

Critical Incident Review: Active Shooter at Robb Elementary School—Chapter 1. Incident Timeline Reconstruction

Rick Braziel

00:01

Hello, I'm Rick Braziel, and I'm one of the SMEs assigned to assist in the Critical Incident Review of the active shooter at Robb Elementary School. The SMEs, along with the COPS team—the technical team, and the advisors on the COPS team—would like to present chapter one, and it's the incident timeline.

A little bit about my background. I did 33 years, a little bit over that, with the Sacramento Police Department. Worked my way up through the ranks and retired as chief. And since my retirement in 2012, I've been part of critical incident reviews across the country, that includes the horrific events in Uvalde, Texas; the terrorism event in San Bernardino, California; as well as critical incidents of response to civil unrest and riots. With that, what we'd like to spend this time with you is talking about the timeline and how we do the incident overview in that timeline.

So those of you in the audience that have done very complicated investigations know how important it is to really, really be exact in a reconstruction of time. In an incident like this, it becomes even more critical, because we're not just looking at a single criminal act, we're looking at the entire response, both during the incident and after the incident. And what we thought we'd share a little bit of time with you is, how technical and how complicated timelines can be, particularly if agencies are not taking care of resyncing their body-worn camera videos, making sure that the cameras are synced to a standard time, that the in-car cameras are synced. And then when you add in cell phone video and all the stuff from the public and the security cameras, it can be overwhelming at times. So what I'd like to do is kind of walk through the process we use, and then we'll actually get into the timelines of this event.

So one of the most critical pieces for us is to identify a video—somewhere in that we go off a video—a video that we can establish as what we call real time or true time. And then once we establish that, we're able to look at additional videos, audios, and look for prompts. That could be a sound in the background, a car alarm, it could be a gunshot, it could be where you see someone walk through and open a door. Because in this review, we found many of the body-worn camera videos were not synced, their surveillance, it didn't have the correct time. The surveillance cameras within the school did not have the correct time. Helicopters did not have the correct time. It was really, we had very few instances where any official government video was synced to true time. So in this case, what we ended up using was the funeral home video, and we'll discuss that in a second. They were synced to internet time, they're actually the start of the video of what we were able to analyze.

And then fortunately for us, the FBI did a phenomenal job of taking inside the school—the video that was inside—and taking a very grainy, hard-to-see images, clean that up, and then superimpose—once we identified what true time was—superimpose true time in the video. That allowed us between what we knew from the funeral home, to be able to sync up all the body-worn camera video, and the videos from inside the school, we're able to then mesh that all together in a database. And when I say we,

Customs and Border Protection did just an absolutely amazing job for us, because they took just dozens of body-worn camera video, dozens of video, radio traffic, CAD incident entries, cell phone audio conversations, and it really—they took dozens of analysts with checks and secondary checks and created this very extensive spreadsheet to where you identified true time, how far off corrections needed to be made on each one of those different inputs, each cell phone, each video. And then were able to allow us to then pull all of that together to basically tell a story based on time.

And when we're talking about time, the report that we produced, most of it has it down to the second. But as you know, if you've done one of these before or you've done a major review—a homicide or even a fatal car crash—it's the fractions of a second that make the difference. So in this, we're able to freeze things down to the hundredth of a second in a lot of the videos. Some we couldn't because they didn't have that many frame counts. And I'll give you an example what I'm referring to. In some body-worn cameras, you have 60-plus frames per second. That means we can look at 60 different images within a second and identify it down to the hundredth of a second. And so that becomes very critical, particularly when you're looking at analyzing shots, analyzing sounds, and it allowed us to create this truer picture of what happened. The same thing occurs when you can slow down audio and actually listen for the background noises and actually recreate this.

So when you look at the timeline, we'll go through the generalities of the timeline, but when you look at the report and if you're fortunate to attend one of the presentations that the COPS Office does, we'll be able to show you in the videos, different sequences to give you just a very much a fuller and much more rich picture of what happened that day.

So let's start with the overview of the school and how we structured our timeline so it gives you kind of a reference. So this is an overhead image of Robb Elementary School. So let me start with the incidents of that day. Prior to our subject, our shooter—and let me pause there for a second.

This report is about the victims. And so we mentioned in the report the victims' names, we give bios on who they were. This is about them. Nineteen children and two teachers. This is not about our shooter. Our shooter's name is never referenced, it doesn't get print. Our shooter does not get to be glorified by having his name in a government document. And that is kind of the strategy and policy behind all the after-action reviews. We do that for a reason, so it doesn't encourage others to try to be famous by seeing their name in print in an official government document that is widely distributed. So here we'll call him *the subject* and at times I'll call him *the shooter*, but never by name.

