to the officer as a clear and immediate danger. During the extended investigation and numerous media articles, the officer stated that he felt “let down by his department and ‘villainized’ by the media.”

A complete, detailed, and expedient investigation of this case could have resulted in a timely and accurate account. Most important, it could have prevented the inappropriate and harmful effects experienced by the officer.

These incidents are painful and damaging experiences for the surviving families, the communities, and all law enforcement officers. Accurate and timely reporting of the true facts of the incident cannot alter the reality of the tragedy, but such efforts may lessen some degree of pain for the innocent survivors.

Endnote

CHAPTER SEVEN
Procedures and Training

To what extent can law enforcement procedures and training matters, such as written policies and directives, influence the outcome of a violent encounter? The question is explored here, with a focus on procedural and training issues that came to light during research for the current study. Although many of the same issues were discussed in the first two studies of this trilogy on law enforcement safety, this chapter also offers insights into an issue not addressed in those: physical training compared to mental training.

Each of the studies in this trilogy identifies procedural and training issues that may have contributed to the eventual felonious death of, or assault on, law enforcement officers. In the first study, *Killed in the Line of Duty* (1992), all of the officers died as a result of the attacks. In both the second study, *In the Line of Fire* (1997), and the current one, the officers survived the assaults and were able to comment on the procedural and training aspects of their incidents. They discussed the amount of entry-level police academy training they received, the in-service and specialized training they attended, and the extent to which their overall training and the procedures (or lack thereof) may have influenced the outcome of their encounters with the offenders.

Because each incident is unique, it would be impossible for law enforcement agencies to develop procedures and training programs to address every type of situation that an officer might encounter. Certain elements, however, appear to be common across all of the felonious assaults on officers studied for this trilogy. Many procedural and training errors documented in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies surfaced again in the current one. The data show that violent and even deadly attacks on law enforcement officers apparently are very similar today to those of the past three decades.

Since 1972, the year the FBI first began publishing these statistics, the number of law enforcement officers feloniously killed has fluctuated from year to year. Between 1972 and 2005, no fewer than 42 officers (1999) have been feloniously killed in any one year. According to the FBI’s annual report, *Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted*, in that same time frame no fewer than 29 officers (1976) have been accidentally killed in a given year. The majority of the officers feloniously killed during this 34-year time period were slain during arrest situations, investigating suspicious persons, and handling disturbance calls. Most of the officers accidentally killed during this time period were involved in traffic accidents, usually consisting of single-car incidents. These tragic events have occurred with such regularity that it may be possible to predict the minimum number of future officer deaths. More importantly, the possibility may exist to predict with a reasonable amount of certainty how these deaths will occur. This raises several questions.

- Why can these incidents not be prevented?
- Why must history repeat itself?
- Are important issues being overlooked?
- If so, what are they?

The following discussion of training issues is meant to encourage the development of safety training curricula. Several of the topics illustrate the positive influences of training, as well as the potentially negative effects, or the lack of training.

In the scenarios discussed here officers faced life-threatening situations. The officers explain what they did and why they followed a particular course of action. They state whether or not their actions were the result of...
training they received, either at the academy or in-service. In some cases, they discuss how a lack of training in certain circumstances created hesitation on their part and may have been a contributing factor that resulted in their injuries. All of the scenarios presented here are from the *In the Line of Fire* and the current study. Some of these scenarios pertain to multiple training issues and may be discussed in various contexts in this chapter.

**Procedural Overview**

**Errors in Procedures**

In some cases in this study, officers did not follow accepted law enforcement procedures.

Examples included:
- Acting alone prior to the arrival of available backup
- Placing vehicles improperly during traffic stops
- Failing to control violators’ actions during traffic stops
- Neglecting to notify the dispatcher of traffic stops
- Searching prisoners carelessly
- Handling prisoners without employing proper restraints

**Correct Procedures**

Conversely, in several cases, officers followed generally accepted procedures and still were attacked. In the majority of these incidents, it appeared that following proper procedures was the primary contributing factor responsible for the officer’s survival. For example, an officer involved in a felony pursuit of a vehicle knew both occupants were armed with handguns. When the vehicle stopped, the officer illuminated it with his spotlight and maintained a safe distance. Both offenders fired multiple rounds at the officer with none taking effect. Adequate backup units arrived, and the offenders surrendered without further resistance.

**Absence of Procedures**

In other incidents, the law enforcement agencies had no formalized or accepted procedures; that is, written policies and directives did not exist. For example, two officers from small departments were physically attacked in separate and unrelated incidents that involved attempting to effect arrests without assistance. Both state their agencies had not established policies relating to effecting arrests without benefit of backup.

**Vehicle Stops and Pursuits**

In 7 of the 40 incidents under review for this study, officers initiated motor vehicle stops for a variety of infractions: 4 stops for speeding violations, 1 for failing to display a current license plate, 1 for drinking alcoholic beverages while operating a motor vehicle, and 1 for suspicious behavior. Three of these incidents involved offenders driving stolen cars. In 2 incidents, offenders believed that they were wanted on felony warrants. One incident involved an offender carrying a substantial amount of illicit drugs, and another entailed offenders transporting a large number of stolen firearms. In 1 incident, an officer initially was assaulted by the front seat passenger before the vehicle’s operator joined the attack. In the remaining 6 incidents, the operators of the vehicles initiated the attacks on the officers.

**Approaching Motor Vehicles**

A generally accepted law enforcement truism is that the greatest danger posed to officers when conducting traffic stops occurs as they approach or walk away from stopped motor vehicles. The officers interviewed in this study agreed with this conventional wisdom. While no incidents in this study involved officers assaulted while walking away from stopped vehicles, two assaults occurred when officers were making the initial approach to the vehicle.

**Case Review**

A lone officer stopped an offender for a speeding violation. The officer notified the dispatcher of the location of the stop and the license plate number of the vehicle. The officer used his takedown lights to illuminate the stopped vehicle. He had his flashlight in his nonshooting hand and approached the vehicle. The officer recalled nothing at the time that would indicate that he would be attacked. In fact, he anticipated a cooperative violator because the driver pulled over immediately when the officer activated his police vehicle’s emergency lights. In the officer’s words:

I moved up slowly, starting from the rear. Checked the trunk area, make sure it’s not loose. Checked the
back seat with my flashlight and made sure there was no one back there or hiding on the floor. Then, I shined it into the driver’s area. The guy was alone. I didn’t go past the post or where the front door shuts. That’s about where I stopped, where I can kind of see in, but he couldn’t really see out without turning out of the car to see me. I told the subject the reason I stopped him, he was doing 85 in a 55. At that point, the answer was two shots in the chest from a handgun. I spun around from the shots and took a cover position behind his car, and I returned fire to the vehicle. I did fire seven rounds into the car, at which point, I saw the car driving away. Once the car started driving away, I went back to my patrol vehicle and started doing a self-check to make sure I was okay. I was okay. I got in my vehicle and started pursuit of the subject. I didn’t know where he went. I got to the nearest little town, which was about 2 miles away when I was met by the fire department. It was at that point I stopped.

When asked what caused him to perform as he did in this situation, the officer answered:

“Training, the training that we do here just instantly took over and all of it went into play. You kind of think maybe it will happen one day and maybe it won’t. Hopefully, it won’t. I reacted in a way that I’m proud of. Training just took over, as we said earlier, pretty much on autopilot. Training kicked in and I did what I had to do. Once it was over, I came back to reality and moved on from there to continue my job the way I’m supposed to do it.”

The 15-year-old offender was driving a stolen motor vehicle and possessed a stolen handgun. When asked his intention at the time of the attack, the offender stated that he was attempting to kill the officer by shooting him in the head as he knew that most law enforcement officers wear protective body armor. When asked his opinion as to why he was not successful at shooting the officer in the head, the offender replied, “He wouldn’t give me a good shot. He stood too far back. I had to stretch around to fire. Because of that, my shots went low, and I missed.”

**Case Review**

Two officers working as a drug interdiction team on an interstate highway observed a 17-year-old male not wearing a seat belt while driving a vehicle with out-of-state license plates. His behavior suggested that he possibly wanted to avoid them. Without warning, he exited the freeway in a desolate area with no commercial establishments. This somewhat aroused the suspicions of the officers. Once on the exit ramp, they activated their vehicle’s overhead emergency lights, but the male did not immediately pull over. The officers then saw the offender’s shoulder dip and rise, which led them to suspect that he might be retrieving or concealing an object. The offender made a right turn and proceeded approximately one-quarter of a mile down a dark, desolate road where he eventually pulled over. The officers activated their overhead takedown lights and approached the offender’s vehicle using their agency’s contact and cover technique. The contact officer stopped at the left rear corner of the offender’s vehicle while the cover officer came along the passenger’s side. The contact officer asked the offender
to step out of the car. The offender looked at him and then turned and looked straight ahead, ignoring the request. The cover officer then advanced on the passenger’s side of the car, observed the offender holding a handgun, and informed the contact officer who then instructed the offender to show his hands. Instead of complying, the offender turned toward the contact officer and pointed the handgun at him. The cover officer fired two times, immediately incapacitating the offender.

Both officers stated that they avoided injury due to the training they received from their agency. The contact officer said:

The way I was taught to approach vehicles by my training officers was the safest way possible. To stay back from the window; don’t get in front of the door post; always be aware of what’s going on around you. And, when things go bad, they’ll go bad real quick. If you’ve trained properly, you can react without thinking about how to react. You will react the way you were trained and come out okay. That’s what we did.

When asked to give his opinion about the type of training he received, the cover officer replied, “My agency is very progressive, and they train us in the most updated techniques available. What would I tell other officers? Train like your life depended on it because, one day, it might.”

COMMENTS: In both of the incidents described above where officers were attacked when approaching motor vehicles, none received serious injuries. The officers credited their training as being the most important factor that prevented them from being seriously injured. In reviewing the facts and circumstances of both of these incidents, two things became clear. Law enforcement officers conducting traffic stops may not be able to prevent an attack from an offender who is predisposed to committing an attack. And, second, by relying on sound training techniques and tactics, officers can greatly decrease the chances of suffering serious bodily injury or death.

Conventional law enforcement training has stressed the need for officers to remain constantly aware of their surroundings. This applies as much to traffic stops as it does to executing a warrant. These cases support the continued need for officers to recognize that they may be developing tunnel vision as they approach a vehicle. By focusing solely on the driver and disregarding the other passengers, officers can commit a fatal error. Officers in this study repeatedly suggested that all officers need to remind themselves that threats on the street can come from multiple sources.
In three incidents, officers were assaulted after engaging in vehicle pursuits for traffic violations. In two of them, officers were attacked in unrelated incidents at the termination point of the pursuits after exiting their vehicles. Both of these officers were alone at the scene and had been chasing vehicles occupied by multiple offenders. In one incident, two officers, occupying separate vehicles, were attacked by a lone offender after they lost sight of the suspect vehicle and the chase had ended.

Discussion of two of these cases follows. The remaining incident appears in the Equipment section of this chapter.

**Case Review**

Two officers were attacked multiple times by an offender they knew from previous police contacts. After a brief vehicle pursuit for an expired license plate violation, the officers lost sight of the offender’s vehicle in a rural area. The officers were attempting to relocate the vehicle when it suddenly reappeared without headlights, and the driver intentionally rammed one of the patrol units. The offender drove away but returned, striking the same car again then fleeing. The officers were standing in a field assessing the damage to the disabled cruiser when the offender drove into the field and attempted to run over the two officers. Both sought cover and simultaneously shot at the approaching vehicle. One officer fired multiple rounds from his handgun with none taking effect. The second officer fired multiple rounds from a 12-gauge shotgun and wounded the offender who abandoned his vehicle and ran from the scene. Authorities later captured him in an empty farm house in the area.

The officers did not receive any physical injuries in this incident. Both stated that they were surprised when the offender initiated the attack. However, street survival training taught them to be “prepared for anything.” As a result, they were mentally prepared to handle the situation. Both officers also credited firearms training that they had received as helping them to survive. One officer said:

I knew the handgun wasn’t going to be enough, so I grabbed the shotgun. Our training has progressed; slowly, but it has progressed. We made our shooting and firearms training more realistic, not just standing and shooting at a still target. We know we don’t always shoot in the daylight; we don’t always shoot in perfect conditions; and we don’t always shoot while standing up. We now have to shoot from cover, and our targets aren’t always stationary. Law enforcement training has changed dramatically over the years and it benefitted us in this case.

In a rural area, a lone officer attempted to initiate a traffic stop of a vehicle containing three people. The 20-year-old driver led the officer on a 10-mile pursuit, which ended when the vehicle struck a fencepost. The male passenger in the front seat immediately fled. The officer exited his vehicle, moved toward the front of it, and began to shout commands to the fleeing subject. The vehicle’s operator then opened the driver’s door and fired six rounds, striking the officer five times. He fled the scene on foot while the officer returned to his cruiser and drove to the local fire department. Other officers captured the shooter several hours later hiding in a wooded area.

When asked what he would do differently, the officer replied:

For one, I would have positioned my vehicle differently and used my vehicle for cover. Where I was, was where they expected me to be. I’ve changed that since the shooting. If I’m on a deal where I think it
could get sour, a lot of times they’re blinded by the spotlight I’ve got on if it’s at night. If it’s in the day, there’s not much going to matter because they’re going to be watching you anyway. But, at night, if you’re going to be doing a felony stop or something like that, exit the car, walk around to the passenger side, and try to position from behind the trunk and do it from there. They can’t see you as long as you’re not shining your flashlight at them. Their car should be illuminated fine by your spotlight.

When interviewed, the shooter stated that he was high on drugs and alcohol, as well as in an angry mood, on the night of the incident. He said that he fled from the officer because he had illegal drugs and an illegally obtained handgun and “he [the officer] was interrupting what I was doing.” The offender also advised that when he fired at the officer, the officer was facing away from him. He added:

He should have put more focus on me; I’m the driver. In a situation where a person has fled in a vehicle, the driver has already shown that he’s willing to break laws or do anything to get away [speeding, suspicious behavior, and erratic driving]. You don’t know about the passengers. You’re going to have to watch out for them, but the driver is the main focus.

**COMMENTS:** During traffic pursuits, officers are inundated with vast amounts of information at an alarming rate. They must be concerned not only about their own safety but the safety of the community, which includes the safe handling of their police vehicles. They must remain attentive to their surroundings, including weather and roadway conditions, pedestrians, and other vehicles. They also must recognize the possibility of the offender leading them into an ambush. With so many variables impacting officers during such high-intensity situations, they must have sufficient training to react without too much conscious attention, thereby leaving their minds’ free to process the inevitable “spur-of-the-moment” decisions that they will need to make.

Officers in this study repeatedly emphasized the need to be cognitively, emotionally, and physically prepared for traffic stops and pursuits. In one officer’s words, “Being commonplace and routine about stops we perform everyday is one of the greatest dangers we face on the road.”

**Felony Pursuits**

Felony pursuits are an extremely important area of tactical law enforcement. Regular practice of “what if” exercises in this area can be especially helpful for officers. Engaging in a felony pursuit requires officers to recognize that the potential danger to themselves and the public is highly elevated. Officers knowing their own

*Increased distance equals increased reaction time.*
patrol areas and kinds of calls for service, both frequent and infrequent, should regularly test their own possible reactions to diverse situations. They can accomplish this by practicing “what if” exercises. This requires the officer (and the officer’s partner) to think about possible scenarios that might occur while on patrol. Developing various tactical responses to such incidents can prepare officers mentally, tactically, cognitively, and emotionally to handle real-life situations. Preparedness and integration of training, education, and sensory information during a high-intensity felony pursuit can influence the officer’s chances for survival.

In five incidents, officers were attacked during felony vehicle pursuits. In each, the officers knew that they were pursuing armed offenders who had committed felonies. In one of the incidents, officers sustained injuries due to gunfire.

Case Review

In three of the five incidents, the officers had prior knowledge that the offenders already had fired upon other officers, wounding none. In one of the incidents, two offenders had robbed a bank and fired a rifle at officers. In another, a lone offender, operating a stolen motor vehicle, fired a handgun at pursuing police vehicles. In the third, a vehicle passenger fired at pursuing patrol units that were chasing him for a previous shooting. In all three of these incidents, the officers stated that they relied on training that had covered how to conduct felony pursuits. All of the officers had received similar training, including maintaining a safe distance from the vehicle being pursued. Each of the officers said that they maintained a safe distance and, as a result, minimized the chance of being struck by gunfire. One of the officers reported having received training that further decreased the chance of being struck by the offender. He advised, “I was taught that if an armed suspect is shooting out of a window, as this offender was doing, you drive in the lane that decreases his chances of getting a direct shot off at you.” He went on to explain that because the offender was shooting out of the passenger window of a moving vehicle, the patrol unit should pursue on the driver’s side of the target vehicle. This forces the shooter to either shoot through glass or position himself so that he must sit in the window and shoot across the roof of his vehicle.

In the fourth felony pursuit situation, an officer began following a vehicle stolen during an armed robbery. Because he knew that the offenders were armed with handguns and rifles, the officer maintained an adequate distance between his vehicle and the offenders’ vehicle. After several miles, the offenders’ vehicle slowed. The officer stated:

I thought they were trying to suck me in, trying to get me closer. I slowed down, took my foot off the gas, and increased the distance between us. I heard some pops, and then I saw the rear window of their vehicle disintegrate, mainly on the right side. I could also see some other holes develop and stuff spattering on their trunk. I concluded I was being shot at. I returned a few rounds to let them know I wasn’t going down without a fight. Then, the vehicle stopped completely, and they stuck their hands out the window to surrender.

When asked to cite the primary influencing factor that helped him survive this incident, the officer replied, “Training, your instincts are to rush in. My agency taught me not to do that. It was my training, you betcha.”

In the final incident, an officer observed a male driving a vehicle that matched the description of one that had been used in an armed bank robbery several minutes earlier. It fled the area with the officer in pursuit. The officer momentarily lost sight of the vehicle as the chase progressed through a series of sharp turns. When the officer drove through one of those turns, he saw the offender crossing the roadway and firing into the patrol unit. Struck with multiple rounds, the officer managed to return fire. The offender fled the scene but was captured several miles away. When asked about this incident, the officer responded:

For this guy to do what he did, I never expected to be ambushed like this. He more or less suckered me in. I’m thinking, I guess cop mentality, the big chase here, we’re going to be in the big chase here. He had the wherewithal to pull over his vehicle and wait for me to just come into his trap. And, basically, that’s what he tried to do. So, I guess in that regard, I’m real fortunate to be here. I didn’t expect this to happen, no way.

When asked if he thought he had killed the officer, the offender replied, “To tell you the truth, I really didn’t think about it. I didn’t think about killing or not killing. It was the target that I needed to stop from chasing me. After I emptied the clip, I assumed it was done, but I was wrong.”
**Case Review**

An officer who was conducting a traffic stop found himself facing a drawn gun. As the officer was writing a traffic violation while still seated in his patrol vehicle, the offender walked up to the door of the patrol vehicle. When the officer exited the cruiser, the offender pointed a .45-caliber semiautomatic handgun at him. The offender instructed the officer to handcuff one wrist, turn his back to him, and get on his knees. The officer complied. The offender handcuffed the officer behind his back and fled the scene. The officer was captured following a lengthy vehicle pursuit.

The officer relied heavily on training that he had received many years earlier, which helped him to survive this dangerous confrontation. He stated:

I remembered the training. The sergeant and the technician told me, “If this happens to you, stay calm. Don’t focus on the gun. Look them in the eye. Relate to the person. Make them realize you’re not just a cop. You’re also human.” I told him about problems he would have if he shot me. There are people and kids around. I told him about problems I had being a single parent. He told me to turn my back and I did. Then, he cuffed me. Then, I thought, this son of a b— ain’t gonna shoot me and not watch me die. I remembered to keep looking at him over my shoulder. I kept looking him in the eye and trying to calm him. I could tell he was nervous and would do anything to get away. He then said I was an okay guy. He picked up his papers and his jacket and drove off. It had been 22 to 23 years since I had been trained. It was like an automatic thing. Pay attention to training. It stuck in my head. It saved my life.
When asked why he did not fire upon the officer, the offender replied:

He told me he had a couple of kids, and he didn’t want to die. I didn’t know this guy from Adam. I have never seen him before in my life, and the chances were I’d never see him again. He’d never done me wrong; he’d never done anything wrong to anybody I knew that I know of. I had no grudge to bear, no axe to grind. I don’t want to shoot him, but I will if the situation warrants it. If you’re going to take on a life of doing things that are illegal, you’ve got to be prepared to do everything that’s illegal. And, you’ve also got to be prepared to do some things that are not very nice, one of which is to carry a gun and be willing to use it. At this particular time, like I said, I was willing to use it. The situation didn’t call for it, thankfully. When I went into the situation, I told him, ‘I don’t want to hurt you, but I will.’

Case Review

During a radar traffic stop, the offender and his passenger stopped a short distance from an occupied disabled motor vehicle. As the officer pulled in behind the offender’s vehicle, he observed two elderly persons inside the disabled vehicle. He later stated that his first thoughts were for the safety of these citizens. The officer approached the disabled vehicle and instructed the occupants to move to a safer position by standing farther away from moving traffic lanes. He further advised the couple that he would return and assist them after completing his traffic stop. During the short period of time that the officer focused his attention on the disabled vehicle and its occupants, the offender exited his vehicle and made his way back to the cruiser. When the officer arrived at his patrol unit, the offender produced a handgun. The officer attempted to retreat behind his vehicle for cover but tripped and fell to the ground. The offender advanced on the officer and told him that any further evasive attempts would result in his death. The offender then disarmed the officer. He ordered the officer into his vehicle and drove the police vehicle from the area. Approximately 30 minutes later, the officer and the abducted officer encountered a police roadblock that had been set up to rescue the officer. The officer persuaded the offender to surrender peacefully.

When questioned, the offender said, “I knew I was wanted and was prepared to kill the officer. So, I took my gun and went back to his car. After the officer fell, he surrendered, and I didn’t have to shoot him. I didn’t know what to do, so I took him with us thinking I could dump him later.”

The officer stated that when he first saw the offender produce the handgun, he attempted to flee to the other side of the patrol car for cover; however, he fell and landed on his back. He never had drawn and fired his weapon while lying on his back, and the offender was standing over him with a gun already drawn. The officer related, “This was not the time to attempt to draw and fire from a position that I had never practiced from before.” The officer believed that he survived by remaining calm and talking to the offender.

Case Review

Two officers arrested, handcuffed, and searched an offender. Both overlooked a handgun that the offender
had concealed in his waistband. Later, when the handcuffs were removed, the offender produced the handgun, pointed it at one of the officers, and said, “Don’t even try it, or I’ll shoot you.” He grabbed the officer around the neck and placed the barrel of the handgun to the officer’s head. The offender then began threatening to shoot the officer when the second officer discharged a round from his service handgun, striking the offender in the eye. The offender immediately fell to the floor. He was disarmed without further incident.

The officers had been partners for approximately 13 years. They reported that training had helped them to survive this incident. The officer who had been held at gunpoint stated that he and his partner had practiced many times how they would react in this type of situation. He said:

Me and my partner, we did a lot of practicums. We were practiced in this type of situation. He immediately places the gun at my partner’s face and screams for him not to try anything. At this point, I started screaming at the suspect. I was directly behind him. “Hey, what are you doing man? Put the gun down. Put the f— gun down. What the hell’s going on?” The suspect turned around, grabbed me around the neck, placed the gun against my temple, and was basically screaming that he’d f— shoot me, better back off. My partner never left the doorway. The suspect was screaming, and he was shaking. I tried to make eye contact with my partner. I mean, this all took place within seconds, but I knew if I could make eye contact with my partner that he was going to know what I was going to do. I was basically going to try to drop, which basically means just put all my body weight to one area where I could fall to the ground. He can let go of me or it would be awkward for him to move the gun away [move the gun toward the direction of his partner]. I started screaming, “Don’t shoot me” and that drew his attention to me. At that point, my partner was able to withdraw his weapon and fire a round at the suspect, striking him in the head. The suspect automatically fell to the ground. He received a gunshot wound to the lower eye area, which actually came through and took his left eye out and came through the front lobule part of the brain and out of his head. If it wasn’t for the practicing and the continuous going over a situation before the incident even happens, I think it could have been fatal if we didn’t have those practicums.

His partner, who successfully incapacitated the offender, stated, “We sort of played him as a team. When my partner stepped toward him and said, ‘What the f— are you doing?’ he changed his thought process again. We bounced him back and forth and changed his mind as to what was happening. He took his attention away from me and that became his fatal mistake.”

COMMENTS: At times, it is difficult to know what we are thinking in our own minds. It can prove impossible sometimes to know what another person is thinking. Although we believe that we can tell what our partner is thinking because we have known that person for so long, the only way to really know what someone is thinking is when the other person verbalizes those thoughts. The lesson that can be learned from the cases reviewed above is that when working with partners, officers need not only to communicate to each other what they are thinking, but
also to practice the plans and behaviors they intend to engage in during life and death situations. It is clear that such communication and practice saved the lives of officers who were interviewed for this study.

Firearm Use and Malfunctions

Several officers who were interviewed for this study shared, in particular, their experiences regarding their firearms training, including with duty, off-duty, and backup weapons. They also discussed the importance of weapon retention during confrontations with offenders. The officers spoke about both academy and in-service training and the way that the training may have influenced the outcome of the felonious assault.

In addition, the officers related instances where they felt that the firearms training they received may have positively or negatively affected their performance. Three officers felt that their training positively influenced their performance; two considered their training as possibly negatively affecting their performance; and one officer believed that his training both positively and negatively impacted his performance.

Case Review

While engaged in a foot pursuit, an officer was shot twice. He immediately returned fire but was shot again. As he fell to the ground, his department-issued semiautomatic handgun struck the pavement. The officer stated, “I felt at that point my gun was jammed, so I reloaded. I thought he was going to come up and finish me off, but one in my head. I looked up quick to see if he was still there. He was gone.” The officer was trained to continue shooting until the threat was eliminated. He said, “I felt me firing the rounds at him is what saved me. It got him away from me and he took off.” The officer also credited his ability to quickly reload to the training he had received. “We were trained never to quit or give up in a gunfight.”

In hindsight, he felt that his firearms training could have been better in some respects. He advised, “Most shootings don’t occur while standing stationary and shooting at a stationary target.” He had fired his handgun seven times with no rounds taking effect. He felt more realistic firearms training may have benefitted him. “I could have used a lot more training in shooting from a ground position. I might have done better.”

Case Review

During a struggle, an offender’s handgun discharged and wounded an officer, who returned fire with his department-issued semiautomatic firearm. The first round missed the offender and the officer continued to pull the trigger. The officer stated:

I was annoyed that the gun didn’t work anymore and I didn’t see any malfunction and it was like a twilight zone or something. The gun functions, and, for some reason, I have missed this individual and the slide has closed. I still have a firm grip on it. I know I have to shoot him some more. I haven’t hit him, and the gun doesn’t work anymore. And, during this time, I’m falling. I’m falling at the time, and I know I’m going to shoot some more. I know immediately that I haven’t hit him, and I was just amazed and mystified and annoyed that the gun didn’t shoot anymore. I knew it wasn’t a stovepipe and the slide had closed. I have to admit, as much training as we had with malfunction drills, I did not consider doing a malfunction drill. There wasn’t a stovepipe. There wasn’t a feed malfunction that I could see.

