



**ELEKTROIMPULSWAFFE
TASER**

POLIZEILICHER NAHKAMPF

**DER FALL D. – TRAGISCHER
EINSATZ ODER POLIZEIGEWALT**

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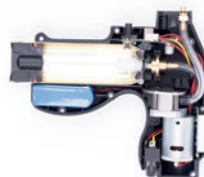
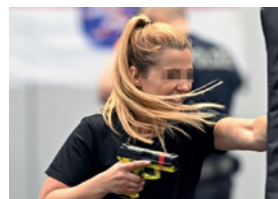
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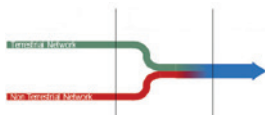
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BY ECKHARD NIEBERGALL

(President Polizeitrainer in Deutschland e.V.)



DEAR READERS,

HOW IT ALL BEGAN...

When I first met **John Meyer** in the early 1990s, he was still head of the Heckler & Koch International Training Division. This group included former SWAT and SAS members who were highly skilled in tactics and weapons training. This became clear during a workshop in which John and his team demonstrated both the alternative use of the MP5 sling at the time and the use of short and long weapons in close combat. This meeting led to a long-standing collaboration, which we continued when John founded TeamOne Network in the US and we founded PiD in Germany. Whether at PiD seminars or the EUROPEAN POLICE TRAINER CONFERENCE, John and his team were always there when we needed support.

What united us was our belief in our shared mission: officer survival! The desire to do everything we could to improve our colleagues' chances of survival through professional training. With every obstacle we had to overcome, our mutual respect and appreciation grew. This gave rise to a bond and friendship that you don't often find in life. A gift from fate.

Joe Willis was my counterpart in the US military police in Wiesbaden when I ran a joint training program for patrol officers and military police at the Hessian Police Academy. He stood out for his high level of commitment and reliability, which I had never seen before in military personnel.

After his return from the Iraq War, we successfully continued our collaboration until the end of his service in Germany. In the years that followed, we remained in regular contact and exchanged information, particularly on topics such as suicide in the police force. Despite the physical distance, a friendship developed with him as well, because the "chemistry" was right. When Joe began his position as Deputy Executive Director at the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILEETA), a proposal to collaborate with PiD immediately followed.

THE CIRCLE IS COMPLETE

Within a few months, the PiD and ILEETA teams developed a cooperation agreement that was presented at the annual conferences.

In the future, both organizations will develop joint training programs, knowledge platforms, and international initiatives to promote and improve police work and knowledge exchange worldwide. TeamOne Network, with John Meyer as an innovative partner, will also be involved. This closes the circle of more than three decades of dedicated cooperation with an eye toward an exciting future. I feel privileged to have spent time with people like John and Joe and developed ideas, one of which is now coming true. As the writer Victor Hugo so aptly put it, "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." ■

YOUR ECKHARD NIEBERGALL



f.l.t.r.: Joe Willis & Harvey Hedden (ILEETA), Ecko Niebergall (PiD), John Meyer & Steve Johnson (TeamOne Network).

SHINE THE LIGHT: A CALL TO CONNECTION IN THE FACE OF FIRST RESPONDER SUICIDE

BY JOE WILLIS, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ILEETA

The room was nearly pitch black.

Behind me, projected on the screen, was a single image: a hand holding up a phone, its flashlight casting a beam through darkness. Above it, two simple words: **Three Questions.**

I asked the audience to turn on their phone flashlights and point them at the stage. Then I asked:

"If you know of at least one police officer from your country who has died by suicide, please leave your flashlight on."

The room remained aglow. Nearly every light stayed up.

"If you've lost an officer from your agency to suicide, keep your flashlight up."

Only a few lights went down.

"If that officer was your friend or a close co-worker, please leave your flashlight on for just one more moment."

Some lights dimmed. Many did not.

And then, something powerful happened, everyone began to look around the room. The emotion in the air was heavy and undeniable. We could see each other. Not just as silhouettes in the dark, but as human beings linked by a shared burden, a shared grief.

In that moment, it was clear: suicide has touched every country. Every agency. And some, very deeply.

