A Review of Police Training for Active Shooter Events:

The Impact of Columbine High School

Ronda Clark

Henley Putnam University

Tamara Mouras, PhD., Committee Chair

Larry Klumb, Subject Matter Expert

Kristen Hangstorfer, Committee Member

FRP 697.1 Research Project B

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Intelligence Management
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... 3
Introduction .................................................................................................................. 4
Active Shooter Training Reform: Columbine High School ........................................... 4
The FBI Study of Active Shooters .................................................................................. 6
Case Studies .................................................................................................................. 8
Case Study Conclusions ............................................................................................... 23
Methodology for Survey Participants .......................................................................... 26
Law Enforcement Professionals Survey Data ............................................................... 28
Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 31
Recommendations ....................................................................................................... 32
References .................................................................................................................... 34
Appendix A .................................................................................................................... 38
Abstract

Mass shootings in public places have risen over the past decade (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 8). The rise of twenty-four hour media coverage, social media and unlimited internet information, true or untrue, are undoubtedly part of the reason these public shootings are securing a foothold on American society. The constant state of information drives a need to report on, listen to and gather as many facts as possible when tragedies, such as when active shooter events occur. Unfortunately, this tends to lay the focus on suspects asking what, why, where, and how they carried out their horrifying events. This focus also tends to engage copy cats who may become motivated to become infamous. Criminal activity has always been a part of communities across America; however, in the past few decades local law enforcement activity has taken center stage on the national level. The events of 9/11 highlighted a breakdown in communication within the intelligence community but it also brought about the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the need to include law enforcement at all levels in the process of sharing information.
Introduction

Active shooter scenarios have seemingly become commonplace, many reports are claiming they are on the rise in our country. Full coverage of these events by the national media tends to give every tragic event, even one that might be considered a local law enforcement issue, national media attention. After the Columbine High School (1999) shooting, law enforcement had to adapt their techniques and procedures for active shooter events. The main changes in training for law enforcement focused on what is required of the first officer(s) on scene and how that could impact potential victims. The goal, post Columbine, is to stop the threat as soon as possible instead of waiting for a specialized unit such as Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). Columbine taught the difficult lesson that even specialized teams have their limits (Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training [ALERRT], 2009). It is important to understand the role of the Columbine tragedy. This paper will look at the outcome of this incident and the reform that took place in police departments across the country. Second, we must understand the background of the information sharing environment and how it effects law enforcement across the country. The Columbine tragedy and the 9/11 terrorist attacks happened within two years of each other and caused dramatic reform to the law enforcement community. This paper will provide a look at three active shooter case studies from the past two years, the type of police responses these events incurred and a chart depicting the rates of mass shooting events in the last decade.

Active Shooter Training Reform: Columbine High School

Although not the first active shooter tragedy in our nation’s history, the Columbine High School incident brought to light outdated procedures used by law enforcement in the event of an active shooter. On April 20, 1999 two students, ages 17 and 18, from Columbine High School
carried out a plan that took a year to create, killing fellow students and teachers (Columbine, 2014). The shooting began at 11:20AM and the first officer to arrive on scene came under fire (ALERRT, 2009). The first officer “returned fire, called for assistance and watched the gunmen enter the school” (ALERRT, 2009). As more deputies arrived they set up a perimeter around the school and waited for the SWAT team to arrive, these actions were rebuked in the media but the officers followed exactly how they were trained to react at this point in time (ALERRT, 2009). The SWAT team started their first entry into the school at 12:06 PM (ALERRT, 2009). The gunmen, in this incident, had 45 minutes to wreak havoc inside the school with no interference from police (ALERRT, 2009). This was a terrible event and the police were perceived for a huge lack of response, what most people did not understand was that good police officers follow commands and act exactly how they train (ALERRT, 2009). This “tragedy identified weaknesses and outdated philosophies in tactical training and responses” (ALERRT, 2009). The Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training guide (p. 10-Module 1) points out:

In the aftermath [of Columbine] law enforcement professionals across the United States determined that we as a profession must be prepared to act more swiftly and effectively to put a quick and deliberate end to active shooting situations such as columbine. One of the primary issues which must be addressed is empowering and demanding that first responders to one of these critical situations be prepared to immediately act to put a stop to the violence.

Understanding that this is a huge burden to put on patrol officers it is also a necessary one, one that must come with extensive training provided to the officers who may one day find themselves in an active shooter situation (ALERRT, 2009). One of the goals of this paper is to reach out to patrol officers across the country to see if they are satisfied with the training they are receiving and how prepared they feel if an active shooter incident were to take place in their jurisdiction. The Columbine tragedy has also stirred an ominous desire in others to produce a similar event, an investigation completed by ABC News identified “17 attacks and another 36
alleged plots or serious threats against schools that are tied to the Columbine tragedy” (Thomas, et al., 2014). This is why it is essential that updated techniques and proper training is being offered to patrol officers across the nation, as well as access to that training. Multiple training programs have been set up around the country to address the training gap (ALERRT, 2009). While observing the changes to active shooter training due to the Columbine High School tragedy in 1999 it is also important to understand the impact that the events of 9/11 had on the law enforcement community. These two events have shaped the way law enforcement officers are responding to active shooter scenarios.