So our shooter, our subject, earlier in the morning in Uvalde, Texas, shoots his grandmother. He then sends some text messages and communications through an associate that he's going to go shoot up an elementary school. He then leaves his residence in a truck from his grandmother's house, he will drive, and how I'll describe this, you'll see Hillcrest Memorial Funeral Home at the top of the screen, top left, and then you'll see South Grove Street. He comes from the top of the screen up near the COPS Office logo, down South Grove Street at a pretty significant rate of speed. We see this on the Hillcrest Memorial Funeral Home camera. I'll just refer to it, Hillcrest. He then tries to make a left turn onto Geraldine Street, and he doesn't. He ends up going into what you see is the crash site in yellow down

below. That's a culvert—because this is a two-dimensional image, you can't see it, but it's a significant drop-off to where from the cameras in the Hillcrest videos, there's surveillance cameras. You lose sight of basically the truck. It's a big drop-off down into a concrete culvert.

Folks in the Hillcrest Funeral Home are aware of the crash. They go out to the street to see what's happening. They actually cross the street or start to cross the street, when our shooter gets out of the truck and starts firing at them. They then scramble back towards the funeral home and go inside. They call 911. So we're starting to have 911 calls back at grandmother's house and 911 calls now coming in at the crash site. And then the crash site 911s turn into an active shooter or a shots fired call.

Our shooter will then get out of the truck, climb over a chain link fence, throw a backpack over the chain link fence prior to climbing over, and you see the subject's movements dotted in red. He will walk across the school, curve around a parking lot, and then you'll notice it says down at the bottom of, he'll say, "Suspect shooting at the school." He begins shooting at the school from outside the school before he enters. Our shooter will then—halfway up the side of the building, he drops a backpack. That backpack is found later on, and inside the backpack has 39 fully loaded magazines for an assault weapon.

He then will go through the doorway, the northwest entrance. Most of the video that you would see in our presentation on a video presentation is video images from the northwest entrance. We do have some from the south entrance, but the northwest entrance is where most of the activity starts to occur. While he's—originally crashes the car before he makes this movement, we have a teacher who's actually outside the northwest entrance who sees the crash, she calls 911, witnesses the active shooter, relays that to the dispatcher, and then closes the door behind her. There was a lot of misinformation that the teacher propped the door open. The door was not propped open. She had closed it behind her, but apparently it was unlocked and she was not aware of that.

So if you notice, now we have an overhead view of the school itself. So if you notice I mentioned the northwest entrance, that's where our shooter, our subject comes in. That's the door that the teacher had gone out, witnessed the crash, witnessed the active shooter, ran inside the school, alerted the school that there was an active shooter, yelled for teachers to lock their doors, yelled for children to get into the school, and they did what they were trained to do. They went in, turned the lights off, closed the doors, assuming the doors were locked and they were safe inside their classrooms.

Our shooter will then walk through that northwest entrance into the campus. So our shooter—or, teacher—who's at the northwest entrance who sees the crash and then sees the shooter shooting at the funeral home employees, runs back into the school, alerts other staff members, yells for teachers to lock themselves inside the classroom, yells for students to get back inside their class, and the teachers do exactly what they were trained to do. They turn off the lights, they get the students up away from the windows. The blinds are closed and they go into a lockdown mode, exactly as they were trained to do, assuming that all the doors are locked and including the exterior door, because that is the policy of the school.

Shortly after the shooter comes into the school, then you see within three minutes a very large substantial response from law enforcement. This picture off the video that was enhanced by the FBI shows the first officers that come in through the northwest door. If you notice way at the top of the screen, you'll see actually officers up near the classroom door where our shooter went into. And if you look way at the top of the screen, you'll see light coming through at the top of the video, that is the south door, and officers also came in from the south door.

This is one of the body-worn camera videos from one of the officers and you'll notice, you'll see the times up on the left side. Those aren't real times. So that's one of the things we had to analyze was, we have body-worn camera video, but then when we look at the time, it's not true time, it's not correct time. And so that's part of our problem is going back and analyzing based on body-worn camera video. These are the officers as they approached the classroom door where the shooter went in. They had all the stimulus, they knew where he was, they had sounds to draw them to. They had a true active shooter response up to that door.

So here's kind of the timeline of how the officers, how quickly the officers responded. And we identify them by officer one, officer two, unless they're ranking officers, then we use the name. So you can tell how quickly we have a sergeant and from UPD is the Uvalde Police Department. UCISD is the Uvalde Consolidated, it's the school district police. And then we also list whether they're a detective from the agency or the rank that they have. But this is how quickly we have officers on both the south and the northwest sides into the hallway and moving down towards that hallway.

