Routine Call Turns Into Life or Death Struggle

Shots Fired, Man Dies

IN EVERY POLICE OFFICER’S CAREER there are defining moments, ones that require an instant life or death decision and mark a point where everything changes.

Sergeant Randall Bell faced one of those moments in the afternoon of December 10, 2007.

About 3:30 p.m. that day, a call was made to 911 that there was a drunken man at the Shell station at Knight and 41st Avenue. Sergeant Bell took the call.

“I was the supervisor that day and we were swamped with calls. This seemed very routine so I thought I would take it to help out. In police work, you learn quickly that there is no such thing as a routine call,” said Sergeant Bell.

It was obvious that the man in question was in no condition to drive.

“He wasn’t impaired by alcohol; it was drugs. I could smell the marijuana coming from his car.”

Sergeant Bell decided that he would have the car towed and he would release the driver as long as he was not wanted on any warrants or in possession of drugs or weapons.

It was during the frisk search that events began to turn deadly. The man, a 21-year-old from Burnaby, stiffened and began to turn away just as Sergeant Bell’s search revealed a hard object in the right side of his waistband.

“He was wearing a track suit and as he turned, the jacket fell open and I could see the butt of the gun.”

“My first thought was, ‘It’s on.’ ”

Sergeant Bell clutched the object, which turned out to be a .45 calibre pistol. At the same time he tried to hold the man in a bear hug.

“All the time I was trying not to get shot and hoping that it was not a real gun.”

Sergeant Bell subsequently broke free from the wounded sergeant and pointed the gun directly at him.

“I was ten feet away from him and looking right down the barrel of his gun. I could smell the cordite from his shots. I was preparing to be shot and imagined what the pain of the bullet would be like as it entered my body.”

Knowing that his life was hanging in the balance, Sergeant Bell attempted to reason with the man, who turned away and went back to his car. “I was verbal tap dancing trying not to get shot.”

As the man desperately tried to flee, Sergeant Bell could see that he still had his gun in his hand as he tried to drive out of the lot.

“There were 100 to 200 people in the intersection.”

Recognizing the threat to public safety posed by an impaired driver armed with a loaded gun that he had already used, Sergeant Bell shouted commands at him to stop. Instead of complying, the man again raised his firearm.

“I had no other option. I had to stop him.”

Sergeant Bell then fired his service pistol three times, fatally wounding the man who had just moments before tried to kill him.

Subsequent investigations confirmed that Sergeant Randall Bell acted professionally and bravely that morning in defense of his own life and the public’s safety.

For going Beyond the Call in the face of deadly force, Sergeant Randall Bell received the Department’s highest award for bravery, the Award of Valour.
Constable Stomps Out Equine Inequity

Over the years, Vancouver Police members have routinely gone beyond the call to improve the living conditions of the poor and vulnerable. But few of the vulnerable have found themselves in a position where they were forced to sleep outside in the mud and the cold. Unless, of course, they were horses and, sadly in this case, VPD police horses.

For Police Constable Cinda Michael it was an injustice too heavy to endure. Vancouver Police horses have a proud hundred-year-old tradition of serving our citizens. But over the last decade, their existing stables in Stanley Park had deteriorated to the point that animals were being injured and exposed to health-threatening conditions. Unfortunately, neither the City nor the VPD had the budget to build a better paddock.

“Those people who prey on the elderly are just leeches on society,” says Inspector Tim Laidler.

He brought unique qualifications to the assignment, since he holds a black belt in judo and at 63 is the oldest serving member in the Department.

“I wasn’t scared ever,” says Inspector Laidler. “I had excellent backup and full confidence in our team.”

Once he was in place, it didn’t take long before he was victimized and robbed by several individuals.

“The first robbery happened in seven minutes, then I was robbed twice. One guy took my money, another guy took my beer.”

By the project’s end, there were 12 charges against ten people, including eight counts of robbery. The number of robberies in the area quickly fell by almost 60 per cent.

For their dedication, leadership and bravery, Inspector Tim Laidler, Sergeant Toby Hinton and Constable Christiane Prevost each received the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

Making a Difference by Mentoring Youth

Officer helps young people make good decisions

When we look back at our youth, some of us are fortunate enough to point at one person who made a difference in our lives. They were the one person who made time for us, cared enough to point us in the right direction and helped us to believe in ourselves.

For about 250 youths in Vancouver, the man they may remember for making a difference is Constable Rajprit Mander.

Since November 2007, Constable Mander has initiated seven Police Athletic League programs in which he invested more than 300 hours of his own time. He initiated, planned and organized basketball camps, along with trips to Seattle, tournaments and Vancouver Giants games.

