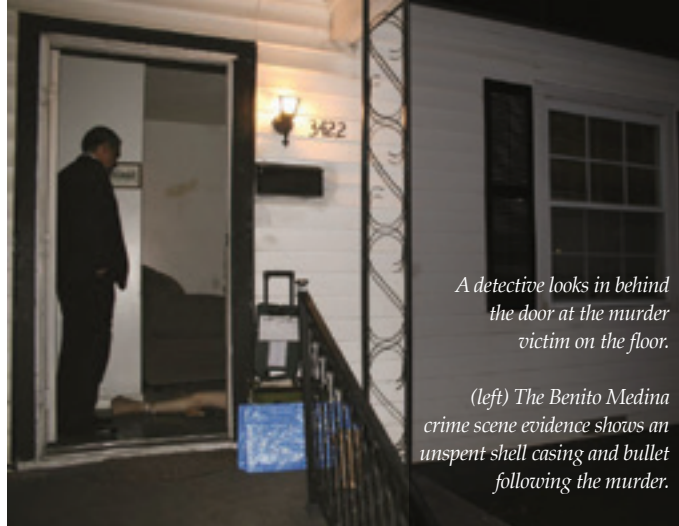


## Interrogation Full Circle



*A detective looks in behind the door at the murder victim on the floor.*

*(left) The Benito Medina crime scene evidence shows an unspent shell casing and bullet following the murder.*



*Benito Medina was one of the inmates interviewed by FLETC Law Enforcement Leadership Institute Division Chief Scott Donovan (left) and Dallas Police Department Senior Corporal Kevin Navarro (center) during the development of A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation. Medina confessed to acting as the getaway driver during the gang-related murder of an Immigration and Customs Enforcement employee.*

# How FLETC Partnered with Dallas to Develop Video-Based Training

**By Jeni A. Groot-Begnaud, Senior Instructor, Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), Glynco, Georgia**

**H**enry David Thoreau once said, “It takes two to speak truth, one to speak and another to hear.” While the philosopher certainly was not referring to criminal interrogations, this principle very much applies when an investigator sits across from a suspect in search of the truth behind an allegation. The Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC’s) Behavioral Science Division (BSD) strives to equip federal, state, and local law enforcement professionals with the best training possible as they work to obtain the truth. Recently, the division partnered with the Dallas Police Department (DPD) to develop and field a groundbreaking video-based training tool, *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation*. The training tool recognizes truth is found during criminal interrogations through an interaction involving two individuals with unique perspectives on a complex process and provides comprehensive analysis of the dynamics and decisions that influence the outcome of an interrogation. This arti-

cle explains the development and implementation of *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* and includes the story of the collaboration from the viewpoint of DPD Senior Corporal Kevin Navarro, one of the key individuals involved in its development. It also incorporates an opinion regarding the effectiveness of *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* provided by DPD Homicide Detective John Palmer, who is featured in the training tool.

The mission of the BSD is to provide law enforcement professionals with an understanding of human behavior that inspires interpersonal communication skills necessary to effectively protect and serve the U.S. public. The BSD vision is to bring out the best in law enforcement through understanding human behavior and communication. The division provides training to basic and advanced investigative and uniformed law enforcement personnel in a vast number of areas including interviewing, victim and witness awareness, conflict management, and managing abnormal behavior. This is

accomplished using a variety of instructional methodologies ranging from classroom lectures to practical scenarios where students interact with role players in realistic law enforcement situations.

BSD instructors, providing training in interviewing suspects, frequently receive requests from students to see examples of real interrogations. Though a number of federal agencies have recently revised their policies and now require the recording of suspect interviews, many federal agencies do not yet have a policy mandating recording interrogations. This reality makes it difficult to obtain video-recorded interrogations associated with federal investigations to present to students. The BSD continually works to improve training and recognizes the tremendous benefit students in basic and advanced training programs could reap from watching actual interrogations take place and analyzing the multitude of associated factors, including

- the suspect’s behavior and decision-making process,



- the dynamic between the interrogator and suspect, and
  - the techniques used by the interrogator.
- The BSD is fortunate to have the ability to call upon the expertise of a number of leading psychologists with whom the division has built relationships through its psychologist consortium. These experts agree there is always something to be gained when a law enforcement investigator can increase

In August 2011, FLETC Director Connie Patrick presented Dallas Police Chief David Brown with the A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation training tool. She also presented plaques expressing appreciation to the detectives highlighted in the tool's five case studies.

insight into the mind-set of the suspect before entering an interrogation room.

