

# OCEANSIDE POLICE DEPARTMENT

96-37

## CORE VALUES

Trust  
Personal Responsibility  
Focus on What can be Done  
Interdependent Team  
Prevent Crime  
Reduce Fear of Crime  
Provide Efficient Service

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"OPERATION 180 ROCK CANYON"

A Nomination for the Fourth Annual

Herman Goldstein Excellence In Problem Solving Award

of the

Police Executive Research Forum

for

Innovative and Effective Problem-Oriented Policing

that has achieved measurable success in

reducing crime, disorder, and a public safety threat

## SCANNING

An extremely high incidence and frequency of overt "hand-to-hand" sales of street level quantities of crack cocaine and methamphetamines, combined with violence and gun play in a complex of one hundred apartments created significant erosion of the health, safety, and aesthetic climate of that site and the adjacent residential and commercial area.

While emergency services dispatchers, responding patrol officers, and field operations managers sensed an alarming upsurge in the number and type of calls for service at the Canyon Drive address, a 2-man team of gang investigators specifically identified the scope of the problem while routinely reviewing documentations of field contacts and patrol reports.

Intelligence reports, public opinion polls, and statistical trends all verify the connection between street-level narcotics trafficking and violent crime.

By far this site, located only one-half mile from the police facility, was the most active location of violence in the 43 square mile city. The complex's enclosed topography, restrictive avenues of approach and egress, and clear lines of sight gave the criminals a strategic "high ground" advantage and presented an extremely difficult tactical challenge for enforcement efforts. Officer safety was precarious, for example, and responding units were required to stage and enter in teams.

The context of this problem was set in a significant increase of gang violence and drug trafficking within the city in recent history. During the previous two years, for example, gang members had been responsible for approximately 150 shootings.

During the scanning period, undercover operations determined that at various times of the day and night up to 30 gang members were selling drugs from within the parking lot or apartment or residences.

## ANALYSIS

Informal communication with emergency services dispatchers and uniformed field officers initially focused the attention of gang and narcotics investigators. The latter subsequently evaluated patrol-generated documentations of offender contacts, crime reports by sight, supplemented by two computer systems: "Automated Regional Justice Information System" (ARJIS, a county network) and the "Gang Reporting, Evaluation, and Tracking" (GREAT) system, a somewhat new resource in Nevada and Southern California. The San Diego County Probation and

California State Parole Departments were called upon to help identify the status of offenders. As the operation evolved, an Intelligence Analyst of the Narcotics Information Network (NIN) was assigned to the effort.

A clandestinely placed, camouflaged video camera provided remote monitoring by case agents. The direct observations by uniformed patrol officers, covert investigator on-site surveillance, and debriefings of undercover officers and informants provided timely information. In fact, in order to better understand the nature and scope of the problem, in the early phase of the operation we depended upon "trial and error" attempts of UC's and CI's to determine the most effective times of the day for deployment.

The City's Code Enforcement Department provided the identities of property owners, financial institutions, and on-site management.

The general nature of the problem came to police attention in March, 1995; the first "controlled narcotics buy" was accomplished on August 1st, and the operation's criminal enforcement activity was formally closed on December 1.

Health and safety enforcement relevant to building code violations were concluded in April, 1996.

The offenders in this case were 19-20 year old documented gang members of Oceanside and Los Angeles. They were chiefly Black males and females, although some were Hispanic. A few juveniles were involved. Money was such a compelling motivation for these criminals that two gang sets "married" in order to conduct their financial business peacefully.

The apartment complex is set in on the periphery of an older, well-kept residential district and on the fringe of a somewhat deteriorating business area - a failing shopping center is on adjacent property along that entire length of the apartment complex. An international chain fast food restaurant, a church and a private preschool are directly across the street from the complex, and an elementary school is located within 1000 feet of the complex in the opposite direction.

Analysis revealed that a contributing - but apparently unmodifiable - factor to the existence of the narcotic trafficking in this case was the neutrality of the geographical location of the complex from any "claimed" gang territory. Further, it was relatively close to interstate freeway access and offered drug dealers' lookouts an excellent vantage point for the approach of police. The complex is within one mile of the "downtown" drug supply.

The impacts of the problem were many and serious. People were murdered and seriously injured requiring long-term medical care. A decline in property values was probable. Law-abiding citizens who resided in the complex were trapped by their fear. Police and EMS workload increased.

Prior to the design and implementation of "Operation 180 Rock Canyon" our actual and philosophical response to these problems was to wait for citizen-generated calls for service and dispatch officers according to our prioritization protocol.

The nuisance abatement portion of the operation actively involved the apartment complex's on-site manager, off-site owner, financial lending institution, and attorney; several meetings were held in which they met with our City Attorney and Code Enforcement Department staff.

In the earlier term of the project, the local newspaper learned of it during a period in which our department was being particularly pressured by the community to "do something."

In order to preserve the confidentiality of the operation we agreed to periodically brief the journal of our progress and allow its reporters to accompany us on surveillances and the warrant service day, in exchange for the embargo on the release of the information. This partnership in itself was lauded by both the media and the police as a new-found moment of trust and cooperation in problem-solving. Some professionals have opined that this heralded a marked positive change in the local history of rapport between the two professions, and is expected to have long-term effect.

