

# Law Enforcement Officers as Offenders

BY VERNON J. GEBERTH, M.S., M.P.S.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MEDICAL LEGAL ART 2016.  
COPYRIGHT (WWW.DOEREPOR.COM)

## CRIME SCENE STAGING

*“Staging a scene occurs when the perpetrator purposely alters the crime scene to mislead the authorities and/or redirect the investigation. Staging is a conscious criminal action on the part of an offender to thwart an investigation.”*

The term ‘staging’ should not be used to describe the actions of surviving family members who cover or redress a loved one, who is found nude or has died in an embarrassing situation. These activities are certainly understandable considering the shock experienced by a relative who encounters the sudden and violent death of a loved one.

## DYNAMICS

In some instances, a perpetrator will attempt to confuse police investigators by staging a crime scene. There are any numbers of possibilities of staging a crime scene, however the most frequent and reoccurring are as follows:

- A crime scene is often staged to make a **murder** appear like an accident or suicide.
- The offender may stage the scene to make it appear that the victim was killed by a stranger during a home invasion or fabricate a break-in to make it look like burglary.
- The offender may pose the victim’s body to make it appear to be a sex crime.
- The offender may conceal or destroy evidence by purposely torching the crime scene to destroy evidence or to make the death appear to be the result of an accidental fire.
- The offender may move the body to fit the staged presentation. This involves altering the scene to try to disguise what really happened.
- The offender may report the victim missing after disposing of the victim’s body to prevent discovery.

- In some cases, the offender may add evidence to the scene, such as cigarette butts, hairs and fibers, or blood and semen from another source to forensically confuse the issue.
- The offender may clean and sanitize the crime scene and dispose of evidence.

## CRIME SCENE STAGING STATISTICS

Crime scene staging and sexual posing and/or positioning of a body in a crime scene are recognized homicide investigation phenomena. However, there are no reliable data on the frequency of occurrences. Little is known about the frequency of staged homicides, nor is there adequate information regarding the motivation of offenders who stage such crimes.

In my experience and travels as a homicide and forensic consultant, I have encountered a number of these incidents in various jurisdictions across the United States. These events seem to be on the increase as people learn more about the process of death investigation through the media, true crime books, television mystery shows, and movies. The death investigator must be cognizant of the possibility that a crime scene may in fact be staged to mislead the authorities and/or to redirect the investigation. That is why I recommend equivocal death investigations.

## EQUIVOCAL DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

Equivocal death investigations are inquiries that are open to interpretation. There may be two or more meanings and the case may present as a homicide or a suicide depending upon the circumstances. The facts are purposefully vague or misleading as in the case of a *staged crime scene*, or the death is suspicious or questionable based upon what is presented to the authorities. These deaths may resemble homicides or suicides, accidents or naturals. They are open to interpretation pending further information from the facts, the victimology, and the circumstances of the event.



In many of the staged crime scenes that I have personally investigated, as well as those that I examined as a consultant, the staging was overdone or not consistent with the event and/or the initial statements given to the police were out of synch with the scene.

Most offenders who stage crime scenes in an attempt to mislead investigators or thwart the investigation do not really know what a burglary, rape, robbery, accident or suicide scene looks like. They have an idea of how it may appear from television or the movies. Or they may have seen crime scenes depicted in the many forensic science and true crime series and believe that they can recreate the same presentation. However, upon closer scrutiny by criminal investigators, along with the application of forensic techniques, the staging is readily apparent.

This is why I recommend that investigators apply the listed Practical Homicide Investigation® Protocol for Investigative Strategies and take each factor to its ultimate conclusion:

1. Assess the victimology of the deceased.
2. Evaluate the types of injuries and wounds of the victim in connection with the type of weapon employed.
3. Conduct the necessary forensic examinations to establish and ascertain the facts of the case.
4. Conduct an examination of the weapon(s) for latent evidence, as well as ballistics and testing of firearms.
5. Evaluate the behavior of the victim and suspects.
6. Establish a profile of the victim through interviews of friends and relatives.
7. Reconstruct and evaluate the event.
8. Compare investigative findings with the medicolegal autopsy and confer with the medical examiner.
9. Corroborate statements with evidential facts.
10. Conduct and process all death investigations as if they were homicide cases.

