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The 5 Most Historic Law Enforcement Shootouts in Modern History

By Eddie Molina

If you're lucky, you can go an entire career without ever having to pull the trigger to defend yourself or stop a perpetrator from committing a serious crime, like murder.

But that's if you are lucky.

Then there are those individuals that do end up pulling the trigger- which can easily be life-changing, altering events. Even in situations that leave an officer with absolutely no other choice but to fire a shot at someone will live with that officer forever. That is a lot to think about and a lot to digest.

Then there's the other extreme- getting involved in a massive gunfight that involves multiple parties (police, suspects and innocent bystanders), a variety of deadly weapons and massive collateral damage. These gunfights often leave people dead and leave a horrific scene only found in either battlefields or Hollywood.

In this article, we look at some of the most historic police shootouts that are now considered 'game-changers' in the eyes of the law enforcement community. These shootouts often lead to changes in policing, tactics and training.

Below are 5 of the most extreme police shootouts in recent history, in no particular order.

The North Hollywood Shootout- February 28, 1997

Heavily armed with assault rifles and covered in homemade body armor, gunmen Larry Philips and Emil Matasareanu attempted to rob a North Hollywood bank only to end up in a gun battle with the LAPD. The gunmen and police shot over 1700 rounds and the battle left 11 officers and 7 civilians wounded, and the gunmen dead. The chilling radio transmission of the battle can be found online at <http://bit.ly/NHollywood>

The Norco Bank Shootout- May 9, 1980

Five heavily armed bank robbers met with deputies of the Riverside and San Bernardino County Sheriff's Office after robbing a local bank in Norco, California. The gun fight left one deputy killed, 9 officers injured, 30 police cruisers and 1 helicopter damaged and led to a 25



mile car chase. Two of the perpetrators were killed while the other three were later arrested and sent to life in prison.

The NJ Turnpike Shootout- May 2, 1973

This is included simply because it's a New Jersey Turnpike incident. Assata Shakur, a member of the former Black Panther Party, was stopped on the NJ turnpike for a broken taillight by Trooper James Harper. Wanted for several crimes, Shakur and her passengers got into a gunfight during the stop and one Trooper and several BPP members were killed. Shakur was eventually charged and sentenced only to later escape and end up in Cuba as political refugee. She is still on the FBI's most wanted list.

The Marin County Courthouse Shootout- August 7, 1970

17 year- old Johnathan Jackson walked into Marin County courthouse in California in an attempt to negotiate the release of his brother by taking Judge Haley, the DA and 3 jurors hostage. A shootout ensued between the suspects and Marin County Sheriff's Deputies that left 4 people dead, including Jackson and Judge Haley.

The MOVE Shootout- May 13, 1985

Officers from the Philadelphia Police Department stormed the headquarters of the known radical group MOVE. However, members of the MOVE group fired weapons and killed an officer. The confrontation led to a 90 minute exchange between the groups. A four pound bomb was dropped on the house killing several MOVE members and the fire that spread eventually burned down dozens of nearby homes.

There are other notable shootouts in American history, but these are among the most devastating. They each led to major media coverage and national attention.

The officers that lost their lives on these frightful days will stay in our hearts forever. We can individually hope that none of us will ever be put in a mass shootout situation but as history has proven, it will happen again. It's only a matter of when, where and who will be responding. Let that be another reason why you should stay vigilant and take training to heart. Once you are put into a situation like that, it is too late to say, "I wish I had trained more."

So stay alert, continue to improve yourself on the job each day and assist others that need to improve. Active shooter incidents seem to be on the rise these days and how you will respond will be up to you. Stay safe!

About the writer: Eddie Molina specializes in leadership and management. He writes articles for the law enforcement, first responder and military community. He also supports the End of Watch with Bootsy and Sal podcast, links available at www.eddiemolina.com