



## THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

**Newsletter article March, 2023**

The Blue Family Tree is dedicated to studying trends related to line of duty death and bringing those trends and solutions for braking them to the forefront of your mind while on duty. We believe actively protecting yourself from common trends may be the best way to ensure your safety throughout your shift and career. Unfortunately many hard statistics are not available until several years after they occur, leaving us to read raw data and make some educated assumptions on what, if anything, it means. Targeting long term trends certainly has value in reducing line of duty death, but being equally aware of acute and recent trends makes for a full picture of premier officer safety.

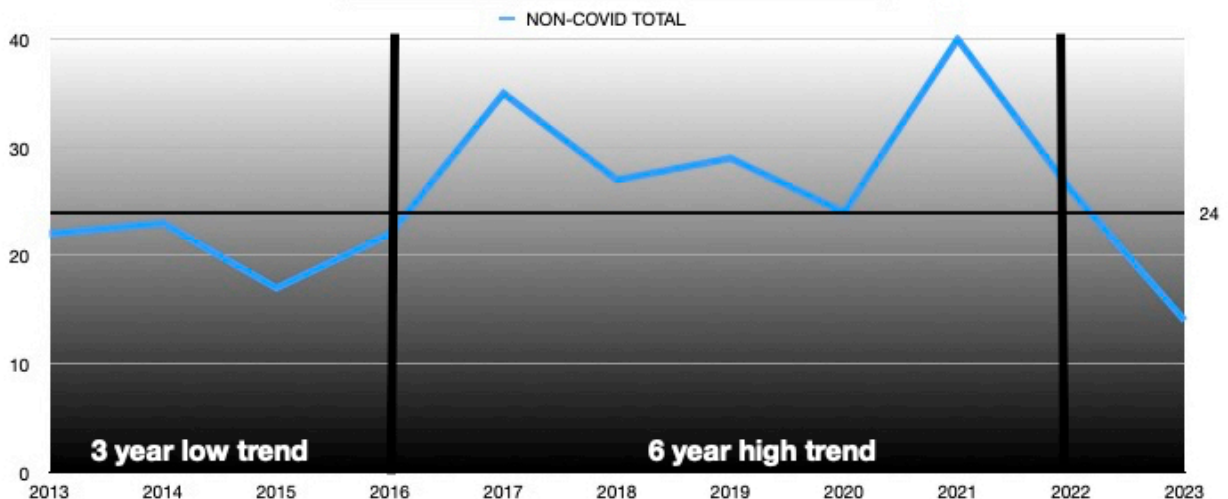
At the time of this article (March 1st 2023) we have suffered 16 line of duty deaths in the year. We had 16 in December of 2022 alone. We are a little baffled as to the cause of this reprieve, although no one at TBFT is looking a gifted horse in the mouth. The first thought to come to mind is, are we backing off as a police community and thus finding ourselves in fewer lethal scenarios? We cannot really know this answer until the uniform crime report for this time period is released, but I know my fellow crime fighters out there. Many of you talk a big game about the blue flue but when it comes right down to it, you are continuing to do business when business needs done. I don't suspect a lack of criminal enforcement is the reason for our improvement in line of duty death tolls.

We have noticed however, over 40 years and even since the beginning of record, that there is a seven to nine year trending cycle in numbers. It just so happens to be illustrated sharply at the turn of the calendar year welcoming 2023. Our best theory is that it takes time for officers to realize an increase in violence around them. Many new officers have a

sense of invincibility for the first several years and after a few police funerals and closer attention paid to the national picture, they begin to recognize the very real hazards of their chosen profession. I think we can all agree that we tend to see this shift in young officers around year six or seven. Many senior officers continue this cyclical process through hyper vigilance followed by complacency until a series of events awakens them again to the dangers of police work and they return to hyper vigilance. Of course at any given time there are officers all over the years of service spectrum, so based solely on years of service this theory would be a wash and have no impact on line of duty deaths. However in the real world in which we serve, daily news events play a real role in both accelerating our rookies towards that vigilant mark, and rerouting those seniors officers away from complacency. Eventually the masses fall on this eight to nine year cycle together based on the events we see in the news and are involved in ourselves.

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YEAR	TOTAL	NON-COVID TOTAL
2013	22	22
2014	23	23
2015	17	17
2016	22	22
2017	35	35
2018	27	27
2019	29	29
2020	24	24
2021	123	40
2022	96	26
2023	16	14



While early indicators and calendar timing both suggest we may be on the edge of one of these vigilant reductions, it's far too early to say for sure. We hope this is the case with one exception. TBFT staff wants to see the cycle broken. We know based on this cycle that our mindsets in fact save our lives and reduce the overall line of duty death picture across the country. Allowing ourselves to relax and suffer greater losses for six years at a time before we make an effort to focus again, is not an acceptable practice.

Hyper vigilance is actually where the problem lies. We always want to blame complacency for senior officers and lack of experience for our friends under five years, but that blame is misplaced. When you have a cough, a sore throat and a fever and you stay home from work, you might take a cough suppressant. You're treating a symptom and doing nothing to cure the actual problem. Complacency is a symptom of hyper vigilance. Some of us have a higher tolerance than others, but no one can stay at the top of their game when their game is 200% forever. It's fair to say based on data, that we can patrol our streets in this state for about two to three years before we return to complacency.

We need to teach our officers to be vigilant without burning out. We can be alert and responsive to threats without being paranoid. This advice can certainly seem contrary to saving police lives on first glance, but if we can be realistic about our threat level throughout our day, we will be less likely to miss legitimate threats, our blood pressure will lower, our mental health will improve, and our burnout rate for complacency and career attrition will both decline. Our communities have been telling us to relax for the last decade. Sure, they say it a little differently and we may find offense in their message, accusing of being something that most of are not. But they are right. If we focus our energy on being vigilant to threats without being hyper vigilant to the extent that we burnout and continue a cycle of complacency, we will also make less critical mistakes where we misperceive aggression and respond inappropriately. Our relationships with our communities will improve as well.

Here's what the doctor ordered: Be hyper vigilant in doses when needed. Then return to a healthy level of vigilance and preparedness. Be conscious about the level you operate in, not only at work but when you are off duty. This is the best medicine to avoid that complacency symptom.

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