

A HEIST GONE BAD

A POLICE FOUNDATION
CRITICAL INCIDENT REVIEW
OF THE STOCKTON POLICE RESPONSE
TO THE BANK OF THE WEST ROBBERY
AND HOSTAGE-TAKING

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POLICE
FOUNDATION

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FOREWORD

At first blush, it is easy to criticize the tactics of the Stockton Police Department (SPD) after 33 officers, at four different locations, fired more than 600 times into a getaway car carrying three bank robbers. They killed two of the bank robbers but also took the life of an innocent woman who had been held hostage.

Like most things in this complicated world of ours, nothing is ever simple.

Every police event is fluid. However, many other extenuating factors played a critical role in this tragic event.

- The police department, located 60 miles east of San Francisco, was in the midst of a bankruptcy that robbed it of 100 veteran officers while leading to a reduction in training and severely limiting the ability to purchase new equipment and technology. Some of those officers were replaced with rookies straight out of the academy.
- The bankruptcy also meant that the department had no air support of its own and depended upon other agencies' helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft, which were not always available to the department.
- The Bank of the West branch that was robbed was nestled in an unusual triangular island created by three major roads, with little room for containment or cover. A bus station nearby put other civilians at risk.
- The bank robbers led police on an hour-long pursuit, sometimes at speeds exceeding 120 miles per hour.
- Throughout the ordeal, one of the suspects fired 100-plus rounds from an AK-47 at police, disabling 14 police vehicles, including their armored BearCat. Bullets tore through cars, shattered windshields, shredded tires, and incapacitated engines. And at the conclusion, over 200 rounds were found in the getaway vehicle.
- The suspects twice escaped the pursuers, but rather than attempting to disappear completely, they chose to wait and ambush police officers.
- Miraculously, no police personnel or civilians were injured in the shootings. One hostage was shot and wounded by a suspect and dumped from the getaway SUV while another leaped out while it was fleeing, causing her to sustain major injuries.
- The one surviving suspect only lived because he used Misty Holt-Singh as a shield. The 41-year-old wife and mother of two, who was visiting the bank to take out money for a trip to the hairdresser, was struck ten times by police bullets, killing her instantly.



Never in the history of U.S. law enforcement has a police force dealt with an event such as this. The only incident that comes close was the 1997 North Hollywood shootout in which the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers battled a pair of heavily armed bank robbers, who were covered in body armor. But there were no hostages in that event and the suspects never got mobile.

Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones knew shortly after the conclusion that he needed to call for an independent review of the bank robbery last year. His staff reached out to the Police Foundation 13 days after the incident and we were grateful to accept their request.

Much like our 2014 review of the event involving [Christopher Dornier](#) (who was a former police and naval officer who targeted LAPD members and their families, murdering four people), the Stockton bank robbery must be considered a sentinel event. What that entails is a critical incident that tests the nation's public safety system, exposes holes in it, and can lead to important change for the future.

The Police Foundation's core mission is to advance policing. One of the ways to do that is by examining these sentinel events. Our goal is to improve protocols, identify new tactics and ideas—and ultimately, unforeseen dangers—and help prepare law enforcement for these new developments in the actions of criminals.

One of the frustrations we repeatedly heard during our interviews with Stockton police officers was they were dealing with an event that they had never trained for, let alone truly considered. Even veteran SWAT members found themselves confused and vexed when dealing with a rolling pursuit with hostages, all the while taking heavy fire that repeatedly disabled their police vehicles, and each time left them worrying that one of their colleagues might be hurt or dying while they continued the chase.

The goal of this review is to provide lessons learned that can then be applied in the field, increasing the safety of both law enforcement personnel and civilians. What is not a goal is to criticize or blame the men and women of the Stockton Police Department who had to make split-second choices amidst the chaos of such an unprecedented crime. They made a great many smart and courageous decisions that undoubtedly saved lives.

We also need to remember that while we hope—and incorrectly expect—that policing is a by-the-book effort, unfortunately that is rarely the case. Criminals make unsound choices at a moment's notice and cops need to react. Sometimes there is no right answer. Sometimes it is simply trying to limit the carnage of what ultimately will be a tragic ending. Bad people do bad things, and we in law enforcement sometimes cannot stop them from having terrible results.

But we must appreciate the openness of people like Chief Jones. He and his administrative staff handled the aftermath with an honesty and tact that should not only be lauded but also repeated



after every tragedy in this country. It is only through transparency that we can ensure we in law enforcement stay connected with our collective communities. Jones truly understands that while we may police them, we are intrinsically linked with them. Perhaps better said, we must remember, that we are ALL the community.

In addition to Chief Jones, I want to thank Stockton Police Deputy Chief Trevor Womack, Deputy Chief Rick Salcedo, Lieutenant Eric Kane, and Lieutenant Rodney Rego for their openness and unrelenting assistance to our review team. I also want to thank Police Union President Kathryn Nance for being so supportive of our efforts in working with the rank and file. And I must say a special thanks to Patricia Hunter, Chief Jones' executive assistant, who was an unsung hero in assisting with schedules, conference calls, and meetings.

I must commend the men and women of the Stockton Police Department for their determined, dogged effort in bringing the three bank robbers to justice. They are all heroes who literally came under relentless fire while trying to stop the robbers under extreme conditions. None were wounded, and for that, I am beyond grateful.

For the men and women of the department who were interviewed by our team, I say thank you for your time, your efforts, and your desire to improve the world of law enforcement. Though our hearts are saddened by the loss of one hostage and the injuries of the surviving hostages, I have no doubt that you saved lives on that fateful day.

I want to thank Stephanie Koussaya and Kelly Huber, the two surviving hostages, and Paul Singh, widower of Misty Holt-Singh, for allowing us to interview them about their recollections from that terrible day. Their memories helped fill out the story and humanize this review.

I also want to acknowledge the determined work of our team, Chief Rick Braziel (ret.), Undersheriff Devon Bell, and George Watson, who produced this report that we believe will help law enforcement across the country.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this review in the memory of Misty Holt-Singh, a true innocent in this event whose legacy was already memorable for all of her time volunteering in her community before that tragic day. May the people of Stockton always remember her as a spark of light who just wanted to make her world, her city, a better place.



Chief Jim Bueermann (ret.)
President
Police Foundation



NARRATIVE OF THE POLICE RESPONSE TO THE BANK OF THE WEST ROBBERY AND HOSTAGE TAKING

The news screamed out from dozens of Stockton police radios.

Three armed men had just robbed the Bank of the West. Each had come out of the bank holding a female hostage, each pointing a weapon at the women's heads. All six climbed into a blue Ford Explorer and sped off.

A bank robbery with three hostages and a mobile pursuit. Collectively, a law enforcement nightmare.

Incredibly, things were about to get much worse.

Over the next 62 minutes, the three bank robbers—seemingly with no care for their own lives let alone anyone they came into contact with—led their pursuers on a violent, terrifying 63-mile chase over both winding residential streets and wide-open freeways, sometimes hitting 120 miles per hour, in and out of Stockton.

For much of the time, one of the bank robbers sprayed 7.62-mm rounds from his AK-47 out the back window of the blue Explorer, disabling 14 police vehicles, including the department's armored SWAT vehicle, but somehow never wounding a single officer or bystander. Meanwhile, another of the robbers held a handgun to the heads of two of the hostages. The third hostage was forced to drive until she was accidentally shot in the leg by one of the suspects and was tossed out into the street.

When the ordeal finally ended, another hostage had suffered serious injuries after jumping out of the SUV at 50 miles per hour. And Misty Holt-Singh, a 41-year-old mother of two, was dead—accidentally killed by the police who were trying to save her—in the shootout that included 600-plus rounds from more than 30 officers shot into the getaway vehicle. Police also killed two of the three bank robbers. Somehow, a third escaped without being shot, most likely because he used Holt-Singh as a shield. He later found himself in jail and facing murder charges.

It was a tragic and unprecedented day in U.S. policing history that left many grasping for answers. Why did the suspects not give up once it became clear their plan was doomed? Why were they instead trying to ambush the trailing officers rather than get away? How did a number of police officers who had shown remarkable restraint throughout the ordeal lose control with a startling, terrifying barrage of gunfire at the conclusion, while others maintained their composure? And was there a way the hostage could have been saved?



It is unlikely any of the questions will ever be truly answered. Ultimately, in an age where criminals are often heavily armed and violently commit their crimes, all that can be done is look at what happened, determine what worked well, and review lessons learned, so agencies are better able to handle incidents like this.

STOCKTON HISTORY

Understanding the complexities of such a horrific day means taking stock of the city and its lengthy history, as well as a look at more recent events.

The city of Stockton began as a small settlement in the early 1800s but flourished thanks to the California Gold Rush that started in 1848. Miners stocked up on supplies before heading into the Sierras in search of both a real and proverbial gold mine. Before long, Stockton transformed into a river hub, one of the state's only two inland ports, allowing goods to be transported to and from San Francisco, some 90 miles to the west along the San Joaquin River.

Over time, the nutrient rich land around the city, coupled with the ample amount of water from the California Delta, turned the entire region into an agricultural hotspot that today makes up much of the San Joaquin Valley. Over time, the city evolved further, thanks to telecommunication and manufacturing industries.

Today, Stockton is home to some 300,000 people, and it is the 13th largest city in California and 64th largest in the United States. The median household income is slightly less than \$47,000 per year, with nearly one out of every four people living below the poverty line.¹

Stockton is also one of the most dangerous cities in the United States. In recent years, the city has appeared at or near the top of the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports for high crime rates in California.²

In 2012, in the aftermath of real estate's burst bubble, Stockton became the largest U.S. city to file for bankruptcy. City leaders facing a plunging tax base found themselves forced to slash budgets and lay off municipal employees.

The police department was hit particularly hard by cutbacks. Large numbers of veteran officers left the department, leaving it understaffed and with a vast number of younger, inexperienced members. As often happens when cutbacks come, training suffered a near-mortal hit.

¹ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0675000.html>

² <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr>



“DON’T BE A HERO”

Misty Holt-Singh and her 12-year-old daughter, Mia, headed to the Bank of the West branch in the northern part of the city mid-afternoon on Wednesday, July 16, 2014. It was a moderately cool summer day for Stockton, with temperatures of 82 degrees and winds of 8-10 miles per hour.

Holt-Singh, a dental assistant well known around the community for her charitable efforts, had talked to her husband, Paul Singh, about getting her hair done that afternoon. She parked in front of the bank entrance and walked up to the ATM. She withdrew some money and headed toward the car where her daughter sat, immersed in her phone.

At the same time, a dark four-door Buick pulled into the same parking lot. Three young men dressed in dark clothing climbed out before the vehicle drove away. Anyone who saw them could tell something was amiss. They wore hoodies over their baseball hats and carried backpacks slung over their shoulders. They wore gloves that had been duct-taped to their sleeves, just as they had done with the legs of their pants. Their faces were covered by obviously fake beards and mustaches, and black sunglasses shrouded their eyes. And for those looking closely, ammunition had been taped to their clothing.

Holt-Singh never made it back to her car. One of the three men—all members of a local street gang—intercepted her, hauling her inside the bank with his two partners, who had already encountered the security officer and taken control of him.

Kelly Huber, who had been a branch manager for three years, was talking to customers. This was already supposed to be an unusual day: The branch’s last before closing its doors for good. As the suspects entered the bank, Huber immediately recognized two of them from a previous robbery six months earlier.

“I thought to myself, oh shit, here we go again,” Huber said.

The suspects screamed at everyone to get on the ground. “Don’t be a hero,” they kept saying, or yelling. “Don’t push the button,” alluding to the silent alert signal banks keep out of sight for employees to trigger for help.

Unbeknownst to the bank robbers, a worker at the Bank of the West corporate security center saw it unfold on the bank’s security cameras, leading to a call to the Stockton Police Department.

At the same time, a witness to the bank robbers entering the building, flagged down a nearby police officer who was trying to decide what to have for lunch. She called in the report, wheeled her police vehicle around, and headed to the southwest entrance to the bank.



A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER, UNTIL...

About the same time that the gunmen entered the bank, Stockton police officials were handling what seemed like another normal day at their headquarters.

Wednesdays are the max staffing day throughout the department as it brings two different shifts together on one day. Undoubtedly, having the maximum number of staff on hand would serve the department well in the hours to come.

Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones was sitting down with a reporter from the local newspaper. Both men had just attended a swearing-in ceremony for new officers who had been hired when the economy began to turn. The reporter was asking about staffing numbers when they heard the reports of a bank robbery. Out came a police radio. The men listened intently, and as soon as Jones heard the bank robbers had taken hostages and taken off in a car, the interview came to an end. The reporter headed out to the scene and Jones went to meet with the operations deputy chief for a briefing.

“It’s indescribable what you are thinking,” Jones said. “We had just had a line-of-duty death funeral, had just given the flag to that family. I was thinking we were going to have an officer shot and killed. It’s a terrible feeling.”