Without his support and dedication, many disadvantaged youths would never have had these opportunities. They were also able to discuss with Constable Mander their concerns about gangs, bullying, violence and drugs. He is clear evidence of the difference a police officer can make to the community.

For his commitment to youth to mitigate the risk factors that may lead them into crime, Constable Rajprit Mander received the Chief Constable’s Commendation.
No Action Was the Right Action
Occasionally, he who hesitates is saved

There are times when the greater part of valour is truly discretion. The decision not to storm the door when there is a killer on the other side can take just as much courage when more lives hang in the balance.

It was a decision that then Constable Aaron Kazuta made on the afternoon of December 12, 2008, when he was first to arrive on the scene of one of the most frightening calls a police officer can receive: an active shooter.

A few minutes earlier a disgruntled employee had taken a shotgun to the office Christmas party, killing his former boss and holding the rest of the staff hostage as he dialed 911 to report what he had done. As Constable Kazuta and his team began to enter the building, they had no way of knowing that the man had stopped searching for his second victim and was instead lying in wait for the police.

Constable Kazuta led the group of three officers up a stairwell, but stopped outside the closed office door when he heard no more shooting.

“We had this weird sense that something was wrong. We heard no screaming, no shooting; in fact, there was no noise at all. What didn’t we know was the shooter had turned off all the lights except for the one over the door and he was lying in the dark waiting to pick us off as we came through.”

Constable Kazuta’s crucial decision to wait prevented a deadly engagement with the killer.

“He would have got at least one or two of us.”

After two tense hours the shooter surrendered without further incident or injury.

“We were very relieved that we had done the right thing and that no one else got hurt.”

For their outstanding skill and judgement, the officers who responded to this call, including Inspector Tony Zanatta, Sergeant Kris Wrathall, Constables Aaron Kazuta, Kal Penner, Brent Derksen, Dan Ames, Trish Peck, Sam Primero, Christian Galbraith, Wade Rodrigue, Michael Wagat, Andrew Ramage, Ryan Visser and his police dog Blade, received the Chief Constable’s Unit Citation.

Making their entry, Sergeant Aaron Kazuta leads members of the Emergency Response Team.

Crackdown on Career Criminals Nets Chronic Offenders

There is conventional wisdom within policing that says 20 per cent of the criminals commit 80 per cent of the crimes. They are called chronic offenders and Vancouver has more than its share. But thanks to some innovative thinking and inspired leadership, Vancouver also has a special program that has dramatically reduced property crime, increased jail time for these offenders and Vancouver has more than its share. But thanks to some innovative thinking and inspired leadership, Vancouver also has a special program.

The Chronic Offender Program was initiated in 2004 under the leadership of Inspector Bob Stewart. The program defined and targeted the individuals who were committing the most crimes.

The Chronic Offender Program was the forerunner of today’s Chronic Offender Unit.

Prior to the program, the piecemeal approach to these offenders meant 80 per cent of their files were not dealt with in a given year. Now that figure has been reversed, with virtually every case resulting in guilty plea. In 2006, the program dealt with 110 offenders, 99 per cent of whom were detained and most of whom received jail sentences that were longer than they received previously.

For their outstanding contribution to the safety of our community, the following individuals received the Chief Constable’s Unit Citation: Inspector Bob Stewart, Sergeants Gerd Elías and John Rennie, Acting Sergeants Mike Linde and Tony Sartori, Detective Paul Bittante, Constables Nathalie Parel-May, Troy Sastiku, Ruth Picknell, Warren Pomeroy, Ken Hranksowski, Kim Greaves, Rowan Pint-Payne, Valerie Spicer, Tyrone Douglas and civilians Priscilla Lam, Julie Smulders, Siew-Lee Chai, Melissa Loveridge, Nahanni Pollard, Chris Giles, Professor Bryan Kinney and Crown Counsel Peter Stabler.

Confiscating Grow Houses Clips Marijuana Crimes in the Bud

Vancouver police efforts to stem the rising tide of marijuana grow-operations within the city have often been frustrated by the lack of deterrents for those involved in the crime. The traditional response of simply tearing down any grow-operation that was discovered usually just led to new operations springing up in new locations.

When Detective Constable Torsten Schroder was assigned to the VPD Grow Busters Unit in 2007, he decided to hit the drug farmers where it would hurt them the most - in the wallet.

By the end of 2008, he was responsible for the seizure of 12 properties, an unprecedented number. To date, the Unit has seized a total of 26 properties, severely crippling the efforts of those who would put these dangerous operations in our neighbourhoods.

