

BJA-FUNDED VESTS HELPS SAVE OFFICER LIVES

Save No: 3101

Justin D. Conley, Officer	Classification: Assault with a handgun
Mount Orab Police Department	Day: Sunday
211 South High Street	Date: January 3, 2010
Mt. Orab, OH 45154	Time: 04:00 hours

Officer Justin D. Conley was dispatched to handle a call of disorderly person in a local fast food restaurant. He arrived and encountered two males who had been drinking alcohol. They were argumentative with other store clients and directed a gender slur at a female store manager. Officer Hodges arrived as backup. The officers calmed the situation and instructed the offending males to leave the store and call for a ride home.

Officer Hodges was called away to handle a station report of a stolen vehicle. Conley left the store and drove to a nearby parking lot. As he was writing his report he observed that the two males had disregarded instruction to arrange for a ride home. He stopped the individuals and determined the driver was operating a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol. Drug paraphernalia was observed on the front passenger floor. The male passenger claimed ownership. Conley arrested and transported the subjects to station for booking.

The suspect were issued citations and released. Office Conley called a number provided by the cited driver and arranged for them to be transported from the police station to home. Conley completed processing evidence and then left the building to retrieve from his patrol car the snack his wife had packed from him before he left home for his shift.

As Officer Conley walked toward his police car he heard a click and turned to observe the driver standing behind him pointing a revolver in his direction. The subject fired hitting Conley in the right lower back. The .357 full metal jacketed bullet impacted and was stopped by Conley's ballistic armor. Conley moved forward away from the threat seeking cover. He broadcast a report that he was shot and a warning to Officer Hodges not to exit the building.

Conley found cover as gunfire continued. He had weapon in hand when Officer Hodges engaged the shooter stopping the assault. The assailant was justifiably killed after firing five times.

Officer Conley was transported to a hospital where he was examined and treated for a backface signature injury. He was released from the hospital after five hours and recovered at home. Conley has recovered.

Management lesson: Officer survival requires constant vigilance and situational awareness. Hearing and reacting to a sound that was likely the cocking of a revolver can be the margin between death and life. Mental and physical readiness to handle the unexpected is a key to officer survival. Normally the first rule of survival is to go to cover. Broadcasting a threat decreases the probability that an assisting officer will be injured or killed.

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Nicholas J. Gattermeyer, Officer	Classification: Motor vehicle crash
West Chester Police Department	Day: Tuesday
9577 Beckett Road, Ste 500	Date: November 24, 2009
West Chester, OH 45069	Time: 0148 hours

Officer Nicholas J. Gattermeyer was working solo overnight patrol early on Tuesday morning before the Thanksgiving Holiday. He reports that a call of a burglary in progress was dispatched. Gattermeyer was en route to the call when he lost control of his patrol vehicle when he went off the right side of the roadway. The vehicle crossed the roadway going off the left side striking a mailbox and sideswiped a utility pole along the left rear side of the patrol car. The patrol vehicle then crashed into a tree, rotated 180°, and came to a stop facing in the opposite direction of travel.

Officer Gattermeyer reported, "My vehicle was traveling at 78 miles per hour upon impact." The speed estimate reported by the crash reconstruction team set the speed at the start of the crash event considerably higher and was reduced as Gattermeyer aggressively braked. The police cruiser impacted the tree at a 20° angle directing energy toward the passenger side of the patrol car. It was reported that both headlights from the cruiser were found a distance of more than 100' from the point of impact with the tree.

Officer Gattermeyer was critically injured and trapped in the wreckage. Other officers located the crash and assisted in extracting Gattermeyer from the mangled car. He suffered fractures, lacerations, and a traumatic brain injury that left him in a coma for three days. He was transported to University Hospital where he remained for one week. He was then transferred to a rehabilitation facility and was able to return home in early December.

The crash investigators determined factors contributing to Officer Gattermeyer's survival "included his seat belt keeping him more stable and his bullet-resistant vest and gun belt acting as energy absorbers..."ⁱ Officer Gattermeyer reported, "I had no injuries to my body that was covered by body armor". Officer Gattermeyer continues his recovery from injuries that could have been fatal and plans to continue his police career.

Management Lesson: Safety equipment is meaningless unless it is faithfully used by officers. Leaders should specify by written police and frequent inspection use of safety items such as seatbelts and ballistic body armor. Body armor provides an officer with protection from a variety of threats. The damaging affect of blunt force trauma associated with a motor vehicle crash is frequently mitigated by an officer's ballistic vest. Motor vehicle related incidents commonly cause police disabilities and deaths. Pre and in-service emergency vehicle operations training must stress that an officer is responsible and obligated to maneuver a police vehicle at a safe operating speed.

ⁱ News.cincinnati.com, December 28, 2009

Save No: 3096

Donald Pete Abrams, Sergeant	Classification: Explosive device (NG)
Casper Police Department	Day: Saturday
201 N. David	Date: February 20, 2010
Casper, WY 82601	Time: 1221 hours

Sergeant Donald Abrams responded along with other officers to a report that a 44 year old male was suicidal. The officers were aware that this individual planned to open the natural gas line in the residence and cause an explosion. While en route to the incident Sergeant Abrams requested that fire, emergency medical, and gas company personnel stage at a command post that was established one block from the residence.

