

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT



Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D

The National Police Association's free Law Enforcement education series is designed for home school, classroom, or independent learning. As part of our nonprofit educational mission, it prepares you for careers in public safety. This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#)

Published by the National Police Association. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

The [National Police Association](#) is a 501(c)3 Alliance/Advocacy nonprofit in the IRS Educational Organizations category. Donations are tax-deductible.

Table of Contents

- 1** Law Enforcement in Rough Waters
- 4** Those Dam Cops
- 8** Policing in the Wild
- 12** The Alphabet Soup
- 15** Police Pilots Face Dangers
- 18** The Cops Everybody Loves
- 21** The FTO and the Future of Policing
- 24** Behind the Badge Behind Detention Walls
- 27** SWAT – America’s Specialty Peace Keepers
- 31** Specialty Cops – Why We Need Them
- 37** About The Author

Law Enforcement in Rough Waters

While there are police units specifically assigned to water safety, every officer is a general-purpose emergency responder and may find themselves saving lives at risk from drowning.

A special force of Metropolitan Las Vegas police rescue officers deployed to save a couple being washed away in flood waters while trapped in their van. Their police helicopter took off to search for the couple in distress. Located at about 3 a.m. the van's occupants were plucked from the vehicle by an officer hoisted from the hovering Airbus H135 which was navigating wind, rain, and utility lines. The older couple had pulled to the side of the road earlier to rest and were overcome by unexpected flooding due to heavy rainfall. Metro search and rescue engages in over 100 rescues every year.

Swift water from torrential rains in California surprised a woman and her two children on September 12th when a flash flood turned their street into a raging river. San Bernadino Police officers were responding to an unrelated call when they arrived to find the family in distress and waded into the torrent to pull everyone to safety. "Our officers do not encounter swift-water floods often, however it doesn't stop them from jumping into action and saving lives," San Bernardino's Police Chief Darren Goodman wrote on Twitter.

A July 30 Twitter announcement from the Apache Junction Police stated "On July 28, 2022, the Apache Junction Police Department responded to 24 different

calls for service related to flooding.” A woman stuck in her car in flood waters was rescued by an APJPD officer with the assistance of others at the scene. The woman’s dog that had been in the vehicle could not be located.

A similar scene occurred in Alabama during heavy June rains that flooded streets and stranded motorists. Gasden, AL police officer Braxton Keener responded to a distress call from trapped motorists and assisted them to safety.

In June a Walla Walla, Washington police officer was able to lasso a cat from a fast-moving flooded waterway, saving it from the species’ noted disdain for immersion. In July the Kentucky State Police in coordination with the Kentucky Division of Wildlife performed a dozen searches and three rescues during flooding near the city of Jackson. St. Louis County police had to break a car window to reach a man trapped in flooding in the city of St. Charles in a July 26th rescue.

In August, a man was rescued when he suffered a medical emergency while driving and sped into a New York pond, sinking in 15 feet of water. New York State Police, Trooper Rush came on the scene and literally dove into action to pull the man to safety.

Unusual monsoon-type rains have inundated urban areas and rural waterways with unexpected flooding. Those areas where canals and lakes are part of the first responder landscape find water rescues part of their routine. Other areas, like many of those noted here, are likely to find uniformed police officers the first on the scene. While officers are trained in basic water rescue,

implements are sometimes hastily obtained from whatever might be available. Spare tires as flotation devices, tow ropes and straps for reaching victims, and batons for forcing open windows replace the tools available for a full-time water rescue unit.

Getting into the water is especially hazardous for officers who are already carrying over 30 pounds of gear. Boots are not ideal for swimming and ballistics vests are not flotation devices. Whether to take time setting aside a few thousand dollars of taxpayer-funded equipment attached to their duty uniform that might be ruined by filthy floodwaters or stolen by opportunistic bystanders is a snap decision to be made. Unless the rescue is in a pristine mountain stream, rescuers may also face dangerous floating debris, frightened animals both aquatic and normally land-based, and chemical and biological hazards unleashed from their usual places.

Whether it's performing CPR on a child submerged in a swimming pool, balancing on a slippery shore to toss a line, or diving to a sinking vehicle, police officers find a way to rescue when duty calls.

Those Dam Cops

No doubt the Hoover Dam Police are tired of the old joke of the headline, but they exist and represent a critical function of law enforcement. Recent attacks on major power grids have resurrected concerns about protecting critical infrastructure that the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks highlighted over twenty years ago. Specialty police like the Hoover Dam cops and those protecting nuclear facilities are not available for the vast majority of properties at risk of attack.

