

Vincent Carroll
The Denver Post

Dear Mr. Carroll,

Thank you for supporting the officers listed on the police memorial who gave their lives, as well as all of those men and women who continue to serve with dedication and honor, thru your very gracious and timely editorial. And you are correct in stating your belief that police officers, "**... sometimes use too much force, or are too quick to shoot.**"

Police officers will never be perfect, any more than any other established occupation, but rather the actions of the police need to be as perfect as possible. Police officers however, are limited by the same kinds of issues all human beings face in their daily dealings with others, with magnified observation and sometimes dire consequences when things go horribly wrong. The tools police officers use, in addition to the hardware they wear, are products of their training, experience, instincts, beliefs, fears, prejudices, environment, health, daily disposition, personal and organizational discipline and expectations. Their actions are not a result of any one thing, but rather the sum total of all things learned throughout their lives that dovetail into the moment when a response is required. That moment is sometimes a sudden response by an officer towards a subject in a critical situation.

When an officer makes a mistake in judgment, we generally call it a mistake of the mind. If, however, the mistake is a calculated response against an individual, wherein the officer goes over the edge, uses excessive force or crosses the line knowing he or she has crossed it, we call this a mistake of the heart. Most if not all police administrations understand this and will address mistakes of the mind with training, discipline, supervision, better or more appropriate equipment and/or other means to change the actions of the individual in future dealings with the public. Mistakes of the heart however, present a very different

matter to most police administrations. These infrequent instances require swift action, to include either departmental sanctions on the appropriate level, suspensions, termination and when warranted - the investigation and filing of criminal charges and incarceration. Occasionally, police officers are subjected to criminal, civil and/or departmental sanctions. Police officers realize they are held to a higher standard and level of expectation than the citizens they serve. The vast majority of officers end their careers with stellar records and minimal if any discipline for mistakes of the heart, and are very proud of their accomplishments.

That being said, there is one area where police administrations themselves cross over the line. When you order an officer not to take action against a perpetrator who is performing an unlawful act in their presence (which flies in the face of the very core of the officer's mission), you are twisting the knife. When a group of perpetrators are defacing a memorial so sacred to the honor of the rank and file, it stands proudly and directly in front of the police headquarters building for all to see, the very subject of an annual rite of remembrance, the deed becomes magnified well beyond the scope of any normalcy an officer can tolerate. Here then, is the police administration making a mistake of the heart.

I have spoken to a number of fellow retired officers in the days since the memorial was defaced, and we as a group are outraged. This outrage is not so much that our memorial was defaced (albeit that is heinous enough), but rather the acknowledged order from the chief, supported by the mayor, to allow the act to continue unabated by officers standing nearby. It is a slap in the face to anyone who has ever served, and the citizens of Denver should be equally outraged. Would the chief have expected the officers to stand by while the demonstrators began chipping away at it with sledge hammers? Or suppose they had affixed explosives to it.

A lot of us are wondering if this is a spin off response similar to the one that occurred recently on US 36, wherein the Boulder police did not want to cause the protestors who blocked the highway any discomfort by arresting them, irrespective of the discomfort and disgust of the motorists who had to sit in their cars and wait until the crowd dispersed? Is this a not so subtle example of how police will be trained to deal with future incidents, to keep confrontations to a minimum? What message does this send to future miscreants? By that standard, I most imagine the next time a suspect is barricaded with a hostage, threatening to do bodily harm, the negotiator will cave in and give them whatever they want...just to keep confrontations to a minimum, with the "hope" they can find and make an arrest later. Isn't this a logical extension of the tactic? So where do you draw the line? How long do you think the US Marine Corps would stand by while some anti-war protestors defaced or began tearing down the Iwo Jima memorial in Washington, D.C.? I should hope about two seconds...

Mr. Carroll, as a long time citizen of Denver, I (we) appreciate your editorial and very kind words about the brave officers who have and will continue to give their lives for the residents of our city, but I for one believe you went only half way with your analysis of this incident. Clearly, I hope you realize the dangerous precedent this response by the Denver chief of police and our city administration presents for future dealings with law violators on a plethora of other levels.

Sincerely,

Douglas A. White
Retired Denver Police Officer