IN THE LINE OF DUTY

VOLUME 9 PROGRAM 3

DUTY SHEET

JASON SCHECHTERLE:
IRON WILL TO SURVIVE
Backup: Concealed Dangerous Weapons

Total Program Length: 46:08

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Accident & Rescue:  (10:03)

In May of 2001 Phoenix Officer Jason Schechterle, on the force 13 months, was responding to a hot call from an adjacent precinct. Officers from that precinct were occupied on other calls, so Officer Schechterle took the call himself. With his lights and siren on, he came to a stop at a red light at an intersection under a freeway overpass. As he was preparing to proceed, his cruiser was struck from behind by a taxi cab going 115 mph. His Crown Vic erupted in flames traveled 226 feet and came to a stop about 50 feet from a fire truck across the street.

Engine #5 was on a low priority, unknown, medical call with no lights, no siren. What the firefighters saw at the red light was, quite literally, a police officer being burned alive. With a big ball of fire in front of the car and the door jammed, an ax was used to bash in the front driver’s side window which was so blackened they could not see in. After the ax was utilized, they saw Jason sitting there, burned, motionless and belted in. Pulling, tugging, trying to unbuckle the belt to extricate the Officer; Jason suddenly snapped up in an unconscious state.  He had heard or felt something. He was still alive! Everything was melting as the cruiser was being destroyed in the raging fire.

The firefighters, with assistance from Jason, had his hips out, but his legs were caught. A police officer with a knife cut the belt as the firefighters had been unable to do so because of their bulky garb. No one had any idea who this officer was – he was so charred, he appeared to be a Black man with crinkled hair.

Survival:  (4:33)

Fortunately, one of the Southwest’s top burn centers was located two miles away. Jason was rushed there. The doctors were exploring new territory. Jason spent six weeks in a coma while the doctors removed his fingers one by one. They believed they needed to amputate both hands, but the family was adamant that did not occur. He lost middle and index fingers and thumbs. They built some (not all) new fingers. But all that knew Jason were convinced his mind was intact. What was left of his eyelids were sewn shut for six months. The doctors can’t explain why he survived. And if he did, they thought he would be deaf, blind and have mental retardation due to lack of oxygen for several minutes. However, Jason Schechterle’s mind, spirit and perseverance remained amazingly intact.

Jason the Cop:  (10:03)

Once a cop, always a cop. In his adult life, Jason has never wanted to be anything but a police officer. That has not changed with the accident. His “beat” now is doing public relations for the department. He is also active in the effort to lobby for safety changes in Ford’s Crown Victoria. The vehicle has been involved in several accidents resulting in fires and in which officers have been severely injured. Jason attributes his survival, and as a result, his ability to continue to serve as a law enforcement officer, on many qualities that would serve any officer well.
b. Never give up – It would have been selfish if he did. Upon reflection he realized that there was another intersection a quarter of a mile ahead where someone else could have been driving and not survived. He feels he was in the right place at the right time ---- and did his duty.

c. Once temperamental, he can’t get angry anymore. Common sense is the valuable asset.

a. Jason’s incredible strength, integrity and character serve him to this day.

b. He knows what he hopes to achieve and retains a fierce loyalty to himself, his friends and department.

c. He would love to have his old life back, but now would not trade who he IS as a human being now with anyone else.

The Jason Schechterle story is clearly inspiring. The legitimate question is what application does it have to fellow law enforcement officers? Law enforcement consultant, David Klinger, tells us the key is survival mindset.

1. The first thing is identifying something in your life you don’t want someone to take away from you such as a loved one.

2. Expect the unexpected. Remain aware that anything can happen at any time and you must be ready for anything.

3. Rehearse possible scenarios by developing “what if” game plan with officers you work with so all are on the same page. Different people have different ideas on how to do things. This is a recipe for disaster.

4. Officers should spend some time reviewing other officers’ bad situations. Focus on failures. And focus on all the things other officers did right.

Epilog (1:48)

Rogelio Gutierrez, the taxi driver, was an illegal alien who had been cited at least four times for driving illegally. He was an epileptic who had not been taking his medication. Gutierrez was found guilty of assault and currently is spending 12 years in prison. He offered no apology.