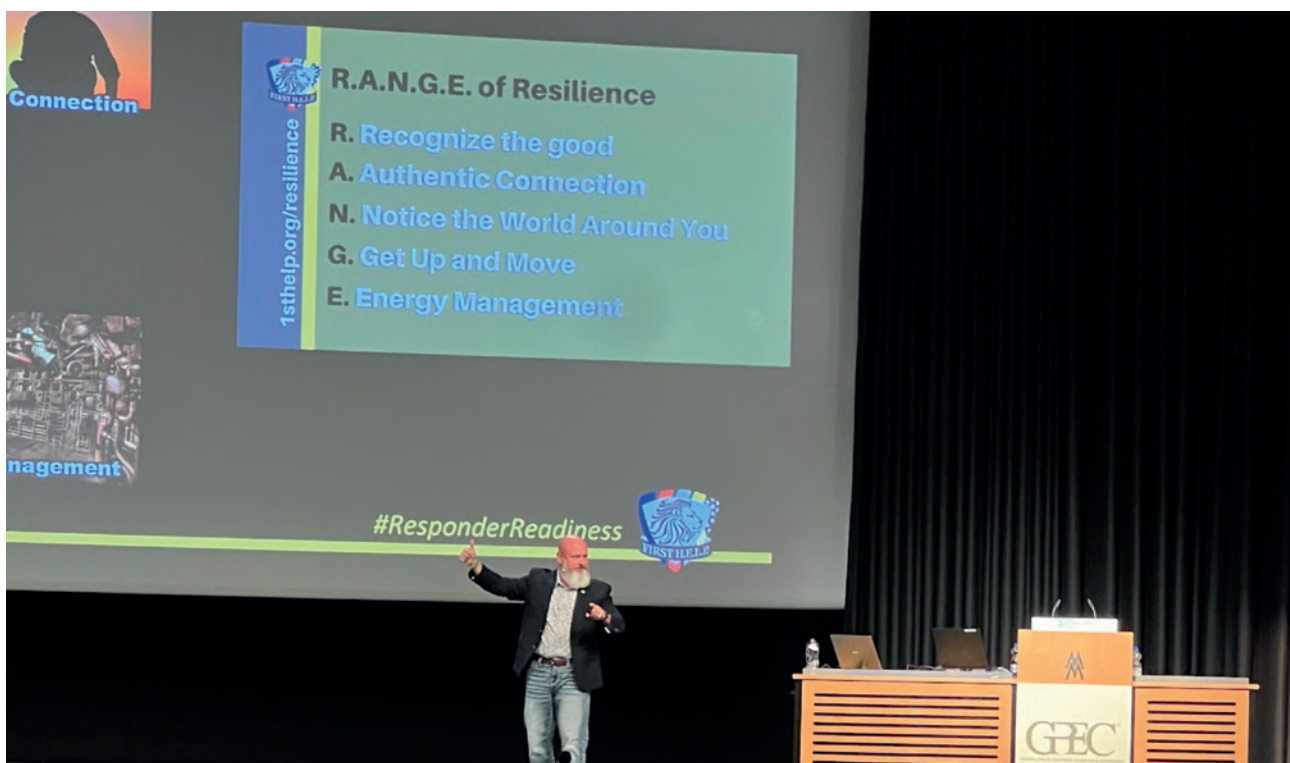
That moment came near the end of my presentation at the European Police Trainers Conference in May 2024, hosted by Polizei Trainers in Deutschland. It was a transitional moment for me, too. I had just accepted the role of Deputy

Executive Director of the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILEETA), and this was my final appearance as Chief Learning Officer at First H.E.L.P.

BY THE NUMBERS

My purpose that day was to share what First H.E.L.P. and CNA Corporation had recently uncovered through one of the most comprehensive analyses of law enforcement suicides ever conducted. Our joint report examined 1,287 deaths by suicide among U.S. public safety personnel between 2016 and 2022. The findings were sobering.

According to the report (Lawrence & Dockstader, 2024), suicide among public safety personnel mirrors many of the occupational and psychological risks we've long suspected, but the data adds clarity:



Joe Willis on stage during the European Policetrainer Conference.

- Male officers constituted the majority (92%), aligning with workforce demographics. Yet, female officers had a higher suicide rate compared to women in the general population.
- Two-thirds were in committed relationships, and 66% had children, underscoring the deep familial impact.
- Veterans did not show disproportionately higher suicide rates; 23% had military backgrounds, close to their 25% representation in the workforce.
- 72% were still on active duty, and suicides were nearly evenly spread across the first 30 years of service.
- Only 17% had sought help for PTSD, and just 5% had documented prior suicide attempts.
- 94% died by suicide while off duty. In 7% of cases, they also attempted or committed a homicide.

Most striking of all: 60% of officers had at least one life challenge prior to death – ranging from PTSD, depression, and financial issues to work-related investigations and relationship problems. And yet, 40% had no documented challenges at all, a likely reflection of how deeply internalized and invisible these battles often are.

SUICIDE IS JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

We can no longer afford to treat suicide as an isolated crisis. It is the tip of the iceberg – visible only after cumulative stress, shame, disconnection, and despair have already taken hold beneath the surface. As public safety leaders and educators, we must address the whole iceberg.

THAT MEANS

1. Expand the #RANGE of Resilience

Equip officers with tools to manage their energy, cultivate authentic relationships, and build physical and emotional resilience. These are not luxuries. They are requirements.

2. Address Changes in Behavior

Peer awareness is critical. The people most likely to notice subtle shifts are those closest to the officer. A culture that encourages speaking up and checking in can literally save lives.

3. Keep the Conversation Going

Programs like #IWillListen create a space for vulnerability and support. The more we normalize these conversations, the more we dismantle stigma.

Though I now serve with ILEETA, my respect and admiration for First H.E.L.P. and their ongoing mission remain deep and unwavering. They continue to lead the way in collecting reliable, compassionate data and helping families and agencies navigate the aftermath of suicide. To learn more about First H.E.L.P. visit 1sthelpp.org.

The data is powerful. But the flashlight moment was unforgettable. That was human. And ultimately, that's the lesson I carry forward: Let's not wait for the darkness to see each other. Let's shine the light, today.

- Let us be the ones who smile.
- Let us be the ones who ask the question.
- Let us be the ones who shine the light.

Joe Willis

Reference:

Lawrence, D. S., & Dockstader, J. (2024). Law enforcement deaths by suicide. Arlington, VA: CNA Corporation. <https://www.cna.org>



JOE WILLIS

Joe Willis is the Deputy Executive Director of ILEETA and a retired U.S. Army First Sergeant. He served in Wiesbaden, Germany from 2005–2009, where he first began working with Polizei Trainers in Deutschland. Through his role with ILEETA, he is committed to strengthening international collaboration and continuing to build the bridge between law enforcement trainers across borders.