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FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

Killings of police officers seem inevitable. What might help?



For Police Issues by Julius (Jay) Wachtel. Let's begin with a slightly edited extract from [Police Chief Paul Neudigate's account](#) of the tragedy that befell his agency and the greater Virginia Beach community on Friday evening, February 21, 2025:



...Last night officers Girvin and Reese...observed a blue Hyundai Sonata with an expired plate. They attempted to stop this vehicle [but] the vehicle failed to yield. They followed the vehicle...It came to a stop at the dead end of Silven Court. Both officers approached the vehicle. The male driver was immediately argumentative [and] refused to exit...They made numerous requests for him to exit. At some point he complied [and] stepped out...Almost immediately there was a tussle...While that tussle was occurring this individual pulled a pistol from his pocket and immediately shot both officers...Those officers fell to the ground. While [they lay] on the ground defenseless he shot them each a second time....

Our lead graphic depicts the late Virginia Beach police officers Cameron Girvin (left photo) and Christopher Reese (right photo). They're the heroes. As for their assailant, 41-year old local resident John Lee McCoy III, he entered a nearby shed [and committed suicide](#).

Both officers were relative newcomers to the force. Officer Reese, a former Sheriff's deputy, was hired in 2022, and Officer Girvin joined the agency in 2020. Neither one knew McCoy. Neither had they been alerted that the man they stopped for a traffic

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infraction had a history of violence and gun misuse. Here's the criminal record we assembled from Virginia State and Federal Court websites:

Court	Offense Date	Filed Date	Charges	Disposition		
				Date	Action	Sent.
Chesapeake	5/6/02	11/6/02	Unlawful wounding	12/9/02	Pled guilty	12 mos. Prob.
VA Beach	8/20/07	12/17/07	Fel. destroy property	6/18/08	Acquitted	
VA Beach	11/26/07	12/17/07	Fel. fail to appear	6/18/08	Not prosecuted	
US District	2003-09	4/2/09	Conspire to Distribute & possess drugs	1/28/10	Pled guilty	6 yrs. prison
			Use, carry & possess gun	1/28/10	Pled guilty	5 yrs. prison
			Discharge gun	1/28/10	Dismissed	

Note that 2002 “unlawful wounding,” a felony offense that [Virginia law](#) defines as “shooting, stabbing, etc., with intent to maim, kill, etc.” That episode ended with a misdemeanor plea (case no. CR 02003662.) It was followed, five years later, by a property destruction charge, of which he was acquitted. Two years later came the Feds. On January 28, 2010 John Lee McCoy III, aka “J-Mac” and “T-Mac”, then a youthful 26, pled guilty in Norfolk, Virginia Federal Court to drug and gun violations. Here's an outtake from the judgment:

<u>Title and Section</u>	<u>Nature of Offense</u>	<u>Offense Class</u>
T.21, USC, Section 846	Conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute cocaine, heroin, cocaine base, and marijuana; Use communication facilities to cause, commit, and facilitate felony violations of the Controlled Substances Act; and Open, lease, rent, use, and maintain places for the purposes of manufacturing, distributing, and using controlled substances	Felony
T.18, USC, Sections 924(c)(1)(A) and 2	Using and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a drug trafficking crime	Felony

According to the record, since 2003 McCoy and his brother had participated in a long-term, wide-ranging drug trafficking enterprise that distributed large quantities of cocaine, marijuana and heroin. A “Statement of Facts” filed in support of his guilty plea

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to the Federal charges, *which McCoy endorsed as correct*, sets out a disturbing history of gun use (and misuse):

- In 2005 McCoy bought a .357 cal. revolver and paid for a shooting range membership. He then applied for a CCW permit.
- In 2006 McCoy “shot a man in the face and neck” as payback for a “burglary” (actually, a theft of drugs) from his brother’s residence. Best we can tell, this episode, [which drew coverage in the local media](#) and supposedly led to a warrant for “aggravated malicious wounding” was apparently never prosecuted.
- In March 2009 McCoy bought a 12-gauge shotgun and a .45 caliber pistol. He was packing that pistol when arrested one month later on Federal charges. A search of his residence turned up a 12 gauge shotgun, another .45 caliber pistol with an obliterated serial number, a .38 caliber revolver, and \$4,500 in cash.

McCoy’s run-in with the Feds landed him in prison. He drew eleven years – six for distributing drugs and five for being armed – to be followed by five years of supervised release. But McCoy got a couple of breaks. He was paroled in December 2017 after serving eight years. Two years later, in November 2019, his supervising agent certified that McCoy “has complied with the rules and regulations of supervised release and is no longer in need of supervision.” Three years before his term of supervision was set to end, the 44-year old ex-con was a completely “free” man.

His final encounter came about five years later.