For his outstanding efforts, Detective Constable Torsten Schroder received the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

Gang Violence Sparks New Community Policing Centre

The Vancouver Police Department is a strong advocate of community policing built on contact and communication with the residents of those communities. Recent surges in gang violence in the South-Asian community, along with ongoing property crime and domestic violence on the South Slope, made police outreach to this community even more urgent.

Constable Roger Rai proposed a VPD drop-in centre at the Ross Street Temple which evolved into the Khalsa Diwan Community Policing Office, in partnership with the VPD, the Khalsa Diwan Society and the South Vancouver Community Policing Centre. His efforts and his personal involvement led to increasing awareness and a reduction in violent crime and property crime.

For the long-lasting relationships that Constable Rai has established with this community and the leadership he has shown in bringing his idea to fruition, Constable Roger Rai received the Chief Constable’s Citation.

Marine Squad, Children’s Hospital and the Vancouver Police Museum, when the players returned home they were able to give presentations at schools to inspire a healthy and drug-free lifestyle. Over the years, his selfless efforts on his own time have led to the Vancouver Giants Drug Education Program, which he dubbed Project Stay on Side.

“...it was the best of both worlds,” said Detective Constable Graham. He made it possible for visiting players to meet and speak with substance abusers in the Downtown Eastside, and tour venues such as the Marine Squad, Children’s Hospital and the Vancouver Police Museum, when the players returned home they were able to give presentations at schools to inspire a healthy and drug-free lifestyle. Over the years, his selfless efforts on his own time have led to the Vancouver Giants Drug Education Program, which he dubbed Project Stay on Side.

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Gang Buster Byrne Made Sure the Charges Stuck

COORDINATING THE FILES on a project of this scope is a staggering task and if not done correctly could destroy any chances of convictions. Detective Constable Lisa Byrne was determined that would never happen.

She personally handled and disclosed 121,000 intercepted communications and more than 700,000 pages of information for Crown Counsel. She worked six days a week, up to 20 hours a day, for months.

“...put the Sanghera gang away; they were a huge drain on our resources.”

For her outstanding efforts that have made Vancouver a safer place for everyone, Detective Constable Lisa Byrne received the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

Gamboa, Tony Herbert, CSSEU Detective Terry Murphy and civilians Kyle Hearfield, Mark Langham, Sara Lee, and Oonagh Tourtire.

Project Rebellion Rids Vancouver of Major Gang Group

There was a time in our city, not so long ago, that gang shootings and killings were a weekly occurrence. The public and the VPD wanted that to end and to end quickly. Project Rebellion was the answer.

For months, a team of tireless investigators combined high-tech tactics with old-fashioned police work to suppress the violence and get the gangsters off the street and behind bars. Their efforts were truly impressive.

They accumulated enough evidence to charge 28 gangsters with 228 criminal offences. As a result, the deadly Sanghera gang has been functionally dismantled.

Shooting incidents among the gangs were drastically reduced by more than half during the project. All gun-related suspects were taken off the streets and kept in jail pending trial.

The success of Project Rebellion is directly due to the dedication, imagination and tenacity of the men and women of the investigative team and support staff. The members listed below received the Chief Constable’s Unit Citation:

Inspector Mike Porteous, Staff Sergeant Mike Serr, Sergeants Dale Weidman, Ike Isaksson, Greg Meyerhoff, Fiona Wilson-Bates, Mark Bragagnolo, Corporal Stan Cratchley, Detective Constables Lisa Byrne, Peter Alfred, Craig Bentley, Jason Chan, Don Coghill, Renick Dobreci, Mike Heard, Tanya Leboutilier, Christian Lowe, Eugene Lum, Ryan Masales, Graham Orlick, Dawn Richards, Matt Smart, Jean-Pierre St. Amant, Brandon Steele, Paulina Vegt, Christine Wohlenbehn, Dennis Wong, Carla Young, Paul McNamara, Constable Courtney Cordrey, Abbotsford Constables Vic Tournier.

For the dedication and unwavering commitment to the safety and health of our young people, Detective Constable Chris Graham received the Chief Constable’s Commendation.

Hockey Players Give Youth a New Shot at a Safer Life

Those who work in the field of drug abuse prevention for youth know that nothing works better than youth mentoring youth. But someone has to identify potential mentors and provide them with the skills and knowledge to inspire others.

For the past 12 years at the VPD, that person has been Detective Constable Chris Graham. In 1999, he was asked to assist the Red Deer RCMP, who were working with the Western Hockey League