The officer eventually fell to the ground and lost control of his firearm. The offender fired two more rounds, one of which struck the officer, and then he fled the scene.

At the time, the officer had more than 20 years of law enforcement experience with approximately 12 years as a firearms instructor. When asked to describe how the malfunction occurred, the officer replied, “The state lab examined the weapon. They found that the expended case was in the chamber with the primer end forward. So, the expended case was reversed in the chamber with the slide closed and a loaded magazine properly seated in the pistol. They fired the next three rounds out of the magazine that had been in the pistol with the ammunition that had been in the magazine [after removing the expended shell casing]. No problems. The report came back that the pistol was safe and reliable.”

The officer stated that he has since learned not to rely on a visual check of a semiautomatic pistol when a malfunction occurs. Seriously wounded, he was not certain if he possessed the strength to rack and clear the firearm. He said, “It’s a one in a million chance that something like that could happen, and I was the one in a million. No matter what your eyes tell you, if your gun malfunctions, rack and clear it, you’ve got nothing to lose at that point.”

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Case Review

During a vehicle pursuit of two offenders who were suspected of having committed an armed robbery, an officer began receiving gunfire. He stated, “The immediate concern I had was protecting myself. There were a few additional pops, and I began shooting back through the windshield. I’m proficient in weapons, but I never actually practiced shooting through the windshield.” The rounds fired by the officer did not take effect, and he felt that training in this area might have increased his accuracy.

Case Review

Two officers were conducting a traffic stop employing a contact and cover approach that they had learned during agency training. The contact officer was on the driver’s side of the vehicle and the cover officer was on the opposite side. The offender turned and raised a handgun in the direction of the contact officer. The cover officer discharged two rounds from his service weapon through the glass of the passenger window. Both rounds struck and incapacitated the offender. Both officers stated that the training they had received had a positive influence on the end result of the incident. Although they cited several areas of training, the cover officer said:

About a month before this occurred, we were in our SWAT training, and we had gotten some wrecked vehicles from our wrecker yard, and we were doing vehicle takedowns. Different coverage patterns of the cars. We did some actual shooting into the passenger compartments. We actually shot through the passenger and driver windows. We shot several times through the glass and noted any differences in the trajectory, bullet fragmentations, and things like that. Just by the fact I’d done it before, I felt comfortable with it. I pretty much had an idea what was going to happen once I did shoot through the glass. I hit him twice and he was incapacitated.

Case Review

During a domestic violence call, an officer was involved in a shootout that lasted approximately 12 minutes. The officer reported:

My biggest fear was running out of ammunition. He’s coming at me firing, and I’ve got one or two rounds left. I was not going to get caught in that situation.

Instinct took over, and I can’t even remember pulling the magazine out of my pouch and put it in the gun. It was so trained into me because of the training we have in the police department. You don’t even look down at your magazine. When you actually get done firing, you keep pointing the gun, drop the magazine, and when you have the other one in your hand, slip it in. Everything came together and it was done smooth. It would not have been that smooth had I not had that training. I probably would have been fumbling over everything. But, I can’t remember taking it out. It was so natural. Knowing where the clip is. How to turn the magazine in the right direction. Everything was just automatic.

Case Review

In the above discussion about officers having to face drawn guns, two officers who escaped without injury credited training as helping them to survive the incident. In a previous incident, one of the officers had shot and killed an offender who assaulted several law enforcement officers. The officer noted that the firearms training he had received helped him to survive that earlier incident. Although it is not examined as part of the current study, the facts, circumstances, and statements referring to that incident and to the officer’s training offer important information.

The incident is described below.

An officer, accompanied by a sergeant, responded to a disturbance call at a private residence. Upon the arrival of the officers, a male—approximately 7 feet tall and later determined to have been high on heroin, cocaine, and phencyclidine—exited the front door brandishing two large butcher knives. The officer grabbed both of the offenders’ wrists and attempted to calm him. The officer successfully removed the knives from the offender and laid them on the ground. Disarmed, the offender then grabbed the officer’s semiautomatic service handgun and removed it from the holster. The officer then moved to his left to avoid being shot and yelled, “He’s got my weapon.” The sergeant unsuccessfully reached for the officer’s service handgun. The offender shot him twice in the chest, causing the sergeant to fall to the ground. The offender then grabbed the officer, placed the weapon directly against the officer’s head, and pulled the trigger several times. The weapon failed to fire because it apparently had “stove piped.” As this occurred, a third officer
drove up and fired all six shots from his department-issued revolver, all striking the offender in the chest. The officer who grabbed the offender’s wrists said, “Six gunshot wounds, center mass in the chest, and it only succeeded in agitating this guy more.” The third officer then sought cover behind a patrol unit to reload his revolver. The offender pushed the first officer out of the way, threw the stove-piped service weapon at the third officer, picked up the butcher knives, and proceeded to chase the third officer, who was attempting to reload. The first officer retrieved his stove-piped service weapon, which had landed in the street. The offender then reversed his direction and charged toward the wounded sergeant, who was lying on the ground. With approximately 18 feet between the offender and himself, the first officer simultaneously cleared the weapon, stepped between the offender and the sergeant, and discharged six rounds. Three of the rounds struck the offender in the face and three struck him in the chest. The offender fell to the ground and died at the scene. When asked to comment on the benefits of his training, the officer replied:

It worked. Training, it saved my life; there’s no doubt about it. I did a rip-and-work deal. I struck him probably six times. Tap, rack, check, and go. I did it not even knowing I did it. The Glock training we did. I think the trainers, which were our people, were excellent. They drilled us to the point where we had to wear Band-Aids on our hands. I’m the type of person, I’m not a gun fanatic. I don’t own guns other than my department guns, but I practiced. I practiced with it unloaded and got familiar with it because I had never handled an automatic [semiautomatic] weapon before in my life. I’ve never been in the military. I didn’t even know how they worked. I was very nervous about it because prior to my first shooting that I was involved in and killed a robbery suspect, I had a .38. And, the .38, you have six rounds; you pull the trigger and that’s it. This thing was a different story. This held 17 rounds, and there were different mechanisms on this gun to make it work. It made me very nervous. But, their training put us at ease. The repetitive training that they did, you can do this stuff in your sleep. The days that we were doing it, when you got home, that’s all you were thinking, tap, rack, check, and go. That’s all you were thinking. I think the practicing and the repetitiveness of our trainers saved my life. I actually thanked those guys. I went back and talked to them.

Backup Weapons

There were two incidents in the current study where officers mentioned the possible use of backup weapons. In one incident, the officer was unsuccessful in his attempt to use a backup weapon. In another incident, the officer felt his failure to carry a backup weapon was a possible influencing factor that contributed to his injuries.

Case Review

In one incident in the current study, an officer attempted to use a backup weapon. The officer had received a serious wound to the throat when the offender discharged a single-shot .410-gauge derringer fired at point-blank range. The officer fell to the ground and dropped his department-issued handgun. He retrieved a backup handgun concealed in a pocket of his body armor. But, before he could discharge the weapon, the offender took it and stood over the officer. When the weapon would not function, the offender racked and attempted to clear the weapon. The offender continued to depress the trigger with no results. Shortly thereafter, he fled the scene. The handgun did not function because the safety mechanism was engaged. Although not a consideration at the time the officer purchased the handgun, the presence of the safety mechanism possibly saved his life.
Case Review

In another incident, an offender using a handgun shot and seriously wounded an officer. As the officer fell to the sidewalk, he dropped his department-issued handgun. He did not possess a backup weapon. The offender momentarily walked away from the scene but returned and discharged two more rounds at the officer, one taking effect. Prior to the incident, the officer considered purchasing a backup handgun. He stated:

Glock had introduced a new pistol that I thought would be a good backup. I had intended to buy one of those, qualify with it, and start carrying it. There was a delay on that gun, actually getting it in the market. I hadn’t chosen something else to carry, and it’s something that you think you’ll never need. I wasn’t particularly concerned about having to wait. So, at the time, I didn’t give it a lot of thought or concern, but for various reasons, I hadn’t started to carry a backup yet. Between the time I was shot the first time and the individual walked into the parking lot, turned around, came back for whatever reason, and shot me from behind again, I would have had time to employ a backup weapon if I had of been carrying one that day.

The officer further stated that he has since purchased a backup weapon, which he “religiously” carries and practices drawing “regularly.”

Weapon Retention

If an officer cannot maintain control of a duty weapon, it can be not only useless but also a liability. Even an officer who is proficient with the weapon can lose control of it. At every scene an officer responds to there is a weapon that becomes available to the strongest and quickest person.

Case Review

In recalling one incident, an officer reported that he felt that firearms retention training may have significantly influenced the outcome of the situation. The officer was struggling with an offender on the ground. The officer later reported:

With his palm, he hit the butt of my gun and slid it [the officer’s handgun] forward, which he knew how to do obviously because the gun doesn’t come out unless you slide it forward. Slid it forward with this hand and was pulling up and taking the gun completely out of my holster, completely out. When that happened, the pucker factor just went from high to off the scale. Well, I immediately, through firearms retention training, you automatically react with both hands. I clamped back down and this was a struggle. I slammed it all the way back down into my holster. His fingers were actually jammed into my holster with my gun because I slammed it all the way back. I couldn’t get it snapped. This struggle happened for about 5 seconds, 5 to 10 seconds, which seemed like 30 minutes. But, I think the firearms retention probably saved my life that night. Just knowing that I had to get that gun back into my holster because I can’t fight him with it. I can’t hold it, and he’s holding the gun while I’m trying to take it away from him. We can have a discharge. It can hit me or it can hit someone in those houses over there. Firearm retention, get that thing back in your holster. Get it in your holster. Okay, now we’re back almost on a level playing field. Now, I’m going to pull out another one of my tools to use. Get him to comply with what I want him to do.

In this incident, the officer successfully maintained control of the offender and possession of his department-issued handgun.

COMMENTS: Officers’ weapons are only a means of protection for themselves and the communities they serve if they can maintain control of them. During interviews
conducted for each of the three studies in this trilogy on law enforcement safety, officers repeatedly mentioned the need to practice weapon retention as, by far, one of the most important training points that they learned. In some cases, they attributed such training to saving their lives.

Use of Force

To be effective in preventing harm to themselves or to innocent people, officers must use force properly and at the appropriate moment during an encounter. To accomplish this, officers must know when they can legally and ethically employ force along the force continuum. They also must have an accurate perception of the immediacy of the danger presented.

As discussed in chapter 2 of this report, 33 of the 50 victim officers who were interviewed for the present study did not realize that an attack was forthcoming. As with the results of the In the Line of Fire study, the results of this study indicate that, in general, officers had clear memories of what “not to do” and when “not to use force” but had some difficulty recalling instances where they used force as an appropriate, timely, necessary, and positive decision. While all of the officers felt that it was appropriate to wrestle or scuffle with an offender, some experienced difficulty in determining the point at which to progress to the next level of force. Some officers admitted that they had a hard time distinguishing at what point a Saturday night brawl at a local tavern had become a fight for their lives. Some officers had to make a conscious effort to recall their departments’ use of deadly force policies prior to the initiation of necessary force. In some instances, that recall came too late.

Case Reviews

In one incident in this study where a 15-year-old male attacked an officer with a knife, the officer stated:

I felt a weak attempt at a punch in my chest. It wasn’t hard; it was just different. That’s the only way I can describe it. I then felt a dragging sensation across my chest. Then, I felt a plunge into my stomach. I immediately knew he just stabbed me. I was wearing a bulletproof vest. The initial blow hit the trauma plate. When I felt the plunge, I knew I had been stabbed. Earlier, when I saw this kid, I had gone from looking at him as a prowler to a kid who needed help. I could tell he was a young, small, skinny teenager. I knew I was in fairly good shape. I worked out. I automatically put him in a category smaller than me. Skinnier, shorter, and younger. After he initially stabbed me, I was caught off guard. I was surprised. I know I’ve got to locate and control his hands. I don’t know which hand; I don’t know where it came from. Once again, I’m thinking because of my physical size, if I can get his hands, I can overpower him and get him down. As I try to find his hands, I feel two blows to my left arm. One in the forearm and one in the wrist. I knew he had just hit me with the knife. Trying to control his arms didn’t work, so now I’m gonna go for my gun. I should have gone for my gun when I felt the first plunge and realized that I had been stabbed.

Case Review

In another incident where an officer was lying on the ground after receiving two serious gunshot wounds, he stated that his agency’s use of force policy entered his mind. The offender was fleeing on foot, and the officer stated, “Well, the question as to whether or not I could shoot a fleeing felon. I thought about that. I seen him running away, and he was not continuing to shoot at me. I wasn’t sure I could shoot a fleeing felon, so I hesitated before I took my shot at him. That probably made my shot a little more difficult because he gained more distance away from me when I shot toward him. That’s probably why I missed, but he didn’t come back.”

Officers must have an accurate perception of the immediacy of the danger presented.
The use of deadly force is a grave responsibility that each officer takes upon himself or herself.

**Comments:** Once an immediate threat to the life of an officer or a citizen is recognized, the longer the officer waits or hesitates to initiate appropriate action the greater is the likelihood of serious or life-threatening injury to the citizen or the officer. The use of force in law enforcement is both a responsibility and an obligation to be carried out to protect an officer’s life or the life of another person. It is a grave responsibility that all officers take upon themselves. Force can be used only within legally and ethically well-defined areas. However, within those areas, the officer has a right and a duty to use these means to protect the innocent.

**Use of Nonconventional Weapons**

Officers have the right to protect themselves. Their agencies may issue them a variety of weapons, including a handgun, a baton, and chemical agents. When they must use force and when the conventional weapons with which they have been trained and have become proficient are not available, officers should consider any object as a potential means of self-defense.

**Case Review**

In an incident involving several officers, an offender charged one of them with a knife. The officer, fearing for his life, fired several rounds, wounding but not disabling the offender. After a short struggle, the offender was arrested. One of the officers in the incident stated that his agency possessed a beanbag gun. However, the gun was not immediately available to the officers. He said:

I don’t want to kill the guy. I don’t want to kill anybody, but I don’t want to die myself. We were trying like h—anot to have to use deadly force on this guy. We had the nonlethal option available to use. Where if we had the opportunity, we were more than happy to try to do that. I was upset that this guy put us in a position where I had to do something like this. I was upset with the fact that this guy had kept pushing the issue and made the decision himself. I didn’t have a decision. I couldn’t wait for the nonlethal weapon. It was my life or his, and it became his.

**Case Review**

During a vehicle pursuit, an officer drove around a corner and observed an offender exiting his vehicle. As the officer slowed his patrol unit, the offender immediately ran toward it with a semiautomatic handgun pointed at the officer. The officer later reported:

I took the only means of cover that I could think of at the time. I went underneath my dashboard and tried to run the suspect over and get out of the kill zone. As I tried to strike the suspect with the vehicle, he jumped out of the way. I couldn’t see where I was going. I was driving completely blind being beneath the dashboard. I proceeded down the street approximately 100 yards and stopped my car when I felt like I was out of the kill zone. When I went through the academy, they would do setups for ambushes. I’ll never forget their words, “Get out of the kill zone. Distance between you and them and cover.” That’s all I kept thinking as soon as I saw a gun. It was my only escape. Get out of the kill zone and use my car as my weapon.

The offender, in fact, had fired numerous rounds as the officer attempted to run over him but none took effect. The offender returned to his vehicle and fled the scene. After a brief pursuit, he was apprehended without further incident.
**Case Review**

In an incident discussed above regarding backup weapons, a seriously wounded officer was on the ground still facing an offender who was armed with the officer’s backup handgun. The officer located a scrap piece of 2x4 lumber from the ground and struck the offender in the head, causing him to stagger backward several feet. The offender then fled the scene. When asked about the reason for striking the offender with the piece of lumber, the officer stated:

Small things can make a big difference, I guess. What you’re talking about is a very small thing in the overall scheme of initial force. I mean, a 2x4 is not any sort of weapon to go up against anybody with any kind of firearm. I don’t think the object is to overcome the person that’s trying to kill you. Sometimes, it’s just to distract them. I think if he had been thinking at the time, I would have been fairly easy to kill. I think a 12 year old could have killed me with a pebble. I was pretty seriously injured. I think I had one swing of the 2x4 and then that may have been it. It was obviously enough to knock him back and get him thinking maybe this guy is going to be a little harder to kill than I thought at first; maybe I’m going to have to spend too much time killing him to wait around here to explore the various ways we could get it done; maybe, I just better get the h— out of here while I’m still alive.

**Case Review**

In an incident not included in this study, a male and a female officer, both off duty, patronized a bar. After exiting the establishment approximately 2 a.m., the officers stopped at an Automated Teller Machine. The male withdrew some cash while the female remained in the car. She observed a vehicle occupied by two males pull into a nearby parking space. The passenger got out, approached the male officer, and pointed a handgun at him. A struggle ensued with the officer and offender falling on the ground. The female officer said:

I dumped my purse upside down to try and find my phone. The knife that I usually carry on duty with me fell into my lap. I open it up, and as soon as I go to exit the car, I hear a pop, a gunshot go off. At the time, the sound was so small that I assumed that the gun that the suspect had was a fake gun ‘cause the gunshot didn’t sound very loud to me. At that point, my boyfriend [the male officer] was laying on top of the suspect on the ground. I get on top of both of them and stab the suspect in what I thought at the time was his side. I didn’t find out until later that I had actually stabbed him in the back, beneath the shoulder blade. I hear him say, “Oh sh—, man,” like he got hurt. I assumed at that point that he dropped the gun. I see a second vehicle pull up. The passenger of the second vehicle exits the car, picks up the gun, and is now pressing it to the side of my boyfriend’s temple, stating he was going to kill him if he didn’t give him the money. I back off, trying to create distance because the second suspect is pointing the gun on me, then would point it back at my boyfriend, switch it to me, back to my boyfriend. I really don’t know what to do ‘cause when I go backward, when he points the gun at me, I’ll retreat backwards towards the front of my car to get cover. Then, when he points it back at my boyfriend, I really don’t want to leave him there, so I come forward. Finally, I see my boyfriend hand up his wallet. The guy starts to back off [the second suspect]. He was telling me, he was telling me to get on the ground. My boyfriend tells me, “Just do what he says.” So, I lay down on the ground in front of my car.

The offenders then fled the scene, but the one who attacked the male officer was later located at a local hospital after seeking treatment for a knife wound. He was charged and convicted for this offense. The male officer recovered from a gunshot wound to his forearm.

Both officers advised that they had made a conscious decision to leave their agency-issued handguns at home, which was their customary practice. One officer stated:

We don’t think it’s a good idea that if we’re going out to consume alcohol, to have a firearm with us. All through the academy, we heard horror stories about officers drinking too much, shooting off their guns, doing stuff, getting in fights, other people taking their guns. We just never thought it was a good idea. We still don’t. We still have other, we still have our knives and cell phones available, stuff like that. We definitely take other precautions, but we don’t think having a firearm is the best thing.

The officer never had received training in using knives as weapons. She said, “I’ve never stabbed anybody before. I didn’t know if it was going to be difficult for the knife to
go in, how it was going to feel. So, I deliberately hesitated for a second, thinking this is going to be weird. And, then, I just did it, and I didn’t feel anything. I didn’t even know how effectively I had stabbed him until afterwards.” She advised that the blade of the knife was approximately 4 to 5 inches long, and, when she stabbed the offender, she buried the blade all the way to the hilt. This effectively incapacitated the offender, who dropped the handgun and discontinued his assault upon the male officer. When asked if she would use a knife in similar circumstances, the officer replied, “Yes, most definitely.”

**Case Review**

In another incident not included in the present study, a lone officer was on patrol. He knew about a series of misdemeanor thefts that had recently occurred in the storage yard of a commercial establishment. The officer suspected a homeless person who regularly camped in a dry stream bed located within yards of the business as the one most likely responsible for the thefts. The officer had gone to the individual’s camp on several occasions during the day but could not locate him. Approximately one week after the thefts, the officer went to the site at night. After parking his patrol unit approximately 30 yards from the camp and illuminating it with his vehicle’s take-down lights, the officer began searching the area on foot with his flashlight. He was then unexpectedly attacked from behind. The officer later reported:

He [the offender] was behind this clump of brush, like dry tumbleweeds. He cracked me in the back of the head with a rock, a big boulder. I went down and landed on some cardboard that he was using as a bed. It knocked me out. The first thing I remember coming to was, I guess I started stirring before that, and he was cracking me with my own flashlight. He split my head open in several locations. When I started coming to [regaining consciousness], I started trying to scramble. He jumps back. I don’t know he had any of my equipment, but he had my 9 millimeter duty weapon. He’s fidgeting with it, trying to get the safety off. I see this, and I’m trying to get to my feet, still in a daze. He gets it off, and he fired three shots. I’m still half prone on the cardboard. The shots went over me. None of the shots hit me, but it got my blood racing. I jump up, and I start fighting with the guy. I grab the hand that has my gun, and I grab his shoulder, trying to push him back, trying to get control of him. As I said, he’s really a large man, really muscular, in shape, which is surprising. I could feel the blood running down my face, and I know I was hurt. He brings the gun down and tries to bring it towards my head, fires off another round, right by the side of my head, by the side of my face. I get the powder burns. At that time, I know that there’s no way I’m gonna win this fight. I carried a backup knife in the shock plate pocket of my ballistic vest. I ripped my shirt open. I got the knife out. It’s got a hook blade, a hooked serrated blade, but they’re really easy to open. You can open them with one hand, with the thumb. I opened it with my thumb, and I made one slash. I was trying for the neck area, and I got it. As I did, he released the grip on my gun. I grabbed it, stepped back, and fired once. I hit him right here [forehead], and he went down. I was able to get on the radio, “Code red, shots fired.” That’s when the cavalry came. Both wounds were fatal.

When asked why he carried a backup knife in his vest, the officer replied:

I had tried everything. I carried a backup gun for a while. A little .25 [caliber] but I was just paranoid of it coming out of my holster on my ankle. The last thing I wanted was to lose this gun and someone else find it and something happen with it. So, I was more worried of that than I was about the usefulness of it, so I always carried the knife. It’s compact, it’s flat, and I always knew where it was. Even in briefing, I had my shirt buttoned down. I’d take it out, put it in, take it out. Just to be sure it was where I wanted it to be. I felt really comfortable at it. I knew where it was. That’s the first thing I thought of that night. He didn’t know it was there; I did. Apparently, I’d been out for a while, and he made fast work. He had also ripped my badge off my shirt, which I didn’t even know at the time. The paramedics had called and said that while they were unloading him at the hospital, my badge had fallen out of his pocket. He had my badge with him. It was kind of spooky. He was taking everything I had, my badge, my flashlight, my gun. He was basically taking everything I had on me. I think he was going to just disappear with it. But, when I started coming to, he probably got nervous and decided that he had to finish the job. He might have thought to look for an ankle holster, but he didn’t think about checking my vest for a knife. Besides, if I had an ankle holster, I don’t know if I could have gotten to
about how and under what conditions they can employ a weapon if their firearm is taken away or when some-thing comes between you going home or you ending up in a body bag, then gouge, kick, bite. Worry about what comes later, later. If you get to hit someone with a lamp off of a table to get them off you, to get them under arrest, to save your butt, then do what you have got to do. That’s the main thing. You’ve got kids; you’ve got wives; you’ve got families. Just get home. Do whatever you have to do to go home and worry about the repercussions later. That’s what I did, and I went home. The press ate me alive, but I still went home.

Identification When Not in Uniform

“Your Honor, my defendant did not know the arresting officer was a police officer. He wasn’t in uniform.” Such statements often constitute a defense heard in courtrooms across the nation. They may or may not have some basis in truth. Two issues, however, are of great importance. First, officers are killed and injured in the performance of their duties. Second, these officers are not always in uniform. If wearing some easily identifiable sign or symbol that denotes a person as a police officer actually saves that officer from injury or death, it is worth the time and energy to discover what type of recognition method might prove effective.

Six incidents that were examined during research for the present study involved officers who were assault-ed while not wearing uniforms; in five of these cases, the officers were on duty. Two incidents involved officers attired in suits and ties and four with officers dressed in casual clothes.

According to the offenders in three incidents, they questioned the identity of the victims as law enforcement personnel. In two of those cases, however, the offenders attacked the officers even after confirming in their minds that they were confronting law enforcement officers. In another incident, an officer who was dressed in casual clothes during a felony pursuit stated that he was somewhat concerned about whether additional respond-ing officers would recognize him as a law enforcement officer. A discussion of four of these incidents follows.
Case Review

In one incident, an African-American officer wearing casual clothes became involved in a foot pursuit of several armed African-American males who had previously fired at numerous officers. The foot chase took place through a wooded area that led to a housing development. The officer advised that at the time, his agency "relied on your badge hanging out. We mainly relied that your vest [body armor] would have the emblem of your department on it. But, on this day, I had mine [body armor] under my sweatshirt because it was cool outside. A lot of people were wearing their vests underneath jackets or something like that. I did have my badge hanging out." Although the chase terminated in another police district, the officer in this incident was not mistakenly identified as an offender. He added, "There have been incidents in my agency where plainclothes personnel were fired at by officers, and, in retrospect, it could have happened to me." The officer stated that his agency has since required additional identifiers to be worn by plainclothes personnel.

Case Review

In another incident, an off-duty officer was at a restaurant when two men entered with the intent of committing armed robbery. Upon initially observing the off-duty officer, one offender advised:

I see a guy sitting at the end of the counter. He was well dressed to the point where he looked like a manager to me. He looked like he was in charge of the place. Once I seen that, I basically know that this is the guy that could possibly have the keys to the safe. You know, where the money is at. I walked up behind him and said, "Hey." My right-hand man, he knew that that was the key. He jumped over the counter. Now, I show this guy the butt of the gun because I thought he was the manager. I told him to open the safe. Get the keys and open the safe. He told me he didn’t work there, but he looked to me like he worked there. I told him I wasn’t trying to hear that sh—. He put his hand on my chest and told me he was a cop. I thought it was some kind of ploy or distraction to make me scared or make me run, but the robbery was
already on. I seen him reach to his side, and I seen a holster. I felt disrespected. Cop or not, he can’t win. He tried to pull it out. I was already ready to pull out. I pulled out, and, at that time, he pushed down the front of my gun. I tried to shoot him in the chest, but, by his pushing it down, I shot him twice in both his legs and that’s when he fell over. My right-hand man heard the shots and jumped over the counter and we ran out. I’m not trying to go to jail and if I see that I could put a cop on his back and get away, then I’m gonna put him on his back to get away. That’s what I’m gonna do.

When asked how this incident could have been prevented, the offender answered, “He could have gone along with the robbery. He could have basically told the lady to give them what they want. I wouldn’t have shot him. Also, I would have never known he was a cop unless he told me.”

Case Review

In a third incident, two plainclothes officers were conducting a drug investigation. After identifying himself as a police officer, one stopped an offender for questioning. The officer requested to do a pat down for his personal safety. The offender responded by shooting the officer in the chest. The offender later reported:

I left the house to go to the store and purchase a few items. On my way back from the store, I was approached by a man that ran out of the alley and grabbed me from behind. The man was dressed in all black with a firearm, and I thought I was in some type of danger for my life or something. I had a firearm on myself, and I fired one time. And, I began to run, trying to get away from this man.

At his trial, the offender advised that he believed he was protecting himself from an armed robber when he shot the officer in the chest. The jury, however, convicted the offender of this offense despite his claims.

