

# Highlighting The Deadly Mix Research



## VALOR Voices Podcast Transcript

Speaker 1: You are listening to VALOR Voices, a production of the VALOR Officer Safety and Wellness Program. The VALOR Program is funded through grants from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, BJA, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The points of view and opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the podcast authors and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Here's your host.

Floyd W.: Hello, I'm Floyd Wiley. I'm a program lead with the VALOR Officer Safety and Wellness Program and the host of this edition of the VALOR Voices podcast. I want to thank you for joining us for today's podcast, which will focus on research findings related to the Deadly Mix. I'm joined today by John Bostain, who is the co-owner of Command Presence Training and a VALOR instructor. John, thank you for being with us today. How are you, sir?

John B.: I am great, Floyd, and thank you so much for allowing me to participate today. This is something that's been part of my training for many years, so I'm excited for the opportunity, and thank you for the invitation. I really appreciate it.

Floyd W.: Absolutely, John. Hey, listen, you and I have been around for a couple of minutes, I'll say, and I know we've both come across the actual developers of the Deadly Mix, and it's been quite the eye-opening body of research, and I think it's been, what? We're almost going on 40 years of research.

John B.: Yeah. If you think about when Dr. Tony and his team was actually conducting the original research, our first study came out, and I think it was '92. So, the actual research was being collected and data being collected in the mid to late '80s. So, the cool part is that I think, Floyd, and you and I have talked about this so much, is the nature of the research. I think people got to be really careful to say, "Oh, well, that's old research." What happened during these studies, it's just year after year, study after study, it just revalidated the things that we believed. So, I think we've got to be real cautious if we have listeners that think to themselves, "Boy, that sounds like old stuff." I think you and I today, as we talk about it, we'll realize, that stuff is still just as applicable today, and it's still as lifesaving today as Dr. Tony Pinizzotto and the others that originally did the research.

Floyd W.: —Miller, Shannon Bohrer, all those guys.

John B.: Absolutely, yeah

Floyd W.: And the cool thing is you and I got an opportunity to work with them, so they developed it, and then it was almost like being with rock stars to me because we ran into the folks who really developed this material, and like you said, it's very lifesaving, and on top of that, extremely applicable to every single day. Now, here's the crazy thing about it. We travel across the country, and a lot of people that have been around haven't heard about it and those that have, have not really read all three pieces, all three bodies of research which are so important. They're not stand-alone. Is that correct?

John B.: Yeah. What a great point, because I do a lot of instructor-level training, especially in the topic of use of force and officer safety. And when I'm talking to people, I have to catch myself sometimes because I almost think it's, "Well, of course everybody's read these studies." And when you bring them up, you realize that no, not everybody has.

So, I think what we've done a great job in VALOR is just extracting those really key fundamental, foundational points that I think that the original researchers want us to take away. So, that's what I share most.

Floyd W.: Let's talk about why all three of those studies are important. What are your thoughts on that?

John B.: Yeah, so I think what they were trying to do, it's really important here, just take a minute and put this in context. The original research came out, and of course, it was called Killed In the Line of Duty. And what they were looking at is they wanted to see, "Hey, were there common characteristics?" Number one, of officers who were killed in the line of duty, but they also wanted to see if the subjects that were committing those crimes had any type of characteristics. And they took this unbelievable approach back for the late '80s, early '90s of actually sitting down and talking to the subjects who had murdered police officers, and what a powerful kind of novel approach to that issue back then.

And then I think after the first study, they quickly realized there's something missing here. Yes, the person who committed this crime, their perspective is really important, but we're missing the officer's perspective. So, they quickly, honestly just adjusted in the next phase of research. And I think that was a lot of foresight on their part to do that. So then, we have the second study, the violent encounter study, where we really get down into this concept of what they call the Deadly Mix—the officer, the subject, and the circumstances that brought them together—and just how much information is in there. So, you've got to give them so much credit for having the forethought of making that adjustment between the first study and the second study.

Floyd W.: And what I want to do is I want to talk a little bit about those three components, and then let's break it down by each study, and we'll just talk about what those commonalities are, because a lot of those things still exist. And the way Shannon and Ed Davis used to put it was almost like doing an accident reconstruction, if you will, on how officers were being killed and assaulted during that period of time. But you know what though, John, when we talk about those three components, when we talk about the way that they converge—and we are talking about what they call the officer, right, the offender, and the circumstance that brought them together.

So, that takes place on every single incident. So, we call it the officer, the subject, and the circumstance for the purposes of how we push out of our training because a lot of times, these are people who we come in contact, we don't know them to be offenders at that particular time. Right?

John B.: Right.

Floyd W.: So, one of the things here is when we look at that, we look at the officer's actions, we look at their orders and their commands. If they're to be followed, they're really going to be dependent upon that subject that's with them. So, that convergence of those three components is absolutely huge. And I want you to touch on, when we talk about the officer's perceptions, their actions and assumptions, those are completely different from the subject's perceptions, actions, and assumptions, correct?

