



## THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

**Newsletter article August, 2021**

On February 1st Lt Michael Boutte of Hancock County Mississippi was dispatched to a suicidal party. Lt Boutte parked his patrol car and began to exit the vehicle to approach the home where the call for service had sent him. Lt. Boutte was immediately met with gunfire from within the home before he could even get clear of his own vehicle.

Several months later, Police Officer Jimmy Inn of Stockton, California had parked his vehicle several houses down from a reported domestic disturbance. He approached the front door, knocked and awaited a response. As the door opened he was met with gunfire without ever drawing his weapon.

A week later Police Officer Chris Oberheim of Champaign, Illinois was dispatched to a domestic disturbance. He and his partner had parked down the street and were approaching the apartment complex on foot. Before reaching the apartment they found themselves in contact with the suspect who immediately opened fire on them both.

Now the trend really ramps up.

July 9th, Police Officer William Collins of Doyline, Louisiana was dispatched to a home on a domestic disturbance call. He was met outside the home by the involved female party and began speaking with her, when the male party exited the home and immediately shot Officer Collins.

July 15th, Sgt Bartlett of Lubbock County, Texas was shot and killed on his approach to a home in a SWAT formation to apprehend a man who had already shot police earlier in the evening.

July 25th, Deputy Phillip Campas of Kern County, California was shot and killed, also on a SWAT approach to a home where a man had already shot at deputies approaching the home earlier for a call for service.

July 27th, Red Lake Nation Police Officer Ryan Bialke was shot and killed forcing entry into a home over a report of a suicidal party.

We're going to break all these down in just a moment, but if you read no further, if you're on duty right now and cannot finish the article because a call for service has come in, then notice the recent trend of officers being shot and killed as they approach a home and make first contact with the persons inside.

All these officers responded as trained and yet found themselves in fatal situations. We cannot stop all line of duty death, but how is it we have a variety of 'approaching the home' scenarios here where officers did as trained and we buried seven of them for it so far this year?

We respond to people's homes for a variety of reasons throughout a shift. We have become quite comfortable doing so. One of the first things I was taught, and have always passed on to my trainees, is to have the mentality that while I am there, I am the person in charge of the home. It's my home, and the people inside will be the ones asking where they can go and what they can do. (It's a mindset, not fourth amendment stomping actions) Having this mentality creates a position of superiority over the occupants that they recognize and it gains compliance while you are there. We will talk more about this in The Blue Family Tree Podcast this month, but having this mentality also creates a sense of comfort over time. When we are home, we are comfortable. Work becomes an extension of home, and being comfortable can cause one to miss potential threats.

Of the seven cases this year, two were suicidal calls, three were domestic disturbances, and two were mental subjects who had already opened fire on law enforcement.

Lt. Boutte was trained to park down the street and approach on foot when responding to a suicidal subject at a home. This allows him to be free from his vehicle and uses his senses while approaching like seeing and hearing his surroundings. It also makes him less conspicuous; a person walking down the sidewalk is not as easy to spot as a marked patrol vehicle. Finally, it provides him an opportunity to identify cover as he's moving closer to the call address and seek it if needed. In his case, however, Lt Boutte never had the opportunity to do any of that. He was met with gunfire while exiting his patrol car. The easy answer here is, "he parked too close." but we all know after our first year of parking seven houses away we eventually are parking one or maybe two away, so let's look a little closer at hypotheticals that may have made a difference here. Was Lt Boutte parked on the same side of the street as the call address or the opposite? If he was parked on the same side, would the vehicle have provided some cover for his exit? Could he have parked on the same side with out driving in front of the house by coming into the block from another direction? Could he have parked on the same side facing the wrong way, losing the engine for cover, but not exposing him to as much visibility as across the street would? We're there other resources available to soften the target location first such as an unmarked driving by? And on the topic of driving by, stepping outside of traditional training, what if a marked unit drove by and did a u-turn at the end of the block, then the responding officers on foot came from the other direction while potential bad guys were watching the marked patrol car that drove by? I don't know if that's a good idea or not.... Just a thought. Hindsight is 20/20 and Monday morning quarterbacking is absolutely unfair. For that reason we are not suggesting that any of these officers did anything wrong. We are only asking questions that may prompt you to do something a little different. The tactic of not rolling up and parking in the suspects driveway is time tested and should never go away, but time

tested ideas are known by both sides of the field and people intended on doing police harm know that we walk in, so we need to consider changing approaches and doing things differently from time to time. I would even suggest there is a time and a place for parking right there in the driveway, having all your tools and resources close at hand, and grabbing as much ground from the suspect as possible right away, but this is not an approach to be used in any of these scenarios.