Case Review

In the final incident, an offender shot and wounded an officer who was dressed in a suit and tie and was operating an unmarked police vehicle. The offender and several other subjects had just robbed a bank and shot at several police officers. The offender separated from the other bank robbers and was walking towards a mall area when he saw a vehicle occupied by a male wearing a suit and tie. He reported that when he originally observed the officer, he believed that he was an ordinary citizen. He stated, “Where I come from, they use big Crown Victorias and Caprice Classics and what have you. Where as out there, it was a Cutlass, an Oldsmobile, it was a little car, a little four-door car. So, I seen him, but I didn’t see [his car] as being a police car. I thought it was the car he was coming to work in.” As the vehicle began to get closer, the offender said:

I can see that the car was coming straight at me, any white man that’s coming straight at you in a situation like that, the gun wasn’t in my pocket it was behind my leg. When you see that, it’s either the police or a d— fool. Straight at me, you know. Not at speed, but at a roll, like you’re trying to park. It was like this is the police right here. I’m telling myself this is the police. I didn’t have to do no more math on that right there. So, when I seen that door open, it was just like pop, pop, pop, pop, you know. I couldn’t count the shots.

Comments: Some officers feel that they need to wear some distinguishing sign when working out of uniform to protect themselves from defense attorneys who claim that their clients were only acting in self-defense. Other officers see the need for identification to protect officers from another. Leaving or killed during a special operation is a tragedy. But being injured or killed from friendly fire is a tragedy that should be prevented at all costs, especially if those costs are for relatively inexpensive raid jackets, arm bands, or other identifying insignia.

Communication Issues and Considerations

In numerous incidents explored for this study, various issues involving communication may have affected the outcome of the officer-offender encounter. These issues fell into several different, but interrelated, categories: officers who, while off duty, became involved in crimes in progress; officers who communicated with department dispatchers; officers who dealt with other officers from the same jurisdiction or agency handling a developing scene; and, finally, officers from different agencies or jurisdictions who became involved in the same situation.

Some of the incidents presented here point out shortcomings in the communication process; others demonstrate how effective communication saved officers
from being injured or killed. The final incident described in this section includes multiple communication issues that could result in an officer being assaulted or killed.

Communicating While Off Duty

When off-duty officers involve themselves in a crime in progress, there is always the possibility of danger to the off-duty officer, the responding on-duty officers, and the community. Many issues related to the topic of an officer’s off-duty behavior are discussed in other parts of this study. Here, the focus is solely on the issue of an officer’s communication while in an off-duty capacity.

Case Review

In an incident at an apartment complex, a uniformed officer was investigating a complaint with the assistance of an off-duty officer. The on-duty officer entered the building and was unexpectedly injured by the offender. Unaware of the occurrences inside the building, the off-duty officer opened the front door and was attacked and seriously injured by the offender. The officer stated, “I was off duty, so I didn’t have a radio or anything like that. I was barely breathing, and I did go back and assist the other officer. We got his radio, called out the description, and waited for the paramedics.”

Comments: Many departments have issued personal or take-home police radios to officers. Some officers have used their personal or department-issued cell phones to communicate with a dispatcher before, during, and after their involvement in an off-duty incident. Whatever decisions officers make regarding their involvement while off duty, they should reflect well beforehand on how they will communicate their location, their actions, and any other details about potential emergency situations that may arise.

Communicating with Dispatchers

Because communication represents one of an officer’s most important safety tools, it is difficult to imagine engaging in most aspects of tactical law enforcement without the benefit of radio transmissions. Calls for service, information on suspects, and requests for help—potentially saving the life of a law enforcement officer—all transpire via the radio.

In the In the Line of Fire study, as well as in the current one, officers related their own experiences about communication with dispatchers, supervisors, and other officers. Most of the officers pointed out ways that such communication assisted them with additional, necessary, and sometimes life-saving information about subjects and various details regarding calls for service. Officers also explained how backup officers and supervisors exchanged important information with responding officers.

In several situations, however, critical information failed to reach the responding officers. Sometimes, dispatchers did not elicit this information from the caller; other times the involvement of more than one dispatcher or operator in the same call caused the loss of the information. In some cases, officers criticized the actions of dispatchers; in others, they praised the level of professionalism and dedication that dispatchers brought to their jobs. Examples of each are given here in an effort to accurately portray the difficulties and challenges facing officers and dispatchers. The scenarios also illustrate the need for effective training that can enhance the communication skills of all law enforcement personnel.

Case Review

In the incident described here, not all of the available information regarding the call was given to the responding officer—and it could have cost him his life. The call involved a robbery in progress at a liquor store. The officer responded to the store, looked in the window, and saw a female cashier handling purchases for two customers. The officer related, “It gave the appearance that this might be a false call. It appeared normal.” The officer entered the store and was immediately shot several times by an offender behind the counter with the sales clerk. The officer stated that after the incident, he “listened to the 911 tapes where the dispatcher talked to me. I found that at least two persons had advised that a male subject was robbing the store. They both gave good descriptions of the male that were similar. Had I known that, I may not have entered the store. Had I been given all the information that was given to the 911 center, things would have been different.”

Case Review

In another incident, two officers received a radio assignment to respond to a barbershop where an escaped convict was allegedly on the scene. Entering the shop from
different locations (one from the front and the other from the rear), the officers observed several customers receiving haircuts. One officer stated that all of them appeared “calm and relaxed.” As a result, he did not believe that the wanted subject was there. The officer then contacted the dispatcher and asked for a clothing description and the identity of the caller but was advised that there was no further information. He then began questioning a customer who was sitting in a barber’s chair receiving a haircut, but the man unexpectedly attacked both officers. He removed a handgun from one of the officers and shot both officers. It was subsequently determined that this customer was the subject wanted for escape. The officer advised, “The guy we were looking for was a pretty high-profile and notoriously known bad guy. The caller didn’t state there was an escapee present in the barbershop; he called him by name. We knew the name; however, we didn’t know what the guy was supposed to look like or what he was wearing.” It was later revealed that the dispatcher neither requested the name of the caller nor asked the caller for a call-back telephone number. A review of the communication tapes revealed that the dispatcher did not ask the caller if he had a description of the escapee. Both responding officers agreed that if “the dispatcher obtained better information, we would have at least had an idea what the suspect looked like. Things would have turned out much differently.”

Case Review

In another incident, a sergeant monitored a radio assignment telling of a suspicious person inside a bank. He was near the location of the bank and advised the dispatcher that he would assist the responding officer. Shortly thereafter, the dispatcher upgraded the nature of the call to a bank robbery. The dispatcher then telephoned the bank to obtain additional information and spoke to a bank teller, who advised that activities appeared normal inside the bank and a robbery was not taking place. The dispatcher then passed this information to the responding units. The sergeant, who was the first to arrive, entered the bank through the front door and was immediately fired upon by the bank robber. The sergeant exited the bank, became involved in a gun battle with the robber, and seriously wounded him. The sergeant was unharmed. He later stated:
I would not have entered the bank if I thought there was a robbery in progress. There were too many civilians in there. The dispatcher did a good job in this incident. The dispatcher contacted the bank for confirmation and was trying to help us with additional information. In this case, the dispatcher was given erroneous information by a bank teller who was not in a position to know what was going on. I made the mistake of relying on that information, and I almost seriously got hurt because of it. You have to remember something. When a dispatcher receives information from a citizen, the dispatchers don’t know if that information is reliable. We usually don’t have time to quiz the dispatcher and inquire as to their opinion of the credibility of the source. On any given call, you may be receiving secondhand, third-hand, or even fourthhand information. We all know what happens to information when it passes through that many channels. It was my mistake. We need to obtain all available information from the dispatcher, but we need to realize we can’t rely on it. They’re trying to help us out the best they can, but we all have to realize they can only pass the information to us. And, quite often, they’re often given inaccurate information.

**Case Review**

In a separate incident that was not examined for the current study, two patrol officers were dispatched to a disturbance call at a bar. When they arrived, they discovered that the disturbance was occurring at a private residence next door to the bar. A male high on alcohol and hallucinating from the use of methamphetamine answered the door. When the officers attempted to talk to him, he became agitated. The situation escalated into a shooting, resulting in the offender critically wounding one officer and the other officer killing the offender. The injured officer had to retire on disability. Several years later, the officer who had killed the offender reviewed the 911 tape and discovered that the offender had placed the disturbance call. The officer said:

We use them [dispatchers] for information on calls, but I’ve learned we can’t rely on them. Believe it or not, I could actually hear the offender. He was very agitated, and these dispatchers are trained to pick up on this stuff. He was very agitated, very upset, and he was hallucinating. You could hear him hallucinating. You could tell it wasn’t a bar. We were dispatched to a bar, but you could tell it wasn’t a bar. It sounded like it could have been a house. There was a TV on and an older woman trying to calm him down and tell him to put the phone down and everything else. These are things the dispatcher should have told us, told us to use caution. He was very distraught. You should have heard him on that 911 tape. So, remember, you can’t always rely on the person on the other end of the radio to give you full and accurate information. You can’t depend on them and you can’t rely on them for information and that’s the bottom line. Any call you get, use caution and treat it as if it could be a deadly situation. He [the wounded officer] has undergone six operations since this incident, and, thank God, he’s still alive.

**Comments:** Dispatchers are officers’ lifelines. They are effective because they are well trained and well supervised. Officers depend on dispatchers’ dedication and training. The current study on law enforcement safety reflected the importance of employing dispatchers who have a solid knowledge and understanding of the perspective and the special needs of the street officer.

Of equal importance, officers must recognize their role in effectively communicating with dispatchers. Even when they receive information from dispatchers suggesting that the original call for service has changed to one less serious or potentially dangerous, officers must remain aware of their surroundings. They must realize that information given to dispatchers may be incomplete, inaccurate, or incorrect. Officers never should assume a scene is safe until they make that determination themselves.

**Communicating Within the Same Jurisdiction or Agency**

In one incident, two officers responded to an apartment where they arrested three individuals for armed robbery and handcuffed all of them. The first officer had removed a loaded handgun from one offender and handed it to the second officer, who placed it on a counter, not believing the weapon was loaded. The first officer left the second officer alone in the apartment with the prisoners while he called for a transport unit. One of the offenders managed to remove the handgun from the counter and shoot and seriously injure the second officer, who later advised, “He handed the gun to me and never mentioned a word [that the gun, in fact, was loaded].”
Case Review

In an incident that occurred inside a hospital, an officer was dispatched to escort a prisoner to the X-ray room. When the officer arrived at the holding cell, he observed the prisoner sitting in a manner that he described as “quiet and passive.” The prisoner physically attacked the officer, removed the officer’s handgun, and attempted to shoot him. The officer stated:

I put my thumb between the hammer and the frame and we’re fighting for the gun and he’s steadily pulling the trigger. I’ve got my left hand on his throat, and this guy will not go to sleep. I’m trying to choke him out, but it ain’t happening. I’m stuck. I can’t lose control of him. The hammer is hitting my thumb. My hands are sweating, and they are beginning to slip. I managed to get the gun out of my chest. I look up and down the hallway, and I see a nurse that’s peeking out the door from the clinic. I holler at her to call the jail ward and get me some help. At the time, we didn’t have handhelds [portable radios]. A handheld would have been nice. We didn’t have them at the time.

Other officers eventually responded and assisted in subduing the prisoner. The officer went on to report that another communication issue arose with respect to this incident. When he responded to the cell area and took custody of the prisoner, the operations desk officer failed to advise him that this offender was known to be violent and that a caution text indicator had been placed in the agency’s computer system for this individual. The officer said:

The night before my incident happened, he had gotten into a fight at the jail with three other officers and apparently got the best of them before they finally subdued him. He had come out to the emergency room that night, fought a couple officers, and that’s the reason he’s at the clinic today. I knew nothing of that. I had no history and no knowledge of this individual or what happened the night before.

The officer went on to say that the caution indicator read “two officers at all times.” He also stated that he would have handcuffed and leg shackled the offender had he known of these earlier circumstances.

Case Review

In another incident, a training officer and a trainee had positioned themselves on opposite sides of a vehicle containing two suspicious individuals. The trainee began to pat down the passenger and said to the veteran officer, “I’ve got a gun.” The offender then broke free from the trainee and ran through the yard of a residence. The veteran officer pursued the offender, who shot him with a handgun. The veteran officer stated:

When he yelled that, I assumed, in that second, that he actually seized the gun. I guess that’s sort of one of those statements; I guess that means the difference between life and death. Certainly nobody in training that I’ve ever heard of tells you how you’re supposed to tell your partner that you have found a gun. Now that I think about it, it’s kind of universal when you yell out ‘gun’ without characterizing who may or may not have it. That’s the phrase he used at the time. In retrospect, he probably would have said it different, and, in retrospect, I might have understood it different. But, at the time, it was two things that probably came together to create the misunderstanding, one on his part and one on mine.

This incident is discussed in further detail below (see also “Foot Pursuit”).

Case Review

In an incident involving a traffic stop, an officer had left his portable radio in his cruiser. While interviewing the driver, the officer began to suspect that he was dealing with more than a traffic violator. Absent ready access to his portable radio, the officer could not communicate with the dispatcher or ask for assistance without returning to his vehicle, thereby alerting the violator. Fortunately, a patrol unit from another jurisdiction arrived and assisted the officer. Shortly thereafter, the offender ran toward his personal vehicle and tried to enter it, but one of the officers prevented him from doing so. During the ensuing struggle, the other officer shouted, “Gun.” The officer involved in the struggle said:

This is about the point where I heard the backup officer shout ‘gun.’ I feared that he had obtained my weapon from the confrontation. I separated from him. I got away from him. I took a couple of steps back. I checked my weapon in my holster and realized the driver wasn’t armed. I then saw the passenger tracking, I felt he was tracking me [following the officer with his eyes]. At this point, I realized it was the passenger that was the primary danger. I knew the other officer had seen the weapon first and I heard...
shots at this point and I didn’t want to move into the field of fire. I was just momentarily confused when he originally shouted the word gun.

Case Review

In another incident that occurred in a rural area, two officers had stopped a vehicle occupied by a lone male who did not see the one officer on the passenger side of his vehicle. That officer said the word gun in a tone loud enough for his partner to hear, but not for the offender to hear. As a result, the officer’s presence remained undetected, and he successfully eliminated the threat. When asked if he was aware of the presence of the second officer, the offender responded, “No, I never thought of it. I don’t know why, but I never did. I never thought there might be two of them. Every time I was ever talking to a cop or being searched by a cop, there was always one to a squad car. My mind was so set on picking up this gun in front of one officer, I didn’t even think of two.”

Communicating with Different Jurisdictions or Agencies

In one incident, an officer was responding to a domestic call at a rural farm. As he approached the area, he received additional information from the dispatcher about a subject near the scene who had discharged a firearm at a passing ambulance transporting the complainant to the hospital. The officer later stated:

The residence where the call for the domestic incident occurred was located within my county jurisdiction. The closest ambulance to that residence was dispatched from another county. As a result, the ambulance was on a different radio frequency than I was. When they reported they were getting shot at, I couldn’t hear those radio transmissions. Their dispatcher had to call my dispatcher, who, in turn, related the information to me. So, I was actually receiving information thirdhand, which caused confusion. My dispatcher advised that the ambulance was being fired upon. Then, the ambulance, which was being closely followed by a car, passed me going in the opposite direction. This led me to believe that the ambulance was being fired upon by the occupants of the car that was following. I started broadcasting the description of the car while I turned my patrol vehicle around to initiate a pursuit. When I got close to the car that was behind the ambulance, the dispatcher advised that the subject at the original location was now firing at passing motorists. I had to make another u-turn and proceed in the direction I was originally headed in. Obviously, this temporary confusion delayed my arrival to the real shooting scene. I apprehended the shooter after a brief gun battle, but that delay could have cost an innocent citizen their life. Our agencies now possess the capability of directly communicating with one another.

Case Review

Another incident began as a traffic stop but escalated into a shooting between several officers and two offenders. During the confrontation, one offender fled on foot and the other in a vehicle. A responding officer from another jurisdiction learned of the confrontation and location but could not obtain, in a timely fashion, a description of the suspects or the vehicle because the agencies were unable to communicate on the same radio frequency. The officer reported that it took him approximately 3 minutes to arrive at the scene. Once there, he obtained descriptions from officers involved in the shooting. The officer said, “Who knows? I could have driven past one of the suspects and not known it because I didn’t have a description. It worked out in this case because no one else got hurt; however, the delay in receiving that type of information could have cost someone their life.” The agencies now can communicate with one another.

Case Review

In another incident, an officer was pursuing two armed robbery suspects in a vehicle. When the chase ended and the offenders were taken into custody, the officer leading the pursuit stated that one of the assisting officers had not been able to communicate with the other units and thus did not know that offenders had exchanged gunfire with the officer. The officer advised, “We need to do a better job with that. Remarkably, I saw people from every agency there. There was a ton of cops, which is a really satisfying thing to see. But, up to that point, we’ve always had a communication problem, and I think this case in point shows it. We couldn’t talk to that officer from the local police department.” This officer’s agency now has the capability of communicating with other law enforcement organizations.
Communications with Complainants

Two officers dispatched to a domestic violence call were advised to meet the female complainant at a location other than her residence. She was not at the requested meeting place, so the officers went to the residence to check on her well-being. The officers knocked on the front door, and the female complainant, who “had a strange look on her face” admitted them. A male walked down the hallway, saw the officers, drew a semiautomatic handgun, and retreated into a bedroom. One officer covered the hallway while the other went to the rear of the house. The officer inside the dwelling reported that he held his position covering the hallway and occasionally glanced back at the female complainant, whom he did not view as a threat. The officer said:

I did not want to leave her in the house, so I held my position. I’m looking down the hallway and expecting this guy to come running out of the room shooting. I’m sitting there behind the wall pointing my gun, and, all of a sudden, I hear these explosions going off near the front door and the sheet rock in front of me starts blowing up. I know someone’s shooting at me, and I look over and he’s standing in the door and he’s got the gun and he’s firing.

When asked if the female had warned him that her husband was armed or approaching the front door to shoot, the officer replied:

She never said anything, never let us know anything about what was going on in the house. We later found out she had knowledge that he had a lot of guns in the house, that he was arming himself and waiting for us. It makes me mad knowing that she would put us in that situation, but she would not say anything. I don’t know if she was in fear of her life or trying to protect him or what. I have no idea why she would not tell us at the door, give us some type of indication. She could have whispered that he had a gun, anything that would have helped us out but she didn’t say anything.

Foot Pursuits

Seven of the 50 officers who were interviewed for this study were attacked while engaged in foot pursuits, six by offenders armed with firearms and one by an offender wielding a knife. Only one of the officers escaped serious injury.
in their back yards, serious obstacles. My experience has been that once they begin running, they would keep running until you were far enough behind that they had an opportunity to hide, get into a friend’s house or blend into the surrounding crowd. In this case, I didn’t expect him to be immediately attempting to force his way into the residence with me so close behind him. It would seem to me that he would have thought that I was much too close to attempt to get into a residence. It was a shock to me that he was that close. I don’t know how he could have expected me to be much farther behind him. At that point, I was probably within a few feet of him. I closed in on him and grabbed onto him in an attempt to take him into custody. I attempted to use my pepper spray, which had no effect. When I attempted to control his hands, I was completely unable to gain any sort of control hold on him or position a bit of leverage or advantage. While we were struggling and I was attempting to gain control of his hands, I could feel him begin to reach down towards his belt line. As he did this, it occurred to me that he might still have the weapon that my partner had identified in the initial search or he might have a second weapon. I was unable to keep his hands from going to his waistband. I recall yelling at him something to the effect, “No, don’t do it.” And, the next thing I recall is a bright flash of light and intense pressure, and I realized I had probably been shot.

Case Review

In another incident, an officer was waiting for confirmation of a minor traffic warrant when the violator fled the scene on foot. The officer described the offender as a “big scary guy.” The officer later reported:

I started to chase him. And, as I was chasing him, in light of his size, I was thinking if I jumped on him, there was no way I was going to get him to the ground. I made that rookie mistake. I fired a warning shot in the air, and he fell down. When he fell, that scared me because I thought I’d shot him. It was just the way that he hit the ground; he slapped on the concrete. And, I began to walk up on him still trying to hold him at gunpoint because he’s big and I don’t want to get hurt. I asked him to cross his feet and bend his knees. I dropped my knee in between his crossed feet and called for his right hand and reholstered. I
got the right hand cuffed. It only clicked one time. I called for his left hand. Well, he’s a left-handed guy. The cuff wouldn’t close. I began to beat on it. It won’t go. It won’t close. In the process of beating on his cuff, I remember that his right hand jerked and then the elbow came up. I don’t remember anything after that.

The offender struck the officer continually rendering him unconscious.

Case Review

During an incident that took place in the early morning hours, an officer pursued an offender who matched the description of an individual wanted for armed robbery. He saw the offender run into an alley and then go between a row of duplex houses. The officer later stated:

There was no illumination at all. I saw one of the suspects running, and he fell over a chain link fence. These are commonly in back yards, separating yards. He fell to the ground. At that time, I thought this is my opportunity to cut off this person’s escape route. So, I exited the patrol car, went out alongside the eastern building, which is two buildings. I went down between the buildings, got to the edge of the building, and, by this time, the suspect who I had seen running regained himself. He ran back over the fencing again, back in the original direction where he’d come from. I proceeded just past the edge of the building, kind of using the building as cover now. I could not see him because it was total blackness out there in the darkness of night. I have a flashlight in one hand and a gun in the other. As I tried to light up the back yard, I saw a person that was illuminated standing there. I just saw the outline of the person and at just that second, I saw a flash from the midsection of that person. I could immediately tell it was a gunshot, and then I immediately felt the force strike my chest.

The offender escaped and was subsequently arrested a short time later.

Case Review

In an incident that occurred at a housing project in darkness, a lone officer engaged in a foot pursuit of an offender who had burglarized a bank. The officer later stated:

An individual carrying bank bags ran in front of my squad car, running on foot past the squad car. I dropped everything I was doing at that point. I grabbed my flashlight and jumped out of the squad car and started after him on foot. While running after him, I pulled my .40-caliber Glock. I reached out to my radio to call dispatch to let them know I was in a foot pursuit with a suspect when I ran into a ditch and dropped my flashlight onto the ground. I kept going. I wasn’t going to stop and pick it up. While running after him, I was telling him to stop and identifying myself as a police officer. He refused. As we ran across a big lawn, he was headed towards a building, and, when he got to the building, he ran around the corner. I decided to go around the same corner but decided to
go around wide just in case he had stopped. When I
was chasing the suspect, I was looking at his hands.
All I saw were two bank bags. So, at that point, I kept
running after him. He went around the corner. I came
around wide, and, as I turned, he was hiding behind
the corner of the building. I could see a shadow, and
I could see him pointing what looked like a handgun
at me. He starts firing. I’m immediately hit in the left
leg, in the upper thigh. As I’m hit, I bring my gun
around and start returning fire, one handed. I put my
left hand up to protect my head and start firing in the
direction where I could see the muzzle flash coming
from. At that point, I was hit, I found out later, three
more times. The last round that hit, when I had my
arm up to protect my head, I was hit in my upper rib
cage. It collapsed my lung, went through my stom-
ach and intestines. When my lung collapsed, that’s
when I fell to the ground.

Case Review

In another incident of foot pursuit, an officer attempted
to stop a vehicle occupied by three males who were con-
suming alcohol. When the officer attempted to pull over
the vehicle, all three subjects fled on foot. The officer
observed one subject jump over the fence of a residence.
The officer later reported:

I could tell by his attire, when he was running down
the street, he was a gang member. I jump out of my
car and go up to the fence that he jumped and looked
over. I took a quick peek with my flashlight, and I
couldn’t see him. At that point, I’m thinking this
guy’s a gang member, so I figured I’d better draw
my gun just in case. When I draw my gun, I break
my flashlight. I decided to jump over the fence after
him. I didn’t know it, but he was actually hiding in
the backyard someplace. I was slow going around
the corner of the back of the house because I don’t
know where he was at. I didn’t have a light, and I
didn’t know what he had. I didn’t enter the yard until
I heard him go over the next fence. When he goes
over fence number four, he goes over it in a different
manner than the others. These are all 6-foot wooden
fences. He goes over it headfirst, which I thought
was totally peculiar. I didn’t cross the fence the same
place he did. I went down a ways and looked over
the fence because the fence that he had dove over
headfirst had a motion light. It lit up the backyard. I
went down about 20 or 30 feet. I could see him. He
went to the ground and laid down, but he laid down
differently. His back was towards me the whole time.
When he laid down, he laid down so his face would
be facing towards the fence. He was in a fetal posi-
tion with his hands between his legs. He’s actually
lying on his side. He’s watching the fence, waiting
for me to come over where he jumped. I went over
the fence very quietly. I went to the darkest area of
the backyard. He was well lit up, and I could see him
real good. There was a tree, and I went behind the
tree. I was directly behind him. I could tell he had a
weapon between his legs at that time. I ordered him
to drop the gun. He began looking around to try and
locate me. He couldn’t. After the third order to drop
the gun, he knew I could see him and he couldn’t see
me. So, he took the gun from between his legs and
dropped it to his side. I approached, stepped on the
gun, and took him into custody. During the interview
process, he told the detective he had set up in three
different locations to ambush me.

Comments: Of the 50 officers involved in the current
study, 10 had received foot pursuit training while in the
academy, consisting of an average length of 2 hours per
officer. Of the officers involved in the seven foot pursuits
described above, only one of the officers had obtained
foot pursuit training while in the police academy. One
of those seven officers reported that he was not trained
in the academy to conduct foot pursuits. He stated that
he received such instruction during in-service training. In
the last foot pursuit incident presented above, the officer
advised that prior to his incident, an officer in his agency
was feloniously killed during a foot pursuit. As a result,
the officer received extensive in-service training refer-
cencing the incident where the officer had lost his life. The
officer stated, “The in-service training was a big benefit
to me on this night. It kept me from going around blind
corners.”

Searches

The physical search of persons, vehicles, and surround-
ings remains a major law enforcement safety issue. When
offenders are interviewed, they report that the skills that
officers display when searching them are “just plain awful
and haphazard” to “very thorough and complete” and
every level of performance between those two extremes.

In several incidents described for this study, officers
were attacked or could have been attacked for failing to
adequately search the offenders themselves or the areas within the offenders’ immediate control. As shown in the following scenarios, officers tend to avoid certain areas of an offender’s anatomy. Some officers assume that if a prisoner is given to them to transport, both the prisoner and vehicle have been thoroughly searched. Other officers appear to neglect searching the area where the offender is arrested. This can include furniture, vehicles, and natural surroundings.

**Case Review**

An offender had been arrested and transported to a cell block facility. The officer stated that he had prior contacts with this offender and described his demeanor as “cooperative and polite.” When the officer opened the door of the transport vehicle, the offender produced a handgun and shot him. The officer later reported, “I searched him prior to putting him in the car [cage car]. There were no subsequent searches after my initial search because he was removed from my car and placed in another vehicle.”

Only 10 of the 50 officers involved in the study received foot pursuit training while in the academy.

**Case Review**

An offender had been arrested and searched. Shortly thereafter, several officers interviewed him in regard to his criminal charges and fraud offenses. The offender produced a handgun at the conclusion of the interview and pointed it at two of the officers. The officer who conducted the search later stated:

I patted the suspect down and went through his pockets. I found a lot of incriminating evidence, charge cards, check books, different things that are in the names of different people. And, I placed him under arrest.” The officer then advised, “The guy came up so quick with the gun I was stunned because I knew I searched this guy. I knew the army coat was a big, bulky coat, but I thought I searched him thoroughly.”