**The FBI Study of Active Shooters**

The FBI published a study that shows an increasing trend in active shooter events. In January of 2014 President Obama signed the Investigative Assistance for Violent Crimes Act of 2012 into law (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 4). The law granted authority to the attorney general to assist in the “investigation of violent acts and shootings occurring in a place of public use” (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 4). The definition of an active shooter that is agreed upon by the US government is “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area” (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 5). The study mentions that “implicit in this definition is that the subject’s criminal actions involve the use of a firearm” (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 5). This study did not include “shootings that resulted from gang or drug violence – pervasive, long-tracked, criminal acts that could also affect the public” as well as “other gun-related shootings which did not put others in peril (accidental discharge of a firearm in a school or building or a person who chose to publicly commit suicide in a parking lot)” (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 5). There were 160 Active shooter events between 2000 and 2013. Of the 160 events, there were only “two incidents that included more than one shooter, nine incidents involved the
shooting a family member before moving to a public location and in six incidents the shooters were female” (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 7). In forty percent of the incidents (64 cases) the shooter committed suicide (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 7). The report shows that damage occurs in a matter of minutes, in almost seventy percent (only 65/160 events had a timeline) the shooting ended in five minutes or less and 23 out of the 65 events ending in two minutes or less (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 8). Over fifty percent, 90 of the incidents ended on the shooters initiative (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 11). In “twenty-eight percent (45 cases) law enforcement and the shooter exchanged gunfire” and “even when law enforcement arrived quickly the shooter still chose to end his own life” (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 11) The “shooter was killed at the scene in 21” of those cases (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 11). One of the most important findings of this study shows the upswing in events over the past fourteen years (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 8). The below graph taken from the FBI study shows the gradual increase of active shooter events.

![Graph showing the increase of active shooter incidents between 2000 and 2013.](image)

Figure 1. A study of 160 Active Shooter Incidents in the U.S. between 2000-2013. (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 8)
As shown in the graph, “during the first seven years an average of 6.4 incidents occurred annually and in the last seven years of the study, the average increased to 16.4 incidents annually” (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 8).

Case Studies

In the following chapter this paper will discuss three cases of mass public shootings that have taken place in the last three years. Each of these incidents took place in a very public setting that is generally associated with a low threat environment. Police response in each case was extremely rapid, most being well under the 10 minute mark. Police training has increased in effectiveness and demonstrated, in at least one case discussed below, to save countless lives.

Case 1: Aurora, Colorado Century 16 Movie Theatre Shooting (2012). This shooting was orchestrated by James Holmes (Frosch, et al., 2012). Holmes grew up in a middle-class community in San Diego and attended high school there (Aurora, 2012). Holmes graduated from the University of California, Riverside with a B.S. in neuroscience in 2010 with highest honors. He enrolled as a Doctoral candidate at the University of Colorado Anschultz Medical Campus in 2011 but dropped out due to poor grades as reported by a university spokeswoman (Frosch, et al., 2012). Around this time, Holmes saw three separate mental health officials associated with the University of Colorado (James, 2012). Holmes legally purchased four guns at two local shops in the previous 60 days before the shooting took place (Aurora, 2012).

As reported by CNN on July 7, 2012 Holmes purchased a movie ticket online for the midnight showing of “The Dark Knight Rises” on 19 July. Holmes entered the theater but immediately exited through a rear door, leaving the door propped open. He dressed himself in full protective gear, returned through the door he propped open while throwing two tear gas canisters into the theater. Some survivors thought they were witnessing a promotional stunt by a
performer until he started shooting. The NY Times reported that witnesses told police that Holmes said “I am the Joker” and even had his hair dyed a bright red orange (Frosch, et al., 2012). After shooting multiple innocent civilians, killing twelve and injuring 58, Holmes surrendered, without incident, to police outside the theater (Pearson, 2012). Holmes, at the time of his arrest, spoke of explosives in his apartment which prompted an evacuation of the building. Police discovered that the apartment was booby trapped with small improvised explosive devices (Aurora, 2012).

Holmes started his shooting rampage at about 12:38 AM on 20 July, 2012 and the first 911 call came in around 12:39 AM (Aurora, 2012). The Aurora police department had officers on scene within 90 seconds of the first 911 call (Strauss, et al., 2012). Reports from CNN stated that Holmes surrendered to police within seven minutes of the shooting (Pearson, 2012). Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper was quoted saying “The work of law enforcement agencies…has been exceptional” (Strauss, et al., 2012). There is no doubt, with the amount of explosives and firearms located on Holmes’ person, without the quick response of the police the Aurora movie theater shooting could have been much worse (Strauss, et al., 2012). With Holmes in custody and victims in the hospital, the police needed to secure his apartment. After disarming the triggering devices in the apartment it was clear that the devices were set up to kill whoever entered through the door. Colorado Department of Safety chief Jim Davis, former FBI Denver bureau chief, said “the coordinated response to the shootings and neutralizing Holmes’ booby-trapped apartment showed the strong leadership of Aurora’s police (Strauss, et al., 2012). Aurora police also reached out early to local law enforcement agencies, the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) (Strauss, et al., 2012).
In May of 2014 the author reached out to the city of Aurora through the Colorado Open Records Act to acquire the after action report of the Century Aurora 16 Theater shooting incident. The report had not been released to the public at the time of this request. In September of 2014 the report was approved for public release and the author received a copy based on the request from May. The report shows that Aurora police arrived at the theatre less than 3 minutes after the initial 911 call (City, 2014, p. 13). The Duty Lieutenant immediately radioed Communications to have them send all available cars and had his request broadcast city wide. It is interesting to note that the Theatre was less than a mile from the District 2 police station which is co-located with Aurora police headquarters (City, 2014, p. 13). The shooting happened during a shift change which bolstered the presence of police at the theatre but did not affect the initial response to the theatre. The report shows a graph that compiles data of the location of the police vehicles. The graph shows that there were six units on scene within a little over two minutes and 14 units within four minutes (City, 2014, p. 14). During incidents the department assumes that “the Duty Lieutenant or other ranking officer will be the incident commander for a major incident” (City, 2014, p. 22). Although initially the Duty Lieutenant took command, later the Duty Captain came from home to the scene, when on scene he took note of the “inside-outside” command structure that was set up and left that in place (City, 2014, p. 22). The inside-outside structure had one command set up in the parking lot and one set up in the Theatre. One important and interesting fact that the report brings up is that the Chief of Aurora Police Department prior to the incident had established a personal relationship with the FBI Special Agent in Charge (SAC) and had an Aurora Police Department (APD) Officer assigned full-time to the Denver Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) (City, 2014, p. 26). The APD also had an officer assigned full-time to work with the Denver ATF office which helped immensely in
clearing the booby trapped apartment of Holmes. Other departments involved were Denver Police Department, University of Colorado Police Department, Jefferson County, Arapahoe County and Adams County Sheriff’s Departments (City, 2014, p. 26). The report talks about how invaluable these relationships with federal and other local partners were in streamlining resources and contributed to rapid deployment of joint resources. The report shows that it is clear that the Aurora police department has strong leadership, training and intra agency coordination efforts throughout all levels of government. Their response time to this incident was outstanding, even with some reports pointing to the fact that the police headquarters are less than quarter mile away from the Century Aurora 16 Theaters a 90 second response points to a well-trained department.