As we analyzed and looked at data, there's a lot of things that we heard and there's a lot of instances where there was significant opportunities for officers to recognize that this was an active shooter, including phone calls coming in, "Help! Help! Help!" Phone calls from students, "I don't want to die." And, "My teacher is dead." You can read that up there, and these were all things that the officers in one form or another were aware of. Now, part of what we looked at and part of the failures here—and if you have had the opportunity to look at the chapter on leadership and incident command, if you haven't, we encourage you to review that as well—is that while this information is coming in, it's not being distributed out to everyone. So some folks had this information, some of the officers, some did not, because there was no incident command, there was no unified command, there was no command post, and nobody was basically gathering this information and dispersing it back out.

So let's walk through the timeline and it's small print, but in the report, we encourage you to look at the report and kind of dissect it and talk about it. But here's the timeline that we identified based on the subject, our subject entering the school. And if you notice, we've got three columns. True time, that's the time we established, not the time on the body-worn camera videos or the time on our surveillance camera video, but that's true time. So it's been corrected. We have the next column that you see is time from building entry by subjects. We started a running clock from the time the subject entered into the school, all the way through the time the officers entered, and this is the running time. And then we have time to entry by law enforcement. So this is the time we have the shooter times in the building, and then we have the time based on the shooter time that the officers started entering the building.

The time to enter by law enforcement into classrooms 111 and 112 is when, it's the breach into that classroom. So it's zero time, it'll get greater by the subject when he entered the building. The time that they, actually, officers breach classrooms 111 and 112 and neutralize our subject, that's how long it takes between basically his entering and officers' entering. So you have an hour and 16 minutes and 55 seconds from the time he enters the school till the time officers breach that classroom. So you see one clock getting greater and one clock going down.

So we have our subject entering the west doors. He then will walk immediately—he does not pause, he does not hesitate—he makes a turn down that comes in the building, makes a right turn down the corridor, and he goes right to 111 and 112 and starts firing into those classrooms. He'll back and forth, go back and forth, continues shooting. And then it appears he enters room 111. We're not exactly certain that he entered 111, but based on where we think the shadows are, that is based on the evidence our best estimate, of that he went into classroom 111. Both classrooms have doors next to each other and then inside the classroom they have a door that allows access to both of those classrooms. So it's an interior door that is opened, and so you can walk back and forth between 111 and 112 once you're inside either one of those classrooms.

For the first minute he continues to fire and then he stops. And what we noticed is you'll see a stopping at 1:29, a minute and 29 seconds into it. But right before that, 30 seconds before that, we noticed when we analyze the audio and video, that the gunfire goes from rapid fire to a single shot, to a single action. So we surmised, based on that, that he had—in our review, that he had some kind of device that took a single action rifle and converted it to pretty much fully auto, Texas DPS will eventually find that device, and there's a chapter when you look at post-incident investigation, we kind of explain that in a little bit more detail. And so you'll notice he continues to shoot, continues to shoot off and on, and he's inside the classroom. We also hear in the audio, you can hear children screaming.

And then this is kind of our timeline of everything that's happening inside and outside the classroom. At the bottom of the timeline, you'll notice that we start to identify there's a University Police Department lieutenant, he's in plain clothes. He runs towards the school and disappears towards the west door. We start to see officers start to converge on the buildings itself, both from the west door and the south door. And if you noticed in the timeline, our subject keeps shooting. He stops, he shoots again, he stops, and he shoots again. And we identify it while identifying number of rounds fired in volleys, and then we will restart the clock on volleys, so to speak, on counts based on when he stops and re-fires again. And again, you'll see officers continue to respond.

At 11:35:42, so two minutes and 40 seconds after he enters the classroom, we have a sergeant from Uvalde Police Department who is approaching the south door, and in his body-worn camera video, you can hear him, you can hear the shots fired and hear him yell on the radio, "Shots fired, shots fired, shots fired, go, go, go." What he's doing is, he sees two officers in front of him near the south door and he's yelling at them to get into the classroom. So we know then that that group of officers entering from that side know we have an active shooter because their shooter is shooting while they're approaching the door.