Stockton’s 911-dispatch center received a notification from an employee of the Bank of the West security center of a robbery. A dispatcher took the call, learning that the employee was watching as the robbers tied up the bank’s lone security guard.

“Once it started going, it never stopped,” a dispatcher said. “I just kept on typing.”

Another dispatcher recalled, “This thing was moving. It was changing. It was like an average day of events all in one incident.”

Several police officers had been finishing K-9 training at the public fairgrounds. As they loaded their cars with their gear, reports of the bank robbery crackled out from their radios.

The officers leapt into action. They headed directly to the police station to change into their gear and get their orders. Already, other officers were geared up, having been at headquarters for regularly scheduled meetings. There was a scramble for radios and rifles, neither of which are assigned to individual officers; instead, they were given out on a first-come, first-served basis. And because of the city’s bankruptcy, coupled with the large number of people working on Wednesdays, there were not enough for everyone.



Throughout the city, officers already out on their respective beats heard the call. Some headed to the pursuit. In other cases, officers stayed on their beats. But for many, hearing the ordeal unfold became too much, and they left behind their beats to join in the pursuit.

THE CHAOS WITHIN

Back inside the bank, it felt chaotic. Everyone was lying on the ground. One of the suspects leaped over the tellers' counter while the other two used plastic zip-ties to bind the hands of the security guard and some of the male customers. They tried to tie the hands of an older man but stopped when he told them he had previously broken both of his elbows, pointing to the scars on both arms. Another elderly woman was allowed to sit in a chair.

One of the suspects—having already robbed this bank before—looked at Huber and ordered her to unlock the vault. Huber was joined by another female employee because two keys were needed to unlock it.

“My hands were shaking,” Huber said. “(The suspect) said, ‘Don’t worry. No one is going to get hurt. Just do as you’re told.’”

The suspect expressed some disappointment at the amount of money in the vault but still filled a backpack with cash and then returned to the main lobby with Huber and the other employee.

“They said, ‘We need to hurry—who has a car, we need a car.’” Huber recalled that after the last robbery, “I had told my staff, ‘If it ever happens again, which it won’t, I will give them my (car) keys.’”

The three suspects headed out of the bank. One of them gripped Huber by her shirt collar. He held a gun first to the back of her head and then to her midsection. They headed toward her SUV when they spotted an officer in the parking lot of the bank. The suspect pulled on Huber’s collar and, as she stepped backwards, she stumbled over a patch of landscaping and pretended to sprain her ankle.

The suspect didn’t believe her, yanking Huber up and slipping them both back inside. The suspects asked for a second exit and Huber lied and said the front door was the only option.

“Grab them!” Huber recalled one of the bank robbers saying. “Take some girls.”

One of the suspects took Stephanie Koussaya, a bank teller, and the other grabbed Holt-Singh, who pleaded with them to leave her because her daughter was outside in the car. Unconcerned, the suspects reemerged with what were now three hostages and started moving toward Huber’s SUV.



By this point, the first police officer to arrive had retreated behind her vehicle. The authorities had a particularly difficult situation based on the layout of the property. The bank had a tiny parking lot and was part of a triangular island in the middle of three major streets, leaving little space for the officers to keep their distance while trying to apprehend the suspects.

The second officer—who had confronted the bank robbers the first time they had robbed the bank—held a semi-automatic rifle and stood in their way, getting within a few feet of them at one point. He yelled repeatedly at them to drop their weapons, let the women go, and get on the ground. A witness and the officer both recalled the women screaming frantically. Two of the suspects looked like they wanted to comply and give up, but the third, who appeared to be the leader, continued on with his cohorts in tow.

“I was contemplating engaging them, but that close, I knew I couldn’t because if I hit one, it would go through and hit a hostage,” the officer said. Moments later he considered shooting out the SUV’s tires but chose not to because there were too many civilians nearby.

GONE MOBILE

At 2:17 p.m., the suspects made it to the car and told Huber to drive out the only exit that was not blocked by police. One suspect sat in the front passenger seat. One got in the back seat with Holt-Singh and Koussaya, and the third suspect climbed into the luggage area in the rear.

Huber wasn’t sure which way to go, how fast to drive, or whether to run the first red light they came upon. Things just felt out of control. And then, only five blocks from the bank, Huber heard a loud noise and felt searing pain in her right upper thigh. She thought a dye pack used by her bank had exploded, but all she could see was red and its dye packs were not that color.

“Then I heard the one in the back say, ‘Oh shit, I am sorry. I am sorry,’” Huber said.

The suspect had accidentally shot Huber. She tried to drive but her leg felt powerless. The bank robber in the front reached across Huber, opened the driver’s door, and suddenly, at 2:18 p.m., she found herself lying upon the pavement. She had no idea what had happened. An officer pulled up nearby and told her to come to him. The pain was too much to stand, so she did three barrel rolls and found herself underneath the bumper of the cop’s car.

A handful of officers converged on Huber and began treating her for not only the gunshot to the thigh but also to her left ankle, which was injured when the bullet passed through her leg and into her ankle, shattering the bone.



Shortly after, just a few blocks away, the back tinted window of the Explorer exploded. The suspect in the back opened fire with an AK-47.

It was the first of some 100-plus shots to come from the weapon whose sound was so recognizable to some officers that they knew exactly what they faced. At 2:20 p.m., the bullets disabled the first of many police vehicles to come—this one driven by the officer who had confronted the suspects at the bank. He had tried to zigzag while driving but the bullets still struck three of his vehicle's four tires.

The Explorer lurched forward heading north, and suddenly, the chase was on.

More shots were fired just a few blocks away near the intersection of Thornton Road and Wagner Heights, which nearly an hour later would play a critical role in the conclusion of the chase. All the while, the frenetic movement in the Explorer kept officers from determining who was seated where.

But for now, the pursuit continued. The suspect in the back kept firing. And at random moments in pursuit, some of the police officers' minds wandered into darkness.

"I had just met with my life insurance guy the Saturday before," one officer said. "It was a morbid thought, but I knew I was good. My family would be taken care of."

Other officers texted their loved ones while driving. Some did it to let them know they were okay. Others did it for fear they might not make it home.

The suspects continued driving north, then turned east and drove some four miles before jumping on Highway 99 toward the city of Lodi—about three miles to the north. It was now 2:33 p.m., and 16 minutes had passed since the suspects had fled the bank. Speeds reached 120-plus miles per hour and by now, dozens of police vehicles had joined the pursuit. At one point during the chase, more than 50 police vehicles could be seen taking part.

Altogether, the chase included marked and unmarked vehicles, motorcycles, and at one point, a BearCat tactical vehicle.

Throughout the ordeal, officers could be heard over the police radio stating their vehicles were taking rounds from the AK-47. In some cases, the sounds of bullets striking the vehicles could be heard. At some points, officers sounded frantic as they relayed information about what was unfolding; at others, they sounded calm.

Either way, the radio traffic made sure everyone involved understood the severity of the undertaking at hand.

"It's a sickening feeling hearing one of your friends and colleagues taking rounds and having no immediate ability to help stop the threat," one officer said.



Another added, “I could hear that clack-clack-clack of the AK. I kept waiting to hear some guy say he got hit. And then I started thinking, if it goes through my windshield, I am not going to feel it. I am just going to be gone.”

Equally, if not more troubling, was having to pass disabled vehicles, several officer recalled.

“It’s a surrealistic thing, seeing cars pulled over, not knowing whether one of our brother officers has been shot,” another officer said.

At times, the chaos got the better of some officers who tried to get to the lead. Officers passed their colleagues, sometimes at speeds exceeding 100 miles per hour, and sometimes in unmarked cars.

“It was crazy because all of a sudden a car came barreling up on the shoulder, passing us, and we were going more than 100 miles an hour,” an officer said. “And we don’t know who it is. One of us? Someone else? Another bad guy?”

Throughout the pursuit, those in operational control debated options with commanding officers in the field:

- Ramming the vehicle was an option although the SWAT leaders wanted to wait until they would have a tactical advantage, which proved tough given the nature of the pursuit.
- Spike strips were briefly discussed, but very few were in the field because the department simply didn’t own many workable strips any longer. An officer had one but was told not to use it because of the danger of trying to deploy them with an active shooter.
- Officers were told not to shoot at the moving vehicle, which is part of the department’s policy.

So the officers kept pursuing. Obviously, there was no other choice. But it also meant there were long periods of uncertainty, leaving even the most experienced officers frustrated.

“This is the first time I didn’t have a plan,” a SWAT officer said. “I didn’t have an answer to make it stop. That was so difficult for me. That was something I had never experienced.”

BACK AT THE BANK

In the midst of the unlawfulness passing in and out of the city, other officers converged on the bank. They knew three suspects had left the bank but didn’t know much beyond that.

Two SWAT officers arrived. Weapons drawn, they cleared the bank, ensuring no one was left behind.



Other officers began corralling witnesses. Later, when there was more time, they would take statements.

Officer Joey Silva, the department's public information officer, had brought his assistant and a chaplain with him. Silva and the assistant immediately hit the department's social media accounts, using them to alert the public about what was going on and getting information to the media.

Over at the police department, high-ranked officers monitored the event and gave orders when they needed. Chief Jones listened in for a while, but found himself going back and forth to his office to update other city officials

"I would leave if it got too busy and crowded," the chief recalled. "Everyone who wasn't involved wanted to come by, wanted to know what was going on. It ... was also a fish bowl. We have talked about it since: If you're not involved in it, you don't need to be in there."

One dispatcher continued handling all of the calls from the pursuit. Stockton operates two primary patrol radio frequencies and officers are accustomed to not talking over each other. The bigger problem for the other dispatchers was all the calls from the public, other departments, and off-duty officers inquiring into what was going on. Additionally, the computer tracking system wasn't refreshing normally because so much data was being input.

The dispatcher alerted the fire department to ensure ambulances were on standby. Her colleagues were all around the office, some of the department's newest additions, monitoring traffic cameras or helping however they could.

Two thoughts ran through the dispatcher's mind: First, it was lucky for this to be taking place on a Wednesday, known around the department as "fat day" because of the overlapping shifts. Secondly, she was amazed and impressed at how clearly the officers were speaking over the radio as bullets struck their cars or whizzed by.

LOSING THE SUSPECTS...AND THEN AMBUSHED

The Explorer sped north on Highway 99 with several dozen police vehicles in pursuit.

Halfway into Lodi, the Explorer exited the freeway. At 2:32 p.m., it disappeared heading west into the heart of the city. One of the advantages to having so many officers was some had already taken to traveling along parallel roads in preparation for just this moment.

Two minutes later, officers located the Explorer about two miles to the south on surface streets. Another two minutes later, the Explorer returned to Highway 99 and headed north once again.



At one point, a lieutenant driving in the chase felt there were too many vehicles involved and ordered all of those behind his vehicle to back off. Most of them did but continued to stay in the area in case the Explorer was lost again.

After passing through Lodi, the Explorer exited the freeway and then jumped back on it heading south through Lodi and back toward Stockton. At 2:48 p.m., the Explorer pulled off at the Morada Lane exit. It's a short exit with a hard right turn leading to a stop sign. Between the stop sign and the freeway, little can be seen because of trees and heavy brush.

It was a perfect location for an ambush.

The Explorer waited patiently. One car was stopped in front of the Explorer. But also waiting nearby was Stockton Police Captain Doug Anderson. He had been in the station when the incident began. The watch commander asked him to go to the bank, which was where he had been heading when the pursuit came close to him, so he searched for a place to wait and see if their haphazard driving would lead them to him. Ultimately, it did just that.

Anderson realized what was happening. The suspects had no intention of driving off. They were going to wait until officers came around the corner and ambush them. In his mind, they wanted to "murder police officers." His car was broadside of the driver's side, across the exit, parked on the shoulder of the entrance to Highway 99. Hearing the approaching sirens, Anderson intended to shoot at the driver but then saw the gunman in the back extend his upper body out the shattered window with his AK-47 pointed toward traffic, readying to shoot.

He fired off a couple of shots and saw the gunman lurch. The Explorer jumped forward, and suddenly was back on the run, heading west on Morada Lane. Just then, the first of the officers came around the bend, in some cases so fast that they bounded off the road as they hit the brakes.

Without Anderson there to disrupt the bank robbers' plans, everyone involved was sure that some law enforcement personnel would have died.

"He saved lives," an officer said. "Was it textbook? Maybe not. But he definitely saved lives."

A FATEFUL TEXT

Minutes later, the chase almost came to an end. The department's BearCat could finally be in play. The driver of the armored vehicle tried to ram the Explorer but missed by a matter of feet. The gunman fired off his AK-47 repeatedly, shredding one of the BearCat's tires, forcing it to back off the chase as the air rushed out of its tires.



The Explorer turned south on surface streets and then headed west. Incredibly, it was heading back toward the bank again.

Word that the bank robbers could be heading back their way forced officers at the bank to take action. They ordered everyone inside. There was a great deal of commotion, but quickly, everyone was safely in the branch.

The Explorer sped by, followed closely by its pursuers. It continued west before heading south and heading to the I-5 Freeway.

