



**AFTER ACTION REPORT
WASHINGTON NAVY YARD
SEPTEMBER 16, 2013**

**INTERNAL REVIEW OF THE
METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

JULY 2014



**METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is the primary law enforcement agency for the District of Columbia. The MPD has over 4,000 sworn and 500 civilian members serving the city.

MISSION OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE DEPARTMENT

It is the mission of the Metropolitan Police Department to safeguard the District of Columbia and protect its residents and visitors by providing the highest quality of police service with integrity, compassion, and a commitment to innovation that integrates people, technology and progressive business systems.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the morning of Monday, September 16, 2013, Aaron Alexis entered Building 197 at the Washington Navy Yard, where he served as an independent contractor, and carried out the most deadly workplace mass shooting in the Nation's Capital in recent memory.

Over the course of 69 minutes, Alexis terrorized thousands of employees of Naval Sea Systems Command, firing indiscriminately from a shotgun he had legally purchased two days earlier and a handgun he had taken from a security guard after mortally wounding the guard. He would also get into multiple shooting engagements with responding law enforcement officers, seriously injuring a Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officer. In his final confrontation with police, Alexis ambushed and fired upon another MPD officer. Fortunately, the officer was saved by his protective vest and was able to return fire, killing Alexis and ending his rampage. When it was over, Alexis had shot and killed twelve people and injured several others.

In the aftermath of the incident, the members of MPD first and foremost want to remember and honor the twelve people who lost their lives. Twelve people went to work that Monday, but did not return home to their loved ones. It is truly a senseless tragedy beyond comprehension, and there are no words adequate enough to express our condolences. Our thoughts remain with the victims' families and friends.

Over the years, the members of MPD, along with other area law enforcement agencies and emergency responders, have trained extensively for the possibility of an "active shooter" incident. The Department did so with the hope of never having to respond to such a tragedy, but in the wake of Columbine, Virginia Tech, Aurora, Fort Hood, and Sandy Hook, among other similar tragedies, MPD recognized the importance and necessity of those preparations. As the primary law enforcement agency for the Nation's Capital, the members of MPD are acutely aware of the many potential targets that exist within the city and the need to remain prepared and vigilant.

On September 16, 2013, hundreds of police, fire, and emergency medical personnel from several different agencies responded to the Navy Yard after receiving news of the shooting. Officers relied upon their training, experience, and instincts to run into an unfamiliar and massive building, towards the gunshots and certain danger, in order to stop the gunman from taking more lives.

MPD would like to thank all of the first responders and especially commend the brave and heroic actions of the law enforcement officers who first entered the building. The arrival and swift entry of police officers was critical. While he exchanged gunfire with responding law



enforcement officers on multiple occasions, Alexis did not fatally wound any additional victims over the course of the last 47 minutes he was moving throughout the building.

In the wake of the incident, it is the Department's responsibility to objectively review and assess the police response to the shooting. An internal review team was assembled and tasked with conducting a comprehensive and detailed assessment.

In composing the report, the team attempted to delicately balance the need to provide extensive details with discretion and sensitivity for the victims, survivors, and witnesses. The team's objective was to provide other law enforcement agencies and emergency responders with MPD's thoughts and self-assessment as to the strengths and weaknesses of the police and emergency response; from the first 911 call through the subsequent investigation. The team also considered that there may be different perceptions or interpretations of the actions as they unfolded that day, depending on the perspective of those involved in the response. The team went to great lengths to critically analyze all the diverse observations and their potential impacts. In the end, the views and statements expressed within this report are from the perspective of the Metropolitan Police Department and its members.

The following report provides a narrative of the multi-agency response and culminates in a summary of MPD's overall observations and recommendations. The Department hopes it may provide other agencies with insight into the police response that day and help us all to be better prepared in the event of a future incident.

Cathy L. Lanier
Chief of Police

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If you have any questions related to the contents of this report, you may contact Cathy L. Lanier, Chief of Police, at Cathy.Lanier@dc.gov and Mr. Matthew Bromeland at Matthew.Bromeland@dc.gov.



PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to describe the events related to the law enforcement response, constructively evaluate and assess the tactical and operational actions, and identify the unique issues and challenges faced by the responding law enforcement officers on September 16, 2013. In the end, we hope that this report provides law enforcement and other stakeholders with practical recommendations should they be called upon to respond to a similar event.

It is not the intent of this report to convey every detail or element related to Alexis or speculate on the possible motive for his actions. While it is human nature to desire to know the specific reasons why Alexis may have carried out this tragedy, his motive is beyond the scope of our review.

It is also not our intention to second guess any of the actions or decisions of the officials and officers at the scene that day. The actions and decisions of that day were made, often in a split second, in a dynamic and extraordinary environment under extreme duress, facing a multitude of unforeseen challenges and dangers, without the benefit of hindsight. That the police response was effective in ending the threat, without the further loss of life, and overall operations continued without substantial issues, is a testament to the professionalism, training, and bravery of the officers who responded to the scene that day.

Our hope is that this reflective analysis and the lessons learned by the Metropolitan Police Department and our partners may provide other law enforcement agencies and related stakeholders with an understanding of the challenges and thoughtful recommendations for possible improvements to the law enforcement response to active shooter situations or other incidents that may require a large-scale, multi-agency response.

*After-action reports are important tools as they provide
"the dynamic link between task performance and execution to standard"¹.*

¹ Leader's Guide to After-Action Review, U.S. Army, 2011, p. 14.



SCOPE OF REVIEW

The scope of this review is mainly limited to the operational actions and tactical response of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and other law enforcement agencies on the day of the shooting. It will focus primarily on the law enforcement actions; however, it will also examine the overlapping actions of other agencies or functions, where appropriate, and when those actions intersect with or impact police operations.

The Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the District of Columbia Government have all commissioned other review or investigative teams to conduct separate assessments of many of the events leading up to and on the day of the shooting. For instance, while there has been an ongoing national discussion regarding how the perpetrator may have been cleared to work as a contract employee assigned to the Washington Navy Yard, MPD's review does not cover that particular topic since it relates to employment suitability. The appropriate Federal agencies are conducting a review of that important issue.

For this report, the MPD Internal Review Team reviewed and assessed the following main areas of the law enforcement and emergency response:

- I. Emergency 911 Services and Initial Notification
- II. Police Response to the Scene
- III. Tactical Operations: Search for the Gunman
- IV. Operational Coordination
- V. Scene Management and Security
- VI. Medical, Reunification, and Victim Services
- VII. Operational Communications
- VIII. Public Information
- IX. Resource Management
- X. Citywide Operations



[21.2] The identification of victims is extremely challenging under these types of circumstances; however, law enforcement should attempt to identify victims as quickly as possible.

VII. OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

OBSERVATION 21: There were some issues with radio communications. Some agencies' radios would not work inside the building due to the unique construction of the building; some officers could not access the main channel utilized for the tactical response; and the substantial amount of radio traffic interfered with some officers' ability to communicate vital information.

All of MPD's radios reportedly worked on scene and within the building; however, some other agencies' law enforcement officers experienced issues with their radio communications at various times. For instance, NDW Police personnel reportedly lost radio communications when they entered Building 197. There were a handful of other officers who reported they lost radio communications at least temporarily while traveling through certain areas of the building. Not all radios worked within Building 197 due to the steel and cement structure of the building. Some buildings, especially those dealing in classified operations, are constructed to purposefully restrict communications.

It should be noted that MPD's radio channels are encrypted. In order to access those channels, other agencies' radios must be programmed with the proper access codes. The majority of partner agencies have at least a portion of their officers' radios programmed to allow them to communicate on MPD's encrypted channels. While we identified some additional officers from other agencies who should have access to MPD's channels, one major issue with radio transmissions that day actually stemmed from too many individuals having access to the channel.

