



### **Metropolitan Division officer safety takes a back seat**

When Darryl Gates was “The Chief,” he assured that his men and women were the best-trained, best-equipped and best-prepared officers in the world. Period. He, we, took pride in that. To *The Chief*, officer safety was paramount. End of story. So paramount that he didn’t care about “political correctness” if that ideology infringed on his officers’ safety. Remember the battering ram? I do, because I was at those briefings. I was a young PIII+I in “B” Platoon. That battering ram, a great tool for breaching dope houses in those days, is seen today as “oppressive.” But it kept officers safe. It was equipment that was necessary in those times, and *The Chief* provided us with the necessary tools to do our job *safely*. To *The Chief*, that “best equipped” standard applied even more so to his baby, the “elite” Metropolitan Division. “Elite” is a term that has resonated with the Department and public for decades. And while it may be an accurate depiction of officers who have some of the highest caliber of law-enforcement training in the country, it is surely not the way that our Department treats them today.



Since the expansion, Metropolitan Division has been ignored and neglected by Department management regarding its equipment, condition of its vehicles, and safety of its officers. Approximately 30 percent of the Metro fleet was previously salvaged, but then *returned to service in Metro!* I do not know about you, but I would not feel safe, nor should the citizens feel safe, with our officers driving salvage vehicles. Many of these vehicles are running at between 120,000 and 150,000 miles! To make matters worse, and in complete disregard for the safety of its officers, the Department has negligently failed to equip these salvaged vehicles with mounted police radios. This forces officers to broadcast and receive information from their handheld radios. Talk about one step forward, two steps back. This is more like 40-plus years back! Many of the shops have more time in service than the officers driving them! I could go on and on about poor suspension, terrible transmissions and other safety features that officers must deal with when deciding to go in pursuit “Code-3” on a daily basis. I think you get the point. But our Department does not.



And what about this elite unit and its weaponry? You would think that a Department that prides itself and publicly proclaims to be the “best-trained Department in the world” would also supply its officers with the best weaponry, right? Or at a minimum, the necessary equipment to utilize the weaponry. Again, due to the Department’s neglect (specifically Commanding Officer George Yamanaka of Motor Transport Division), lack of concern, or both, the shops are no longer equipped with shoulder weapon racks mounted in the passenger compartment. That forces officers to place their rifles in the trunk of the vehicle, with all their other equipment, where they are inaccessible. In fact, during a recent Metro OIS, an officer who was positioned near their shop and attempted to arm himself with his rifle did not have the time to unlock the trunk, pull equipment out, open the rifle case, and then charge his rifle before the suspect emerged armed with an 8-inch .44 Magnum, and a deadly force encounter occurred.

Metro has had these racks for approved shoulder weapons since the Department began deploying shotguns following the 1965 Watts Riots. Mr. Yamanaka, in his wisdom, unilaterally

eliminated all shoulder weapon racks in Metro vehicles. Why, you may ask? Ask George, who claims that it is a “budget issue.” How about the safety of our Metro officers, George? George, isn’t it true that you equip several of the command staff officers’ brand-new Ford Explorer SUVs with dual gun racks in the passenger compartments, along with mounted radios? I do not remember the last time a command officer went in pursuit, broadcast a vehicle pursuit with a mounted radio or had to use a shotgun or rifle in the field. Little tidbits of information that Mr. Yamanaka and the Department fail to acknowledge.

As your representative, I have attempted to resolve these issues informally. I have tried the phone route with command staff. I tried the lunch route. I have written letters. I have tried to impress upon the Department command staff that these serious issues need to be addressed. Our concerns are falling on deaf ears. From the onset of the Metro expansion, Metro supervisors have reported that the Department and Mr. Yamanaka have displayed overt animus, almost disdain, toward Metro. Worst of all, Mr. Yamanaka, on behalf of the Department, has publicly stated that “[the equipment] is not in the budget.” So we went from hardworking officers, to serial numbers, to now budgetary line items. Unfortunately, due to the lingering issues that the Department has failed to address, the time for lunch is over, and it may be time for legal action. It is a shame that a Department that prides itself on its alleged national reputation of superiority cannot sit down and figure out a solution to such a simple issue. As your president, I’m frustrated that our Department does not put the safety of its men and women who serve the community first. We do, and always will!



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