Many times a private investigator may be hired by the surviving family for a wrongful death suit or murder defense case involving staged crime scenes. It is imperative that the investigator follow the above established protocol to assure that the case is properly examined and that any discrepancies or subterfuge is discovered which will benefit the client.

## TWO MAJOR CASE EXAMPLES OF DECEPTION

Crime staging by offenders with law enforcement experience are problematic for investigators because the actual presentation and position of the body in the scene, as well as the crime scene itself, will imitate what an ac-

tual burglary, rape, robbery, accident or suicide scene should look like based on their experience with police procedures and prior events.

## SERGEANT DREW PETERSON

Peterson first received national publicity in the United States in 2007 when his fourth wife, Stacy Ann Peterson, disappeared from the Peterson home. He quickly came under suspicion by his inappropriate and outrageous behavior during the missing person's case. Suspicion of foul play grew within the public and law enforcement, especially in view of the untimely death of Drew's third wife, Kathleen Savio, just three years prior. Stacy's family and friends were making an all-out effort to find her, appealing to the media and public for assistance, and expressing their grief and concern. On the contrary, Drew Peterson showed no concern as he played the fool and gained national notoriety. Peterson laughed and joked with the media while making TV appearances. He was in a radio contest "Win a Date with Drew." He basically taunted the police and their investigation. In my opinion, Drew Peterson knew that he had successfully disposed of Stacy's body and that the police would never be able to connect him to her disappearance.

After the disappearance of Peterson's fourth wife in October of 2007, Will County authorities

approved the exhumation of Kathleen Savio's body for a second autopsy. The Exhumation Order was a direct result of Peterson's outrageous actions after Stacy Peterson had gone missing. The second autopsy conducted by Forensic Pathologist Larry Blum and celebrity Forensic Pathologist Michael Baden concluded that Kathleen Savio had been murdered.

Drew Peterson was charged with murdering Kathleen Savio.

## THE KATHLEEN SAVIO CASE: HOMICIDE MADE TO LOOK LIKE AN ACCIDENT

Drew Peterson, in his capacity as an experienced law enforcement officer, was able to manipulate and choreograph this event from the initial discovery of the body through the preliminary investigation at the scene. Interestingly, Peterson was able to elude early detection due to the fact that the lead investigator from the Illinois State Police was not experienced and the State Police CSI who was supposed to assist him was indifferent and acted like a smart aleck. I acted as a consultant for the Illinois State Police during the re-investigation as they attempted to put together a prosecutable case. I also met Peterson's defense counsel while on Fox News and told them that I wished that I was the lead investigator that evening because I would have called it a homicide at first sight.



This illustration indicates the position of Drew Peterson's ex-wife in the bathtub of her home. Note the position of the victim's feet and toes. She was placed into the tub by the offender who literally had to bend her toes to fit her in that position.



