

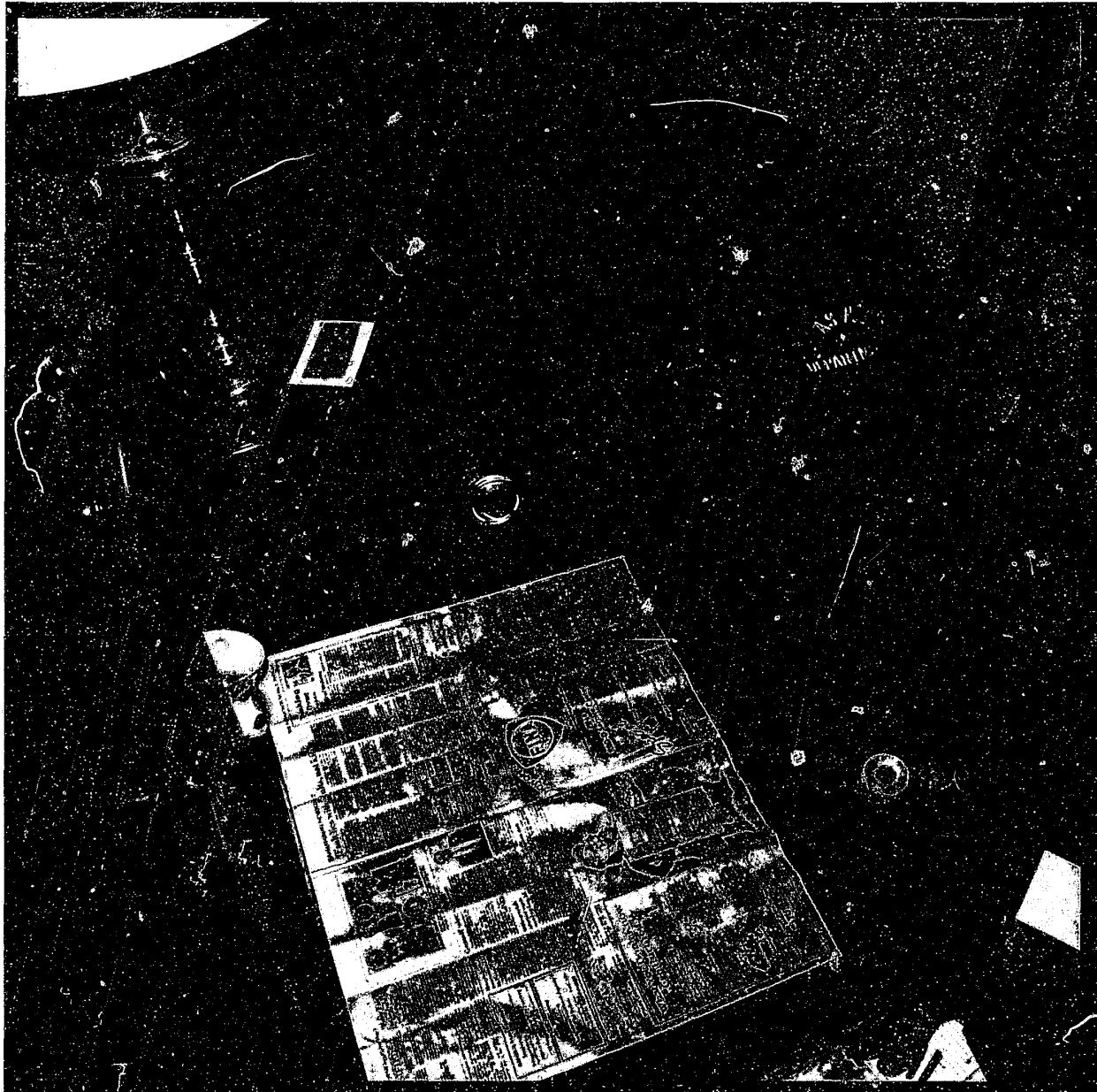
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FBI Law Enforcement

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Focus on Cooperation

Fugitive Apprehension Task Force

By Elizabeth A. McManus
and Jeffrey Locke



The memorable U.S. marshal portrayed in the hit movie, "The Fugitive," relentlessly remained hot on the trail of the fleeing criminal. Of course, apprehending fugitives in real life is not always as exciting or as glamorous as depicted in the movies, but it can consume a large portion of a law enforcement agency's resources.

Often, fugitives remain at large because agencies cannot devote enough personnel or resources to locate them. Agencies in the Tidewater region of Virginia found that by joining forces to address the problem, they could apprehend more fugitives without draining all of their resources.

The Problem

In the late 1980s, administrators of the Fifth Division of the Virginia State Police recognized a need for more concentrated efforts to capture fugitives. They conducted a study and found that too many suspects eluded justice as a result of the division's limited resources.

A fugitive unit, formed by the State police in 1988 and staffed by one supervisor and seven special agent investigators, soon found that close cooperation with local sheriffs, police chiefs, and Federal agencies proved essential to tracking fugitives. Additional study showed both the need for and the advantage of working more closely with area cities to maximize the efficiency of the fugitive tracking process in the region.

The Solution

To facilitate cooperation, the State police invited local law enforcement agencies to develop a task force designed to handle fugitive cases better. As a result, the Tidewater Fugitive Apprehension Task Force (TFATF) was formed. Officers from the Criminal Apprehension Unit of the Portsmouth Sheriff's Office, the Warrant Bureaus of the Virginia Beach and the Chesapeake Police Departments, as well as the Fugitive Squad of the Chesapeake Sheriff's Office, joined forces with the Virginia State Police Department's Fugitive Unit.

