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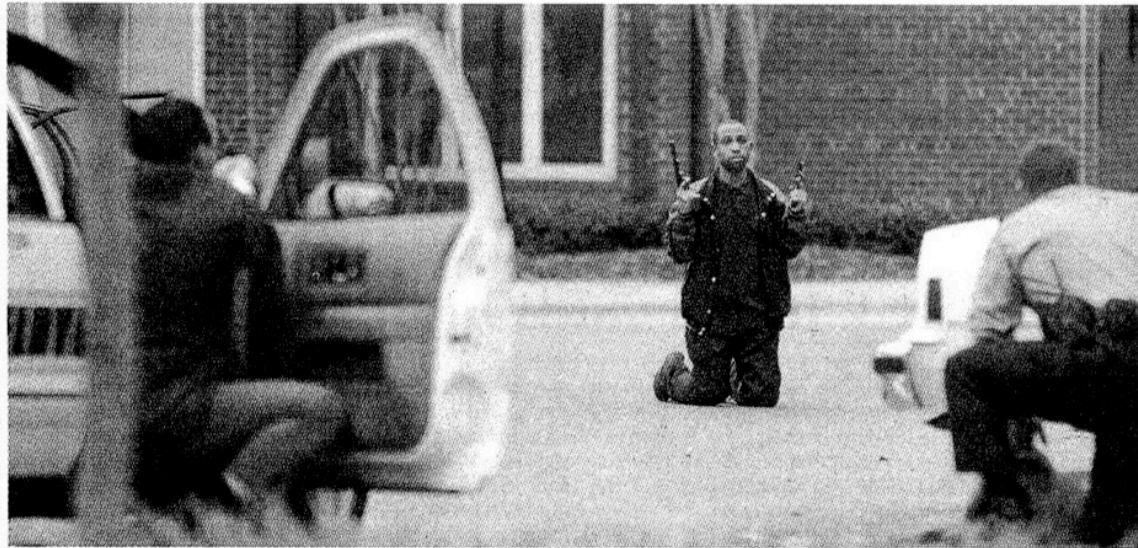
**THE MAN**  
Brian Wood was shot to death in an exchange of gunfire when he confronted police after allegedly attempting to kidnap his estranged wife in Amesbury.



**THE WEAPONS**  
Wood reportedly had weapons like these on him at the scene and used what looked to be the .45-caliber pistol to shoot at police.

## 'SUICIDE BY COP'

### The method, the madness



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Much like this Jan. 6, 1997 incident in Shelby, N.C., in which Henry Cornelius Brown, Jr. (center) was eventually shot to death by police after holding them at bay, Massachusetts State Police say Brian Wood was committing suicide by giving them no choice but to fire back at him.

By GRACE RUBENSTEIN AND TIM WACKER  
STAFF WRITERS

**T**hey thought they were responding to a routine noise complaint, but back on Dec. 2, 1987, five Haverhill police officers became the unfortunate and unknowing triggermen in a Methuen man's suicide.

Dressed in camouflage with a pistol in one hand and a rifle in the other, the man is believed to have shot at police to get them to fire back and kill him — a phenomenon known as “suicide by cop.”

It was a situation eerily similar to what happened in Amesbury early Friday morning. Armed with three handguns and an assault rifle, a distraught Brian Wood, 47, provoked a 50-round firefight with officers by firing first. Friends say the mild-mannered boat mechanic and marksman likely wanted to die, but couldn't muster pulling the trigger on himself.

Instead, he had three Amesbury police officers do it for him, friends say. Wood died at the scene, the victim of multiple gunshot wounds all over his

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## Life over in matter of seconds

By GRACE RUBENSTEIN  
STAFF WRITER

AMESBURY — As the shots rang out on Collins Street early Friday morning, Brian D. Wood looked to police like a madman, firing wildly even as the officers' bullets riddled his body.

But it wasn't madness, friends and police say, that led the boat mechanic with no criminal record into the fierce firefight that ripped through the quiet neighborhood and ended his life — it was heartbreak.

His relationship with his wife, Karen Wood, had been “amicable” since she moved out of their home at 15 Larkin Road in Newbury's Byfield section in June, said Sgt. Mark D. Gagnon.

Wood, 47, had tried for months to make himself a better husband and win her back, Gagnon said, but on Thursday — their 11th wedding anniversary — he realized it was over.