Jason has had over 43 mainly major surgeries with skin grafts on hands and eyes and other surgeries for abdominal and tissue expansion. During therapy, he suffered no depression.

Jason and Suzie, with two children, welcomed a new addition, son Mason, in October 2002. Jason is currently back on duty working as a Public Information Officer at the Phoenix Police Department and does speaking engagements nationally to groups, schools and, of course, other agencies.
Lessons Learned  (2:08)

4. Departments should treat injured officers as part of the Family.
5. Have a Plan to help injured officers and their families.
6. Give Officers Support Time to do what they need to do.
7. No matter what, Never Give Up

Questions:  (1:22)

1. Do you believe you have the mental toughness to survive injuries as horrific as Jason Schechterle’s? Why? Why not?

   1. Have you and your partner(s) discussed “What If” Scenarios, in the event you may be seriously injured or killed?

   1. What actions would you expect your partner to take in such event(s)?

      1. Would you prefer your partner or an officer close to you to notify your family in the event of a tragedy? Have you discussed it at length with fellow officers and/or department administrators.

   1. As an administrator, is your department prepared to deal with a critically injured or wounded officer, who may need support and backing for years? If not, why not?

   1. Would you, as a department administrator, “clear the decks” in any way possible to support a horribly injured officer, such as Jason?

   1. Exactly, how would you go about it? Have personnel been identified who would act as liaison to the media, the injured officer’s family, insurance and welfare, etc.

   1. Has this program had an impact on your own “Iron will to survive” any test? Share your thoughts with fellow officers as best you can.

Don and I welcome your feedback. We invite you to bookmark our website at: www.lineofduty.com which is updated seven days a week with vital law enforcement news and information

Sincerely and in Officer Safety,
Ron Barber and Don Marsh, Executive Producers
IN THE LINE OF DUTY
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LESSON PLAN

SYNOPSIS: This course is designed to underscore the survival mindset in law enforcement officers through the miraculous survival of a Phoenix officer who nearly burned alive in his police cruiser. Officers will also learn to recognize some of the new concealed weapons being found on the streets.

Time: 1 Hour

Objectives:

Upon completion of this course, officers should have a better understanding of the qualities needed to survive when facing the unexpected.

Obj. A. Understand how the unexpected can happen to any officer at any time.

Obj. B Understand survival instincts.

Obj. C Understand the means of developing the survival mindset.

Obj. D Understand and identify some of the latest in concealed weapons now being found on the streets.
Obj. A 1. Understand how the unexpected can happen to any officer at any time.

 a) Accident totally unpredictable
 b) Luck plays a role. Firefighters just happened to be on the scene after accident.
 c) Jason’s presence of mind, even in a semi conscious state, of trying to and assisting in escaping from the burning vehicle.


 a) Jason never lost the will to live
 b) He never gave up in fight
 c) He refused to accept doctors’ concerns that he might not survive
 d) Maintained spirit and perseverance
 e) He had loving support of family
 f) It was as much to survive for them as for himself
 g) He had support from the Phoenix P.D. which attended to his family’s needs allowing him to concentrate on his own rehabilitation
 h) Determined to survive to continue as police officer

Obj. C 1. Understand the means of developing the survival mindset.

 a) Mindset is the key to survival
 b) The first thing is identifying something in your life you don’t want someone to take away from you such as a loved one.
 c) Expect the unexpected. Remain aware that anything can happen at any time and you must be ready for anything.
 d) Rehearse possible scenarios by
developing “what if” game plan with officers you work with so all are on the same page. Different people have different ideas on how to do things. This is a recipe for disaster.

e) Officers should spend some time reviewing other officers’ bad situations. Focus on failures. AND focus on all the things other officers did right.

Obj. D

1. Understand and identify some of the latest in concealed weapons now being found on the streets.
   a) Cell Phone Gun---Looks like cell phones but weighs slightly more. Capable of firing four 22 caliber rounds.
   b) Pen Gun---Looks like a pen, but can cock on opening to fire a single action 22 caliber round
   c) Knife Gun—A functioning knife that can be concealed in the palm of the hand. Stubby blade. Separate barrel flips out at 90 degrees to fire
   d) Stinger---World’s smallest handgun. About the size of credit card and can fire a single 9mm round.