TFATF Mission

For the purposes of the task force, a fugitive is any wanted person whose whereabouts is unknown, regardless of whether that person is trying actively to evade detection. The mission of the task force is to reduce the number of wanted felons in the Tidewater region of Virginia.

This region covers approximately 1,100 square miles and stretches from the town of Emporia near the North Carolina border to the Maryland State line on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. In addition to extensive rural areas, it includes the cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, Suffolk, and Chesapeake, with a total population of approximately 850,000 citizens. When the task force was formed, there were roughly 10,000-12,000 outstanding warrants for the arrest of felonious fugitives.

Training

All task force officers had been working fugitive investigations within their respective agencies prior to being assigned to the TFATF. Three of the investigators received formal instruction in fugitive investigations at police training facilities, while the others

learned through on-the-job training. The collective experience embodied by task force members greatly enhances the TFATF's effectiveness.

Operation

Each participating department contributes an officer (except the State Police, which assigns two troopers), a car, and a pager. In return, the six task force members share all information, leads, and contacts. Officers are selected by their department heads to work on the task force full time; they may request reassignment at any time in accordance with normal departmental procedures.

Task force members work cases from all jurisdictions. The TFATF receives cases in two primary ways. First, if a warrant bureau from one of the police departments attempts to serve a warrant without success, it can turn over the case to the task force. Second, TFATF members can pull felony arrest warrants that had been on file with their own departments. The task force does not handle every fugitive case in the region. The Chesapeake Sheriff's Office, for example, continues to operate its own Fugitive Squad.

To tackle day-to-day assignments, the task force works in teams. Officer safety dictates the size of each team, depending on the character of the fugitive being sought and the charge involved.

Typically, officers first check leads using computer inquiries to locate new information and to confirm information acquired previously. Such computer inquiries include NCIC checks, conducting a 50-State driver's license search, running employment history and address checks through the D-Tech and FYI On-line systems, and occasionally using EPIC, the DEA's database of drug dealers and traffickers.

Officers also put in a great deal of "leg work" to gather leads. They walk the streets in the fugitives' old neighborhoods, talk with neighbors at known previous addresses, interview relatives and acquaintances, and check for forwarding information from former

employers, post offices, and utility companies. At this stage of the investigation, the collective ideas, contacts, and knowledge of the team members provide vital information for locating subjects. When investigators pinpoint a fugitive's location, the task force, often in conjunction with local authorities, makes the arrest and turns the subject over to the appropriate agency.

Case Study

On July 9, 1993, the TFATF launched an investigation to locate a fugitive from Florida who authorities believed was in the Tidewater area. The Alachoa

County Police Department sought the fugitive on probation violation charges stemming from a previous robbery conviction. Florida's governor asked the governor of Virginia to issue a special "governor's warrant" authorizing Virginia law enforcement officials to arrest the fugitive so he could be extradited to Florida to answer charges. Following an extensive but fruitless investigation by the Portsmouth, Virginia, Sheriff's Office, the case was turned over to the TFATF.

Over a 4-month period, investigators assiduously collected data and followed leads. Finally, a break in the case came when an anonymous citizen informed police that the fugitive was staying with a girlfriend in Portsmouth. With this tip, coupled with the information compiled by the task force, investigators secured a search warrant for the woman's apartment.

Hoping to catch the fugitive by surprise, the task force decided to enter the apartment in the early morning hours of November 23, 1993. Not certain whether the fugitive was armed, investigators requested additional deputies from the Portsmouth and Chesapeake Sheriff's Offices to assist in the raid. At 6:10 a.m., the officers knocked on the door and announced that they had a search warrant. Officers allowed the fugitive 5 minutes to give himself up, but when he didn't respond, they entered the apartment.

“
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”

They found him hiding in the attic following a brief search. Task force officers arrested the fugitive without incident and took him to the Portsmouth City Jail to await extradition to Florida.

Results

This case study exemplifies the many successes achieved by the TFATF. Through teamwork, information sharing, and a singular focus, the task force has located felons throughout the region. Working together, law enforcement agencies in the area have multiplied the resources dedicated to capturing fugitives without overburdening any one agency.

In its first year, the TFATF made more than 300 felony arrests stemming from nearly 600 felony charges that ranged from drug charges and sexual assaults to robbery and murder. In addition to apprehending fugitives locally, the task force has pursued fugitives across State lines, making arrests in at least 19 States, even as far west as California. The task

force also has assisted other law enforcement agencies, such as the FBI and the U.S. Marshals Service, locate wanted persons in the Tidewater area.

Conclusion

Acting alone, few law enforcement agencies can devote sufficient resources to track down fugitives. The success of the Tidewater Fugitive Apprehension Task Force shows that the combined resources of law enforcement agencies in adjoining jurisdictions can locate fugitives efficiently and effectively. Working together, the agencies of the Tidewater Fugitive Apprehension Task Force prove that communities do not have to continue to live with felons in their midst. ♦

Lieutenant McManus is the Public Information Officer for the Portsmouth, Virginia, Sheriff's Office. Deputy Locke, also with the Portsmouth Sheriff's Office, serves as an investigator on the TFATF.

Bulletin Alert



Shifty Suspect

During an interview with police, a suspect wanted in connection with an assault with intent to murder admitted to officers that they could find the handgun used in the offense in his pick-up truck. However, an exhaustive search of the vehicle by crime scene technicians failed to produce the weapon. Investigators reinterviewed the suspect, who informed them that the weapon was hidden beneath the vehicle's rubber transmission boot (top photo, see arrow). Technicians re-examined the gearshift housing and found that one side of the boot was not secure. When they raised the unattached side, the handgun became easily accessible (bottom photo, see arrow). ♦

Submitted by Supervisor Jeffrey Cover and W.E. Cook of the Anne Arundel County, Maryland, Police Department's Identification/Crime Scene Unit.