On Christmas day, 2022, two men attacked four electrical substations in Washington State. As a result over 15,000 were without power and an estimated \$3 million in damage was caused. Although the motive, according to one suspect, was to knock out alarm systems so that a business could be burglarized the specter of terrorism remains.

Other attacks include shootings at two electric substations in North Carolina in early December of last year and damage to two other substations in South Carolina. In addition to the Washington attacks, Oregon was also hit with attacks on power stations in October and November.

With more than 55,000 power substations across the nation, the relatively small number of firearms attacks on them may seem minor, but the sudden spate of damage to them is cause for concern. Without arrests, law enforcement has yet to determine if the incidents

are connected to a terrorist motive, but experts are on heightened alert.

Having worked at one time for an agency located along the Mississippi river at the time of the World Trade Center attacks, the focus on terrorism added new concerns for patrol. The Mississippi is peppered with a system of locks and dams that assist in flood control vital for commercial river traffic essential for shipping agricultural and other products. Bridges along the way connect major east/west highway routes, not to mention the riverside industries sustained by America's waterways.

Other potential targets for economic chaos that would bring an evil grin to terrorists include petroleum refineries, railroads, and pipelines. In 1982 over 250 refineries were operating in the U.S. Now there are about 130. Despite the move toward non-fossil fuels, the petroleum industry is vital to innumerable products used in our daily lives. A coordinated attack – whether by traditional means or cyber crime – risks crippling our national security. The expense and regulatory burden of building a new refinery mean that lost facilities are not likely to be replaced.

Local law enforcement is the key to protecting all these assets. The diminution of law enforcement strength not only affects the response to traditional crimes but weakens our national security in a very real way. Gathering collective intelligence to establish patterns is a challenge without a centralized database for reporting attacks on infrastructure.

In addition to targets that can cause widespread outages and expensive repairs, damage from irresponsible vandals using such facilities as random target practice is a concern that may not be reported as potential intentional acts designed to disrupt power sources. Like stop signs and street lights, publicly exposed utilities are tempting to that select brand of idiots driving around with rifles and shotguns itching to destroy something.

Vandalism or terroristic attacks are not the only reason for criminals to damage facilities. When scrap metal values are high the amount of copper in electrical equipment is a profitable harvest for thieves.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has issued a terrorism advisory bulletin which was distributed just before the attacks in the Carolinas. The threat, according to the briefing, comes from both potentially organized criminal cells and disgruntled “lone wolf” actors who may have a variety of grievances and motivations. Internet chatter indicates that there is recruitment for others to join the mayhem.

An expert in infrastructure security within Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency says it is known by intelligence agencies that bad actors are pre-positioning assets to conduct attacks when it might be useful to them in matters of geopolitical maneuvering. Russia’s use of attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure is an example and deserves a study of their methods and targets.

Threats of cyber attacks loom as well, but the physical security of the fragile web of power sources, bridges, roads, and dams around the country rests largely on the diligence of local law enforcement to discover, prevent, and prosecute offenders. Citizens don't often think of local law enforcement as essential to national security, but the officer on patrol is a critical element in keeping us all safe from disaster.

Policing in the Wild

One interesting law enforcement specialty is wildlife enforcement. These officers are a mix of police officer, biologist, search and rescue specialist, public education officer, and organized crime fighter. Game wardens, park rangers, conservation agents or whatever title they use have responsibilities to human, animal, plant, and geological resource protection. They are found on state and local lands, bodies of water, and even city parks.

On the federal level, there are several layers of outdoors law enforcement. The U.S Fish and Wildlife Service is an agency of the Cabinet Office of the Interior with primary responsibility over federal wetlands and wildlife refuge areas. The National Park Service maintains its own force of law enforcement rangers and investigators to deal with criminal activity and public safety in our national parks.

Not all federally owned or managed lands are national parks or wildlife sanctuaries. The Bureau of Land Management deals with federal properties, many of which have mining, forestry, oil production, or other resource extraction operations. The bureau has its own law enforcement team, as does the U.S. Forest Service. The U.S. Park Police are most visible in Washington D.C. but are also deployed in other federal park lands. Even the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office has a law enforcement division.

Each state employs wildlife enforcement officers and park rangers with various responsibilities. In high tourist traffic areas, the traffic and crime issues are similar to any population. In addition, there are issues of preservation of historic artifacts and structures that are subject to vandalism and theft. Fugitives finding refuge in isolated areas is not uncommon and pose a special threat to these officers that often work alone and in remote areas.