## **AN INCOMPLETE INVESTIGATION MANIPULATED AND STAGED BY DREW PETERSON.**

- Drew Peterson basically orchestrated the investigation by staging an alleged accidental drowning in the tub. He had the experience to present the death as accidental.
- Drew Peterson first contacted neighbors to inquire if they had seen Kathleen, feigning his concern for her well-being. Drew set it up to provide an alibi.
- Drew Peterson then got the neighbors involved in making the initial discovery of Kathleen Savio's lifeless body in the bathtub. He stated he couldn't enter the premises because of his current divorce situation.
- Peterson then called for a locksmith to gain entry to Savio's house because he did not have a key to his ex-wife's premises.
- Drew remained downstairs in the foyer while two neighbors discovered Kathleen's dead body in the tub. This provided him with an additional alibi.
- Within a half-hour after conferring with Drew Peterson and First Responders, the state police investigators, who arrived at the scene of Savio's death, decided Savio was a victim of an accident.
- The coroner's investigator reported there were no signs of any trauma on the body and after conferring with an Illinois State Police CSI, who was completely indifferent to circumstances of the death, agreed that the death was accidental.
- The same Illinois State Police CSI stated that in his opinion the death was not suspicious therefore the homicide/suspicious death protocol was not followed.
- The State Police CSI did not take any evidence, look in the garbage pail, or take note of any objects in the bathroom. He did not look for any possible evidence, nor interview personnel who entered the scene prior to his arrival to document any possible changes made to the scene.
- Drew Peterson was actively engaged in these conversations with first responders and state police investigators and was able to convince them that the death was accidental. All parties at the scene felt that there were no signs of foul play or trauma for this death.
- Illinois State Police Sergeant Collins, who led the investigation of Savio's death in 2004, told the jury her death was treated as an accident from the start.
- Illinois State Police Sergeant Collins stated that Drew Peterson asked to sit in on the interview of his fourth wife Stacy, who was Drew Peterson's alibi witness, as a matter of "professional courtesy" and Collins allowed it.
- The interview by Illinois State Police Sergeant Collins took place in Drew Peterson's home instead of at a police facility.
- Sergeant Collins failed to collect forensic evidence, interview Savio's relatives, or secure the suburban Chicago house where her body was found because he never considered Drew Peterson to be a suspect.
- Sergeant Collins testified that he had never investigated a homicide in his 22 years as a detective in the Illinois State Police

In my opinion, Drew Peterson with his law enforcement experience, was able to psychologically bring everyone on board to believe that the death was accidental, including the coroner's investigator who reported his findings of accident to the Will County Coroner Dr. Bryan R. Mitchell. Dr. Mitchell, who performed the original autopsy on Kathleen Savio, theorized that Savio's death, "Could be ascribed to drowning." However, Mitchell hadn't seen the crime scene photos.

On September 6, 2012, Drew Peterson was found guilty of the premeditated murder of Kathleen Savio. The conviction was based on the compelling testimony of Dr. Larry Blum, the forensic pathologist who testified for the state that the manner of death was homicide.

## **THE DEATH OF FOX LAKE LT. JOE GLINIEWICZ – SUICIDE STAGED AS A HOMICIDE**

On the morning of September 1, 2015, Lt. Charles Joseph "Joe" Gliniewicz of the Fox Lake, Illinois Police Department was found dead in woods bordering U.S. 12 in Fox Lake. Gliniewicz, a thirty-year veteran of the department, was very popular with the young people who were part of the Fox Lake Police Explorer Club that he supervised. He was known as "G.I. Joe" in the community for his military demeanor and "gung ho" actions and events with the police explorers.



## FACTS OF THE CASE

- At 7:52 AM, Lt. Gliniewicz radioed from his unit that he had observed three male subjects and described them as two male whites and one male black in the vicinity of an abandoned cement plant that abutted a wooded swamp area.
- Dispatch asked if he needed a back-up. Gliniewicz initially turned down a backup unit. Gliniewicz then radioed Dispatch that the subjects were heading for the swamp and requested back up.
- Several minutes later, back up units arrived from different ends of the area. One unit observed Gliniewicz's empty vehicle parked near the reported location behind a locked access gate.
- The approaching officers indicated they heard what they believed to be a single muffled gunshot. Since they were not familiar with the area, officers proceeded through a dense wooded area and within several minutes located Lt. Gliniewicz's body.



