

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

Administrative Response to Officer Deaths

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
David L. Slanker**

**Bryan Police Department
Bryan, Texas
March 2009**

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper was to receive credit for the Leadership Command College Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas. Many police organizations do not have a policy governing the administrative response to officer deaths. Supervisors from a cross section of police organizations were surveyed to determine if they had adequate policies in place. Research indicated that the majority of departments did not have sufficient policy and that research into the considerations that should be addressed was necessary. The classification of the types of officer deaths and the nature of the administrative response for each was outlined. Law enforcement organizations now have a starting point and recommended procedures for the administrative response to officer deaths.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.	1
Review of Literature	2
Methodology	4
Findings	5
Discussions	7
References	10
Appendix	

INTRODUCTION

Daily in our society law enforcement officers prepare for duty and report to their assignments in order to protect and serve in accordance with their oaths of office. Most law enforcement professionals are required to carry a firearm and wear a ballistic vest while on duty. This is because of the innate danger associated with the profession of enforcing laws. Felonious assaults on police officers are responsible for numerous deaths every year. Law enforcement officers do not live as long as other members of society after retirement. (Stein, 2002) The primary cause is stress and related health problems associated with the rigors of police work.

There are thousands of police officers in Texas. Several law enforcement officers including retired officers die every year. Many law enforcement administrators are not prepared for the death of an officer or the death of a retired member of the department. Many law enforcement agencies have not experienced a line-of-duty death. Perhaps for this reason, thirty three percent of the police agencies that responded to a survey conducted by Concerns of Police Survivors reported having no policy dealing with this sensitive issue. (Sawyer, 1999) The author's purpose for conducting this research is to illustrate the lack of preparedness by numerous law enforcement administrations regarding officer deaths and to furnish suggested practices to law enforcement administrators confronted with the death of an officer.

The author used several methods of inquiry while researching police administrator's responses to officer deaths. The methods consisted of researching published documentation including journals and periodicals and the review of existing policy and procedures regarding officer deaths. The author also surveyed Texas law

enforcement supervisors to determine if there was a planned response or policy at their department for officer deaths. If a policy was available, the supervisors were asked if they believed it was adequate to guide the administration through an officer's death.

It was anticipated that this research would demonstrate several findings. First, that many law enforcement administrations did not have a satisfactory procedure in place to effectively respond to officer deaths in a manner where the department member is appropriately honored based upon the status and circumstances of the death. Second, it was anticipated that the research would show the primary concern of the officers was the surviving family members and how they were assisted by the police agency. Finally, it was anticipated that the research would show that members of law enforcement organizations had not planned for a professional response to the different circumstances surrounding officer deaths.

This research will lend valuable insight to law enforcement administrators regarding the need for a planned response to officer deaths. Law enforcement agencies with no response plan or an undesirable plan will realize the importance of ensuring the circumstances outlined by this research are considered. Important details may not be overlooked due to an unplanned response during an emotional time. The surviving family members will potentially feel included, comforted, and honored by the law enforcement agency's response to the death. The department members will likely be proud of the agency's response to the officer's death.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS) published a helpful line-of-duty death guideline that contains a comprehensive officer questionnaire. The confidential

questionnaire allows officers to record information about wills, insurance policies, funeral wishes, and the distribution of possessions. After the officer completes the questionnaire, it should be sealed in an envelope to be opened only in the event of the officer's death or serious injury. (Wilson, 2006)

Several areas of responsibility are assigned depending upon the category of the funeral. Many liaisons will be required. An agency representative will be required as necessary at the hospital, the administrative offices of the department, a family representative, a funeral coordination representative and a media point of contact. The administrative representative will be responsible for coordinating benefits and stress management for surviving officers. The funeral coordinator will work within the department and assisting agencies to outline the ceremonial protocol. (Wilson, 2006)

William Sanders book, Law Enforcement Funeral Manual, provides law enforcement agencies with a reference to assist in preparing for the unexpected death of department members. His sources included the International Conference of Police Chaplains. Law enforcement officer death circumstances and the funeral protocols utilized for each are discussed. It further covers the nuances of many religious preferences after death. The appendices contain checklists to assist the departments to avoid forgetting important details. (Sanders, 2001)

I Love a Cop: What Police Families Need to Know was written by clinical psychologist Ellen Kirschman. (2000) It was written for the significant others, spouses, and family members of police officers. The very skills required to be a competent officer, such as being able to suppress strong emotions including fear, anger, and even compassion, are harmful to officers' private and personal lives if carried over to the

home. Practical advice is given about what to expect from the demands of police work and coping with stress or trauma are outlined. The advice includes information about dealing with domestic abuse, threats of suicide, and other severe cases. *I Love a Cop* is intended especially for the loved ones of police officers.