John B.: Oh, absolutely. And I think the key point that you're hitting on, Floyd, that's really important is that a change in one of those things necessarily affects the other, right? So, a change in what the subject is doing necessarily affects the circumstances and necessarily affects the officer's perception of what's occurring. One of the things that came out of the study is that there's some characteristics amongst officers that are not necessarily predictive that they're going to find themselves in trouble. But I will tell you this, in all three studies, the same characteristics popped up on officers who were either violently assaulted or murdered in the line of duty. If we're doing 30 years of research and the same things pop up over and over and over again, then we should probably be paying attention to those things, right?

Floyd W.: Right. Because if you look at that, John, by altering any one of those components, it could prevent that Deadly Mix. So, we could be saying—like, say for instance, the officers display professionalism, whether or not they're alert, whether or not their perceived ability is perceived by the subject may actually change the circumstance because the subject believes they're able to gain control, and then therefore we may avoid an assault or a felonious killing, right?

John B.: Yeah, absolutely. And that's really, I think, what the heart of what they were doing there is that officers may have a perception of what's going on based on

the information that they had when they arrived—pre-assault indicator, we gather information, but it is really important for us to remember that the subjects involved in these incidents, they have their own perceptions. And you know what, they may be right, they may be wrong, but their perceptions are driving their behaviors as well.

I'm reminded of a case that we talk about in our training where there's a traffic stop, the operator of the vehicle knew he was a three strikes offender. He knew that, but the officer that was involved, he was just doing a traffic stop. In fact, he's just on his way to lunch. And so, his perception of what's occurring was totally different. And the subject, the driver of the vehicle later tells the FBI, he said, "Yeah, I knew I was a three strikes offender, and I had decided if the officer went to write me a ticket, I was going to have to kill him." And so, this officer, no discredit to the officer at all, but his perception is, "Hey, I'm just on a traffic stop. I'm on my way to lunch." We cannot oversimplify how important the diversity of perception is oftentimes between what we think is going on and what the subject thinks is going on.

Floyd W.: Exactly. So, we were going to talk about the comparison of the different studies. So, let's talk about the descriptors of the victim officers in that first study. And here are just a few of the things, is that the officers were friendly and well-liked. They said that they were hardworking, and we would think, you want a friendly and well-liked officer on your organization for the community. So, there's nothing wrong with that. They were hardworking, although there were some that weren't. But here's where it goes, John, where they started to talk about—they felt like they can read others, and they drop their guard as a result. Now you know when we go to classes and we instruct, we speak to folks and say, "How many people think they can read others?" And we see a whole room of folks put their hands up, and—

John B.: Yeah, absolutely.

Floyd W.: Yeah. Now, we can't read others. We may be able to read some behavioral cues, but we can't read what's on people's minds, right?

John B.: One of the biggest misnomers in law enforcement actually is this belief that we can read other people. And it's not a knock on officers' intelligence or professionalism or their ability. There's no way for me to know what's going on in the mind of the person I'm interacting with. What we really see in the studies is that we have this universal false belief that we can read people, we can read the situation and know exactly what people are thinking. That's a dangerous premise. I think it's something we have to be really on alert for.

Floyd W.: And what you're saying really goes to the illusion of ability and illusion of capability that we have. We put the badge and the gun on, and we have these illusions, and we have to erase some of these mythological thought processes that we can read others. The other thing that came up there was that officers

use less force. And when we talk about less force, they didn't know when to appropriately use the correct amount of force or disengage. Listen to this one, John—do not wait for backup. That's a constant. We still have that occurring.

John B.: I think this is a big deal. They tend to violate procedures. And when we say that the study says, it doesn't mean that I violated policy number 138 bravo of the general orders. It's not talking about that. It's talking about, we tend to violate good officer safety principles. And I think what happens—we can still remember, I want to do the best that I can in my community. And for me, that was getting drugs off the street. But boy, my desire to get drugs off the street often caused me to get in a hurry, get in a rush. That might mean that my pat down is not as thorough as it should be.

Maybe I'm not handcuffing as well as I should be, or we're in a foot pursuit, and we don't pie those corners or there's so many things that come with violating procedures. And so, what I call it, instead of just saying violating procedures, we've got to be honest with ourselves. Sometimes, we cut corners in this job.

Floyd W.: Exactly.

John B.: Anybody listening right now, I'm just going to put that on you. I'm going to ask you, be honest with yourself. Are there areas of your daily work, regardless of your position—whether you're patrol, detective, canine—are there areas of your work that you might be cutting corners? And if so, let's get back to the fundamental things that we know keep us safe. I think that's a huge, huge element out of the studies.