Lt. Gliniewicz's body at the scene after he was turned over by First Responders

- Gliniewicz was face down with his right arm under his torso and his left arm extended along his left leg. His holster was empty and his weapon was missing.
- Gliniewicz's body had been rolled over by the first responding officers and medics to check for vitals.
- The case was treated as a homicide and active-shooter event with the possibility that the offenders were still in the area. A loose perimeter was established. Approximately 1 ½ hours into the incident a 2 ½ mile secure perimeter was established.
- Over 400 local, state and federal officers responded to the scene. Forty-eight K-9s, 5 aircraft including four helicopters and one fixed-wing aircraft were utilized to search the area.
- Evidence Technicians (ETs) from the Task Force did not gain access to the crime scene for several hours due to the possibility of an active shooter in the area. Eventually they were escorted into the scene by a tactical unit.
- Lt. Gliniewicz's weapon was located approximately 1 ½ hours later, after the ETs arrived, in thick grass approximately five feet from his center torso above his head.
- As helicopters buzzed overhead and police dogs searched the ground, Fox Lake took on the appearance of a war zone as this sprawling man-hunt went into the night.
- Dozens of state and federal agents joined the local police. A No-Fly Zone was established over Fox Lake, Schools were on lockdown and commuter trains were stopped.
- Residents were asked to stay indoors and report any suspicious activity to the authorities.
- The Lieutenant's death came amid a series of high-profile killings of police officers while on duty. This reinforced the belief that Gliniewicz had been shot in the line of duty.

Police Officer Darren H. Goforth was shot and killed on August 28<sup>th</sup> in Texas while filling his gas tank.

Police Officer Henry Nelson was shot and killed in Louisiana on August 26<sup>th</sup>

Trooper Steven Vincent, Louisiana State Police, was killed on Monday, August 24<sup>th</sup>.

Deputy Carl Howell was shot and killed in Carson City, Nevada on August 15<sup>th</sup>

- An initial roundtable with the pathologist, lead investigators and FBI crime scene analysts indicated this may have been an "execution style" scenario. The pathologist formulated a theory based on the angle of the wound. His theory involved the possibility that the offender(s) had disarmed Lt. Gliniewicz and placed him on his knees. It was surmised that Lt. Gliniewicz may have attempted to lunge at his captors, thus explaining the angle of the shot that entered under his bullet-proof vest.

The following day, Fox Lake residents held a vigil to honor the fallen police officer. Hundreds lined the small town's main street with flags and homemade songs praising Lt. Joseph Gliniewicz for giving his life to protect them.

On September 7, the funeral for Gliniewicz drew thousands of mourners from across the United States and Canada. There was an eighteen-mile long procession of police vehicles through his home town of Antioch, Illinois.

## THE CHIEF CORONER

Coroner Thomas Rudd initially believed that the gunshot wounds that Gliniewicz had sustained could possibly be self-inflicted, resulting in some conflict with the Major Case Squad that was pursuing the case as a police homicide. The news media reported tensions between them.

The pathologist noted a bullet perforation over the left chest two inches below the upper collar. This corresponded to the approximate location of the gunshot entrance wound. There was also a bullet perforation noted over the left back region, which corresponded to the approximate location of the gunshot exit wound.

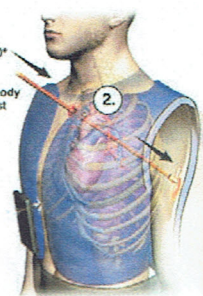
### Penetrating gunshot wound of cell phone and bullet proof vest:

- Wound 1 - Non Fatal
- Front to back
  - Very slightly upward
  - Perforation of cell phone
  - Bullet lodged in vest
  - Contusion of right lower chest / upper abdomen



### Penetrating gunshot wound of chest:

- Wound 2 - Fatal
- Front to back
  - Left to right
  - Downward approx. 40°
  - Entrance over left upper chest
  - Bullet does not exit body
  - Bullet retained by vest
  - Perforation of ribs, left lung, and left pulmonary artery



Pathologist's Findings

## THE INVESTIGATION

The Major Case Investigation into the death of Lt. Joseph Gliniewicz was conducted as an active homicide investigation and active shooter case by the Lake County Major Crime Task Force under the command of Commander George Filenko.

The Task Force located the three individuals matching the description of the three suspects based on area videos collected by investigators from businesses, private homes and private dash cameras. The three individuals were in the area prior to the incident. All three were identified and had solid alibis.



The GPS indicated that Gliniewicz had stopped at a local gas station and purchased two packs of cigarettes, which was part of his regular routine. Gliniewicz then drove to the cement plant. The GPS indicated that his vehicle was parked for approximately 25 minutes before he called Dispatch about the three suspicious subjects. The working theory was that Gliniewicz observed the three individuals while driving to the cement plant.

