



THE BLUE FAMILY TREE

Newsletter article October, 2020

So much has happened in 2020, we often don't even know how to make sense of it. We typically categorize information and events by their level of importance to us and then digest from there, but we cannot even organize 2020 by importance because each event has carried critical issues with dire consequences for all of us in one sense or another. Many people have resorted to chalking the year up as a loss and moving on. 2021 can't get here soon enough. If this is you, I beg you to come back to us. As a novice statistician, I can tell you that without question, the calendar day has very little if nothing, to do with horrific or more positive events in your life. The most likely cause for change in these cases is self manifestation. If we are able to change our perspectives and convince ourselves things are better, and then have them actually be better because the last digit in the date changed, then why can't we do that tomorrow, or next hour, or next minute? don't be fooled into believing 2021 brings better things our way. The sentiment is nice and gives us a 'light at the end of tunnel' feeling maybe when we need it most, but it's one of the greatest superstitions imposed on man in all time.

This concept is perpetuated by studies which are then referred to in articles like this. However it is very difficult to identify and respond to trends if we do not categorize them by time. A catch 22. The best studies and reports will consume vast periods of time. Five years, ten years, or maybe more depending on the topic being covered. In the case of officer survival and understanding what takes our lives when at work, I like to focus from 1900 forward. There are times, certainly, when the 2,104 recorded officers lost in our great nation prior to 1900 carry great importance, and their lives should forever be honored. Time carries no value when discussing and learning from each of their individual incidents.

In 1832 the nation suffered just one on duty death, as was occasionally the case of our young country, perhaps because of failure to report, varying standards for what constituted LODD, or maybe that in fact was the case. These reasons are just a few of the reasons I try and stay post 1900. However to highlight my point of the importance of ALL LODD regardless of time, let's take a moment, honor, and learn from Town Sergeant John Smith of the Foster Police department in Rhode Island. May his passing continue to save the lives of officers working the road today.

Connecticut authorities were searching for a suspect for "being a debtor." They tracked the man to Foster, Rhode Island where, by today's terms, he felony menaced them as they attempted contact. The Connecticut authorities back off and continued to track him while employing the assistance of the local authorities. Sgt Smith scribed a warrant for the man's actions in his jurisdiction as authorities had attempted to contact him. (Imagine what that warrant might look like in your jurisdiction today. Resisting, obstructing, felony menacing, state and local weapons charges, etc.) After the warrant was signed and before the ink could dry, Sgt Smith and his posse were out the door and going to get the suspect. In their minds, were they arresting a debtor from Connecticut, or a man who threatened to kill any law enforcement officer who came near him? I don't know that answer, but it is our first points of learning from Sgt Smith's honorable passing, and should generate an entire conversation amongst you and your colleagues down the 'what ifs' of either decision, and each decision that could happen thereafter. As Sgt Smith approached the subject, the subject produced an axe and struck Sgt. Smith between the shoulder blades and then again in the back of the neck, before menacing the rest of the posse and fleeing the second attempt to arrest him. Sgt Smith was 83 years old at the time of his death and had served his community for more than 40 years. While we can certainly attribute his age as a contributing factor, we have to also consider that his experience was vast. It may have been 1832, but there was still crime. Our profession is relatively archaic in the fact that bad people have done bad things since the cave, and good people have done their best to stop them. As the population grows and technology spreads into new opportunities to rape, steal, and pillage, crime will continue to adjust as well, but I am certain Sgt Smith had a treasure trove of experiences to draw from by his 40th year of service, experiences relevant to his time, and that can still be applied today. We cannot go into all the unknown questions and generate the discussions and learning points from his death in this article, but some great jumping off points for your discussions would be: Did Sgt. Smith see the axe or in any way visually clear the suspect for potential weapons on his approach? Was the suspect near an area that couldn't be visibly cleared that allowed him to acquire the weapon at the most advantageous of times? Was Sgt. Smith of the mindset that he was arresting a debtor, or a violent criminal? Was there a tactical plan created with the posse before hand, or was this just another warrant arrest? Should we be working the street at 83 years old, or even 73, or is there a better use for our expertise should we just refuse to hang it up? How often have we taken cases over from neighboring jurisdictions and what is our mindset when this happens? Do we puff our chests as if to say, "Stand back weaker and inferior agency, and let us handle this now!" Or do we continue to give the investigation the gravity it deserves? It was 1832, yet so many parallels and

lessons we can consider. God bless Town Sergeant John Smith EOW Thursday, June 21st, 1832.