Floyd W.: John, that's so key because I do the same thing. I'll say to them, "We're so intent on cutting corners that it turns into a cycle of cutting corners," right? Because it's just something we consistently do, and we create that cycle. One of the biggest outcomes of the first study—really, I would say summary after you put everything together and aggregate all the different things—is that the officer did not take control of the subject.

A lot of times, they were a participant in the actual event that when we say control, it doesn't necessarily mean arrest procedures. It may be, as we look at it, maintain their tactical advantage, maybe controlling your emotions or find some other alternatives for a peaceful resolution.

And you know what, in the very first study, as well the second, and in the third is officers not wearing their vest. That was another piece. And the first one was facing a drawn gun and that whole action-reaction concept.

Let's move on to the second one, which was In the Line of Fire. So now, John, we have officers that have survived, and we also had folks that were arrested,

and they were prosecuted, and once they got through the process and all their appeals were exhausted, we are now able to gather some information to try and link these two things up together. Let's talk a little bit about that.

John B.: Yeah, so I think what the huge thing that we got out of that study is about the issue of perception. And almost all of the cases, when we talked to the officer, and the research team asked about what they were perceiving, what were they thinking, what did they think was going to happen? And then, they talked to the subject who committed the violent assault on them, they could not have been more different. As you read through that study, case after case after case, it was the same thing. So, all that does is reinforce what the first study said is we're not good at reading other people. And quite honestly, I think it's a huge red flag for us to be more intentional about the way we look at situations.

Floyd W.: Here's the thing that's really interesting and really leads onto the FBI study is 61 percent of the officers were unaware of the attack, and then 62 percent of those offenders said that the officer was surprised—he was either unprepared or indecisive. I mean, these things all have a similarity. The officer didn't wait for backup, thought they could read folks, and then again, didn't follow rules. You spoke about handcuffing procedures, those things occurred as well in the second study. And again, we don't place blame, John. We never place blame on the officers themselves—

John B. No.

Floyd W.: —as to why they got killed or injured. We really just look at how the subjects reacted to what the officer did. So, let's move on to the Violent Encounters. That one came out in, well, the study started in 1997, and then it came out, roughly, I think it was it 2006. So, we made some changes. We were still making changes in law enforcement in terms of our training. So, let's talk a little bit about how that played out.

John B.: I've always gotten a lot out of every one of the studies, but the 2006 Violent Encounters—if you're not going to go back and read everything, you got to read the 2006. And the reason is because first of all, you know what it did? It reaffirmed the first two. So again, we call that a clue. Hey, these things keep showing up. But I think more so than the first two studies, what they really did a phenomenal job of is actually telling us exactly how to try and mitigate this. There's a lot of stuff on perception. There's a lot of stuff on training. There's a whole chapter on training. Then they did something really great. There's an entire chapter on some of the human performance factors that affect why we might perceive things a certain way.

So yes, here we go again. They found that officers were hardworking and friendly, which again, you mentioned that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it may go to and lend itself to this understanding of affecting their perception.

They don't wait for backup, that showed up again. Of course, they're not wearing their body armor. So, we saw the same things. But again, I think the biggest thing from the '06 report that I take away is some of the human performance factors affecting perception. They talk about the visual narrowing, and then they really give us some rock solid, "Hey, here's how you train to mitigate some of these things." I think that's the best part about the '06 report.

Floyd W.: This is the power of the studies. This is really a part of your craft, and you really should know it. When you also look at that study, it goes back to discussing facing a drawn gun. We're still having those issues.

The use of soft body armor—how many times we travel across the country and, number one, we see a lot of folks not wearing their soft body armor because they work in detectives or, "I can get it from my seat in my trunk in time," or, "It's too hot." And you know what I always say, "A bullet's a whole lot hotter." And so, we still see that, or organizations that have policies, but they don't implement those policies. And you may have your detectives, you may have your chief of police walking around without a vest and then something comes their way.

And then, obviously, searches upon transport. That's still a situation that we're kind of dealing with. We're talking about things that are happening every single day.

John B.: You know, read the research, and do a quick self-assessment. "Hey, what are these things that I'm doing well?" And some of you that are wearing your body armor all the time, you don't care if you're in uniform, if you're a detective, so check that block and say, "Yes, I'm doing well on that." Some of you do get training on foot pursuits, so check that block. Some of you are just really methodical about the way you conduct searches. So, great. So do a great self-assessment. But what I will ask anybody listening here is if you look at these three studies, if you're going to do a self-assessment, be self-aware and be honest with yourself. "Hey, what are things I'm doing really well? What are some things that I could improve on?"

And I used to say this all the time. I said, "Start, stop, continue, and change." And it's a great way for us to say, "Hey, what am I going to start doing that I haven't been doing? What am I going to stop doing that I know I shouldn't do? What am I going to continue to do that I do well?" And then, the hardest one, the hardest question, "What am I going to change about the way I approach this job that will keep me safer, keep the public safer, keep my partner safer?" So, I've always loved that start, stop, continue, and change as a great self-assessment tool.