Search and rescue operations are a natural part of these outdoors officers. Adventure seekers, both proficient and foolish, can find themselves in unexpected danger. Those who are lost and injured often naively expect a quick helicopter rescue, but the complexity of extrication from the wilderness requires a trained team with much technical knowledge.

Maintaining a balance of the ecosystem of both public and private lands is often accomplished by licensing and regulation. Enforcing these in the field requires diplomacy and sometimes stealth. Officers sometimes work undercover, sometimes under leaves and brush! The one thing every officer in the fields and mountainsides knows is that nearly everyone they contact is armed with deadly weapons.

In addition to the danger involved in working alone in remote areas, these officers face serious criminals. Certain animal products are very valuable in international trade and poachers accept the risks of encountering law enforcement agents. These parts hunters harvest the organ or body part that they can sell and leave the wasted carcass of the animal to rot.

Investigative efforts include special forensic examinations and dangerous undercover work. Hunting tour guides are carefully licensed so that natural resources remain in balance. Those operating outside the law often will use illegal tactics to ensure that their clients get a trophy animal.

Organized criminal elements use our national lands as rent-free property for growing or making illicit drugs. Even in states, like Colorado, where marijuana can be grown, sold, and used legally, offenders often associated with international criminal enterprises, cultivate marijuana in remote areas of public lands. Not only are these products unregulated and untaxed, they are grown with no regard to the environment. In fact, many prosecutions for marijuana related offenses on federal land are charges related to environmental crimes, rather than for the illegal drug. Drought conditions and water rights are ignored as are the dangers of chemicals used to cultivate and process the crop. Mobile meth labs also leave their indelible mark on pristine lands. Even officers doing biology studies like bird counts and fire danger surveys must be aware of the possibility of coming across a criminal enterprise guarded by booby traps or armed guards.

These officers must be adept at all kinds of rescues. This requires hours of training in rope techniques, emergency medicine, and navigation. In addition to a typical four-wheel drive SUV loaded with equipment, the ability to work around or in helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft is required. Outdoor officers may pilot a drone, operate an ATV, navigate with watercraft, all

while being prepared to hike miles on foot in hostile terrain.

For most officers who choose to work in conservation law enforcement, the job is their dream career. While their more urban counterparts may make light of their job as “tree cops” or “possum cops”, these officers garner great respect for their many skills to respond to the demands of working in the wild.

The Alphabet Soup

When in Washington D.C. or watching newsworthy events on television, it may be hard to keep up with what agency is attending to what event. The plainclothes and secret agents with law enforcement tasks can't always be spotted with the ubiquitous earphones and wrist microphones, but they are there!

In addition to Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police with an authorized strength of over 3,400 (although dealing with many resignations and retirements creating a staff shortage) and the transit police of nearly 500, nearly every branch and unit of the federal government has its own police including the Supreme Court with its own uniformed police force. Even the Smithsonian Institute has an armed security force with special police powers.

Patrolling other areas of federal property and national monuments is the U.S. Park Police under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service within the Department of the Interior. Across the country park rangers, investigators, and even SWAT teams operate to protect persons on public lands. The U.S. Park Police number over 600 members and was instituted by President George Washington.

The U.S. Secret Service, most visibly by its uniformed division, keeps an eye on the White House and with human and technological resources protecting the perimeter and grounds. While famous for dignitary protection, the Secret Service was originally part of the

Treasury Department and still retains its primary mission of protecting the integrity of our currency from counterfeiting and fraud. It is now under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security.

HSI, or Homeland Security Investigations, is a new major player in federal law enforcement. With broad mandates and resources, HSI targets a number of national security threats and criminal activity. The CIA, FBI (which also has a uniformed division), DEA, ICE, DIA, and others we probably aren't supposed to know about, engage in covert activity in a city crawling with potential for espionage.

The Pentagon has the Pentagon Force Protection Agency with the Pentagon Police being the uniformed officers seen around the institution, with about 500 officers. Of course, the military law enforcement agencies have a presence as well. The military has Army and Marine military police as well as their criminal investigators (CID), Air Force Security Forces and Office of Special Investigations (OSI), and NCIS, the Navy's investigative arm of television fiction fame. The Department of Defense Police are found on military installations as civilian counterparts to their military law enforcement.

