

COKER TRAINING

Always Armed



MICHAEL COKER

Section 1

ALWAYS ARMED

Training

1. *Prominently displaying their badge without making a movement that may be perceived as threatening to the responding officers.*
2. *Immediately following the commands of responding officers.*
3. *Using caution to ensure that any movements are not perceived as threatening toward the responding officers.*

On January 28th 2000 the Providence Police Department received a call that would irreversibly change the lives of three officers forever. Officer Carlos Saraiva, a three year veteran and Officer Micheal Solitro, a rookie who had completed his field training just days earlier were riding as partners due to a lack of police vehicles.

Officer Saraiva and Solitro monitored a call of two women fighting in the parking lot of Fida's Restaurant. Fida's Restaurant was one of only two restaurants in the City of Providence, a city of nearly 200,000 people, that had and operating license which enabled it to stay open after the hundreds of bars and clubs in the city closed. Due to the scarcity of open restaurants, Fida's regularly drew a diverse bar and club crowd that made it a hot-spot for police activity and crime.

The fight at Fida's had begun inside the restaurant when two females began arguing. One of the females had insulted the other by asking her out on a date, mistakenly believing she was a lesbian. One of the females involved broke a glass and attempted to slash the other woman. A worker in the restaurant began screaming at the females to take it outside.

Once outside, the fight escalated further as the two females were accompanied by their respective companions into the lot of the restaurant. One of the women, Crystal Calder, was joined by her boyfriend, Aldrin Diaz. Out in the lot, Calder shouted to Diaz to get her gun from the car. Meanwhile, Officer Saraiva and Solitro pulled up to the restaurant. Instead of seeing two

girls fighting as reported, they observed Diaz pointing a gun at other people in the lot.

The two officers, upon observing the man with the gun, immediately sought cover. Officer Saraiva, who had been driving was immediately exposed to Diaz, whose position in the parking lot was on Saraiva's side. Officer Saraiva jumped from the police vehicle and positioned himself behind two telephone poles that had been strapped together. Officer Solitro, only eight days off field training, got out of the vehicle and moved behind the engine block and wheel of the police car on the passenger side. Both officers, now having cover between them and Diaz, began shouting commands for Diaz to "DROP THE GUN." Diaz complied with the two officers, but dropped the gun into the passenger compartment of a car that he was standing next to. The officers began telling Diaz to get on the ground. When Diaz complied, Officer Solitro, who was positioned behind the police vehicle and off-center to Diaz position between two vehicles, lost sight of him. Officer Solitro then moved over behind the car in which Diaz had dropped the gun in order to maintain visual contact of Diaz.

As the officers continued to take control of Diaz, another man came out of the restaurant and began approaching Diaz, who was prone on the ground. The officers observed that this man had a gun in his hand and that the gun was pointed toward Diaz. The officers immediately began shouting for this man to drop the gun. The man continued toward Diaz. As he closed in, Officer Saraiva and Officer Solitro each fired two shots. Officer Saraiva's two shots hit the man in the chest and would later be determined to have been fatal wounds. Officer Solitro's first shot went into the car that he was positioned behind. His second shot struck the man in the forehead and was also a fatal shot. Aldrin Diaz, the initial gunman told detectives later that he felt that the man was about to kill him and he could not believe the officers were allowing this man to close in on him. He recanted this statement after he was charged with felony murder.

As officers began arriving at the scene, one officer, looking at the man on the ground, thought he looked familiar and reported that fact to his supervisor. The supervisor agreed and told him to check the deceased man's pocket for identification. When the officer did, he found Cornel Young Jr.'s police badge and identification in his back pocket. Officer Saraiva and Solitro had mistakenly shot one of their fellow-officers, Cornel Young Jr., the son of the highest ranking African-American police officer in the City of Providence. Officer Young had merely been waiting for a steak sandwich at the take out counter when this fight had started in the restaurant. Tragically, Officer Saraiva and Young were classmates in the police academy, had worked together for three years and were friends.

According to materials on the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial web-site, there have been approximately 200 friendly fire deaths in the time period for which statistics have been collected on line of duty deaths. Only 28 have been from mistaken identity, with others occurring from things like cross-fire or training accidents. The issues surrounding the death of Cornel Young Jr. are not limited to off-duty officers. In fact several "Friendly Fire-Mistaken Identity" cases involve plainclothes and undercover officers who are shot while trying to make an apprehension. An example includes Detective Kely Wilkins, an Oakland California detective who, while on-duty, got involved in a foot pursuit of a subject