**Case 2: Sandy Hook Elementary School (2012).** This shooting was orchestrated by Adam Lanza, a twenty years old who attended Sandy Hook from first through fifth grade (Smith, 2013). This section contains information from the Report of the State’s Attorney for the Judicial District of Danbury on the Shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. In 2005 Lanza was diagnosed with Asperger’s Disorder and was described as presenting with significant social impairments and extreme anxiety” (State, 2012, p. 34). In high school Lanza was considered a special education student, he attended Newtown High School and graduated in 2009 (State, 2012, p. 33). Lanza was treated by mental health professionals but not one of them noticed any behavior that portrayed any red flags (Berger, et al., 2013), however they recommended tutoring and medication (State, 2012, p. 35). There are several reports throughout Lanza’s school years that he created some disturbing written material, both in fifth grade and seventh grade (State, 2012, p. 32-34). He made comments about mass murders and serial killing to an acquaintance approximately seven months before he became the shooter at Sandy Hook Elementary School
Lanza did not have an emotional connection to his mother, one witness stated that his mother “asked him if he would feel bad if anything happened to her and his reply was ‘no’” (State, 2012, p. 30). Lanza’s mother became increasingly worried about him in the months leading up to the shooting. She said that he had not gone anywhere in that time and even refused to speak with her directly even though they lived on the same floor in the house (State, 2012, p. 28). Lanza’s mother never expressed fear of her son and even planned to purchase a pistol as a Christmas gift for Lanza, evidence was found in the form of a check written by Lanza’s mother for a firearm (State, 2012, p. 26). Lanza became increasingly introverted and refused to “take suggested medication and did not engage in suggested behavior therapies” from his therapists (State, 2012, p. 35). On the morning of the Sandy Hook shooting, the shooter Adam Lanza, shot and killed his mother in her bed at the home they both shared (State, 2012, p. 2).

Adam Lanza drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School armed with a Bushmaster rifle, multiple hand guns and a large supply of ammunition (State, 2012, p. 9). The doors to the school were locked at the time of day Lanza arrived so he continued to shoot his way into the school by the front lobby doors around 9:35 AM (State, 2012, p. 9). Numerous 911 calls were made as Lanza shot multiple times down the hallway, striking the principle and school psychologist. He stopped at the main office but left when he didn’t see anyone around. The people in the main office had taken cover when they heard the gun shots in the hallway. After witnessing the principle being struck a 911 call was made and the school intercom was inadvertently turned on but provided notice about the situation to the rest of the school (State, 2012, p. 9). Lanza headed down to two separate classrooms, opened the door and open fired. This attack left six adults and
20 children dead (State, 2012, p. 2). Lanza then proceeded to shoot himself before police arrived (State, 2012, p. 2).

The official report on Sandy Hook from the State’s Attorney gives a chronological timeline of the police response. Lanza first started shooting shortly before 9:30 AM; reports of glass breaking at the front entrance were reported around 9:35 AM (State, 2012, p. 9). The first 911 call was made at 9:35:39 AM, 27 seconds later the Newtown Police Department dispatcher broadcast the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School (State, 2012, p. 11). At 9:37:38 AM just at the 2 min mark, the Connecticut State Police (CSP) are dispatched for the active shooter situation at the elementary school (State, 2012, p. 11). The report shows at 9:39 AM the first Newton police officer arrived behind Sandy Hook and 13 seconds later two more officers from Newton arrive (State, 2012, p. 11). Gunshots are reported in the background, at 9:40 AM the last gunshot is heard and believed to be the final suicide shot from the shooter (State, 2012, p.12). About 90 seconds later a Newton police officer has unknown male on the ground, started relay of information about a possible second shooter (State, 2012, p. 12). At 9:42 AM Newton officer relays license plate of the shooters car and at 9:44 AM Newton police officers enter Sandy Hook Elementary School (State, 2012, p. 12). Ten minutes after they were initially notified, CSP arrived on scene at Sandy Hook Elementary School (State, 2012, p. 12). At this point the police believed, based on a number of factors that there was second shooter and treated the scene as such by bringing a K-9 in to search the area while officers were posted as lookouts (State, 2012, p. 12). The report lays out the factors that lead to the suspicion of a second shooter, the first being the encounter with an unknown male outside the school in correlation with the reports of someone running outside the school while the shooting was ongoing (State, 2012, p. 13). The second was the detection of two black zip up sweat jackets located by the shooters car and the
discovery of a 12 gauge shotgun and ammunition in the passenger compartment of the shooters car and shell casings located outside of the school (State, 2012, p. 13). Lastly, the apparent sound of gunfire coming from outside of the school all pointed to a false positive of a second active shooter (State, 2012, p. 13). After the investigation was complete it was determined that there were no subsequent shooters.