We'll continue on in the timeline, I'll let you read through that as you go. The shots continue to occur. You start to see officers entering both hallways now. At 11:35:58, the school district police chief, actually he enters the south hallway. And so what we have is the bottom timeline, 11:36:08. From the time officers are within the exterior perimeter of that classroom and to that time, there are 17 shots fired that would've been heard from or heard by responding officers as they rushed to those classrooms. This continues the response. You'll notice that you've got a sergeant now entering right behind the chief, and this is off the south corridor. If you go down, if you look at 11:37:09, this is four minutes and seven seconds after he entered the school. While officers are actually in the hallway, he has four more shots are fired. And then what ends up happening is as officers approach to the classroom, they're going to the active shooter, they're doing exactly what they're trained to do—at least, three of the officers do that.

As our shooter actually shoots through and actually frags from the round, shoots through the wall, frags from the round, it turns out to be sheet rock and some of the wall structure actually hit a UPD lieutenant and graze him. They will then retreat down the hall and try to regroup. And again, as you can see, we continue through the timeline, our shooter keeps shooting. We have officers in there, and our shooter keeps shooting. 12:13:48 is when we've got our first phone call in from 911, and basically that we've got a child that just called and there's victims in there. That should have been a trigger for law enforcement to know they've got—one, they have victims inside, there's someone inside the classroom, and they also have the ability to have an intelligence source inside the classroom. They've got somebody in there that might be able to relay information out or at least that they can just listen and relay information out.

And then finally, when you look at 12:49, the final breach, they finally breach into 111 and 112. That's one hour and 16 minutes and 55 seconds after our shooter entered into the building. This is a highlight of our timeline. It doesn't go into all the detail. It's many, many, many pages, things that occurred in our timeline. But this just shows you how often and how frequently there was a stimulus of active shooter stimulus that should have prompted or triggered an active shooter response.

What we'd like to do now is we took that timeline and we broke it down into how many stimulus were there from the time the officers first entered the school to the time they actually breached the classroom? How many times should there have been a trigger for an active shooter response? Because if you recall—the, the reason that law enforcement leaders said they didn't go in is they thought they had a barricaded gunman. They treated it as a barricaded gunman. Our job was to look at all the facts and determine that no, in fact, it wasn't a barricaded gunman, it was an active shooter, should have been an active shooter response. And then identified all the separate stimulus that should have, even if they thought it was an active shooter, should have changed that response—or thought it was a barricaded gunman, should have changed that response to make it an active shooter response.

So these are all the officers running down the hall, right? So this is the resources that we have available to us for an active shooter response. And so these are different perspectives from different hallways. And this is the hallway where our shooter is and where the classrooms that we have victims, and we know that there's victims inside. And the number of officers just keeps coming and coming and coming. One of the complicating factors in this is you had a lot of self-deployment. Self-deployment is not

necessarily bad if there's a staging area, there's command and control, there's resource deployment, but you have all these officers standing in a hallway and you've got 19 children and two teachers, some dead, some dying, some alive. And we sat outside that doorway for an hour and 16 minutes.

So, what are some of the times that should have triggered all these officers to actually go into action and breach that classroom? So you get this massive response and this is the number of officers that showed up here. And again, without incident command, without command and control, without a staging area, without assignments, they all rush into the building. So the dots that you see are where they came from in Texas. From San Antonio on the east, all the way down south, and then you've got Uvalde in the middle. So you've got everyone coming from the Mexico border on the left side of the screen, from San Antonio on the right, and you're talking about a significant drive to get there. And then we listed all the agencies and then we'll blow that up so you can see the number of agencies. This is where they all came from.

Now, one of the unique features about Uvalde, and you have to look at your own jurisdiction, your own region, is while we've got Uvalde Police, Uvalde County Sheriff, and Uvalde school police, very small agencies and when you look at size. But also within that region, you have a large contingent from U.S. Customs and Border Protection. So one of the things that isn't happening in regions that have this is people are not looking at, what are all their assets and how do we coordinate together, particularly in our response? That's a different chapter in here.

But you have to also look at, are there areas of the country or in your region where you might have small jurisdictions, but you might have a prison with a lot more employees inside the prison and maybe a tactical unit inside the prison. Or a customs and border patrol station close by. Or a state police barracks where they have more resources than you might have if you're a municipality. And then how do you manage all that? So if you look at the numbers, all these folks came, and yet we had no command and control and it shows in how our response went. And again, those are additional chapters within here and we hope that you reference to those.

So we have 77 minutes after the first officers entered. During that time that we have officers in the school, our shooter fired 45 rounds in the presence of officers over those 77 minutes. We had phone calls coming in asking for help. We had a teacher who's one of our victims, who was texting her husband saying, "Help us." And yet we waited 77 minutes.

