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Off-Duty Survival

by Jim R. - IPA-USA Region 6 Member

In 2010 one of my partners and I were discussing off-duty murders of officers and the fact that we were starting to see more and more officers involved in violent encounters with suspects with their babies or small children with them. At this point in our department's history, 4 of the last 11 deputies had been murdered at their homes. It appeared none of the suspects knew they were law enforcement officers.

My partner (Roy Burns, one of the most experienced tactics instructors on our department) discussed the situation. The few law enforcement agencies in California, who ever had off-duty survival training, had cut back their courses from a couple of hours down to nothing. Only one department still had a course and they would not allow officers from outside their agency to attend. As for our own agency we had been left with an optional PowerPoint we could watch that unfortunately put out bad information that could get officers killed.

We realized that we needed to create our own course and open it up to all law enforcement. We learned a lot in doing the research in preparation for the first class, however we have learned so much more from the students over the last few years. In almost every class session we have a student that has been attacked off-duty or one of their family members have been attacked in their presence.

We need to realize any of us could get involved in an off-duty violent encounter today. An active shooter may attack your child's school as your dropping them off, you could be targeted for a robbery when you stop to gas up your personal vehicle, you might see a lone uniformed officer in a fight on the way home, or



you and your family could be in a restaurant during a takeover robbery.

Are you ready?

This training was developed based on hundreds of case studies, interviews with surviving officers and witnesses.

TOPIC ONE: BLENDING

Off-duty consider yourself undercover. You have the element of surprise that you are an armed officer and that is mostly what is keeping you safe. Based on reviews of hundreds of actual off-duty incidents, rarely is identifying yourself as an officer going to protect you.



Rule #1: Don't dress like an off-duty cop

Start looking at how civilians actually dress. It's not all jeans and black t-shirts. Ask suspects you arrest how they spot off-duty or undercover cops when they are out capering. Often they have told us cops will have their badge case visible in addition to a wallet in their back pocket, they have silver beaded chains visible around their neck for a badge holder, they don't wear jewelry and they will have law enforcement or firearm related t-shirts.



\$35.00 Off Duty Police Detective Sweatshirt (dark)



More from this collection:



Rule #2: Don't let your behavior give you away

As law enforcement officers we are trained to be observant and that is what gives us situational awareness and keeps us safer than

the general public. We need to be just as observant when we are off-duty however; we need to be discreet about it. Far too often our eyes give us away. A typical civilian going about their daily travels will not make nearly as much eye contact with a stranger as law enforcement officers do. Bad guys quickly pick up on our level of observation and lack of fear and know we are cops. Our civilian family members will recognize danger when it becomes much more obvious, but they often rationalize it and never act on it. An outstanding book to help them learn to trust their instincts and react as soon as they detect danger is called, "The Gift of Fear" by Gavin de Becker.



Rule #3: Don't immediately disarm just because you are home

Your home is not a safe zone! You or your family can be targeted because of your official duties; however, much more frequently officers are murdered in their homes just because a suspect decides to make them one of their random victims.

In 2009 Las Vegas Metro Officer Nettleton saved his family including his 2 month old daughter because he had his handgun on him when 3 armed gang members walked into his



garage shortly after getting home. Take a tour of your home with your family and show them what items can be used as a weapon if they are not able to just escape from an intruder.

TOPIC TWO: FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

When you are in public do you have a safety plan for your family? The same way we made mistakes during our role playing in our basic academy, we can expect our family members to make mistakes the first time they need to perform in an emergency. We can drastically improve their performance by roleplaying with our children and significant others. Have a code word or phrase set up with your family to get their attention and tell them there is an emergency and what to do.

Here is an example you may want to use:

"Code red, get away" When you tell them this, they should immediately look at what you are wearing (so they can describe you to the dispatcher later), and leave the location quietly without asking questions.

When they are at a safe distance they call the local police and give your location, tell them you are an armed off duty-officer, describe you and tell dispatch you need help.

"Code red, get behind me" You have evaluated that based on the threat and location, the safest location they can get to is behind you. When you tell them this, they should immediately get behind you without asking questions.

"Code red, get away drill" When you tell them this, they should immediately look at what you are wearing (so that they can describe you to yourself later), and leave the location quietly without asking questions. When they are at a safe distance they call you and you act as the dispatcher seeing if they can relate the proper information.

Similarly have you discussed with your family what to do if you are recognized? If someone approaches you and your family and says, "You remember me Officer Jones?" In that situation our families should be prepared to act just as if we had said "Code Red Get Away."



The purpose of this briefing bulletin was to give you topics to consider prior to an incident, generate conversation and make you, your partners and your families safer.

FOOTNOTE:

The author of this article is Jim R. who is an IPA-USA Region 6 member. He has been with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department for 27 years, and is currently a detective in counter terrorism assigned to the Joint Terrorism Intelligence Center.

His past experience includes 4 county jails and 6 patrol assignments. For the last 6 years he has been the Lead Instructor and Team Leader of his department's Dignitary Protection Unit, and has spent 3 years as a task force member with the FBI's Joint Terrorism Taskforce. He is an experienced instructor having taught Firearms, Defensive Tactics, Dignitary Protection, Active Shooter Response, Vice Enforcement, Bus Emergency Tactics, Taser, WMD, Intelligence, Surveillance, Surveillance Detection, Bomb and Explosive Threats, Undercover, Off-Duty Survival and Ambush Survival.

Jim has also taught tactics and investigative classes for the Department of Defense Force Protection Detachment and the U.S. State Department as well as HUMINT classes for LAPD's Policing Convergent Threats course. Since 1998 he has been a Peer Counselor for his department's Peer Support unit, including one of the initial members of the Officer Involved Shooting Roll-out Team. Currently Jim is a member of the Sheriff's Response Team available for large scale tactical responses and is President and owner of High Threat Solutions Worldwide.

Jim's reasons for not including his surname with this article is "We have "Sovereign Citizens" the National Lawyers Guild and others that are making it a practice to track officers to their homes and families so I try to use my last name as little as possible."

What do readers think of the statement above? My opinion is that is a bit 'over the top', but that's apparently what's happening in Jims part of the world – so be it. Send me an email with your opinion.

Ray Newman – National Editor

