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March 6, 1985



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Dear Captain Bennett:

message - To know that I somehow helped you through your ordeal means more than words can say. I only know that faith, courage and a sense of humor have always been my mainstays. I learned these from my best friend, my mother Nelle.

I am pleased to hear that you are coming along so well and Nancy and I will keep you in our thoughts and prayers for a continued recovery.

God bless you.

Sincerely,

A

RONALD REAGAN

Captain Charles W. Bennett, Jr.
Commander, S.W.A.T. Team
Richmond, Virginia Bureau of Police
1025 Hull Street
Richmond, Virginia 23224

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Example
Captain Charles W. Bennett, Jr.
Commander, S.W.A.T. Team
Richmond, Virginia Bureau of
Police
1025 Hull Street
Richmond, Virginia 23224

AH
President Ronald W. Reagan
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D. C.

ml
Dear President Reagan,

I am writing to thank you for your help when I was recently shot and wounded. Obviously, you don't recall this help but let me explain.

I am a Police Captain with the Richmond, Virginia Bureau of Police and am the Commander of the Special Weapons and Tactics Team here. On December 18, 1984 we were faced with a hostage situation involving the abduction of a two-year old girl by an armed man. At approximately 2:30 AM he set fire to the apartment where he was holding the child and stated that he would kill her. It became necessary for the Team to forcibly enter the apartment in an effort to rescue the child. As I entered the apartment after other team members had forced open the door I was confronted with a raging fire and a room filled with smoke. The abductor was running to the hottest part of the fire shouting that he was going to throw the little girl into it. I managed to block his advance and grabbed the child. A struggle ensued but the child was freed and carried to safety by one of our team members. However, as I thrust the child away from the abductor he shot me once in the abdomen, the bullet entering my body just below my protective body armor.

As you are so well aware it is not immediately obvious that you are wounded, even if it is a serious wound. We were forced to shoot the abductor to subdue him and following the gun battle my team members dragged me down the stairs from the burning apartment to the outside and safety. Once I was aware that I had been seriously wounded two thoughts entered my mind: As a Christian, I called on the name of the Lord for protection and strength, and I remembered your example when you were shot.

The Lord was faithful to me, and because of your example I remained conscious, kept a positive outlook, and retained my sense of humor. This was extremely important to me and to others around me (my wife, team members, doctors) in

successfully treating my wounds. The initial surgery was successful, I spent only 15 days in the hospital, and although I will have to undergo another operation full recovery is expected.

Courage is an important thing in any leader and your courage was an example for me to follow. I want to thank you for exhibiting that courage and for the help it has been to me when I was faced with the personal challenge of being shot. Because of you, I have been able to set an example for younger police officers who may one day also face being wounded.

I know that many people, and the news media, seem to have forgotten your suffering and courage when you were wounded. I haven't and I never will. Again, thank you for the example that made my journey easier.

Sincerely,

Charles W. Bennett, Jr.

Captain Charles W. Bennett, Jr.
Commander, S.W.A.T. Team
Richmond, Virginia Bureau of
Police

City man is killed, two officers shot in hostage siege

By Jim Mason
News Leader staff writer

A shotgun-wielding man holding a 2-year-old girl hostage was shot fatally and a Richmond police captain was wounded early today as police stormed the man's upstairs apartment at 2303 Decatur St. in South Richmond.

Another police officer also was wounded slightly in the incident.

A few minutes before the police assault about 2:45 a.m., the man, identified as Clarence Bassett, 27, had set fire to his apartment and threatened to "blow the apartment up and kill everybody," Richmond Police Chief Frank S. Duling said.

Earlier, Bassett had told police he would shoot anyone who tried to enter



Capt. Charles W. Bennett was

his apartment and take the child from him, Duling said.

Duling said Bassett was wounded in an exchange of fire with police officers and died at 3:21 a.m. at Medical College of Virginia Hospital.

Capt. Charles W. Bennett Jr., commander of the police special weapons and tactics team that stormed the apartment to rescue the child, was wounded in the abdomen below his bulletproof vest.

Bennett, 37, underwent surgery at MCV. Duling said hospital officials told him that Bennett was in stable condition and that his wound was not believed to be "life-threatening."

Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney Aubrey M. Davis Jr., who joined Duling at a midmorning news conference at police headquarters, said Bennett was "the first officer through the door" of the apartment.

Duling said Bennett made the decision to enter the apartment forcibly "in an attempt to rescue the child from Mr. Bassett and the fire."

"The child was rescued and was not injured," Duling said. He identified the 2-year-old as Sherri Antoinette Armstrong.

Patrolman Michael J. Arrighi also was wounded in the exchange of shots, Duling said. Arrighi suffered a "blunt trauma wound but was saved from further injury by his protective vest," the chief said.

"Once entry was made, there were shots from inside, and SWAT team members advised that an officer (Bennett) had been shot," said Duling, who was at the scene.

In addition to the shotgun, Bassett was reported to have had a revolver,

Hostage

Continued from Page 1

Duling said. He added that police had not determined what weapon Bennett was shot with.

Davis said such details would have to await receipt of findings of the state medical examiner's office and ballistics experts.

Before SWAT officers charged the apartment, Bassett had kept the 2-year-old hostage and held police at bay for almost two hours, according to police.

Duling said the child's mother,

Sherri Armstrong, called police about 12:50 and reported that a friend, Bassett, had hit her in the head with a shotgun on the street and had abducted her 2-year-old daughter.

The call was made from the area of Pilkington and Hull streets. Police officers searched the area and determined that Bassett was holding the child hostage in his apartment at 2303 Decatur St., Duling said.

When police officers knocked on the door of Bassett's upstairs apartment, Duling said, Bassett yelled that he was armed and would shoot anyone who tried to enter and take the child from him.

Police sealed off the area around the building and Bassett began to barricade the windows and doors and continued to shout threats at police officers, Duling said.

He gave these further details:

About 1:20, officers called for the SWAT team and a hostage negotiator.

About 1:45, acting Capt. Frederic Pleasants Jr., the negotiator, arrived and began talking with Bassett from the bottom of the apartment building's stairs. Pleasants made no progress in trying to talk Bassett into releasing the child.

About 2:35, Bassett, visibly agitated and having been seen by officers outside holding the girl up at a window, set fire to the apartment and threatened to blow it up.

About 2:45, Bennett decided to storm the apartment and led the charge.

child, and a friend had stayed with Bassett for about a week recently but no longer were doing so, according to a relative who lives near the apartment building.

Bennett, a 16-year veteran of the Police Bureau, long has been considered one of its most able young officers. He was named the bureau's rookie of the year in 1969.

His previous assignments have included those of detective and head of training for the bureau.

When he took command of the Second Precinct, he headed the first precinct to use the four-day-a-week, 10-hour-a-day work schedule. That schedule puts more police officers on the streets during peak hours for crimes, and arrests in the precinct have increased significantly.

Over the years, Bennett has developed a reputation as one of the bureau's experts in hostage negotiations. In 1976, he spent almost 90 minutes inside a house with an escaped convict who was armed with a rifle and holding three hostages. Bennett talked the man into surrendering peacefully.

In an interview in 1977, Bennett said he enjoys such risky recreational pursuits as skydiving, scuba diving and spelunking because overcoming the fears involved helped him in his jobs.

Regarding hostage situations, he said, "Time is on your side . . . There are times when you're within a hair breadth of being shot. If you're wor-