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Why I am one of many former MPD officers

Minneapolis police officers have gotten no support in the aftermath of the 2020 protests, and many are struggling with PTSD.

By **Kim Voss**

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Aaron Lavinsky • Star Tribune

The Minneapolis Police Third Precinct station was evacuated and destroyed May 28, 2020.

I sit here in mourning.

I had a friend over for dinner recently and she told me that two Washington, D.C., police officers have committed suicide since the civil unrest at the Capitol on Jan. 6. I know so many people will jump to blame former President Donald Trump, but I don't. I know better.

You see, I was a lieutenant with the Minneapolis Police Department, assigned to the Third Precinct. I had been a police officer in Minnesota for 37 years. I use the words "was" and "had been" because effective this month, I am retired.

I did not retire because I wanted to retire, despite many thinking 37 years was enough. I didn't feel as if I was done just yet. I still had a mission to complete and that is what makes leaving difficult.

I don't know how to respond when people congratulate me on my retirement or thank me for my years of service to the community. I want to scream "This isn't what I wanted to do," and "Don't thank me."

While our leadership held us back and we remained unsupported by our state, our city and our police administration, our neighborhoods burned. We felt helpless. And to add insult to injury, they gave up our home, and called it "just bricks and mortar."

It wasn't just bricks and mortar to us.

If you want to totally break down the morale and mission of police officers, hold them back and leave them hanging without any support. What you are left with is a department that sees almost one-third of its sworn personnel leave due to PTSD both diagnosed and undiagnosed. I am one of those.

It's hard to get up every day and be happy to go to your job feeling like damaged goods. I received over 4,000 voicemails of vitriolic hate, and I didn't have a phone left or a desk to put a phone on. My office had been firebombed.

The people now being touted as "peaceful protesters" hacked the city's e-mail and subscribed me to more than 1,000 online sites. "I" have done everything from signing petitions to abolish the death penalty to subscribing to the Harvard Law Review and Change.org. And my personal favorite: I am Cowgirl911 on FarmersOnly.com. Although I should thank the trolls for saying that I am a 30-year-old Gemini.

I got a call in the middle of the night when I was out with officers in the riots from a "friend of the police" who told me to immediately shut down my credit cards, as all my information was out on the dark web.

I called my husband (a retired officer), who of course wasn't sleeping due to the threats on our home from these "peaceful protesters," and he immediately shut down our credit. I also forwarded the information to others in the Third Precinct to secure their credit.

When I reported to those above me what had happened, I got snickers and "I don't know why you would cancel your credit cards." I made several requests that the old city e-mail that was compromised be shut down and repeatedly was told that it could not be.

These are examples of how I was not supported, and I am only one person in a large department.

I was one of four lieutenants assigned to the Third Precinct. Outsiders probably thought that those above me would have reached out to see how I and my people were doing during all this. This never happened.

At one point during the initial riots, I had self-deployed to work with the overnight shift of young officers. A high-ranking administrator asked why I was out there since my regular shift was during the day. I explained that this was where I needed to be. They asked then if I could "break off" one or two officers to check the memorial.

I explained that due to officer safety issues, we were traveling three or four to a squad and responding to 911 calls in the Third Precinct.

That was the extent of hearing from anyone above me.

To this day, no one from the police administration has checked in with me, and I know that I'm not alone on that.

This brings me back around to my initial statement that I am in mourning that two Washington, D.C., officers have committed suicide. I pray every day. I have developed a gratitude attitude as I work through the issues the civil unrest in Minneapolis has left me with. I encourage those struggling with PTSD to seek help.

As horrible as it sounds, it was helpful that there were so many of us at one location, exchanging stories and venting. At one point, one officer asked me if I would have ever in my wildest dreams thought, 35 years ago, that we would all be openly talking about things like not being able to sleep, always feeling as if "they" were following you home and the big one — feelings.

I do think that we as the Minneapolis police family are blessed that (knock on wood) we have not lost any of our warriors to suicide after what we are all struggling with from 2020. And to any of the other warriors out there struggling, please reach out for help; the life you save may be your own, and you are worth saving.

To those in the public with a shocked look on their faces, unable to understand what went wrong here in Minneapolis and in Washington, D.C., it's not rocket science. We learn from the past. The city and police leadership in Minneapolis should have anticipated issues. In our world, you plan for the worst and hope for the best, all the while monitoring all those secret little sites that we have access to.

When those in leadership disregard warning flags and stick their heads in the sand, it is the officers on the front line who pay the price. This seems also to have been the case in Washington. Trump is not responsible for what happened on Jan. 6. That was a planned, well-choreographed event that leadership knew about two weeks in advance.

Did they learn nothing from Minneapolis and the failure of leadership?

Here in Minneapolis, I would venture to guess that if someone, anyone, in leadership from the city or the Police Department had reached out to us and talked to us as if they really cared about us, you would not be seeing one-third of our department leaving. That is a lot of experience walking away.

Kim Voss, of Roseville, is a retired lieutenant from the Minneapolis Police Department.