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Officer Down

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I heard my pager vibrating on the night stand. I grabbed my glasses first and read, *Call the office*. It was 00:30 hours, Saturday morning, and a hostage situation had developed in the Norview Section of the city. Our Emergency Response Team (S.W.A.T.) was being called out. I grabbed my to-go bag and reported.

Our team was briefed on the incident and current situation. After a domestic argument between a male and female, the woman had fled to her car, seeking safety for herself and her unborn child. She was in her car when she was shot by her partner. The next-door neighbor called the police after hearing the shot.

Officer Drye and his partner responded to investigate the gun shot. As one of the officers was interviewing the neighbor, Officer Drye found the car and pregnant woman. He and another neighbor tried to get her out of the car. Paramedics were also coming but would not be able to treat the woman for fear of being shot themselves.

Another shot rang out, hitting Officer Drye in the chest. The impact knocked him on his back, mortally wounding him. Drye’s partner called for assistance but was unable to help.

Within minutes officers arrived, found cover, and surrounded the house. The sniper continued firing at officers as they arrived. They were able to make a hasty perimeter preventing the suspect from leaving his house.

After arriving at our staging area two blocks away, we set our plan of action in motion. Our job was to relieve the officers surrounding the house and gather information about the shooter. Leaving the staging area, I moved to my assigned position in front of the house. I set up
behind the engine block of a truck and adjusted myself to observe the front of the house. I checked in with the officer in charge, Sergeant Carter, to let him know I was in position.

After adjustments were made, I found myself focusing on Officer Drye’s body. He was lying face up, eyes open. I knew him. We had been on a few calls together, while I was in K-9. He had only been on the police department for two years. He was a husband and father. He was a good man. I could no longer help him, he was gone.

As hard as it was, I had to focus on my job; observing the front of the house for any movement. It was dark inside; no signs of movement or the shooter. I notified Sgt. Carter.

Once snipers were in place, it was time to recover Drye. Two team members, Larry and Bob, were to actually recover him, while a cover team protected them. The cover team would use body bunkers and place themselves between the house and the recovery team to protect them. The plan was to divert the suspect’s attention to the rear of the house by breaking windows. This plan would call for coordinating the diversion during the recovery of Officer Drye.

The team was a go.

The command was given, and the recovery team moved. As the windows were broken, I shifted to a heightened sense of awareness. As my teammates moved into position, I also watched for movement by the suspect. I saw the two teams move from my left. They were able to position themselves over the fallen officer. As I watched, Larry and Bob picked him up and moved towards safety. I was both relieved and sad. The entire action took roughly four and a half minutes. The diversion must have worked; for whatever reason, the sniper did not fire.

Our team hostage negotiator could begin to establish communication with the shooter. He first attempted to use a bull horn but, after several attempts, there was no response. This went on for several hours.
I held my position in the front of the house with still no signs of the shooter. Sgt. Carter asked for a situation report by all perimeter officers. We all reported no activity. He confirmed and stated we were going to deploy gas into the house. I knew the use of gas might force the suspect out. If not, he would barricade himself or he would shoot himself. Carter announced that gas would be deployment in three minutes. I checked my watch and prepared to put my gas mask on. I hated wearing that damn thing, but it was better than breathing tear gas. One minute and then thirty seconds. The grenadier placed the first round of riot gas in the side window. There was a thud as it left the barrel of the 37mm Federal gas gun. Two more rounds fired into the house ensuring complete coverage.

The house remained quiet. Two minutes passed, and I heard shots being fired from inside the house. I reported, “Shots fired inside, shots fired!” At that moment, the front door opened, and the shooter attempted to shoot his way out to freedom. He was not successful.

Although he was no longer a threat to himself or anyone else, he had changed the lives and future of many people during the last seven hours, especially his own and Officer Drye. The gunman had been suffering from mental illness and hearing voices for over a week. If only someone had attempted to get him some help.

Officer Drye left behind a wife of five years and an eleven-month-old daughter. I lost a comrade and friend. I think of him often and see him lying on the ground, face up, and eyes open. His last breath was taken as he attempted to help someone he did not know.