Federal facilities are patrolled by the Federal Protective Service, another uniformed division of Homeland Security. Buildings that house federal agencies rely on the FPS. The Veterans Affairs Police are seen at VA facilities. The U.S. Marshals remain responsible for court security and, more famously, for pursuing fugitives from justice.

One example of the pooling of resources is dignitary protection. When high-profile officials travel, we expect that the Secret Service is staffing the VIP protection detail. During the presidential election months when candidates meet the threshold to be given federal law enforcement protection, agents from other departments are recruited. The plainclothes agent milling around in the crowd or wearing the dark suit and sunglasses might be from the Capitol Police, U.S. Marshal's Service, or any of the other alphabet agencies.

Coordination among dozens of agencies during events that create the need for a massive law enforcement response is a challenge. When hundreds of thousands of marchers, millions of visitors, and occasional outbreaks or threats of violence, no single agency can bear the burden of maintaining law and order. On rare occasions, National Guard or federal troops may be authorized. Routine use of the military to engage in civilian law enforcement is prohibited by law. The United States has a unique separation from civilian and military law enforcement, an important aspect of freedom from federal oppression embedded in the Constitution and the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878.

Police Pilots Face Dangers

Two officers have died this year as of this writing during police helicopter operations. There were six in 2022 and one in 2020. Sixteen police officers have been killed in aircraft in the line of duty over the past decade. Although the number of officers who died in this manner is small compared to the 1,756 who fell during the decade, the tragedies are significant. Since aircraft are staffed by co-pilots and observers, crashes often kill and injure more than one person at a time. Injured persons and civilians killed aboard the crashes are not counted in the official toll.

Air operations, whether by helicopter or fixed-wing craft, are a vital asset to law enforcement for criminal interdiction and emergency rescue. The first police aviation unit is attributed to New York City with fixed-wing aircraft just after WW1, as the value of aircraft had been proven and a cadre of pilots had been trained.

As helicopter technology also improved during the war times of the 1940s and 1950s, rotor wing craft became the preferred police air unit with its flexibility. Fixed-wing units are still widely used for a variety of tasks with their ability to cover more square miles at higher altitudes.

The stories of officer sacrifice reflect the airborne operations of law enforcement. In March of this year Sgt. David Poirrier and Cpl. Scotty Canezaro of the Baton Rouge, LA Police Department were assisting with a vehicle pursuit when the aircraft behaved erratically,

ending up inverted and crashed leaving the two experienced pilots dead.

In August of last year Sgt. Harold Russell of the Tennessee Highway Patrol and Detective Matthew Blansett of the Marion County, TN Sheriff's Department were airborne to surveil an illegal marijuana grow. They were diverted while in the air to assist with a missing persons search when they struck a powerline and crashed.

Also last year, three Bernalillo County, NM officers were returning to a staging area to pick up fire crew members while assisting with a wildfire. Undersheriff Lawrence Koren, Lt, Fred Beers, and Deputy Michael Levison along with the County's Fire Rescue Specialist Matthew King were killed instantly when the craft suddenly went down.

In an unusual third helicopter fatality of 2022, Huntington Beach, CA Police Officer Nicholas Vella, and another officer were responding to assist with a fight call when the pilot slowed and hovered in order to photograph the scene. The aircraft began to veer and the pilot fought to control the craft and get over the ocean to avoid crashing in a populated area. He survived with injuries but rescuers could not save Vella.

A Houston Police helicopter was requested to help search for two bodies reportedly sighted floating in the Greens Bayou area of Houston. Tactical Flight Officer Jason Knox, 35, died from his injuries. The pilot, Senior Officer Chase Cormier, 35 survived with critical injuries

when the aircraft crashed into part of an apartment complex. No one on the ground was injured.

During civil disturbances in Charlottesville, VA Lieutenant Pilot Jay Cullen and Trooper Pilot Berke Bates of the Virginia State Police were monitoring the unrest in advance of a VIP visit to the area. The pilot lost control of the craft which plunged into a stand of trees and became engulfed in flames, killing both occupants.

In 2016 Deputy Sheriff Scott Ballantyne of the Tulare County Sheriff's Office, California and Mr. James Chavez, a civilian pilot were assisting in the search for a fleeing suspect in a firearms-related case. After the suspect was arrested, Chavez began to return to base but suddenly lost altitude and crashed into a hillside.

