

“During my PhD research, I observed many officers. Jonathan and Ellen are two young officers in their mid and early twenties. During an afternoon shift, dispatch sends a general priority 1 call to all available units. A 15-year-old boy had escaped the psychiatric ward, where he was held by court order. The escapee had had a meltdown, went ballistic, and had threatened his caretakers possibly, but not confirmed, with a knife and had thrown a cup of boiling (tea) water in their direction before escaping the facility. All the available units started a coordinated search party in the facility’s vicinity. Jonathan and Ellen took the outer circle of the search party. Their initiative was to search in the area between the facility and the railway station. Within 10 minutes, we notice the boy sitting on a bench in a park. He was hunched down, hidden in his oversized jacket.

Even from far away, I could see that the boy looked like a giant of a man. Ellen and Jonathan approached the boy with all tactical operating procedures by the book; they approached him calmly, sneaking toward him to cover the distance to prevent him from running away. They approached him diagonally, respecting the fire and safety lines. Closer to the boy, it became clear that he was introverted and closed off from his surroundings. Ellen and Jonathan immediately switched their approach.

They signaled each other with hand gestures; Jonathan engaged with the boy, and Ellen was responsible for tactics and safety. She kept her distance but let the boy know she was there by waving and smiling at him. Jonathan started to talk to the boy in the regional dialect. The boy got agitated again and became restless in his behavior. Jonathan and Ellen stayed calm and explained the rules of the game but kept in connection with the boy. He asked his permission to join him on the bench. He introduced Ellen (“my friend”) and me (“she wants to learn about policing”). An empathetic conversation about the boy’s condition and his previous meltdown developed on the bench. It took Ellen and Jonathan approximately 15 minutes to calm him down and convince the boy to cooperate with them and return to the facility.

Right before they guided him into the patrol car, the boy started to get stressed. He said that being handcuffed had traumatized him. Ellen and Jonathan believed him. They patted him thoroughly and found no sharp or blunt objects or contraband: the boy was “clean.” “You

can go sit next to me in the back of the patrol car,” said Jonathan. “But we have a deal. You remain calm and cooperative. If you start causing problems, I am forced to use heavy force against you,” he said with his heavy regional accent. The boy turned pale. “And with heavy force, I mean really, really heavy. I will sit on you if you cause us trouble. I don’t know if you have looked at me properly, but I am seriously heavy [and tall, red]. And you’re lucky. My girlfriend wants me to lose weight. So a month ago, I would have been even 5 kilos heavier.” The boy started laughing and relaxed. “Promise,” he said and gave a box to Ellen, Jonathan, and me and stepped into the patrol car.

Even after 30 years of service, I was deeply touched and impressed by how Jonathan and Ellen operated. In a nutshell, this case exhibited good police action: smoothly switching between tactical and social skills, adapting behavior when the circumstances demand, and encountering people, including potentially violent suspects, with humanity – knowing when to use force and when not to, sticking to the tactical operating procedures, and knowing when to deviate from them. The fact that Jonathan and Ellen are so young and have limited experience made it even more impressive.”

– Wendy, 51; PhD Candidate, Service Member, 34-year veteran

Case 1: Breda 2015. Officers surprised by violent suspects

Police officers in Breda respond to a domestic violence call. A father and his two adult sons are having a dispute on the street. Once the police arrive at the scene, father and sons turn against the police, kicking and hitting them. The officers use their pepper spray multiple times to gain control of the three suspects. When backup arrives, the suspects are arrested. Two of the police officers are injured and are taken to the hospital for treatment. One of the officers, who is kicked in the head several times, ends up with permanent and crippling brain damage. This incident caused an internal debate about police training, suggesting that better preparation, such as fighting skills, would have protected the officers.