The Newton Police arrived within four minutes of the initial 911 call to Sandy Hook Elementary School but it took 9 minutes from the first 911 call to enter the building. About 60 seconds after the police arrived on scene the final suicide shot was heard and four minutes later the first officers entered the school. This particular incident of an active shooter incident has received negative attention on how quickly the first officers on scene entered the school. It is very difficult to judge first responder’s actions to an active shooter while sitting behind a desk; it is more important to review the policies and training and make sure the training that is being offered is up-to-date. It is also important to review if the officers were acting in accordance with training. Police officers have a very difficult job that requires an understanding of having to put themselves in harm’s way in order to protect members of the community. The scrutiny in this incident comes from how long it took for the first officers on scene to enter the school. After multiple Newton officers arrived, two three man teams were formed and tried to enter the school through back entrances. This was difficult since the school was on lockdown and forced one team to break a window to enter (Colli, 2013). However, when state troopers arrived approximately 10 min after the first 911 call, they immediately entered through the front entrance where Lanza had shot through the front glass doors (Colli, 2013). They followed his path directly from where he entered and found him with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. When Newton arrived the first officers parked about a football field away, they could hear the shots
inside the school but were also getting reports of unidentified figures outside the school. These events lead to a chaotic scene, one that School safety expert Kenneth trump pointed out by stating that “the amount of activity going on outside would have made it difficult for officers to proceed. You have to approach this with the thought that there are multiple shooters and anyone you encounter could be a potential shooter and that is going to delay or obstruct the police” (Altimari, 2013). While these are certainly important facts and very true, the issue at hand is the active threat unloading a firearm inside an elementary school, Vincent Riccio, a former New Haven police officer said “six minutes is a lifetime in a shooting situation” (Altimari, 2013). The first officer should have been running into the building with the officers following left to worry about security” (Altimari, 2013).

Based on reports and witnesses it seems as if the CSP did exactly as law enforcement should be trained, enter immediately, locate the threat and take it out. It is easy to read a report and try to hash out how Newton officers should or could have responded; however, given my expertise in Intelligence Management, I see this as coming down to the training that is received and how it is practiced. Practice makes perfect in all things and active shooter events are not the time to figure out how to navigate the chaos around the scene. Newton police reviewed their active shooter policies twice a year before the Sandy Hook incident and had their last training in 2011, although it did not say when in 2011 (Colli, 2013). The point of the training, according to Newton Police Chief Michael Kehoe, is “to get to the aggressor and stop the shooting as quickly as possible” (Colli, 2013). The Newton Police active shooter policy was 10 years old at the time of the Sandy Hook incident and never released but according to Chief Kehoe’s his department was aware of how to approach an active shooter situation. Chief Kehoe said, “Rapid response and then, you know, in a coordinated effort, as much as you can, go in a find a threat… actually
bypassing victims until you find a threat, until you know the threat is no longer hurting people” (Colli, 2013). It is not evident exactly what the police officers were told when being dispatched to the scene and what instructions they received. There were a plethora of effects for the first responding officers to consider. Was there a second shooter, what kind of weapons were being used and were their explosives inside the school or on the school grounds (Colli, 2013)? Retired New Haven police officer, Vincent Riccio who was injured in a shooting in New Haven had strong words for the situation. Riccio thought that 6 minutes was too long for the cops to wait to enter the school, “who would you rather see inside, a police officer with a gun or a teacher without a gun?...I’m not saying they are bad cops, they are brave enough to put on a uniform and go to the scene. I’m saying they made a bad mistake” (Dixon, et al., 2013). Riccio goes on to say “It’s all about tactics; they have to move toward the shooter. If they were there for 45 seconds, they should have gone into a sprint and moved from cover to cover toward the shooter. You can’t lose focus, according to FBI statistics, 97 percent of active shooters are lone shooters. I believe they lost their focus” (Dixon, et al., 2013). These situations are tough to judge but in order to be better equipped to respond to active shooter events, this type of feedback that Riccio provided is essential. Chief Kehoe, who arrived at Sandy Hook Elementary School a few minutes after the first call supports his department and officers and their actions, he said, “We recognize that our active-shooter training protocols give you a base to follow. We know that you can’t follow to a tee because you can’t say that every incident is going to look the same, many things come in play with an active shooter response (Colli, 2013).

While it is true that no active shooter situation is the same, the post-Columbine active shooter training that is echoed by all parties interviewed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting states that first responding officers are not to wait but to get to the threat as quickly as possible. The differences between the Newton Police department and Connecticut State Police (CSP)
initial response to the Sandy Hook incident is notable and very telling of the possibility of different approaches to active shooter training. The CSP immediately entered through the broken glass doors, followed the trail of the shooter and found him within a couple minutes while still operating under the belief that there was a second shooter. If this is the case, why the long wait for the Newton Police officers to enter the building? As mentioned by the experts, it is not appropriate to judge the initial responding police officers of the Newtown Police department but in terms of applying policy, tactics and training during an active shooter event it appears that the officers were not as prepared as their CSP counterparts.

