



## THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

**Newsletter article January, 2021**

### 2020 IN REVIEW

It's over. Everyone has been waiting for January with great anticipation, and it's finally here. Let's take a minute and reflect on 2020.

we entered 2020 leaving behind 148 of our brothers and sisters in 2019. Just think for a moment about the world they left us, and the things they never knew. Household words (and I mean every household) like "COVID", "George Floyd", "Defund police", "Rittnehouse", and "autonomous zone" just to name a few. If those we left behind just 12 months ago could somehow miraculously return, what on earth would they think of our face coverings, six foot gaps in grocery store lines, and carry-out margaritas? It really is an entirely different world. What a difference one year can make.

Our government always fights with itself; this is not new, but to these extreme measures? No matter your viewpoint, I think we can all agree this house is broken, and the saddest part of all is that we only want to do our jobs and protect the public, but we've been involuntarily thrown directly into the center of the pot. yep. Center stage, and at times it seems we've forgotten our lines. Of course most the time we are spot on. American law enforcement is the most highly trained law enforcement on the globe, and even within our own ranks, the training from one decade to the next just keeps getting better and better and better. This is why when we sit back and listen to the professional talking heads discuss what's wrong with our profession, it angers us. They say our training is stuck in the ages of Jim Crow, but we know exactly how much training and standards and testing and accountability has changed and grown, not just since 1900 or even 1950, but as recently as the last decade and even the last year. Police are constantly learning to change and adapt to the political, judicial, legal, and policy driven environments around them. I'm willing to bet if you're an officer in 2020 who is reading this article, you have experienced new trainings this year, and will soon be sporting a body worn camera.

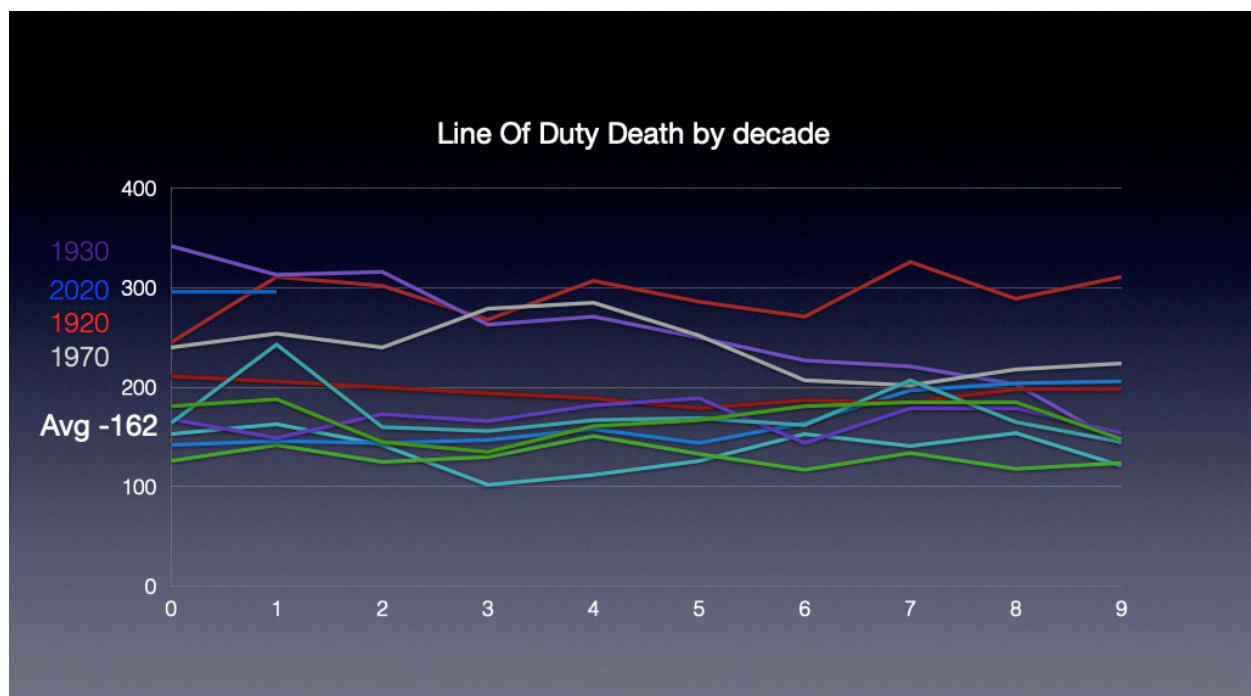
Let's talk about the cameras. Nancy Regan is the creator of the police camera. It came about under her signature program, Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Her idea