It was about that time that Misty Holt-Singh's daughter texted her father, hitting "send" on her fateful words at 2:52 p.m.

"Leave work."

"Bank got robbed."

"They took mom."

NO DEDICATED AIR, BUT HELP STILL ARRIVES

Complicating matters stemming from a high-speed pursuit was the fact the department did not have any dedicated air support. The California Highway Patrol (CHP) did, but its helicopter was based in Auburn, CA, more than 65 air miles away. The request was made; the CHP aircraft was dispatched. But it would take some time before it would be in the area.

But late in the chase, a San Joaquin Sheriff's Department fixed-wing aircraft arrived. Members of the department's narcotics air unit had been listening on a scanner when a sergeant told them to get involved. The pilot and his spotter took flight shortly after and joined up with the pursuit on the I-5 Freeway.

"I knew I couldn't lose this car," the spotter remembered thinking to himself. "As we were flying, I am trying to prep myself for it. We needed to protect those guys."

Winds were blowing at 30 knots, making for some turbulent conditions. One of the Stockton sergeants got on the air, ordering officers to back off and let the airplane take the lead. The airplane spotter verbally kept track of the Explorer's progress, at one point warning the pursuers of a potential ambush.

Because the airplane was used primarily for narcotics-related surveillance missions, there had been limited interaction between the flight crew and patrol officers. This lack of experience working together resulted in some awkward moments. The spotter did not know some of the



street names, and Stockton officers repeatedly talked over the spotter on the police radios. At one point, a Stockton officer's car got too close to the Explorer, causing a sergeant to order him to back off and let the air support call the chase.

Still, many of the Stockton officers credited the air support for making their jobs easier, and safer, which was exactly what the spotter liked to hear.

"It seems like this is an untapped resource," the spotter said later. "I don't think they [Stockton Police Department] know what assets are available to them. It could save lives. There is no doubt in my mind. Save lives."

At 2:57 p.m., the Explorer charged north on I-5, driving some eight miles before exiting the roadway and then once again, jumping back on the freeway heading south back to Stockton.

Another eight miles later, the Explorer exited the freeway and came to a stop.

The plane's spotter knew what was going on: another ambush.

He called it out, warning the officers who still found themselves under fire. This time, at least some gunfire was returned by police. But thankfully, once again, no one was hit.

HEADING INTO SUBURBIA

The Explorer drove north and then east before heading into a residential subdivision. It weaved through the tight-knit streets, almost getting trapped at one point but finding its way out by passing the pursuers as they came at them head on.

"Clear as day, I could see the guy in the back training his gun at us," an officer said. "I nearly head-butted (the officer) sitting in the passenger seat as we both ducked the bullets. We could hear them whistling by."

Inside the Explorer, the level of stress grew. Bullet casings were everywhere from shooting out the back window. The smell of gunpowder was overwhelming. The bank robbers found the earlier arrival of the SWAT vehicle frightening, knowing that it carried inside officers trained to kill them.

They were not the only ones who took notice. From the moment Koussaya, one of the hostages, had seen the SWAT vehicle, she began putting together a plan.

"I know jumping out of a vehicle going any speed that you can die. But I knew with the SWAT team there, I was going to die if I didn't get out of the car," Koussaya said.



Her door was locked. She shifted her leg toward the door lock to see if the bank robbers were paying attention. They were not. She nonchalantly unlocked the door. Thirty seconds later, it locked itself.

“I didn’t know if they knew I had done it,” she said. “A little later I thought, maybe it’s because the car is going. When I did it again, it was all in one motion. I remember my door and the handle and that was it.”

Koussaya launched herself out at 3:15 p.m., cartwheeling across the street, from the SUV that officers estimated was going 50 miles per hour. She blacked out, having sustained a significant head injury. Although she was badly hurt, she would survive with help from the officers who stopped to care for her as they waited for an ambulance to arrive.

The Explorer continued north and then veered northeast on Wagner Heights. As they returned to Thornton Road, the street they first took when they escaped the bank, they encountered several officers on foot. The gunman in the back of the SUV opened fire.

So, too, did the officers, two of whom were using a six-foot tall electrical box as cover. They filled the Explorer’s tires with bullets, causing it to fishtail down the road.

Finally, the chase was near its end.

A LOSS OF RESTRAINT

As the Explorer careened to a stop less than a half mile later, the gunfire kept on coming.

Multiple police vehicles pulled up along the wide and open four-lane road. Officers fanned out. Some sought coverage from their vehicles. Others found trees to use for cover.

Dozens of officers fanned out, many of them opening fire. There were no dedicated shooters. There was very little control. Just police officers trying to stop a threat. The gunfire roared as more than 600 shots were fired.

In some cases, officers inexplicably opened fire with their colleagues standing in front of them. One officer lay prone on the ground, searching for a target but not seeing any. At the same time, a colleague standing above him fired off shot after shot.

“What’s your target?” the prone officer yelled, thinking he was missing something.

“The car!” responded the officer, who continued shooting.



Finally, a lieutenant's voice screamed out, "Cease fire." There were no shots coming back from the Explorer. Other officers joined in, shouting out the message.

For a moment, officers were unsure of what to do or how to approach the SUV. Suddenly, almost like in a movie, the disabled BearCat came lumbering over a ridge in the road. Tire-less, it still remained a viable option. The SWAT members quickly huddled up and made plans. Using the BearCat for protection, they walked behind it until they were close enough to approach the SUV.

"We knew we had to approach quickly, but safely," a SWAT officer said. "Our first priority, obviously, was the hostage."

Some officers trained their weapons on the two motionless suspects, one in the far back and the other in the driver's seat. They opened the back doors and found Holt-Singh lying by the floorboards. As they pulled her out, they found the third suspect, also lying motionless but clearly breathing.

They quickly realized there was nothing they could do for Holt-Singh. She had been struck ten times. They pulled the third suspect out and to their amazement, he was unharmed. Most likely, he used Holt-Singh's body as a shield.

The suspect in the driver's seat was dead. The suspect in the far back was breathing but he would die on the way to the hospital.

Immediately, officers began some introspection of the event, particularly the conclusion. There was a lot of internal anger and frustration.

"We had people shooting at what, I don't know, the car?" an officer said. "You can't do that; you own every bullet you fire. That said, you've got officers who've been shot at for an hour and are afraid their lives are in danger or the guy next to you's life is in danger. With the training you've had, I don't blame them."

POST-SHOOTING AFTERMATH

In the aftermath, police officials began following officer-involved shooting protocol.

All of the 33 officers, from the four separate scenes, who fired their weapons, were taken to a nearby hotel.

"I just kept meeting with guys and telling them how grateful we were and how grateful that no one was shot," said one of the chaplains who is deeply involved in the peer-support program. "I



tried to keep them from watching the news, if only to give them a break. It didn't go so well. People want to know."

Chief Jones made his rounds throughout the night. He wanted to speak with every officer who was involved.

"That's customary, but I have never had to deal with it to that extent," Jones said.

He also activated the department's Wellness Network, which includes chaplains, a department psychologist, an employee assistance program, and a peer-support system, that had undergone a rebirth in recent months, to try to ensure everyone involved had someone to talk with. That included making sure his peer-support members received help, which meant calling the Modesto Police Department and asking it to send members of its team.

Dispatchers were sent home before their shifts ended. Their supervisor thought they could use the break. He later lamented the decision because it had made them feel isolated from the rest of the department.

Jones continued talking to his staff as much as he could over the following days and weeks, making sure to tell his officers first what he would later release to the press. That included the information that it was their bullets that had taken Holt-Singh's life.

For the chief, the reasons for being so transparent were three-fold:

- Dispelling rumors and uncertainties;
- Invoking communication in roll call for healthy self-critiques; and
- Instilling a sense of teamwork.

In the days that followed, more meetings, small and large, were held to ensure the department's peer-support program could work at its best. The largest meeting was held at the local sports arena, simply for the sheer space that was needed.

"Everyone got to hear the entire story," the chaplain recalled. "We had a turnout of more than 100. It was a huge success to be able to go around the room and just talk about what each had experienced. We started with dispatchers and then went through the whole experience."

Not everyone felt like they needed all of the talking, but almost all approved of it because it showed that the department was rallying around them.

"The chief was very supportive of us," an officer said. "He informed us what he was going to say to the public. That means a lot."



Of course, there was also a need to ensure the regular beats were being covered. That meant on the first night, as well as in the ensuing days, because so many officers had been placed on administrative leave for firing their weapons.

Over the next few days, Jones made sure to meet with the two surviving hostages or their family members and Holt-Singh's family.

“My whole point was, I am sorry it happened, sorry it happened to you, we care for you,” Jones said.

The support has been clear to the men and women of the Stockton Police Department. Yet, in the end, it does not make what happened any easier.

“I have thought about this every day. What could we have done better?” an officer said. “It’s haunted me. Given all of the circumstances with this, I really don’t know.”

HARROWING, FATEFUL ORDEALS ENDURED BY HOSTAGES

What began as a rash attempt to rob a bank turned into a day of tragedy and pain for three families who unwillingly found themselves in the midst of the crime.

No one lost more than Misty Holt-Singh and her family. Holt-Singh was killed by police bullets fired to try to stop a trio of bank robbers from a shooting rampage that turned the streets of Stockton and the freeways around it into a war zone.

Holt-Singh, who was 41, left behind her husband, Paul, and children, Paul Jr., who was 20 at the time, and Mia, who was 12.

“The thing is, no one can put themselves in my shoes,” Paul Singh said in an interview nine months after the robbery. “I wake up and my wife isn’t there. And then I think about my (now) 13-year-old daughter. I took her to Macy’s so they could do makeup for her and thought to myself, this is something Misty should be doing.”

Losing his wife was particularly difficult because Holt-Singh was devoted to her family. She also worked as a dental assistant and spent much of her time volunteering in the Stockton community.

One of her volunteer efforts was being part of Stockton’s minor league hockey team’s “We Paint the Ice” event, which consists of children painting the ice prior to a game. The effort, which was reported on by ESPN, has caught on around the country, with a number of other franchises doing the same as a way to connect more closely with their communities. Holt-Singh helped convince



her employer to be one of the three sponsors. During the game, Mia operated the music and goal-scoring horn for one of the periods.

“That’s just who Misty was,” Paul Singh said.

As Christmas Eve neared, five months after Holt-Singh died, Paul Singh asked his children what they wanted to do. Normally, they would open presents from Santa. This time, they decided to do something Misty Holt-Singh would do: Give back.

Working with Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones, the family delivered Christmas presents to families who were victims of violence. It just felt right, Singh said. Afterward, the family returned home for their Christmas Eve.

“It just wasn’t the same,” Singh said. “It was very somber. They didn’t want anything. They just wanted their mother back.”

Currently, Singh is working on other projects to “keep Misty’s name alive.” Donation drives to fund a new scoreboard bearing her name for a Little League team and a park bench close to where she was killed are ongoing.

“My goal, by the time I die, is that this city will have Misty Holt-Singh’s name all over it,” her husband said.

Singh has also made it clear he is not happy with how his wife died. His lawyer has filed an intent to sue Stockton for the decisions and actions made by the police officers.

Also filing intents to sue are the other two hostages: Kelly Huber, the Bank of the West branch manager, and Stephanie Koussaya, a bank teller.

Both sustained serious injuries. Koussaya leaped from the speeding getaway car when she decided it was her only chance to live. The suspects tossed Huber out early on after one of them accidentally shot her in the leg. The bullet cleared her thigh and shattered her ankle.

Huber recognized two of the bank robbers the moment they came in as the men who robbed the bank in January 2014 but were never caught. She tried to keep everyone calm inside the bank. Along with another teller, she opened the vault for the suspects. And later, Huber led them to her Ford Explorer when the suspects grabbed her and the other two women as hostages.

After she was thrown from the car, Huber lay there for a moment until an officer told her to roll to him and his vehicle. An ambulance arrived and paramedics went to work on her before she was whisked to the hospital.



Her wounds remain a daily problem for her. She still feels the tunneled path of the bullet that passed through her thigh, causing her to fidget endlessly. Huber's ankle has two pins in it but it is not healing well and she believes she will need an ankle replacement.

Koussaya is also not faring well. She struck her head when she leapt to freedom. The last thing she clearly remembers is placing her hand on the door handle before vaulting out. She has fuzzy recollections of her clothes being cut off by paramedics and nurses braiding her hair to keep it away from her head wound.

The days of braids are long gone for Koussaya. She has enough frequent headaches that she will not wear her hair up any longer because it makes them worse. She also has lost her ability to taste.

Her memories remain clear from the bank robbery, though.

She recalls Huber being shoved out and then an explosion in the back of the Explorer when the suspect there began firing an AK-47. Shell casings bounced about, as the smell of gunpowder filled the vehicle. Another suspect kept handing banana-shaped magazines to the shooter in the back.

"I knew this guy was shooting at the cops and I couldn't believe it," Koussaya said.

She became especially frightened when she heard a different sound of gunfire because she knew it meant the police officers were firing back.