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# SECONDS: Friends, police say man was distraught over marriage

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Around 12:30 Friday morning, he called her cell phone from his cell phone and said he wanted to talk. She could tell he was intoxicated.

"She said, 'No, it's not a good time, Brian. You're intoxicated. You're drunk.'" said Gagnon, who interviewed Karen Wood just after the shootout. "Eventually she had to tell him the boyfriend was there. He knew. He knew there was a boyfriend."

When she told him she didn't want him to come over that night, Gagnon said, "He said, 'Well, it's too late. I'm already here.' Within seconds there was a knock on the back door."

Through the window panes of the locked door, she told him to go away. Then he gave her the ultimatum that he would repeat several times during their conversation: "Tonight, it's victory or death."

Karen Wood told him to go home or she would call the police, and he replied, "Bring it on. I'll kill them all."

Knowing that her husband — licensed to carry a concealed weapon — often packed a gun, she told police he was armed. She could see him sitting in his silver Toyota Tacoma pickup outside her kitchen window.

As Officers Jason E. Kooken, Michael J. Purvis and David P. Noyes stopped their cruisers at either end of the street, they saw the reverse lights of Wood's truck as he backed out of his wife's driveway. With his headlights off, he started

driving slowly east on Collins Street, toward Kooken.

Kooken turned his spotlight on the pickup and Noyes switched on his blue flashing lights to get Wood to stop.

Within two car lengths of Kooken's cruiser, Wood pulled his truck over to the right and stepped out. As the truck — which he neglected to put in parking gear — kept rolling, officers said he appeared to be reaching for the loaded assault rifle later found inside the cab.

When he couldn't reach the rifle as his truck rolled downhill, he grabbed a .45-caliber handgun from the holster on his side and aimed at Kooken. With his partners in the line of fire behind Wood, the officer couldn't shoot. Kooken dove to the ground and scurried on all fours behind his cruiser — Wood following the officer's movements with his handgun as if he were hunting him, Lt. Gary P. Ingham Sr. said.

Standing beside their cruisers behind the gunman, the other two officers yelled at him to drop the weapon. Wood whirled and started shooting. Purvis took cover behind his cruiser, while Noyes, armed with a patrol rifle, ran to the sidewalk to escape the line of fire.

The pickup truck kept rolling east about 100 feet, nearly hitting the cruiser of Officer Denis A. Champagne Jr. as he turned onto the street.

As all three officers shot back, an estimated 50 bullets sprayed

through the street, "blue lights going and smoke and gunfire and people screaming," Ingham said.

The shots shattered windows, popped tires and tore off a side mirror on the cruisers. Two of Wood's rounds were found lodged in the motor of Noyes' cruiser. Another bullet matching Wood's gun ripped through a wood fence and through the window of 30 Collins St.

Police estimate that about 40 of the rounds came from the officers' guns.

Officers at the scene reported that Wood "looked mad. He looked like he was in a rage," Gagnon said.

By that point, Wood was riddled with so many bullets that he was like the walking dead, police said, but he kept shooting. The initial autopsy report showed gunshots to his eye, heart, stomach, foot and both legs, police said. One of his thumbs was shot off.

He was still firing and appeared to be loading another magazine into his handgun as he fell face down. Noyes and Purvis approached Wood, who was still moving slightly. The officers pulled a 9 mm and another .45-caliber handgun out of two holsters at the back of Wood's pants and slid them across the pavement to Officer Larry E. Bybee, who had arrived just as the shooting began. They rolled the man over to take the other handgun — the one he had been firing — out from under him.

"From the time they approached him with the cruiser lights, it all went down in a matter of seconds,"

Gagnon said.

By the time paramedics arrived on the scene, Wood was dead.

After the shooting, police found books and computer printouts in the gunman's truck on how to make a marriage work and be a better husband. They found notes Wood had written to himself listing things he needed to do, like pay her compliments on her appearance and things she did.

In June, Gagnon said, Brian Wood helped his wife move to Amesbury. They kept in contact and had lunch together occasionally. But the relationship became awkward for Karen Wood as she tried to tell her husband they were headed for divorce and he kept hoping to patch things up, police said.

The Woods had tentative plans for lunch Thursday, but when he showed up at the Amesbury doctor's office where she works, she told him it was a bad idea.