Alaska State Trooper Tage Toll was serving as a spotter during a search and rescue mission near Talkeetna, Alaska in the agency's rescue helicopter. The mission had successfully located a missing snow machine operator and had taken the subject aboard the aircraft. Likely a result of rapid loss of visual references due to weather changes, the craft crashed near Larson Lake in the Talkeetna area, Trooper Toll, civilian pilot Mel Nading, and the snowmachiner 56-year-old Carl Ober were all killed in the crash.

Aircraft, and helicopters, in particular, are expensive to obtain, operate, and maintain. Their value in saving lives and saving time and ground resources is only part of the equation. With over 2,000 police helicopters patrolling and responding, public safety demands their continued use and brave crews.

The Cops Everybody Loves

Who is getting expanded emergency medical care benefits, ballistics vests from fund-raising efforts, legislative protection, and love and respect from nearly everyone? No, not the DARE officer, but the furry cops in the K-9 corps.

With 23 K9 line of duty deaths over the last twelve months, 50,000 police dogs are engaged in dangerous and valuable work across the USA. Varying in tasks from apprehension, public relations, sniffing out narcotics, locating dead bodies, looking for bombs, tracking lost children or escaped prisoners, the K9s and their dedicated handlers prove their value daily. At a cost of from \$5,000 to \$20,000 to obtain and train, police agency managers can't assume that they can afford a K9 unit.

Complicating the operation of a K9 unit is the cost of the handler. Because of the unique relationship that is developed in the team, the human asset creates costs as well. Despite common belief, a dog can change handlers, but that transition doesn't always go well, so the retention and care of the K9 team is part of the total investment. With feeding, housing, ongoing training, and veterinarian costs, the availability of the team can be limited. Add that to the handler's days off and the police manager recognizes that the number of hours on patrol or assignment will be reduced by those factors. This can limit the option of having a K9 unit for small agencies.

Another limit on K9 use is that, while many dogs are cross-trained, they do have limitations. An explosives detection dog, for example, must alert calmly with minimum movement, such as sitting, to avoid causing ignition of a suspicious device. This obviously differs from a tracking dog's alert to a scent. Because of the legality of marijuana possession in many states, narcotics detection dogs that were trained to include marijuana in their searches, many drug-detecting dogs have been forced into retirement from that duty. Many agencies still retain marijuana sniffing dogs because of the continued illegal smuggling of black-market marijuana.

Tracking dogs and cadaver dogs are asked to cover large areas with their noses near the ground. The physical strain on the dog's olfactory senses, along with the excitement that working dogs generate when on the job, they require limited work periods and appropriate work breaks. An agency will get five to eight years of service from a police dog. Many handlers adopt the retired dogs to their family, but others are rescued.

Handlers must be very well trained in search and seizure law. The general rule is that there is no expectation of privacy of the air around us or our car, but the length of a detention and K9 sniff can be attacked at trial if a stop extends beyond a reasonable time. A K9 team may be too far away in some circumstances. Use of force comes into play as well for those animals used for apprehension work. A bite must be justified like any other use of force. The handler and the department may be held liable for injuries.

A variety of breeds are found in police dogs from the classic German shepherd to the low-slung beagle. While you may find the former patrolling a perimeter at a corrections facility, you'll find the stout beagle sniffing around airports for unlawful imports of fruits, meats, and vegetables that threaten the health of people and crops in the US.

A new use for dogs is as emotional support animals in police stations or during extended emergency duty at command posts. These critters' job is to be petted and act as a temporary companion to lighten and brighten officers' days.

Finally, in a futuristic twist, robotic dogs are being introduced to law enforcement agencies to engage in search and hostage situations to look, via remote camera, for people and explosives. With the ability to navigate terrain, the robotic Rover can keep humans out of harm's way while transporting messages, video images, or packages. An experiment with "Digidog", a robot K9 tried out by the New York City Police Department, was removed from their inventory after social media backlash. The skeletal dog-like design was deemed "too creepy" for NYPD after social media criticism following a demonstration of the multiple talents of the machine.

Police K9s are revered partners of value across the country, ready to take a bite out of crime.

The FTO and the Future of Policing

America's law enforcement field training officers (FTO) are among the most important components of professionalism in policing. One could reasonably argue that the FTO exceeds the importance of basic academy training. The academy may be the backbone and skeleton of a police career, but those first weeks of supervision under the watchful eye of an FTO are the meat, muscle, and sinew that bring the officer's career to life.