A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation is a video-based training tool resulting from the collaboration between the BSD and the DPD that began officially in 2009 and continues to this day with the development and delivery of this product. The training tool uses video to present case studies based on DPD homicide investigations with the objective of providing perspective on all aspects of the interrogation process. This is accomplished through the examination of video-recorded interrogations associated with specific homicide cases, interviews of detectives who conducted those interrogations, and follow-up interviews of the now incarcerated suspects. These three components were gathered by BSD and DPD subject matter experts before being compiled by the FLETC Media Support Division into a user-friendly DVD-based instructional tool.

The training tool consists of five DVDs. Each DVD is devoted to a single case study and contains a menu that allows the instructor to navigate through a presentation that emphasizes a variety of concepts associated with criminal interrogation. Two of the case studies highlight an investigation in which two suspects are interrogated regarding their involvement in the homicide and each interrogation is analyzed. An effort was made to select a variety of different homicide cases portraying offenders of different characteristics. The offenders range from a very high-ranking member in the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas to a young woman who plans a homicide to obtain bail money for her boyfriend. Some offenders were motivated by money or status, and others were motivated by pure emotion.

Each case study DVD includes a video introduction outlining key aspects of the investigation and the circumstances under which the interrogation or interrogations took place. Introductions contain information on victims in the featured homicide cases and the suspects' backgrounds. In addition to the introduction, the menu for each case study itemizes five subject areas from which an instructor can show video segments:

- Planning
- Rapport
- Themes
- Confession
- Core Principles

The DVDs are designed to allow instructors to show a video segment related to one of these areas that complements or reinforces their instruction and facilitates classroom discussion on the topic.

The majority of video segments included in the training tool are blends of video from

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the interrogations, inmate interviews, and detective interviews associated with particular cases which instructors commonly refer to as "360s." These video montages provide multiple perspectives on specific topics associated with criminal interrogation. Included in the compilation are some stand-alone clips featuring only interrogation video, inmate interview footage, or film from the interview of a detective, which are used to showcase a particular training principle. The video-based training tool is accompanied by an instructor guide book that provides a synopsis of the investigations, background on the investigating detectives, and comprehensive descriptions of all video clips included on the DVDs.

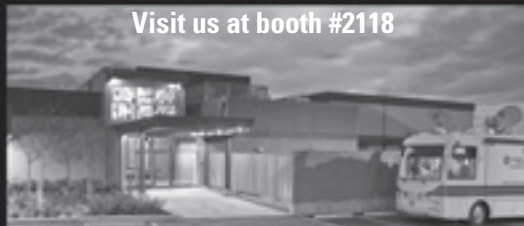
All 360 and stand-alone video segments included in the structured DVD training tool are also individually available to BSD

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Photo courtesy City of Phoenix Police Department

and DPD instructors in formats that allow them to be incorporated into classroom presentations in support of interviewing lesson plans.

A *360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* has been used by the BSD to provide training to FLETC students completing both basic and advanced training courses. The BSD's Advanced Interviewing for Law Enforcement Investigators Training Program includes a four-hour block designated to *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* and copresented by the BSD and the DPD. This training tool is flex-

ible, and instructors can present specific case studies to illustrate particular principles based on their training audience. Instructors are able to navigate through the DVD menus to select video clips that best reinforce their instructional objectives or answer questions posed by trainees. The adaptable nature of *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* has allowed for tailored instruction to various FLETC partner organizations, as well as state and local law enforcement entities by both the BSD and the DPD. The feedback that the BSD has received regarding this training has been

overwhelmingly positive. Students find the insight provided by inmates and detectives invaluable and consistently emphasize their appreciation for the opportunity to view real interrogations and analyze the dynamic that influences a suspect's decision-making process.

The BSD was fortunate to partner with the DPD, which gave FLETC the ability to gain access to footage from critical homicide interrogations. The DPD videos on which *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* case studies are based consist of homicide suspect interrogations; however,

## 5 Years in the Making: A Personal Story Behind the Development of *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation*

By Kevin Navarro, Senior Corporal, Dallas, Texas, Police Department

In August 2006, the Dallas, Texas, Police Department (DPD) Academy class number 168 celebrated its 25th anniversary. My classmate and friend, Scott Donovan, attended the reunion. Scott was a Dallas police officer for three years before leaving the department to pursue a career as a special agent with the United States Secret Service. When Scott retired from the Secret Service, he joined the Behavioral Science Division (BSD) of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Glynco, Georgia, and eventually became a FLETC division chief. I remained with the DPD where I served as a homicide detective for many years before transferring to the department's academy as an instructor.

