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The two most recent names inscribed on the Tampa Police Department Memorial are those of Rick Childers and Randy Bell.

The two veteran homicide detectives had almost 40 years of service behind them on the day they died.

That was the day they ran into 30-year-old Hank Earl Carr. He was being questioned in connection with the shooting death of his live-in girlfriend’s 4-year-old son.

But detectives Childers and Bell didn’t know Carr by that name. He was a wanted felon who identified himself as Joseph Lee Bennett. Even though he tried to elude officers at one point, he was regarded as a “grieving father” mourning what he said was the accidental death of the boy. As they were preparing to question Bennett, or Carr, Childers and Bell stopped him from slipping out of his handcuffs. He apparently used a hidden handcuff key.

They interrogated him, then returned with him to the scene of the shooting so he could better explain and demonstrate how the boy had been shot.

While there, Childers and Bell retrieved the S-K-S assault rifle that had killed the boy. Now handcuffed in front, Carr was placed alone in the back seat of the detective’s car for the return to headquarters. The weapon was placed in the trunk. Detective Childers was the driver. Bell sat next to him.

Near the police station, Carr, again got out of his cuffs, grabbed detective Childers’ weapon from his shoulder holster, and shot both detectives dead. He retrieved the assault rifle from the trunk, carjacked a pickup truck, and fled.

Moments later, Florida State Trooper James “Brad” Crooks, spotted Carr. Carr killed him and fled, exchanging shots with officers along the way. When his truck was disabled, he wound up at this shell station where he took an employee hostage. It was there in a radio interview that he revealed his true identity. Ultimately, he released the hostage, but ended that bloody day by killing himself.

The Tampa Massacre: five people dead in less than ten hours. The issues this case raises are numerous.

Incident Issues
Identity issue
Search procedure
Transportation procedure
Weapon retention
Mindset of officers and Carr
Dealing with media

THE MORNING (10:00-NOON)

The identify issue was exacerbated by the fact Carr’s girlfriend, Bernice Bowen, was telling interrogators that 1) the shooting of the child was an accident 2) that Joseph Lee Bennett was her husband 3) and never revealed that Hank Earl Carr was his true identity. Bowen proved adept at controlling the interview so detectives could not press
her on key points. One of those points was her feeble explanation of a blood spatter on her clothes, a sign that she had been present when the boy was shot. She indicated the blood came from holding him, which would have created a smudge rather than a spatter.

Bowen and Carr had taken the boy to a local firehouse for treatment after the shooting. Carr left immediately, ostensibly to go care for Bowen’s other child, a five-year-old girl. He returned to the house. Finding cops there, he hid, then attempted to flee. He was wrestled to the ground by an officer, given a cursory search, and cuffed in the back. He told them he was returning to be with his son.

Upon arriving at headquarters, Carr had almost managed to slip from his cuffs (apparently using a hidden handcuff key he carried). He was reprimanded by Det. Childers and taken inside for questioning. He was never fingerprinted because he was not charged with anything. Had his real identity been known, he most certainly would have been treated differently.

EARLY AFTERNOON (NOON-3:00)

Childers and Bell taped a formal, ten-minute interview with Carr. He insisted the shooting of the boy was accident, and vowed never to touch a gun again. The detectives returned to Bennett/Carr’s house for a reenactment of the shooting and to retrieve the S-K-S assault weapon. After 30 minutes, they left the house. Carr was handcuffed in front. (Childers and Bell, like many detectives, take some latitude in dealing with subjects. They often feel that making that person comfortable can lead more quickly to a confession or an admission than is the case by taking a hard line.) The loaded assault weapon was placed in the trunk. Carr was placed alone in the back seat. Bell sat in the passenger seat. A jacketless Childers, wearing his shoulder holster, was the driver. En-route back to police headquarters, Carr, using the hidden handcuff key, unlocked the cuffs, grabbed Childers’ weapon, and shot both detectives dead. He retrieved the assault rifle from the trunk, carjacked a pickup truck, and fled north. Some moments later, he was spotted by rookie FHP officer James “Brad” Crooks. Carr, knowing he was being followed, left the highway and slammed on his brakes. When Trooper Crooks was forced to stop, Carr jumped out and shot him between the eyes with his assault rifle before Crooks could get one foot out of his cruiser. He fled, firing at other officers along the way. He missed two deputies by inches, hit a police helicopter, and wounded two civilians. When his truck was disabled by police gunfire, Carr entered a Shell Service station and took the lone employee there hostage.

