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CRJ 101

A N.Y. Hostage Situation Revisited

It was January 19, 1973, inside a local sports store named John's Sporting Goods located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn N.Y. The local shoppers were socializing among themselves, unaware of the danger that was currently on its way to intercept them. The store would quickly become the grounds for a high-stakes hostage situation that would raise a lot of questions in the future. According to the New York Times, "*The siege would last 47 hours, one of the longest such dramas in the city's history, and mark a turning point in the New York Police Department's approach to hostage situations*". In order to grasp an understanding of what made this hostage situation such a frightening occurrence, one must reanalyze the case and the factors that played into it.

Lieutenant Frank A Bolz Jr. recorded a timeline of events that took place between the local police and the perpetrators up until their eventual arrest. According to his timeline, four Muslim revolutionaries (later identified as Salih Ali Abdullah, Shulab Abdula Raheem, Dawd A. Rahman Yusef and Abdullah Almussudig by the police) had entered John's Sporting Goods located in Williamsburg, Brooklyn in an attempt to loot the establishment for any viable weapons. At about 5:30 PM, they triggered a silent alarm in the building that had notified the police. When law enforcement arrived, the men quickly set up a barricade around the store and armed themselves with the many firearms available throughout the building. They also took about ten hostages for leverage against law enforcement. Following lieutenant Bolz's timeline, at 5:42 pm there was a standoff between the police and the criminals. They exited the side door of the building using one hostage named Sam Rosenberg as a bullet shield. They managed to shoot police officer Jose Adorno in the arm, but Sam Rosenberg was rescued in the process. The perps retreated back into the building and blocked the entrance. For the purpose of this paper, any further time or event used in this evaluation will derive directly from Lieutenant Frank A Bolz Jr.'s timeline. At 6:10 PM, the revolutionaries shot and presumably killed another officer named Steve Gilroy, who was exiting his vehicle. Officer Frank Carpentier moved to shield Gilroy, and ending up taking a bullet in the leg. Carpentier was rescued and perimeters were established between the two groups. At 7:05 PM, ambulances were requested in order to evacuate civilians away from the perimeter. It was time for the police to establish contact with the criminals and come to a compromise.

After the majority of civilians were evacuated, the police attempted to make contact with the extremists. At 8:00 PM, one hostage was released following repeated attempts at contact

using a bullhorn. She delivered a verbal message stating that all the hostages would be brutally murdered if the criminals were not allowed to escape. Fortunately, this threat was never enacted throughout the siege. An hour later, the revolutionaries requested a doctor in order to treat their various injuries. The police told them to come out of the building to receive treatment. They responded by shooting wildly at policemen and civilians in order to cause a distraction. An ERV (emergency response vehicle) was utilized to rescue any officers and citizens pinned down from the attack, as well as taking shots from the criminals. These events mark only the beginning of the hostage situation. The next series of events on Lieutenant Frank A Bolz Jr.'s timeline take place on January 20, 1973.

At 12:50 AM, another hostage was released by the extremists. Similar to the first released hostage, this one came with a message to deliver. A note was attached to the hostage, asking all Muslims and Allah, their god, to unite as one. At 4:00 AM, Reverend Roy Brown from a local church arrived, stating *"This is being done all wrong. Tanks, guns, spotlights, that's what the brothers are raging against. Can't you see that? They don't mean any harm"* (The Voice, Vol. XVIII, No. 4). He wanted to talk to the criminals and try to find a peaceful solution. Forty minutes later, three Muslim ministers arrived, wanting to do the same thing. One of them went into the store and came out approximately five minutes later. He stated that the extremists were willing to die for Allah if it was necessary. At 7:35 AM, the police discussed the idea of cutting the power, but ultimately decided against it due to the numerous public utilities surrounding the store. Twenty five minutes following this decision, officers were sent out to give the public the correct information of what was occurring at the crime scene. At 9:25 AM, the Muslim ministers tried once more to establish a connection with the extremists. This time, they did not receive any form of response from within the building. An hour following this event, Dr. Thomas Matthew arrived and offered his assistance to the police. At 11:15 AM, a walkie-talkie utilizing the Mayor's frequency was placed at the doorway. A hostage named Rico acquired this walkie-talkie and started to converse with the law enforcement. When they requested to speak with his captors, the walkie-talkie was thrown from the store, presumably because the perps believed it was some kind of trap.

In the afternoon at 2:45 PM, two lawyers named Sanford Katz and Gerald Lefcourt arrived on the scene via emergency response vehicle. According to Lieutenant Bolz's timeline, they were defense lawyers known for defending black militants. They offered to represent the

revolutionaries in court if they were to surrender themselves. The response came in the form of six shots aimed at the response vehicle. The police urged the criminals to pick up the walkie-talkie in order to establish future contact. The perps ended up sending one of their hostages to retrieve it. At 3:15 PM, the criminals made repeated demands for food and medical supplies. They were told that they would receive an answer in thirty minutes. A half hour later, the police decided that they would administer food to the criminals, and Dr. Thomas Matthew would administer medical aid. At 4:35 PM, the extremists offered up one hostage in exchange for Dr. Matthew going in the store to administer medical treatment to one of their members. After careful consideration, the chief officer agreed to this proposal. At 5:05 PM, Dr. Matthew exited the store with the names and telephone numbers of all the nine remaining hostages. At 6:30 PM, a Think Tank was established at the 90th precinct of the city. For those unaware of the term, a think tank is *“an organization whose work is to study specific problems and suggest solutions, often with a particular political view”* (Cambridge Dictionary). The police established a connection with the Think tank, and listened to their views while they proceeded to cover almost every possible contingency. At 8:00 PM, Dr. Matthew reentered the store with more food and supplies for the extremists. He brought his nurse with him forty minutes later in order to check on the wounded member of the group. At 11:10 PM, they exited the store claiming that the wounded one was dehydrated and had an alarmingly high fever. Dr. Matthew also brought another note from the perpetrators themselves. It was written in Arabic and it addressed all “Oppressed peoples”, telling them to fight back against their oppressors. They also claimed that they killed Officer Steve Gilroy in retaliation for the wounding of their comrade.