**Case Review**

An offender, who slept with a handgun under his pillow, was asleep in bed when an officer arrested him for armed robbery. He stated that when he awoke, the arresting offi-
Office “was stepping right at me.” The offender was placed under arrest, and the handgun was recovered from underneath the pillow. He was handcuffed behind his back and removed to the living room area. Commenting on the arresting officer’s search skills, the offender later said:

“There’s another gun by the TV set where my partner is standing. He couldn’t reach that gun behind the TV set. There was just no way. He was handcuffed from behind. There’s a gun in the cushion of the chair where I’m seated. When I scooted up on the chair, that was the first thing that I went for. If it hadn’t slipped down a little bit, I would have been able to reach it. It was loaded with dum dums. I could touch the barrel, but I couldn’t touch the gun. During the course of the night, it had moved a little bit, or I would have had the gun. They left loaded weapons around. They put me in a chair they didn’t even look at.”

The offender also reported that he had been arrested in an earlier incident where he had possessed a handgun. He stated that after being searched by the arresting officer and placed in a transport vehicle, he still had the handgun, a derringer affixed to the inside of his belt buckle. He said, “It’s called a Sidewinder. You get them out of [a] magazine. It was comical. The girl that was with me, I told them she was my wife. The offense was only a $200 bond, and I had $800 on me at the time. I had the gun on, and they patted me down. They never checked inside the waistband or nothing. The girl that was with me, she knew where the gun was. I asked them if I could kiss my wife good-bye. They opened up the back door of the police car and she leaned in, pulled the gun from where it was, cupped it, kissed me, stepped back away from the car, and turned around and walked away.”

Case Review

An offender convicted and sentenced to a lengthy prison term for bank robbery and assauling several police officers escaped from custody while being transported to a court hearing. The offender advised that he could effect the escape due to a handcuff key concealed on his person. He stated:

I concealed it in the sleeve [elastic waistband] of my boxers. There’s a little slit. You can slice the back and hide contraband there. It’s no secret what I’m telling you. I told myself this is it. When you get in that van, you’re going to get out of that van. There’s...

a guy busted for robbing a casino right next to me. I get out the key, and we’re driving right through my neighborhood. I know right where I am. I’m wearing handcuffs, belly chain, and shackles. I open my handcuffs. I take the belly chain off and set it quietly behind me. I take my shackles off. I’m completely unrestrained. I pass the key around. Nobody wants it. Okay, have it your way. I turn around and put my hands on the front seat, and I kick the window. The bars come out, and I go out in the same motion. I’m on the street in my neighborhood. I run down the ditch and the officer comes out and he tries to shoot me. He fires and tells me to stop. Stop for what? I jump over some fences, go through some yards, and out of the yards through a side gate. He doesn’t pursue me. I was on the street for 7 ½ weeks.

The offender said that a common method of moving contraband while in custody was known as “cheeking.” He stated, “If you want to cheek something, you can cheek a handgun key. You can cheek a knife. You can cheek a .25 automatic. You might even cheek some small .32s between the buttocks, not in the keister. That’s all the way up the rectum. Cheek it right there between your buttocks and keep it tight and try not to drop it. They don’t want to look in your crack.”

Case Review

An offender who assaulted an officer with a handgun was arrested and searched after a lengthy pursuit. The officers who searched him overlooked a handcuff key in the watch pocket of his blue jeans. The offender stated that officers were sitting on both sides of him while transporting him to the police facility. He reported that he and several friends regularly practiced freeing themselves from handcuffs. He regularly practiced obtaining the key from his watch pocket and unhandcuffing himself, as well as removing handcuffs by using a pocket comb. During this incident, the offender said that he did not have the opportunity to attempt an escape because officers kept him under direct observation at all times. His clothing was removed from him and he was given institutional clothing to wear. To his knowledge, the handcuff key has yet to be discovered.

The offender also advised that he had been stopped and frisked on two prior occasions during which he was armed with a handgun that was not detected. On one occasion, the offender was placed in a transport vehicle
with the handgun in his possession. He was then released by the officers, who did not discover the presence of the weapon. The offender stated, “It was a little piece. It fit in the palm of your hand, a little Smith and Wesson, Chief Special, 5-shot revolver. I carried it in my crotch. Nobody will ever notice you’re carrying a piece. They’ll never even notice the bulge in your pants because there won’t be one. Had the officer done a good job on me on those few occasions, they would have nailed me.”

The offender further said that he believed that he could talk officers out of doing a thorough pat-down search. The offender also preferred to be searched by females officers. When asked why, he responded:

I can be a smart a— and say, ‘Hey, a cheap feel is a cheap feel.’ I don’t give a sh— if she’s a cop. But the real reason is a female officer will be much less likely to do a proficient search of a male suspect mainly because you can talk them out of doing it. You don’t say, ‘Please don’t search me.’ You say, ‘Baby, reach up there and get yourself a good f—hold of that Johnson.’ Sh— like that. ‘What’s the matter? You afraid to reach up into a man’s crotch? Your old man not giving you any?’ If it p— them off, so what? They still don’t do a very good search if they think you’re going to enjoy it. A female cop, or a male cop for that matter, who believes they don’t have the upper hand when they’re searching you, and this is a thoroughly unpleasant experience for the suspect, will be more unlikely to do a good job in a pat-down search. If you can convince or even partially convince the officer that you really enjoy them running their hands all over you, they’re much less likely to do a good search. It takes away part of the joy of f— with somebody. But, there’s a lot more male officers who don’t want to stick their hands in the crotch of another man. And, homophobia I’m sure plays a part in that. They don’t want to look to their buddy or at themselves and say, ‘Oh my God, I grabbed another man’s d—. What does that make me?’ If you’re a cop and you’re putting somebody down, the purpose of the pat-down search is to find out if they have anything that’s going to hurt you. That’s the whole purpose of the pat-down search. If you’re going to pat a guy down half—, if you’re not going to do a good job, don’t do it at all.”

**COMMENTS:** Officers and offenders in this study stressed the importance of and need for thorough searches. Officers never should assume that another officer completed a proper search. Once an officer takes control of a prisoner, it becomes that officer’s responsibility to verify whether the prisoner is free of weapons.

Another point several officers made regarding searches involves what is commonly referred to in the law enforcement community as the plus one (+1) rule of searching. This emphasizes to officers that if they find one weapon, they should assume that they will find another. They never should assume that a subject has only one weapon.

**Equipment**

Numerous incidents in this study had equipment issues that influenced them. While officers identified the majority of these, the investigators also recognized several. These incidents review circumstances where the use of equipment, the failure to use equipment, or the lack of equipment may have, in some manner, positively or negatively influenced factors that either contributed to or helped to prevent injury to the officers. The discussion covers department-issued, as well as nonissued, equipment. For the purposes of this study, nonissued equipment includes purchases made by officers wherein their agencies provided the funds and approved the items, such as holsters and clothing.

**Nonissued Equipment**

**Case Review (Body Armor)**

Three officers in the current study advised that their agencies did not issue body armor at the time of their incidents. All three were involved in shooting incidents. Two of the officers who were not wearing body armor were not struck by gunfire. The third officer had purchased body armor at his own expense and was shot five times, once in the chest, twice in the legs, once in his arm, and once in the back. The officer stated:

An interesting thing was that the vest, our department at that time didn’t issue vests. Me and one of the other officers got vests. We were probably the only two on the department that spent our own money on vests. I’m glad I went to that expense. I was seriously injured by this guy. He shot me five times, once in the center of the chest and once in the center of the back. He would have killed me for sure if it wasn’t
for that vest. I don’t know why anybody would not wear a vest. It saved my life.

Case Review (Holster)

An off-duty officer, patronizing a restaurant during an armed robbery, was approached by an offender who displayed a handgun in his waistband. The officer attempted to draw his own weapon, which he had secured in a new off-duty holster he had received as a Christmas present. The officer said, “I pulled and pulled, and the gun wouldn’t come out of the holster. When it finally did come out, the whole holster came with it. By then, I had already been shot twice. I dropped the gun and it fell onto the floor, still contained in the holster.”

In another incident, an officer had become involved in a physical struggle with an offender. He later reported:

I took him to the ground. I was on top of him. I did not realize until I had gotten on top of him that he had my gun in his hands. I never felt the gun come off. He completely ripped the holster off my belt, and I never even felt it. I purchased the holster from a guy in town. Our firearms instructors had approved him making holsters for our agency. It was a belt-loop holster with a thumb-snap release on it. After buying it, I took it to the range. You fill out a form when you get there. They don’t stamp [the holster] it or anything. They look at your gun and inspect it. They check out your holster and inspect it. They fill out their little form and send you to the firing range. It’s a visual inspection. Obviously, it wasn’t an adequately designed holster. He tore it from my belt like it was nothing.

Case Review (Holster)

While effecting an arrest for a misdemeanor warrant, an officer attempted to place handcuffs on an offender. After placing one of his arms behind his back as requested, the offender stated:

As I was turning around, I looked down and saw his weapon holstered in his holster. I noticed it was a button-buckle type setup where to open it, you would have to pull on the button and it would pop off and you can release the weapon. And, for some reason, I knew at that moment that I could disarm the officer. I think he’s holding my right hand. One hand was free, and I thought to myself I can get this weapon.” The offender then spun around, disarmed the officer, and shot him numerous times.

In an interview, the officer said, “I had a single thumb-snap holster, just over the top. We’re given a clothing allowance to spend. For a couple years, I threatened to get a new holster, but they’re very expensive. I now have a triple threat-retention holster. It’s worth it, no doubt about it.”

Case Review (Baton)

In two incidents, officers received critical injuries when offenders beat them with their fists. In both cases, the officers were attempting to handcuff offenders who were physically much larger and stronger than they were. In the first incident, the officer did not have a baton. When asked why, the officer responded, “Our agency didn’t issue them. If we took training and we opted to carry an asp or a nightstick, then we could carry it. They didn’t issue them. It was our choice.”

In the second incident, the officer had a baton but left it inside her patrol vehicle. When asked why she did this, the officer replied, “We were not permitted to carry it without the proper training. I had the baton probably 4 months, but I hadn’t received the training yet. I didn’t have chemical spray because the agency didn’t issue it. My only options were my hands or my pistol.”

Case Review (Flashlight)

In a foot pursuit of an offender wanted for armed robbery, an officer was shot in the chest. The offender ran into the rear yard between several residences. The officer described the lighting conditions as “total blackness in the darkness of night.” The officer stopped at the rear corner of a residence and began to shine his flashlight into the area. He stated, “I saw a person that was illuminated standing right on the corner of the building and that’s when I saw the outline of this person. Just at that second, I saw a flash from the midsection of that person. I could immediately tell it was a gunshot, and I immediately felt the force strike my chest.”

When questioned, the offender replied:

It was too dark back there to keep running. You couldn’t see anything at all. I stopped running because I was hoping he [the officer] would run by me. When he started lighting up the yard with the flashlight, I
moved closer to the building. I didn’t think he would figure that I would be there. I could see exactly where he was because of the flashlight. When he swung the light in my direction, I fired directly at the flashlight. Then, I ran. They said I hit him in the chest. It was easy. I could tell exactly where he was, but he didn’t know where I was. I didn’t know if I killed him or not, but I knew I hit when he hollered. And, when I started running again, he didn’t chase me no more.”

Case Review (Flashlight)

In an incident that took place at a housing project, an officer was in foot pursuit of an offender for a misdemeanor violation. The officer was running with an illuminated flashlight in his hand. He said:

I then started running towards the breezeway that he was running towards. As I headed towards that breezeway, just pop. I basically didn’t know what happened. I knew I was shot. I knew something had just hit me, but my body just went into complete shock. I stood there, but I couldn’t move. I didn’t see anything. I just heard the gunshot itself. At this time, my flashlight was still in my hand, and I’m looking around and scanning the area for him. I then realized maybe I just made myself a target by this flashlight beaming right on me. As I look straight ahead towards the breezeway, I’m wondering why did he shoot me and where is he? As I look forward, pow. This time, I see a muzzle flash. I see like fire. This time, the bullet strikes me in the left leg, and I completely collapse to the ground.”

When asked about firing at the officer and the effects of an illuminated flashlight, the offender responded, “He’s easy. For one thing, he’s got a flashlight, and, two, he’s got on black, the word police lit up like a reflector.”

Issued Equipment

Case Review (Holster)

Two officers were conducting a traffic stop when the passenger of the vehicle produced a handgun. One officer shouted the word gun and began to exchange gunfire with the offender. The other officer attempted to draw his department-issued handgun and experienced problems. He stated:

We had recently been issued level-three type security holsters. I was trying to stay out of the field of fire. I had never in my training practiced this kind of movement. I was always stationary from a safety standpoint. That’s the way we had qualified and practiced and been trained with the weapons. We had never tried to move and draw at the same time. It was subsequently determined that if you were moving away from your strong hand, in my case moving to the left as I was past the vehicle, you couldn’t get the proper leverage on the mechanism to break it free. You actually had to have some pressure into your hip, as well as down and forward, to break the weapon loose. I did practice it afterwards, and I still never found any way to get the thing out without stopping so that I could get that pressure. I was never able to develop a technique to get it drawn. My department did subsequently test holsters and did come up with a level three that could be drawn while you were moving away from it.

Case Review (Radio Case)

An officer was out of his vehicle conversing with an offender during an incident that began as a traffic stop and escalated into a shooting. The officer later stated that the conversation and actions of the offender made him suspect that he was possibly dealing with a violent offender, but he was unable to summon assistance. The officer advised:

At this point, I had become very concerned for my safety with all these indicators. I did not have the ability, my belt [portable] radio was in the car. The carrier for the radio, the leather, had separated, and the radio wouldn’t stay on. So, quite frankly, I was afraid I’d drop it and damage it. So, I left it in the car. I called the supervisor at my station to see if they had any spare carriers, but they didn’t. I left it in the car also because I didn’t want to tie up my hands with a radio.

Case Review (Microphone)

During a foot pursuit of an offender for a misdemeanor offense, an officer carrying a flashlight in one hand and a radio in the other was shot several times after briefly losing sight of the subject. The seriously wounded officer fell to the ground and dropped the flashlight and radio. At the conclusion of the gunfight, the officer had to groove around in the dark to locate the radio to notify the dispatcher of his circumstances. The officer reported that his duty belt was equipped with a carrying case, but he had
to remove the radio from it to transmit messages. The officer did not have a collar microphone. He said, “I’m not too comfortable with collar microphones. You don’t always get activation when you press the mike button, so I’m a little more comfortable using a handheld.”

Asked if he felt fortunate that he could locate the portable radio in the dark after receiving two serious gunshot wounds, the officer replied, “I never thought of that; I guess I was lucky. If I had been carrying the radio in a case and using a collar mike, I wouldn’t have had to worry about locating the radio when I was in such excruciating pain.”

Case Review (Microphone)

In an incident not included in this study, a lone officer was involved in a physical struggle with a male under the influence of PCP. The dispatcher was not aware of the officer’s whereabouts or of his being engaged in a struggle. The officer managed to gain control of the offender using a carotid restraint. The officer later stated:

He went unconscious almost immediately. When I would release the pressure on his throat, he would regain consciousness. Normally, when a person is rendered unconscious, there’s a certain period of time that they remain that way. I suppose because of the physiological effects of the PCP, as soon as the pressure was let off his carotid artery, he would begin struggling. The result of this is that I was forced to fight him and hold him unconscious, or halfway between conscious and unconscious, for an extended period of time. Something that I didn’t mention earlier that quite possibly saved me at this point is that we were using lapel microphones. I was able to actually key my microphone while I was applying the hold and call for assistance, which I did several times during the struggle. I wouldn’t have been able to do that if the microphone were not positioned there. It was a good thing my partner got there when he did. If he had tried to attack me, I’m not sure I had the strength left in my hands at that point to actually pull the trigger on my revolver.

Case Review (Equipment Location on Duty Belt)

During a struggle, an offender attempted to take an officer’s department-issued handgun. The officer withdrew his collapsible baton, struck the offender, and prevented the attack from continuing. The officer carried his handgun on his right side and the baton on his left side. The officer later stated:

I’m kind of strange. Most officers carry their batons on their dominant side, which is the same side as their gun. I shoot right-handed and I write right-handed, but, other than that, I’m left-hand dominate. I’m much better with the baton in my left hand because I’m much stronger with it. Our agency doesn’t dictate where on your belt equipment is carried. I know some agencies do. That would not have worked for me. If I’m putting pressure on the gun with my right hand, trying to keep it secure from the bad guy, there’s no way I can get to the baton if it’s on the right side, too. In this case, it saved me. I’m not telling officers to go out and start changing the location of their equipment on their belt. I will say that when it comes to convenient and comfortable, make convenient first. Make sure it’s convenient and make sure you practice with it. Practice until it becomes second nature to you. If you have a second gun, I’ve seen a lot of guys carry it on their ankle. I carry mine in another spot because I don’t know if I can get to my gun on my ankle. I carry it in another spot where I know I can get to it quickly. You have to practice. I practice with my guns and my baton. I placed my baton on the left side of my belt for a reason. I conceal my backup gun in a particular location for a reason. And, the night of this incident, the baton was where I needed it when I needed it. I got it out and extended very quickly just as I had practiced, and it worked for me.

Case Review (Electronic Locks and Holster Location)

A detective responded to the area of a bank robbery where suspects had fired shots at other responding officers. He drove into a nearby parking lot and saw a male about to walk directly in front of his unmarked vehicle. The detective later related:

When I first saw him, he was several feet away from me. At that point, I wasn’t sure if he was one of the suspects. I hadn’t seen the gun yet. He was dressed in coveralls. I didn’t know if he was some maintenance person from the hotel. As we got closer to each other, just by the way he acted, and then I saw a gun in his hand. I figured he was one of the suspects from the bank robbery. By then, we were very close to each other, within about 10 feet of each other. I had stopped my car and was in the process of getting out. I was going to try and order him to the ground at
gunpoint. Unfortunately, the car has a safety feature of the doors locking while the car is in gear. I had to unlock the car door, and, when I took my eyes off the suspect, he brought up his gun. I guess he figured that since I was trying to get out of the car, that I’m not a citizen. I was drawing my pistol, and we ended up, once I got the door partially open, shooting each other. I think we fired about the same time, but he may have fired a millisecond before me. The aim of my pistol was thrown off a little bit. I’m assuming that, that I’d been hit in the hand. I was shot in the hand, and it pulled my aim off of him just a millisecond before I fired the shot.

The detective found out later that the offender had actually fired four shots at him. He said:

One hit the post for the windshield that was right in front of my face, one hit the windshield in front of my chest, and another hit the doorframe behind where I was seated. The guy had me at a disadvantage because of those electronic locks. My agency has since disengaged them.” He advised that his agency also had made some policy changes. Prior to this incident, nonuniform personnel had discretion regarding the method of carrying their firearms and additional magazines. The detective stated,” Some guys used shoulder holsters and ankle holsters. Some guys would carry their magazines in coat pockets, pants pockets, briefcases, even leave them in their desks, you name it. We are now required to carry our sidearm on our hip with a badge near it and our magazines on our belts. If I had of had an ankle holster, he would have killed me.

Case Review (Seat Belt)

While patrolling an area in search of a motor vehicle and several suspects who had previously exchanged gunfire with other officers, an officer observed a vehicle that had one male occupant and matched the description. As the officer attempted to stop his vehicle and exit, the suspect began to fire an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle. The officer immediately exited and sought cover at the rear of the patrol vehicle. He and another officer exchanged gunfire with the offender, who eventually fled on foot. Neither officer was injured. When asked what message he would like to pass on to his fellow officers, he responded:

I would say practice with your equipment. Be as proficient with it as you can. I didn’t mention this before, but part of the reason I was able to get out of there as quickly as I did is I did not have my seat belt on. Many departments require that, but I have made a habit to get rid of it when I’m approaching any call not knowing what it might turn into. You could easily be trapped by your seat belt. Think through ahead of time what you might do.

Case Review (Takedown Lights)

In another incident, after a lengthy vehicle pursuit for a traffic violation, the offender opened the driver’s door and fired at the officer with a handgun. This incident occurred during the hours of darkness, and the officer did not use his takedown lights to illuminate the scene. The offender later reported that at the time he fired the handgun, he saw the officer standing outside the police vehicle “facing away from me; he should have put more focus on me.” The offender also stated that he could see the officer “very clearly” and that there were “no lights that affected my vision.”

COMMENTS: Police equipment has evolved greatly over the past 15 years of the investigators’ research. Numerous considerations exist for both departments and officers in the purchase of equipment. The primary focus should be on the safety of the officer and the community. When officers decide to purchase their own equipment, their main responsibility is to ensure that the equipment and its use are consistent with their agencies’ rules and regulations.

The investigators recognize that a dilemma can occur between the introduction of new and innovative safety equipment and the length of training necessary to ensure its proper use. Minimum mandatory curricula have been established in each state. The introduction of a new training block requires the elimination of an existing training segment or an increase in the length of the minimum mandatory time allocated to train law enforcement officers.

The investigators also realize that physical limitations exist regarding the amount of equipment that officers can safely wear. Research has to focus on minimizing the physical size, shape, design, and weight of existing equipment. The development of new products should attempt to combine or replace existing equipment.
Handcuffing and Escape Techniques

Several offenders who were interviewed for the present study reported that they had learned a variety of techniques designed to disarm law enforcement officers. As described in the cases reviewed below, they spent considerable time practicing these techniques and honing their skills to avoid being handcuffed, to remove handcuffs, and to successfully escape from custody.

Handcuffing

In three cases in the current study, officers were attacked when they attempted to handcuff offenders. In all of these cases, the officers were alone and were seriously injured.

Case Review

In an attempt to handcuff an offender for a misdemeanor warrant violation, an officer placed the offender’s hands on a truck. As he did this, the offender resisted. The officer later stated:

I instantly pushed his arm back down, forced it back behind him, and started pushing him more into the truck. As I started to do that, he spun around and grabbed for my gun with his left hand. As I saw the attack coming, I grabbed his left hand with both hands and pushed it back and somewhat turned my hip away to get my gun further away from his hand. As I did that, he came around my back with his right hand and just snagged the weapon right out of the holster. The move he used was too well engineered to be something spontaneous.

The offender denied using a disarming technique to remove the officer’s gun. He explained his ability to react so quickly seemed to indicate his prior thoughts regarding avoiding arrest.

Case Review

An officer was attempting to handcuff an offender for a misdemeanor violation. The offender was in a prone position. According to the officer, “I asked him to cross his feet and bend his knees. I dropped my knee in between his crossed feet and called for his right hand and re-holstered. Got the right hand cuffed. It only clicked one time, and, when I called for his left hand, well, he’s a left-handed guy. The cuff wouldn’t close; I began to beat on it. In the process of beating on his cuff, I remembered that his right hand jerked and then the elbow came up. The lights went out, and I don’t remember anything after that.”

When questioned about the incident, the offender responded:

With my left arm, I did a push up with him on my back, straightened out my right arm, and took him to the ground. I pinned both arms and had him by the throat. Wore his a — out. I was hysterical. I shook them handcuffs in his face, and I told him to take these off. And, he didn’t say anything; he just gurgled up blood. When I let off his throat, he said, ‘Get off me.’ And, I told him, ‘F— you.’ I don’t remember how many times I hit him; I really don’t. I was hysterical at the time. I reach down and pull his gun out of his holster and I looked at him and I threw it off to the side. His keys fell off his belt, I guess. I took his keys, and I took his gun. I took off in his cop car.

Case Review

An officer attempted to arrest a man after discovering a large amount of marijuana in his vehicle. The officer instructed the offender to place his hands on the hood of the patrol car. The officer related, “During the attempted arrest, he turned and struck me in the face and got me on the ground and continued to beat me.” Her injuries included a crushed nose and left eye socket, a displaced left cheek and jaw, numerous facial fractures, and a moderate concussion. The offender then fled the scene but was apprehended shortly thereafter. When asked about the incident, the offender replied:

I knew I couldn’t go to jail because I would never see daylight again. I feel that the officer in my situation made a mistake. I think that the mistake is that when
she found it [marijuana], she didn’t draw her gun. She reached over to get her handcuffs, and, at the same time, she was telling me to turn around and put my hands on the car. I was already in a position to do anything because I could easily turn because I didn’t have my feet spread out. I could hear the handcuffs, and I could hear the officer’s voice directly behind me. It was all one motion because when I turned around, I was already balling up my fist and because of hearing her voice, I knew where she was standing. When I swung, I caught the officer flush on the face. When I made contact, the officer proceeded to fall to the ground. I climbed on top of the officer, and every time she moved, I felt like I couldn’t run off. This was actually what made me continually hit the officer.

**Escape Techniques**

Six of the 43 offenders in the current study admitted to practicing techniques designed to allow them to escape custody.

**Case Review**

In an incident that occurred after a short vehicle pursuit for a traffic violation, an offender feigned injury and asked an officer to help him. When the lone officer approached, the offender used his legs to knock the officer to the ground while simultaneously attempting to remove the officer’s service handgun, a technique that he had learned from his “biker buddies” and had routinely practiced. Fortunately, the officer retrieved a collapsible baton from his belt and struck and incapacitated the offender. Although his attempt to escape failed, the offender said, “It almost worked.” He indicated that he will continue to practice until he “gets it right.”

**Case Review**

During their interviews, two gang offenders admitted practicing escape and disarming techniques. They would neither discuss nor share their knowledge during the interviews. One, however, commented that gang members practiced the techniques while incarcerated. He advised, “When you’re in jail and you’re bored all day, you talk and talk and talk. And, you learn and you learn and you learn. Sure we talk and we share with each other.” He said that he could disarm any police officer who attempted to handcuff him and remove handcuffs in a variety of conditions with many different objects. He stated:

> When they brought me in here today, the cuffs weren’t double locked. I kept closing my handcuff in the first part of the interview, and I could have, if it was a serious hassle, come out of my restraints. And, I could have put some hurt on you. But, you know, like I said, violence is for those who use violence.

Neither offender would provide a demonstration during the interview. One declared, “I can’t share that kind of information with the enemy.”

**Case Review**

One self-admitted gang member reported that relatives, also gang members, taught him how to escape handcuffs. He stated, “All I need is something small like a paper clip, so long as the cuffs are not double locked.” Supplied with a paper clip and handcuffed behind his back, the offender, stating that he had been in jail for 4 years and was probably out of practice, straightened the end of the paper clip and freed himself from the handcuffs in approximately 30 seconds. He also indicated that his tool
of preference for escaping handcuffs was a short piece of guitar string.

Another offender reported that he regularly carried a handcuff key in the watch pocket of his jeans and practiced removing it with his hands cuffed behind his back. He also advised that he had cut slits in the waistband of his jeans and frequently carried a handcuff key in the rear waistband area. He regularly practiced escape moves designed to prevent an officer from placing handcuffs on him. The offender demonstrated two techniques, both designed to assault an officer who placed him against a wall. They involved spin moves from the right and left that enabled the offender to deliver blows to the officer’s face.