MID AFTERNOON-EARLY EVENING

One hundred-seventy Officers from 13 jurisdictions converged on the scene. Negotiations began with Carr immediately. He promised not to harm the hostage, and said he wanted to talk to his “wife” Bernice. She was sent for. During a break in the talks, Carr was reached by phone by a radio newsman. It was during this conversation that he revealed his true identity. For the first time, officers knew whom they were dealing with.
**LESSONS LEARNED-TAMPA POLICE DEPT.**

The Tampa Police Department made some changes one of which was a natural consequence of the murders. Officers voluntarily began to refocus.

**Search Policy:** The search procedure did not change other than officers in Tampa are now taught with the Childers-Bell example that failure to conduct a thorough search can produce deadly consequences. Tampa training instructors feel that reminders of what happened to the two detectives brings the need to search thoroughly into sharp focus.

**Handcuff Policy:** Handcuffing in the rear is not mandated. Tampa gives officers wide discretion in dealing with such issues. However, when they decide to handcuff in front, they now need approval from a supervisor so two people have to think about the situation.

**Transport Policy:** Tampa officers and detectives are now encouraged to call for a caged squad car to transport prisoners. However, discretion is provided officers here for those times when it might be inappropriate to convey a passenger in a marked car (i.e. observing drug transactions). Now, however, officers are placed in the back seat with a prisoner to be able to more closely monitor that subject.

**Shoulder Holster Policy:** Officers have discretion again as to whether they want to wear shoulders holsters. Trainers point out that officers have been killed with guns taken from hip holsters. Here again, rather than mandate hip holsters, officers are told to go with what they are most comfortable with. NOTE: Since the Childers-Bell shootings, there has been a noticeable drop in the number of detectives who wear shoulder holsters.

**Take nothing for granted:** Childers and Bell’s fellow officers say their deaths illustrated that officers must never take anything for granted. Carr played the grieving father well, but got it over on two officers with some 40 years of experience between them.

**Complacency:** Officers used to “presumed compliance” at work or at home, may not
expect the worst to happen. That can have deadly consequences.

Stay alert: Always be ready for the unexpected as well as the expected.

Maintain focus: The Childers-Bell murders enable Tampa officers to maintain a high level of focus. The challenge is for officers in other communities to maintain that focus even if they have not undergone a similar tragedy in their departments.

You never know: It can happen to anyone, anywhere, any time.

LESSONS LEARNED-FLORIDA HIGHWAY PATROL

The Florida Highway Patrol has attempted to learn what it can from the murder of Trooper Crooks so that some measure of good might come from his death.

Understand what you’re dealing with: Officers should understand what they are dealing with. In the case of Carr, he had already killed three people when Crooks caught up to him. Extraordinary caution is called for under such circumstances. Crooks was “suckered” by Carr into driving into an ambush.

Don’t act alone: Avoid close personal contact by yourself. Pick up surveillance, but don’t close in until you have sufficient help on the scene.

Follow at a safe distance: Maintain that safe distance between you and the subject so you, as the officer, set the stage for confrontation. That distance can be hundreds of yards. You don’t have to be on top of a subject on the highway to follow successfully.

Firearms training: FHP is implementing firearms training more compatible with officer survival. Learning how to draw and shoot from a seated position is among the changes.

AFTER ACTION NOTES

Tampa officers believe Carr hid the handcuff key in his jeans rather than on a chain around his neck as first thought. He took the key from a pants pocket, and put it on his necklace when turning his effects over to the hostage upon her release.

Officers were not suspicious when Carr left the firehouse, then tried to elude officers at his home after the shooting. They felt his erratic behavior was not inconsistent with that of a “grieving father.”

Trooper Crooks’ murder was witnessed by a motorist who tried to run over Carr with his own vehicle. He was unable to do so.

The officer who interrogated Bernice Bowen described her as “evil.” The officer could not understand how a woman could protect someone who had just killed her child.

The grieving continues in Tampa. While voluntary counseling was available, some officers believe mandatory counseling should be required long after the incident and on the anniversary of the incident.
The media is a factor in ongoing situations like this. The reporters in Tampa were very aggressive in dealing with the Carr standoff. Much of the coverage was live, including the live interview. Such media tactics can trigger a deadly response from the subject. Had the wrong thing been said, Carr, for instance, might have killed the hostage. Live coverage can also show the hostage taker the relative position, size of force, and weaponry of tactical units outside. Carr did not have a TV. If he had, he would have had an advantage over his adversaries.

Dealing with media: Work with the media, but recognize that airing information live can often put officers in jeopardy. Make it clear to the media that they do not have the right to put others’ lives in jeopardy.