"She said, 'We're getting a divorce. Why are we going to go

through these motions?'" Gagnon said. "I think that's when he realized that she was serious."

He gave her the anniversary card — a nice, generic one, Gagnon said — and he left. The pair didn't talk again until he made the phone call late that night.

During the shootout, Karen Wood and her boyfriend stayed inside. Afterward, Jennifer Lee-Poulin, the Police Department's victim and witness advocate, took the woman to another location and spent most of the night with her, Gagnon said.

Yesterday, the only sounds along the tree-lined street were a distant lawnmower and fallen leaves blowing across the pavement.

With frustration, Ingham denies suggestions he has heard that Wood — an avid hunter — could have hit the officers but chose not to. He says Wood was "absolutely" shooting to kill, and he is "stunned" that no officers wound up dead. Still, Ingham said he believes there is a "strong possibility" that Wood wanted offi-

cers to end his life.

Marksmanship, he said, "doesn't mean anything when you're shooting in a real-life situation and people are shooting back at you."

Officers Kooken, Noyes, Purvis, Champagne and Bybee have been home since the gunfight. Ingham said the five officers will start counseling with the Boston Police Department's stress unit today and may take off as much time as they need to recover.

Ron Barrett of Plum Island, a friend of Brian Wood for 25 years, said Wood's mother, father and two sisters, who all live in the area, are emotionally exhausted.

"They're just crying and crying," he said, adding that the pain is deepened because they don't know when Wood's body will be returned from the medical examiner in Boston and they can't plan a funeral.

"This whole thing is just a bunch of emotions," Barrett said, "and the only one that's away from it is Brian."

# SUICIDE: People driven to the brink of disaster

■ *Continued from Page A1*

body. Police would not say how many times he was hit, but his vehicle was peppered with bullet holes.

Experts say suicide by cop is an underreported and growing problem for police. A Harvard University study four years ago found 11 percent of victims of police shootings between 1987 and 1997 could be classified as suicide by cop, the name used as the title of the study.

Why people do it is a mystery that can only be answered by those who commit suicide by cop, experts say. Some are distraught by an unspeakable crime they have committed, while others are driven by unrequited love. Many provoke police to kill them for the same reason friends said Wood did it — because they are too afraid to kill themselves.

It is not a victimless crime, and experts say those who usually suffer most are the officers who pull the trigger.

## Was he killing himself?

No one knows what was going through Wood's mind in the moments before he confronted police. No one can say with certainty if his ultimate goal was to lure police to take his life. Amesbury police Lt. Gary P. Ingham Sr. would only say, "I think there's a good possibility."

Wood's was a violent death for a man with an apparently peaceful past. He had no previous criminal record, left no suicide note and had no record of domestic violence. All are often hallmarks of suicide by cop, but not requirements, said West Coast suicide expert Rebecca Stincelli.

Taking a pile of weapons over to his estranged wife's home with a threat to use them, however, was classic suicide-by-cop behavior, she said. At the door to her home, Wood told his wife: "It's victory or death. ... Bring them on. I'll kill them all (police)."

"Calling (his wife) first could have been a punishment for her," Stincelli said. "He wanted her to know the reason why he was doing this. That could have been a punishment to her."

Friends and neighbors of the Woods said they were a nice couple, and many were unaware they had split up in June. One said Wood raised his wife's two children from a previous marriage — who still lived with him in his Byfield home — like

his own. So when Karen Wood left him and appeared to be spending time with another man, Wood had the sort of motive that has driven others to kill themselves.

"If it involves a relationship and if the person had a relationship that was somewhat controlling, yes," it fits the "suicide-by-cop profile," Stincelli said. "Gambling, debt, anger, or relationships — all can make a person feel out of control. And the suicide is just looking to regain that control even by the most ultimate means."

## Driven to death

Experts say many instances of these deliberate deaths bear similar hallmarks. The people who draw police fire are often terrified by a crime they have just committed, deeply depressed or — like Wood — heartbroken.

Stincelli called Wood's case similar to three other suicide by cop cases she has studied:

■ **Just three weeks ago**, James Glidden of Plymouth, Mass., was shot three times after threatening police with a 12-inch military knife. Glidden's history of depression and a suicide note he left suggested he intended to harm no one but himself.