The few agencies that have protocols for officer deaths are mainly restricted to the administrative response to line-of-duty deaths. The confidential questionnaires allow the officer to take the responsibility of planning for his untimely death from the survivors. The line-of-duty death while the most shocking officer death is not the most common. Some agencies do have a plan for line-of-duty death but not for other categories. Accidental deaths of officers and the deaths of retired officers occur much more frequently. The department has a significant responsibility to the survivors during these times. Unfortunately, officers commit suicide more often than they are feloniously killed. (Kirschman, 2000) The time for debate on the type of ceremony available is not after the death.

METHODOLOGY

The author was a supervisor on duty when an officer was killed in the line of duty. The author was the administrative liaison with the surviving family of an officer that died off duty. During these two traumatic deaths the author's department had no comprehensive administrative and departmental response plan. The author believes other police agencies are also unprepared. There are departments that have planned the response but have neglected to consider the numerous categories of officer deaths. The author believes that agencies need a comprehensive list of recommended practices to consider for use during the administrative response to officer deaths. Police

agencies must have policy governing the administrative response to an officer's death. The policy should cover line-of-duty deaths, retiree deaths, non-duty related deaths, suicide and retiree suicide. The officers and survivors expect the administration to respond in a manner that honors the fallen officer and comforts the survivors.

The author conducted a small survey of twenty-three police supervisors and administrators attending the Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, Module I. There was a one hundred percent response rate to the instrument. Supervisors were defined as first line supervisors while administrators were defined as all ranks above first line supervisors. The survey asked questions to determine if the administrative response to officer deaths was in policy and if so, what the policy covered. The survey also asked if there had been at least one officer death at the agency. The survey asked if the supervisors believed the policy was adequate to guide the administration through and officer's death. All participants were asked what the most important priority for the administrative response to an officer's death, from their point of view, in a fill in the blank format. The data will be mathematically analyzed to determine what percent of departments have policies and what percent of departments believed the policy was adequate. Further analysis will determine how many of the agencies have experienced an officer death and still do not have a policy. The data will also be utilized to determine what type of officer deaths are covered by policy.

FINDINGS

One hundred percent of the survey instruments were completed and returned. Fifty-two percent of the survey group was first line supervisors. First line supervisors are defined in this survey as sergeants supervising line level officers. The remaining 48

percent were administrators. Administrators are defined in this survey as supervisors that are senior in rank to first line supervisors. Of the 23 departments surveyed, 61 percent had experienced at least one officer death. Officer death for this survey was defined as a current officer or retired officer that died regardless of circumstance. The survey asked the participants if their department has a policy governing an administrative response to an officer's death. Thirty-five percent of department surveyed had a policy. Of this 35 percent, 88 percent had guidelines for line-of-duty death. Seventy-five percent had line-of-duty death, retiree death and non-duty related death. Only 38 percent of those agencies with a policy had guidelines for retiree deaths or officer/retiree suicides. The survey group was asked if they felt their agency's policy was adequate to guide the administration through an officer's death. Only 63 percent of the survey group that had policies at their agency believed the policy was sufficient. Ironically, of the 61 percent of the survey group that had experienced an officer death, 26 percent still do not have a response policy. The survey group was a cross section of Texas Law Enforcement agencies. Seventy percent of the survey group was employed at municipal police departments. Thirty-nine percent of the survey group had between 26 and 75 officers in the department while 22 percent had between 76 and 150 officers. The principle concern listed by the participants in the survey was the department's ability to adequately respond to the needs of the survivors. Ninety-six percent listed the surviving family member's needs as the most important priority for the administrative response to an officer's death.

DISCUSSION

The fact that the majority of these departments are not small rural agencies further illustrates the lack of preparedness to respond adequately to an officer's death. The national organization Concerns of Police Survivors national survey showed that only 33 percent of departments had a policy outlining the administrative response to officer deaths. (Sawyer, 1999) This disturbing fact was confirmed during the survey conducted by the author. Clearly, many departments are not prepared to honor the fallen officers and adequately support the survivors. This research supports the need for police departments to have a policy governing the administrative response to officer deaths.

The purpose of the policy is to establish procedures that will ensure the proper notification, support and emotional care for an employee's family should an officer's death occur. The policy will also ensure proper honor of the fallen officer is rendered. The objectives of the policy should be to establish protocol for notification, standardize burial protocol, promote honor and respect for the fallen officer, establish lines of authority and assign responsibilities during the events relating to the officer's death, establish criteria for each level or class of funeral and establish the criteria for the honors rendered for each class of funeral. It is recommended that departments mandate that every employee complete an information packet. (Wilson, 2006) A team approach should be utilized. A supervisor should be designated to oversee the entire response to an officer's death. The honor guard supervisor is a logical choice. The chief of police must be notified and then will assume responsibility of official notification of the next of kin. A hospital liaison should be designated if applicable. The hospital