"When I started hearing the other shots, I got worried and I ducked down behind the driver, but I was pushed up by the guy next to me who said, 'I don't think so,'" Koussaya said. "I still ducked down as best as I could."

Koussaya eventually knew she was faced with a critical decision.

"When I saw the SWAT team and its vehicle, I knew it was going to go badly. I knew I had to get out," she said.

"My whole thing was, I wasn't going to die that day."



ANALYSIS OF THE INCIDENT

METHODOLOGY

The Police Foundation assessment approach involved three modes of inquiry: document and video review, interviews, and direct observation, including

- Crime reports and physical evidence related to the Bank of the West robbery and death of Misty Holt-Singh;
- Department policies and manuals, as well as model polices developed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP);
- Video recordings;
- Site visits to critical locations and the pursuit route;
- Semi-structured interviews and meetings with SPD command staff and employees, and with the victims.

In total, the team interviewed over 50 individuals for this assessment.

The Stockton police response to the Bank of the West robbery was anything but routine. While some may say this is what movies are made of, the events of July 16, 2014, are far too real for all of those involved and will leave lasting physical and emotional scars on many.

While the events of July 16 are horrific, the leadership of Police Chief Eric Jones to request this independent review so that others may learn from the Stockton experiences is commendable. The lessons learned from this event will not bring back Misty Holt-Singh or heal the physical and emotional scars of those involved. However, it will allow others to learn and possibly prevent such tragedies as this from happening in the future.

The Police Foundation in its review of sentinel events hopes to bring to light lessons learned so that others may benefit. The lessons learned in the following pages are not designed to isolate an individual's action but rather to identify themes and create dialogue so that law enforcement is better prepared to respond to future sentinel events.

The Police Foundation assessment team identified four themes and many lessons learned throughout the investigation. The lessons learned are presented in chronologic order with overarching themes presented at the conclusion of this section.



BANK RESPONSE

The Stockton police response to the Bank of the West robbery posed many challenges, the first being location. A safe and out-of-sight approach to the Bank of the West was severely limited by the lack of adequate cover and concealment. The bank is located within a triangle formed by the intersection of Thornton Road, Lower Sacramento Road, and Hammer Lane. Figure 1 is an aerial view of the triangle formed by the three streets and Figure 2 is a closer view of the bank.³ The Bank of the West is depicted in the southern corner (lower) of the triangle. Immediately north of the Bank of the West is the San Joaquin Regional Transit District (RTD) Hammer Triangle bus station. To the northwest of the bank structure is the drive-thru access for bank customers. Beyond the property line is a small parking area and driveway for the RTD buses and the back of a strip mall. To the southwest is Thornton Road and to the southeast is Lower Sacramento Road. The bank has one driveway on Lower Sacramento Road and two driveways on Thornton Road. Complicating the approach to the bank is a wrought iron fence surrounding the perimeter of the bank with pedestrian access only through the driveways.

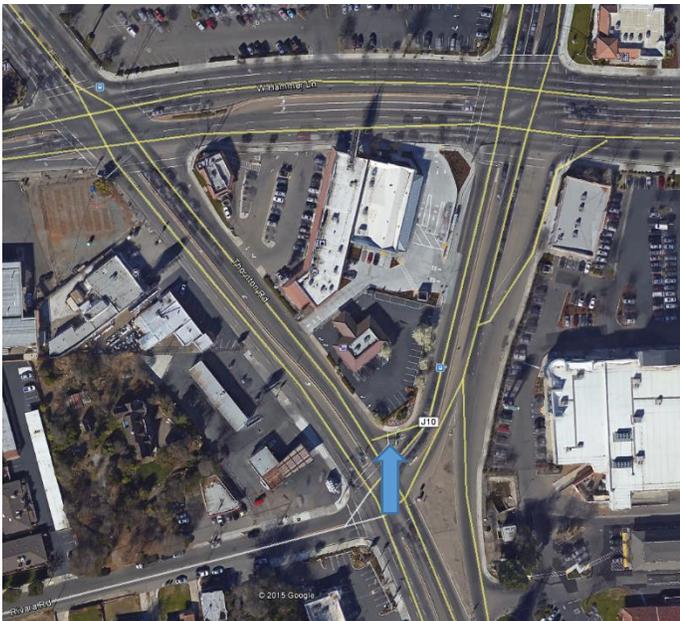


Figure 1: Bank of the West Overhead View

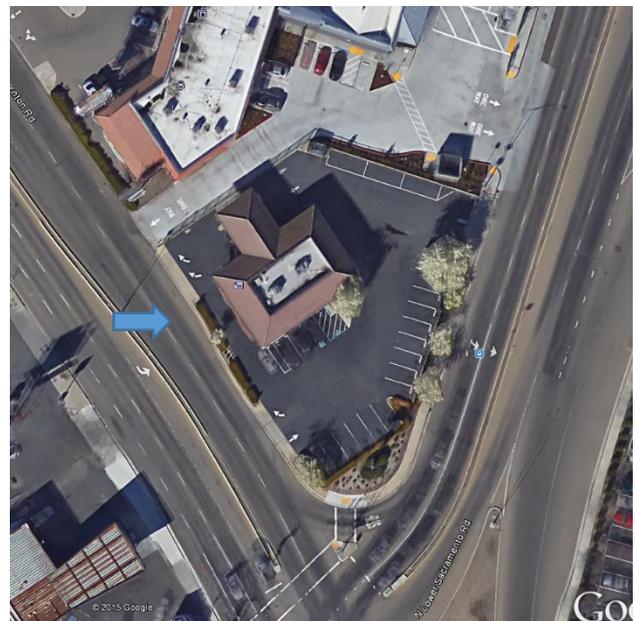


Figure 2: Bank of the West Overhead View Close-up

³ Figures 1 and 2 obtained from Google Earth. <https://www.google.com/earth/explore/products/>

A second challenge was how quickly officers were on the scene. The Stockton Police Department was notified of the robbery by three primary sources. Witnesses near the bank observed gunmen entering the bank and called 911. A review of the 911 phone calls revealed several witnesses with detailed descriptions of the suspects and their actions. Additionally, a SPD patrol officer was across the street from the bank and was stopped by witnesses who informed the officer of the robbery. The Bank of the West also reported the robbery through its corporate security monitoring center. That center reported receiving an alarm activation and was able to monitor bank surveillance cameras and provide real-time information to SPD dispatchers.

The result was a response time for the first officer of three minutes from the time the suspects entered the bank and 83 seconds from the time the call was entered into the Stockton police dispatch system. The second officer arrived 65 seconds later, followed shortly thereafter by several additional patrol officers. The Police Foundation observed in surveillance videos, as the first two officers arrived at the bank, an uninvolved individual on foot in the middle of the parking lot near the front door, as well as a vehicle leaving a parking spot in the bank parking lot. As the second officer approached the bank on foot from the Lower Sacramento Road entrance, the suspects exited the bank with hostage Huber. This occurred within 16 seconds of the second officer's arrival. As the suspects moved across the parking lot toward Huber's vehicle, the officer confronted the suspects as he moved toward them along the rear of the vehicles in the parking lot. The uninvolved person, who was between the officer and suspects, laid on the ground. The confrontation in the parking lot between the officer and suspects resulted in the suspects retreating into the bank. Officers on the scene reported the retreat made them think the incident would slow down and hostage negotiations would follow.

The fast response time can be attributed to several factors, including time of day, patrol patterns of individual officers, proximity to three major roadways, and prior calls for service. However, a significant factor in not only the response to the bank but also the ensuing pursuit is the number of officers available on July 16, 2014. The Stockton Police Department uses a 4-10 work schedule for patrol officers who are assigned to work four consecutive 10-hour days. The department schedules every Wednesday as an overlap day for all shifts. The result was nearly twice as many officers available to respond to an event on Wednesday, July 16, 2014.

While police departments in general measure and value short response times, there is an inverse relationship between response time and spontaneous response planning. In instances of immediate or near immediate arrival, the ability to develop a plan of action is reduced. This is not to suggest all responses should be delayed, but to identify the complicating factor of the immediate arrival of officers at an in-progress critical incident.

The reemergence of the three suspects two minutes after they retreated into the bank, each with a hostage, surprised many officers, and left one officer in the parking lot without cover or



concealment. The lack of compliance by the suspects and the ability to enter a vehicle and go mobile was, according to some officers, “one of the worst possible scenarios.” With the suspects and three hostages fleeing the bank in a vehicle, all of the officers at the scene gave chase, leaving no police officers at the bank to secure the scene, check the welfare of remaining victims, or gather potential information regarding the suspects or victims.

LESSONS LEARNED

ROBBERY RESPONSE

Law enforcement model policies, such as those developed by IACP⁴, emphasize a safe response by officers that does not needlessly endanger the officer or the public. The policies also discuss a response that reduces the potential for a hostage situation. Law enforcement agencies should review their policies and training for robberies to ensure that they are consistent with best practices. Additionally, agencies should develop response plans for high-risk locations that are unique to the specific location. The response plans should be exercised so responding officers are familiar with the challenges presented and consistent in their responses.

HOSTAGE SITUATIONS

Agencies should develop response plans and training for heavily armed mobile hostage situations. Plans may include, when appropriate, the use of lethal force, limiting escape routes to areas of less risk of harm to everyone involved, prohibiting all escape by blocking all entrances with vehicles or deploying spike strips, and establishing scenario-based training that encourages highly creative scenarios outside the normal law enforcement response protocols.

USE OF REAL-TIME INTELLIGENCE

Most officers interviewed did not know the department had direct contact with Bank of the West employees watching live video of the robbery. This was not a result of any significant communication failure but rather one where officers at the bank were more attentive to what was taking place in front of them and not hearing all police radio traffic. Agencies should determine the technological capabilities of high-risk locations and the agencies’ accessibility to the technology. First responders, including dispatchers, should be familiar with the technology and plan for response protocols that include accessing information from the technology.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

A coordinated response during a critical incident is key to successful resolution. Agencies should develop training exercises that clearly establish the need for command and control and develop employees in such a way that they have the skills and abilities to assume a leadership role in the coordination of critical incidents. This is extremely important with officers maintaining positions of cover or concealment.

⁴ <http://www.theiacp.org/Model-Policies-for-Policing>



THE PURSUIT

Trying to manage an evolving situation that includes hostages, hostages being shot and thrown from the vehicle, officers being shot at, patrol vehicles being disabled by gunfire, ambushes being set up, and a hostage jumping from the suspect vehicle is extremely complex, leaving little room for error. The chaos created by the suspects fleeing the bank with hostages became worse when responding officers became rescuers of Kelly Huber and then victims of gunfire. The dynamics of the chase created tremendous potential for a significant number of horrible events to occur.

The review of the pursuit, from the time the suspects left the bank property to the time the suspect vehicle came to a stop, revealed many lessons learned. The Police Foundation team was able to identify several key lessons to assist agencies in policy, training, and practice.

One of the most significant observations was the lack of air support during the pursuit. Air support is critical to tracking suspects and reducing risk to the public and officers. Many agencies have established policies requiring pursuing ground officers to disengage a vehicle pursuit when the pursuit is unsafe and an air unit is involved. The units will trail at a safe distance but be available to respond when the suspect vehicle stops.

In reviewing dispatch audio tapes and logs, the amount of radio traffic for an event of this magnitude was minimal. While there were times when multiple officers attempted to broadcast, those instances were limited. The majority of the transmissions were calm and factual, providing updates for responding officers and supervisors. Enhancing the calm was the demeanor of the dispatcher.

Noticeably absent early on in the pursuit was direction from supervisors. During interviews, the review team heard differing opinions related to the low volume of supervisor radio activity. Some, including supervisors, believed it was more important to allow the officers who were actively engaged in the pursuit and under heavy gunfire to have exclusive access to the radio. They believed that unless there was an overwhelming need to broadcast, radio traffic should be limited to the units actively involved. Others were anticipating direction from supervisors and became frustrated when no one was taking charge of the pursuit.

Supervisor engagement changed during the latter part of the pursuit. When air support joined the pursuit, supervisors on several occasions instructed officers to allow the aircraft to broadcast the pursuit and for officers to back off the Explorer for the officers' safety. Additionally, a watch commander attempted to limit the number of vehicles actively engaged in the pursuit. The Police Foundation team reviewed numerous videos that recorded different segments of the pursuit and identified between 40 and 56 police vehicles in the pursuit.



The SPD command staff was able to monitor the pursuit via radio traffic, as well as view segments of the pursuit through an extensive traffic camera system in the City of Stockton⁵. Several workstations and large video screens, as seen in Figure 3, are located within the SPD dispatch center. The cameras are monitored during certain parts of the day by staff, some of whom are retired SPD officers. During the pursuit, the camera operators were able to listen to the pursuit and adjust the cameras in anticipation of the suspects' travel, providing SPD commanders with additional information.