With the prevalence of applications that allow members of the public, press, and potentially even suspects to monitor radio transmissions, the use of the encrypted channels ensured that sensitive information, such as police movements and tactics in the building, was not widely disseminated. The safety and security benefits of encrypted channels are clear. This was highlighted by the media's active monitoring of other agencies' unencrypted emergency channels during the shooting and their subsequent premature and inaccurate reporting.

SUMMARY: At the height of the police response that day, over 1,000 radios were tuned to the channel used by responding officers. We realize that a large number of those individuals were merely listening to the transmissions; however, continual radio transmissions by personnel stationed outside of the building created substantial congestion. On several occasions, personnel who had entered the building and the forward commander coordinating the contact teams were unable to transmit vital information to one another due to the heavy radio traffic.



RECOMMENDATIONS for OBSERVATION 22:

[22.1] *When responding to a major incident, officers may find that radio communications and cell phone service are not available. First responders should be prepared for the possibility of having to relay information through non-traditional modes of communication, such as utilizing runners or hand signals.*

[22.2] *MPD is exploring the establishment of a secure multi-jurisdictional tactical channel and separate support channel and developing the appropriate policies and ensure officers know how and when to utilize those channels. These policies must be consistent with Recommendation 8.5, which outlines the updates to the policies related to switching channels during large, tactical response operations, such as an active shooter. Again, the initial tactical operations should remain on the original radio channel. The communications for all other activities and functions should be moved to another channel. Due to the nature of the incident and sensory overload, officers involved in the search for an active shooter will often not hear requests to switch channels. That switch could potentially be life-threatening. Additionally, during recent training, MPD has emphasized officers' radio discipline in order to reduce unnecessary transmissions and ensure the channel is available for the most critical communications.*

[22.3] *Agencies should consider investing in encrypted radio channels. There are clear safety benefits of utilizing encrypted channels during a tactical response to an ongoing threat. MPD is spearheading an initiative that is evaluating shared encrypted tactical channels that would be available to many of the responding agencies.*

OBSERVATION 23: Responding law enforcement did not get timely access to the CCTV cameras in and around Building 197, and the initial limited access to some video contributed to difficulties during the subsequent investigation.

Early on during the emergency response, Unified Command requested access to the CCTV cameras both in and around Building 197. Security video serves as an invaluable resource to first responders. Security camera footage would allow responders to review and confirm various details and events as they unfolded and the investigation progressed. The footage may have also allowed police to quickly identify the shooter, ascertain his movements, and help in determining whether others may have been involved.

Officials later learned that the locations to monitor and access video from the external and internal cameras were separate and distinct. Additionally, there were different entities responsible for the cameras depending on the camera location, and the units reportedly did not coordinate with one another.



T [11.3] *As mentioned in Recommendation 7.2, provide position-specific training for Incident Command System (ICS) and Incident Management Team (IMT). While all personnel should be familiar with ICS and IMT roles and principles, most mid- to upper-level police officials will likely serve in a specific role during a large response and a full understanding of that particular role and its responsibilities is imperative.*

P, E/S [12.1] *The IAP and planning process is important and should be completed properly, but the focus on completing all portions of the IAP during an initial tactical response may be unnecessarily burdensome or even counter-productive. A tactical checklist that includes all of the immediate goals and objectives may be a more appropriate format for an immediate tactical response in active shooter scenarios.*

P [13.1] *To avoid confusion and congestion, it may be prudent to designate a primary command bus and operations center for Unified Command. This will ensure there is adequate representation from all agencies for the duration of the incident. If other agencies wish to transport their command bus to the scene of an incident or activate their operations center, they should ensure that neither impacts the functions of the primary designated bus and center.*

V. SCENE MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY

P, T [14.1] *Ensure comprehensive actions are taken to establish site security.*

P, T [14.2] *Have personnel prepared and standing by to respond rapidly to a secondary or additional incident.*

P, T [14.3] *Ensure all personnel understand the importance of proper site security. All personnel should be wearing the appropriate identification and it should be conspicuously displayed.*