Case 2: Den Haag 2015. Suspect accidentally killed during the arrest

In June 2015, during a festival in Den Haag, a team of police officers arrests an Aruban man, who behaves suspiciously and issues threats, including that he has a gun. The arrest is filmed by bystanders and uploaded to YouTube the same day. In the video, multiple officers can be seen attempting to control the suspect. Once in the back of the van, the suspect remains unconscious and is brought to the hospital. Several hours later, the man is declared dead. Within a day after his death, a riot begins in the Schilderswijk in Den Haag for days in a row. The public outcry is loud and visible in multiple media. The incident causes public outrage, resulting in multi-day riots, placing the quality of operational training under intense scrutiny, and the police as an institution become the subject of criticism. Six of the police officers involved in the arrest continue to face the consequences of their actions: Threats are made to their children and spouses. Within the police organization, in the media, and in a report by the National Ombudsman, this

case caused a debate about police training regarding the amount of time and content and whether they are sufficient to prepare officers for their duties (YouTube, 2015) (Algemeen Dagblad, 2018).

Case 3: Eindhoven 2016. Suspect attacks police, officers shoot suspect

In March 2016 in Eindhoven, the police receive a call from neighbors that a notorious perpetrator of (domestic) violence is causing trouble in front of a house, possibly where his (ex-)spouse resides. Confronted by the police, the suspect becomes irate and threatens to stab the officers. The officers attempt to calm him and draw their batons to hold the man off and force him into a confined space. However, the man begins to chase one of the officers, who subsequently falls on the street. At this point, the other police officer draws his firearm and shoots the suspect. The man dies immediately, and the officer, now lying beneath the man's body, is physically unharmed. Bystanders filmed and uploaded the incident to YouTube. The public prosecutor concludes that the shots were legal and justified (YouTube, 2016) (NRC Handelsblad, 2016).

Case 4: Schiphol 2017. Raging suspect shot by officers

In December 2017, officers of the Koninklijke Marechaussee (KMAR) at Schiphol Airport fire shots at a raging man. The officers are confronted with his screaming and irrational behavior when the man suddenly attacks the small police post and ruins the glass wall with an object. He then enters the police post and threatens to kill the officers. The officers immediately implement their recently trained emergency procedure, which, in this case, ends in firing seven shots to stop the man. The man is wounded in his leg and abdomen and recovers from his injuries. The officers state that they executed the recently adapted standard operating procedures as taught by the police trainers. The public prosecutor concludes that the shots were legal and justified. Bystanders film and upload a part of the incident to YouTube (YouTube, 2017) (Volkskrant, 2017).

Case 5: Den Haag 2018. Police shoot and arrest knife attacker

On May 5, 2018, a Syrian-born Palestinian seemingly at random stabs three members of the public, seriously injuring them. While attacking, he yells religious slogans – an act that frames the attacks as terrorism. Patrol officers coincidentally close by the location rush to provide assistance and stop the attack. The Quick Response Team of the Anti-Terrorism Branch is also close by due to the festivities of Liberation Day (May 5), which are considered a “high-profile event” because of the gathering crowds. The suspect is arrested by the first arriving foot-patrol officer, who had confiscated a bike from a bystander to race to the incident scene. This officer and the ATB shoot multiple rounds at the suspect and bring him under control. Due to the fact that the suspect yells religious slogans, he is treated with extra safety measures in case he is wearing a bomb. The public prosecutor concludes that the shots were legal and justified. Bystanders film and upload part of the incident to YouTube (Omroep West, 2018) (Parool, 2019) (Omroep West, 2018) (YouTube, 2018).

Case 6: Amsterdam 2019. Successful “suicide by cop”

In February 2019, officers receive the message that the KMAR, responsible for the safety and security around the Dutch National Bank, hears gunshots. Witnesses state that there is a man with a gun. Arriving at the scene of the incident, the officers from the Nederlandse Politie approach the man and command him to surrender, and he initially seems to comply. Unexpectedly, the man begins to run toward the officers, and the officers hear shots fired. The officers decide to return (open, as is later revealed) fire to stop the man’s attack. The man dies at the scene of the incident. As the investigation by the Rijksrecherche (Internal Affairs Department of the Attorney General) shows, the man wanted to commit “suicide by cop” and had a history of mental illness. The man was carrying a fake gun and a knife to succeed with his plan. The public prosecutor concluded that the shots were legal and justified. Bystanders film and upload part of the incident to YouTube (Volkskrant, 2019b) (YouTube, 2019).

