

my Personal side

By Craig Hastings



Just when I think the table has begun to turn on how the general public feels about police officers another wound is opened and a deep scar remains. Of course I'm talking about what has happened in Memphis, Tennessee in the past three weeks. If you're not aware, it has been reported and alleged that five police officers of the Memphis Police Department beat a young man badly enough to cause him to be hospitalized and die three days later. All of the officers and the victim are African American males. So far all we know about what led up to the alleged beating was that the victim had committed a traffic violation and refused to stop when requested by one of the police officers. A short pursuit followed. Body camera footage shows the victim being pulled from his vehicle and police surrounding him yelling at him to put his hands behind his back. Somehow the victim was able to get up off the ground and run from police. A taser was deployed but missed its mark. A short distance later a second patrol managed to stop the victim and once again remove him from his vehicle. This is when the incident turned ugly.

In the body camera footage released to the public it shows what appears to be four or five of the officers gathering around the victim and using a combination of kicks, punches, pepper spray, taser, and a night stick to beat the victim to a point he was unable to move. All five officers have been fired and charged with a variety of charges including second degree murder, aggravated assault, aggravated kidnapping, and official misconduct. All have been arrested and are currently out on bail. Having been a police officer for forty-two years myself, I found the body camera video horrific. I can not believe even one police officer acting out in this manner let alone five. Not one of these five officers on scene attempted to intervene and stop any of the others from continuing the beating. After all that has happened in this country over the past two years and how police officers have been vilified and disgraced, how and why would not one but five police officers act so recklessly and think that they were going to get away with what they did to this man. Damn! They all were wearing body cameras and the police patrol cars had video operating also. Two of the officers are seen fist bumping each other afterwards. I guess in celebration of what they had just done. Of course I'm sure none of the five thought the victim would succumb to his injuries. They couldn't have because not a single person on scene rendered any medical aid to the victim as he lay there bleeding from his head wounds screaming for his mom. It was reported that as many as thirty minutes may have passed before the victim received any medical aid.

So just what is the how and why this happened? I have my own theory. First let me say that I believe it was reported that none of these officers involved had more than five years experience. Most less than three years. None of the five were older than twenty-eight years old or thereabouts. They belonged to a special enforcement unit called "The Scorpions". I believe their primary duty was to put their patrol emphasis on gun and drug crimes. I understand from reporting that this unit has actually made a tremendous difference since the unit was formed. And as of now, the unit has been disbanded. Once again, punish all for the mistakes of a few. But here is what has happened in the career of law enforcement over the past two to three years.

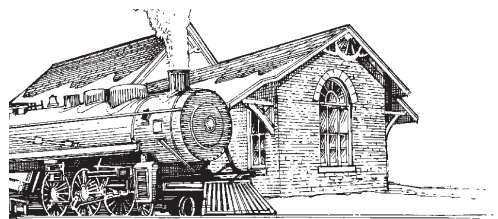
No one wants to do it. The police officers that are currently doing it want out as quickly as they can. Many have taken early retirement and the rest are just counting the days until they can retire. The few people left that do apply for the job are either not qualified or walk away when they learn what the pay and benefits amount too. I know these are both factors because we have been struggling with

the very same issues right here in our police department. We haven't been able to field a fully staffed police department for more than six months for several years. We typically employ seven full time officers and usually are working with just five or six and sometimes even just four. With these numbers shifts can't be covered. This understaffing in itself causes problems hiring and keeping officers. Understandably no police officer nor his/her family wants to be left out on a patrol working alone, especially so after dark. It's just much too dangerous anymore. So what is happening all across the county now is that police departments large and small are having to settle with who they can get just to fill patrol shifts. Methodical screening is all but gone in recruiting. Police departments are so understaffed they are "settling" with who they can get. Times have changed dramatically over the past three years in how criminals view and treat police. A given percentage of the population now believe it's perfectly okay to defy the police and refuse any lawful orders the police might give. I've experienced the bad attitudes as often as not. I'm estimating that as many as fifty percent of the traffic stops I make that I see someone in the vehicle recording everything I do and say during the stop.

This latest incident has set the relationship between citizens and police back two years from everything we had gained. And once again I'm listening to a bunch of hacks that know nothing about policing screaming about no training, more training, bad training, etc. Watch the video of this incident. This had little to do with training. These five cops never had the character in them to do the job in the first place. You can't teach character, either you have compassion and a sense of decency for other people or you don't. A recruit can fake his way through the academy easily enough because as hard as the instructors try, they can't create an actual high stress, highly physical, adrenalin rush, event that police are going to have to deal with once they are on real patrols. However, not that it would have made a difference in this latest event in Memphis but, it didn't appear to me these officers involved truly understood how to effectively use a taser and for sure didn't know how to deploy pepper spray because they clearly sprayed each other. Five police officers were involved and it didn't appear to me that any of them really knew what to do once the victim refused to cooperate. Remember now, five young, strong, and well equipped police officers were unable to put handcuffs on a guy 6' 2" 160 pounds that was already on the ground!!!! What?!! We're expected to be able to do that here much of the time with just two of us on duty and sometimes all by yourself on duty! Finally, what I most don't understand about the procedure on that evening is this; because none of these five officers had much experience and because they were operating in a special enforcement unit, where was their experienced supervisor? Why would these officers be turned loose to act randomly and as they pleased without proper supervision.