A few hours after the murder of officers Girvin and Reese [a like tragedy befell a small Pennsylvania community](#). On Saturday morning, February 22, 2025 a gunman took

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hostages in a hospital ICU, then opened fire when West York Borough police officers arrived. Officer Andrew Duarte (pictured above) was killed, and two other officers and three hospital workers were wounded. Diogenes Archangel-Ortiz, the 49-year old gunman, was shot dead.

What brought him to the hospital? After learning that the woman he loved “was gone,” Archangel-Ortiz apparently [intended to confront the staff members](#) who had “failed” him. According to a former girlfriend, the bad news had landed in the lap of a chronically depressed man. And according to York County criminal records, one who was physically aggressive as well. Here’s the summary we compiled from the [York County Court portal](#):

Offense date	Charge	Action	Sentence	Date
3/17/07	Leave scene of accident	Pled guilty	3-12 mos. jail	4/24/08
3/26/08	Simple assault	Pled guilty	10-23 mos. jail	12/15/08
	Parole viol	Confined	421 days	12/26/12
	Parole viol	Confined	263 days	10/30/13
10/16/16	Physical harassment	Pled guilty	Unk.	Unk.
	Contempt of Court	Probation	6 mos.	10/28/16
	Contempt of Court	Confined	3-6 mos.	3/22/17

Archangel-Ortiz had been prosecuted for three crimes: leaving the scene of an accident, simple assault, and physical harassment. He pled guilty to each, then repeatedly failed to comply with his conditions of release. His most recent criminal charge, “physical harassment,” apparently stemmed from [an incident in which he struck a woman](#) – we assume, the former girlfriend – with a wine glass, and the contempt charges reflect his failure to obey a restraining order that was intended to keep him away.

McCoy and Archangel-Ortiz were coming from different “places.” McCoy, a convicted felon, was probably anxious about being caught with a gun, as that would likely lead to his re-imprisonment. On the other hand, Archangel-Ortiz was acting out his inner demons, and the officers got in the way.

Might these tragic outcomes have been avoided?

Despite decades of strategizing and rule-making (see, for example, “[A Not-So-Magnificent Obsession](#)”) there are few real preventives for situations such as those faced

by the officers who responded to the hospital. Tactical units have to be assembled, and given the immediate, lethal threat that Archangel-Ortiz posed, that highly vaunted “de-escalation” approach (we wrote about it [here](#)) may have been out of reach.

On the other hand, there seemed to be no pressing need to stop the car in Virginia Beach. Post-Floyd pressures to keep cops from needlessly tangling with citizens have led many agencies to prohibit traffic stops for pretextual reasons or for minor transgressions such as expired tags. Here, for example, is [LAPD’s policy](#), dated March 9, 2022:



Use of Traffic/Pedestrian Stops - General. Traffic or pedestrian stops made for the sole purpose of enforcing the Vehicle Code or other codes are intended to protect public safety. Therefore, officers should make stops for minor equipment violations or other infractions only when the officer believes that such a violation or infraction

significantly interferes with public safety.

Yet there *is* a trade-off. Not stopping McCoy would have allowed an ex-con who had once shot someone “in the face and neck” to keep packing (and misusing) a gun.

Back to square one. Is there a way to enhance officer safety during self-initiated encounters (i.e., Virginia Beach) *and* dispatched calls (i.e., West York)? Perhaps. [Artificial intelligence \(AI\)](#) has promised to revolutionize policing. While we think its potential is overblown – and that its risks *are* real – A.I. is being used to develop place-based crime solutions, generate investigative leads, [and even dispatch non-emergency calls](#) using “chatbots.” So let’s extend that vision. Might things have turned out differently had dispatchers been able to instantly scan consumer, motor vehicle and criminal databases and compare the results? Once alerted that McCoy and Archangel-Ortiz likely had serious criminal records, the officers would have probably called in additional units and handled the encounters in a more cautious, tactical fashion.



As it turns out, that capability could have prevented a like, tragic outcome *on the very next day*. After we finished writing the original piece we learned that on February 23, 2025 Hinds County, Mississippi Deputy Sergeant Martin Shields, Jr. (pictured above) was shot and killed while responding to a domestic disturbance. According to the [Officer Down Memorial Page](#), a 42-year old man with a “lengthy criminal history” (reportedly, *seven* felony and *eighteen* misdemeanor arrests) opened fire when the deputy arrived. Eric Brown also shot and wounded his wife and another woman when they tried to flee, [then committed suicide](#).

Full stop. In “[Our Never Ending American Tragedy](#)” we emphasized that lawmaking was *not* the ultimate solution. As firearms continue flooding the streets – we’re now beset with unserialized “ghost” guns – policing has become increasingly risky. Indeed, firearm mortality rates for most U.S. States [are reportedly similar](#) to those of countries “experiencing active conflict.” So forewarning officers about the criminal records of their antagonists seems an obvious step. Yes, the tip-offs could be incorrect. Yes, officers might over-react. But other than simply pulling cops back, it’s really all we have left.