In providing information to the media, the following items are important:
- Limit info to basics
- Make sure all reporters get the same information
- Get to know media people before the crisis

QUESTIONS

1. What is your search policy and is a cursory pat down sufficient?
2. What is your handcuffing policy?
3. Define the purpose of handcuffing as it relates to officer safety and subject safety.
4. Discuss the merits and demerits of handcuffing in the front and rear.
5. How should prisoners be properly transported?
6. What role do seat belts or additional restraints play in transporting prisoners.
7. Discuss the transportation of the assault rifle. Should it have accompanied the prisoner?
8. Discuss the use of shoulder holsters and retention of weapons in shoulder holsters.
9. What retention level does your holster have?
10. Have you trained in handgun retention and do your practice?
11. Discuss the question of proximity when following a dangerous subject in a car.
12. Do you ever practice shooting from a sitting position?
13. Discuss the issue of complacency.
14. Discuss the issue of live radio and television broadcasts at an active crime scene or ongoing hostage situation.
EPILOG

Rick Childers and Randy Bell
46-year-old Rick Childers was with the Tampa Police Department for 18 years. Randy Bell, 44, was a 19-year veteran. Each was highly decorated. Bell was within two weeks from transferring to Internal Affairs when he was killed.

Trooper James “Brad” Crooks
Trooper Crooks was armed with a .40 caliber Smith and Wesson, and was wearing body armor. Carr’s first shot killed him. The second shot would have been lethal.

Hank Carr
Carr, who had a near genius IQ of 133, was a high school drop out, and was either in prison or wanted by authorities in 4 states most of his adult life.

Carr was never fingerprinted in Tampa because he was not officially in custody.

He had 3 Kids from various girlfriends, none from Bowen.

Bernice Bowen
Bowen is serving a 21-½ year sentence for being an accessory after the fact in the Carr case. She had earlier pled guilty to child neglect. Bowen unsuccessfully appealed the original conviction.

Bowen’s daughter Kayla, who was five at the time, witnessed the killing of her brother Joey Bennett. She told at least one neighbor that “Daddy” shot Joey. She is living with relatives in Ohio.

Stephanie Kramer (Hostage)
Kramer, claiming emotional damage, threatened to sue the Tampa P.D. on charges officers were negligent in how they handcuffed and transported Carr. No suit was ever filed.

Post Script
Soon after the murders, the Florida legislature, and Tampa City Council, passed bills making it a third class felony to possess a concealed handcuff key.

Legislation was also proposed limiting news coverage of hostage incidents. It passed the Senate but died in the House.
TIME LINE

9:45 A.M.  Joey Bennett shot
10:10 A.M.  Boy’s body taken to fire station, Carr bolts.
10:40 A.M.  Carr captured, taken downtown
12:23 to 12:32 P.M.  Carr formally interviewed
1:00 P.M.  Childers, Bell and Carr return to Carr house
1:30 P.M.  Group leaves house
1:35 P.M.  Childers and Bell murdered
2:15 P.M.  Trooper Crooks murdered
2:45 P.M.  Carr arrives at Shell Station and negotiations begin shortly thereafter.
5:30 P.M.  Bernice Bowen joins negotiators
7:20 P.M.  Hostage released
7:30 P.M.  Tactical officers deploy gas and percussion grenades inside Shell Station. Carr commits suicide.
7:45 P.M.  Ordeal proclaimed “officially over”

LESSON PLAN

SYNOPSIS

This course details the Lessons Learned following Tampa Massacre in which Hank Earl Carr killed his 4-year-old stepson, 2 Tampa Police detectives, a Florida Highway Patrol Officer, and then himself.

TIME: 2 Hours

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this course, officers should understand the chronology of events leading up to and following the massacre, as well as the lessons learned as a result of the incident.

OBJ A  Recognize the chain of events that led to the killings

OBJ B  Recognize the issues which were raised by the incident.

