



LEO | NEAR MISS

LESSONS LEARNED BECOME LESSONS APPLIED

Armed Suspect Flanks Responding Officers at Convenience Store

Event Summary

Officers responded to a report of a robbery shooting in a residential area next to a convenience store. A citizen caller advised that two suspects had fled into the store several minutes before officers arrived. The citizen caller reported that he was also inside the store and provided his own physical description to the call taker.

Two patrol officers arrived to check the store, but it was believed that the suspects had likely already fled the scene due to the time elapsed. The two officers entered through the store's front door and immediately recognized the caller based on his clothing description. The officers asked him if the suspects were still in the store. The citizen said no and then told the officers that he did not know what they were talking about because he did not call 911. As officers walked further into the store, they observed several patrons but did not order anyone to the ground or detain anyone.

Unbeknown to the two officers, the two suspects approached the officers from their flank and walked behind the officers while exiting through the front door. Once the two suspects had walked out of the store, the citizen caller felt safe enough to tell the officers that the two individuals who had just walked out of the store were, in fact, the suspects. The officers ran out of the store and confronted the suspects. Both suspects complied with orders to lie down prone on the ground. A loaded semi-automatic handgun was recovered from the waistband of one of the suspects.

One of the two officers who entered the store told me that he had allowed the suspect who was armed to brush past his back as the suspect was leaving the store. The officer was shocked that he had allowed an armed person to get that close to him and eventually behind him. The officer stated his guard was down because of the statements from the citizen caller, who had indicated that there were no suspects in the store.

Lessons Learned

- Officers must take control on a scene where there are reports of armed suspects. In this near miss incident, officers chose not to engage all the customers in the store because they feared they would receive a citizen complaint. As a result, officers put themselves in a deadly situation and for only luck, they were not killed.



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- Per Terry v. Ohio, officers are justified in temporarily detaining citizens when they have reasonable suspicion that criminal activity is occurring or has occurred, and officers can conduct a pat-down search of a suspect's outer clothing when they have reasonable suspicion that the person is armed and dangerous. When officers meet these standards, they need to place officer safety over concern of a citizen complaint. Officers who take these actions but remain professional and take the time to explain the reasons for their actions to citizens after the situation has been resolved can avoid complaints, and most importantly, remain tactically sound and survive an encounter with an armed subject.
- Offices should also recognize that citizens may not be forthcoming with information even after they have called 911 to report a crime. Officers should investigate further and never make assumptions, which can endanger their safety.

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