1.1 APPROACHING POTENTIALLY VIOLENT SITUATIONS

At the beginning of every shift, I check who is on duty and how they are doing. Do they look fit? I estimate how this team will cooperate and perform when the shit hits the fan. There was one shift where we received an emergency call. We had to arrest a violent man at a traveler’s camp. We knew that this arrest would be difficult. The inhabitants of this camp had a history of violence, including violence against the police and resisting arrest. I looked at my officers and saw that one of them tried to compose herself. That was not as I knew her: she is a go-get-’em type of officer. I instinctively knew that I should not deploy her right now, so I followed my gut feeling and told her to stay in the car. The rest of us arrested the man and restored the order at the camp, and all went well.

Back at the station, the young officer approached me. It turned out that she recently discovered that she was pregnant, and that at the moment of our briefing, she got anxious about hurting her baby by engaging in this high-risk arrest. I think it is of the utmost importance as an on-scene commander and a police officer to trust your gut feeling and instincts. Policing and leading police action are more than following procedures and legislation; you have to be aware of the subtle changes in circumstances and read people’s behavior.

– Roger, 52; Inspector and on-scene commander

The six cases presented at the beginning of this chapter illustrate recent incidents of *Nederlandse Politie* use of force covered by the media. Some civilians died, while in others police officers were critically wounded. These cases illustrate the variety of incidents police officers face and the apparently unpredictable course of those incidents. The cases stirred a debate within Dutch policing and society about the extent to which police officers are adequately prepared for their duties.

Officers deal with dangerous situations daily. Of course, not all interactions with the public end with the use of force. Most public-police interactions are peaceful, but some escalate, ending in use of force, as in the examples at the beginning of this chapter. Officers are trained to deal with potentially violent situations; it is up to them to analyze the situation, estimate the risks, and take de-escalating action when and where possible before intervening.

Incident types can vary from calls that seem to be low risk but escalate to dangerous situations – seemingly with no apparent reasons – to calls that appear to be highly dangerous when accepted but that then unfold smoothly without severe police intervention. Suspects can be arrested, casualties can occur, or everybody can leave the scene in good health. Emotions may run high, or the scene may be calm as the ocean by sunset.

At the beginning of every shift, the on-scene commander (OSC [*or in Dutch: OVD*]) briefs the officers. Important information, including the “who is wanted” arrest list and specific risk assessments for the area, is shared, and the officers receive their respective instructions. As seen in the case of Inspector Roger at the beginning of this chapter, OSCs are expected to check the duty roster and attendance list, as well as the officers’ state. Typically, officers of the *Nederlandse Politie* (henceforth, “the Police”) work in pairs or sometimes, in low-risk environments, solo. In certain areas, officers work in trios in public-order shifts. Due to the managerial choice to work with flexible duty rosters, as well as the relatively large units (*Basisteams*) of police, officers may meet their patrol partner for the first time immediately before working the shift together, or they may have worked together previously. The Royal Gendarmerie (*Koninklijke Marechaussee* [KMAR]) works in a group structure, so these officers regularly work with each other.

When a citizen requires police assistance, they can call either 112 if the case is an emergency or 0900-8844 if the situation has a less severe, non-life-threatening character. Calls to this number are received by the police call center (PSC, an abbreviation of *Politie Service Centrum*), and the call is transferred to the dispatch center if it requires immediate police intervention. Lower-priority calls are transferred to the computer system with a note for the local community officer to contact the citizen. The dispatch center receives the 112 calls directly and determines whether the police, the fire department, or the ambulance will be sent to the scene.

Dispatch triages the call and allocates it to the relevant patrol unit or specialist unit, such as SWAT (*Arrestatie Team*) or the Forensic Medical Unit (*Forensisch Arts*). The patrol unit might be dealing with a traffic stop or so-called interruptible