**Case 3: Navy Yard Office Shooting in Washington, DC (2013).** The shooter, Aaron Alexis, had three documented run-ins with law enforcement before he open fired in an office building killing 12 people before he was shot and killed by law enforcement officials. The after action report from the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) paints a vivid pictures and notes his “uneven behavior and deteriorating psychological state before the shooting occurred” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 8). Alexis, born in Queens, New York and attended high school in the Bronx, joined the Navy in May of 2007 and served for four years before earning an honorable discharge in January 2011 (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 8). It is important to note that Alexis suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), according to his father, as a result of assisting with rescue efforts on 9/11 (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 8). The first run in with law enforcement mentioned in the report from MPD stated that in 2004 Alexis had shot out the tires of a vehicle after an angry confrontation with a construction worker in Seattle, Washington (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 8). The second incident took place in 2008 in DeKalb County, Georgia; he was arrested for disorderly conduct. The third documented incident took place in 2010; Alexis discharged his firearm into the ceiling of his apartment in Fort Worth, TX. Alexis claimed this was an
accidental discharge while cleaning his firearm (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 8). Alexis exhibited signs of severe anger indicated in police reports that stated Alexis “did not recall his actions because he suffered from black outs caused by anger” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 8). Alexis, however, never exhibited these outbursts while working which explains his honorable discharge and his ability to get a job as an independent contractor, employed by a subcontractor of Hewlett-Packard, Experts, Inc. (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 8-9). Interestingly, Alexis showed no signs of any ideological differences with the Navy nor with any specific co-workers at the Navy Yard; Alexis was working on the Navy Yard for about a week before the shootings took place (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 9). In the weeks leading up to the shooting, Alexis reportedly tried to receive treatment from two separate Veterans Affairs hospitals, in Providence, Rhode Island and Bethesda, Maryland (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 9). He sought treatment for insomnia but denied any psychological issues at the time. The MPD report does mention that Alexis “told police in Rhode Island that he believed voices were harassing him and that the government was doing a microwave project on him” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 9). A couple of days before the shooting, Alexis went to a firearms dealer in Lorton, VA and attempted to purchase an AR-15 assault rifle. He was denied only because he was not a resident of Virginia, in which case he decided to purchase a pump-action shot gun. Alexis also purchased a hacksaw that was most likely used to saw off the barrel of the shot gun and he etched messages on the shotgun that read “Better off this way”, “My ELF Weapon” and “Not what you say” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 9). The after action report describes the morning of the shooting as Alexis participating in a very normal work day routine, showing his ID to gain access to the Navy Yard installation and taking his backpack and clip board into the building as he had done the whole previous week.
Aaron Alexis entered the building at 8:08 AM, went to the fourth floor which he was assigned to work and went into the bathroom (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 12). In the bathroom he set up the shot gun and left the backpack and clipboard in the bathroom. Eight minutes later he starts his shooting rampage by killing his first three victims and injuring a fourth (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 12). Alexis shot and killed eight victims in total on the fourth floor within four minutes of firing his first shots. Alexis then makes his way down to the third floor where he fatally shoots two more victims within the first two minutes of being on that floor (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 14). Within the first 6 minutes of when the shooting started, Alexis shot and killed 10 people (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 14). He fires on a group of employees, some at very close range but does not hit anyone. He walked by a woman trying to hide and pointed the shot gun at her and fired twice but the gun was not loaded. There seemed to be no stopping point for Alexis, he was clearly waiting to ambush and kill anyone who got in his way, including law enforcement. In the previous two cases discussed, one shooter hid (James Holmes) and was eventually arrested by police while the other (Adam Lanza) shot himself before police entered the building. Alexis appeared to be shooting at anyone he could find and would continue to do so as long as he had ammunition. Alexis continued his path of terror by heading to the first floor where he shot and killed a security guard, who became victim number 11 and took his weapon (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 16). Alexis was on the move and came across another security guard and a Navy MP and later a group of three men, in each instance there was an exchange of gunfire but no one was shot (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 16). Alexis made his way back to a stairwell, looked out the door into an alley and saw two men. He raised his shot gun but lowered either because it was jammed or out of ammunition and decided to use the handgun he took from the security guard he fatally shot. He fired toward the two men, striking and killing one who became his 12th and final victim.
The MPD report shows multiple encounters that Alexis had with law enforcement which went on for approximately 47 minutes but distracted him enough that no other people were fatally shot; he instead had to focus on the 117 law enforcement officers inside Building 197 ready to neutralize the threat (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 15-16). The MPD report points out that Alexis’s “demeanor had visibly changed; he went from hunter to the hunted” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 18). Alexis goes back to the third floor and found cubicles to hide in after a couple instances of almost running into law enforcement teams searching Building 197. At 9:15 AM a team of one MPD and two NCIS agents made their way down a narrow path running along the bank of cubicles that was providing cover for Alexis (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 19). Alexis fired at the officers and struck the MPD officer twice. The NCIS agents pulled the officer out of the line of fire and requested immediate assistance from additional officers (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 19). Within seconds of the request, two USPP officers and an MPD tactical officer found the NCIS agents. Officer Wong, USPP, covered the hallway that housed the entrance to the cubicles where Alexis was hiding. Officer Hiott, USPP and Officer DeSantis, MPD SWAT head toward the last known position of Alexis, as the officers round the last corner Alexis fires on the officers hitting the MPD SWAT officer in the chest. Officers return fire, at 9:25 AM Officer Hiott shoots and kills Alexis to end the threat 69 minutes after the initial shot was fired (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 20). Officer Hiott radios that the suspect is down. Due to conflicting reports of the description of the shooter, it took several hours for police to confirm that the shooter acted alone (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 21-22).

The report states that “approximately one minute and 30 seconds after the first shots, the first 911 call is received in the city’s emergency call center” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 12). The first caller provided important details about the description of Alexis. Within seconds of the first
911 call, MPD had dispatched officers to the scene; the first MPD officer arrived at 8:23 AM. It is important to note that US Park Police (USPP) officers heard reports of shots fired over their radio and headed toward the scene; the first USPP officer arrived. The US Capitol Police (USCP) Containment Emergency Response Team also headed toward the scene, with the mounting scene the traffic was so bad by the time they “self-deployed” to the scene, repositioning between the Navy Yard and the Capitol seemed like the best option (SWAT, 2013). Initial reports stated that USCP had a tactical command decision given for them to turn away. This was not the case; Capitol Police Chief, Kim Dine, ordered a review to look into the allegations against his department. The report of the USCP CERT said,

Because of traffic gridlock caused by both emergency vehicles and commuter traffic the CERT unit was unable to reach that incident command post. The CERT unit then moved closer to the Capitol, increasing its flexibility to respond as needed at either the Capitol or the Navy Yard (Mears, 2013).

