

Battery, the new past time?

Written by By Kimberly A. Gaona Sun Correspondent
Friday, 05 June 2015 13:45



It seems in the last year, every major American city has been broached with the question of police brutality. The riots in Ferguson, MO, the more recent incident in Baltimore, MD have caused national speculation. More locally, the recent indictments of two ex-Las Cruces officers or Albuquerque's numerous shootings.

These scenarios have caused protests on both sides of the coin, riots, destruction, injuries and indictments. McKinley County is not without it's fair share of crime and battery charges are not in short supply, even being named in the list of the most dangerous cities in the state.

The Gallup Police Department [GPD] has already handled 614 battery reports and 596 assault reports since January. McKinley County Sheriff's Office [MCSO] has handled 128 assault and battery reports in the same time frame. Despite the fact that law enforcement is put into dangerous situations at any given point during their shift, our city has not had an officer involved shooting since 2001.

In May 2001, GPD Officer Michael Mitchell was shot and injured and GPD lost Corporal Larry Brian Mitchell (no relation). Robert Kiro is currently serving his sentence for those shootings.

The leaders at the various law enforcement agencies say that it is their training, experience, knowledge and the respect of the community that are the contributing factors that diffuse dangerous situations

Capt. Rick White, Gallup Police Department, is not shy to tell you what a great department GPD is.

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“We’ve got a good reputation with our citizens,” White said. “Our department has the citizen’s respect.”

McKinley County Sheriff Ron Silversmith said that every scenario in law enforcement is different than the last.

Officers have to endure many different scenarios and handle many different tasks while on patrol in the city and the county. They could go from testifying in court, to having their lunch, to fighting with a person who just beat up their girlfriend all in one afternoon. They have to remain calm and professional through it all.

GPD is currently averaging one battery upon a peace officer per month, having already had five reported, year to date.

GPD Officer Douglas Hoffman just experienced that first hand with 49 year old Duane Freeland of Fort Wingate, N.M.

According to the police report, Hoffman responded to the 2100 block of East Highway 66 where he found 53 year old Kathy Charley who had been battered to the point of being unconscious and was bleeding heavily from the head. Witnesses described the suspect and Hoffman located him walking on Aztec adjacent to the spot Charley was at. Freeland was identified as the aggressor and was taken to the jail.

“While in the jail, Freeland made several threats toward myself, stating he was going to catch me on the streets and kill me,” Hoffman wrote in his report.

Freeland is currently charged with aggravated battery and aggravated assault upon a peace officer.

A regular citizen does not have to endure threats such as that on any given day, for police

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officers, it comes with the job. How do they carry on with their jobs after such a threat? White says training and experience are a plus.

“We are disciplined, we are experienced and we don’t overreact,” White said. “And training, not only the police academy, but also on the job training.”

MCSO has reported one battery of a peace officer for this calendar year thus far.

MCSO has also had their fair share of battery calls.

Deputy Nocona Clark had to transport a battered subject from Thoreau, N.M. all the way into the Gallup Indian Medical Center before he was flown out to UNM Hospital. According to Clark’s report, on May 23, she responded to a fight call in Thoreau.

Clark found 53 year old Sampson Sam of Thoreau with dried blood on his forehead, a fat lip as well as a swollen and black eye. Sam and his girlfriend told deputies that they were both battered by 49 year old Hubert Damon. Damon allegedly punched the girlfriend and hit Sam with a rock. After knocking Sam unconscious, Damon ran into his home in Thoreau and did not answer the door for MCSO deputies. The extent of Sam’s injuries and his current condition are unknown.

The same deputy, Clark, was the victim of a battery on May 16 when she attempted to wake 19 year old Brett Lewis and he swung and kicked her several times. This was reported in the May 22 issue. Yet, Clark remained professional, did her job and returned to duty.

Both GPD and MCSO have a massive call volume. As of May 28 at 5:56 pm, Metro Dispatch advised that MCSO had 10,832 calls for service. As of June 2 at 12:48 pm, GPD had 24,369 calls for service.

“I think we average 180-200 calls a day,” White said.

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These calls for service include everything that is called into Metro Dispatch and does include the transportation of intoxicated individuals, as well as burglaries, domestic disputes, fights, etc.

Silversmith contributes the fact that deputies are able to diffuse dangerous situations safely to three words: "Courage, training and discipline."

While these incidents were handled with the best possible outcome, it is important to note that law enforcement officers are well trained in various levels of force, from restraint to non-lethal to deadly, in order to protect the citizens of Gallup and McKinley County as well as themselves.

"When the threat arises, we will use necessary force to stop the action," White finished.