So, timelines are critical when we assess what we do because we can actually step back—and yes, we're Monday morning quarterbacking, but this is one of those where the stimulus were there to change our response. And so when you're looking at a strategy and any trainings you do, we strongly encourage you to mix up your trainings. Have an active shooter go to a barricaded gunman, back to an active shooter, create the scenarios where we have to change our mindset in the middle of a crisis. Too many people got tunnel vision. Too many people decided that this is the strategy we're going to have and nothing would change their mind, not even the stimulus.

So again, we can be critical of what happened and we are of what happened, and you can think that'll never happen in our town, that'll never happen in my county, that'll never happen in my city. But if you were to ask the Uvalde Police Department, Uvalde's—the school district police, the sheriff. "Would this ever happen in Uvalde?" If you'd asked them the day before, they probably would've said, "This would never happen in Uvalde." But it did. So please, don't dismiss this as this would never happen here, because they didn't think it would happen here, but yet it did.

So we're hoping that just chapter one and we look at the timeline of the reconstruction of the timeline, that you were able to take some lessons learned out of it.

CIR Report Closing

26:35

Thank you so much for reviewing these important issues, for taking the time to talk about recommendations and policies. We certainly hope that the observations and recommendations throughout the report will improve the preparation and response by those law enforcement agencies that were addressed during the review, as well as other law enforcement agencies throughout the country. And we would add as well, as schools and school districts and people who are engaged with children in the school workplace to take a look at and address these different issues as well and become familiar with them. If you do nothing else, it would be very informative to review the recommendations, familiarize yourself with what the issues are talked about today, and look at these specific recommendations and see how you might be able to work them into your active shooter and other disaster response plans.

Also in the latter chapters, starting on page 513, there are many resources for the different topics that are addressed throughout the report. That whole section is really comprehensive for anyone that's looking for specific agencies and organizations that provide consultation, direct services, crisis services. There are planning templates and other toolkits related to all the topics that are covered by the critical incident review team in the entire report. So we encourage you even to familiarize yourself with the resources.

And certainly before we wrap up the video, we really do want to encourage you to look at all the different chapters. We cover many, many important issues, just as this one is important. There's tactics and equipment, leadership and incident command, post-incident response and investigation, public communications, trauma support services, and finally, pre-incident planning and preparation. If you're looking for more on that, that's chapter 8. Chapter 3 covers leadership and incident command. We know how important—that's the base of where you start all your planning from. Chapter 5, public communications—we know that during and following a crisis are good interventions themselves. And so it's very, very important to familiarize yourself with what the appropriate type of public communications are that can help the community.

Chapter 6 covers trauma and support services, and I will make a plug here, that throughout every phase of the critical incident review, every team member was well-versed and practiced trauma-informed services in how we interviewed, how we talked to the community, how we talked about the incident itself, how we talked to the other youth and the community members, to make sure that we weren't

activating people and adding to any of their distress. And as you can imagine, that's not an easy thing to do under these circumstances. So overall trauma-informed practices throughout this kind of a review and in all of your disaster planning in your exercises and drills, we don't want to make the school staff and the children feel more afraid. We want to help them get into a routine and a familiarity so that they know how to go through the process of keeping themselves safe without being more afraid because they're aware of the need to do this. And chapter 7 on school safety and security if you're looking for that specifically.

So there's a lot to learn there and we're so thrilled that you took the time to join us today. We also want to point out that we had an opportunity to talk to family members and learn about these children, who these victims were. And you will see that there is a section of remembrance profiles of the victims who were killed at Robb Elementary in Uvalde on May 24th in 2022. It was a gift and a really sacred place for us to be able to learn about who they were, these dynamic young people who were looking forward to their lives, and to honor their memories as their families continue to suffer through their losses.

But we also want to make sure that you know that you can visit the website where the entire report is listed. It's at cops.usdoj.gov/uvalde. You can download the report, you can refer to it, but know that the website houses the full report and the executive summary, and it's in both English and Spanish. And there are links for the resources that you can access at no cost, getting technical assistance to implement the recommendations in the report. Overall, the report has several hundred recommendations. So again, looking for specific information, you can go to the individual chapters and you can refer directly to the recommendations, and know that you can implement the different recommendations in the report with no-cost technical assistance. So please do visit the website, familiarize yourself with the information that you're looking for, and expand your reach to take a look at all the specific chapters, because there's a lot of lessons learned that we are hoping that throughout the country, others who are working in schools, working in law enforcement, are able to learn and implement some of the lessons that came out of this horrible event.

And we thank you very much for joining us today. We know that it takes a lot of energy out of your day to attend a webinar. We hope it was informative, and we appreciate your being with us. Thank you.