DC Metropolitan Police Chief, Kathy Lanier said, “Two police unites responded within two minutes after the initial 911 call” (Leger, et al., 2013). “Within four minutes, five to seven additional police units had entered the Navy Yard gates” (Leger, et al., 2013). The MPD report points out that some external reports show a slightly different timeline; this is due to events that “happened concurrently rather than sequentially” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 12). Seven minutes after the initial 911 call, officers heard shots and took immediate action by entering Building 197 in order to stop the threat (Leger, et al., 2013). The Naval District Washington (NDW) Police and Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) agents are the first to enter Building 197 (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 11). Approximately five minutes after the initial dispatch, the first MPD and USPP officers arrive at the Navy Yard, however the first gate they arrive at is locked with no guards. It took the officers precious extra time to find an entrance that was manned and without clear markings on the buildings it was hard to find the exact location of Building 197.
(Metropolitan, 2014, p. 15). As more officers arrive, there was confusion over the exact location of the shooting; officers began receiving communications that the shooter was in Building 58 (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 15). Around the same time, the Unified Command post was being set up by MPD. A mistaken assumption was made about NCIS being the law enforcement representative for the Navy Yard, they were just a tenant at the Navy Yard, it was later determined that “the Base Commander was the appropriate authority but he was operating from an internal operations center and unaware of the Unified Command” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 15). The missing line of communication from the Base Commander and the Unified Command was crucial and had “the impact of their absence felt early on when Unified Command requested from NCIS access to Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras and video recordings” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 18). The first organized teams consisting of multiple law enforcement agencies, including MPD and USPP enter Building 197 approximately seven minutes after the NDW and NCIS officers entered the building (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 11). At 09:25 AM the rampage was brought to an end by USPP Officer Hiott after sixty-nine minutes (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 11/Hermann, 2014). The MPD report states that “at least 117 officers entered the building during the initial search for the shooter” (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 15). This included officers from MPD, USPP, NDW, NCIS, Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, US Marshals Service, Navy Contract Security Guards and the US Navy, Department of Defense (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 15).

The response to this active shooter was very complicated in terms of levels or law enforcement and jurisdiction, there was a common mission to take down the threat but several missing links. The two command centers seemed necessary given the situation and access that MPD had versus the Base Commander; however the Base Commander should have been notified
of the Unified Command center set up by MPD. Another issue that arose was the multiple radio channels, used by different departments which impeded vital communication. At 09:25 AM a USPP officer shot and killed Alexis and radioed over the USPP network (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 20). Officials inside the Unified Command center heard the transmission, there were USPP officials set up at the Unified Command; however, it takes several more minutes to confirm with other officers that the gunman is down (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 20). The MPD report states, 

As an important reminder, for safety reasons and clear communication, all officers conducting tactical search for the gunman should be operating on the same radio channel. If different departments are on their own channel it can create the potential for large communication gaps and increase the risk to other officers (Metropolitan, 2014, p. 21).

Another issue that is critiqued in the after action process and discussed in the report, “Police are getting earpieces, convinced that Alexis could hear the radio transmissions and used the sounds to elude capture or set up ambushes. It is believed that this radio chatter is what betrayed MPD Officer Williams who was shot in the leg” (Hermann, 2014).

**Case Study Conclusions**

Colorado was the site of the 1999 Columbine High School massacre that pictured the police as not doing enough but it was an issue of training rather than lack of response. Fifteen years later the training and culture of some police departments in terms of active shooter incidents has taken a dramatic change for the better and these efforts appear to be working. After reviewing these three case studies it seems that the response from the Aurora Police Department was by the book. They were on scene and the shooter had surrendered within seven minutes of the initial 911 call. Not only did the officers operate how they trained, the APD leadership had developed relationships with outside agencies, including the Federal government, which helped immensely during this incident. The second case study, Sandy Hook Elementary School, the
response of the Newton Police Department was questioned due to how long it took them to get inside the school. Their initial response, about four minutes, to arrive at the school was never questioned. The questions came after it took the officers five extra minutes to go into the school. The State Police took ten minutes to arrive and they were the first ones to find the shooter, who had already killed himself. As mentioned earlier, the NPD response seemed to be more a failure of training and updated procedures than officer incompetence. This tragedy re-ignited the discussion about making sure law enforcement officers across the country were being properly trained. The President came up with a plan to reduce gun violence and called upon federal agencies to “immediately expand access to federal training on active shooter situations (White, n.d., p. 1). The actions of the President’s plan were compiled into a fact sheet. The Department of Homeland Security has implemented five actions. The first, they reached out to “law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services officials…to get their input on best practices” and hosted a roundtable in May of 2013 of more than “2,400 law enforcement, school administrators, and faith-based leaders (White, n.d., p. 1). The second and third comprised of launching a new active shooter webpage which includes active shooter training resources and they have conducted site security assessments and security briefings to at least 100 K-12 schools (White, n.d., p. 1). The fourth action from DHS contained active shooter workshops, presentations and table-top exercises for schools (White, n.d., p. 2). Lastly, the active shooter fact sheet released by the White House states that DHS held the National Summit on Preventing Active Shooter Situations (White, n.d., p. 2). The Department of Justice (DOJ) implemented six actions to include, improving and expanding training for law enforcement, training at FBI field offices nationwide and the development of critical incident handbooks and crisis communication quick reference guides from the FBI (White, n.d., p. 2-3). The last two actions include a web
resource initiated by the FBI which “houses information on best practices, lessons learned and resources on active shooter situations” and expanded outreach in partnership with DHS that focus on best practices and lessons learned from recent events (White, n.d., p. 3). Lastly, the Navy Yard brought on a law enforcement response that shut down a portion of Washington DC. Even with this vast response, this even came to an end because of the first responders who were grouped with two other officers and went inside the building within seven minutes of the first 911 call. This incident shows that because law enforcement was taking the offense, the shooter became distracted, which lead him to stop killing civilians and ultimately was killed by police. One thing that all the after action reports had in common was how the Columbine tragedy had shaped their active shooter training and that their first priority was to stop the threat. These case studies show that the changes to active shooter scenario training has worked, however, it is important to point out that the Century 16 and Navy Yard incidents had phenomenal, efficient police response the Sandy Hook response was less efficient. While it seems that updated training and frequent access to active shooter training is essential, smaller towns may not have the money to send their officers to training or be able to provide frequent access. One of the more interesting and practical tools and one that should be utilized by law enforcement all over the country is the “HERO 911” application for smart phones; this application is created specifically for active shooter situations (Snyder, 2014). This application has teachers and school officials download an application called school guard and the law enforcement officers download the HERO 911 application (Snyder, 2014). When a shooting starts, and the school guard application is activated, all law enforcement officers with this application on their phone will receive a message with the school address, school layout, how much time has elapsed since activation and how many law enforcement officers are responding (Snyder, 2014). This application is very
sophisticated; it asked the law enforcement officer if they are in uniform or plain clothes so that responding officers know how many people are responding to the scene. The explosion of applications and smart phones are relatively recent but now that this technology exists it should be utilized by departments of all sizes.