### VICTIMOLOGY

In any equivocal death investigation victimology is the most significant factor to consider in ascertaining motives, suspects and risk factors.

The Task Force requested and initiated numerous subpoenas for Gliniewicz's credit cards, personal bank accounts, as well as the bank accounts for the Explorers Club.

It was discovered that Gliniewicz had a Jekyll and Hyde personality. The Task Force ascertained that Gliniewicz had two personas. The public persona was one of "GI Joe" the community hero and "Cop's Cop." But the real persona was one of a criminal with a badge. Gliniewicz was committing felonies by stealing money. He was involved in adulterous affairs, accessing adult sites that are known for locating prostitutes, stealing monies from the Explorer fund and taking extravagant vacations to Hawaii with his wife.

His personal record indicated he had been sued in federal court by a female subordinate for forcing her to have sexual relations with him on and off duty. Co-workers anonymously complained about his inappropriate behavior.

In March of 2014, a new village administrator had been hired and immediately began a village wide inventory/audit. Gliniewicz became concerned about this audit because he would be exposed for his questionable financial dealings with the Explorer account. Interestingly, one of his deleted messages made reference to possibly setting up the new village administrator or even murdering her.

Additionally, Gliniewicz had acquired thousands of pieces of military equipment through a government program. He had on at least two occasions forged a signature to acquire this equipment. All the equipment was being used to train his Explorer unit in military style assaults. Video acquired by investigators showed Explorers of various ages being pepper sprayed and running field drills in the area where Gliniewicz's body was found.

Investigators also discovered that Gliniewicz had facilitated a sham marriage between his son, who was serving in the military, and one of Gliniewicz's female companions. The

scheme involved getting his son additional monies through the military and providing the female with insurance for her and her children. Investigators located the female who voluntarily provided the Task Force with details and a copy of a pre-nuptial agreement outlining the terms of the sham marriage. She divorced him and collected \$9,000 dollars in tax refunds.

It was theorized that Gliniewicz had staged the scene to appear that he had lost control of his weapon as he chased the suspects into the woods or was forced to go into the woods. The three subject scenario was based on a theory that because he was fit and tactically trained he was able to fend off one opponent, possibly two, but three attacking together would be more than even he could handle.

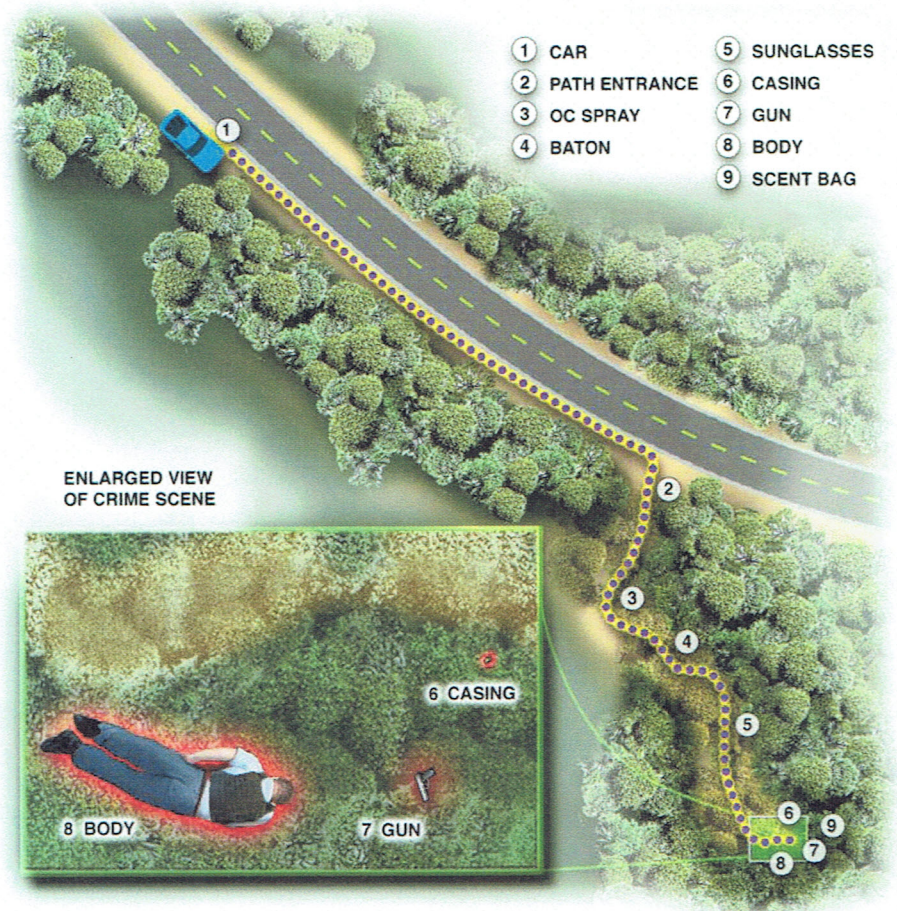
Gliniewicz wanted to create a scenario in which he bravely struggled against three opponents, succumbed to injuries in a valiant battle and that his body would be found quickly. His body was found 50 yards from his patrol car. I believe that he theorized that his criminal acts, even if uncovered, would be forgiven and he would be remembered as a hero officer who died in the line of duty.