at the time was that the absolute best evidence in a DUI trial would be for the jury to see and hear the drunk themselves. (I'd like the jury to smell them too, but that technology has not yet been invented.) And she was right. DUI convictions increased with the introduction of the in-car camera, even though at the time it was a VHS tape that the officer had to remove and book as evidence. Imagine in today's world if you booked a VHS tape. The lawyers would never stop accusing you of tampering. Now we have digital video that the officers are not allowed to have editing rights to. Another change. Since the inception of car cameras, line of duty death has decreased. There are other factors that came along near the same era such as bullet proof vests and non-lethal options like Taser, but no one can dispute that through armchair quarterbacking of our shift-mates videos, we have changed and improved tactics. Getting to see ourselves in action provided actual data instead of perceived data. Where we may have thought officers were just being bested by their opponent, we now are able to pinpoint a weakness in training and develop training programs and methods to improve specific skills. Deaths were on the decline and it was an unintended consequence of Nancy Regans MADD program and in-car cameras. Of course, groups like the ACLU were all too happy to support the dash cam program as well. They were salivating at finally having an opportunity to prove all the misuse and abuse that happens on America's streets. It was not long before they found they were gravely disappointed. When the film didn't show abuse the cries for missing videos, and doctored videos began to come, and we moved to digital media where accusations of tampering became nothing more than frivolous. Dash cams became expensive, and as storage mounted up, it just added to the agencies cost. The ACLU became less interested because they were not finding the gold mines they had hoped for, and the pressure on departments to record, started to drift away. Many departments moved away from cameras, that is, until 2020 happened.

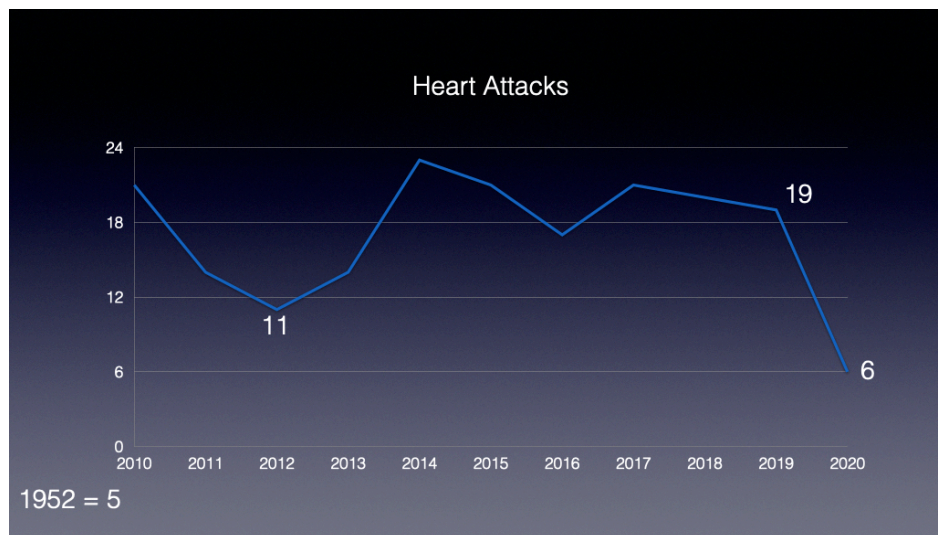
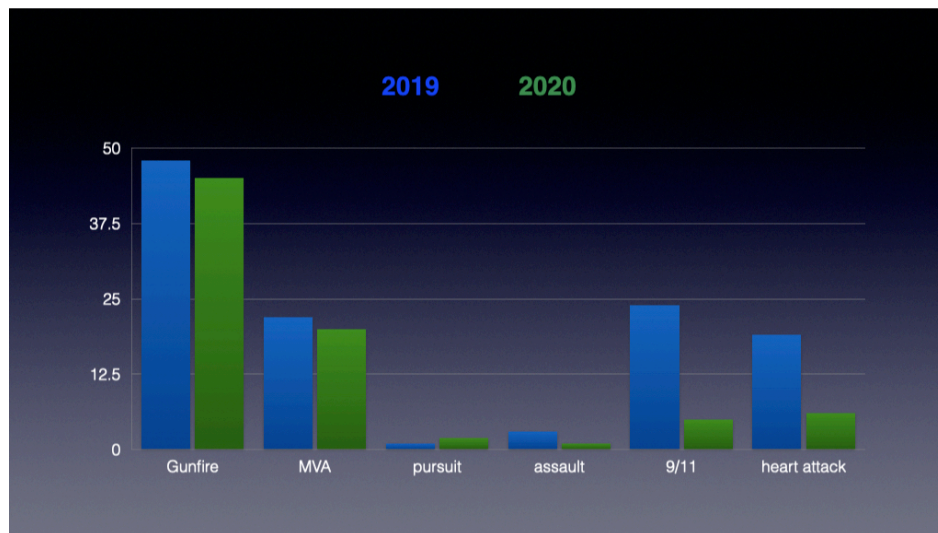
I am a fan of cameras. I know many officers rounding the corner towards the finish line like myself that are not fans, but let me explain. If you have been an officer for 20 years, you know that 20 years ago there were very few training videos aside from those with a PPCT instructor in piping shorts and a headband talking at you from under his mustache on a gym floor of wrestling mats. There were stories to be heard, but none to be seen and as time progressed and real training videos began to emerge, our skill levels shot through the roof, almost over night. Now, new officers are coming in having watched hundreds of hours of training video already. Sure, they call it entertainment because it's on their social media news feed, but there is no better training tool than the free training we receive while on a 15 minute break taking a 10-100. Police cameras have saved officers from frivolous suits and spared our lives in deadly situations far more than they have ever hurt us, and when in fact they have caught an officer doing something wrong, the masses among us are