Methodology for Survey Participants

For this study a law enforcement professional or participant refers to local, state and federal sworn police officers. The survey (listed below) is titled the Law Enforcement Professional’s Survey. The only criterion for the individuals being surveyed is to be a current sworn police officer at any level of law enforcement. The thought process behind grouping all levels of sworn law enforcement officers is that the mission should be the same across the board during an active shooter situation. A stratified random sample was used in the early stages of identifying the search group to make sure that local, state and federal sworn police officers were selected for the survey (Techniques, n.d., para. 5). Within the stratified sample group, simple random samples were chosen meaning that all cities and counties had the same chance of being selected and all states had the same chance of being selected to receive the law enforcement professional’s survey (Techniques, n.d., para. 6). The first step in getting a random sample for my population was to list the States alphabetically and then use a random number generator from 1 – 50 to come up with my list of police departments for the survey sample. Five columns of ten numbers appeared in the number generator and the top number from each column for the first set and second number from each column for the second set were the numbers assigned to the alphabetical list of states. The first row of numbers is for state police agencies and the second for city or county (in this sample population there is no distinction). Using state police agencies is very straightforward since there is only one per state. However, to choose the single county
or city a google search was used and one of the top three results were selected (as long as an email address was available on the department website) for the survey request email. The decision was to start with five states for city/county departments and five states for state police which equaled 10 percent of the sample available (50 US states). The first email sent out was through a Gmail account and not through an official email, in the case for this author, a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) account.

Federal law enforcement agencies were selected under opportunity sampling with the hope that it would include snowball sample (Techniques, n.d., para. 9). From working for National Operations Center Law Enforcement section, DHS Headquarters this author is acquainted with federal law enforcement officers. The survey was sent to known law enforcement officers in contact with the author. The author asked the recipients to forward the survey to other law enforcement they worked with or knew. The survey was also sent to the Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA) due to their large size as an organization and heavy training. The email was sent to the public information officer (PIO) and the PFPA PIO was the first agency that called and emailed to verify the request was legitimate. This was not surprising, due to the nature of the survey and the mind set of law enforcement professionals it was expected that some departments might suspect spam or a phishing attempt. Unfortunately, in the end, PFPA ultimately declined to participate in the survey.

From Robert Niles online tutorial and for the purpose of this paper the “formula $1/\sqrt{N}$ where N is the number of participants or sample size” (Sample, n.d., para. 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Size (N)</th>
<th>Margin of Error (fraction)</th>
<th>Margin of Error (percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.224</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.071</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Displays margin of error in relation to sample size (Sample, n.d., para. 2)

The goal was to gather between 100 and 200 responses since that would place the survey responses between a seven and ten percent margin of error. After two weeks, there were only seven responses online and three responses by email. Due to the low participation it was decided to add five more states to use for city/county departments and five more states for state police agencies. The same random number generator from the first selection was used and the third and fourth lines were selected for the new sample set. This time the email from the authors official DHS account in hopes that it would hold credibility.

**Law Enforcement Professionals Survey Data**

Below is the survey that was sent out to law enforcement officers across the county. The survey was sent out in three forms, in the original email, in an adobe pdf format and attached to a link that led to an online survey site. The goal of this survey was to see, from an officer prospective, what type of training was being provided and is the government doing enough to streamline effective training for law enforcement professionals across the country. After six weeks, 128 survey responses were collected from participating agencies and departments which
provide a 7-10 percent margin of error. Eight main questions and four sub questions were asked in the survey (please reference appendix A for the survey). The first three questions were basic data questions provide a baseline and get a feel for what part of the country the surveys were coming in from and the experience level of the officer filling out the survey. These questions asked if they were federal, state or local law enforcement, how long they served as an officer and their current position. The fourth question asked if the officer had received active shooter training in their initial training program. The basic data responses show 53 percent of participants did not receive initial training. This number was not a big surprise since the survey participants were a mixture of experience levels. After reviewing the data, the number of participants who spent fifteen years or less on the job were placed into a sub category to see if they received initial active shooter training. This timeframe would presumably put them in a post-Columbine era of police training. There were 27 percent of participants that fell in the post-Columbine era of police training that did not receive active shooter training in their initial police academy. Regardless of the level (federal, state or local) of law enforcement this shows there is still a huge gap when getting vital training about active shooter situations to new recruits. One of the sub questions asked if they found their initial training useful, most answers were positive. They talked about practicing with simulated ammunition, being inside confined areas, learning to coordinate and mentally prepare for an active shooter event.

The follow up question asked the participants if they had attended any additional training for active shooter situations; the numbers go up significantly. There were only three percent of participants who had not attended any active shooter training and three of those officers were listed as recruits. This is a positive finding, it shows that although initial training may not provide active shooter training there is a very high likelihood that the officer will receive the
training eventually. This continuing education for active shooter scenarios seemed, in the participant responses, to provide more realistic scenarios and case studies. There were a lot of responses that mentioned the training focused on officer responsibility and coordination with other agencies. Moving on to the next question, the participants were asked how jurisdiction played a role in active shooter scenarios. An overwhelming majority, 93% (117/128) said there were no issues with jurisdiction. The responses were very specific in mentioning that at the beginning of an incident it does not matter who shows up first, who you might work with, etc., it only matters that the threat is neutralized. There were nine outliers that mentioned some significant issues that were addressed earlier in the Navy Yard case study. These outliers address the issues of radio communication being different between departments inhibit the safety and coordination for a seamless response. Another issue brought up was that of inter-agency cooperation, more interagency training was suggested to remedy this issue. Lastly, it was noted that, without question the lead and command structure should stem from the jurisdiction the incident happened, other agencies can and should provide support but not take the lead. These are very good points that are brought up and highlight some of the issues identified in the recommendations of the case study after action reports.