Figure 3: Stockton Police 911 Center⁶

While the camera operators were anticipating possible suspect travel, so were officers in the field. On numerous occasions, officers, on their own, prepositioned themselves to possibly intercept the pursuit. The importance of officer prepositioning is illustrated when Captain Doug Anderson, in an unmarked vehicle, waited along a freeway off-ramp with the sole purpose of notifying pursuing officers of the suspects' location. What he observed was the suspects setting up an ambush of pursuing officers at a blind corner. Anderson was able to disrupt the ambush by firing at the

⁵ The City of Stockton has approximately 290 traffic cameras that SPD can access.

⁶ Photo taken by Craig Sanders

suspects. The actions of Captain Anderson, as well as others who had prepositioned, were not immediately known to others involved in the pursuit. Radio traffic is very disciplined at the SPD and unless you have an immediate need, you are taught not to use the radio.

What was obvious in radio transmission was an attempt to get SWAT officers to the front of the pursuit. The goal, according to SPD personnel, was to get tactical officers in place and then look for opportunities to stop the vehicle. They did not want to stop the vehicle in an area that created more risk to the public or officers. At the same time, everyone acknowledged that as long as the vehicle was still moving, the SPD could not control the situation. This created a sense of urgency for SWAT officers to catch the pursuit and move up in the order of vehicles giving chase.

While SWAT team members tried to work their way to the front of the pursuit, SPD experienced an additional challenge. Normally, there is a designated lead vehicle and others assume roles within the pursuit. With the suspects actively shooting at the officers, the lead vehicle frequently changed as officers backed off, either as bullets struck their vehicles, or they were forced to discontinue when their vehicles were disabled by gunfire. This caused a leapfrog effect with vehicles passing each other. According to officers in the pursuit, the passing was appropriate in some instances as police vehicles became disabled; however, in most cases, officers believed the passing was inappropriate and unsafe. They reported both marked vehicles and unmarked vehicles⁷ passing without warning and in some cases without emergency lights.

As the pursuit continued to develop, the Stockton police eliminated the option of completely disengaging the suspects and allowing them to escape. Given the total disregard for life by the suspects, the SPD feared the suspects would kill the hostages. Also of concern was that the suspects would flee and take additional hostages. What was not realized until post-incident review by the SPD was the suspects had several opportunities to evade the pursuit but instead set up ambushes.

Before the pursuit ended at 3:18 p.m., it had traversed some 60 miles in slightly more than an hour, with the suspects shooting at pursuing officers from start to finish, disabling 14 police vehicles, including the SWAT BearCat. One hostage had been shot by a suspect and thrown from the vehicle and a second hostage jumped from the moving vehicle, both suffering significant injuries. Sadly, the third hostage was killed when the pursuit came to a stop.

Lessons Learned

PURSUIT POLICY

Many agencies have pursuit policies that restrict the number of units actively involved in a pursuit. The pursuit policies are designed to limit risk to the public and officers by reducing the number of

⁷ The review team was unable to determine the identity of unmarked vehicles but did observe several unmarked cars during the video review.



police vehicles actively engaging a fleeing vehicle but allowing enough officers to effect an arrest. In this case, pursuing officers also served an additional role of providing medical aid to the injured hostages and potential aid to any additional victims caused by the suspects' driving or shooting.

Agencies should establish a review cycle where all policies are examined and updated as necessary. Specifically related to pursuit policies, agencies should develop policies and train so officers understand and plan for the likelihood that pursuing officers may need to disengage and assist victims.

911 DISPATCH CENTER, TRAFFIC CAMERAS, AND CRIME ANALYSIS

The importance during a critical incident of a well-equipped and appropriately staffed 911 center cannot be overstated. During the Bank of the West incident, the Stockton police dispatch center was double-staffed as the result of an overlapping work schedule. The staffing allowed the dispatchers to remain focused on critical tasks without having their attention distracted by competing priorities.

The SPD 911 center also co-locates its crime analysis section and video camera monitoring functions in the same work area. The City of Stockton has an extensive traffic camera network that has monitoring and control capabilities within the SPD 911 center. The SPD routinely monitors the camera network with retired officers during times of peak call volume. The retired officers working the video cameras serve as additional sets of eyes for officers responding to calls. This was exactly what happened during the Bank of the West pursuit. Staff members working the video cameras were able to track and monitor the pursuit when it was within the city limits, while crime analysis staff were conducting research on possible suspects and potential destination locations.

While staffing and co-location of critical functions were assisting the dispatch center functions, the computer aided dispatch (CAD) system was struggling to keep up. Dispatchers became concerned that the system was not logging all of the entries and that the amount of activity might have crashed the system. An IT specialist was available onsite and worked to keep the system operational and reassured dispatch staff that all the entries were properly being logged.

The 911 center also noticed an increase of incoming phone calls from off-duty officers and other law enforcement agencies, asking about the status of events and if they were needed. The influx of calls frustrated dispatchers and interfered with their efforts.

Agencies should evaluate 911 center staffing, training, and equipment to ensure functionality during a critical incident.

Agencies should assess the need to contact an agency in the middle of a critical incident. Mutual aid protocols should be reviewed to reaffirm that proper requests and notifications will be done by the affected agency.



Agencies should develop an internal notification system that allows for the immediate and comprehensive notification of employees related to the status of a critical incident and the need for additional staff.

The Stockton Police Department's co-location of three critical functions, dispatch, crime analysis, and traffic camera video monitoring, served as a real-time information center for decision makers. This should be viewed as a best practice and replicated in agencies where appropriate.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

During any critical incident, command and control are crucial. It is not enough to understand incident command—it must be a part of everyday operations so it becomes a way of doing business. Equally important is the confidence first responders have in leadership, even when leaders are not necessarily seen or heard. In this incident, SPD leadership was working on secondary radio channels and cell phones to develop response strategies to stop the suspect vehicle.

Agency supervisors must ensure that first responders trust that leadership is supporting efforts to resolve critical incidents, even if they are not heard or seen. This can be accomplished in many ways to include field and tabletop exercises of critical incidents.

AIR SUPPORT

Agencies with readily available air support should establish clear protocols and training regarding the use of an aircraft to allow officers to disengage from a pursuit to reduce the risk to the public and officers. Agencies with limited access to air support should become familiar with all regional air assets and provide field training to foster a closer working relationship between air support providers and field personnel so that all available resources can be used during a critical incident. Additionally, agencies that use surveillance aircraft should develop policies and the necessary training to engage these types of aircraft in critical incidents.

SELF-DEPLOYMENT

There was virtually no self-deployment of officers from other agencies. The review team was told of only one patrol vehicle from an agency that was not requested to assist. This compares to reports of massive self-deployment in other highly charged incidents.⁸ The review team discovered that self-deployment in the Stockton/San Joaquin County law enforcement community is not an accepted practice and not allowed by supervisors and leadership within the agencies. When asked why there was no self-deployment from other agencies, several officers responded, "Why would they?" and "That's not how we do things here."

⁸ Critical incident reviews can be found at *The Police Foundation Critical Incident Library*.
<http://www.policefoundation.org/critical-incident-review-library/>



Agencies in the region did make ready and stage resources awaiting any request from the SPD. The San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office SWAT team was staged and awaiting a request.

The self-deployment that did occur was from within the SPD. As mentioned previously, the SPD staffing plan has a department-wide work schedule overlap on Wednesdays. On a non-overlap shift, there may be as many as 25 patrol officers on day shift. On Wednesdays, the overlap creates a doubling of patrol staff, with as many as 50 officers on day shift. Additionally, the length of the pursuit crossed over into a time when swing shift patrol had a contingent of employees readying for its shift. This added an additional cadre of officers on the street, many of whom were directed by supervisors not to respond to the pursuit but to handle the growing number of pending calls for service. Between the two patrol shifts, plus additional sworn officers working at the time, SPD had nearly 100 officers either in pursuit, responding to the pursuit, or attempting to anticipate where the pursuit may be going. Many officers the team interviewed stated there was a sense of helplessness listening to their friends and coworkers being shot at, and it was that sense of helplessness that led to them going to help in the pursuit.

Agencies should take note of the culture of not self-deploying in the Stockton/San Joaquin County region. At the same time, agencies should be aware that the emotion to help and protect friends and coworkers is powerful. The best way to counter self-deployment is through preplanning and continued reinforcement of the troubles that causes for command and control.

THE STOP

For purposes of this review, the stop scene starts when the suspect vehicle makes the final turn from Wagner Heights Road to Thornton Road and SPD officers are able to shoot and eventually disable the suspect vehicle. After the shooting, the Explorer continued slowly north on Thornton Road until it came to a stop near Otto Drive. While the findings of the review team are specific to this incident, the issues surrounding sympathetic fire are not unique.

The ability of the SPD to engage the suspects in gunfire and disable the suspect vehicle was the result of officers anticipating the direction the suspects would go and pre-deploying to those locations. Once at the intersection of Wagner Heights and Thornton Road, officers positioned themselves behind patrol vehicles and a utility box, waiting for the suspect vehicle to pass through. When it did, an exchange of gunfire erupted with the officers aiming at the tires and engine of the Explorer and the suspects shooting at the officers.

The resulting shots by officers disabled the Explorer about 600 yards from the shooting scene on Thornton Road at Otto Road. The responding officers fanned their vehicles across the width of the three-lane road, including both dirt shoulders, while the suspect in the rear of the Explorer



continued to shoot at responding officers. There the scene became even more chaotic with dozens of officers arriving and no response plan in place.



Figure 1 Final Stop Location Overhead View⁹

Several officers reported that the suspect in the rear of the Explorer stopped shooting after taking fire from police, eliminating the threat. One officer reported firing four shots and seeing the suspect in rear of the vehicle go down, at which time the officer stopped firing. Another officer near the suspect vehicle tried to move laterally for his own safety but was pinned down by officers shooting from behind him. Others told the review team that they were angry that officers were shooting at the vehicle without a clear, articulable threat.

Several officers, ranging in rank from police officer to lieutenant, yelled cease fire when they individually determined that officers continued shooting after threats had been eliminated.

Based upon interviews and physical evidence, the review team grouped most responders into categories based upon their actions. The team did not determine how many officers were in each category:

- Officers who determined an active threat existed and immediately fired their weapons until the threat stopped, and then they stopped firing.

⁹ Available at <http://www.gannett-cdn.com/-mm-/31a9a34638840daa23cad3686b39ae479f7dd5f7/c=269-0-1701-1075&r=x513&c=680x510/local/-/media/KXTV/KXTV/2014/07/16/1405550102005-Still0716-00006.jpg>



- Officers who determined an active threat existed and moved to a safer position to avoid personal threat or to gain a clear sight picture to reduce the possibility of shooting the remaining hostage, uninvolved parties, or another officer.
 - Within this group, officers either continued to see a threat and fired their weapons following their movement and ceased when the threat no longer existed, or
 - After moving, determined that a threat no longer existed and did not fire their weapons.
- Officers who determined an active threat existed but did not have a clear line of fire and did not fire their weapons.
- Officers who did not see an active threat and did not fire their weapons.
- Officers who did not see an active threat but did fire their weapons based on others firing their weapons and fired until a cease fire was given.
- Officers who arrived after a cease fire was given and did not fire any rounds.

LESSONS LEARNED

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Despite the direction from the watch commander to limit the number of officers in the pursuit, dozens of officers continued in the chase and ended up at the pursuit's conclusion, in a position to shoot at the suspects. While there were 32 shooting officers¹⁰ at the end of the chase, others did not shoot but were present at the stop scene. Some of the officers at the scene are directly attributable to the pursuit and others had not been in the pursuit but had pre-staged at critical intersections.

In reviewing dispatch tapes and in response to interviews, the review team determined there was no planned response for when the suspect vehicle stopped. This lack of planning, along with the number of officers involved, created a level of chaos that was difficult to manage and overcome.

Agencies should train for and reinforce the importance of following command directions during critical incidents. Additionally, plans during critical incidents should include rolls and responsibilities for responding officers, with the understanding that plans will frequently change during a fast-moving event.

Agencies should reinforce that felony stops need structure and control, including the width of the stop pattern and designated shooters if the situation warrants. During the stop of the suspect

¹⁰ Captain Anderson's shooting earlier in the chase was not included in this total.



vehicle, SPD vehicles fanned out across all three lanes of traffic and onto the dirt shoulders. This was partially created by the large number of responding officers, many of whom felt the need to be as far up front as possible. The width of the felony stop and lack of planned responsibilities also contributed to sympathetic gunfire.

SYMPATHETIC FIRE

Based on interviews, the review team determined that some officers fired their weapons in response to fellow officers firing. More than 600 rounds were fired at the suspect vehicle, many after the threat had been eliminated. The review team was not able to determine the number of rounds that would have been reasonable. However, the review team did determine that 600 rounds were excessive and unnecessary.

A cursory review of SPD officer involved-shootings did not identify a pattern of sympathetic fire. The general conclusion by the review team is that the sympathetic fire in this case appears to be a result of the circumstances involved and not a culture of tolerance of sympathetic fire by the Stockton Police Department.

Agencies should be aware that sympathetic gunfire might occur in highly charged long-lasting events. Attention should be given to train for and anticipate events that may possibly lead to situations of sympathetic fire.