So here we were at that class reunion, both working to train new generations of law enforcement officers, 25 years after the beginning of our own separate law enforcement careers. In spite of the divergent paths of those careers, we shared a strong interest in the art of interrogation. Scott was a polygraph examiner and an interrogator for the Secret Service; I honed my interrogation skills investigating homicides in an era when the murder rate was extremely high in Dallas. During the reunion, Scott and I discussed how beneficial it would be to collaborate on an interrogation training product that presented law enforcement trainees with unprecedented insight into the interrogation process.

We thought it would be particularly insightful to gather information from suspects who had been interrogated regarding their perspectives on the interrogation process and the individuals who interrogated them. There were successful examples of this type of project such as the Exceptional Case Study Project, accomplished by the United States Secret

Service and National Institute of Justice, and as well as Project Slammer, conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Justice.

Both projects provide unique insight into offender motivations and behaviors in the areas of assassins, near assassins, and espionage in videotaped interviews of those types of offenders. We felt the information provided by suspects who were interrogated by law enforcement officers in homicide investigations could likewise be invaluable and incorporated in groundbreaking training materials.

As we parted ways after our class reunion, this training concept was nothing more than the idea of two buddies. It took a little time, but this brainstorm grew to be much more. In July 2009, Scott contacted me and asked if I was still interested in pursuing such a project. He asked me to crunch numbers and explore the logistics it would take to make this idea a reality using homicide investigations conducted by the DPD.

Soon after, current FLETC Assistant Director for the Glynco Training Directorate Dominick Braccio traveled to Dallas for a meeting to discuss what this potential project would entail. FLETC and the DPD agreed to partner in the development of a case study and video-based training tool using video-recorded interrogations, interviews of the detectives who conducted those interrogations, and follow-up interviews of the now incarcerated suspects to examine criminal interrogation. Our brainstorm now had funding and a title: *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation*. There was a tremendous amount of work ahead.

After meeting with Dallas homicide detectives to talk about this project and potential cases that could be included, Scott and I selected 21 offenders with whom to speak. The video-recorded interrogations of those offenders were assimilated, and the work began. This work included our travel to several Texas prisons to interview these offenders. We logged many miles as these offenders were housed in seven different Texas prisons, and these correctional facilities were spread across 1,500 miles. We were accompanied on this journey by professionals from the FLETC

Media Support Division (MSD) who ensured that the important information the inmates provided was impeccably recorded. Wardens at the prisons were extremely helpful in accommodating our access to the inmates and the placement of media equipment.

Five homicide investigations were eventually chosen as the focus of the case studies for this project, with two of the cases including two offenders. The next step in development of this training tool was the interviews of Dallas homicide detectives who conducted the interrogations of the suspects associated with the case studies. These detectives explained the particulars of these cases and provided their views on the interrogations they conducted of suspects in each investigation. They also shared their perspectives on some key principles of interrogation and strategies when interacting with suspects. Again, the FLETC MSD was a critical part of the process as its members recorded these interviews in top studio quality.

We then had the three components of our 360-degree look at interrogation, but the work did not stop there. Over the next several months, a number of subject matter experts from the FLETC BSD spent countless hours reviewing the interrogations, inmate interviews, and detective interviews. They identified and organized training points in each video that were subsequently edited and compiled by FLETC MSD professionals into video segments included in this unique training tool.

Five years after the brainstorming session at our class reunion, the idea that two former fellow rookies envisioned is now a reality and a training tool I wish I had when I began my career as an investigator. I hope *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* enhances the interrogation training of criminal investigators for years to come. As society and law enforcement become increasingly dependent on science and technology, it is my strong belief that skillful interrogation remains one of the greatest resources in investigating and prosecuting criminal activity. Every juror wants to hear a suspect say that he or she committed the crime, and well-prepared interrogators make that happen.

the training principles demonstrated in those recorded interrogations and reiterated in the words of the inmates and the detectives apply universally. Homicide investigations were initially chosen to showcase verbal and nonverbal cues to deception when dealing with investigations in which the stakes are high for the offender. The interrogation skills instructed and reinforced by using this training tool can be applied to any interrogation regardless of the underlying crime or investigation being conducted.