The last series of events covered in Lieutenant Bolz’s timeline take place on Sunday, January 21, 1973. At this point, the police were determined to bring the extremists to justice. At 3:00 AM, some officers started to put down barbed wire along the perimeter of the building in order to prevent any form of escape on foot. One hour later, Aerial shots of the building were taken as extra data for the think tank. At 7:45 PM, one of the perps wildly fired nine shots from the store. They caused minor property damage across the block, but no injuries. The police attempted to make contact with the criminals once more. None of the calls were answered this time. From 9:00 AM to 11:30 PM, The Think Tank discussed the pros and cons of many possible courses of action. They considered using tunneling, wrecking balls, tear gas, and explosive entry into the building. The emergency response unit began to move tunneling equipment into the

basement of a nearby furniture store, in case the tunneling method would be enacted in the near future. At 11:00 AM, Dr. Matthew and his Nurse entered the building yet again to administer more treatment to the wounded gunman. They exited the store fifty minutes later with yet another letter written in extremely similar fashion to the one that came before it. At 12:45 PM, one of the hostages named Jerry Rico convinced his captors to relocate the remaining hostages to a dark corner of a balcony in order to avoid getting shot. This was an ingenious ploy by Jerry, as he remembered a hidden stairway to the roof located in that exact area. All he had to do now was bide his time and wait for the right moment.

At 12:47 PM, The criminals became alarmed when they heard the sound of a drill coming from the store. They believed the noise was coming from the third floor and decided to go check it out. In reality, the noise was stemming from the basement in the furniture store, where the police were drilling their way across. In a moment of panic, the perps completely forgot about their captive hostages. Sensing a moment of opportunity, Jerry Rico revealed the hidden staircase and proceeded to lead the other hostages to the roof of the building, where the emergency response unit was waiting for them. All the hostages escaped three minutes later via a ladder from the opposite roof. In a moment of irony, the extremists could not give chase to the hostages because they had barricaded the entrance to the stairs on their side of the building. They fired a few shots at the other building that had little to no effect. With all the hostages rescued,

the criminals had absolutely no leverage over the police whatsoever. They continued to fire more shots at the building to no avail. Starting at 1:25 PM, many people spoke to the criminals in an effort to get them to peacefully surrender. These people were the defense attorneys, the Brooklyn D.A.(District Attorney), Commissioner Ben Ward, and a few relatives of the perps. The criminals finally surrendered at 4:42 PM. This marks the end of Lieutenant Bolz's timeline.

In the aftermath of this event, all four criminals were arrested and put in prison. According to the New York Times *"In 1974, the men were tried in State Supreme Court in Brooklyn. A jury found them guilty of 41 counts, including murder, kidnapping and robbery"*. Police officer Steven Gilroy died in this siege. Although it was never determined who exactly was responsible for killing him, the blame was placed on the ringleader of the crime, Shulab Abdula Raheem, for his death. Gilroy was honored properly for his services as an officer. According to fellow police officer Al Sheppard *"There is a plaque hanging in Truck # 8 quarters*

honoring this hero. I would walk past Steve Gilroy's plaque every time I reported for duty at Truck # 8. And every time, it would bring back the smell of the wet cobblestone street, the fear and anger that we felt and the frustration of watching Gilroy fall"(E-Man, chapter one). This was not the last the world would see of Shulab Raheem. He was released from prison in 2010 for good behavior, much to the outrage of both the hostages' families and the family of Steve Gilroy. *"Linda Terry, who named her son, now 12, after her uncle, Stephen Gilroy, fumed: "The two Parole Board members who voted yes will be held accountable if this fool does something else. It makes me sick to my stomach"'"* (New York Post).

Taking into account personal beliefs and opinions, this case was handled moderately well in terms of how it was solved and the verdicts for the criminals. However, there is one issue that I disagree with concerning the case. I completely disagree with the parole given to Shahib Raheem in 2010. He did not deserve that luxury of freedom, especially when so many other prisoners are doing life sentences for much lesser crimes. He not only committed murder, he killed one of the brave individuals who have sworn to fight for and defend the public. Such a heinous crime does not warrant a light sentence, no matter how sorry the criminal feels. For instance, take into account the fates of his accomplices, Salih Ali Abdullah, Dawd A. Rahman Yusef and Abdullah Almussudig. They were just as guilty and responsible of the death of Officer Steve Gilroy as he was. Yet for some strange reason, Raheem gets to walk free while his followers rot in prison for the rest of their lives. I don't know if Raheem managed to pull some strings behind the scenes or call in some favors, but he should never see the light of day again. If he is not given the death penalty, he should be rotting in a jail cell just like his accomplices. Yet in a cruel twist of fate, he gets to come home while Officer Steve Gilroy will never see his family and friends again. Other than this complaint, this case was riveting and drastically changed the New York police department's approach to hostage situations.

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