Most states prohibit a person from acting as a police officer without certification or licensing. While this makes sense in a lot of ways, it creates a deficit in academy training because the information presented to trainees is done without real-world context. Learning without meaning attached is less effective than learning with experience and application. For example, the academy will have a class in firearms, a class on car stops, a class on search and seizure law, and a course in de-escalation. Only when the cadet graduates and makes their first vehicle contact do all things need to coalesce into a cohesive set of behaviors and decisions. Until put into use and integrated, the subjects are abstract and theoretical.

This is where the FTO enters in to develop an effective police officer. In days gone by, especially in smaller law enforcement agencies, training consisted of handing the new hire the keys and a map and told to go to work. Formal police academies are a product of the mid-20th century, and police training developed into a three

phase process: academy, field training, then independence. This writer's home state of Missouri had no academy requirement at the time of his hire, so there was only field training, then out on solo patrol. An academy was available even though not required and an officer might eventually be sent after several months of service without academy training.

There are two basic FTO training plans. The oldest is called the San Jose model, obviously the namesake of its original department. The other is referred to as PTO (Police Training Officer) or commonly known as the Reno model from that city's role in developing PTO with the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing.

The primary difference between the two are in educational philosophy. The San Jose model is a checklist of skills needed by the trainee to eventually act independently as an educational bridge between the academy and full duty. The trainee is evaluated on the skills over time based on evaluation standards. The Reno model claims to be a better fit for community-oriented policing and for the new generation of police officers whose backgrounds and expectations are less suited to the regimented "right answers" of the San Jose model.

The Reno model is predicated on the trainee becoming a problem solver. In fact, the basis of the model is PBL which is problem based learning. In PBL, rather than merely attaching a policy and procedure to a situation, the officer looks for root causes and integrates their knowledge to develop a deeper solution. Some medical

education has moved in this direction. Rather than just studying a list of symptoms and cures, the student is presented with an actual or role-playing patient and tasked with determining a diagnosis and treatment plan. The results for medical students are that they may score lower on standardized tests, but score higher on patient satisfaction and outcomes.

Regardless of the method, the training officer assigned to the police recruit is more than a babysitter or supervisor. An FTO is a mentor for more than just policy and practice, but also conveys the heart and soul of policing. They help the recruit connect the academic material to daily practice, guide them in communication with persons under stress, balancing empathy with cautious survival skills. The stories that they tell become very real to the trainee who will soon enough have their own stories that shape their career.

There are many vital components of the law enforcement team from clerks to dispatchers to supervisors to administrators. Tying them all together is the field training officer who will be an unforgettable character to the new police officer for the rest of their career.

Behind the Badge Behind Detention Walls

If someone were to ask for a list of law enforcement agencies and specialties, would Corrections Officer (CO) be included? Some debate whether COs are law enforcement officers (LEOs) or not. On the side of the LEO argument, the CO responds to disturbances and criminal activity, uses their presence to deter disorder, investigates offenses, and has the authority to take physical control of persons. Opposing that position is the argument that the CO does not serve the public at large, is usually not carrying a firearm, and has limited power outside of the correctional facility.

Some states give peace officer status to COs, at least in certain situations such as when escorting or transporting a prisoner outside of the facility. A complicating factor in the definition is the various level of corrections personnel. Local and county jails may be staffed by deputies with peace officer duties. The most important difference between jails and prisons is that jails also house persons not yet convicted of their alleged crimes.

Although there are some very large county detention facilities, such as Los Angeles County's with about 15,000 incarcerated persons, the largest inmate population tends to be in state prisons. Counting federal facilities, city and county jails, state prisons, juvenile facilities, civil commitment and psychiatric confinement facilities, immigration detention facilities, military

prisons, Indian country jails, and privately contracted prisons, there are nearly 2 million persons held in secure facilities in the U.S.

Constitutional protections of due process, freedom from cruelty, and even unreasonable searches are all part of the complex legal framework that COs must navigate. A prison, and even smaller facilities, are self-contained communities. People need to eat, get medical care, practice their religion, get exercise, bathe, and engage in daily activities in a secure environment. Even the most mundane activity of the residents and workers in confinement facilities is subject to security procedures and precautions.

Something often heard of convicted persons being sent to prisons is “at least they can’t hurt anyone anymore”. That’s true unless you count COs. The corrections profession suffers one of the highest injury rates in the workforce. Assaults on COs are an ever-present hazard of the job. In addition to violent assaults from unarmed inmates, the creativity of prisoners in making and obtaining weapons makes cutting and stabbing injuries and fatalities a constant threat.