THE INVESTIGATION

One of the many consequences of the City of Stockton bankruptcy was the reduction of police staffing in a city known for a high violent crime rate. Staffing reductions, particularly in investigative units, created several challenges for the Stockton Police Department in the response to the many incidents associated with the Bank of the West robbery.

A significant task for investigators was identifying the many crime scenes associated with all the actions of the suspects and potential witnesses to each action. The Bank of the West and final stop scenes were defined locations. Although significant efforts were required in evidence collection and witness interviews, the two locations were known to investigators. The actions that transpired during the hour-long, 60-mile pursuit were a much greater challenge. During the pursuit, the suspects shot at and attempted to ambush many officers at many locations. Some of the locations were identifiable by radio tapes or officer actions. Many locations were not immediately known, making evidence collection and witness identification extremely difficult.

Stockton police detectives, upon learning of the bank robbery and pursuit, used an incident command structure to assign teams of detectives to locations as they became aware of them. The



investigators also understood that when the vehicle was finally stopped, they would need to have a team of detectives ready to respond. While the urge to get into the field and help with the pursuit existed, the detectives understood their roles and were focused on getting investigators to the multitude of scenes as quickly as possible.

At the conclusion of the pursuit, investigators were presented with another daunting task. They had three shooting scenes related to the stop, one deceased hostage, two dead suspects, one surviving suspect, a total of 33 officers who fired their weapons at four different locations, countless witnesses, and more than 600 rounds they had to account for. To assist with the investigation at the scene at Wagner Heights Road and Thornton Road, the Stockton police requested the assistance of the California Highway Patrol.

With limited facilities to place and interview officers, investigators acquired hotel rooms near police headquarters. All officers who fired their weapons were separated from each other and housed at the hotel. They all had their photographs taken and their weapons collected. The officers who fired their weapons were then interviewed at the department's investigations facility. Victim and witness officers who did not fire weapons were housed and interviewed at the police department's investigations building.

The Stockton Police Department, like many other departments, affords officers legal representation during interviews. Coordinating with the Stockton Police Officers' Association and legal representatives added to the logistics of coordinating dozens of officer interviews. Additionally, the SPD made peer-support and chaplaincy services available to all involved officers, which increased the number of individuals in and around the investigation.

LESSONS LEARNED

LOGISTICS FOR LARGE COMPLEX INVESTIGATIONS

The Stockton Police Department, despite limited staffing, deployed investigative resources efficiently and effectively to multiple crime scenes. It also used other agencies with specific skills to assist in the investigation.

Agencies should ensure protocols are in place to request the assistance of agencies with the skills necessary to assist in complicated investigations.

Agencies should preplan potential events that may require the use of outside facilities to complete investigations. Planning should include logistics and staffing requirements for not only investigative personnel but also support staff and ancillary staff, such as police accountability officials, lawyers, and labor union representatives.

During large-scale events, agencies should consider modifying interview protocols to allow for a concentrated effort on the most critical witness. Modifications may include using other agencies



for lower priority witnesses, enlisting the assistance of staff not assigned investigative duties but have investigative experience, or delaying interviews until investigative staff have appropriate time and attention to complete witness statements.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Chief Jones and his leadership team knew that they needed to communicate openly with their staff from the moment the pursuit concluded. The event was chaotic and unprecedented. A hostage was dead, accidentally killed by police officers trying to stop the brazen bank robbers. Scrutiny, criticism, and negative commentary were inevitable. The department was likely to be under siege from the media. Police officers were going to be facing unusually high pressure from a number of fronts.

On the night of the shooting, Jones met with each officer who fired a weapon and many other officers who were involved in the pursuit. In the days that followed, he briefed his department repeatedly on what he planned to say before each press conference. The department also held a debriefing session at the nearby arena, which was chosen because its size could accommodate such a large group.

Fifteen days after the event, Deputy Chief Trevor Womack reached out to the Police Foundation and asked for an independent review. The Foundation accepted the request as a pro bono review. If the department paid for the project, it could have raised concerns about its validity.

The department also produced a “Debrief and Department Review” report that included a 36-slide PowerPoint presentation.

The report

- Summarized the event;
- Provided photographs, maps, and a timeline of the pursuit;
- Detailed the suspects’ involvement;
- Discussed the sensitive nature of the event and the criticism that would come; and
- Offered a page discussing “what the chief’s office would do differently.”

The report highlighted police and family wellness, which it deemed a priority, community sentiment (acknowledging that criticism comes with the business while adding that tremendous support had come from the community), and the need to be transparent with the media because it “leads to community trust in their police department.”



LESSONS LEARNED

SUPPORT EMPLOYEES THROUGH REAL-TIME INFORMATION THAT IS CANDID AND SINCERE

It could be easy to underplay the need to support line staff when an agency faces so many issues: Potential community backlash and lawsuits may seem more important subjects to tackle. However, it is the women and men throughout the department that need strong and constant support after disturbing events. They are the ones that directly hear criticisms from the community. They must deal with the roles they played in the event. Moreover, they and their families face the brunt of the emotions that can come in the aftermath of a tragedy.

The Stockton Police Department should be commended for its proactive and forthright efforts to handle the internal issues.

HONEST, TIMELY INFORMATION MAINTAINS TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

Stockton's leadership team has operated under a "transparency first" standard that is as progressive as it is proper. Law enforcement agencies that are transparent enjoy a stronger bond with their communities, along with the rank and file. It is clear Stockton's policing leaders also saw an opportunity—or as they put it in their review, an obligation—to learn by reviewing internally all of the events that transpired. They also saw the chance to open the department up to scrutiny as a means to share lessons with other law enforcement professionals.

MEDIA

From the outset, Stockton's public information team sprang into action. Officer Joey Silva, the public information officer (PIO), and his assistant headed to the Bank of the West branch. A pastor with the department also came to provide assistance. After assessing the situation, they began using social media, namely Twitter and Facebook, to begin notifying the public of what was unfolding.

The initial post¹¹ was four sentences but told what most needed to be known: "Armed bank robbery at the Bank of the West on Thornton Road. Suspects fired multiple rounds at officers during pursuit. At least one hostage was in the suspect vehicle. Suspect's (sic) dropped off at least one hostage."

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/stocktonpolicedepartment/posts/641945642568030>



Altogether, Silva and his assistant filed six tweets¹² linked to the event, which consisted of updates and information on an upcoming press conference. In addition to notifying the public, the social media posts helped relay information to the media.

Members of the media called Silva's mobile phone early and often. Over the first two years of his job as the PIO, Silva had met with several local reporters (print, television, and radio), giving them his mobile phone number as he built a positive rapport with them. Reporters from across the country also were given the number when they called the police headquarters. Silva answered calls when he could and made sure to return each call that went to voicemail.

It was not long before reporters, photographers, and TV camera operators arrived at the Bank of the West. Silva created a media staging area across the street from the bank because it remained an active crime scene, he wanted to keep the press away from family members of the hostages, and he wanted to make the bank the backdrop for any filming that was done. If Silva had gone to the conclusion of the pursuit and held any discussions with the press there, members of the media could have filmed the bank robbers' getaway vehicle, which was now riddled with bullet holes, as the backdrop.

Chief Jones held a press conference that day¹³ and another one the following day. His goal was to be as open and forthright with the press as possible, which has been one of his central tenets as chief. But he also focused on the suspects' reckless use of an assault weapon that could easily have taken more lives and did disable numerous police vehicles.

After learning that Holt-Singh had died, Silva waited for her family members to leave the scene before telling the media in order to give the family time to grieve outside of the limelight.

As soon as the department learned that police bullets killed Holt-Singh, Chief Jones held a press conference to disclose the news. He could have waited until later but chose to release the information as soon as he could. But he did so after first making sure every member of his department knew what he was going to say.

In the days after the event, Silva reached out to his local media contacts and asked them to provide any critiques of his efforts. The effort was met with surprise from reporters but helped him to continue building a relationship with them.

¹² <https://twitter.com/search?q=from%3AStocktonPolice%20since%3A2014-07-16%20until%3A2014-07-20&src=typd>

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcefUYLubv4>



LESSONS LEARNED

TRANSPARENCY

Being open and honest with the media is always the best practice. The news that cops had killed the hostage was painful and disturbing. But it was also a fact and needed to be disclosed. Holding onto the information would only have brought great scrutiny and likely criticism when it was eventually disclosed. Departments should make this a top priority because it not only improves relationships with the press but also it improves relationships with their communities.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The ever-growing medium is a useful way to inform the public about what is transpiring during an ongoing event. It is also a great way to reach the media as a whole, decreasing phone calls or other unnecessary one-on-one interactions that are too time consuming in the midst of an event.

Departments must invest in technology to be able to use social media from the scene.

RELATIONSHIPS

Building a good rapport with the media *before* major events is a must. Journalists are more likely to trust the message from PIOs or police officials once relationships are established. They also are more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt when mistakes are made. Departments with adversarial relationships with the media will get just the opposite.

BACKDROPS

Stockton held its media briefings across the street from the Bank of the West branch instead of at the conclusion of the pursuit. While photos of the bullet-riddled getaway vehicle of course were still published, holding the briefings at the bank made for a different, less painful and embarrassing backdrop. It also meant the focus was on the words coming from the public information officer and helped keep attention on the fact that the bank robbers were the cause of this story.

OVERARCHING THEMES

The Police Foundation review team identified several key themes. The impacts associated with the City of Stockton bankruptcy, failure of imagination, emotional impact on officers, and leadership.

BANKRUPTCY

The financial troubles and resulting bankruptcy resulted in a loss of senior police staff. The subsequent seniority shift was evident to the Police Foundation review team during interview sessions. It was not uncommon to have the majority of the officers in the small group sessions have fewer than two years of experience. Oftentimes, only one to two officers (out of six to ten)



had 15 years or more experience. The average seniority for patrol officers was fewer than 7.5 years, with 82 officers having fewer than two years with the SPD.

In addition to staff reductions, the training and equipment budgets were slashed. The training budget for 2014 was less than \$500 per authorized employee. It was common for officers to speak about the lack of training opportunities outside the department. Officers expressed concerns about equipment availability and confidence. Several officers identified the lack of spike strips and on a couple occasions said the spike strips the SPD did have were “old and rusty.” Of greater concern to officers was the lack of rifles to combat a threat such as the AK-47 fired at them by the suspect. Additionally officers felt the checkout process of merely being issued a rifle from an inventory of available rifles did not instill a level of confidence in the weapon because the officers did not necessarily fire that particular weapon at the range. The SPD has since gone to a system of assigning a rifle to an individual officer and the officer is required to check the rifle out for each shift.

IMAGINATION

The Police Foundation team heard many times from not only the Stockton Police Department but also from other law enforcement agencies and the public that the Bank of the West robbery, hostage taking, and pursuit was so unusual that no one could ever prepare for it. While the Police Foundation review team recognizes the complexities of all the events associated with the Bank of the West incident, the team also recognizes the multitude of similar but not identical incidents that have occurred in real life. The Bank of the West was an armed robbery, which became a hostage incident, resulting in a vehicle pursuit, evolving into an active shooter with suspects trying to ambush and kill police officers. Any one of these incidents by itself is difficult to resolve and requires a unique response. Combined, they are a law enforcement agency's nightmare. However, agencies across the country and the world have experienced some or most of these types of incidents, singularly or in combination.

Agencies should not wait for an unusual or complex event to occur before conversations begin about response planning, but rather they should invest in training that creates highly unusual, complex incidents that will not only sharpen response skills but also creative problem solving.

EMOTION

Despite the months that had passed since the events of July 16, 2014, and the completion of this review, some members of the Stockton Police Department are still struggling to understand the extreme level of violence displayed by the suspects and the death of Misty Holt-Singh. During many interview sessions, officers became teary-eyed when they described the scene at Thornton Road and Otto Drive. Some knew Misty and her family and her loss was extremely difficult. Many were self-reflective of the extreme peril they were in and the wonderment that no SPD officers, motorists, or bystanders were killed during the hour-long active shooter pursuit.



The Stockton Police Department's Wellness Network is a comprehensive system of resources concentrated on the well being of all employees. Included in the network is a peer-support program that focuses on the aptitude of the officers selected to perform the duties of peer support. The department also requested the assistance of peer support from a nearby police department. Additionally, the department has a robust chaplaincy program that is well respected by many of the officers interviewed. The department also uses an outside psychologist to assist with stress-related events and issues. Despite all of the resources, and a large department-sponsored stress debriefing session with involved employees, the volume of employees involved in the incident taxed these resources.

The efforts of the SPD illustrate the need for agencies to work with peer-support experts and professional stress experts to develop plans for large-scale traumatic events. Even a robust set of programs can be quickly overwhelmed, particularly when support is needed for those providing support.

LEADERSHIP

"This Is the Way We Do It Now"

There was a time in the history of the Stockton Police Department that a tragic incident like what happened with the Bank of the West robbery would have been dealt with behind the scenes and without much scrutiny.

But you could probably say the same about thousands of other police departments around the nation, where a culture of self-protection at almost any cost could often be found. It was a prominent enough idea that a term—the blue wall of silence—was even generated to depict it.

