

In documentary, officer from Bernards recalls his near-fatal shooting

By PAMELA SROKA-HOLZMANN
STAFF WRITER

With every squeeze of the trigger as the suspect shot 19 rounds of bullets from a semiautomatic weapon, Irvington police Sgt. Ken Hogan knew both men had a plan.

The suspect's plan was deadly; he wanted to shoot down the officer in a drug-deal bust that went wrong Jan. 24, 1994, before he crossed the street and took his own life. Most of the bullets were shot into Hogan's patrol unit, and four hit Hogan -- in the spine, hand, right shoulder and one that became lodged in his skull.

The bullet-proof vest that Hogan wore was aging -- about 16 years old -- and the bullets shot through it and penetrated his body.

But Hogan's plan was what kept him alive that day, said the now 49-year-old retired officer who lives in the Basking Ridge section of Bernards. While in excruciating pain, he kept thinking that if he could hold on for one second, then, maybe he could hold on for two seconds, and so on. The good thoughts are what kept him alive, Hogan said.

"I just wanted to live for one more second, to think of those people most important to me," said Hogan, who had plans to get married that year. "To me, that was part of my plan, and I wasn't going to let him go through with his plan -- his destruction plan on me."

Hogan shares his experience in a new 11-minute film entitled "A Call for Valor." The film took about seven months to create and was screened before the public at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey University Behavioral HealthCare in Piscataway.

About 50 people attended Friday's program, including mental-health clinicians; peer counselors; administrators from the N.J. Department of Personnel; Dr. Kevin M. Barry,



Ken Hogan talks about being shot and the documentary film made about him at a COP 2 COP anniversary event Friday in Piscataway.

a trustee at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey; members of the COP 2 COP Wounded Officers Support Group; law enforcement officers; and physicians and health professionals, among others.

Hogan also saw it Friday, for the first time.

The action that day

Filmed by retired Caldwell police Capt. Donna Ramon Hernandez, 49, of Belleville, who also is the creator of Blue Force Films, the documentary features photographs of the blood-stained patrol unit in front of a snow-covered roadway backdrop. The film also features taped footage from dispatch radios that day, calling out, "An officer's been shot on Nelson and 21st," and Hogan yelling, "I've been shot."

"From the first round to the last round, it was extremely frightening. When he started shooting, he kept shooting," Hogan said in the documentary. "And I never had a chance. He fulfilled his mission -- he died with his own hand."

Lolita Whiting, Irvington police department's dispatcher, was fielding calls during the shooting. In the film, she says, "It flustered everybody. I prayed, and I knew he had an angel over him. I knew he would make it. ... He'll be a patrolman forever."

Hogan's backup officer, Dennis Doriety, then arrived at the scene as streets were lined with yellow "Do Not Cross" police tape. In the film, Doriety said, "Kenny was bleeding. He was bleeding from the head, hand and back. I didn't think he was going to make it."

Doriety helped rescue-squad workers as the team rushed his partner via ambulance to the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey University Hospital in Newark. Doriety pushed open the doors to the hospital's emergency room, shouting over the sirens, "Cop shot!"

Everyone stopped what they were doing, he said.

Following the shooting, Hogan received treatment for his injuries for nearly a month in the hospital; then he received psychological support, which he said was a necessity.

On Friday, Hogan announced, "If some of the doctors were in this room, I'd kiss them on the lips."

Sharing the story

Hernandez's path crossed with Hogan's at a COP 2 COP Wounded Officers Support Group about a year ago, and she said she was inspired to make the film, to ensure his story got a wider audience.

"I've admired him and his tenacity for life," Hernandez said. "I remember when he got shot and most of us didn't think he was going to make it."

"A Call for Valor" is her way of saying "thank-you" to Hogan and other law-enforcement officers for putting their lives on the line each day to help serve the community.

"It's to all of us in law enforcement who move beyond tragedy, and to know we're not alone because of COP 2 COP, and to the administration who have a vision and think outside the box," she said.

When discussing how she came up with the film's title, Hernandez said she searched for words that defined Hogan's bravery.

"Valor stood out," she said. "It defined not only the bravery Ken has, but it's a word used in the medieval times or when someone went to war, and Ken went to war that day. And he survived the war."

Hogan married his fiancée, Roseanne, in March 1994, and now the couple has a son, Dean, 8, and daughter, Madison, 11. He served in Irvington Police Department for another 12 years, retiring after 27 years of service. Today, he is working in law enforcement for the Union County Prosecutor's Office.

"As a law-enforcement officer, you don't realize the people you touch, who you never meet," said Hogan, who was promoted from patrolman to sergeant following the shooting. "There are people who truly appreciate law enforcement."

In his free time, Hogan lectures about 30 to 100 students at the Morris County Police and Fire Academy.

When he was shot, the COP 2 COP Wounded Officers Support Group did not exist. In fact, it would be six more years until its creation, and Hogan said such an organization would have been a tremendous help to him. That's one of the reasons he is now a member of the group, giving him the opportunity to help other police officers in times of tragedy or stress.

"There are many untold stories that go unrecognized, but this is one of the good ones," said Rolando Torres, who was appointed Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Personnel by Gov. Jon S. Corzine, during the documentary. "The volunteers are at the heart of this."

• **At a glance:** Chris O. Kosseff, president and chief executive officer of the UMDNJ-University Behavioral HealthCare, and Cherie Castellano, program director of COP 2 COP at the UMDNJ-University Behavioral HealthCare, offer the following statistics:

- The national suicide rate for the general population is 11 per 100,000 and for police officers it is about 18 per 100,000.
- In New Jersey, suicide rates have averaged 6.5 out of 100,000 over the past 10 years in comparison with the national police suicide rate of 18 per 100,000.
- The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey is the nation's largest free-standing public health sciences university with more than 5,700 students attending the state's three medical schools, its only dental school, a graduate school of biomedical sciences, a school of health-related professions, a school of nursing and a school of public health on five campuses.
- Annually, there are more than 2 million patient visits at UMDNJ facilities and faculty practices at campuses in Newark, New Brunswick/Piscataway, Scotch Plains, Camden and Stratford. UMDNJ operates University Hospital, a Level I Trauma Center in Newark, and University Behavioral HealthCare, a statewide mental health and addiction services network.

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