

SO CLOSE TO A SECOND DEATH

BY BRETT WILLIAMS

Sergeant Michael Hutchinson was lucky to survive the shooting which cost the life of Brevet Sergeant Jason Doig. What he came to feel afterward was “bullied” out of his job.



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ergeant Michael Hutchinson dislikes but does not hate the gunman who

shot him and killed his colleague, Brevet Sergeant Jason Doig, at Senior in 2023. He believes in the theory that to carry hatred is to damage oneself rather than the hated. Free of anger and bitterness is how he wants to live out what he calls “the last quarter of my life”.

No one in policing would have condemned Hutchinson, then 59, if he had chosen to hate. Right in front of him, he had seen the shotgun blast which, fired by Jaydn Stimson, killed 53-year-old Doig. And there was the blast Hutchinson himself took, to his head and abdomen, and the health issues which would beset him for life.

The irony was that, as a veteran country cop, Hutchinson had known Stimson, then 26, since long before the killer fired a shotgun at him.

He knew his whole family, and no animosity had ever existed between Hutchinson and Stimson. Exchanges between the two were indeed friendly. Hutchinson always offered a greeting and, once or twice, some parent-like advice.

In a Bordertown youth centre Hutchinson ran for around a dozen years, he had taught Stimson how to play pool. And, later, if ever he saw Stimson and his brothers playing pool at the Bordertown Hotel, he always acknowledged them.

Even as a year-one kid, Stimson had sat in on school talks Hutchinson gave about police. No thought then, of course, that that kid would grow into a killer and shoot the school-visiting cop after gunning down his colleague.

On that Thursday evening, November 16, Bordertown OC Hutchinson was not even rostered

to work the afternoon shift. He had returned to duty after receiving a call from Bordertown colleague Senior Constable Rebekah Cass around 9:40pm.

She had briefed him on a report of domestic violence at the Stimson place. And it seemed the violence might have involved the shooting of a dog. Once Hutchinson had a grasp of, and assessed, the circumstances he decided to return to duty.

“Knowing there was only one member on duty the next day,” he says, “I couldn’t leave it for just her to do. It was a big enough job, it ticked all the boxes in relation to high-risk DV, so ‘let’s do it tonight’ (I decided).”

“So, it was going to be Bek and me who were going to do it but, then, Jason just turned up. I believe he was monitoring the job.

“We do that all the time. We hear a job, start cruising toward the place and, if needed, we jump in. You have to do that all the time because we’re so light-on up that way.”

Hutchinson was “quite happy” to have Lucindale OC Doig, a firearms training officer, as back-up to him and Cass. He had worked with him many times, knew how he operated, and perceived “a great aura” about him.

Indeed, the previous week, Doig had finished a stint relieving at Bordertown. And, just days before he died, he had led Hutchinson and others in firearms training.

But now, the need was for a plan before any move on the Stimson house. The officers gathered at Bordertown police station where Cass briefed Hutchinson and Doig. Hutchinson undertook the standard firearms licence and criminal-record checks on Stimson.

“I looked up real estate (online) too,” he says, “to check out the house and make sure I had the right one. I’d been

to that house before for another job so I kind of knew the place. Jaydn wasn’t (living) in it at the time. I did a mud map of the house on the whiteboard as far as I remembered it.”

After 23 years based in Bordertown, Hutchinson had a stack of local knowledge. He knew the town of Senior intimately. On Senior Road over the years, he had dealt with three fatal crashes and numerous house fires.

“I’ve been almost at every house bar two on Senior Road,” he says. “And from the briefing from Bek, we knew it was only Jaydn living there (in his house).”

The trio agreed on how best to approach the house. Hutchinson would take the front and Doig the back. Cass would remain outside to cover both officers in case Stimson was lurking somewhere outdoors with a surprise attack in mind.

So, with their action plan, the officers set out in two cars for the Stimson house. On the 15km drive, Hutchinson rang Stimson and left a voice message. He indicated that he and his colleagues were on their way to him (Stimson) to check on his welfare.

Also part of his message was not to panic at the sight of the police cars. It was good advice given that, when they got to the scene, the officers activated their red and blue emergency lights. In the darkness, at that late hour, the cars were then unmistakable.



1. The western side of the Stimson house.
2. The back wall of the house leading up to the dual rear entry.
3. The rear entry area with doorways either side.
4. Front view of the house and the door through which Hutchinson entered.



So, now at the property, the officers headed cautiously down the driveway. The car headlights, directed at the house, gave some light to their path. As they had planned, Doig went to the back and Hutchinson to the front, where he announced himself.

"Jaydn," he called out. "Sarge here. You know me. Where are you? We've come to check on your welfare."

No response came from Stimson, and Hutchinson could see only one light on in the house, in the master bedroom.

"The bed had been pulled to the side," he recalls, "which probably indicated to me that he (Stimson) was inside the house somewhere."