Officer Inn also responded as trained. Specifically, he had positioned himself to see down the long wall next to the front door where he could see the windows and he was on the door's non-hinge side so he would have immediate view into the home when the door opened out. There are several points to consider in this case. The windows on the long wall are barred, and it was during the middle of the day, so the likelihood of a threat coming out the barred windows was fairly low, and the ability to see movement inside with the sun's reflection was also pretty low. Like all of you, I hate the idea of not watching the windows, but consider what value watching them actually brings. Officer Inn had positioned himself perfectly centered on the corner between the door and the long wall. Sometimes our lives come down to a matter of inches. If he is hell-bent on watching those windows, What would he lose if he actually stood on the long wall looking around the corner at the door, instead of fully in front of the opening door? Finally, one that I have grown to like over the years, but it took some time to get comfortable with: I prefer being on the hinge-side of an outward opening door. Make the occupant extend out of the home to find you. This does a few things. If they lead with a gun you have the drop on them. If they lead with their head, you have already processed the door opening and now you are prepared for what's next, rather than visually consuming the door opening and a person and a hand with a gun all at once. And after they have presented themselves past the door without a threat to you, they are now positioned in the doorway providing cover for you from any other threats that may come from inside the home. In this case the hinge side is a short wall and there is no room to offset on the hinge side, so positioning on the long

wall and looking around at the door was likely the best option. There is always going to be different arrangements of walls, windows, door styles, cover, etc, so study the arena you're stepping into on your approach and make the best decision you can for the circumstances presented instead of the decision you always make.

How many times have we all been making the walk up to an address and the presumed RP is standing out front waiting for us. We reach the corner of their property and make a 45 degree turn toward the porch and say, "Hey what's going on tonight?" The RP meets us half way and there we are, getting the scoop from the RP in the middle of the yard with the suspect lying in wait inside. Don't lie. We've all done this more times than we can count. For Officer Collins, this proved to be a big mistake, and it stems from that command presence and knowing that while you're there, it's your house like we talked about before. What kind of command presence is it to hide around the corner and make the RP come to you? And how paranoid are you anyway if you think every domestic call could end this way? So we stand in the yard and get sucked into the RP's story until we miss the threat that emerges from the home.

Sgt Bartlett and Deputy Campas have strangely similar stories to occur just back to back from each other. Deranged men who have already been firing at police and are now barricaded in their homes. Well trained, well equipped, and sound SWAT teams respond to end the standoff. With the exception of the SWAT team, Officer Bialke's incident follows suit as well. In these cases we already know a great deal about the mindset and willingness of the barricaded subject. We should also recognize that when approaching the home we are at an extreme disadvantage. If the issue needs to be forced and ended right now, then so be it, let's just make sure that is actually the case. With the exception of an innocent bystander inside that's in danger, The better option may be to carry the call through the shifts until the situation changes to our benefit. Administrators may not like that answer. They want the situation resolved before the evening news, but if they knew the outcome would

be a line of duty death, they'd take 'sit and wait' any day. With time, it will only get better for us and worse for the suspect.

It's never fair for us to sit back and analyze these incidents with extremely limited information. The Blue Family Tree has not received de-briefings on any of these incidents and has only the public research available on the web from which to draw likely inaccurate conclusions. The point is not to give our readers precise accounts of what happened to these officers, but rather to make you think on the hypotheticals of what might have happened and how they may have been able to do something different.

There is a trend developing right now in line- of-duty-death and it is on approach to homes for a call for service when we are most vulnerable. The trend includes ambush. It includes suspects understanding our tactics. It includes information known from dispatch about the mental status, or anger level of the suspects. It includes a position of comfort for us in years preceding the trend. Take your knowledge of this trend brought to you by our close watch of Officer Down Memorial Page and be conscious of it the next time you have to approach a house on a call for service.