P, T [15.1] *If not already in existence, agencies should establish clear policies regarding self-dispatching. MPD has reiterated its policy regarding members not self-dispatching. Officers should instead follow established protocols (Example: report to the appropriate patrol district or nearest police facility) and if required to report to the scene of the incident, do so at a designated location or staging area. Training should test the officers' understanding of self-dispatching policies.*

P, T [15.2] *Training and exercises should also test the supervisors' and managers' ability to manage an incident in which there are many self-dispatching officers.*

E/S [16.1] *Explore technology to track officers when entering a hot zone in order to account for those who entered the area, especially in the event of a secondary incident.*



complexes/campuses) may want to explore the possibility of utilizing more conspicuous visual markers for building and streets within their installation.

III. TACTICAL OPERATIONS: SEARCH FOR THE GUNMAN

- T** [6.1] *Neighboring law enforcement agencies, both Federal and local, should conduct collaborative, inter-agency training exercises. By training together, officers from different agencies are able to develop trust and mutual understanding prior to responding together to an incident that may require a multi-agency response. The tactical teams for the various regional agencies train together on a regular basis. MPD's Emergency Response Team (ERT) and the other area agencies' tactical operators are extremely familiar with one another's teams, tactics, and response plans. This familiarity should exist on additional levels throughout the agency – including patrol officers, field agents, and deputies – since these will often be the first personnel to arrive on the scene of an active shooter. Active shooter training should include different types of locations, including military bases. This point is also included in Recommendation [8.2]. It is also important to note that even if a closed campus or gated facility has its own plans and protocols to respond to and manage a crisis, it is vital that the facility's personnel plan for the unexpected and include larger-scale response.*
- T** [6.2] *The personnel from different agencies should receive standardized training, which results in a consistent understanding of tactics, communication, and approach. Collaborative training is also an opportunity to highlight the importance of a coordinated response by all involved. Ultimately, all personnel who arrive on scene should report to and be deployed by the incident commander.*
- T** [7.1] *Equipping personnel with strong leadership skills and the ability to make difficult decisions in the midst of a crisis requires a long-term effort. The Commander on scene was a veteran police official with over 35 years of service. Strong leadership skills are honed through exposure to a myriad of experiences, comprehensive training, and police leadership opportunities. One consistent theme in the after action reports published by other agencies following similar mass shooting incidents is the recognized need for strong, composed, and decisive leadership during the initial response. A well-coordinated and effective response often hinges on the leadership of the police official managing the on-scene efforts. The leadership of the initial tactical response at the Navy Yard serves as another example of that important element.*
- T** [7.2] *Provide position-specific training for Incident Command System (ICS) and Incident Management Team (IMT). While all police personnel should be familiar with ICS and IMT roles and principles, most mid- to upper-level police officials will likely serve in a specific management role during an incident response; especially in larger agencies. For these larger agencies, having all sworn officers, regardless of rank, train tactically may not provide the most benefit since most command officials and managers will not be*



required to respond in a tactical role. They will, however, be needed to manage personnel and the overall response to an incident. There are many good mid- to upper-level police officials who should be trained to take leadership of a portion of the operational responsibilities, rather than merely waiting for an assignment.

T **[8.1]** *Review active shooter formations and train officers to adapt their tactics to fit the environment. For instance, the current standard of training instructs active shooter teams to move in a diamond formation. While this formation may work well for scenarios involving large hallways, in schools for example, it may not be effective in narrow hallways and walkways of offices and cubicles. In narrower environments, the diamond formation may allow a hidden gunman to more easily target officers.*

