
HISTORICAL EVENTS

THAT SHAPED LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

REMEMBERING THE PAST TO PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

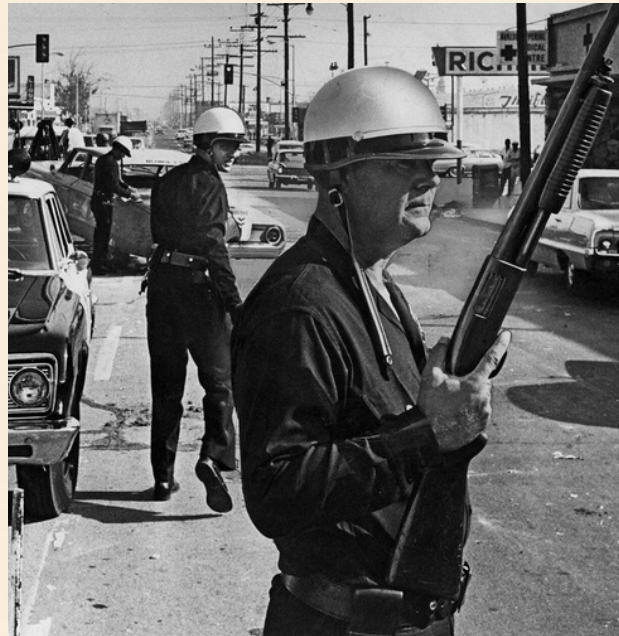
In April, we shared a simple social media post highlighting a few historic incidents that occurred during that month, events like the Miami Shootout and the Newhall Incident that continue to shape how we train today. The response and conversation that followed got us thinking... what if we did this every month?

This series is the result of that idea.

Each month, we'll publish a short, simple reminder of a few historical incidents tied to that time of year. These are not meant to be deep academic studies or comprehensive after-action reviews. Instead, they are quick, one-page reflections, a way to pause, look back, and consider a few key lessons that still apply today.

These write-ups are not exhaustive. They will miss details. They will not capture every lesson learned, and that's intentional. The goal is not to provide all the answers, but to start the conversation.

We encourage you to engage with this content. If you see something we missed, add to it. If you interpret a lesson differently, share that perspective. If there are other incidents or milestones we should include in future issues, let us know. The strength of ILEETA has always been in the collective experience and insight of its members, and this is simply another way to tap into that.



Credit: The Los Angeles Times

AI Transparency:

As part of this project, we've used artificial intelligence tools to assist with formatting, editing, and brainstorming. As an association, we are embracing this technology thoughtfully. That said, the content itself is human-driven, created by trainers, for trainers, to meet a distinctly human need: Excellence in Law Enforcement Training.

Contribute:

If you're interested in contributing to this series or have an incident, perspective, or lesson you'd like to share, we'd welcome the input. This is a community-driven effort, and we're always looking to bring in additional voices. Reach out to info@ileeta.org to connect.



THE NORCO BANK ROBBERY

Norco, CA • May 9, 1980. What began as a bank robbery quickly escalated into one of the most influential gunfights in modern law enforcement history. On May 9, 1980, heavily armed suspects robbed the Security Pacific Bank in Norco, California before engaging responding deputies and officers in a prolonged running gun battle spanning more than 25 miles across Riverside and San Bernardino Counties.

The suspects employed semiautomatic rifles, improvised explosive devices, body armor, and large quantities of ammunition, dramatically outmatching the revolvers and shotguns commonly carried by patrol officers at the time. During the incident, Riverside County Deputy James Evans was killed and numerous deputies and officers from multiple agencies were wounded. Patrol vehicles were repeatedly struck by rifle fire and explosives, and even a police helicopter came under attack.

The incident became a defining point of reference in discussions surrounding patrol rifle deployment, interagency communications, tactical emergency casualty care, vehicle-based gunfighting, equipment readiness, and officer preparedness for heavily armed adversaries. The response also exposed the challenges agencies faced coordinating communications across jurisdictions during rapidly evolving incidents.



Photo Created by ChatGPT

In the years that followed, Norco helped reshape thinking around patrol capabilities and the evolving threat environment confronting law enforcement. It remains a reminder that extraordinary violence can emerge from seemingly routine calls, and that training, equipment, communication, and preparation often determine how effectively officers can respond under extreme conditions.

What lessons were learned from this incident, and how have they influenced policy, training, or operations?

Continue Reading

- [Police1, Lessons from the 1980 Norco Robbery](#)



THE MOVE INCIDENT

Philadelphia, PA - May 13, 1985, a prolonged standoff between the Philadelphia Police Department and members of the MOVE organization escalated into one of the most controversial law enforcement operations in modern U.S. history. After repeated attempts to resolve the situation, authorities deployed a satchel charge containing a Tovex-based explosive onto a fortified bunker on the roof of a rowhouse from a Pennsylvania State Police helicopter. The resulting explosion ignited a fire that was not immediately extinguished, allowing it to spread to surrounding buildings. The fire ultimately destroyed more than 60 homes and killed 11 people, including children.