Floyd W.: I really like that. And I think that's very applicable to what we're doing. The last thing they talk about in the final conglomeration is recognizing potential

threats. And they spoke about folks from very young age all the way up to, you would never expect an 86-year-old man or a 60-year-old female or a 73-year-old man on oxygen in a wheelchair, to make sure that we're recognizing the potential threats through a baseline in anomalies, which we always talk about in the VALOR training.

So, John, I want to give some quick takeaways on what the first study really talked about was making sure that you're in charge and you're wearing your vest. The second one was talking about having that survivor mentality. And that was a big piece to that second study, and never giving up and knowing your use of force policy, know when to act and when not to react or what type of reaction to have. And then this third study really talked about being prepared to react and recognize the threats.

John, so let's just talk a little bit about the 2018 study by the FBI on ambushes and unprovoked attacks. One of the things you and I spoke about—almost everything in the Deadly Mix, they were really pretty much either an ambush or an unprovoked attack. What's your thoughts on that?

John B.: Yeah, and I'm glad you said that because I looked at some of the data that came out of that, and here's what I want people to know about ambush. If you feel like the number of ambushes or the percentage of ambushes, or that they're becoming more frequent, let me tell you, they are, okay? This is not anecdotal, and I think that's really important. If you look at the data from, I think 1987 to 1996, all right, that period—when we look at all the officers that are murdered, about 10.8 percent of them were as a result of ambush. Now we forward to the next ten-year period, what we see in '97 to 2006, we see of all the officers that were feloniously killed, that number went to 17 percent. And then the period that we have the last data from 2007 to 2016—this is really important. Of all the murders of police, a full 20—it's 20.6, so almost 21 percent, are ambushes and unprovoked attacks. This is not to make people paranoid in any way, shape, or form, but it is to make us understand. We have to understand that this is an increasing threat because it's doubled since the original data in '87 to '96. When I talk about ambush, I always just highlight that, again, not as a scare tactic, but as a reality. Because what's really interesting, you look at these ten-year periods, the number of officers being killed actually has dropped significantly.

Floyd W.: But the ambush attacks have gone up.

John B.: Exactly. That's the point I really want to make. You hit it right on the head.

Floyd W.: And when we start to talk about that ambush study, they really break it down. They use the same concepts, everything we just talked about, same importance. So, let's give them some tips right now to enhance their ability to survive.



John B.: Yeah. So, the great part about that particular study is that man, they pull no punches, meaning the data is the data. I can't make it any more simple or clearer than this. If you want to increase the likelihood of surviving an ambush attack by quite a degree, you're going to do three things. The first one we learned is that getting off the X, changing your position, moving to cover increases survivability from 39 percent to 68 percent. I don't know anybody out there that's listening right now who wouldn't take a 30 percent increase in their ability to survive an ambush. But the quick caveat, getting off the X, moving to cover—you've got to practice that. You've got the training context. You have to do this on the range. You have to do this in reality-based training. You have to do this in force on force.

The second huge one, and what's really interesting is the numbers are exactly the same. If you want to survive an ambush, return fire, moving, getting to cover, and returning fire, that element—they looked at that element, and you can increase survivability from 39 percent up to 68 percent just by returning fire. So again, we're talking about dynamic training, force on force. These things all have to come together, and these things are all interrelated.

And then lastly, what's number three? Wear your vest. In fact, not having a vest gives you the lowest survivability rate from when we compare it to getting off the X, moving to cover, and returning of fire. If you're not wearing a vest, survivability rate drops all the way down to 30 percent. And that's probably, let's be honest, more attributed to tourniquets and life early medical intervention. If we were not living in the times we are, that number probably goes down where survivability goes up to 53 percent with our vest.

Floyd W.: John, the bottom line is we're going to continue to get that information out. And the statistics just don't lie.

John, this has been awesome. I can't wait 'til we link up again. I want to thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your knowledge as you do across the nation. For our listeners, thank you all for listening to this podcast today. I want to thank you and offer you an opportunity to visit our VALOR website, [valorforblue.org](http://valorforblue.org). For more information on Deadly Mix and other officer safety and wellness resources, check back often for future podcasts and Web events when we continue to talk about officer safety issues. And remember, you've got to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to assaults and deadly encounters. You must prepare now and consistently, like John said, consistently train for these dangerous encounters through studying your craft and matching it up with realistic, reoccurring, and relevant scenario-based training. Knowledge is power, but it must be accompanied by positive behavior change if you want success. So, until later, stay safe, stay healthy, stay well, and stay resilient. Thank you.

Speaker 1: The VALOR Program is dedicated to delivering training, developing resources, and conducting research to improve the safety and wellness of law

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