

How to Cover High Sec



CHIEF CHARLES A. MOOSE'S NEWS BRIEFINGS CAPTIVATED THE WORLD DURING THE OCTOBER SNIPERS' SPREE NEAR WASHINGTON, DC. ©2003 DION P. SPARGER IFPO.

Showing up at a high profile news event with proper credentials will get you in. Right? Sometimes, but not always unless you are prepared. The Sniper Press Conferences in Rockville, Maryland during the month of October 2002 were under high security for obvious reasons -- everyone was a potential victim. As is widely known, snipers were shooting innocent victims at random in Maryland, Virginia and the D. C. Metropolitan area. Fortunately, I was able to cover some of the press conferences because I did have proper credentials and I had an ongoing working relationship with law enforcement in the area.

Being able to respond instantly to breaking news events is usually not an option for me. I work a full time job so to cover breaking news is very difficult -- unless it happens on a day that I am not working. I do sometimes carry my camera bag to work just in case I can get to a news event afterward. But it's the ongoing news events that capture most of my attention because I can work them into my schedule. And in the D. C. area where I live there have been an abundance of them in the last year or so.

What usually transpires is that once the news event occurs, and if it goes on more than a day or so, I contact the police department in that jurisdiction and ask for their media relations division. Once I have reached someone I immediately give them my full name, my location, the name of the media organization that I represent (American Image Press), and a telephone number where I can be reached.

By experience I have learned that police like details up front about anyone they are speaking with on the telephone. I try to be as forthcoming as possible; in return they have always been very helpful. For example, during the Chandra Levy murder investigation, they would fax me the latest police department press releases regarding the case upon my request. On one occasion the chief media relations officer called me back with details about a press conference that was to take place later that day. I was

Continued on Page 40



Priority and Breaking News Events

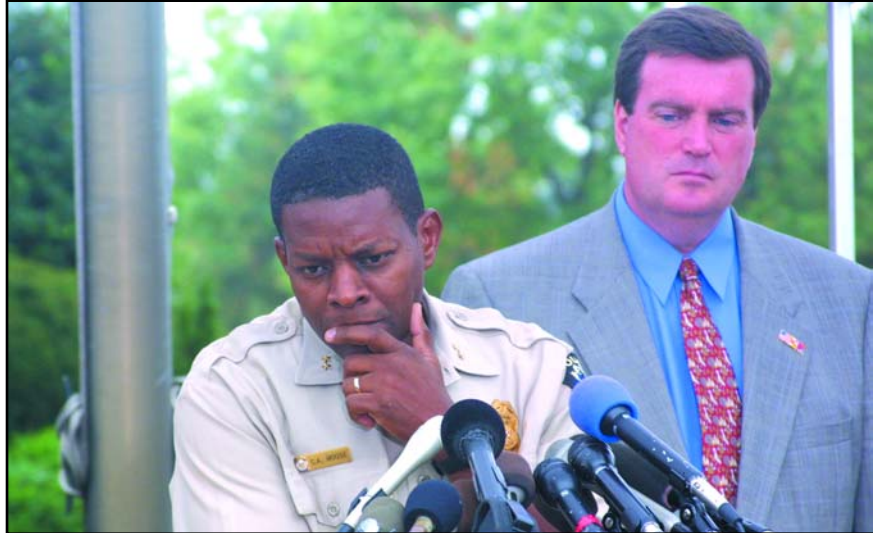
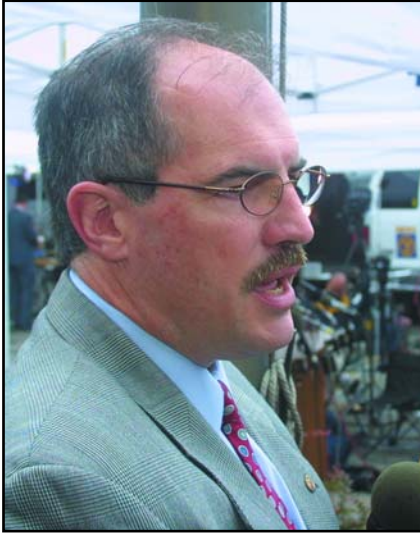
By DION P. SPARGER IFPO, WASHINGTON, DC

MONTGOMERY COUNTY MARYLAND POLICE CHIEF CHARLES A. MOOSE HEADED THE MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL TASK FORCE ASSIGNED TO APPREHEND THE SNIPERS WHO TARGETED MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN MARYLAND, VIRGINIA AND WASHINGTON, D. C. OVER THREE WEEKS IN OCTOBER, 2002. THE TASK FORCE INCLUDED THE BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO AND FIREARMS (ATF), THE F. B. I., STATE AND LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT IN MARYLAND, VIRGINIA AND WASHINGTON, D. C. THE SUSPECTED KILLERS WERE APPREHENDED ON OCTOBER 24, 2002 IN MARYLAND.



HOW TO COVER HIGH SECURITY NEWS EVENTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6



The Daily Briefings Were Often Emotional. The F. B. I., Chief Moose, Maryland State Officials and others held daily news briefings in Rockville, Maryland. *Photos ©2002 Dion P. Sparger*

very surprised and very grateful for that type of consideration. I later saw him at one of the press conferences and took the opportunity to thank him for his consideration and the information. But more important what I wanted was for him to be able to put my face with my name and to remember me for future reference.

While covering a range of events, my experience with the media relations divisions in the D. C. Metropolitan Police Departments has always been positive. They have always shared any information they could.

I try to attend the major news events when I can for two main reasons: 1) to get good photojournalistic shots, and 2) to keep my face before the police and members of the media. Usually, I try to get to press conferences early, even though they usually start later than scheduled. Once I have been screened by a police officer and given access to the restricted area, I use this time to walk around and look over the area for good vantage points.

A key goal of mine is to talk with those police officers who are handling security, especially the ones who are in charge of screening members of the press for access. I introduce myself and tell them the organization I repre-

sent. I may engage them in light conversation but, being careful not to impede them from doing their job. I want my face, name and mode of conduct to be 'burned into their memory' for the next time I need to attend a news event in their jurisdiction.

Police officers are highly-trained professionals. Part of their job is to remember faces and names and that works in my favor. For example, I attended two news events in the same police jurisdiction four months or so apart. The first was an Amtrak train wreck, the second was one of the press conferences during the sniper investigation. By coincidence, the same police officer was providing security at both events and remembered me. But he still did his job and thoroughly checked my credentials.

I also try to talk with other photographers and TV camera personnel at these events to get additional information and to have them remember me as well. You never know when it may be helpful to have a member of the media vouch for you should the occasion ever arise.

There is a sort of standard format for news conferences. Usually a police officer or other official will come out to the podium and give the press the

two-minute warning. This lets everyone know they are about to start and the network camera crews can prepare to go live.

At the Sniper Press Conferences, because of the tight security, it was difficult to get a good camera shot. The network TV cameras are always given the prime spots so I had to shoot from the side or from a vantage point between and behind the TV cameras using a longer focal length lens. Kneeling below the TV cameras in the front row is an option, but the news reporters are camped out there so they can ask questions. I try to find some harmony between getting the best shot available from the spots I can find without infringing on the other photographers and cameramen.

At all times I keep a good balance of being professional and courteous but also being aggressive in getting the type of photojournalistic images that are needed to make a good presentation.

My American Image Gold Press Credentials are priceless. Without them I could not have gained access to these events. I also believe that a familiar face at the scene is also invaluable. Both are entwined in my success and inseparable for me. Ω