OBJ C  Understand the Lessons Learned by both the Tampa P.D. and FHP

OBJ D  Discuss the issues and implications of the incident.
OBJ A

Recognize the chain of events that led to the killings:

a. The shooting of the child led to a police investigation.

b. The victim’s mother, Bernice Bowen, consistently and convincingly lied to police about the identity of her “husband” identified as Joseph Lee Bennett.

c. His real name was Hank Earl Carr, a wanted felon.

d. Carr tried to avoid police at the fire station where the boy’s body had been taken by returning home.

e. There, he tried to elude police again, but was apprehended and taken to police headquarters for questioning.

f. En-route, he tried to slip out of his handcuffs (probably using a hidden handcuff key).

g. He was questioned and insisted that the death of the child was an accident, and vowed never to touch a gun again.

h. Carr and homicide detectives Childers and Bell returned to the scene of the shooting where they recovered the assault rifle, which killed the boy.

i. Carr was handcuffed (in front), placed alone in the back seat of the detective’s uncaged car, and the three headed back to headquarters.

j. En-route, Carr slipped out of one cuff (using a hidden handcuff key), grabbed the weapon from driver Childers’ shoulder holster and shot both detectives.

k. Carr took the assault rifle, carjacked a pickup truck and fled.

l. FHP Trooper Brad Crooks followed Carr and was shot to death in an ambush.

m. Carr drove until his truck was disabled and took refuge in a Shell station where he held a hostage.
n. During four hours of negotiations, and in a radio interview, Carr revealed his true identity.
o. Bernice Bowen helped in negotiations and convinced Carr to let the hostage go.
p. He did, but killed himself.

OBJ B

Recognize the issues raised by the incident.

a. Identity issue
b. Search procedure
c. Transportation procedure
d. Weapon retention
e. Mindset of officers and Carr
f. Dealing with media

OBJ C

Lessons Learned

a. Search Procedure: The search procedure did not change other than officers in Tampa are now taught with the Childers-Bell example that failure to conduct a thorough search can produce deadly consequences. Tampa training instructors feel that reminders of what happened to the two detectives brings the need to search thoroughly into sharp focus.

b. Handcuffing: Handcuffing in the rear is not mandated. Tampa gives officers wide discretion in dealing with such issues. However, when they decide to handcuff in front, they now need approval from a supervisor so two people have to think about the situation.

c. Transport: Tampa officers and detectives are now encouraged to call for a caged squad car to transport prisoners. However, discretion is provided officers here for those times when it might be inappropriate to convey a passenger in a marked car (i.e. observing drug transactions). Now, however, officers are placed in the back seat with a prisoner to be able to more closely monitor that subject.

d. Shoulder Holsters: Officers have discretion again as to whether they want to wear shoulders holsters. Trainers point out
that officers have been killed with guns taken from hip holsters. Here again, rather than mandate hip holsters, officers are told to go with what they are most comfortable with. NOTE: Since the Childers-Bell shootings, there has been a noticeable drop in the number of detectives who wear shoulder holsters.

e. **Take nothing for granted:** Childers and Bell’s fellow officers say their deaths illustrated that officers must never take anything for granted. Carr played the grieving father well, but got it over on two officers with some 40 years of experience between them.

f. **Complacency:** Officers used to “presumed compliance” at work or at home, may not expect the worst to happen. That can have deadly consequences.

g. **Stay alert:** Always be ready for the unexpected as well as the expected.

h. **Maintain focus:** The Childers-Bell murders enable Tampa officers to maintain a high level of focus. The challenge is for officers in other communities to maintain that focus even if they have not undergone a similar tragedy in their departments.

i. **You never know:** It can happen to anyone, anywhere, any time.

(LESSONS LEARNED FLORIDA HIGHWAY PATROL)

a. **Understand what you’re dealing with:** Officers should understand what they are dealing with. In the case of Carr, he had already killed three people when Crooks caught up to him. Extraordinary caution is called for under such circumstances. Crooks was “suckered” by Carr into driving into an ambush.

b. **Don’t act alone:** Avoid close personal contact by yourself. Pick up surveillance, but don’t close in until you have sufficient help on the scene.

c. **Follow at a safe distance:** Maintain that
safe distance between you and the subject so you, as the officer, set the stage for confrontation. That distance can be hundreds of yards. You don’t have to be on top of a subject on the highway to follow successfully.

d. Firearms training: FHP is implementing firearms training more compatible with officer survival. Learning how to draw and shoot from a seated position is among the changes.

OBJ D

Discuss the issues and implications of the incident.
1. What is your search policy and is a cursory pat down sufficient?
2. What is your handcuffing policy?
3. Define the purpose of handcuffing as it relates to officer safety and subject safety.
4. Discuss the merits and demerits of handcuffing in the front and rear.
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10. Have you trained in handgun retention and do your practice?
11. Discuss the question of proximity when following a dangerous subject in a car.
12. Do you ever practice shooting from a sitting position?
13. Discuss the issue of complacency.
Discuss the issue of live radio and television broadcasts at an active crime scene or ongoing hostage situation.