T **[8.2]** *Active shooter training should include different types of locations, buildings, and structures in the scenarios, including modern buildings with various levels of security, access card entry, motion sensors, cypher locks, alarms, and narrow hallways and complex layouts. These security features are becoming more common in both private and public sector buildings. As stated earlier in Observation 6, law enforcement has conducted extensive active shooter training exercises and scenario-based drills in many types of locations (such as schools, hotels, hospitals, universities, transportation hubs, government buildings, and more); however, military bases were often excluded from the training even after the 2009 shooting at Fort Hood. Police departments may hold the mistaken belief that the personnel working within gated military installations in the United States, such as the Navy Yard, are heavily armed and capable of defending against threats. The truth, however, is that the majority of the individuals working on military bases are not armed. Out of the many thousands of people at the Navy Yard, an extremely small number either possessed or had access to a firearm. In terms of an armed presence, the Navy Yard was really no different than other civilian government agencies or private facilities that employ armed security at entrances.*

P, E/S **[8.3]** *Police departments should conduct pre-incident evaluations of buildings and facilities located within their area of responsibility. The evaluations should be stored in an accessible, central location (e.g. operations center).*

E/S **[8.4]** *MPD is in the process of obtaining and distributing earpieces to all of its members. The extensive noise and sensory overload may result in officers not being able to hear all radio communications. The fire alarm in Building 197 complicated communications, especially for officers searching for the shooter. Earpieces will allow officers to better hear communications in loud environments and also keep radio communications from giving away the officers' position to a shooter.*

P, T **[8.5]** *Review and update the policies regarding when officers should switch to an alternate radio channel during a large scale, critical incident. The current policy governing when officers should switch channels is based on the more common scenarios of pursuits or barricades, but it does not take into account the unique dangers of a*



critical incident like an active shooter. At the Navy Yard, the initial responding officers, the ones who entered the building to search for the shooter, were on the First District (or "1D") radio channel, but they were asked to switch to an alternate channel during the search. In critical incidents, such as an active shooter, the responding officers should remain on the original channel. Due to the nature of the ongoing threat and sensory overload, officers involved in the search for an active shooter will often not hear requests to switch channels. That switch could potentially be life-threatening. The tactical response operations should remain on the original channel, and all other support activities and communications can be moved to an alternate channel. Additionally, all of the officers inside the "hot zone" should be communicating on the same designated tactical channel. There are obvious safety risks if, for example, some of the officers are operating on one channel and other officers, such as ERT, are operating on their own ERT tactical channel.

E/S **[8.6]** *MPD is procuring shorter barrel rifles and additional ballistic shields. Many years ago, police departments across the country, MPD included, began to acquire semi-automatic rifles, such as the AR-15, in the event of an active shooter or other incident in which responding police officers may find themselves out-gunned by suspects (see the 1997 Bark of America Shoot-out in North Hollywood, California). Many of the MPD officers who responded to the Navy Yard were armed with a rifle. The narrow hallways and cubicle environment of Building 197, which are common in many office buildings, posed some challenges for responding officers to maneuver throughout the building with the long rifles. They were, however, able to proceed through the building and continue their search for the gunman. In an effort to provide officers with rifles that better accommodate movement through narrow or confined environments, MPD is procuring shorter-barrel rifles. Training will also include tactics in close-quarter maneuvers and approaches. Additionally, ballistic shields provide officers with additional protection, which may increase the officers' speed of movement toward an ongoing threat (as previously mentioned in the summary of Observation 6).*

P, E/S **[8.7]** *MPD is exploring the procurement and deployment of an equipment truck that is manned and ready for rapid deployment to any location in the city in the event of a critical incident. The truck would hold various tools and equipment – such as additional breaching equipment, rifles, shotguns, Level III vests and helmets, compact shields, lights, batteries, etc. MPD has long had this equipment deployed to various officers throughout the department; however, the deployment of an equipment truck, standing by 24-7, is a practical approach that allows the equipment to be ready and available for responding officers. As stated earlier, many patrol officers are not in vehicles, but rather patrol on foot, bike, motorcycle, or other mode that does not allow for carrying large pieces or large amounts of this type of equipment.*

P, T **[9.1]** *There are two critical pieces to ensuring that good emergency plans are more than just another book on a shelf. Even the best crafted and most comprehensive plans rely on the awareness and understanding of the workers and the first responders. Facilities*