However when focusing on trends, it's better to stay close to the trends of other factors as mentioned above. Technology, medical advancements, transportation, training, and equipment advancements, are just a few of the more obvious changes that have affected our death rate over the years for better or worse. Considering the trend you wish to inspect closer, will influence the time frame you focus your research on. For instance, straight gunfire deaths would be best looked at from 1900 forward to see the end of the old west style gunfights, and the beginning of a more sophisticated American civilization. Trends surrounding economic strife would need to begin before the great depression. Trends searching for answers to the ongoing race war in America would certainly need to be far enough back to include the 50's and 60's. Trends searching for medical advancements could begin as early as 1900 to demonstrate just how quickly advancements occurred throughout the 1900s that moved many would be murders on police, to assaults on police. The trend is uncanny to see as police deaths stay on a consistent upward curve and police assaults skyrocket. Of course consider the population is booming during the early 1900's and so is the number of officers being put on the streets. We clearly did not become a less violent nation at that time, as looking at only one statistic might suggest, but we became better at saving lives.

So when we return to 2020, and we look at that staggering and painful number, we again find ourselves unable to prioritize information and just wishing it would go away. 212 officers lost by the end of September. In 2001 our death toll was 200 at the end of September, compliments of one major catastrophe, much then same as COVID19 has had a devastating impact on 2020. So while we need to honor them all, regardless of the manner in which they have passed, it is important to be able to manage the numbers and create a realistic look at trends to have a fair view of where our country stands with regards to violence against police officers. If we remove the COVID19 numbers from 2020, we find our losses YTD end of September to be 95. A number much more in line with trends year to year, and decade to decade. As a matter of fact, a number that is fairly low historically speaking. I attribute this to the current civil unrest around our nation. Some of it may be because we have turned largely toward re-active enforcement, but also I believe during times such as these, we become extra vigilant. We pay closer attention to our neck hairs. We don't allow ourselves to become as complacent. There have certainly been deaths this year that are also a direct result of the current strife between us and the community. Some officers have hesitated to act in matters of importance to them because they don't

want the next riot to be named after them. A syndrome created entirely by our national media who bares the blood of those officers and does not seem to care.

But here is our report card on the year. We are doing well. Don't let the sticker price you see on ODMP get you down. COVID19 has been devastating to those professions that didn't get to close, and in large part to our corrections officers.

There is, however, another category less spoken about. A category that has never received the attention it deserves. We are doing better, but we are a long way from perfect. I am not sure we will ever get there, simply given the nature of our jobs and the importance placed on us being of sound mind day in and day out. Suicide. Again, statistically speaking, we take our own lives at a rate very similar to the general public, but in my mind this is unacceptable. We have undergone a series of tests before donning a badge, that demonstrated we are above the general public in our general mental health and our ability to absorb the negative world around us for the duration of a police career. After becoming officers, and over time, we have failed to recognize the importance of managing and offloading the material that has been installed and imprinted on our minds. Just like regular citizens often take their own lives, there will be a number of officers who have done so for non-work related reasons, but one major factor that applies to all of them is still work. It is not possible to separate work and home entirely, and the stresses that occur at work will inevitably weaken the relationships we have at home if not managed properly. You may be familiar or close to a police suicide yourself, and it is easy to quickly write them off as a personal suicide, not work related. Look closer though. Talk to their spouse if it's appropriate for you to do so. Think about your own life and circumstances. Are there things there that may be suffering because of what you have brought home? Try not to be so literal when you consider this question. Instead think about your overall attentiveness to home. How much do you participate? Are you allowing the family to move forward without you? I am not suggesting my readers are suicidal. I am, however, suggesting that those officers that on the surface appear to just have personal problems, may have those problems because of work. 137 REPORTED police suicides 2020 YTD. Please check in with one another. Find that officer who has less friends on the force than others, and at least become friends while at work so you can learn his behaviors and you can know when something is different. Don't assume the most popular officer is exempt either. Be someone's hero that they never talk about. This month I am suffering yet another police suicide personally. While I think I do a pretty good job of watching my friends and checking in, it often times will shock you to find just who is susceptible to the weakness brought about from chronic mental, emotional, or physical pain. We mask these things very well, placing our would-be protectors at a disadvantage of identifying problems in time. On that note,

should you find yourself in a position of needing a friend to lean on, recognize that you have masked your pain, and it's not that no one cares, it's that no one knows. While there are many resources available across the country I will extend one more. On our website, thebluefamilytree.org, is a contact page. we are a small enough organization still, that the number you will find there rings directly to me, Patrick Rice, a 20 year veteran and still active police officer. I will listen. I will do my best to understand. I will help however I can.

**In memory of
Deputy Dodd Jacobsen
EOW September 19th, 2020**