appreciative of the fact that we have a tool to weed out corruption. I will concede that I have remained old school with regards to cameras in one aspect. I will not cater to the camera. I have noticed younger officers returning to their car to re-position so their contact is in view. The camera is a tool like any other. Sometimes it is really effective and sometimes it is not. Every tool we carry is designed with safety in mind; every single one right down to our pen. Placing yourself in harms way to look good on youtube, is not the goal of the camera and should never happen.

As we exit the year universally thought to be the worst year ever, I want to reflect on how we did as a family. What did our line of duty death actually look like? 307 deaths. That's a staggering increase of 107%. We have to look back to 2007 for an anomaly over 200, and clear back to 1932 to beat 2020 with 316 line of duty deaths. Yes, 1932. So will 2020 be an anomaly as well, or is this the new norm? Well, for a stable trend above 200 we have to go back to the 1970's when every single year of the decade was above 200. before that we see those kinds of numbers in the 1920's and 1930's, with 1939 being the only below 200 year in the two decades combined. For all three of these elevated decades we can point to a time in our nation's history when things were not so perfect. The 1920's and 1930's are of course the time of organized crime gangs followed by the great depression. After the mobs wreaked havoc on our cities, people who had nothing learned to steal, rob, and kill to feed their families. We changed, we grew, we passed more laws, we learned how to enforce them. Times got better. The last few years of the 60's began the climb into the 70's where we sustained high death tolls averaging 240 a year on the decade. This would be on the heels of the civil rights movement as the police and citizenry learned to live together again and police had yet to undergo much of the training that was to come. The 1980's brought with it vests, new less-lethal weaponry, and video cameras, and we experienced a staunch decline.

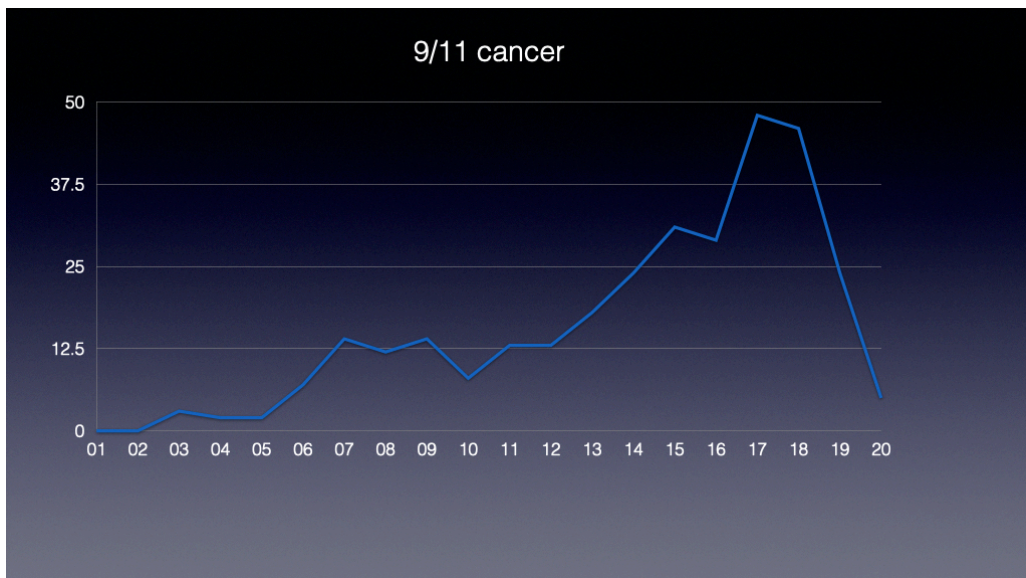


For our absurd 2020 increase we can point to COVID, claiming 189 lives. Many of the categories our on-duty deaths are listed under are below or very close to the same as they have been in subsequent years.