FLETC educates thousands of students each year who will go on to conduct federal, state, local, and administrative investigations. Whether they are questioning an individual in a tax matter or a homicide, when investigators in any sort of case interrogate suspects, they seek to hear the truth from someone who must make a decision to speak it. There are a multitude of factors and actions on the part of an interrogator that can influ-

ence whether or not the truth eventually becomes known and incorporated in the resolution of an investigation. *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* provides law enforcement students and practitioners with a firsthand look at interrogations taking place, the thoughts of detectives listening for the truth, and the perceptions of suspects who eventually spoke the truth. Having this comprehensive perspective and the ability to analyze the complex dynamics and strategy an interrogation entails provides investigators a valuable resource they can apply to the development of their own skills and in their search for the truth. ♦

This article is adapted from an article that was originally published in the Spring 2012 issue of the *FLETC Journal*.



*Callie Marshall, an inmate serving time for her role in a drug-related homicide, was interviewed in prison regarding her interrogation by Dallas Police Department Homicide Detectives Kenneth Penrod and Scott Sayers.*

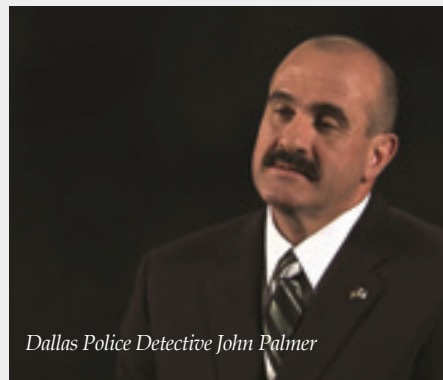
## Words from the Field: A Featured Detective Speaks about the Value of A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation

By John Palmer, Detective, Homicide Unit, Dallas, Texas, Police Department

Law enforcement continues to change as a career choice. Degrees in criminal justice are a relatively new development in the world of academia. Technology has developed at a pace that is difficult to keep up with. Law enforcement has made a remarkable migration from what was once considered a blue-collar career path to what is now considered a profession. All professions have one thing in common: Training and education is essential for those working within the profession.

Investigative excellence at the Dallas, Texas, Police Department (DPD) can be traced to Captain Will Fritz. He was known for his role in the investigation of President Kennedy's assassination. Captain Fritz laid the foundation of investigative excellence at DPD and embraced technologies as they became available. He always placed a high value on interrogation skills; today, the DPD Homicide Unit maintains that high regard for interrogation skills, as detectives are expected to become good interrogators.

When I transferred into the DPD Homicide Unit, I had the good fortune to work with some gifted interrogators. I observed that those gifted interrogators shared several common traits—some of which might also be



*Dallas Police Detective John Palmer*

considered character flaws. During conversations, they were all quick witted, skilled at separating fact from fiction, hypersensitive, and able to pick up on the nuances during conversations. Importantly, they all were willing to talk about anything with anyone.

My transfer into the unit came with some formal training, and I worked hard to become a good interrogator. However, I learned that interrogation skills are one of the most difficult skill sets to teach during formal training. I also realized that I was not one of those gifted interrogators.

The DPD began videotaping interviews and interrogations in 2005. This opened opportunities for me to view interrogations in progress and later review my own recorded interrogations and those of other detectives. I began to mimic some of the methods and techniques of other detectives, and I began to improve as an interrogator. As I continued to watch the interrogations, I continued to improve. Soon, the DPD as a whole got better at interrogating.

The DPD and FLETC partnership then asked the question, "What was happening during these interviews that resulted in confessions?" To get the answer, they went to the source: They traveled to Texas prisons and asked the convicted inmates why they confessed during interrogations. The inmate interviews were revealing, and the DPD's Kevin Navarro and the Secret Service's Scott Donovan recognized another excellent source of training material from those interviews. FLETC assembled a video production team, returned to the Texas prisons, and recorded the inmate interviews.

The partnership now had videos of interrogations and recorded interviews from inmates. The circle was completed by turning the tables on the interrogators and videotaping interviews with them. The collaboration has been named *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation*.

As with all new things within law enforcement, I had some doubts about the project. When I saw the inmate interviews, though, I became curious, especially once I observed FLETC's ability to organize and present information. I was impressed, and my doubts turned into confidence. FLETC has combined practical exercises, classroom instruction, and the video library into a training tool that is unique and powerful.

Interrogation skills always will be a difficult skill set to teach, and there always will be those individuals that have a specific aptitude for it. *A 360-Degree Look at Criminal Interrogation* is a tool to fill the growing demand for training within our profession for investigative interrogators.