Case Review

One offender who considered himself a professional “holdup man” said that he and his crime partner regularly practiced escape and disarming techniques. He stated, “I could jump through cuffs before your mind could think about what happened. I used to put my gun on the coffee table, stand 4 or 5 feet away from it, jump up in the air through the cuffs, come down, grab the gun, and bring it back up in seconds. I also owned my own handcuffs and key and would practice with those.”

The offender also rehearsed numerous techniques designed to disarm officers who tried to handcuff him. He demonstrated those techniques using a wall to execute a variety of spin moves, along with several disarming techniques while in a prone position with his hands behind his back. Finally, the offender showed the escape technique used to assault the officer in the incident of examination. The offender was handcuffed behind his back, but the cuffs were not double locked. He deliberately tightened the one on his right wrist and asked the officer to loosen it. As the officer did so, the offender effected a spin move, retrieved a loaded handgun, and critically wounded the officer by shooting him directly in the face. The offender stated:

I would train myself like you see in the movies. I mean, how many guys do you know that would handcuff themselves and sit in their apartment night after night thinking of ways to get out of them and do this over an extended period of time? I trained myself for this. I watch you guys. I watch cops on TV. I bought the SWAT handbook. I have all the literature that you have. Badges, pamphlets, I studied that stuff. I watched officers make traffic stops. How they get you out of the car. You people don’t know me as well as I know you. And, so the inevitability of what happened that day was just a prelude to years of training. Like I showed you. I didn’t feel the cuff loosen, I heard it. Why? Because I trained myself to do that.

Comments: Offenders demonstrated their willingness to spend time practicing techniques designed to disarm law enforcement officers and use officers’ weapons against them. While most officers practice their control techniques during required in-service training periods, the officers in this study recommended that all officers should engage in retraining more often than only during required times.

Not Waiting for Backup

In numerous incidents in the current study, officers chose to act without the benefit of backup for a variety of reasons. In some instances, backup was not immediately available, but the officer felt that the situation required immediate action. In other cases, officers called for assistance and acted alone believing backup was coming.

Case Review

An officer pulled behind a vehicle being operated by a lone driver. Both matched the description of a lookout wanted for bank robbery. The officer activated his emergency equipment, and the driver fled in the vehicle. After a chase of several miles, the offender seriously wounded the officer with a handgun and continued his escape. When asked how the offender was eventually apprehended, the officer replied:

He was actually caught in a neighboring community. The chief of police there came upon him, called it in that he was following this car, and waited until there were other marked units. They initiated a felony stop on this guy. At the time they stopped him, he had a 9 millimeter on the front seat, and it was recharged. It had a full clip in it and one in the chamber. So, he had more ammo; he was ready to go. I think when the stop was made, there were so many marked units and unmarked units there that he knew there was no fight. It would have been useless for him to try and fight. In retrospect, I should have done it that way.

Case Review

A lone officer attempted to stop a vehicle occupied by two
subjects. After a brief chase, the driver fled on foot, and the passenger fell to the roadway and feigned injury. The officer approached and attempted to assist the offender. A lengthy struggle ensued. Additional units responded to the scene as a result of having monitored the chase on the radio and helped the officer handcuff the offender. The officer later stated:

The first thing I’d do is I wouldn’t approach the guy again. I would have kept him at gunpoint. I heard sirens coming, and sometimes you have to get, I’m known on my department in this area. I can take of things myself, and I wanted to have this guy, self-consciously, I wanted to have the guy handcuffed before anybody got there. Everything taken care of. I think that’s what pushed me to do that. He’s in pain and you want to help the person, and what I did was put myself in harm’s way. I basically moved right into a trap. That would be the first thing. I would just hold steady and wait until the troops got there. I mean, that’s what they’re there for, to help you. I don’t mind admitting my mistakes, and that was my first mistake right there.

Case Review

Another lone officer conducted a traffic stop and discovered a large quantity of illicit drugs. The officer ordered the offender to place his hands on her patrol vehicle. The officer then called for a nearby unit to assist her. When the officer attempted to handcuff the offender, she was assaulted and received life-threatening injuries. When asked what she would do differently if put in the same situation, the officer responded:

I’d wait for a backup officer. The main thing is a backup officer is always the best bet. You have another set of eyes. From the time I called backup, it was just a couple of seconds before he hit me, and he had already completed the assault, attempted to get my weapon, and proceeded forward when my backup got there. My backup, it didn’t take him 40 to 45 seconds to get there. It doesn’t take long. It can all happen in a split second. You just don’t know.

Case Review

An officer responded to a burglar alarm at a bank. Exiting his police vehicle, the officer discovered a forced entry had occurred and notified the dispatcher. At that point, an offender exited the bank and critically injured the officer before eventually escaping. The officer said:

I was the only city officer on at that time. The last officer just went off at three in the morning. There were two deputies that were on, but they were out in the county on another call at that time. What I wanted to do was maintain a perimeter and wait for backup. Wait for backup and wait for the key holder [property manager]. When backup got there, make an entry and check the bank. The suspect jumped out the window and took off on foot. It’s always good to have assistance, but I didn’t have that luxury that night.

Case Review

Another officer was severely injured by gunfire at the conclusion of a vehicle pursuit that lasted approximately 12 minutes. When asked how close the nearest backup unit was, the officer replied, “I was the only unit on duty in my county. The nearest backup? I’d say they were probably in bed. As far as officer safety goes, a rural area simply doesn’t have the amount of money city departments have. You’re primarily out there by yourself.”

Case Review

An officer attempted to serve a misdemeanor warrant on a female offender at her residence when she attempted to assault him with a carving fork. The officer stated:

Assistance was available. It was a female and a minor charge. I didn’t think it was any big deal. I probably should have had another officer assist me. The whole incident might have been avoided.

Case Review

An officer had made prior arrangements with a business owner to be contacted when an offender wanted for a misdemeanor violation showed up at the establishment. The officer received a message from the dispatcher that the business owner had called and said that the offender was on the scene. The officer called for assistance and learned that it would take the backup unit several minutes to respond. The officer reported, “I knew this business didn’t keep people around for very long, so I made a decision not to wait for the other officer to arrive. I at least wanted to get on the scene before the suspect had the opportunity to leave.” The officer attempted to effect the arrest of the offender and was critically injured. The
Case Review

While attempting to arrest an offender for a misdemeanor traffic warrant, an officer was critically injured. Five minutes prior to attempting the arrest, the officer called for assistance. He later said:

I was told the officer working the adjoining town wasn’t coming. The one that was coming was on the other end of the county. It would take him a good 20 minutes to get there. After waiting 5 minutes, the guy bolted, and I had to handle it alone. Our agency had an unwritten policy that nobody gets away. That’s what I was accustomed to. Now, I have learned that it’s just a misdemeanor warrant. I’ll never chase anybody on foot again for a misdemeanor warrant. Not like that, it’s not worth it. It’s a lot easier to let those misdemeanors go. Sooner or later they’re going to get caught. If you’re by yourself, it’s just not worth it to put your own health and safety at risk, not for that.

Comments: Sometimes, officers must act quickly and decisively regardless of whether backup units are present. Officers must prepare for making this oftentimes split-second decision. Training should incorporate reality-based scenarios that provide officers with real-life situations that prepare them to respond appropriately and safely. Officers, on their part, should consider the consequences of acting alone. As one officer in this study said, “It’s a cost-benefit question. Is the cost of catching this person at this time worth risking my life?” Sometimes the answer is yes, and sometimes it is no. Administrators, instructors, supervisors, and officers all should consider this question when developing policy and training.

Tactical Retreats

Officers interviewed in this study who were assaulted in various situations stated in different ways that the law enforcement profession should distinguish between “tactical retreats” and “running away.” In the minds of some officers, this distinction is either blurred or simply denied. One officer advised, “There’s too much ego involved for some of us. We have only one direction, forward. This can get us in trouble. It got me in trouble.”

Case Review

Answering a call about a woman yelling for help, two officers responded to a residence where a male confronted them with a knife. One officer stated:

He came out; his eyes were huge. He was glaring at us. He was very upset. He had already made up his mind what he was going to do. He was about 8 to 10 feet away when I fired my first two rounds. Where they struck I don’t know. I fired what I thought was one more round, and then my gun jammed. It turns out it was two more rounds and my gun jammed. It just seemed to p— him off even more. He continued coming. My gun wasn’t working. I had the other officer to the left of me, and we still had to get out of the hallway. He still had the knife in his hand. I turned around. I’m yelling, “Everybody out,” and I’m grabbing him [another officer] by the back of his shirt, and the two of us are running out the door. As we’re running out the door, backup officers are arriving on the scene. I just started, cleared the porch, and started going down the steps when the officer came around the corner of the house.

I could hear him yelling, “drop the weapon; drop the knife.” If I would have had time, I could have racked it, cleared it back into service. It scared the h— out of me. It’s every officer’s nightmare. You always have a real big fear of that happening. He had the distance, he was well within range to pull off what he wanted. He still, for all I know as we were running out the hall, he could have stabbed me in the back ‘cause he was right behind us. You don’t have to be 6’5”, 300 pounds, high on crack to pull something like that off. You can just be 5’10”, 170, and drunk if you have the mind-set. That’s what’s going to get you through it and that’s what this guy did. He had the mind-set to accomplish what he wanted to do. He came pretty close to it. If we hadn’t of gotten the h— out of there he could have cut us up. It worked out good.
Case Review

An officer who attempted to handcuff an offender was disarmed and shot in the chest. The officer’s protective armor prevented the round from entering his body. He later stated:

[The force of the round] backed me up several steps. And, there was approximately 6 feet of distance between me and him, which is way too much to get a hold of the gun. Then, I instantly decided that I should run, get the h— out of there. As I turned and started to run, there was a whole group of cars, approximately 8 to 10 vehicles parked together in the tow yard to my right. I immediately decided to attempt to get to those cars. As I started to run, he continued to shoot and shot me in the left leg, in the thigh. As I proceeded to run, he shot me in the left arm. And, as I got just about to the cars that were parked there, he shot me in the back, which threw me over the cars and onto the ground. Running was the only decision at that time. There’s no doubt in my mind he would have killed me. I mean, he’s got the gun and you don’t have one and it’s a good decision. It would be like going out here on the main road and trying to stop a car by taking it head-on with your shoulder. It’s not going to work. He’s shooting, and I can’t shoot back. I’m certainly not quick enough to beat those bullets to the gun. And, I know the only option I had at the time was cover, and cover was not between me and him. Cover was over there. If I was going to get to cover, it was over there. No doubt about it, it saved my life.

Case Review

An officer located a vehicle occupied by an offender who was sought for an earlier assault on several other officers. The officer later stated:

I got out of my car. I put my pistol in my left hand, so I could put the car in park. I was standing up. He [the offender] got out of his car. Before I could say anything, he raised up with what I recognized as an AR-15 rifle, and then we began shooting at each other. I took cover behind the rear of the patrol car. He fired 28 times, and I think my car was hit 11 times by him. I returned fire as I was moving back to cover without any effect that we were able later to determine. I maintained my cover back there expecting him to charge one side or the other of the vehicle and he never did. I later found out that he fled on foot in the opposite direction. We didn’t have information that this subject was armed with a rifle. I knew that weapon was capable of penetrating the car doors or anything else. I knew I needed to keep that engine block between me and him. He had an AR-15, and I had a handgun. Good cover was the only option.

Case Review

An officer involved in a traffic pursuit was shot in the legs several times by an offender. The officer fell to the ground and immediately began to crawl toward his patrol vehicle for cover. The offender then shot him in the back. The officer stated that once he returned to his patrol vehicle:

I put it in reverse very quickly. A sergeant told me once that if you’re by yourself and you get involved in a situation where you think it could go south or you’re involved in something where your safety is involved, there is nothing wrong with using that engine to get out of that situation just as fast as it took you there. Get yourself out. There’s no call worth dying for, you know. What the sergeant told me came through my head. Do whatever it takes to stay alive; get out of there. And, that’s what I did.

Case Review

Answering a call for a domestic dispute, an officer entered the open doorway of a private residence. An offender opened fire at him, but the round did not take effect. The officer immediately retreated, sought cover, and called for assistance. The officer later said, “Retreat was my only option. The subject had a rifle, and I wasn’t sure where in the home he was located. Obviously, I did the right thing because no one got hurt.”

Case Review

An officer initiated a short vehicle pursuit of an offender who had just robbed a bank. After turning a corner, the officer saw that the offender had exited his vehicle. The officer later stated:

When I made my commitment of turning towards his vehicle, he saw my commitment. He got within 10 feet of the front of my car and was running towards me with a semiautomatic chrome, what I hear now
was a .40 caliber. Unknown if he was shooting at me at this time, I took the only means of cover that I could think of at the time was to go underneath my dashboard and try to run the suspect over and get out of the kill zone. To put distance between him and I and keeping something between us for cover. I proceeded down the street approximately 100 yards and stopped my car when I felt I was out of the kill zone. I peeked up the side of the car to see where his location was. He was in the middle of the street, and he was pointing at me. During this whole time, I never knew he was firing his weapon at me. He jumped into his car.

After a brief pursuit, several officers apprehended the offender. The officer stated that he had received prior training and participated in scenarios where perpetrators attacked him. He advised, “They would set up ambushes and their main job was, and I’ll never forget the words, ‘get out of the kill zone’. Distance between you and them and cover. That’s all I kept thinking as soon as I saw a gun.”

**COMMENTS:** At the end of the tour of duty, officers should return home in the same condition in which they left. They will make tactical decisions during those working hours that will protect society from forces that threaten its safety. They also must make these same tactical decisions to protect themselves and return to duty the following day.

**Answering Electronic Alarms**

Experienced law enforcement officers realize that electronic alarms are usually false. In the cases examined here, however, officers were seriously injured when the alarm they responded to turned out to be real.

**Case Review**

An officer was in the dispatch center when a bank burglary alarm sounded. The officer responded alone. He later stated, “That same alarm went off last week, and the bank had never been broken into. I figured it was another false alarm, and, on the way out the door, I told the dispatcher to call the key holder.” The officer drove by the front of the bank and did not observe anything unusual.

The offender in this incident advised that he did not believe the bank was alarmed. A short time after forcibly entering the bank, he observed a marked police vehicle in front of the premises. He later said:

The first thing he [the officer] did wrong was that he pulled in front of the bank. That was the first mistake. Letting the police car be seen. If there’s anybody in the area of the bank doing anything, they’re gonna see the police car. I drop the money and the envelopes that I had and I took my gun out. I was looking to try and see which door he was going to come to first. I know he’s coming, but I don’t see him. I ran to the little office where I knocked the window out and I stand right there at the window. I see him shining the flashlight at the window. It was up high. It was about 9 feet off of the ground. If he sticks his head in the window, I’m going to shoot it off. It’s real simple. But, he never did. He left. So, I run back out of the office and I’m looking for him, but I don’t see him. At this time, I’m in the panic mode to the tenth power. I don’t even think about the money anymore. The money is irrelevant. I left the money right there. I grab a chair and pull it out about 6 feet from a wall. I take a running start, hit the chair, and dive for the window. I hit the ground. I’m off. I run right past the police car and the officer who was bending down with his foot on the running board talking on the walkie-talkie. I guess he heard the noise and looked up and saw me running past. “Hey, stop,” but it’s too late, I’m gone.

**Case Review**

An officer and his partner were dispatched to a holdup alarm at a retail establishment. Upon their arrival, they saw a subject running from the front of the building. His partner pursued the subject while the officer approached the side of the store. He later related:

I went to the corner of the building. I looked in the window that was away from the door. My body was basically behind a concrete wall and I looked into the window and it looked like business as usual. There was a lady conducting a sale, and there was a couple of customers in front of the cash register. So, it looked like it was okay, and I walked in the front door. Peeked my head in the front door and asked everybody if it was okay. The cashier nodded yes. She didn’t say anything, but she nodded yes, so I stepped into the door. As I stepped into the door, a man tried to push his way past my left side and I held him up.
This individual was the second holdup man. The officers did not know the number of subjects involved. In the ensuing struggle with the offender who was trying to exit the store, the officer was seriously wounded by a gunshot to the head.

When questioned about the incident, the offender responded, “I think when it came down to it, if he would have came in with his gun out, I’m no fool, I ain’t gonna try no officer with his gun out. If he would have came in with his gun out asking questions, then I think it would have been different.”

Case Review

A uniformed police sergeant answered a call for a holdup alarm at a bank. Prior to arriving at the scene, he had learned from the dispatcher that she had contacted the bank by telephone and was verbally advised that no robbery had occurred. The sergeant told her that he would respond and confirm that the alarm was false. The sergeant parked his vehicle in front of the bank and entered the front door. Immediately, the offender, in the process of robbing the bank, fired upon the sergeant with a handgun. The shots missed the sergeant who retreated from the bank and took up a position of cover outside. The offender exited the bank while simultaneously exchanging gunfire with the sergeant. Wounded by gunfire, the offender was apprehended at the scene. The bank teller had told the dispatcher that there was no robbery in progress because she could not see the offender’s interactions with the teller he was robbing.

The sergeant said, “You can never assume any alarm is false. You have to also be aware that the dispatcher may not receive all of the necessary information that enables you to make good decisions. I should have never entered the bank without backup.”

Comments: Officers must remain vigilant and proceed to each alarm with caution and never assume that a call is false. Officers also must realize that they cannot fully rely
on information received from the dispatcher or third-hand information passed from citizens to dispatchers. Officers who become complacent, decide to take shortcuts, or rely upon inaccurate information place themselves and their communities in unnecessary danger.

**One-Shot Drops**

Over the years, the media has criticized and condemned officers for shooting suspects numerous times. The public and the press have a false image of the capabilities of police officers’ handguns. The only certain way to immediately stop an individual with handgun fire is to sever the spinal cord. The following excerpts from actual cases highlight the problems. One case demonstrates a rare officer-involved shooting wherein the officer incapacitated the offender with a single shot fired from a handgun.

**Case Review**

Two plainclothes officers responded to a location known as a high-intensity drug-trafficking area. The officers parked their vehicle in an alley and began separately to search for a suspect matching the description of a person observed making drug sales in the area. One officer located the offender, identified himself as a police officer, and attempted to conduct a pat-down search of the offender. However, before the officer could do so, the offender produced a .357-caliber handgun and shot him in the chest. The offender immediately attempted to flee the scene on foot while continuing to discharge rounds at both officers who returned fire, striking the offender numerous times. The offender later related:

The gunshots began to rain coming from both directions. Him and his partner began shooting. As I continued to run, I’m being hit as I’m running. I was so scared that I just kept running [two city blocks]. So, I made it to this house for safety. I was shot between ten and thirteen times. I felt my leg buckle when I was running, but I just kept on running. I didn’t realize that I had been shot until I got to the house and someone told me to lay down because I was bleeding. I figured I was shot then, but there wasn’t no pain. I was so nervous and scared that I was just trying to get away. My mind wasn’t on no pain or none of that.

One of the officers reacted to the incident stating, “After me knowing that this person was hit ten to thirteen times and might have been in a wheelchair for a couple of months, I didn’t have much confidence in the ammunition, in grain or in power. I mean, you would assume getting hit ten times in the body by gunshots would have at least knocked him down.”

**Case Review**

An intoxicated offender charged at several officers with a knife raised above his head. The officer who had been closest to the offender later related:

He was about ten feet away when I fired my first two rounds. Where they struck I don’t know. We carry the Glock 21. It’s a .45 caliber. Myself, I was using Black Talons in it. He hesitated for a second and continued moving forward. I fired what I thought was one more round and then my gun jammed. It turned out it was two more rounds and my gun jammed. It just seemed to p— him off even more.

As the officers fled the apartment, backup units arrived and observed the offender, who had the knife and was still threatening the officers on the scene. A backup officer discharged an additional .45-caliber round, which struck the offender in the sternum. The officer stated:

The last round was right in the middle of the sternum. You could hear air, so I know it hit a lung. He dropped the knife and leaned against a wall. It was only then that we were able to move the knife from the area. The offender was still leaning against the wall, and I was amazed that he didn’t go down.

The offender was apprehended and transported to the hospital for treatment. He has since fully recovered from his injuries. When asked what he felt at the time of the shooting, the offender replied:

It felt like a bee sting. It enraged me to where I lost all control after that because now it said to me, these people are going to hurt you. So I figured, now I’m going to hurt you back. After the final shot, I don’t really remember anything. I know I had gotten really drunk, and I was really mad. I’m glad the cops didn’t let me get close enough to hurt them. What kept me on my feet? Rage.
force. In this incident, he had stopped a traffic violator who was wanted on a felony warrant. The officer later related, “He looked nervous, like he might have been under the influence of some kind of stimulant. So, rather than acknowledging the dispatcher about the warrant, I grabbed him and attempted to take him into custody.” A lengthy struggle then ensued and the officer later stated:

My intent was to place him in a carotid neck restraint and render him unconscious. When I released my hold, he fell to the ground. I bent over top of him. I put one handcuff on one wrist, and he turned over and moved up into me and started to struggle again. I got into position and put my arm around his neck. He brought his chin down to his chest. He began to chew and bite and tear at my arm that was nearest to his teeth. Just after that, I could feel something into my back, my upper right back. It felt exactly as if someone had pushed a hot poker into my chest. In quick succession, he stabbed me twice more, once through my right arm and once into my left leg. I realized, at that point, I was going to have to kill him to keep him from killing me. We were still struggling at that point but had still reached a standing position. I was able to, at that point, to push him away from me and he fell backwards. I drew my duty weapon and fired once into what appeared to be his center mass. After the shot, he fell to the ground. Then, he sprang back up almost as if he was on springs. I shot him with a 9 millimeter, and I think we were using silver tips. I fired again. After the second shot, he began to run away diagonally across the street from me. I fired again, and he fell to the ground. At that point, I thought okay, this is over with. Almost as soon as he hit the ground, he sprang up again, which seemed rather remarkable because, at that point, I sustained three stab wounds and he had been shot at least twice. When he jumped back up and ran down the street, I fired, I believe, four more times and struck him three of those. He was hit five out of six times. Two of the shots that hit him were lethal rounds and the other three were grazing rounds that wouldn’t have disabled or killed him. The first shot went into his chest and down through his liver. The last shot that hit him went diagonally into his left shoulder and across through his chest and landed in his right shoulder. He ran down the length of the block, and the last time that I saw him he was going around a corner into a neighborhood. I remember being incensed at the idea that somebody else was going to have to respond and clean up this mess and find this guy. Somebody else might get hurt or he might get into somebody’s house and hurt them. At that point, it seemed like I had failed. I had let him loose. I really think we get conditioned to a certain degree watching television and the way people react when they get shot. TV is a great deal different than the way they react in real life. He didn’t act, except for falling, as if he’d been shot at all when he was running. He looked like he was entirely uninjured, and if you had of told me afterwards that I hadn’t hit him, I probably not would have been surprised. I was stunned that he was able to function like that after being shot. I later learned that he was on a fairly high dose of methamphetamines. He actually ran a whole block, about 300 yards, and turned down an alley where he ran another 50 yards where he tried to get over a fence and into a backyard. He fell backwards and expired, which is where I found him. When I finally caught up with him, I was actually skeptical that he was going to stay put. I remained back with my weapon on him in case he got up or moved again.

Case Review

In an incident discussed in the section titled “Facing a Drawn Gun,” an officer drew his service weapon in response to an offender who unexpectedly produced a handgun, held it to one officer’s head, and threatened to kill both officers. The officer stated:

I withdrew my service weapon and came up and got on target. I was aiming like at his temple and apparently he caught me out of the corner of his eye and, as he did, he started to turn to look at me as the shot went off. It hit him right here [pointing to his eye], went through and blew this eye out, and came out his temple. We’re taught to double tap in our agency, but he fell so fast and fell across the path of my partner that I wasn’t able to get a second shot off. He went to the ground.

The other officer held at gunpoint related, “My partner was able to withdraw his weapon and fire a round at the suspect, striking him in the head. When he struck the suspect in the head, he immediately fell to the ground. It was so quick.” Medical examination revealed that the path of the bullet passed through part of the offender’s brain.
causing a disruption of electrical transmissions from the brain to the spinal cord.

**Comments:** Many of the officers interviewed for the present study lacked knowledge of human anatomy. They thought that, if forced into a situation where they must protect themselves or a member of the community, they could disable an offender quickly, effectively, and efficiently with their department-issued handguns. After lengthy discussions, the officers related that the majority of their real-world experience about gunshot wounds came from watching television and movies. In most of these productions, the “good guy” fires one shot and the “bad guy” immediately drops to the ground completely incapacitated. Many shooting scenes portrayed by the entertainment industry and the media present unrealistic reactions and underlying expectations regarding ballistic effects. In contrast, realistic and regular law enforcement training should counterbalance the fallacy of the one-shot drop; training should provide a way for officers to mentally and emotionally override that myth. Law enforcement officers must realize that there is no magic bullet or magic caliber of bullet. For additional information about this topic, see “One-Shot Drops: Surviving the Myth,” by Anthony J. Pinizzotto, Harry A. Kern, and Edward F. Davis (*FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* [October 2004], available at http://www.fbi.gov).

**Evacuating Wounded Officers**

Fifteen of the 50 officers who participated in this study received gunshot wounds during the incident of examination. Wound location and severity varied from officer to officer. The length of time for medical assistance to reach the victim officer also varied, in part depending on the area of the country in which the incident occurred. Even in situations where emergency medical teams were in close proximity to the wounded officer, some could not respond to an officer’s location because of the potential for continued gunfire from the perpetrator still at large. In one case, assisting officers placed the victim in a patrol vehicle and transported the officer to the nearest available help. In two incidents, officers chose to drive themselves from the area to seek medical assistance. Both of those officers were alone on the crime scene and without benefit of backup units. All officers transported via patrol cars were successfully treated and eventually recovered from their wounds. However, in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, a victim officer wounded by gunfire remained on the scene while assisting officers waited for a medivac helicopter to respond. The officer eventually died from the wounds he received. The killer in this case stated, “I shot the officer, but I didn’t kill him. There was a hospital 25 miles away where I had been treated for a gunshot wound.” He alleged that the assisting officers could have saved the officer by driving him to the hospital.

**Case Review**

In one case, an officer suffered multiple gunshot wounds at the conclusion of a traffic pursuit that occurred approximately 3 a.m. He advised that he was the only patrol unit working in the county that night and his closest backup was “probably at home in bed.” The officer also said:

As far as officer safety goes, it’s much more dangerous to work in a rural area simply because the department does not have enough money for extra manpower. You’re primarily out there by yourself. I thought I was going to die. I figured that after getting hit so many times that high in my legs that bullets may have hit an artery for sure. I didn’t check the extent of bleeding because I didn’t want to know. I drove away because I knew I was running on adrenaline, and I was trying to use that to my benefit in getting out of this situation. We don’t have full-time fire departments. It’s mainly farmers that know how to drive a fire truck. Rather than having them get out of bed at 3 o’clock in the morning and drive their car to the fire department and get a truck and come and find me, I was just trying to get to a location where I knew they could land a helicopter, so I drove right to the fire department. I had already called for my own helicopter. When I got to the fire department, I tried to walk and fell flat on my face. I felt like it was just half over. I didn’t have a thing to do but wait. I had a huge adrenaline dump. That’s when I really got spooked because the feeling that I could drive or even sit up straight was suddenly gone. Assistance arrived and got me stabilized. Had I waited for them to come to the scene of the shooting, I may have bled to death. I’m amazed that I had the strength to drive to the firehouse, but I did.