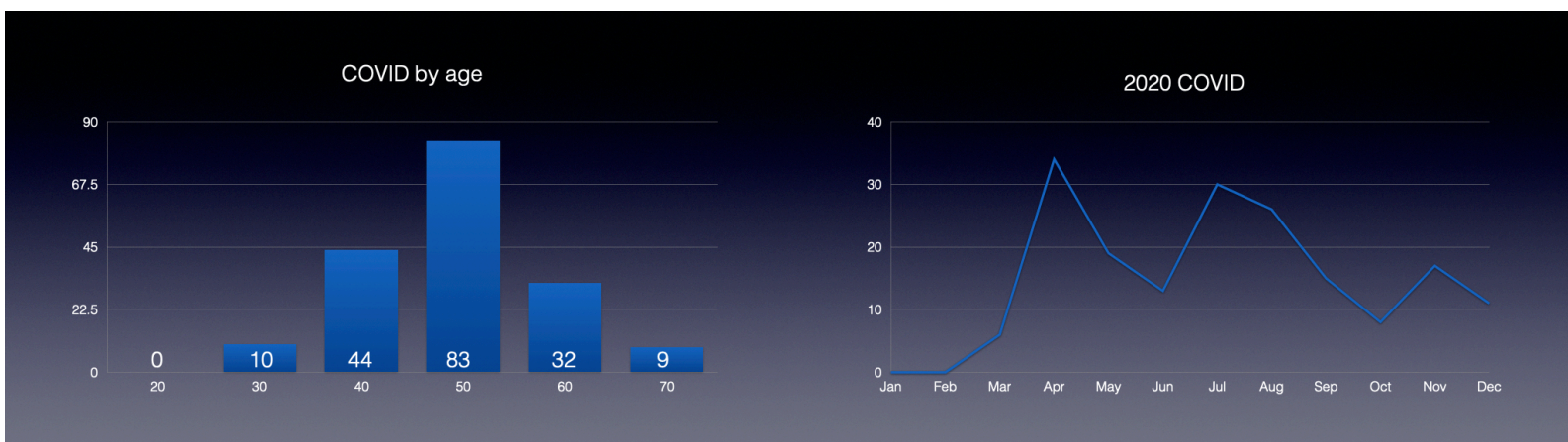
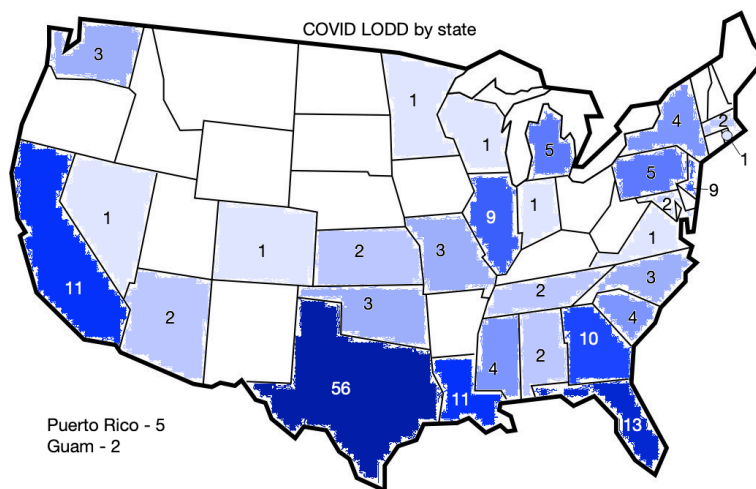


One exception is heart attacks. Heart attacks took a 300% dive off the last ten year average, and the last ten year average is pretty steadily the same for many decades before. As a matter of fact we have to look at 1952 to see less heart attacks than 2020 gave us. Did we just suddenly figure out heart disease and start eating right and exercising? Doubtful. The numbers might suggest that would-be heart attack victims may have succumbed to COVID before their heart disease could catch up, but certainly not to the tune of 189.





We also experienced a sharp 470% decrease in 9/11 cancer this year, but we do not know if those cancer patients succumbed to COVID, or if we are nearing the end of an era with regards to 9/11 cancer. No matter the case, there is no question that COVID took its toll.



So just like in our politics and elections, where we see numbers we cannot explain in the history of the country, we find ourselves scratching our heads to understand the numbers before us in LODD. There is no question that these men and women did in fact die, and we mourn the loss of some great peacekeepers who dedicated their lives to public service. But understanding and learning from 2020 may take many more years to come. We need to study the events of 2020 to understand the year better. Just as with the development of Nancy Regan's cameras came better policing, George Floyd, defunded departments, political unrest, and COVID 19 will bring better policing too. Have faith, search for the answers in the past, and it will improve with time. It always does. We always do.

\*The LODD numbers in this article reflect that which was recorded on January 1st, 2021. The numbers may have risen as more cases were reported after the article was published.