Because of this event all police officers will have to return to a heightened sense of awareness that causes even more stress on the job as if there isn't enough already. What happened in Memphis Tennessee will trickle down to little Tuscola, Illinois once again. Just when people were returning to a normal relationship with their police departments, this happens. The 99.8 percent of police in America will be punished for the acts of just .2 percent of police in America. Will this ever get better?

(The views and opinions expressed in the submitted columns are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of The Journal.)

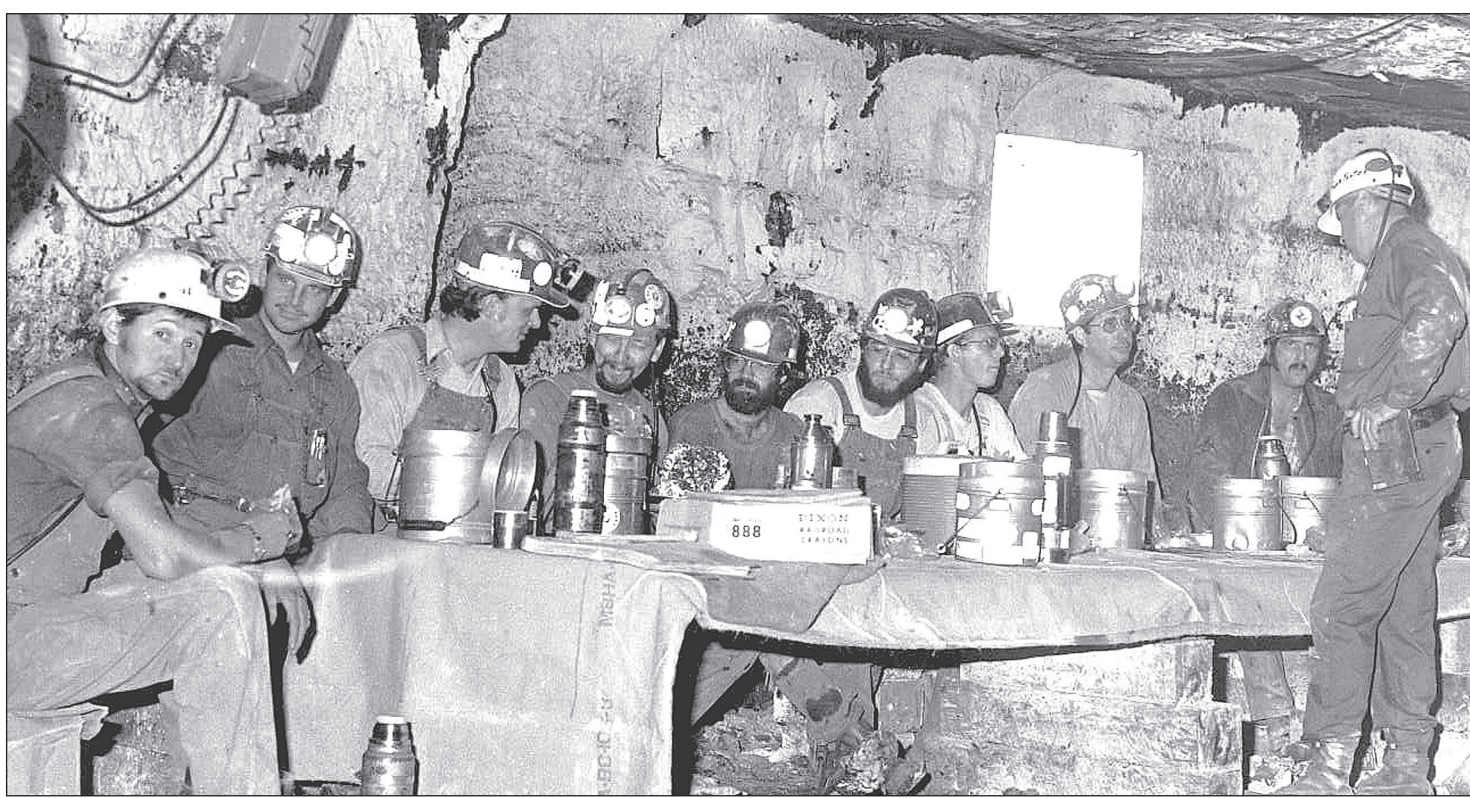


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DO YOU RECOGNIZE this week's Back in the Day photo? If so, drop us a note at The Journal. Your efforts will be rewarded.

10 Years Ago Feb. 6, 2013

In the wake of a recent threat alleged to have been made involving North Ward Elementary School, the discussion has been raised regarding the timing of a recorded message sent to parents and guardians regarding the matter. Superintendent Michael Smith said the decision to send out a SchoolReach notification to parents on Tuesday, Jan 29, was based on the available and verified information at hand at the time.