Many correctional facilities have a museum or at least a display that includes examples of prison-made weapons. Industrial activities that provide inmates with the coveted opportunity to work include food service, metal fabrication, and woodworking. Many prisons make products for the state or for sale to support the facility or inmate activities. This introduces tools and materials into the prison that must be carefully inventoried. Even with security procedures, objects

that can be made into edged weapons end up in the hands of inmates.

German inmates constructed a working shotgun using a bedpost, a charge made from lead from duct tape and matchheads, and an igniter made of a broken light bulb and AA batteries. It was discharged during an escape. A decorative wooden crucifix was discovered to contain a sheathed, sharpened metal rod. Blades from disposable razors are melted into toothbrush handles to make a deadly slashing weapon. Paper products are wetted and molded into hardened saps. Plastic bags are filled with urine or fermented products of sugar and smuggled fruit to toss at COs.

In addition to weaponry, articles are fashioned for use as drug paraphernalia or tools for escape such as keys, grappling hooks, or chisels. Items to push barbed wire aside or to cushion an escape over razor wire can be found during searches. Narcotics use is still a problem behind prison walls as items are smuggled in or tossed over the walls, and somehow, cell phones also make their way into correctional facilities to be used for criminal transactions or planning an escape.

Whether they carry the label of LEO, those maintaining order behind the prison walls face deadly challenges every moment of their shift. They deserve our thanks and respect.

SWAT – America’s Specialty Peace Keepers

Daryl Gates, a Los Angeles police Inspector nearing his 20th year of service with LAPD during the Watts riots of 1965, is often credited as the “Father of SWAT”, a small, specially trained, and equipped unit of police officers created to deal with unique tactical challenges beyond the ability of a normal police response. In his biography, Gates states that he did not develop SWAT tactics or equipment, but did advocate for the concept which was met with initial resistance from the higher-ups.

Others will identify LAPD officer John G. Nelson as presenting the concept to Gates who promoted the idea. Meanwhile, in 1964 in Philadelphia, a special squad of 100 officers was formed to be a rapid response force to an alarming increase in violent bank robberies. The Acronym SWAT has stood for Special Weapons Attack Team but quickly evolved into a more palatable Special Weapons And Tactics moniker. Variations include HRT (hostage rescue team), STAR (supplemental tactics and response), QRT (quick response team), CIRT (critical incident response team), ESU (emergency service unit), SRT (special response team), SOG (special operations group) and other labels.

The National Tactical Officers Association defines SWAT as “A designated law enforcement team whose members are recruited, selected, trained, equipped and assigned to resolve critical incidents involving a threat

to public safety which would otherwise exceed the capabilities of traditional law enforcement first responders and/or investigative units”.

The unrest and rise in violent gang, drug, and political violence of the 1960s included snipers, fortified drug houses, major robberies, and mass disturbances. Gates is reported to note that during the Watts riots, even the massive response of National Guard units was not effective without special training and appropriate equipment.

The effectiveness and safety of these special teams have resulted in an increase in their deployment and are now often a component of smaller agencies in addition to their urban law enforcement colleagues. Most SWAT teams around the country are made up of officers who have regular duties and are on call for SWAT. Only large urban agencies with high critical incident call volume, rescue operations, and frequent high-risk warrant executions maintain full-time teams.

In some areas, the tactical teams are multi-jurisdictional where officers from various police departments train together for response in any of their communities. Agencies with no tactical teams typically have mutual aid agreements with the jurisdiction with a team. Even where agencies have a team there can be situations, like hostages or barricaded suspects that can last for hours beyond a normal operational period where relief and backup teams become necessary.

Specialties within SWAT teams vary, and many members can be cross-trained in case a team member

with expertise is incapacitated. For example, a dynamic entry specialist may have expertise in using explosive charges, using distraction devices, or heavy entry tools. Emergency medicine, sometimes a licensed physician, is an important area for staffing in high-risk operations where life-saving care may be needed for an officer, suspect, or victim. Sniper training is another specialty that takes a great deal of ongoing training to maintain proficiency in both marksmanship and judgment.

SWAT teams are the only place where police officers are equipped with automatic weaponry (machine guns), but that type of weapon is of very limited value and rarely deployed. Specialized equipment and tools for SWAT teams may include armored rescue vehicles, robots, special cameras, and various distraction devices like stun grenades, smoke canisters, and chemical irritants that can be launched from a distance.

