

Hazards Cops Face With EDPs Are Unappreciated

Can Be Victims Either Way

By **THOMAS R. SULLIVAN**



Once again our police family has experienced a devastating reminder of how cruel and confounding our daily worklife can be.

The grievous injury suffered by Sgt. Timothy Smith in January as he was about to Taser an emotionally disturbed person ("EDP") was made all the more painful for our NYPD family by the utter lack of concern it elicited from our city's power elite.

Sustained Horrendous Wounds

Sergeant Smith was stabbed in the eye with such force that the knife not only penetrated his eye but caused severe bleeding on his brain, resulting in horrendous injury and perhaps permanent brain damage.

Think about that happening to someone you love and cherish, your father, your child, brother or sister. Take a moment to consider how your world would implode.

Members of the NYPD suffer permanent life-altering injuries on a regular basis, especially when dealing with emotionally disturbed persons.

According to news accounts, the person who plunged his knife into Sergeant Smith's eye, Neil Perreira, had been in and out of psychiatric wards for nine years, and police had been called to his home 10 times since 2001 to subdue him. He had set small fires, threatened neighbors, and become aggressive when he went off his anti-psychotic medication. A mental health review found that Perreira's frequent pot use made him paranoid and delusional. When he's off his meds, he "has a history of becoming agitated and aggressive in public," the review found. Perreira has been charged with attempted murder.

Who is responsible for establishing the misguided policy that allowed this person with his history to remain on the street? Who is being held accountable?

Cops Always Take the Weight

Every time a police officer is involved in an incident that does not go according to the text book, he/she is held accountable and must answer for their actions.

Unfortunately, incidents such as this make only the slightest impact on most of our citizens as they go about their daily lives, absorbed in their own issues and concerns.

To those officers who witness such horrific acts of violence being committed upon their comrades up close and personal, the memory never fades. It is instead added to a long litany of collective recollections that are shared and stored away for the next time, to be recalled in a split second at the unfolding of a similar situation to hopefully prevent a similar result.

So it was that I could not help but recall an earlier EDP confrontation situation of only a few months ago. In that incident, another member of the NYPD, faced with a comparable event, made a split-second decision to Taser an EDP as he attempted to strike one of his men with a long fluorescent glass bulb as the officer was attempting to secure himself to a fire escape. In this incident, which ended with the tragic death of the emotionally disturbed person, Lieut. Michael Pigott, a highly-respected and experienced member of ESU, was immediately vilified by the power elite and transferred without any opportunity to tell his side of the story. In police parlance, he was "thrown under the bus."

Overcome by Grief

I did have the opportunity to speak to Lieutenant Pigott shortly after the Taser incident. He was overcome by grief for a life lost. As we discussed what he was thinking in those split seconds before he gave the order to fire the Taser, he told me about a prior job where an officer had been knocked off a fire escape by an EDP and had fallen to the ground, suffering permanent, life-altering injuries before the Taser could be used. Lieutenant Pigott was deeply affected by this injured officer's plight and did not want "his" officers to suffer a similar fate. Following the utterly callous and disgraceful manner in which he was vilified in the media, Lieutenant Pigott took his own life.

The men and women of the NYPD are the best-trained, most-restrained and compassionate police force in the world. They are not supermen; they feel and bleed. They want to live long healthy lives, and enjoy their children and watch them grow, just as much as you do. It is the ultimate hypocrisy to continually vilify them for split-second, life-and-death decisions which do not always work out as well as we all would have hoped.

These decisions are made under enormous pressure under circumstances most of us could not even begin to imagine or deal with. Our officers bring to each job not only their training but the collective memory of all of their comrades killed and maimed in previous encounters.

The men and women of the NYPD are the single most important factor in preserving our way of life. They deserve far better, especially from all of those who influence and shape public opinion.

Lieutenant Sullivan is president of the Lieutenants' Benevolent Association.