A perimeter was established around the residence and nearby homes evacuated. Officers were shut off gas flow to the home at the gas meter. Negotiators were unable to establish contact with the subject. The home was ventilated by officers employing 40mm beanbag and foam projectiles to break window glass. Shortly thereafter communications was established with the subject and he agreed to surrender to authorities. However, the subject did not make good on his promise and remained barricaded in his residence.

The front door to the residence consisted of two steel doors secured with a combination lock. Sergeant Abrams and Officer Ben Mattila were tasked to open the front door to expedite ventilation of the residence. They were unable to open the combination lock. The officers pulled back before approaching for the purpose of using a ram to force the doors open. This effort also failed as the subject had barricaded the doors. The officers then focused on breaking out the glass portion of the doors. Abrams was breaking the glass in the second door panel when the residence exploded. The force of the explosion tossed Abrams and Mattila a distance from the residence. Abrams landed 15' from the front doors on top of a brick pile. The officers retreated unassisted from where they landed.

Officer Mattila and Sergeant Abrams were treated by hospital emergency room staff for blast injuries. Abrams suffered minor bruising of his lungs and fluid on the ear drums. Abrams body armor protected his torso from injuries.

Investigators concluded that during the confusion resulting from evacuating the adjoining properties the subject had slipped unnoticed out the back door and turned on the natural gas supply to his home. The subject apparently triggered the explosion as the officers battered glass from the front door panels. The subject died in the explosion.

Management Lesson: Body armor affords an officer protection from a variety of threats. A suicidal individual may have no concern for the survival of others. Perimeter security can be challenging as officers often must multitask. This is especially true during the confusing that often accompanies the period of initial response and while achieving absolute control of a scene – criminal, accidental, or natural. Employment of a tactical team may create a delay in solving a problem but may minimize potential for disability or death.

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Save No: 3093

Christopher Alan Young, Corporal	Classification: Assault with a handgun
Oak Hill Police Department	Day: Thursday
691 Virginia Street	Date: March 18, 2010
Oak Hill, WV 25901	Time: 0428 hours

Corporal Christopher Alan Young was working solo patrol duty. He initiated a traffic stop. Corporal Young followed procedure by notifying the dispatcher of his location and a description of the vehicle. Young was unable to provide the dispatcher with a plate number but reported that the plate was likely issued by the state of Ohio.

The target vehicle stopped and the driver immediately exited the driver's door. The driver began firing a handgun at Corporal Young. One bullet impacted Young's level IIIA body armor center mass. This bullet was stopped by Young's body armor. A second round penetrated the lower portion of the driver's door on Young patrol truck. The shooter fled away in his vehicle.

Corporal Young held his ground and alerted the dispatcher of his situation. Officers from Oak Hill Police Department along with county, state, and nearby municipal agencies responded to Young call for assistance. Young was examined by EMS on scene and transported to a local hospital for follow up examination. He suffered a backface signature contusion from the bullet strike on his body armor.

A suspect in this shooting has not been identified. Investigators have a person of interest with known links to drug trafficking in West Virginia. This individual is from Columbus, Ohio and has a history of criminal gang affiliation. The matter remains under investigation.

Management lesson: It is impossible to predict with any level of certainty when an officer will experience a potential lethal force encounter. Police officers are best served when an agency enacts a mandatory vest wear policy and inspects for compliance.

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Save No: 3073

Barney E. Parsons, Corporal	Classification: Assault with a handgun
Fort Smith Police Department	Day: Sunday
100 South 10 th Street	Date: November 1, 2009
Ft. Smith, AR 72901	Time: 0118 hours

Corporal Barney E. Parsons was working a Saturday evening DWI enhanced enforcement program. He was positioned to observe an intersection when a white pickup truck stopped and then accelerated away reaching an excessive speed.

Corporal Parsons attempted to overtake the white truck but was unable to do so. The driver of the truck turned at an intersection. When Parsons made the same turn the vehicle was not in view. Parsons concluded that the driver had turned into a driveway waiting for the police to leave the area.

Parsons continued and crested a grade. He observed the white truck stopped in the middle of the roadway with all lights turned on. Parsons became suspicious when he observed that the driver's door was standing ajar. He started to notify the dispatcher of his location and situation when the driver of the truck executed an ambush.

The driver's door of the truck was thrust open. Parsons moved to exit the patrol vehicle as the driver of the truck leans out the door firing using his right hand what was determined to be a 9mm pistol. The shooter exits the truck and advances toward Corporal Parsons while shooting. The shooter fired the 9mm pistol nine times.

Parsons is shot twice in the right leg and the third bullet impacted him center chest. The bullet to the chest was stopped by the level II vest worn by Corporal Parsons.

The shooter continues to advance and shooting. The shot to the chest took Parsons to the ground. He suffered a gunshot wound to the bottom of his right foot.

The shooter moved back toward his vehicle. Corporal Parsons fired at his assailant but was unaware if he had injured him. As the shooter fled away in his truck Parsons used his portable radio to summon aid. He was transported to a hospital where he remained for three days for treatment of the gunshot wounds to his leg and foot.

The shooter walked into a New Mexico Division of Public Safety Port of Entry at San Jon. He told personnel on duty that his vehicle was broken down on I-40 and made a spontaneous utterance that he had shot a police officer in Fort Smith. The shooter was identified as having no known criminal history. The shooter was returned unharmed to Arkansas on November 5th and is charged with attempted capital murder of a police officer.

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