

## **CWC Mt Diablo *Writers Table* for January 11, 2020**

### **Police Procedures & Criminal Investigations**

*Whatever you want to know about policing!*

*Presented by Bob O'Brien and John Schembra*

Are you writing police or public safety thrillers? Want to get it right? We do, too, though Bob O'Brien and I (John Schembra) may have an advantage, having been police officers for 60 years between the two of us.

Although the home setting for my books is the San Francisco PD and Bob's career was in Cleveland, Ohio, sometimes protagonists must seek the help of other police or federal agencies. This presents a problem, as not all law enforcement agencies conduct investigations the same way.

Each agency has their own set of procedures and though general investigative protocols are the same, there are distinct differences in how they conduct an investigation. Evidence collection, interrogations, interviews, use-of-force issues, and so on. The list is long.

Research is critical. Your readers have diverse backgrounds which usually means there is always that person out there who knows if you make a mistake. Knowing how an agency conducts investigations, along with their everyday duties, adds realism and actually makes the writing simpler.

There are benefits to getting the procedures right. It can make the difference in whether readers like your work or not. If they like it, your book could show up in a favorable review, and your fans can give it good marks in discussions with other potential readers. Unfortunately, if you get it wrong, it could mean a less than sterling review and none of us want that.

The best way to get what you need is to talk to a police officer from the agency you are writing about. In my case, it is San Francisco PD. I was lucky that my best friend's son was an SFPD officer, and that son's wife, also a sworn officer, was a forensics and crime scene technician. They were a big help whenever I needed a procedural question answered. In Bob's case, it is the Cleveland OH PD. Bob's son is currently a Cleveland police officer.

If the agency in your book is fictitious, model their procedures after an agency that most resembles your fictional one. Look for one with similar demographics, and size, and use their procedures. If you can, look up the agency's website and contact (via email) the public information office. I have found they are very accommodating and willing to help.

Bottom line: getting it right is satisfying and enjoyable, and, we believe it makes the story easier to write. Presented by two retired police officers, with careers full of varied situations, *Police Procedures & Criminal Investigations* is a perfect way to understand all-important details that will make your writing read as if you were there. Please join Bob O'Brien and John Schembra as they share their experiences.

## ***Are John and Bob experts in this field?***

### ***Absolutely yes! Here are their biographies:***

**John Schembra** spent a year with the 557<sup>th</sup> MP Company at Long Binh, South Vietnam in 1970. His time as a combat M.P. provided the basis of his first book, *M.P., A Novel of Vietnam*, a work of fiction based in part on his personal experiences. Upon completing his military service, John joined the Pleasant Hill Police Department, where he retired in 2001 as a Sergeant, after 30 years of service. He then became the lead Emergency Vehicle Operations Course (EVO) instructor for the Contra Costa Sheriff's Office and was certified by the State of California as a subject matter expert in Emergency Vehicle Operations. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Administration of Justice through California State University, Sacramento, and a Master's Degree in Public Administration through California State University, Hayward.

In addition to *M.P.*, John has had several articles published in law enforcement periodicals, including, *Law and Order*, *Police Officer's Quarterly*, and *The Backup*. He is also a contributing author in *True Blue – Police Stories by Those Who Have Lived Them*, a collection of short stories released by St. Martin's Press. His second novel *Retribution*, a fictional story of the hunt for a serial killer in San Francisco, was published in the spring of 2007, and his third novel *Diplomatic Immunity*, was published in 2012. His fourth novel, *Sin Eater*, was released in 2016 and his fifth book, *Blood Debt*, was released in November of this year. John lives in Concord, CA with Charlene, his wife of 47 years.

**Bob O'Brien** retired from the Cleveland OH Police Department as a SWAT Sergeant in 1998, after a 31-year career. He co-founded the current Cleveland Police SWAT Unit and served 26 years as a full-time SWAT/Tactical officer/supervisor. He participated in, and supervised, thousands of high-risk, critical assignments: hostages, barricades, active shooters, dignitary protection, riot control, suspect searches among others. In one such incident, with international impact, he supervised and participated in the successful 1985 hostage rescue during the attempted hijacking of a Pan-Am jetliner and shooting at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport.

As an Ohio certified police instructor, he trained thousands of law enforcement officers in crisis management topics. He authored a number of policies/procedures, including the *Cleveland Police Emergency Operations Plan for Disorders, Disasters, Terrorism*. He also trained and helped form numerous regional SWAT/Tactical teams.

He served for three years in the U.S. Army, including a year tour in 1963 in Pleiku, Vietnam, assigned to the 52nd Combat Aviation Battalion.

Bob has written numerous published police related articles for a number of law enforcement, counter-terror publications. He also wrote *Police Magazine's* weekly SWAT web blog for five years.

Bob's son is currently a Cleveland police officer.

After 35 years, Bob and his high school sweetheart, Judy, reunited and married 22 years ago, and now live in Antioch, CA.