The second to last question asks the participants for their recommendations that are not currently taught or enforced. There were about 51% of participants that responded with recommendations. Forty percent of those recommendations centered on inter-agency training to include EMS and fire departments. Twenty-five percent stressed more training on a quarterly or at least annual basis. Twelve percent of the responses thought it would be extremely helpful to train and arm teachers, school administrators or enlist the help of citizens, especially in rural areas. The participant was specifically referring to former or reserve military and police in any
capacity. A couple of recommendations were to provide basic medical training to officers for the immediate aftermath, after the threat was neutralized. Lastly, it was pointed out that not every department requires upper level officers (Lieutenants, Captains, etc) to attend active shooter training and this becomes an issue when those in leadership positions do not train for the event where they may be in charge. The last survey question asks if the participant has heard of the DHS RUN. HIDE. FIGHT. program and if they thought informing the public was a good idea. About 67% of participants had heard of the program and even if they had not heard of it, ninety percent of the participants believed this program to be a good idea. There were a few participants that had mixed feelings, 3% and those that did not agree with informing the public, 7%. One participant mentioned that their department provided free training using this material to state agencies and their employees. Another participant initially thought that informing the public was not a good idea; however, then changed his mind stating that an average civilian will probably not even think about what to do in an active shooter event which makes the training necessary to the general public.

**Conclusion**

Law enforcement is a dynamic and evolving entity. As society changes and produces new threats, law enforcement and its officers need to adapt training and policy to fit the communities they patrol. This country saw the events of 9/11 and used that tragedy to expose the IC gaps to change, adapt and open the lines of communication for inter-department sharing. In the same way, the tragedy that took place in Lakewood, Colorado at Columbine High School changed the way law enforcement responded to active shooter scenarios. The study of active shooters conducted by the FBI showed a disturbing trend that active shooter scenarios were on the rise (Texas, et al., 2014, p. 8). The case study’s represented law enforcement agencies across
the country and showed that the post-Columbine mindset of neutralize the threat as quickly as possible was taking route and being put into use. Training across the country is better than it has ever been and has worked in several situations; however, there is still one glaring gap that needs to be addressed. First responders need to be provided more realistic training with multiple agencies and they need the training more than once.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are proposed for active shooter police training.

1. Given the fluid environment of an active shooter scenario it is important that all responding agencies to an active shooter event be in on the same page. On a bi-annual rotation federal entities should provide more inter-department training to state entities. State entities should provide more inter-department training to big city entities. Big city entities should in turn provide more inter-department training for smaller towns and surrounding area departments. The state, big city and small town departments should also have receive federally funded training at least every three years.

2. Given that the survey as well as the Navy Yard case study pointed out the issue with radio communication issue between departments responding to an active shooter scenario can become chaotic it is important to assign a communication channel for active shooter events before said event occurs. This channel could also serve as the channel in the case of a terrorist event. The important item to remember is that this should be agreed upon before an incident occurs so when officers are responding to shots fired they switch to the radio channel assigned to active shooter events.
3. While the current active shooter techniques for non-law enforcement entities, such as schools and military bases are to ‘lockdown’ in order to keep additional shooters out and the identified shooter from leaving the premise it also can become an inhibiting factor for first responders. It is important to remember the FBI study (2014) discussed earlier in this paper, out of 160 active shooter events from 2000-2013 there were only two incidents that had more than one shooter. Police departments need to have honest discussions with the schools in their districts about the lockdown procedures and provide a ‘backdoor’ entrance for police during active shooter incidents. Military bases should leave guards at the gates to allow first responders access to the base in the event of an active shooter.

4. Research on the topic of active shooters does not show a pattern in what city or location may be targeted next. The reality of the situation presented shows that law enforcement officers are simply unable to be everywhere and in some states may be up to thirty minutes away. Setting up a program in which retired or reserve police, military and in some cases civilian personnel can respond to active shooter events may widen the ability of a quick response. People in this program should be in good standing and vetted by the department in which they would most likely be helping out and allowed to possess the HERO 911 application mentioned earlier in this paper. A second part of this recommendation is to identify and train select school officials in the use of firearms in order to be ahead of the threat of active shooters. This school official, in theory, would be a member of the program mentioned above.
References


Washington, DC: Author.


_A study of active shooter incidents, 2000 – 2013_. Washington, DC: Author

Thomas, P., Levine, M., Cloherty, J., & Date, J. (2014, October 7). Columbine shootings’ grim legacy: more than 50 school attacks, plots. _ABC News_. Retrieved from

Appendix A

**Law Enforcement Professionals Survey**

a. Are you Federal, State or Local Law Enforcement? __________________

b. How long have you been a police officer? _________________________

c. What position/rank do you current fill? ____________________________

d. Did you receive any active shooter training in your initial training program (FLETC, police academy, etc?) YES / NO
   
   i. Did you find the training useful? YES / NO
   
   ii. What about the training did you find useful?

e. Have you attended any additional training for active shooter situations? YES / NO
   
   i. Did you find the training useful? YES / NO
   
   ii. What about the training did you find useful?

f. In your experience, what role does jurisdiction (between federal/state/local) play in an active shooter situation?

g. Do you have recommendations that aren’t currently taught or enforced for how active shooter events should be handled?

h. Have you heard of the DHS program RUN. HIDE. FIGHT in response to active shooters? If so, do you think informing the public is good or bad for these incidents?