In a 2013 presidential inauguration detail that recently drew a million people to our nation's capitol, it was a quiet, contemplative moment in the dark with a long-deceased former rail-splitter that stays with an Illinois State Police officer on assignment in Washington D.C. for the historic event. Trooper Kevin Smith had ventured out in the pre-dawn hours for his customary run before starting what would be a very long workday.

Madison Frerichs, Amber Miller, Susan Ponder and Erin Weaver played their final regular season contest this past Thursday night, upending Argenta-Oreana on Senior Night.

After losing at Unity on Jan. 25 to start the Okaw Valley Conference Tournament, the Tuscola Warriors sat and waited a week for their next chance at redemption. That chance came Feb. 1 at host site Maroa against 11th-seeded Argenta-Oreana, and the Warriors took advantage by coming back down from 10 points down to pull out a 57-54 victory.

20 years ago Feb. 4, 2003

The City of Tuscola TIF subcommittee met recently to consider 15 requests for TIF funding, including one from sisters Ann Flesor Beck and Devon Flesor Nau, who were hoping to resurrect their grandfather's Kandy Kitchen business.

Tuscola Fire Dept. south station positioned its flag at half mast over the weekend as a sign of respect for the seven astronauts killed aboard the Columbia space shuttle, which disintegrated Feb. 1 as it re-entered the Earth's atmosphere.

Congressman Tim Johnson was in Tuscola last week to receive a portrait created by Amishland artist Dan Morakot. The portrait was a gift of thanks to Johnson for efforts over the years on behalf of the Douglas County area.

TCHS senior Bonnie Obrecht was awarded an academic scholarship to attend SIU Carbondale in the fall. The Dean's Scholarship Award was valued at \$6,000.

Tuscola High School boys basketball laid claim to its third straight LOVC Tournament championship Saturday night at Arcola in a one-point overtime victory against Oakland. Justin Long had 16 points, and Austin Hogue was right behind him with 15 points in the win.

The Lady Warriors pulled off their second mini-upset in succession Thursday night with a 57-48 win over Okaw Valley at TCHS. Chambry Gilmore had 18 points, Marissa McCumber was good for 11 points, and Holly Nichols chipped in nine points.

30 years ago Feb. 2, 1993

After 19 years of service to the Douglas County community, Joyce Lewis was being forced to close the doors of her Sears outlet store in Tuscola. The action was part of a companywide restructuring being done by Sears executives.

In Clinton, Tuscola resident Janet Luster was found guilty of second-degree murder and concealing a homicide in the shotgun slaying of her husband, Dale Luster, on June 15, 1992.

More than 100 interested residents attended a town meeting held by Congressman Tom Ewing at the Tuscola Community Building regarding the possible consolidation of the Douglas County Farmer's Home Administration office with the Champaign County office.

A total team effort was the best way to describe the 65-40 thumping the Lady Warriors put on the conference-leading Atwood-Hammond Rajenes. Tuscola had three players score season high totals: Andrea Wax with 25, Pam Sudduth with 15 points, and Kim VonLanken netting nine points.

George Barnett (21) and Caleb Englehardt (20) combined for half of Tuscola's points in an 82-49 drubbing of Atwood-Hammond. Barnett also led Warrior rebounding with 11.

40 years ago Feb. 8, 1983

Douglas County snowmobilers met recently to lay the groundwork in forming a rescue network that would respond to snow-related emergencies throughout the rural community.

The Chamber of Commerce

Farmer Appreciation Night, attended by some 300 farm guests and their hosts, was a tremendous success, due primarily to the outstanding entertainment provided by Bill Bailey's Banjos group. The event was coordinated by Orville Frye, Theo Houser, Larry Williamson, Les Hall, Mike Wesch, Marcian Hausmann, and Jerry Baird.

After an off-night Tuesday, the Tuscola Warriors got past Argenta-Oreana Friday night in a 53-39 road victory against the cellar-dwelling Bombers. It was the fifth victory in a row for Tuscola.

50 years ago Feb. 1, 1973

The search for a short-haired, light brown dog resembling a German Shepherd continued in Tuscola, in order to keep 4-year-old Tommy Doud from having to undergo a series of 21 rabies shots. The youngster was bitten on the forehead while playing in his yard.

Navy Lieutenant James R. Allen, son of Mr. and Mrs. William Allen of Tuscola and husband of Mrs. Bonnie Allen of Tuscola, was promoted to his present rank while serving with Patrol Squadron 24 at the Naval Air Station in Jacksonville, Fla.

Mrs. Wilbur (Emma) Jolley was presented the Thank You badge—the highest honor given Girl Scout volunteers—at the 13th annual meeting of the Green Meadows Girl Scout Council held recently in Champaign.

Coach Bill Burress credited discipline, determination, dedication and defense as keys in his Tuscola Warrior boys winning the Okaw Valley Conference Tournament following a 51-45 victory over Unity in the title game.

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