"That stuff is gone—those days are just gone," said Stockton Police Chief Eric Jones. "This is the way to do it now.

"We can be proud as a department that we are transparent and we can always do better. That's not a knock, that's just the reality of it."





Figure 5 Chief Jones Press Conference

In the Bank of the West case, there were no claims of police misconduct. However, there were serious questions raised regarding the tactics and decision making of police. Of particular consequence was the conclusion of the 62-minute pursuit in which 32 officers fired more than 600 times at the getaway sports-utility vehicle. Ten of those bullets struck Misty Holt-Singh, a 41-year-old wife and mother of two kids held hostage inside the SUV.

“I have kept to my basic stance: My heart goes out to Misty’s family,” Jones said. “I am proud of my staff, they showed bravery and courage, and also I felt that those assailants had to be stopped, but to the exact extent that it happened has to be reviewed.”

Jones was pretty sure not long after the July 16, 2014, bank robbery that he wanted an external review of everything his department did. His feelings were confirmed after meeting with his administrative team who he relies on greatly when making decisions.

They looked at four or five firms that conduct after-incident reviews before settling on the Police Foundation. The chief tasked Deputy Chief Trevor Womack to contact the Police Foundation.

In an email dated July 29, 2014 (13 days after the bank robbery), Womack wrote: “We are exploring possibilities for an objective, detailed review of this entire incident. My knowledge of the

Foundation's review of the [Christopher Dorner](#)¹⁴ incident prompted me to consider reaching out to you regarding the possibility of a similar incident review here in Stockton.”

After some discussion, the Police Foundation agreed to conduct the review. Collectively, Police Foundation officials and Jones determined that the best way to handle an independent review was for the work to be done pro bono. Having the Stockton Police Department pay for the project would only undermine its effectiveness as being independent.

“I give Chief Jones and the SPD a lot of credit,” said Jim Bueermann, president of the Police Foundation. “It’s never easy being scrutinized. Certainly, very few of us would choose to intentionally ask someone else to probe or dissect the things that we have done. But it’s only through this sort of transparent reflection that we as an industry can improve policing as a whole.”

Jones said it was a rather easy decision. He believes police departments that make themselves more transparent ultimately will enjoy more success connecting with their communities, which thereby will improve their abilities to police them.

That also has meant holding department-wide meetings to discuss what happened on that fateful day, while also providing Jones an opportunity to tell the rank and file about his plans for full transparency. It has also meant speaking to the press as often as necessary, Jones said.

“Every time the media wanted to talk to me on this topic, I did,” Jones said. “It was tiring. Many times, I wanted to say in my mind, ‘Come on, we are done with this.’ Someone once told me, ‘You aren’t done with this until they are done with this.’”

The openness has drawn rave reviews, both inside and outside the department, Jones said. Many outsiders were stunned with how quickly Jones acknowledged that it was police bullets that killed Holt-Singh.

For Jones, it was far from stunning. However, that did not mean there was not some resistance from other local leaders at first.

“I just think it is the only way to do it,” Jones said. “I ultimately had to tell the district attorney, the city attorney, and the sheriff that I am doing this. It was all amicable and everything, but it was outside everyone’s comfort zone. But the good thing is, ultimately they all said in solidarity, it is the right thing to do.”

PRE-ESTABLISHED TRUST

Leadership before, during, and immediately following a critical incident sets the tone for the days, weeks, and months to follow. The Stockton Police Department, under the leadership of Chief

¹⁴ <http://www.policefoundation.org/critical-incident-review-library/police-foundation-regional-review-of-police-response-to-the-attacks-by-christopher-dorner/>



Jones, set the stage for how the department would respond to a critical incident such as this. The chief and his command staff had a pre-established network of community leaders that they relied on for input and feedback. The relationship between the executive staff and police officers' labor groups was positive and well established. The chief's organizational philosophy is one of transparency and accountability to the public and the organization. His relationships and philosophies have been put to the test in many ways, from the moment that the robbery suspects entered the bank to well beyond the release of this report.

During interviews, to a person, the employees of the Stockton Police Department supported the chief's decision to speak quickly, publically, and candidly about the events surrounding the bank robbery and death of Misty Holt-Singh. They appreciated his candor and willingness to discuss tough issues surrounding decisions officers made and the need to review all aspects of the incident to determine what the SPD did well, to learn what it can improve upon, and to share these findings publically.



POLICE FOUNDATION TEAM

Rick Braziel served as chief of the Sacramento Police Department from 2008 until his retirement in December 2012, capping 33 years on the force. He increased transparency and community involvement through the creation of a police advisory committee, interfaith leaders' council, youth advisory committee, town hall meetings, and online citizen surveys.

Braziel was the team leader on the Police Foundation's first sentinel event review of the case involving Christopher Dorner. In Braziel's career, he has shown leadership in community policing through his book, *Cop Talk: Essential Communication Skills for Community Policing*. He is a nationally recognized instructor, leading classes at Humboldt State University in team building, communication skills, community policing, and leadership. He received his BA and MA in communication studies from California State University, Sacramento, and an MA in security studies from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School.

Braziel recently assisted the Institute for Intergovernmental Relations with the After-Action Assessment of the Police Response to the August 2014 Demonstrations in Ferguson, Missouri. He also serves as the field team leader in the Police Foundation's Collaborative Reform Initiative: An Assessment of the St. Louis County Police Department.

Devon Bell is the undersheriff of Placer County. He has been with the Placer County Sheriff's Office since 1992. Hired as a deputy sheriff, he worked in every facet of the sheriff's office and progressed through the ranks until he was appointed as the agency's first assistant sheriff in 2006. In 2007, he was appointed as undersheriff. As the agency's second in command, Bell is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the sheriff's office, including oversight of the patrol division, investigations division, support services, North Lake Tahoe operations, and the corrections division.

Bell received his BA in Criminal Justice and completed the MA coursework at the Naval Postgraduate School in 2014. Additionally, he completed the FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Seminar and is a graduate of the FBI National Academy (222nd Session).

George Watson spent 18 years in journalism, working across the country in a variety of capacities that often focused on law enforcement, including serving as the state prison reporter at the *Hartford Courant*. He has also covered general news and politics for the *Associated Press*, the *New York Times*, and most recently, the *San Bernardino Sun*, where he won multiple awards for investigative and breaking news coverage.

He served as the chief of staff for a county supervisor in California, where he dealt with numerous local, state, and federal issues. Watson is a graduate of Hobart College in upstate New York.



APPENDIX

BANK OF THE WEST TIMELINE

2:10 p.m. Three men are dropped off near the Bank of the West branch. They are wearing disguises and dark clothing. They have ammunition taped to their bodies and they are carrying backpacks. They enter the bank and announce their intention to rob it. Misty Holt-Singh, a bank customer using an outside ATM, is grabbed by a suspect and forced inside.

2:11 p.m. Stockton Police Department notified by several 911 calls and a patrol officer being flagged down by a witness.

2:13 p.m. First Stockton police officer arrives at the bank.

2:14 p.m. Second Stockton police officer arrives at the bank.

2:14 p.m. The three suspects walk out of the bank with the bank manager as a hostage and are confronted by an officer in the parking lot. The suspects and hostage flee back inside the bank.

2:17 p.m. The three suspects walk out of the bank branch. Each has a female hostage under his control. They are each pointing a handgun at their hostage. They encounter Stockton police officers, who order them to drop their weapons and give themselves up. They refuse to yield and instead get into a Ford Explorer, owned by one of the hostages, Kelly Huber, who is also the branch manager, and drive away, heading northwest on Thornton Road.

2:18 p.m. One of the suspects accidentally shoots Huber in the leg. She is in the driver's seat. The suspect in the front passenger seat pushes Huber out of the SUV and takes the wheel. Huber lies on the ground, rolling herself to a nearby police officer.

2:20 p.m. Shots ring out. A suspect in the rear of the SUV opens fire with an AK-47, blowing out the back window as he shoots at the lead police car. The patrol vehicle is the first of 14 to be disabled.

2:22 p.m. The suspects head east on Eight Mile road, which travels along the northern edge of the city. The suspect continues firing at police. Speeds reach more than 120 miles per hour. The suspects then head north on Highway 99 toward the city of Lodi. Several dozen police cars are now part of the pursuit.

2:32 p.m. The Explorer exits the highway at Victor Road in Lodi and is last seen heading west into the city before police lose sight of the vehicle.



2:34 p.m. Police officers encounter the Explorer on Cherokee Road and Kettleman Lane and reinstate pursuit. The suspects head south on the surface street.

2:36 p.m. The suspects jump back on Highway 99 and head north, traveling out of the city before again exiting the highway and then getting back on it heading south.

2:48 p.m. The Explorer returns to Stockton and exits the highway at Morada Lane. The suspects wait at the stop sign at the exit ramp, apparently intending to ambush the trailing officers. Unbeknownst to the suspects, SPD Captain Doug Anderson is waiting in an unmarked car on the other side of the ramp. He sees one of the suspects preparing to shoot out of the back window. Anderson fires several shots, possibly wounding the suspect in the arm. The SUV drives off rapidly.

2:51 p.m. Members of the SPD's SWAT team try to strike the getaway vehicle with their BearCat armored vehicle but just miss. The BearCat becomes the primary vehicle in pursuit but cannot keep pace with the Explorer, especially after one of its tires is shot out. The pursuit heads west, eventually passing the Bank of the West branch again.

2:57 p.m. The suspects drive on I-5 north, heading out of Stockton.

3:04 p.m. The suspects exit the freeway. Once again, they get back on I-5 and head south toward Stockton.

3:10 p.m. Another ambush is attempted by the suspects. Police return fire. The Explorer continues on, heading back into the heart of Stockton.

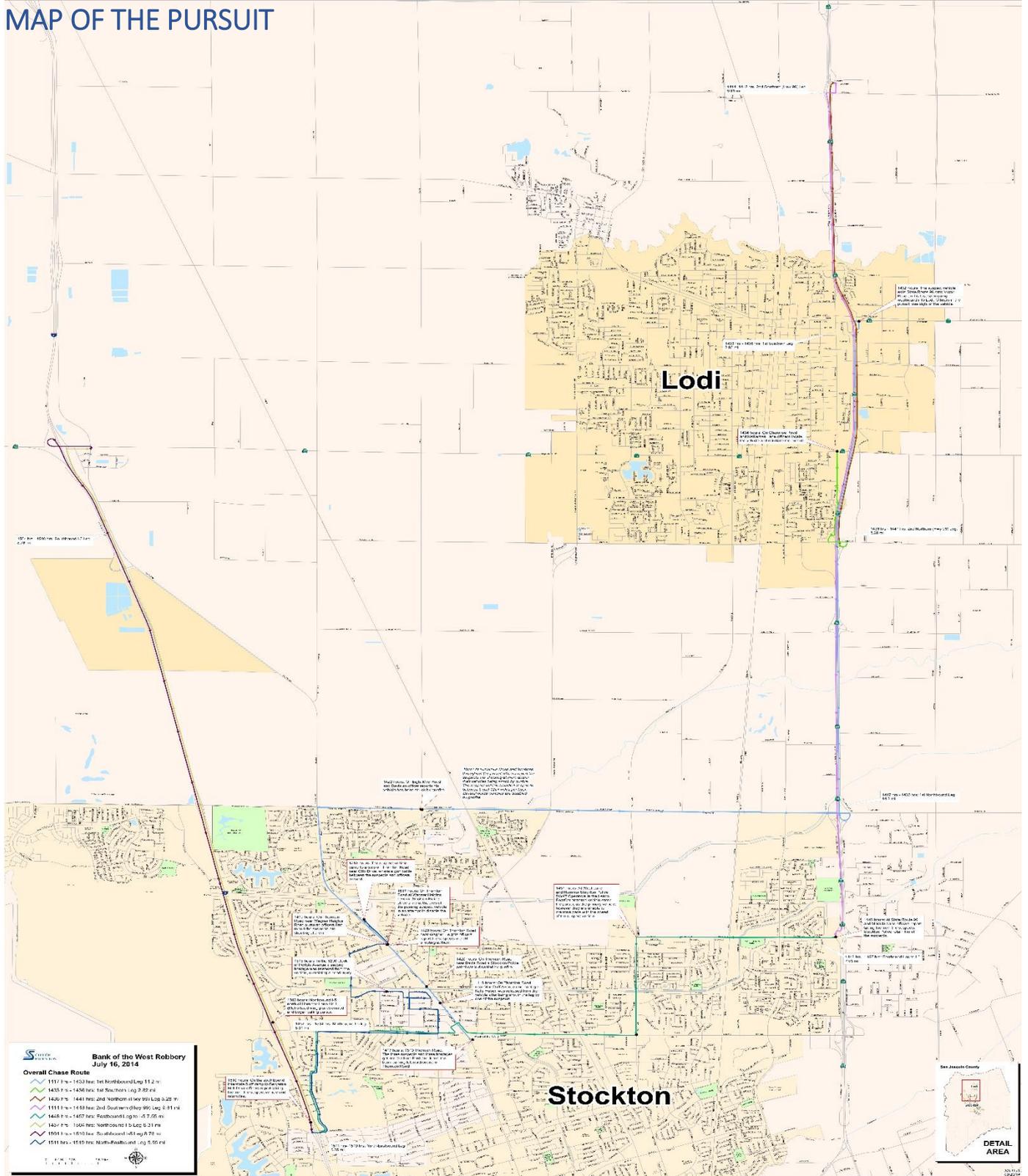
3:15 p.m. Hostage Stephanie Koussaya leaps from the vehicle, sustaining a significant head injury.

