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POLICING In the Modern Day

Coping with Community Tragedies,
Meeting the Community's Needs Through Social Work,
Well-being and Support Programs for First Responders



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A Few Lessons from the Canadian Mass Casualty Commission Final Report – FBI LEEDA

— John Patrick Clair, Chief of Police,
Town of Marion, VA Police Department

In April of 2020, Nova Scotia experienced one of the deadliest mass shootings in modern Canadian history. As a result, the Mass Casualty Commission was created, to examine the response of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (among other things), and offer a report and recommendations. In March of 2023, the final report – “Turning the Tide Together”, consisting of over 3000 pages, spread across 7 volumes, was publicly released.

I’ve decided to absorb Volume 5 on “Policing”, and hope to give you some sense, of what this 722-page study might offer in its analysis. For the purposes of this article, we’ll be examining the first, of its 4, major divisions - “Part A: The Critical Incident Response”. In my own summary, here are a few conclusions from the report:

- 1. The general bureaucracy of the RCMP, coupled with the intensity of the event, resulted in a lack of command presence, and as a result, a lack of overall response strategy. This was exacerbated by a lack of training in command of complex incidents, and a failure of overall imagination for just how serious an event was unfolding. Simply – no one knew who was in charge.*
- 2. As the response was stumbling, communication was crashing. Dispatch systems had never been tested under the capacity loads experienced that day, neither had the RCMP’s overall internal communications apparatus. 911 calls couldn’t be replayed easily, information sharing failed, CAD operation was slow, and radio communications were inconsistent, if not contradictory. Simply – they couldn’t communicate or coordinate effectively.*
- 3. The public communication wasn’t any better. The RCMP relied heavily on social media to issue belated warnings, failing to account for rural dynamics, and when they were issued, they were veiled and misleading. This is especially problematic in Canada, as a result of legal decisions creating an affirmative duty to protect the public via mass alert. The external communications execution, was just as plagued as the internal coordination. Simply – they suffered from a paralysis of analysis and lack of transparency.*

In the end, these types of failures are not unique, or uncommon. Let’s all step back a minute, for a dose of reality – the RCMP was responding to an unbelievable event involving a mass shooter in a marked replica cruiser, on unfamiliar rural ground, with untested procedures and under-practiced plans – just like the vast majority of agencies in the United States. This might be a hard pill to swallow, but how confident would we be in our response under the same conditions?

Unlike the RCMP in 2020, we don't have to "cold open" these types of events in the U.S. With the notable rise in mass violence, we shouldn't be unaware of the possibility, that complex coordinated critical incidents can occur anywhere. As a result, we need to be asking all the questions the RCMP wish they knew the answers to then. Do we have well-trained leaders in place, with the charisma, skills, and imagination to lead critical incident responses? Can our internal communications infrastructure adapt, in capability, to massive surges in capacity? Can we prepare better, for the release of accurate and timely public information, in order to allow our communities to respond appropriately?

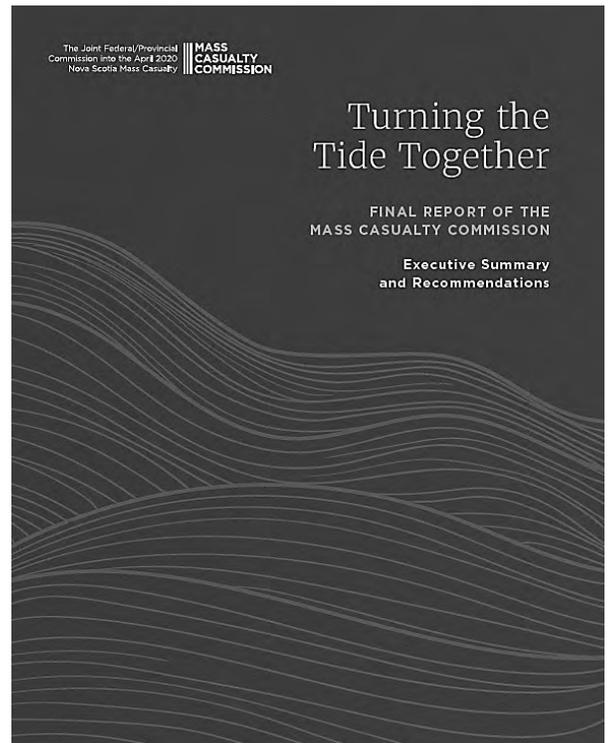
Every law enforcement leader should be asking these question, and seeking the best answers available. Lives depend on it.



Chief John Patrick Clair

Chief John Patrick Clair began his law enforcement career in 1999, as a U.S. Army Military Police Officer, serving in Texas, the District of Columbia, and the Republic of Korea. In 2018, Clair was appointed the Chief of Police of the Town of Marion, Virginia Police Department where he leads 21 sworn members, in a jurisdiction approximately 4.2 square miles.

Clair has a Bachelor's of Science in Religion, from Liberty University, and has completed graduate coursework in theology and philosophy at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Taylors, South Carolina. He is a regular columnist and essayist with local and regional print media. He also serves on the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police Executive Board, and resides in Marion with his wife and four children.



On March 30, 2023, the Mass Casualty Commission released its Final Report – Turning the Tide Together – in Truro, Nova Scotia and delivered to the Governors in Council of Nova Scotia and of Canada. The work of the Commission has now concluded.

Final Report

The final report is organized thematically across seven volumes. Recommendations, main findings, and lessons learned are woven throughout the report. The executive summary provides a condensed overview of the final report.

<https://masscasualtycommission.ca/final-report/>



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