**Case Review**

In another incident, an officer was shot multiple times while conducting a foot pursuit. He later reported, “After I was shot, I wanted to concentrate on surviving and
just make sure I was breathing and making sure I stayed conscious. I knew I was losing a lot of blood, and I just wanted to make sure I stayed awake so I knew what was happening. The hospital was a considerable distance away as was the nearest ambulance.” The officer further stated that when assistance arrived:

I think they knew they just needed to get me out of there, so I think it was a combination of me saying it and them just doing it. I ended up at a small hospital, and they couldn’t do a lot for me except get me ready to be transferred out. They stabilized me and that probably saved my life. I was then taken to a major hospital 50 miles away and underwent 7 hours of emergency surgery.

The officer went on to say that he believed that the assisting deputies saved his life by getting him to the first hospital so quickly.

Case Review

In a case where an officer was pursuing two armed carjackers on foot, the officer was shot in the chest. He later said:

I was knocked backwards, felt a shock, and immediately returned fire. My first thought was this is a fatal shot just because of where it hit me. I advised the dispatcher I was shot [the officer’s body armor stopped the bullet]. Because these two guys were still at large, the fire department refused to come into the area and get me. I was actually alone and walked out of the area on my own not knowing really, at that point, the extent of my injuries. So, it was an uncomfortable feeling, and something I definitely checked into later on so that we could be more prepared as a department of what we do if an officer is critically injured on a situation that was hot. Obviously, one of the things that we learned from this is that if you have a critically injured officer, you need to get them out of there and transport them to a hospital or a location of a fire department so they can work on them away from the hot area.

Case Review

In another incident, an officer was shot in the head, hand, and back while in the sally port area of a cell block facility. He later related:

I felt like I was going to die. I retrieved the cell phone from my pocket [to call his wife], but I couldn’t read the numbers. I had blood in my eyes, and it was hard to see. I handed my phone to my partner and I shouted out my phone number and she had to call my wife. I remember her handing me the phone back saying she got an answering machine. I don’t know what number she dialed or if I gave her the wrong number, but she didn’t call my house. She left a message on somebody else’s answering machine. I’m sure that disturbed them a great deal. I don’t remember anyone tending to my wounds. When the EMTs got on the scene, within a half a minute, I was on a gurney and being thrown into the back of an ambulance. All around me is just chaos. I remember somebody screaming that the ambulance couldn’t get out because there was so many squads that had responded. The streets and driveway was more of a parking lot than just a driveway. Probably thirty guys had to move their cars. I can picture in my mind these guys driving into each other trying to get the f— out of the way. I couldn’t tell you how long of a delay that caused. A guy I had gone through the academy with got into the ambulance with me. It was nice to see a familiar face. He did a real good job of trying to keep me focused and not going off the deep end and panicking. I remember in the ambulance looking out the back window, and it was a sea of red and blue lights following me to the hospital. And, that was actually quite comforting.

Case Review

Regarding a case where an officer responded to a bank robbery and received a gunshot wound to his gun hand after exchanging gunfire with an offender, the officer later reported that assisting law enforcement personnel concentrated on the “wrong things.” When asked to explain, he replied:

First, they didn’t move me very far, and I was worried. I really couldn’t defend myself. There’s two armed suspects that are still in the area. All the officers there are concentrating on me, and I’m not a threat to them. They eventually did move me to a curb on the street [the shooting occurred in a mall area], where I waited for an ambulance. They should have just put me in a patrol car and driven me to the hospital. I didn’t have a life-threatening injury, and I really didn’t need that aid there on the scene.
COMMENST: The sooner officers receive emergency medical treatment, the better their chances become for surviving a serious gunshot wound. The best scenario is the immediate presence of qualified emergency medical personnel to stabilize the injured officer.

In the current study, no cases occurred where law enforcement officers on the assault scene administered emergency first aid. The officers who responded to the crime scenes either awaited the arrival of emergency medical personnel or transported the wounded officers to the nearest medical facility.

Neither the officers interviewed nor the investigators who conducted this study were medical personnel. In this section, the investigators did not intend to direct officers on a scene regarding what they should do medically nor was their purpose to establish department policy on medical emergencies. Rather, they presented the data as a strong recommendation for departments and officers to consider the development and implementation of orders that will result in the best care of their own personnel when medical emergencies arise.

Conclusions

As the scenarios described in this chapter demonstrate, training greatly influences the way that officers behave when involved in a critical incident. The most dangerous time for officers is when they begin to disregard or shortcut their safety training. A few suggestions about how best to learn from training sessions follow below.

Listening to the Instructor

Research for the In the Line of Fire study and the present study showed that numerous officers recalled that some safety exercises were repeated often and extensively. Although at the time of their training these officers did not recognize the importance of these exercises, these same officers reported that during the critical incident, their instructors’ voices, and sometimes their faces, came back to them issuing a variety of commands, for example:

- “Tap, rack, check, and go.”
- “Stay calm, you’ll get through it.”
- “Concentrate on breathing and not on the injury.”
- “If you’re shot and think you are going to die, pick something to focus on and you’ll survive.”
- “The fight’s not over until I say it’s over.”
- “Never quit no matter how bad it hurts.”
- “Never give up.”
- “I’m always going to win no matter what.”

Supervisors can assist officers by constantly reinforcing safety principles introduced during recruit and in-service training. In contrast, supervisors who fail to champion departmental safety policies enable their personnel to become complacent. All law enforcement officers must realize that they are primarily responsible for their own safety. Lack of, or not enough, agency-provided training is no excuse for not training on their own.

Taking AIM

The investigators have offered numerous training issues for law enforcement officers and agencies to consider but have not attempted to suggest how each agency should train its personnel. Based on many years of presenting safety training issues to law enforcement throughout the United States, they have developed a practice to assist officers during potentially deadly encounters and recommend that officers use it prior to the start of a tour of duty. This simplistic technique, described as Take AIM, has three components:

AWARENESS: Every year, more than 50,000 law enforcement officers are assaulted in the United States. Everyone tends to think that bad things, such as serious assaults, always happen to other law enforcement officers, but I am aware that it could be me. I am aware that I can be assaulted while performing my duties at any time. I am aware that anyone—young or old, tall or short, thin or heavy—may be a potential assaulter. While serving the public, I will be constantly aware of the total environment that I am working in. I am aware that all situations will contain unknown circumstances. Because I am aware of these dangers, I will not become complacent regardless of how many years of experience I have. I am aware that I am responsible for my own safety.

IMAGE: The image I think I am projecting may not be perceived in the same way by potential offenders. I always will strive to project the best possible professional image. My actions will convey that I am alert and prepared. My uniform and equipment will be neat, clean, and well maintained. I will stay in the best physical condition possible. I can be friendly and courteous to citizens and still
maintain my professional demeanor without letting my guard down. I never will give the appearance of being laid back or lax. My mannerisms will imply that I am a formidable opponent.

MIND-SET: I will take my training seriously. I will be mindful of safety procedures and never allow myself to take shortcuts. I always will wait for backup when available. I will thoroughly search, properly handcuff, and use the appropriate tactics at all times. I will protect my life and the lives of others by instituting the appropriate amount of force when necessary. If assaulted, I will refuse to quit no matter how bleak things look. I will continue to fight when seriously injured no matter how bad it hurts. When I can no longer physically fight, I will mentally fight to survive. I will not lie down and die. I will maintain mental preparedness by using what-if scenarios and practicums. I always will hope for the best, yet I will be mentally prepared to face the worst. I realize that I cannot read persons and situations. I realize that I cannot assess the dangerousness of others based on physical characteristics. I always will remember to take AIM before I begin a tour of duty to protect myself and serve my community.

Endnote

1. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Firearms Training Unit, FBI Academy, Handgun Wounding Factors and Effectiveness, Quantico, VA, July 14, 1989.
In this chapter we offer brief narratives of several of the cases that we examined as a means of supplying readers with details that can help them better understand the rigors endured by the victim officers. If an officer received any injuries during the altercation, the summary will contain that information. If not, the narrative will make no mention of the officer’s condition.

Case 1
Approximately 8:20 during rush-hour traffic on a cold winter morning in the western portion of the United States, a 23-year veteran law enforcement officer stopped a vehicle for exceeding the speed limit. As the officer was writing the citation, he noticed that the vehicle operator, a 20-year-old male, had exited his vehicle and was standing near the driver’s door of the police vehicle. As the officer got out of the police vehicle, the offender pulled a .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol from underneath his jacket and pointed it at the officer. The offender directed the officer to turn his back to him, kneel on the ground, and remove his handcuffs from their case. The officer complied and the subject handcuffed him behind his back. The offender left the officer handcuffed, on his knees, and unharmed at the side of the road and fled the scene in his own vehicle. A citizen witnessed this activity and notified law enforcement via a cell phone, providing a description of the offender and his vehicle. Approximately 15 minutes later, other patrol units observed the subject, and a lengthy high-speed pursuit ensued. The offender wrecked his vehicle, fled on foot, and was apprehended without further incident. He pled guilty to armed assault of a law enforcement officer and was sentenced to a lengthy prison term.

At the time of the traffic stop, the officer did not know that the offender was wanted for violating parole. The offender later stated that he had made up his mind that he was not going to jail that day.
**Case 2**

Approximately 10:15 on a cold winter morning in the western portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 6 years of experience received a nonemergency radio assignment to assist a detective at an apartment. The complainant alleged that individuals residing in the building had robbed him the night before. He directed the officer and the detective to a particular apartment. A male answered the door, and the complainant positively identified him as a participant in the robbery. The officer immediately arrested and handcuffed the man behind his back. A further check of the premises revealed another male and a female asleep in the bedroom. The detective entered the bedroom, detained both suspects, and handcuffed them behind their backs. He also recovered a .38-caliber revolver from the bed where the subjects had been sleeping and handed it to the uniformed officer, who placed it on the kitchen counter (not realizing it was loaded) as he brought the two suspects into the living room. The detective then temporarily exited the apartment, leaving the three suspects in the living room with the officer. The 29-year-old male offender who had been arrested in the bedroom complained that the handcuffs were cutting his wrists. As the officer loosened the handcuffs, the man executed a practiced escape move, knocked the officer backward, retrieved the revolver from the counter, and shot him in the mouth. The officer fell to the floor, and the offender immediately disarmed him. The offender then freed his accomplices, and all three escaped the premises via a rear bedroom window. Police captured the subjects several hours later in a motel room.

When they initially encountered the suspects, the officer and detective had no idea that they were confronting a professional hold-up team who practiced escape strategies to prevent being taken into custody. The team later reported that they had repeatedly rehearsed the escape move that was used on the officer. The 29-year-old male offender was convicted of this offense and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The officer did not fully recover from his injuries and retired from the law enforcement profession. The other male and female offenders were sentenced to prison terms for their participation in the robbery.

**Case 3**

Approximately 1 o’clock on a cold winter morning in the northeastern portion of the United States, an off-duty law enforcement officer with 20 years of experience was dining with his wife at an all-night restaurant. A local gang member entered the establishment and immediately jumped over the counter and announced a robbery. Simultaneously, a second gang member positioned himself behind the officer and asked him to open the safe. The officer identified himself and attempted to draw his service weapon, but the offender discharged a .38-caliber revolver two times, striking him in both legs. The officer fell to the floor, dropping his service weapon. The offenders escaped on foot without taking any cash and were apprehended without further incident several hours later in a residential area. At the time of the robbery, they believed that the off-duty officer managed the restaurant and had access to the safe. Both offenders were convicted of this offense and received lengthy prison terms. The officer recovered from his injuries and returned to full duty.

**Case 4**

Approximately 3 o’clock on a cold winter afternoon in the northeastern portion of the United States, a plainclothes law enforcement officer with 4 years of experience was conducting a drug investigation in an alley near the area where a drug sale had just taken place. Another plainclothes officer with 7 years of experience was across the street from the alley and was looking for potential suspects. In an attempt to search the offender, the officer in the alley took him by the arm. The offender spun and shot the officer in the chest with a .357-caliber revolver. The offender then fled the alley and began to run down the street. Both officers opened fire—striking the offender in the chest, back, legs, and arm. The offender was apprehended several blocks from the scene.

At the time of the incident, the offender stated that he thought he was being robbed. After a lengthy hospital stay, he was convicted of assaulting the officer and sentenced to prison. The officer who had been shot in the chest was wearing a protective vest at the time of the attack, which prevented serious injury.
Case 5

Approximately 6 o’clock on a cool spring evening in the northeastern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 10 years of experience attempted to effect an arrest of a 23-year-old male offender on a misdemeanor warrant. The officer had the offender place his hands on the patrol vehicle to handcuff him. The offender then executed what the officer described as a rehearsed disarming technique by spinning around and relieving him of his service weapon, a 9 millimeter semiautomatic handgun. The offender immediately discharged one round, which struck the officer in his protective vest and knocked him backward several feet. The offender continued to fire as the officer retreated, wounding him in the left leg, arm, thigh, and back. A backup unit arrived and arrested the subject without further incident.

The offender was convicted of the offense and received a lengthy prison sentence. The officer recovered from his injuries and returned to full duty.

Case 6

Approximately 10 o’clock on a cool fall morning in the northeastern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 16 years of experience was on patrol. The officer observed a vehicle that matched the description of one that had been involved in a bank robbery minutes earlier. The officer pulled behind the vehicle driven by a 25-year-old male who immediately attempted to flee. After a brief chase, the officer drove around a curve and saw that the vehicle had then pulled over to the side of the road. The offender had exited the vehicle and was standing alongside it. The officer immediately began advancing on and shooting at the officer with a 9 millimeter semiautomatic handgun. He fired 16 rounds with 14 entering the windshield of the patrol unit. The officer exited his moving vehicle, fell to the pavement, recovered his balance, arose at the rear of the still-moving cruiser, and returned fire at the offender. The offender then stopped shooting and fled on foot through the rear yards of several residences.

The officer was convicted of the offense and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The officer recovered from his injuries and returned to full duty.

Case 7

Approximately midnight on a cool spring evening in the western portion of the United States, a 15-year veteran law enforcement officer, accompanied by a probationary officer he was training, responded to a shots-fired assignment. After checking the area for several minutes with negative results, the officers observed suspicious activity in a motor vehicle parked nearby. The officers illuminated the vehicle and found it occupied by two local gang members. As the probationary officer was searching the 17-year-old passenger, the officer stated: “I’ve got a gun.” The passenger, who had an extensive criminal record, then broke away from the probationary officer and fled on foot through the rear yards of several residences.

The veteran officer chased the offender and caught up with him as he was trying to force his way into the rear door of a dwelling. The officer used pepper spray on the offender with no apparent effect. A struggle ensued until the offender fired a single-shot .410-gauge derringer at point-blank range, wounding the officer in the throat. The officer fell to the ground and lost control of his department-issued handgun. The officer retrieved and raised his 9 millimeter backup handgun in the direction of the offender. The offender grabbed the weapon from the officer, and attempted to shoot the officer in the chest. Unbeknownst to the offender, the weapon contained a safety mechanism that would not allow it to function. The offender grabbed a 2- by 4-inch piece of wood from the ground and struck the officer on the side of the head. The offender then punched the officer in the face and forced his way into the residence, a local crack house. Individuals inside the house physically disarmed him and turned him over to the police.

The offender was convicted of this offense and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The officer did not fully recover from his injuries and retired from the law enforcement profession.

Case 8

Approximately 1:30 on a warm summer morning in the midwestern portion of the United States, a law enforce-
Case 9

Approximately 3:30 on a clear summer morning in the southern region of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 5 years of experience assisted with the felony vehicle pursuit of an offender wanted for an alleged carjacking. During the chase, the lone 17-year-old offender discharged numerous rounds from a 9 millimeter semiautomatic handgun in the direction of multiple pursuing officers. The offender drove the vehicle into a wheat field, causing the officers to lose sight of it. Assuming the offender would exit the vehicle and flee on foot, the officers established a perimeter of the area and took positions of cover. Moments later, hearing the car engine rev and tires spin, the victim officer proceeded back toward his patrol unit. The offender exited the wheat field at a different location than he had entered and drove directly at the officer, who sidestepped the vehicle and discharged one round of .00 buckshot from a 12-gauge shotgun. The offender suffered a serious wound to his left arm, which caused him to wreck the vehicle. He was arrested without further incident.

Investigation revealed that the offender had left his parents a suicide note earlier in the day. In it, he advised his parents that if they called the police, he would make the officers kill him if confronted. The offender later stated that he had intended to go to a private location and kill himself with his father’s handgun. After committing the carjacking and being pursued by police vehicles, however, he had a change of mind—from being suicidal to being scared. He said that he had fired the handgun only to escape, not to injure any law enforcement officers.

The offender pled guilty to attempted murder and was sentenced to a 20-year prison term. Later, a judge reduced the sentence to 3 years. He was released prior to completing the sentence but was arrested later for another armed robbery and sentenced to a lengthy prison term.

Case 10

Approximately 11 o’clock on a warm summer night in the northeastern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 6 years of experience received a radio assignment that a man armed with a gun was standing in the middle of the street. An additional unit was dispatched to assist. The officer was familiar with this location because he had responded to a residence on that street many times concerning an ongoing dispute between neighbors. While both patrol units were en route to the scene, another officer in an unmarked vehicle drove by the residence and confirmed by radio that a male offender was standing in the front yard with a gun in his hand.

The officers parked a distance from the scene and positioned themselves so they could observe the yard. They saw the 50-year-old offender holding a handgun and heard his wife, who was standing on the front porch, ask him to come back inside the house. He told her that it was too late and that he had already killed them. The officers, unsure what this statement meant, watched the offender enter his neighbor’s home and drag two bodies into the front yard. He then reentered the dwelling and set it on fire. The officers left their positions of cover and found the offender walking from the fire carrying a handgun. He placed the .25-caliber semiautomatic to his head and fired a single round. He then dropped to his knees, remaining in an upright position with the gun still in his hand. The offender then saw the officers and raised the weapon in their direction. One officer fired a round of .00 buckshot from a 12-gauge shotgun, striking the offender in the side. He fell to the ground and was arrested without further incident.
further incident. He was sentenced to two consecutive life terms with regard to this incident.

**Case 11**

Approximately 11 o’clock on a warm fall morning in the southern portion of the United States, two plainclothes law enforcement officers with 8 and 3 years of experience, respectively, monitored a call about four subjects firing weapons from a vehicle. They responded to the area, where they observed a uniform patrol unit in pursuit of the vehicle. The plainclothes officers remained on the perimeter of the chase until the patrol unit reported losing sight of the subjects. Unexpectedly, the plainclothes officers found themselves directly behind the vehicle as it turned off the road onto a side street. An 18-year-old male offender in the front passenger seat recognized them as the police and discharged several rounds from a .357-caliber revolver at the unmarked car. After a chase of approximately 5 to 6 minutes, the driver wrecked the vehicle, and all four occupants fled on foot. One officer chased the offender who had fired at him a short distance and commanded him to stop. The offender did not comply, and the officer wounded him in the leg, causing him to fall to the ground. He was apprehended without further incident, convicted of assaulting the officers, and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

**Case 12**

Approximately 12:20 on an overcast winter afternoon in the western region of the United States, a plainclothes detective with 14 years of experience was operating an unmarked vehicle when he monitored a call regarding a robbery in progress at a local bank. As he neared the scene, he heard the dispatcher advise that a brief pursuit had occurred during which three suspects had crashed their vehicle and fled on foot. The detective, canvassing the area of a nearby parking lot, observed the 34-year-old offender carrying a 9 millimeter semiautomatic handgun at his side. He drew his service weapon and quickly attempted to exit his vehicle as the offender raised his weapon at him. The offender fired approximately the same time as the detective, who was struck in the right hand and dropped his service weapon. The offender was wounded in the chest but fired four more times at the detective with no shots taking effect. He then walked a short distance and collapsed on the ground. Other units apprehended him without further incident. The offender was convicted of this offense and sentenced to life in prison. The detective recovered from his injuries and returned to full duty.

**Case 13**

Approximately 11 o’clock on a warm fall morning in the western portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 13 years experience was on patrol in a residential neighborhood. He saw two males jump over a wall that separated the area from a shopping mall. One male, 56 years old, entered a parked vehicle. The other approached the officer and advised him that the person entering the vehicle had just robbed a bank. The officer notified the dispatcher and began to pursue the robber’s vehicle. After a brief chase, the offender’s vehicle rounded a corner. As the officer turned the corner, he saw the offender running toward him with a .40-caliber semiautomatic handgun in his hand. The offender fired one round at the officer, which did not take effect. The officer laid down on the seat of the patrol unit, which continued moving forward, careened off of the offender’s vehicle, and stopped approximately 100 yards away. During this time, the offender continued to fire at the officer. The officer exited his patrol unit to use it for cover. The offender then got back into his own vehicle and fled the scene. The officer returned to his vehicle to pursue the offender but lost sight of the vehicle. He notified dispatch with a description of the vehicle and continued canvassing the area. Several minutes later, other units located the suspect vehicle and took the offender into custody without further incident. The offender was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

**Case 14**

Approximately 2:30 on a cold winter morning in the midwestern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 15 years of experience was patrolling a rural area when he saw a pickup truck occupied by two males behaving suspiciously. The officer requested a license plate check from the dispatcher. The tags came back listed to an automobile dealership that the officer knew was associated with individuals involved in manufacturing illicit drugs. The officer attempted to stop the truck in a well-lit business area, but it sped away and led the officer to a dark rural road. The driver suddenly slammed on
the brakes, rapidly slowing the pickup from an estimated 70 mph to approximately 10 mph. The passenger opened the door, exited the still-moving truck, and fell onto the road. The driver brought the vehicle to a complete stop, also exited the pickup, and fled into a wooded area. Meanwhile, the 37-year-old offender, now on the road, began rolling around and holding his arm as if he were in extreme pain. The officer cautiously approached the offender who continued to scream complaints. He asked the officer to call for an ambulance and assumed what looked like a fetal position while continuing to request assistance. The officer moved closer, and the offender “leg swept” him in an apparent well-rehearsed disarming move. As the officer fell to the ground, the offender simultaneously grabbed the officer’s service weapon, managing to partially dislodge it from the holster. The officer jammed the weapon back into the holster with both hands, trapping the offender’s fingers. He then managed to remove his collapsible baton and strike the offender once in the head, causing him to stop struggling. The officer then rolled him onto his stomach and maintained control of the offender until backup units arrived. The offender was taken into custody without further incident, pled guilty to assaulting the officer, and received a prison sentence of 7 years.

Case 15

Approximately 1:30 on a cold winter afternoon in the midwestern portion of the United States, a 25-year veteran law enforcement officer observed two males in a sport utility vehicle (SUV) with expired license plates on an interstate highway. The officer followed the SUV and pulled it over in a nearby town. The vehicle’s 23-year-old operator could not produce a driver’s license, so the officer escorted him to the patrol unit. When asked, the offender refused to be patted down. A passing officer observed the traffic stop and pulled over to assist. In the presence of both officers, the offender again refused the pat down search. After a lengthy conversation, the offender attempted to run back to his truck. During the ensuing struggle between the officer and the offender, a second offender who was the passenger got out of the stopped SUV. He produced a .45-caliber semiautomatic handgun, exchanged gunfire with one officer—with no shots taking effect—and ran from the area. The driver broke free from the other officer, entered his vehicle, and fled the scene. The officers immediately broadcast a lookout for the offenders. Several minutes later, a third officer in another patrol unit spotted the SUV near a warehouse. As this officer pulled into the driveway to block the offender’s escape route, he faced multiple rounds fired from a .223-caliber semiautomatic rifle. As the officer returned fire, several backup units arrived on the scene, but the offender escaped on foot.

Within several months, both offenders were arrested without incident. They were convicted of assaulting the officers and several other crimes. They were both sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

Case 16

Approximately 3:30 on a warm summer morning in the midwestern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 2 years of experience received a radio assignment for a silent alarm at a local bank. The officer responded to the scene, discovered a broken window, and returned to his patrol unit to call for assistance. Shortly afterward, a 19-year-old male offender carrying two bank bags ran past his cruiser. The officer chased the offender while verbally ordering him to stop. After an approximate 2-block foot pursuit, the offender ran around the corner of a building. As the officer turned the corner, the offender fired numerous rounds from a 9 millimeter semiautomatic pistol, striking the officer in the left leg and upper thigh. While falling to the ground, the officer returned gunfire. In the ensuing shoot-out, the officer received three more wounds; the last—in his chest directly above his protective vest—caused his lung to collapse. His service weapon jammed, but he quickly reloaded. The offender fled, and the officer immediately radioed for assistance.

Several weeks later, police arrested the offender in another jurisdiction. He was convicted and sentenced to a 29-year prison term. The officer fully recovered after a lengthy hospital stay and convalescence period and returned to full duty.

Case 17

Approximately 5:45 on a warm summer afternoon in the southern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 3 years of experience stopped a speeding vehicle operated by a 36-year-old male, who was accompanied by his young daughter. After obtaining the violator’s license and registration, the officer learned from the
dispatcher that the offender was wanted on an outstanding misdemeanor traffic warrant. After a brief discussion with the officer, the offender consented to a search of his vehicle. The officer discovered approximately 1 pound of marijuana behind the driver’s seat and advised the offender that he was under arrest, ordering him to place his hands on the front of the police vehicle. The officer removed her handcuffs from their case, and called for assistance while approaching the offender from behind. The offender spun around and struck the officer in the face with his fist. The officer fell to the ground, where the offender straddled her and continued to strike her in the face and head numerous times. The officer knocked the officer unconscious and tried to remove her service weapon but could not. He then fled the area in his vehicle.

A citizen stopped to help the officer and used her radio to call for assistance. Officers apprehended the offender without further incident approximately 2 miles from the assault scene. He was convicted of the attempted murder of a law enforcement officer and sentenced to 60 years in prison. After a lengthy hospital stay and convalescence period, the officer recovered from her injuries and returned to full duty.

**Case 19**

Approximately 1:30 on a warm fall afternoon in the western portion of the United States, a 22-year veteran law enforcement officer was advised by a citizen of a man with a gun at a local shopping center. The officer saw a 39-year-old male offender who matched the description of the alleged gunman sitting on a bench in front of a store and relayed this information to responding patrol units. The officer approached the store using the corner of a building for cover and concealment. He intended to wait for backup units to respond before revealing his presence to the offender. As additional units organized their approach via radio, the officer cleared the area of civilians. He returned to the corner of the building to see if the offender was still sitting on the bench. At the same time, the offender unexpectedly walked around the corner of the building.

The officer grabbed the offender with his left hand and drew his service weapon with his right while advising the offender that he was under arrest. The offender resisted by twisting in a downward motion and simultaneously fired a .44-magnum revolver, striking the officer in the hip directly beneath his protective vest. The round came to rest inside the officer’s chest. The officer fired a single shot from his .40-caliber semi-automatic service weapon, which did not take effect, and attempted to fire several more times, but his weapon malfunctioned. He then fell to the ground, and the offender walked away, turned around, and fired two more times at the downed officer. One of the rounds missed, while the other hit between the vest panels and entered the officer’s chest. The offender attempted to leave the area but was surrounded by responding units and taken into custody without further incident.

The offender was convicted of this offense and sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The officer recovered from his injuries and returned to full duty.