3:17 p.m. Officers are on foot and lying in wait for the Explorer on Thornton Road and Wagner Heights. They open fire, taking out the SUV's tires and damaging the engine. The SUV heads northwest on Thornton Road, fishtailing as it loses speed.

3:18 p.m. The Explorer comes to a stop. Police arrive and spread out across the road. The suspects continue shooting at police, who return fire. Officers shoot more than 600 times, riddling the Explorer with bullets. Two suspects are killed. Hostage Singh-Holt is struck by bullets fired by police officers and dies before police can reach her. The third suspect survives by using Holt-Singh as a shield.



MAP OF THE PURSUIT



SIDEBAR STORIES

CAPTAIN DOUG ANDERSON

As Captain Doug Anderson trained his handgun at the man holding an AK-47 from the blown-out back window of the getaway vehicle, one thought took hold of him.

It wasn't that he had never fired his gun in 25 years.

It wasn't that he was retiring in three weeks.

What flashed through his mind were the faces of his wife and two young daughters.

Instinctively, Anderson leaned back in his unmarked Ford Fusion's seat, using the metal pillar between the vehicle's front and rear doors as a shield, and fired three shots from his Sig-40. The suspect, who had been lying in wait to ambush his police pursuers, lurched forward and squeezed off a couple of shots from his assault rifle.

The driver of the vehicle, alarmed because he hadn't seen Anderson sitting in his plain silver car directly to his left, slammed his foot on the accelerator and took off.

"I think I hit him in the arm but I'll never know," Anderson said. "It's irrelevant. I did what I wanted to do, which was to distract him."

He aimed at the moving car and fired two more shots but missed. By that point, what mattered most was he had accomplished his goal: saving his colleagues' lives.

Anderson was never supposed to be involved in the chaos of the pursuit in the first place. He was at police headquarters when the call first came in of a bank robbery with hostages. Anderson had been heading to the Bank of the West to see what help he could provide when it became clear that the chase was heading his way.

He remembers his hands shaking as he drove, not out of fear, but from the rush of adrenaline that guys like captains don't get to feel so often anymore. Too much desk work to be done.

Rather than find a way to get involved in the pursuit, Anderson did what he has tried to do his entire career: Outthink the bad guys.

Over the years, his colleagues would express amazement at his knack for catching criminals. Every time, he would explain how: Instead of letting the criminal dictate the action, Anderson would go to where he thought they might head.

"It led to a lot of sitting around and waiting and sometimes having nothing happen," Anderson said. "But then sometimes, they come to you. And that's when you get them."



Anderson drove further south on Highway 99, getting off at the Morada Lane exit. The freeway's entrance and exit ramps converged at the same point. It was a good spot if the suspects chose that exit. At first, Anderson stopped his car across the frontage road from the exit, but then realized he was placing himself in the potential line of fire from his trailing colleagues.

He drove to the entrance ramp, pulled over to the shoulder, and waited.

Moments before the suspects' sports-utility vehicle arrived, a lieutenant's voice came across the radio, reminding the officers that there were hostages on board and not to shoot. Suddenly, the SUV was there, waiting behind another car at a stop light.

Anderson could see the profile of the driver.

The guy is clearly wearing bank robber garb, Anderson thought to himself.

He strongly considered a headshot, but the words of the lieutenant came to mind and he hesitated. But then movement at the rear of the vehicle caught his eye. A man leaned out of the back. The window had already been shattered. The man pointed his assault weapon back toward the exit ramp, and Anderson knew immediately that they were preparing an ambush.

"They had had a total opportunity to get away and dump the hostages. It was a perfect location," Anderson said. "They wanted to kill cops, no doubt about it."

Anderson did not pause this time, firing three shots, sending the suspects fleeing from the scene. What had taken only about 15 seconds felt like several minutes. He later heard that the AK-47 shooter moved a lot slower from that point on. Anderson thinks maybe he wounded him, but he isn't sure, and ultimately, he doesn't really care.

"I never even got on the air afterward," Anderson said of using his radio. "They were gone. My job was done."

JOEY SILVA

As they say, it's one thing to talk the talk.

And when the Stockton Police Department found itself besieged with reporters from across the country with questions about the bank robbery that left a hostage dead, their public information officer made sure his department walked it. He answered each one as best he could, regardless of the tragic and embarrassing conclusion to the July 2014 ordeal.

"Our strategy was always to be open and transparent," said Officer Joey Silva, who had been the department's PIO for two years at the time of the Bank of the West robbery. "Chief (Eric) Jones has always been about that. This was our big test."



The department surprised many with its candor when Jones announced early on that bullets fired from his officers took the life of hostage Misty Singh-Holt.

Much of the reason for the candor was based on Jones' leadership as a chief. He is known in Stockton for getting out in front of issues. He has created a community advisory board as one of several ways to better connect with Stockton residents.

But as the chief will acknowledge, he gets a lot of great advice from his executive team, which includes Silva. And it was a talk that Silva had with Jones that remained crucial.

"One of the conversations I had with the chief was that this was going to be something that sticks with him for his career," Silva said. "It wasn't going away."

Jones readily agreed. The family wanted to have answers, Silva said, leading to the decision to try to work closely with Singh-Holt's husband, Paul Singh. During one of the press conferences, the department asked her sister to stand with them, which she agreed to do.

"The room just got silent," Silva recalled of announcing the circumstances of Singh-Holt's death. "It shocked the reporters that the chief told it."

Throughout the ordeal and the aftermath that followed, Stockton's public information department has helped ease the horrific situation.

As soon as Silva heard the news of a bank robbery with hostages, he, his assistant, and a department chaplain sprung to action:

- They headed to the bank and assessed the situation: Holt-Singh's then-12-year-old daughter was there. So too were members of her family. And the number of reporters kept on growing.
- Silva and his assistant took to social media, via a tablet, to alert Stockton's residents about what was unfolding.
- Silva's mobile phone just kept ringing with calls from local and national news agencies. He answered when he could and then listened to the voicemails as soon as he had a moment. He made sure to return each and every one.
- They created a media staging area across the street from the bank. Silva wanted to get the reporters away from the traumatized family members. But there was another reason, too.

"I wanted the backdrop to be the bank rather than a shot-up SUV," Silva said, explaining that he always thinks about backdrops based on his time as a homicide detective.

At one point, Silva also had to secure the scene for safety reasons after hearing that the suspects' vehicle was heading toward the bank. At another, he had to quash a report that Holt-Singh's



daughter was also in the getaway vehicle. Silva said the reporter later apologized to him for the error.

When he learned that Holt-Singh was dead, Silva waited for the family members to leave the scene before breaking the news to the media.

From there came two press conference that night and another the next day. They made sure to also focus on the fact that the suspects had shot repeatedly at police with an assault weapon, disabling a dozen police vehicles during the pursuit. And as often as they could afterward, police officials released new pieces of information.

While the department's reputation has been bruised by the tragedy, Silva is sure it would have been much worse without the relationship with local reporters. And as Silva explained, that doesn't just happen overnight.

When he got the job, he made sure to meet with every reporter who covered local law enforcement. He gave them his cell phone number and told them to call him anytime. When he can and when it will not compromise the investigation, Silva gives the media a call on upcoming police actions and even invites them to come along.

Ultimately, Silva said, what it comes down to is hard work and an open, transparent relationship with the media and community. Just recently, the department dealt with a traffic accident that took the life of a pedestrian. While not as complex as the bank robbery, Silva and his assistant both headed out to the scene and went to work.

"We always try to train and act like it's the big one," Silva said. "We are going to do it accurately. And we aren't putting out any information that we haven't double-checked, triple-checked. It's just the way we do things."

In the days after the ordeal, Silva emailed reporters with an unusual request: He asked for their critique.

"It's just about relationship building and learning how I can do my job better," Silva explained.



PEER SUPPORT CAN SUSTAIN A DEPARTMENT FACING THE WORST

As the saying goes, the best way to learn something is to do it yourself.

Members of the Stockton Police Department's Wellness Network found that particularly true in the aftermath of the Bank of the West robbery. Stockton had started a peer-support program years earlier but in the months leading up to the tragic incident, Chief Eric Jones instituted a more complete network to tackle the overall health of his department.

It was desperately needed after the robbery. Officers took fire from an AK-47 for more than an hour in the pursuit, leading to 14 police vehicles being disabled from the semi-automatic weapon's rounds. A total of 33 of the officers had fired more than 600 shots at the suspects' car at four different locations. They killed two bank robbers but also took the life of a hostage. Emotions ran incredibly high.

"Everything happened at once," said a sergeant and member of the network. "It was a lot of trial by fire."

The Wellness Network is an attempt to promote mental and physical health. It includes members of the department and local chaplains who volunteer their time. The department contracts with a psychiatrist. The network's goals also include promoting physical activity as a de-stressing component to cops' daily lives.

On the night of the shooting, members of the peer-support team, coupled with police chaplains, spent hours at a local hotel talking to officers who had fired their weapons. Sometimes it meant providing a hug. Other times it meant deeper conversations because some of the officers knew Misty Holt-Singh, the hostage who was killed.

"It was a miracle that no cop was shot," the sergeant said. "We just kept meeting with guys and telling them how grateful we were and how grateful that no one was shot. We spent most of the night doing it."

They kept doing the same in the days and weeks that followed because this was an incident that everyone knew would stick with them for years to come. The department's psychiatrist made herself available to everyone involved. Many took the opportunity to unload their troubles to her. Others chose not to, mostly because they simply did not want to, while a few just were uninterested in making the 40-minute drive to her office in the city of Modesto.

In the days that followed, Jones went out of his way to address his department as often as he could. He talked to them before every press conferences, so everyone knew what he was going to say, particularly the first time he announced that it was gunfire from police that took Holt-Singh's life. And he chose to hold a debriefing session at a nearby sports arena because so many people were involved. The goal was to allow everyone to discuss what had happened to him or her.



“Everyone got to hear the entire story,” said the sergeant. “We had a turnout of more than 100. It was a huge success to be able to go around the room and just talk about what each had experienced. We started with dispatchers and then went through the whole thing.”

Historically, cops are some of the worst at talking about their feelings, whether it is incidents like this or just the general life struggles that can wear a person down. But the sergeant said he believes the experiences officers had through peer support has altered what they think about it.

“I have noticed a change to all people who are part of peer support,” he said. “They treat officers differently, but in a good way. They are more likely to talk, to open up to it. I have noticed that it really has changed.”

That doesn’t mean everything worked perfectly. Jones said it helped reveal weak points in the program as a whole.

“We are stripping down the whole program to build it back up again,” Jones said.

That entails everyone involved in it reapplying for positions on the peer-support team. In some cases, Jones and the sergeant said, people who were involved were better off not being part of it.

“You start to identify those who are in an assignment more for themselves, to talk more about themselves, rather than let people unload as they need to be able to do,” the sergeant said.

Other things they learned:

- The cops who shoot are not the only ones who need peer support. That can include everyone who is involved.
- Confidentiality is key. That is why the psychiatrist stays in Modesto, so cops can go see her anonymously.
- Issues will keep arising, both through stories from traditional news sources but also social media rants. Cops, peer-support members found, are fervent online readers when it comes to incidents they have been part of.
- Make sure you have protocol in place to ensure you have enough chaplains available. Only a few chaplains came that first night because most were tied up in their regular services. Now the department has a plan to ensure more are available when needed.
- Some chaplains can be a little too enthusiastic in trying to speak with officers. Training chaplains as part of the program helps eliminate that problem.
- Currently, the department has about 15 members in its peer-support program. The goal is to get it to 25. Training is being offered. And one other aspect is being considered: trying to have at least 75 percent of the members be cops and 25 percent civilians. In the past, that figure has been closer to 50/50.



“Cops just tend to connect better with cops,” said a department chaplain.

The chaplain added that he is very optimistic about the role a wellness program can play, not only in Stockton but also in the law enforcement industry.

“I see this department being ready for a major transformation, which is happening in general in the police industry,” the chaplain said. “We are a youthful department...and we want to enable them to be happy and healthy as they go out and work in our community, which really needs their help.”



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MISTY HOLT-SINGH KILLED BY POLICE BULLETS

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POLICE USE FACEBOOK TO SHOW PHOTOS OF DAMAGE

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HOSTAGE, BANK ROBBERS KILLED IDENTIFIED

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BANK ROBBERS WERE MEMBER OF LOCAL VIOLENT GANG

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COVERAGE OF MISTY HOLT-SINGH

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