### INTERVIEW OF COMMANDER GEORGE FILENKO

I interviewed Commander Filenko who advised me that this two-month long investigation determined conclusively that Lieutenant Joseph Gliniewicz intentionally committed suicide and left a staged trail of police equipment consisting of pepper spray, a baton and his personal glasses at the crime scene to mislead first responders and investigators to believe that this was a homicide.

It was learned through investigation that Gliniewicz was familiar with this area because he conducted Explorer exercises there and had significant experience in staging mock crime scenes at this location for his Explorer group.

Commander Filenko stated, "We have also concluded that Gliniewicz strategically aimed the first of two shots from his own weapon at the lower abdominal area striking his cellular phone and bullet proof vest which absorbed most of the impact of the first shot." Cmdr. Filenko stated that their investigation indicated that Gliniewicz appeared to have a



Overview of crime scene indicating how Gliniewicz spaced his equipment along the trail like "Cookie Crumbs" leading to his body



high threshold for pain and had actually participated during a competition with a torn bicep. He had tattooed his entire torso from his neck to his abdominal area in a relatively short period of time.

Later analysis revealed that Gliniewicz was standing when he self-inflicted the second shot. He dropped his weapon and walked several feet, falling face first, as he was discovered. The pathologist indicated that his wound would have permitted him to live up to two minutes. The first shot was self-inflicted approximately 175 feet from the death shot.

According to Commander Filenko, "This cowardly act of suicide by Lieutenant Gliniewicz, represented the ultimate betrayal of everything that law enforcement stands for."

Commander Filenko told me that this case made him ashamed to be a police officer."

### CONCLUSION

I recommend that investigators apply the listed Practical Homicide Investigation® Protocol for Investigative Strategies and take each fac-

**“Most offenders who stage crime scenes in an attempt to mislead investigators or thwart the investigation do not really know what a burglary, rape, robbery, accident or suicide scene looks like.”**

tor to its ultimate conclusion to avoid missing Staged Crime Scenes.

(Geberth, 2015, 2010, 2010a, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2006, 1996, 1996a) **PI**

*Vernon J. Geberth, M.S., M.P.S., president of P.H.I. Investigative Consultants, Inc. is a nationally renowned author, educator, consultant and expert witness on the subject of death investigations. His flagship book, Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures and Forensic Techniques 5th edition is considered*

*“The Bible” of homicide investigation. He retired as a Lieutenant-Commander of the New York City Police Department and has personally investigated, supervised, assessed, researched and consulted on over 8000 death investigations.*

**Ed. Note:** Mr. Geberth has quoted heavily from his books in this article. Please note that he has been writing and publishing about staged crime scenes since 1996. The most updated version of his book was published in 2015.