The operation involved multiple agencies and highlighted the complexity of coordinating law enforcement, fire services, and city leadership during a high-risk, evolving incident. The decision-making environment was shaped by prior confrontations with the group, the fortified nature of the structure, and concerns about officer safety. As conditions changed rapidly, the incident evolved beyond the initial tactical objective, with the spread of the fire becoming the defining outcome. The scale of destruction and loss of life placed immediate and lasting scrutiny on the operation.



In the years that followed, the MOVE incident has remained a significant point of reference in discussions around use of force, incident command, and operational decision-making in densely populated environments. It is frequently examined in the context of how agencies prepare for complex, high-risk events, particularly those involving barricaded subjects, fortified positions, and prolonged standoffs. It remains a point of reflection for how decisions are made, and how those decisions are remembered.

What lessons were learned from this incident, and how have they influenced policy, training, or operations?

Continue Reading

- [Police1, Scars remain from 1985](#)
- [The Philadelphia Tribune, What lessons...](#)
- [Wikipedia, 1985 Move Bombing](#)



WEST MEMPHIS POLICE SHOOTINGS

West Memphis, AR - May 20, 2010. What began as a drug interdiction traffic stop along Interstate 40 quickly escalated into one of the most significant ambush incidents in modern law enforcement history. West Memphis Police Officer Bill Evans stopped a white minivan with suspicious plates while working a narcotics interdiction detail. Sgt. Brandon Paudert arrived shortly after as backup.

During the encounter, driver Jerry Kane engaged the officers in a physical struggle as his 16-year-old son, Joseph Kane, exited the vehicle armed with a rifle and opened fire. Sgt. Paudert was killed at the scene, and Officer Evans later died from his injuries despite returning fire. The suspects fled, leading to a second gunfight later that day in a Walmart parking lot where additional officers were wounded before both suspects were ultimately stopped.

The incident became a major point of reference in discussions surrounding vehicle stop tactics, ambush awareness, sovereign citizen encounters, patrol rifle deployment, and officer preparedness for evolving threats. At the time, the sovereign citizen movement was poorly understood by many agencies, and the attack highlighted how anti-government ideology could directly influence behavior and willingness to engage in violence.



The encounter also reinforced how quickly “routine” calls can become deadly. The suspects possessed superior weapon systems and initiated violence with little warning, leaving minimal time for officers to recover or reposition. In the years that followed, agencies across the country expanded patrol rifle programs, improved ballistic protection, and placed greater emphasis on tactical positioning, threat recognition, and training for high-risk roadside encounters.

What lessons were learned from this incident, and how have they influenced policy, training, or operations?

Continue Reading

- [Police Magazine, Shots Fire: West Memphis](#)
- [Police1, 15 Years Later](#)



LANDMARK CASES FOR THIS MONTH

Graham v. Connor (1989)

On May 15, 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Graham v. Connor*, establishing the standard that governs how use of force is evaluated. The case involved Dethorne Graham, a diabetic in medical distress who was detained and injured during an investigative stop. The Court ruled that force must be judged under the Fourth Amendment's "objective reasonableness" standard. This shifted the focus away from an officer's intent and toward what a reasonable officer would do given the facts and circumstances at the time. The decision acknowledged that officers often operate in tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving situations, where judgments are made in seconds, not with the clarity of hindsight. Today, this framework remains the foundation for evaluating force, shaping how officers are trained, how incidents are reviewed, and how actions are understood in both the field and the courtroom.

Caniglia v. Strom (2021)

On May 17, 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Caniglia v. Strom*, clarifying the limits of law enforcement authority inside the home. The case stemmed from a welfare check in which officers entered a residence without a warrant and seized firearms under a "community caretaking" rationale. The Court unanimously rejected that justification, reinforcing that the home holds a uniquely protected status under the Constitution. Even in situations involving concern for safety or well-being, legal authority must be clearly established. The decision serves as a reminder that good intentions do not override constitutional boundaries. As calls for service grow more complex, particularly in areas like mental health and crisis response, officers must navigate not only urgency, but legality, ensuring that actions taken in the moment remain consistent with established legal protections.

Lessons From A Global Profession

The lessons shaping law enforcement training are not confined to a single agency or country. Incidents around the world, from Manchester to Jaipur, reflect shared challenges. The profession is global, and so are the lessons that continue to shape how we train and respond. We look forward to sharing more international events in future editions.

This series will continue to grow.

This series will continue to evolve as we study incidents across the profession. Each month will expand the archive and highlight lessons from both familiar and lesser-known events. If there are incidents or milestones we should include, we encourage you to share them.

Honoring the Past, Shaping the Future



ILEETA has named Eric Nowicki as the Association's Historian. His role is to capture not only the history of ILEETA as we approach our 25th anniversary in 2028, but also the rich, human narrative behind the evolution of law enforcement training. Through

interviews with members, Eric will explore the connection between people and the events that shaped the profession, helping preserve our legacy while connecting the past to the present and future of training.



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