**Case 20**

Approximately 10:30 on a warm summer night in the western portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 10 years of experience responded to a carjacking in a rural area. A male complainant reported that a man and a woman had stolen his taxicab at gunpoint. While canvassing an area several miles from the scene of the robbery, the officer observed the stolen taxicab operated by a 20-year-old male accompanied by a 16-
year-old female passenger. The officer called for assistance, followed the vehicle, and activated his emergency equipment. The taxicab refused to pull over, but, after a brief chase, it slowed to approximately 40 to 50 miles per hour. Knowing that the occupants allegedly were armed, the officer slowed his patrol unit to increase the distance between the two vehicles. The officer then heard gunshots and observed bullet holes in the rear glass of the taxicab. As the officer returned gunfire, a round fired by one of the offenders shattered the front windshield of his police vehicle and struck him in the right ear. The female offender fired approximately 11 rounds from several .357-caliber revolvers while the driver fired approximately 20 rounds from a .22-caliber semiautomatic pistol, many striking the police vehicle. The officer continued to return fire from his .45-caliber semiautomatic handgun until the taxicab came to a stop. Then, he saw both offenders place their hands out of the windows of the vehicle, which had run out of gas. Both offenders were arrested without further incident.

The offenders were convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms. The officer was treated at a local hospital for the grazing wound to his right ear and released.

Case 21

Approximately 1 o’clock on a cold winter afternoon in the southern region of the United States, a 14-year veteran law enforcement officer at a hospital escorted a 24-year-old male prisoner to the X-ray area of the facility. When they reached a desolate, seldom-used hallway in the hospital, the offender suddenly turned and physically attacked the officer. As the two struggled to the floor, the offender gained control of the officer’s .45-caliber revolver. He placed the barrel of the weapon to the officer’s chest and began pulling the trigger. The officer prevented the weapon from discharging by placing his thumb between the hammer and firing pin. Even though the offender pulled the trigger numerous times, the weapon failed to discharge because of the officer’s thumb. Other officers responded and apprehended the offender without further incident. He was convicted of this offense and sentenced to prison. The officer was treated for minor injuries.

Case 22

Approximately 11:15 on a cold winter morning in the northeastern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 1 year of experience responded to investigate a suspicious vehicle in front of a commercial establishment. The three male offenders who were robbing the business at gunpoint, saw the officer arrive at the front of the building. Two of the offenders fled to the rear door of the establishment while the third exited the front door and attempted to conceal himself between parked cars. At one point, the 20-year-old offender stood up from between the parked cars and began firing at the officer, striking him once in the chest with a .38-caliber round fired from a .357-caliber revolver. The officer immediately sought cover and returned fire. The offender attempted to escape in a motor vehicle while continuing to fire at the officer and other officers who had responded to assist. Numerous officers fired at the offender as he attempted to drive away from the scene. He crashed the vehicle approximately 30 to 40 yards from the scene and was immediately apprehended. A second offender was taken into custody attempting to exit a side door of the establishment, and the third temporarily escaped on foot but was apprehended later.

The officer who wrecked the getaway vehicle was mortally wounded during the confrontation. The victim officer received minor injuries since his protective vest prevented the .38-caliber round from inflicting a serious gunshot wound. The two surviving offenders were convicted and sentenced to a lengthy prison term as a result of this incident.

Case 23

Approximately 8:30 on a warm spring night in the western portion of the United States, two 22-year veteran law enforcement officers responded to a residence for a domestic violence call. Upon entering the home, the officers observed a 24-year-old male offender with a 9 millimeter semiautomatic handgun sticking out of his waistband. When he saw the officers, he retreated to a bedroom while simultaneously pulling the weapon from his waistband. One officer remained in the hallway while the other circled the home to cover the rear. The officer in the hallway attempted to talk the offender into exiting the bedroom but elicited no response. A few moments later, the offender appeared in the front doorway of the home and discharged several rounds at the officer in the hallway. The officer returned fire, and the offender retreated into the front yard of the residence with the officer following. The officer and offender exchanged numerous gunshots.
with none taking effect. The officer’s collar microphone was shattered by a round fired by the offender. A backup unit arrived and discharged a shotgun at the offender, who fled on foot into an open field. A short time later, the offender surrendered without further incident.

The offender was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. The officer who engaged the offender in the gun battle received minor cuts caused by the shattering microphone.

**Case 24**

Approximately 10 o’clock on a warm summer morning in the western portion of the United States, two plainclothes law enforcement officers with 13 and 9 years of experience, respectively, visited the apartment of an offender wanted for numerous bank robberies. The officers were interviewing his wife when the offender knocked on the rear door of the home. The officers concealed themselves in the bedrooms. When the offender’s wife went to the door, she advised the offender that there were officers in the apartment. The offender entered the living room and immediately began firing a .357-caliber revolver through the walls at the officers, who returned fire. When the offender emptied his weapon, he left the residence on foot and hid in a nearby apartment. Officers encircled the area and attempted to communicate with him via a bullhorn. The offender tried to flee the area on foot, was bitten by a dog, and was struck three times with beanbag rounds fired from a 12-gauge shotgun. He was arrested at the scene, convicted of multiple bank robberies and assaulting the officers, and sentenced to a prison term of 35 years.

**Case 25**

Approximately 4 o’clock on a warm spring afternoon in the western portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 5 years of experience was operating radar and stopped a vehicle driven by a 19-year-old male offender accompanied by a female passenger. During the interaction, the officer’s attention was drawn temporarily to a motorist with a disabled vehicle. Although instructed to remain in his car, the offender approached the officer seated in his patrol unit. The offender, armed with a .380-caliber semiautomatic handgun, forced the officer from the patrol unit at gunpoint. He then forced the officer into his vehicle and immediately left the area. Approximately 30 minutes later, the officer and offender encountered a roadblock set up to locate the officer. The officer managed to convince the offender to relinquish the weapon and surrender. The offender was arrested without further incident, and his vehicle was discovered to have been stolen. The offender pled guilty to assaulting and kidnapping the officer and was sentenced to a lengthy prison term.

**Case 26**

Approximately 3 o’clock on a rainy winter morning in the southern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 8 years of experience was on patrol in a rural area. While using moving radar, he observed a 15-year-old male offender driving in excess of the legal speed limit. The officer pulled over the vehicle and advised the offender that he had been speeding. The offender immediately fired a 9 millimeter semiautomatic handgun two times, striking the officer in the upper chest. As the vehicle sped away, the officer returned several rounds, which struck the vehicle but not the offender. The officer radioed that he had been shot and checked himself for wounds, discovering that his protective vest had stopped both of the 9 millimeter rounds. After a brief vehicle pursuit, other units apprehended the offender when he wrecked the car, which was stolen.

The offender pled guilty to the attempted murder of the officer and was sentenced to a 24-year prison term. The officer suffered minor injuries and returned to full duty.

**Case 27**

Approximately 3 o’clock on a cold winter morning in the western portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 11 years of experience was on patrol. The officer observed a vehicle, occupied by three males who were observed drinking alcohol, stopped at a traffic light. The officer activated his emergency equipment and attempted to pull the vehicle over. The vehicle sped off with the officer pursuing it through a residential section. Upon turning a corner, the suspect vehicle stopped and the occupants abandoned it. The officer observed a 21-year-old offender running from the scene and initiated a foot pursuit. The offender jumped over a series of 6-foot fences in the rear of several residences and then cleared one more by diving over it headfirst. The officer moved
approximately 30 feet down the fence line where he could see the offender on the ground focusing his attention on the fence, as if waiting for the officer to follow. The officer then circled the fence, came up behind the offender, and saw that he was holding a .38-caliber revolver as if prepared to raise and fire it. The officer drew his service weapon, successfully disarmed the subject, and, after a brief struggle, restrained him. The offender pled guilty to assaulting the officer and was sentenced to 2 years in prison.

**Case 28**

Approximately 2 o’clock on a rainy winter morning in the southern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 3 years of experience and his partner were on directed patrol in a housing development known for being an open-air drug market. The officers received a radio alert for two males involved in a drug sale. The officer and his partner observed a 21-year-old offender known from two prior arrests who matched the description given over the radio. Upon observing the officers, the offender fled on foot. One officer chased the offender while his partner remained in the patrol vehicle to circle the area. While running, the officer temporarily lost sight of the offender. From an area of concealment, the offender fired two rounds from a .45-caliber semiautomatic handgun, striking the officer in the upper chest above his protective vest and in the left leg. The officer collapsed to the ground, and the offender approached, pointing his handgun at the officer’s head. The officer immediately drew his service weapon, and the offender discharged another round, which struck the dirt next to the officer’s head. The officer discharged one round, which did not take effect. The offender then fled the area, but was apprehended a short time later after he disposed of the weapon he used to assault the officer.

The offender pled guilty to drug distribution, possession with the intent to distribute, and attempted murder of a law enforcement officer. He was sentenced to 10 to 25 years in prison. The officer recovered from his injuries and returned to full duty.

**Case 29**

Approximately 3 o’clock on a cool spring morning in the midwestern portion of the United States, a law enforcement officer with 2 years of experience was on patrol in a rural area when he observed a vehicle occupied by two males and one female, who was in the driver’s seat. Upon seeing the marked patrol unit’s approach, the unlicensed female driver switched seating positions with the 20-year-old male sitting in the front passenger seat. The other male passenger was in the rear seat. The officer activated his emergency lights and siren, and the suspect vehicle fled the area. Following a chase that lasted approximately 12 minutes, the driver crashed the vehicle into a fencepost. The male passenger immediately fled on foot. As the officer got out of his patrol vehicle, he issued verbal commands to the fleeing passenger. Simultaneously, the male offender driving the vehicle opened his door and fired 6 rounds from a 9 millimeter semiautomatic handgun. Five rounds struck the officer in the lower legs, thighs, and hip area. The sixth round the offender fired struck the officer in the center of his back as he attempted to crawl back to the patrol car. The offender then fled the area on foot but was captured in a wooded area approximately 6 hours later after being surrounded by law enforcement officers.

The offender pled guilty to assaulting the officer and was sentenced to two life terms. He attempted to escape from a county facility and was sentenced to 5 additional years in jail. The officer recovered from his injuries and returned to full duty. His protective vest prevented serious injury from the round that struck him in the back.
As outlined in greater detail in the Introduction, *Violent Encounters* is the third and final installment in a trilogy on law enforcement safety. This report concludes a journey undertaken for the sole purpose of saving the lives of law enforcement officers so they can continue to perform their sworn duties, protecting and serving their communities. As the architects of this effort, we feel a responsibility to the law enforcement profession to reflect on our work, which we hope has provided a foundation for others to build upon.

**The Odyssey**

This project began over 15 years ago in a small office near FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C., during a discussion of the senseless felonious death of an officer. Our initial reactions to this tragedy and subsequent research into other such incidents resulted in the report titled *Killed in the Line of Duty* (1992). Upon offering this work to law enforcement agencies throughout the United States, we received an overwhelmingly positive response. Officers identified with the findings and incorporated the findings into their training. Most important for us, many officers provided various comments and questions about the study. These proved invaluable and opened up an entirely new focus of research for us: assaults on law enforcement officers.

Moving from examining cases involving officers feloniously killed to those of officers assaulted offered new and rich data. Not only could we speak with the offenders but we also could obtain the perspective of the officers involved in the assault. We chronicled the results of this endeavor in the second study, *In the Line of Fire* (1997).

Once again, we gave the results to members of the law enforcement community for their comments and suggestions. Once again, important and significant questions arose from these discussions that led to the final segment of this trilogy, *Violent Encounters*. We wondered if it was possible to elicit from both officers and offenders their thought processes and emotional reactions before, during, and after the assault.

Reflecting upon these studies, we noticed that certain results appeared as recurrent themes. Other issues surfaced for the first time. We have discussed these throughout this publication and indicated where similarities and differences occurred among the three studies. What follows are reflections on these overall findings and our attempts to place these issues in a context of safety for the officers who patrol our streets.

**The Discovery of the ‘Deadly Mix’**

Since the publication of our first study, we have seen a gradual evolution in the training of law enforcement officers: for example, new and varied emphases in the types of tactical training, physical conditioning, and mental preparedness exercises that officers receive. We commend the trainers for their constant concern for the men and women who risk their lives daily to serve and protect us. As former law enforcement officers ourselves, we share that concern for our street officers and hope that research continues to point to ways in which they may patrol more safely.

One question remained unanswered throughout the many years of our inquiry into law enforcement safety. Given the implementation of modern developments in law enforcement technology and safety, why do the numbers...
of officers killed and assaulted each year remain, on average, constant? The law enforcement community knows many of the tactical problems and issues facing officers on the street. Trainers and law enforcement departments continue to redesign training programs to reflect an ever-increasing body of knowledge. Officers themselves have sought additional training in street tactics and survival at their own expense. Despite these efforts to improve officer safety, the number of officers feloniously killed and assaulted remains somewhat constant. Why can we not reduce this number?

Perhaps a significant part of the answer to this question can be found in understanding the “deadly mix” as developed and explained in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study. The deadly mix consists of three components: the officer, the offender, and the circumstances that brought them together.

It is often difficult to determine the specific role each of these components has played—and its degree of influence—in a particular assault. To further complicate quantifying the influence of the individual factors, elements within each component are affected by changes within each of the other two. As a way to better understand this dynamic, consider the following two incidents that describe the same offender interacting with two different officers.

**Scenario 1:** A lone police officer stopped an offender for a speeding violation but did not check the license plate number of the vehicle or the violator’s name in NCIC (National Crime Information Center). Although he normally followed this procedure in every traffic stop, he was due to meet a fellow officer 1 mile away for lunch in 5 minutes. The officer obtained the driver’s license and registration and walked to the rear of his police vehicle and proceeded to write the traffic citation. The offender, wanted for a felony violation in a nearby jurisdiction, remained in his vehicle, closely watching the officer in his side-view mirror. At that point, the officer received a radio transmission from the officer he was supposed to meet for lunch. He answered the radio and confirmed that he was on his way to the restaurant. The officer then finished the citation and approached the offender who shot him several times with a handgun and fled in the vehicle. Although seriously wounded, the officer survived. Authorities captured the offender 2 days later in a neighboring jurisdiction. When asked about the incident, the officer replied, “I wasn’t aware at any time that I was in danger. The offender appeared very cooperative and polite.” When asked what prompted him to attack the officer, the offender stated, “It was nothing personal. The officer seemed like an okay guy. I was willing to take a traffic ticket for speeding; that was the least of my worries. But, when I saw the officer talking on the radio, I thought he discovered I was wanted on a felony warrant. If he had not gotten on that radio, I would have thought everything was okay, taken the ticket, and left.”

In this incident, the perceptions of both the officer and the offender proved incorrect. The offender perceived the officer’s acknowledgment of the lunch appointment over his police radio as a threat. He assumed that the officer was talking to the dispatcher and retrieving information regarding his felony warrant status. Conversely, the officer perceived the offender’s courteous and cooperative behavior as posing no threat or danger to him.

**Scenario 2:** In contrast, this same offender stated that in the past and under a similar set of circumstances, he had been stopped by another law enforcement officer. In that situation, the professional manner of the officer impressed the offender so much that he did not use the weapon he had under his seat. The offender explained that he believed the officer conducted himself in a professional manner. By this, he meant that the officer’s attention was focused directly on him and the movements he made in the vehicle. The offender watched the officer in his side-view mirror and, at one point, made eye contact with the officer who was watching him. He saw the officer touch the back of his car, look in the rear passenger area, and take a position slightly behind the center post of the car door. He decided, “It wasn’t worth taking the chance that I might get over on him. He had his stuff together. I didn’t feel I’d be able to get my gun without getting hurt.”

To further understand the implications of these scenarios for law enforcement training, we should examine how each of the components (officer, offender, and circumstances) interacts with the others. The concept of interaction of officer, offender, and situation is at the heart of our research. By altering only one aspect of only one component in an event where an officer and offender come together, the outcome can change dramatically. In the incidents cited above, it was the offender’s perception of both officers’ behaviors and the assumptions that the offender made regarding those perceived behaviors that significantly altered his actions, resulting in an attack on one officer but not on the other.
The deadly mix can be conceptually portrayed by the convergence of three circles, with each circle representing one of the three components. Each component influences—and is influenced by—the others.

The particular way in which these three components converge will greatly influence the outcome of each encounter. The officer’s perceptions, actions, and assumptions; the offender’s perceptions, actions, and assumptions; and the circumstances all contribute to a peacable or deadly result. Here, the mix turns deadly.

Altering just one of the components may prevent the deadly mix. The officer’s display of professionalism and alertness, for example, may influence the offender’s perceived ability to gain control. In this instance, the assault is avoided.

Everyone who investigates, reviews, or reports on violent encounters involving law enforcement must examine each of the three components. The officer, the offender, and the circumstances themselves all may individually or collectively affect the outcome. Slight changes to any of the components may override or enhance the potential for an assault.
A simplistic reading of the officer’s behavior in the first scenario might lead to the conclusion that he made what could have been a fatal error. However, we should examine the incident on three levels: the officer’s view, the offender’s view, and the context in which they came together, that is, the circumstances. The officer failed to notify the dispatcher of the offender’s license plate number and the location of the stop, certainly an important consideration. If we stop our analysis at that point, however, we lose a deeper meaning of this encounter and fail to examine a significant training principle: perceptions and assumptions of the offender and the officer that have an effect on the outcome of the situation.

If we could rewind the videotape of the traffic stop in Scenario 1, we would see that what eventually became an assault on the officer began in the offender’s mind. His assumption that the officer was receiving a radio message that would lead to his arrest and transport to jail, combined with what he perceived about the officer’s inattentiveness, resulted in his making a preemptive strike against the officer. The dangerousness of this situation became heightened by the officer’s inaccurate reading of the offender’s polite behavior. Although the officer accurately perceived the courteousness and the cooperative behavior of the offender, he misinterpreted the motivation behind it and concluded that the offender was not dangerous.

The offender had, in the past, faced a similar situation. He was stopped by an officer for a traffic violation, but in that case he did not attack the officer. Although he feared arrest and jail, he perceived that the officer was too professional to succumb to offensive action. The offender quickly evaluated the officer’s abilities, matched them with his own, and determined that this situation did not indicate a favorable outcome for him. In contrast, during the other scenario the equation came out with the perceived power on his side, and he made a preemptive strike against the officer.

In each of these scenarios, the components that potentially result in an officer’s death or injury are fluid and dynamic. We can only understand the outcome of each particular death or injury by examining such interactions between the officer and offender within the context of the specific and changing events. Even situations that an officer may perceive as nonthreatening can suddenly change and become tragically violent because of the offender’s misperceptions or misreading of his perceptions. In some cases, misinterpreted perceptions are less of a causal factor than are actual misperceptions of events. For example, in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, an offender killed an officer who the offender, to this day, believes was about to shoot him with a rifle. Crime scene photographs indicated that the officer had a nightstick in his hands when the offender shot him. The officer did not have a rifle in his hands or in his police vehicle. Misperceptions and inaccurate interpretations of perceptions continue to affect the actions of officers and offenders.

**Officers**

Across all three studies, the victim officers generally had been raised in warm, caring, and stable environments by their biological parents. Most of them experienced relatively little, if any, exposure to violence in their childhoods. They chose the law enforcement profession because they wanted to better the communities they served and to make a difference.

Some of the descriptors developed for the victim officers remained constant throughout all of the studies. In particular, the descriptor *hard working* seemed to apply to every officer. This trait usually has positive connotations. In law enforcement, however, it can result in some potentially negative consequences. Hard-working officers effect more arrests, write more traffic citations, respond to more calls for service, and initiate more interactions. Because they have more contact with members of both the general public and the criminal element, they can become the target of more complaints. Hard-working officers also appear more likely to get involved in incidents where property damage and injury to the officer
and offender may occur. When an agency tracks the number of complaints received by personnel and the number of injuries of violators and officers, the same officers’ names may emerge. Once again, hard-working officers may be punished, rather than rewarded.

Hard-working officers also are more likely to be viewed as high profile and given monikers, such as John Wayne, Hot Dog, and S— Magnet. These usually produce negative connotations or images in the minds of law enforcement managers, the citizens served, and the media. It is important to recognize that when this occurs, hard-working officers suffer the effects of this misunderstanding. This, then, has negative consequences for everyone. Sometimes, these officers reduce their performance on the street. Administrators must spend time investigating allegations that have little, if any, merit. The media present these officers to the public as if they were misguided at best, criminal at worse. The public, however, loses the most. They lose effective deterrents to crime.

Potentially serious administrative and safety issues can arise with hard-working officers. Some may take unnecessary safety and procedural shortcuts to increase their levels of production. They may rush into a building totally engulfed in flames to save a family pet; they may continue a pursuit that could increase their chances of being injured or killed; they may charge headlong into a situation where, logically and tactically, most officers would retreat. The community and the media often consider these actions as acts of heroism and applaud an officer for taking needless and, perhaps, irresponsible risks. When other officers observe the reactions of the administration, media, and community to this type of unnecessary and dangerous behavior, they often hear a harmful message: for example, If I work hard and get too many complaints, I may be disciplined or possibly lose my assignment; but if I take unnecessary and foolish chances, I may be rewarded. Law enforcement supervisors should recognize when an officer is caught up in this dynamic and take the necessary steps to correct it.

Unfortunately, the inappropriate actions and overly aggressive behaviors of a very small percentage of officers have brought disgrace to all who have worn a law enforcement uniform. Some law enforcement personnel needlessly escalate their contacts with criminals and citizens alike; they hurry to the scene of an encounter in hopes of obtaining “stick time.” Dedicated and professional officers wish such individuals would be removed from their ranks.

Another descriptor of the victim officers that remained constant throughout all three studies was the ability to “read” people and situations. Unlike veteran officers, relatively inexperienced officers rarely exhibit this trait. The amount of street time needed in an agency to lose the rookie status varies from agency to agency. Many officers expressed that this generally occurs after spending 5 years on patrol and becoming comfortable with their position in the law enforcement profession. As veteran officers, they feel that they can deal with anything from a traffic violation to a homicide. They have successfully handled so many intoxicated individuals, so many incidents of disorderly conduct, and so many domestic disputes that they believe that they can accurately “read” people and situations. They start to act on this belief in various ways, such as predicting the successful outcome of an incident before it actually happens. Why? Because they have experienced successful outcomes in the past and had success followed by more success. As for the times that they may have been unsuccessful, they either forget these or explain them away. Success reinforces their belief in reading and predicting. They begin to depend on experience to get them through situations because it always has worked in the past. By relying on experience and believing that they can read danger accurately in all of the situations they encounter, officers walk a dangerous tightrope. They become complacent, thinking that they can shortcut a thorough examination of a situation. Complacency, however, is the worst enemy of the veteran officer.
Presuming that you can read people and situations can be dangerous. For example, an officer may encounter an individual who seems to fit a certain pattern of behavior that he has seen many times in the past. He feels comfortable with this person because he “knows” how the subject will react. The officer tests his theory. After giving several commands and seeing that the individual complies, the officer’s level of caution begins to wane. With the subject’s increased compliance, the officer makes a fatal error: he drops his guard. Although previous subjects followed this officer’s command, this one is waiting for an opportunity to take the advantage away from the officer, and the officer gave it to him.

**Offenders**

Consistent with our understanding of the dynamic called “the deadly mix,” we apply the same analysis to the offender that we used for the victim officer. Namely, what qualities, aspects, preconceived notions, and emotions does the offender hold that when added to the other two components (the officer and the circumstances) result in an assault on or death of a member of the law enforcement profession?

We know from our research for the *Killed in the Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies that no clear profile of an offender who assaults or kills a law enforcement officer exists. And yet, many officers continue to possess a picture of this imaginary offender. Many anticipate a physically dominating individual who exudes danger from every pore. Research, however, does not support this image.

Some offenders have criminal records; some have psychiatric histories; some belong to gangs; some constantly carry weapons. Many other offenders, however, defy placement in any category. The only well-defined characteristic shared by the offenders who were studied for the present trilogy on law enforcement safety was that they assaulted or killed a law enforcement officer. A few aspects of these offenders that frequently showed up during our research for the three studies are discussed below.

We noticed that many of the offenders who participated in the current study were affiliated with gangs. Many more were exposed to violence at a much earlier age than were their counterparts, and most of the offenders abused alcohol and other drugs. The offenders who were intent on “suicide by cop” (which is discussed in chapter 6) had resolved to die and, unknown to the officers who responded to a number of calls, wanted to use the officers as the means to achieve that end. In some of those cases, the officers attempted to de-escalate the situation while the offenders tried to heighten the tension.

We can learn some lessons from an analysis of encounters between officers and offenders. Much like anyone else who interacts with another person, offenders assess people, including law enforcement officers. The interaction may involve an exchange of money or drugs or an interview by an officer. The higher the stakes in the encounter, the more extensive and intense the assessment.

The most dangerous offenders in such situations are those who are often described as predatory, as psychopaths, or as antisocial personalities. Even in life-and-death circumstances, these types of offenders can coldly assess their chances of survival. Because they do not experience the same levels of stress as most people, they are less distracted by either internal or external factors. Quickly and decidedly, they weigh their chances and options and make a choice. Where they believe that they can overcome an officer, they attempt an assault or murder. In circumstances where they feel that an officer has the edge, they respond as one such predator advised, “I just sit back and wait, somebody gonna make a mistake. That’s when I win.” Officers would do well to read *Without Conscience*, by Dr. Robert Hare, whose keen insight can enable officers to identify many encounters they have had with such a person.

Only the offenders know how high the stakes are in a particular situation. They have more information—or believe they do—than do the officers. This puts the officer at a disadvantage from the beginning of the encounter. This disadvantage greatly increases when officers judge the level of dangerousness based on the erroneous belief that risk can be measured by the physical characteristics that an offender displays. In several incidents that we studied, officers, by their own admissions, missed obvious danger cues because they viewed the offenders as safe. They based these judgments on assessing physical characteristics without giving any thought to what might be the offender’s emotional state or possible mind-set.

What, then, do we know about offenders who have assaulted or killed law enforcement officers? We have stated that physical characteristics are not necessarily accurate indicators and that the offenders do not match any particular profile. Paradoxically, this apparent dearth of identifying information brings to light the most salient fact regarding individuals who might assault or kill an
officer—it can be anyone. While this observation may seem simply to state the obvious, it bears examination. The offender decides whether to assault an officer after assessing a significant number of items in an astonishingly short amount of time. Although some assaults that we studied came about during an extended interaction with an officer, many were impulsive and reactive.

Because the deadly mix always involves an officer, an offender, and the circumstances in which these two individuals meet, the way in which that encounter begins and develops has a dynamic effect on the offender and the choices that person makes. Those choices will have a very important effect on the way the officer will then act. And, so, the dynamic continues and changes. Many examples of this changing and dynamic action have been described throughout this study. Reflecting on them can reveal how fluid these encounters are and how often the offender can determine which direction an encounter will take. As described previously, the perceptions and misperceptions, as well as the inaccurate interpretations of those perceptions, can trigger reactions within a very brief moment. The offender might, as in Scenario 1, misinterpret a traffic stop, initiated for a minor violation, as a potential felony arrest. If he concludes that the officer is aware of a felony warrant, he might very well prepare for battle; in contrast, the officer may merely be considering whether to write a violation or a warning.

Constant assessment and reassessment on the part of the offenders, although at times rapidly accomplished, determines their next move. The offender’s internal environment—including thoughts, feelings, expectations, fears, hopes, and experiences—interacts with the external surroundings, which, of course, include the officer.