■ **A little over three years ago**, Taylor Bradley of Sacramento, Calif., was killed in the front seat of his Jeep Wrangler after threatening his wife with a 9 mm Beretta. When police told him to give up, he aimed the weapon and was shot several times.

■ **Five years ago**, Syosset, N.Y., college student Moshe Pergament refused to put down a gun he pointed at police and was shot by officers, who learned later the weapon was a toy.

Typically, suicide by cop occurs when a person kills someone else and then decides to take his own life, said Dr. Jack Levin, director of the Brudnick Center on Violence at Northeastern University.

"I think what happens — and I've seen it happen so many times — is an individual finds that it was easier to kill others than to kill himself," he said. "When he finally figures out that he can't commit suicide by his own hands or his own gun, he refuses to put down his guns facing a police officer or he decides to go to trial (in a state that allows capital punishment) so that he's executed."

Since no one can know a shooter's

motivation but himself, suicide by cop probably happens more often than people realize, he said.

In these situations, Levin said, gunmen "have given up hope. They feel as though they've gone too far in committing a terrible crime, even if they haven't taken someone else's life. ... Suicidal rampages are often planned, but the act of suicide by cop is an act of desperation.

"It occurs at the end of the road, when someone is so distraught that he feels life is no longer worth living, and I think it may be the only spontaneous part to his crime."

In February of 2001, Secret Service agents wounded a man holding a gun and accused of firing shots at the White House and said they believe he wanted to be shot, and the phenomenon is not rare, studies show. One Los Angeles County study found at least 10 percent of police shootings between 1986 and 1997 fit the pattern of suicide by cop.

## Officers forced to kill

Haverhill police Sgt. John P. Arahovites was one of those involved in the 1987 shootout with the camouflage-clad man. At the time, he said, officers had no idea of the man's intentions, and firing back was a matter of survival.

"When it's going on, you're not thinking that this guy is trying to commit suicide," he said. "He's trying to kill you, so your survival instincts kick in and all your training kicks in."

"In my mind, the bullets are the bullets," he said. "He very well could have killed one of us."

When the firefight was over and the urgency faded, the officers involved all dealt with the killing differently, and several were "pretty shook up," Arahovites said.

"Several guys had diarrhea for a couple of days, and we all were ordered at the time to go see a psychologist. Some guys couldn't sleep," he said. "Another one never worked another night shift again. He was on overtime that night. A few guys, it didn't seem to bother."

Haverhill's Deputy Police Chief Robert D. Gariepy said he has seen studies showing that officers often leave their jobs after being involved in a shooting. He saw it happen himself after a partner in his former job in Hartford, Conn., shot and killed a teenager fleeing the scene of a crime.

"I could see his emotional stress every single night," he said of the partner. "When I was working with

him, when I was talking to him, he must have asked 20 times, 'Did I do the right thing?' and not long after that he put in his papers and terminated the job."

When confronted with a violent situation, police are trained to refrain from firing as long as officers and bystanders are not at risk. But if a suspect starts shooting, Gariepy said, police are trained to shoot back. He said he won't take chances with the lives of officers or innocent victims by guessing at the gunman's motivation.

Gariepy and Arahovites said it makes little difference in officers' emotions if the shooter they killed meant to commit suicide or not.

"Sometimes we can reason to ourselves that this person was designed to do this and so it's really not our fault," Gariepy said, "but subjectively there's always a little seed in the back of your mind that there might have been something you could do that might have changed that."

It's that feeling that Stincelli says bothers officers involved in such incidents most.

"They can justify a shooting if it's a bank robber or if it's someone holding a gun to a child," Stincelli said. "But cops that I talked to involved in suicide by cop, they are so devastated when they have to kill somebody. Especially when they find out that it was somebody who had emotional distress."

The five Amesbury officers in-

involved in Friday's shootout were treated immediately by counselors — something that is standard in such cases, said Mayor David Hildt. Tonight, they will attend their first round of counseling with the Boston Police Department's stress unit.

Ingham said he plans to give the officers as much time off as they need to recover.

Since 1987, Arahovites said, the

Haverhill department has added more resources to help officers deal with such situations. Besides a fitness center in the station, they are offered counselors 24 hours a day, he said. Officers involved in a shooting also automatically get time off to recover.

"You have a real adrenaline high and then you get real worn out," he said. "You come down. You've got to get your equilibrium back."