### RESPONSE

One obvious response strategy we could have employed was to continue our proven-ineffective call-response mentality to reported crime incidents only and to ignore relevant "broken window" contributing factors. We did, however, consider and employ the following integrated tactics:

1. Controlled narcotics buys
2. Aggressive patrol response to radio calls for service
3. Collateral nuisance abatement through code enforcement

This strategy was designed through a series of conferences with a variety of municipal, county and federal agencies. To a great extent, the culmination date of the project was determined by urgings of local government leaders to "do something." The clandestine nature of the wide-scale project prevented us from telling our municipal officials much more than "we're working on it."

The legal issues involving clandestine investigation and search and seizure were predominant concerns in our evaluation criteria for implementing strategy alternatives. Our goals were the restoration of peace to the law - abiding residents, who had effectively been made hostages by their fear, and enhancing their health and safety by requiring the property management to repair stairs, railings and windows, and fire hazards, for example.

These agencies actively served as task force members

- OPD Special Enforcement Section
- San Diego County's NTF (municipal, county, state, federal officers and DDA's)
- A county DDA was assigned to the project full-time
- DEA's Mobile Enforcement Team
- California Narcotic Information Network (NIN) provided technical support
- Private business - video surveillance design, adaptation
- San Diego County probation and California State parole
- Oceanside code enforcement and city attorney

A significant part of the response can be called "technical": a remote focusing video camera was clandestinely installed on a utility pole adjacent to the target's property line. Miniaturized belt and jacket (sewn to the inside) video cameras provided multi-angle documentation.

As this was a premier project for the Mobile Enforcement Team (MET), the head of the DEA attended the start-up briefing of this first-of-its-kind operation in the Western United States.

#### EVALUATION

Our success was measured initially in the achievement of effecting every one of the arrest warrants we sought, and by the repair of the hazardous apartment facilities by the property management.

Long term success has been realized with the continued absence of crime reported by the residents and observations of patrol beat officers. There have been no more violence or nuisance problems attributable to previous causations.

We believe the illicit drug networking could have been even more greatly impacted by more arrests. We were still in the process of formalizing case information on more suspects when "pressure from City Hall" and its constituent community to "do something visible" forced the date of the project's conclusion by the mass warrant service.

Also, the implementation of a collateral public nuisance abatement plan somewhat hindered the criminal investigation by displacing some of the suspects, who subsequently had to be re-located for arrest.

Thirty arrest warrants were served, however, and six suspects were selectively arrested prior to the "raid day" for strategic reasons. Two suspects fled to other states and were arrested seven months later.

There were indeed several major problems to overcome in implementing the response plan. Technical issues involved the design and placement of unique, sophisticated stationary and miniaturized personal video

surveillance equipment in order to provide multiple angle documentation for prosecution. Tactical obstacles were presented in the topography of the apartment complex because of the "high ground" advantage enjoyed by the suspects and the limited access/egress. Suspect Identification was difficult for long periods even though we had multiple narcotic purchases from them. Finally, the parallel nuisance abatement procedure scattered some of the suspects.

The success of the project was formally monitored for three months and we are very satisfied with the results. Some of the project highlights include:

- Warrants were served on 12 locations; the fact that only one was at the target site was evidence that outsiders were terrorizing the residents;
- Before he could be arrested, one suspect drug salesman was murdered;
- Two arrests for murder were effected: on the 1st night of the operation, a gang investigator who was remotely monitoring the surveillance camera observed the two suspects running from what turned out to be the homicide;
- Coincidentally, another gang investigator made an on-camera field contact with the suspects near the crime scene a few hours prior to this homicide greatly influencing the success of the investigation;
- Two arrests for armed robbery and ADW were made;
- One person was arrested for a drive-by shooting.

As the result of the solid investigation and video surveillance, most suspects pled guilty without going to trial. The average sentence offer was six years. One suspect went to trial and received an eight year sentence, and another 25 years to life imprisonment.

The public nuisance abatement efforts resulted in the repair of broken windows, stairways, balcony railings and fire hazards. Inadequate lighting was remedied and absent fire extinguishers were installed. Abandoned vehicles were removed, security officers were mandated, tenant screening was established, and visitors entry was controlled by the property manager. Initial hesitation by the property's attorney to remedy cited discrepancies was immediately overcome when he was permitted to review video documentation of in-progress drug sales/purchases.

### PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION

This project was a line-driven concept initiated by two gang investigators who were introduced to the Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) resource potential by our narcotics task force representative while preparing to design a relatively crude local operation. Coincidentally, the gang unit sergeant was formally trained in POP/SARA techniques during his previous assignment as our agency's Neighborhood Enhancement Team" supervisor at PERF conferences and other courses, and he taught POP in in-service training programs.

Our personnel, combined with support personnel, had no how-to texts for reference and effectively "wrote the book" in the arrangement of this case, we believe. No extrinsic incentives were given to those who participated in this problem-solving - in fact, they had normal caseload responsibilities throughout most of the project. Approximately \$30,000 for narcotic purchases and equipment provided by the Drug Enforcement Administration supported the roughly 50,000 man hours of pre-arrest project time.

Media treatment of our response to this community problem-solving challenges was positive and generous. (See enclosures of the "North County Times"). This example of police-press partnering, we believe, can be held up as a model of how the two can work effectively together to instill public confidence and reduce the fear of crime.