Dramatic scenes of SWAT use from the Black Panther stand-off in 1969 in which thousands of rounds of ammunition were fired over four hours, to the 1974 Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA – famous for the Patty Hearst kidnapping and brainwashing) shootout that resulted in six SLA members dying and the house in which they had holed up burned to the ground, likely as a result of a tear gas canister with a combustible fuse.

In the mid-70s the art of hostage negotiation was added to tactical operations, which influenced teams to contain and hold with the hopes that surrender would preclude further violence. With the failure of this strategy at the Columbine school massacre, active shooter response now relies largely on the first

responding officer, whether alone or specially equipped or not, to immediately enter the killing zone and confront the attackers.

SWAT teams have been criticized (of course) for influencing the militarization of local law enforcement. These teams were created to respond to extraordinary risks to the public and serve to preserve life with their special weapons and tactics. With nearly 100,000 SWAT operations annually across the country, their success is well documented and their failures (such as the 1993 raid on the WACO Branch Davidian compound and the 1973 incident at Wounded Knee) are carefully reviewed for continued improvement.

Specialty Cops – Why We Need Them

As laws and institutions become more complex, law enforcement has expanded to meet the challenge. The four categories of law enforcement that most people know about are federal, state, county, and local. But wait! There's more!

Federal Agencies

Enforcement of the law is a function of the executive branch of government, therefore most of the agents with police powers to enforce federal law are employed by various agencies of the President's cabinet. While most citizens know about the FBI, the Secret Service, the U.S. Marshalls, and the Border Patrol, there are over one hundred agencies with law enforcement responsibilities who partner with the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). A handful of other agencies operate their own training facilities as well, such as the FBI's training academy at Quantico, VA.

Many of these federal agencies deploy uniformed officers with specific responsibilities. Those include securing federal facilities and protecting federal assets. Others are primarily investigative and most agents operate in plain clothes. A variety of undercover operations are performed as well. When we read that federal officers are being deployed to a hotspot, they may be pulled from a number of different agencies from those who protect our borders to those who protect our national parks. During presidential campaigns, the

Secret Service is assisted by other federal law enforcement for the extensive demands for personnel.

The Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security are well-known umbrella agencies for federal agents, but every cabinet-level has investigators and protection specialists.

Military Law Enforcement

With millions of soldiers, airmen, marines, and sailors stationed all over the world and even in space, every branch of the armed services has its own highly trained law enforcement and investigative personnel. With its own set of laws, known as the Uniform Code of Military Justice, military courts and law enforcement have jurisdiction not only on the millions of acres of land, air, and sea but also over any service person no matter where they are.

State Agencies

States regulate who can be considered a peace officer with arrest authority, in addition to investigative bodies that may or may not have the power to arrest. Some agencies may have limited jurisdiction while others carry their arrest powers outside of their normal work assignment. For example, police officers in state parks may be limited to taking police action within the park boundaries, while some states authorize arrests anywhere within the state.

It should be noted that many states give automatic authority to federal officers, while some states require additional certification. For example, the FBI has jurisdiction over bank robberies because a federal agency that insures deposits can be a victim. But if an agent observes a convenience store robbery they may have to take action as a citizen's arrest.

With elected sheriffs covering all of the territory of states, independent state law enforcement agencies were often begun with limited support or direct opposition of politically jealous sheriffs. This is one reason why some states have highway patrols and some have state police. In Missouri, for example, the state patrol began as the Courtesy Patrol with arrest powers limited to the roadways. In Colorado, the state investigative agency conducts investigations only at the request of the district attorney or another law enforcement agency.

States may also have specialty law enforcement such as brand inspectors, conservation and wildlife officers, and capitol police.

Local police

Many municipal police agencies began with an elected marshal with authority only over ordinance violations. There are still many smaller jurisdictions with marshals. Most police officers today work in towns of fewer than 10,000 population.

Special jurisdictions

If given authority by their state, public schools and colleges, transit operations, public housing complexes, hospitals, and other institutions may organize and staff their own police departments. Some states allow private campuses to have state license police officers, but many will have security or public safety officers who may be armed and have arrest authority on the grounds.

Another facet of law enforcement is tribal policing on native American land that is a sovereign nation within the United States. These agencies often partner with the FBI and the Bureau of Indian Affairs police.

Interagency cooperation

Most agencies that serve within or adjacent to other jurisdictions maintain good communication and cooperation. While they may not share the same special responsibilities, they almost always share responsibility for the same criminal elements.

About The Author



This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#) Joel is a retired police chief. He is an award-winning writer, college professor, trainer, and first responder chaplain.