liaison should arrange a private waiting area for the officer's family, a separate area for waiting officers, establish a press staging area, ensure information is given to the family in a timely manner, and arrange transportation for the family back to their residence. The department's critical incident stress management (CISM) team supervisor should be responsible for notifying the risk management and human resources representative and assembling the response team for the department members if the circumstances surrounding the officer's death warrant it. An administrative liaison should be appointed. The administrative liaison will coordinate shift coverage by another agency during the funeral, assignment of a uniformed officer at the residence of the deceased officer and all aspects of the officer's death concerning benefits and administrative response. (Wilson, 2006) A family liaison should be appointed. This officer should be trusted by the survivors. The dual liaison appointments will ensure the survivor has trusted advisors during the aftermath of the officer's death. If necessary, an information officer should be designated. The department's public information officer could be utilized if the circumstances of the officer's death are not overwhelming. The honor guard supervisor or the chief of police designee should review the deceased officer's information packet and begin preparing to honor the fallen officer. If the classifications of officer funerals are in the policy it will reduce the discussion of what should be done by the department to honor the fallen officer. (Sanders, 2001)

Class one deaths should be for members of the department killed in the line of duty or die from injuries sustained while on duty. Class two deaths should be for deaths occurring when an active officer is off duty and not related to any police activities. A class two death should be for suicides. A class three death should be for the death of a

retired member of the police department regardless of the circumstances. A class one death should require a full activation of the department's response team and full honors of the honor guard including a funeral escort, viewing casket guard, folding of the flag, a twenty-one gun salute, bagpipes, taps, and any other honors available. The incident command system (ICS) may be necessary for logistic support and traffic management on the day of the funeral. Department personnel should be assigned to attend in full dress uniform. A class two death should require a funeral procession escort, viewing casket guard, all available personnel should be encouraged to attend on duty and the honor guard should be present. A class three death should require notification of the department by the deceased retiree's family. Viewing casket guard and a funeral procession escort should be offered if the funeral is within a reasonable distance of the department. Honor guard attendance and taps are appropriate if requested. The family liaison and the administrative liaison are responsible to ensure the survivor's needs addressed into the future. The survivor should have final say in any funeral and ceremonial arrangements. It is vital that the ceremonial honors do not surprise the survivors. If the survivor requests honors usually reserved for a different class, the administrative liaison should be responsible for the final decision. With these considerations, departments should be able to adapt this research to a workable policy. The policy will ensure that the administrative response to an officer's death will be appropriate, adequate and professional.

REFERENCES

Kirschman, E., (2000). *I Love a Cop What Police Families Need to Know*. New York:

Guilford Press.

Sanders, W.P., (2001). *Law Enforcement Funeral Manual: A Practical Guide for Law*

Enforcement Agencies When Faced With the Death of a Member of Their

Department. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher LTD.

Sawyer, S., (1999). Support Services to Surviving Families of Line-of-Duty Death, A

Public Safety Agency Handbook, Concerns of Police Survivors Inc., retrieved

February 23, 2008 from <http://www.nationalcops.org/forms/support.pdf>

Stein, R., (2002). Scientists ID stress, aging link. *The Washington Post* retrieved

December 1, 2004 from

http://www.qctimes.com/print.php?story_id=1040499&doc

Wade, D., (2001). Line of Duty Police Death Notifications Planning for the Unthinkable.

FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, 70 (4), 13-17.

Wilson, B., (2006). Standardized Law Enforcement Funeral Protocol. *The Police Chief*,

LXXIII (5), 20-28.

APPENDIX

- Appendix 1 Survey Instrument

Survey

- 1: Are you a Supervisor? (First line) Yes_____ No _____
- 2: Are you an Administrator? (Above First line) Yes _____ No_____
- 3: Has your agency experienced an officer's death? Yes _____ No_____
- 4: Does your department have a policy governing an administrative response to an officer's death?
Yes _____ No_____ [If No please go to #9]
- 5: Does your agency's policy address:
- a) Line of Duty Death Yes ____ No_____
 - b) Retiree Death Yes ____ No_____
 - c) Non-Duty related death Yes ____ No_____
 - d) Officer/Retiree Suicide Yes ____ No_____
- 6: Does your agency's policy address Survivor Assistance? Yes_____ No_____
- 7: Does your agency's policy address ceremonial protocol? Yes_____ No_____
- 8: Do you feel you agency's policy is adequate to guide the administration through an officer's death?
Yes_____ No_____
- 9: Please list the one most important priority for the administrative response to an officer's death from you point of view.
-
- 10: Please List the one most important priority for the administrative response to your surviving family members in the event of your passing away both on or off duty.
-
- (Please, use the back of the sheet if you need additional space or would like to make additional comments, thank you)
- 11: Size of Department: Under 25 _____ 26 –75 _____
75 - 150 _____ Over 150 _____
- 12: Type of Department: City _____ County _____ State _____ Other:_____