Circumstances

In the majority of cases examined for this study, the hardworking officers initiated contact with the offenders, who subsequently attacked them. In other instances, dispatchers sent officers to the scene of the encounter. Officers who initiated contact with the offenders generally chose an environment that they believed was tactically advantageous to them. In some cases, offenders did not stop at a location of the officers’ choosing but attempted to find a spot where they felt they held the advantage. For example, an officer attempted to make a stop in a well-lit area. The offender, however, did not stop his vehicle at that point but eventually pulled over at a place that provided much less light.

When dispatched to a location while answering a call for service, officers have no control over the site of the encounter but they can control their approach. Of course, in any situation, officers and offenders cannot control certain elements, such as weather conditions, pedestrian and vehicular traffic, natural lighting, availability of cover, and the distance of backup units from the scene.

In Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA), an annual FBI publication, data about the killing of and assault on officers are presented according to categories of the circumstances at the scene of the incident. These categories reflect the call for service or type of activity that precipitated the officer’s involvement with the offender, as follows:

- Disturbance calls
- Arrest situations
- Civil disorders
- Handling, transporting, or custody of prisoners
- Investigating suspicious persons or circumstances
- Ambush situations
- Investigative activities
- Handling mentally deranged persons
- Traffic pursuits and stops
- Tactical situations

The circumstances that the officers encountered at the time of their assault or death are not the only elements we should focus on when attempting to understand the dynamics that occurred during these incidents. LEOKA categorizes circumstances in conjunction with the type of work activity that the officer was performing at the time of the attack. These categories, however, do not necessarily accurately reflect what occurred. For example, the LEOKA publication records in the “traffic stop” category an officer injured by a traffic violator who fled the scene on foot. In fact, the officer was assaulted during a foot pursuit, not while engaged in a traffic stop.

Upon examining any encounter where an officer was assaulted or killed, we must consider it as an evolving scene that included the perceptions and interpretations of the officer and the offender. These perceptions and the concomitant interpretations were altered by the actions of each person as they interacted. And, based on those assessments of each other’s behaviors, each acted accordingly.

Offenders evaluate officers’ vigilance (profession-
alism) by their choice of locations for the encounter or approach to the scene. While this is happening, officers attempt to assess the individuals they are approaching. At this point, the participants have already set in motion the potential for the deadly mix.

The Implications of the Deadly Mix
Having presented the individual components, we now turn to the potential benefits of understanding the deadly mix for use-of-force investigators, academy and in-service trainers, first-line supervisors, law enforcement managers, and officers. By evaluating all three components of the deadly mix (officer, offender, and circumstances), we can more clearly grasp some of the dynamics that result in serious assaults or deaths.

Officers
Does the hard-working, dedicated, service-oriented officer also project the image of being attentive, vigilant, and professional? The image that an officer projects and the verbal and nonverbal messages that the officer communicates on the job can potentially yield as much protection as a weapon and body armor. It is important for the officer always to project being alert, attentive, and professional. The officer’s demeanor must convey that, if necessary, he or she is prepared to be a formidable opponent. The officer’s mannerisms, traits, and behaviors must reveal a readiness or preparedness. Such behaviors are observed and interpreted by subjects on the street. It is not only what one does, it is how one does it. Although officers cannot control certain elements of a deadly confrontation, they can greatly influence other elements. Learning to be mindful of one’s awareness, image, and mind-set (AIM) can be preparation for surviving a deadly encounter. (Take AIM is a safety mind-set technique described in chapter 7.)

Use-of-Force Investigators
When investigating use-of-force incidents, investigators should remain aware of the components, interactions, and implications of the deadly mix. The chapter on perception, especially the sections on sensory distortions and information storage and retrieval by both officers and offenders, may assist investigators in understanding the complexities of perception and memory.

Academy and In-Service Trainers and Field Training Officers
All three studies in this series on law enforcement safety focus on important training issues that need to be addressed not only in basic academy training, but also by in-service training programs. Understanding the concept of the deadly mix and incorporating the related principles into realistic training can better prepare officers for potentially violent encounters. This training can bring together the multiple tasks of report writing, handcuffing, and defensive tactics in the same scenario. Altering just one element of the deadly mix in a training scenario can provide a multitude of changing circumstances and outcomes with which to challenge each officer. Law enforcement training must teach officers to be vigilant, attentive, and mentally prepared to deal with ever-changing circumstances on the street.

Field training officers must observe the behaviors and messages that recruits project as they interact with the public. They must ensure that their trainees never evaluate individuals based solely on physical characteristics. They must instill the knowledge that part of being a professional law enforcement officer is to be mentally focused for the unexpected during the entire tour of duty.

First-Line Supervisors
Supervisors should monitor officers constantly to ensure their compliance with departmental safety policies and practices. They should scrutinize their officers’ interactions with citizens and evaluate the messages these officers project. Supervisors should not commend officers for inappropriate risk-taking behaviors that place them, their fellow officers, or citizens in danger—regardless of the outcome.

Managers
In law enforcement, as in any other endeavor, the manager sets the tone for the department. There should be well-written policies and directives that are easy to understand and that clearly outline safety policies and procedures. Managers must ensure that supervisory personnel enforce these policies and procedures. Executive officers should not limit their training programs to their specific state’s established minimum standards. They should ensure that personnel regularly receive timely, updated in-service
training. They should meet regularly with members of the local media and explain such matters as suicide by cop and policies and procedures regarding the use of deadly force.

Managers should meet regularly with citizen groups and ensure that citizen academies receive relevant safety training information so that members of the general public can better understand law enforcement safety matters and issues regarding the use of force. Managers should also ensure that local citizens are educated on how to conduct themselves during situations, such as traffic stops and other circumstances, where they encounter officers who are performing their duties.

Law enforcement managers should recruit the best available applicants based on job-specific criteria. A major component of an officer’s job criteria includes safety awareness, which is a complicated issue compounded further by an officer’s actions or decision not to act that may affect the safety of other officers and the public.

**Final Thoughts**

Violent encounters on our Nation’s streets are inevitable, and law enforcement officers will continue to mediate situations involving people who are willing to seriously injure and kill each other. During such situations, officers will be exposed to hostility and aggression. Some of this hostility will be displaced on officers by citizens’ frustrations and anger toward others. Subjects affected by serious mental and physical illnesses may project their problems on officers or try to provoke officers to act violently toward them—a desperate bid to thus indirectly resolve their personal problems. In some cases, offenders will direct their aggression at officers because they stand between the individuals and their freedom.

Officers are often in a particularly unenviable position in society. They are called upon when threats of violence are anticipated or actual incidents of violence have taken place. They are expected to contain the aggression and to defuse the situation when everyone else has failed to accomplish these peacekeeping measures. But, when the action has ended and the scene is safe, judgments are made regarding the decisions and actions the officers took. It is seemingly unfair when the actions of officers who made those decisions within seconds because their lives and lives of others were threatened are judged in safety and at leisure by individuals with little exposure to such violence. However, supervision, oversight, and analysis of violent encounters involving law enforcement are important and necessary. We must remember that such encounters can result in individuals’ freedom being taken away—and, in some cases, even their lives.

Examination of the various components of the deadly mix should be made by everyone who investigates, reviews, or reports on these violent encounters. There is no easy equation into which the circumstances of each violent encounter can be placed to answer why it occurred and what amount of responsibility each player had. It is only by a careful, impartial, and unbiased examination of each of these events that the facts of the case will surface and an objective and honest assessment will be made.

The purpose and focus of our research has been to examine and increase the safety practices of the individual officer who patrols the streets and highways of our nation. This process began by questioning why one particular officer was feloniously struck down in the performance of his duties—actions in which every officer engages each day. This one senseless death eventually brought us to examine several hundred incidents where officers were Killed in the Line of Duty or survived serious assaults In the Line of Fire and taught us valuable lessons from their Violent Encounters.

Our objective for this research was to learn from these officers and from their costly experiences—lessons that can be passed on to present and future generations of law enforcement officers. We refrain from making negative comments regarding officers or departments. Instead, we commend all of the law enforcement participants—every officer and every department—for their dedication and for their keen and helpful insights into these important issues. Many of the comments and judgments offered in these pages are from the very officers involved in the reported incidents.

These officers have taught us, often through their own pain and suffering, about the need to be prepared physically and mentally when patrolling our streets. They have taught us, even at the cost of their own lives, how to survive violent and potentially deadly encounters. They have taught us, in the final analysis, what law enforcement safety is all about. We honor these officers. We honor their sacrifices. We honor their lives.
APPENDIX I

Methodology

The present study answers several questions that *Killed in the Line of Duty* (1992) and *In the Line of Fire* (1997) did not answer regarding the perceptions of the officers and the offenders. For example, why did officers sometimes correctly perceive behavioral cues but other times apparently misperceive them prior to and during the assaults? Many answers emerged directly from the reflections and insights of officers and offenders. Information also came from a variety of other sources, including evaluations of crime scenes, investigative reports, forensic evidence, and courtroom testimony.

The investigators adapted the protocols used in the current study from the officer and offender protocols in the *In the Line of Fire* study of officers assaulted in the line of duty. Specific modifications to the officer and offender sections of the protocols are detailed in the respective segments that follow.

In contrast to the *In the Line of Fire* study, the current one contained a larger number of offenders interviewed within a community as opposed to a prison. Another difference involved more officers and offenders who consented to being videotaped at the conclusion of the interview process. The videos included both a summary statement of the interview, as well as a discussion of facts and circumstances not captured by the protocol. Insights by the officers and the offenders captured on these videos enabled the investigators to develop programs intended for use in law enforcement safety training. Participants in this safety training can see and hear the officers and offenders discussing various aspects of the assaults.

Offender Overview

For each offender, psychological testing was attempted using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2). Additional information concerning the offenders’ backgrounds and the incidents in question were retrieved from investigative files of the assaults, pre-sentence investigations, court testimony, and medical/psychological institutional evaluations. The MMPI-2 was administered in the hope of uncovering any psychological information that might help the investigators to understand some of the motivation of the offenders. (See chapter 3 concerning the offender for an explanation as to why the limited findings of the MMPI-2 were not used in this study.) The offenders who were interviewed for the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study had murdered law enforcement officers. Because this was a capital offense, those offenders already had received batteries of psychological tests and evaluations. In contrast, many of the offenders who participated in the current study were not charged with a capital offense and thus had undergone little psychological testing.

For the present study, new questions were developed regarding the behavior of the offenders. These
included how offenders obtained the weapon used; how they carried it; the way they used it; where they stored it; and, when appropriate, where and how they disposed of it. The offenders were asked how they formulated their decisions either to use the weapon on the officer—and what behavioral cues they perceived about the officers that made them feel that they could successfully initiate and complete the assault—or to surrender it. In such cases, they were asked what perceptions led them to believe that an assault would not succeed.

Several offenders who were interviewed for the In the Line of Fire study reported that prior to the assault for which they were charged, they had experienced suicidal thoughts. Some stated that they had attempted suicide in the past. To acknowledge these comments—and to recognize what appears to be an increase of suicides and attempted suicides in which offenders provoke officers to kill them—the protocol for the present study was amended so that it captured such information. A number of offenders clearly stated that their intention was to die at the hand of the officer. Officers and offenders provided their insights regarding this phenomenon.

The protocol for the current study has a greatly expanded section of questions concerning the offenders’ participation in gangs, covering, for example, their development of a “gang mentality” and their participation in the “gang culture.” The section on “street gang mentality,” as discussed in the In the Line of Fire study, was expanded, and comparisons are made between the offenders’ street background and the officers’ more traditional background.

As with the Killed in the Line of Duty and In the Line of Fire studies, the number of cases in the current study was small. Also consistent with the first two studies, the sample population was not achieved using a randomized selection process. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized. Consequently, all results and findings in this study must be carefully evaluated as to their relevancy to a particular agency or department.

Sample Selection

Following the same format used in the In the Line of Fire study, mailings were sent to over 17,000 law enforcement agencies. The purpose of the letter was to request participation from each agency in providing assault cases that met the criteria of this study. The result of this canvass provided 811 cases, with 80 initially selected. Of these 80 cases, 40 were chosen based upon the completeness of the information provided.

No promises or special favors were offered to the offenders for their involvement in this study. In each case, the offender and officer agreed to freely participate in the interview process. Complete anonymity was granted to departments, correctional agencies, officers, and offenders. Both the officers and the offenders agreed to waive partial anonymity while participating in the videotaping process to supply information for law enforcement safety training.

The investigators sought and were granted permission to conduct the research from institutional review boards within the FBI, as well as state and other federal agencies. Each participant signed all necessary consent forms. All had access to the investigators and to mental health providers in the event of an adverse reaction to the interview process.

The cases chosen for inclusion in this study met two predetermined parameters. First, they had to occur between 1992 and 2002 and be fully adjudicated. Second, both the offender and the officer had to agree freely to participate. The final sample consisted of 40 incidents wherein 43 offenders feloniously assaulted 50 law enforcement officers.

Additional relevant cases later surfaced. The results of interviews related to those cases are incorporated into the write-up of the present study, with specific mention as needed for clarity. These cases, however, are not included in the statistical analysis, nor are they reflected in the tables and figures.

Crime Scene Investigation

As part of the data collection process and to obtain insight into the location of the encounter, the investigators visited the scenes of the assaults. This provided a clearer picture of the environment in which the incident took place. Visiting the scene during the same time of day or night that the original incident occurred assisted in replicating the physical environment that existed. Items, such as lighting and pedestrian and vehicular traffic, contributed to understanding the social fabric within which the felonious assault occurred. These locations ranged from relatively quiet, rural settings to neighborhoods known for gang activity, drug distribution, and violence.
Officer Interviews

Setting
As in the In the Line of Fire study, the main consideration during the officer interview was to make the process as comfortable for the officer as possible. Therefore, the officers selected both the time and place of their interviews. The investigators conducted the interviews during all three shifts and both on and off duty to accommodate the wishes of the officers. By doing this, the investigators tried to minimize the potential negative effects on the officers.

Atmosphere
At the beginning of the interview process, the investigators attempted to develop an openness and rapport with the officers by telling them that they were former law enforcement officers. Then, they made their position clear: to remain nonjudgmental, to not point fingers or affix blame or responsibility, and to not second-guess or criticize the officers’ decisions or behaviors. Their main concern was to obtain information that would assist other officers in the safe performance of their duties.

All interviews began by discussing a common interest, law enforcement. This dialogue included why the individuals had become law enforcement officers and why they wished to continue as such. The investigators talked about family and educational backgrounds, as well as general interests and hobbies. As the officers became more comfortable and understood the purpose and value of the study, the investigators continued with more specific incident-based questions.

Process
As in the In the Line of Fire study, the interview approach for officers was developed with several assumptions. These included the following:

- The officers had information potentially beneficial to the law enforcement community.
- They could provide information unobtainable in the previous studies.
- They could be reluctant to discuss details of the incident with outsiders.
- The interview process had the potential of opening previously healed wounds.

The interview times ranged from 4 to 8 hours, with an average of 6 hours in length. A detailed description of the protocol used to facilitate the interview appears in Appendix II.

Offender Interviews

Setting
The setting of the interviews with offenders depended upon whether the offenders were incarcerated or had been released from prison. Of the 43 offenders, 35 were interviewed in a correctional setting. Of these, 5 were housed in federal prisons and 30 in city and state institutions—all located within 20 different states. The remaining 8 offenders were interviewed in their homes, business establishments, or state or county buildings.

As with both previous studies, the investigators attempted to create the same setting. Regardless of the location of the interview, the investigators wanted the setting as neutral and nonthreatening as possible under the circumstances. It was important that the interview area have minimal distractions and disruptions and no major physical barriers, such as furniture or partitions, that might impede total involvement in and observation of verbal and nonverbal communication. Though efforts were made to maintain control of these external factors affecting the interview process of both custodial and noncustodial settings, noncustodial settings proved more difficult to control. For maximum observation purposes, the investigators attempted to position themselves so that one would be in front of the offender and the other seated to the side and slightly to the rear of the person.

Atmosphere
The investigators formed similar assumptions regarding the interview approach for the offenders as they had for the last two studies. Specifically, these included the following:

- The offenders would have information that could benefit the law enforcement community.
- They initially would be antagonistic toward the investigators.
- They would receive no compensation for cooperating with the investigators.
- They could terminate the interview at any point.
The investigators developed rapport by spending time with the offenders discussing nonthreatening aspects of their lives and experiences. They covered such topics as hobbies, areas of the country they either lived or worked in, and general background information. As the offenders became more comfortable, the investigators made the transition to the crime in question, specifically the assault on the law enforcement officer.

Process

The initial obstacle to the interview process was the hostility and mistrust toward law enforcement each of the offenders displayed. The investigators overcame this by developing a set of themes based on respect and nonjudgmental attitudes that encouraged the offenders to listen to the purpose of the study.

The investigators collected and reviewed all victim data, circumstances of the incident, and offender background prior to the interview to increase the quality and accuracy of facts that they could extract from the offender. A detailed discussion of the protocol used to facilitate the interview process appears in Appendix II.

At the end of the interview, the investigators asked the offenders for any other information they thought relevant to understanding the circumstances of the assault. They then discussed this additional data on the videotaped interview that followed.

No promises or special favors were offered to the offenders for their involvement in this study. Each offender agreed freely to participate in the interview process.

Institutional Review Board Requirements

Institutional review boards within the FBI as well as state and other federal agencies granted permission to conduct the research. Each participant signed all necessary consent forms and had access to mental health providers in the event of an adverse reaction to the interview process. Both the officers and offenders agreed to waive partial anonymity while participating in the videotaping process to supply information for law enforcement safety training. All signed forms are on file and copies have been given to each participant.
APPENDIX II
Participation Protocols

Overview

To make relevant any comparison of data presented in the *Killed in Line of Duty* and *In the Line of Fire* studies, the investigators made no deletions from earlier offender protocols, only additions. These permitted the comparison of offender responses with the *Violent Encounters* officer protocol answers. Changes also included altering references about killing a law enforcement officer to assaulting one. Because of these modifications, the investigators field tested the revised protocol on two cases prior to using it for the current study. These tests did not result in changes to the protocol.

As the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study did not include officer interviews, the investigators had to develop a new protocol for this element in their *In the Line of Fire* study. They designed this protocol to capture data comparable with that retrieved from the offender protocol and with that presented in the *Killed in the Line of Duty* study, as well as to capture new information. The *Violent Encounters* protocol collected more data about the officer as reflected in the Officer Protocol section that follows. In formulating this protocol, the investigators consulted various members of training and investigative units from law enforcement agencies of all sizes across the country, as well as personnel in the FBI’s Firearms Training Unit. In addition, they contacted special contract consultants in research methodology, along with law enforcement specialists, under the auspices of a grant provided by the National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance. The investigators considered comments from all groups and appropriately collated and incorporated them into the officer protocol.

Officer Protocol: Nature, Content, and Construction

Composed of seven sections, the officer protocol included specific questions that were posed during the interview. The sections addressed the following topics:

1. Background information: physical condition, education, military background, exposure to violence prior to entering law enforcement service, and reason for choosing a career in law enforcement.
2. Family structure: family of origin, current marital status, and number of children.
3. Law enforcement training: type of academy attended, perceived level of performance, subject matter preference, subject matters in which the officer excelled, recruit training, and in-service training.
4. Performance prior to assault: physical conditioning (including use of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco) both on and off duty, physical limitations, evidence of precipitating stress or crisis in officer’s life, prior uses of force, any critical incident debriefing or counseling regarding earlier uses of force, previous incidents of assault or witnessing the serious assault or death of another officer, lessons learned from previous assault incidents, psychological or physical problems associated with being a victim or witnessing a previous assault, and subsequent assaults occurring after the incident of examination.
5. Assault under study: physical condition at time of assault, including self-reported general health and use of any medication.
6. Characteristics of scene: tour of duty during which assault occurred; environmental conditions; officer’s attire, including use of body armor; mode of transportation; type of location where assault occurred; familiarity with location and offender; circumstances first encountered by officer at the scene; assessment of offender and offender’s behavior; specific behavioral changes of offender observed by officer; danger signals perceived by officer; use of backup units; type of weapon used by offender; officer’s first thoughts when attack started; use of force by officer, including point at which officer initiated it and its effectiveness; inju-
ries sustained by both officer and offender; officer’s first actions immediately following assault; officer’s perception of why attack occurred; how past training impacted outcome of assault; and how assault possibly could have been prevented.

7. Post-assault activity: extent of incident’s subsequent effect on officer’s life; support received by officer from family, friends, department personnel, other officers, and community members; potential for psychological impact on officer and family; and officer’s perception concerning potential use of deadly force in future situations.

**Offender Protocol: Nature, Content, and Construction**

The offender protocol contained questions in 10 sections that were posed during the interview. A description of the topic areas follows:

1. Background information: physical, ethnic, occupational, educational, medical/psychiatric, and social demographics.

2. Military service: branch of military, length of service, performance, highest rank achieved, and criminal history while in the military.

3. Psychiatric history: whether offender ever considered suicide, number of actual attempts to commit suicide, and circumstances and consequences of previous attempts.

4. Family structure and home environment: stability of the family; intactness of the family during offender’s childhood; occupations of family members; extent and nature of religious expression within the family; offender’s history of juvenile institutionalization; and offender’s involvement in gangs, extremist groups, clubs, or cults. Questions in this section helped determine any physical or psychological abuse by family members, alcohol and drug abuse, psychiatric disturbances, and criminal history within the immediate family.

5. Entertainment: interest in reading, sports, music, and video games, as well as use of Internet; frequency and extent of self-admitted use of alcohol and illegal drugs; and frequency and type of social activities engaged in prior to the assault under study.

6. Attitude toward authority: response to authority figures, including parents and guardians, teachers, supervisors, clergy, law enforcement officers, and other adults in general.

7. Criminal history: first crime committed and whether offender was caught, extent to which offender recognized consequences of the criminal conduct, offender’s juvenile confinement history, type of weapon used in criminal activity, how offender obtained weapons, whether offender ever attempted to kill or assault a law enforcement officer in the past, and whether offender had predetermined any course of action if interrupted or confronted by police while committing a crime.

8. Weapons training and use: knowledge of and involvement with weapons, extent of training or practice (including where and when), where offender kept weapon when not carrying it, why weapon was carried, how weapon was carried, whether a second weapon was carried, and how weapons were obtained and disposed of.

9. Characteristics of the scene and the encounter: area of the country; month, day, and time of occurrence; weather conditions; description of location; distance from assaulted officer; and, if applicable, means of transportation and description of vehicle.

10. Self-reported offense data: psychological and emotional states prior to, during, and following the incident; alcohol and drug use at the time of the incident; influence of any codefendants; nature of conversation, if any, with officer prior to assault; consideration of officer’s age, sex, race, size, and behavior; intention of offender at time of assault; and description of offender’s subsequent arrest. Questions also addressed searches related to this or other incidents that the offender may have experienced.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


BIOGRAPHIES

Anthony Joseph Pinizzotto

Dr. Anthony J. Pinizzotto received a B.A. in English from De Sales University, an M.A. in forensic psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, an M.A. in Theology and Pastoral Counseling from De Sales Graduate School of Theology, a Ph.D. in psychology from Georgetown University, and a post-doctoral M.S. in clinical psychopharmacology from Alliant University. He completed a clinical internship at Bellevue Hospital in New York City in Psychiatric Emergency and Evaluation. Dr. Pinizzotto was an instructor in the Department of Psychology at Georgetown University where he taught courses in forensic and abnormal psychology. Involved in law enforcement for over 25 years, prior to his entrance on duty with the FBI, he had worked with the Criminal Investigations Division and Training Division of the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Pinizzotto is a Senior Scientist currently assigned to the FBI’s Training and Development Division, Behavioral Science Unit, where he teaches courses in clinical forensic psychology and the psychology of violent behavior. He has assisted in developing and teaching the program, “The Use of Deadly Force in Law Enforcement”, established to assist Assistant United States Attorneys review the use of deadly force incidents by members of the law enforcement community. He served as a consultant and trainer in the United States Attorney General’s “Firearm Interdiction Program” designed to assist local law enforcement in removing firearms from criminals. He currently serves as an Advisory Board Member of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.

Dr. Pinizzotto has lectured throughout the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Italy and the United Kingdom on the topics of law enforcement safety, criminal investigative psychology, personality assessment, the psychology of interview and interrogation, hate-related crimes, sensory distortions involved in critical incidents, forensic hypnosis and deviant social groups. He is the author of numerous articles reflecting his research in these fields of study and investigation. He has been recognized by the courts as an expert witness in cases involving child exploitation and pornography.

Edward F. Davis

Mr. Edward F. Davis received a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in the Administration of Justice from the American University, Washington, D.C. He is a graduate of the 123rd Session of the FBI’s National Academy.

Mr. Davis has been involved in law enforcement for more than 40 years. As a member of the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C., his last assignment was as a lieutenant, commanding a District Investigative Section, responsible for all general investigations. In addition, he conducted numerous investigations concerning the use of deadly force by members of his command. He has been an expert witness in U.S. and Canadian courts in the field of violence against law enforcement personnel as well as the application of use of force by law enforcement personnel.

In 1984, Mr. Davis entered on duty with the FBI. He served as the National Training Representative for the Uniform Crime Reporting Section and as acting Unit Chief for the Criminal Justice Information Services Division. He assisted in the development of the program, “The Use of Deadly Force in Law Enforcement,” which was established to assist Assistant United States Attorneys in reviewing the use of deadly incidents by members of law enforcement.
He also served as a consultant and trainer in the United States Attorney General’s “Firearms Interdiction Program” designed to assist local law enforcement in removing firearms from criminals on the streets of our country. Currently, Mr. Davis is assigned to the Training and Development Division, Behavioral Science Unit where he is an instructor at the National Academy.

Mr. Davis consults with law enforcement throughout the United States, Canada, and England on topics of law enforcement safety, management of deadly force, and interviewing and interrogation methods. He has authored numerous articles reflecting his research in these fields.

Charles Edward Miller, III

Mr. Charles E. Miller, III has been involved in law enforcement for more than 35 years. Before entering on duty with the FBI, he was a member of the Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, D.C., where he retired at the rank of Captain. During his tenure, Mr. Miller commanded uniformed and investigative divisions in a variety of assignments most notably undercover drug operations. He investigated, adjudicated, and wrote legal conclusions and findings of fact regarding numerous “Use of Deadly Force” incidents. Mr. Miller has completed advanced courses and institutes in management and social sciences at the American University in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Miller entered into duty with the FBI in 1993. He is assigned to the Criminal Justice Information Services Division in Clarksburg, WV. Currently, he serves as the Coordinator for the FBI’s Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Program. He has been researching felonious assaults and killings of law enforcement officers for approximately 13 years. Mr. Miller has authored numerous articles and publications relating to law enforcement safety. He has lectured and trained law enforcement personnel both nationally and internationally. He has consulted and advised numerous federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies regarding law enforcement safety issues. Mr. Miller is a member of the International Association of Chief’s of Police Subcommittee on Law Enforcement Stops and Safety. He also served as a consultant and trainer in the United States Attorney General’s “Firearms Interdiction Program” designed to assist local law enforcement in removing firearms from criminals on the streets of our country.

Dr. Pinizzotto, Mr. Davis and Mr. Miller are recipients of the Jefferson Award for Research from the University of Virginia. The Jefferson Award was given in recognition of their research in the area of law enforcement safety. This research is documented in the monographs published by the Department of Justice entitled Killed in the Line of Duty (1992) and In the Line of Fire (1997).