Acting on instinct, Hutchinson entered the darkened house through one of two front sliding doors and began to look for Stimson. The sizeable home consisted of 10 main rooms: five bedrooms, two living areas, two bathrooms, and a kitchen-dining area.

From an equally sizeable garage was direct entry to an expansive living area at the back of the house. Hutchinson headed in that direction as he searched rooms for, but found no sign of, Stimson.

Once in that living area, he discovered that, in the adjoining laundry, was a washing machine – which was running. So, there was the chance that, if it was Stimson who had started the machine, he was somewhere in, or close to, the house.



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Hutchinson and Doig came together in the living area, spoke momentarily, and established that neither of them had seen any sign of Stimson. What they spotted up against the western wall of that back room, however, was an open gun safe with no firearms inside.

"At that stage, I thought: 'Has he (Stimson) gone out the back?' " Hutchinson says. "I'm then thinking about Bek outside (and her safety).



So, I thought: 'We'll clear the house, reassess, and then, if we can't find him quickly, we'll come back in daylight when it's probably a lot safer.'

"But, at that stage, we were still calling out to him. There was no noise. Nothing there."

That was until they checked the last bedroom on the other side of that western living-room wall. The bedroom adjoined not only the living area but also the garage to its north.

As Hutchinson remembers it, he was just a metre behind Doig who moved first to look into the room, partially illuminated by light from the garage. But Doig appeared not to see anyone in there and nor did Hutchinson, who "basically just looked over his (Doig's) shoulder".

Then, from that metre-or-so behind Doig, Hutchinson looked to his right, into the garage. He saw no one but, in

an instant, a shotgun blast rang out! Hutchinson saw the muzzle flash and Stimson behind it and realized Doig had taken the blast!

"I was like: 'F--k! Where did he (Stimson) come from?!' " Hutchinson recalls.

Stimson had emerged from that bedroom. Behind a short length of the western living-room wall, which extended into the bedroom, was where he had kept himself out of sight.

Hutchinson was now extremely vulnerable. He desperately needed cover and so "bolted" around four metres into the garage. Its doorway was barely a pace away from the bedroom door.

But nothing in the garage, other than some flimsy cardboard packing boxes, offered Hutchinson any protection. Nonetheless, he literally rolled in behind them and, in the process, tore his right medial meniscus.

5. The room Hutchinson dived into for cover from Stimson.

6. Passageway leading to wet area and bedrooms.

7. Kitchen-dining area at the front of the house.

8-9 The bedroom from which Stimson emerged and fired on Doig and Hutchinson.

10. The rear living area leading up to the rooms at the centre of the shooting.

"I felt my knee pop," he says. "But I had to put that behind me. I can remember hearing another shot or shots, but the sequence of shots gets a little bit grey (in my memory)."

In another instant, Stimson appeared in the garage doorway, still armed with a shotgun.

"I pulled out my gun and, as I came out from behind the boxes, he shot at me, and I returned fire," Hutchinson recalls. "After I'd fired my shots, he wasn't there in the doorway anymore."

Just moments before all the gunfire, Cass had stepped out the blackness of the night and into the house. When only a few paces beyond the front door, she heard the shots but did not know who had fired at whom. Nor did she know who, if anyone, had taken a hit.

Without knowing if she was herself now under threat from Stimson,



“Jaydn had the shotgun open, so I think he was about to reload. And there was a .22 (calibre rifle) there as well, with a number of shells on the floor.”

she moved through the house in search of her two colleagues.

Hutchinson now had serious gunshot wounds to his abdomen, which several pellets had penetrated. And still more pellets had grazed the top of his head. His multiple injuries could have led him to give up on pursuing Stimson, but Hutchinson took the opposite course.

He knew that, unless he cut off any potential for the attack to continue, he and his two colleagues would still be at risk. His focus now was to find and contain Stimson.

Hutchinson headed for the adjoining bedroom where he suspected Stimson had gone. Near the doorway was Doig lying badly injured on the floor. He was indeed near death from serious gunshot wounds to his torso.

Hutchinson stepped into the bedroom where he found Stimson who had collapsed onto the floor with wounds to his torso and leg.

“Jaydn had the shotgun open,” Hutchinson recalls, “so I think he was about to reload. And there was a .22 (calibre rifle) there as well, with a number of shells on the floor.

“I approached him, explained that I was going to handcuff him, and he knew who I was. So, I handcuffed him, quickly checked his injuries, and he was coherent.

“But Jason was the priority. I went to him and he had a significant wound to the top right of his torso, and another one lower down.”

Great responsibility now fell to Hutchinson and Cass. She had by then found her injured colleagues, and she and Hutchinson would do all they could to save Doig. But it would, of course, be under extreme mental and emotional tension.

The pair tended Doig's wounds and began an exchange of messages with police communications.

“We heard that ambos were going to be 45 minutes,” Hutchinson says. “My thought was: ‘Bugger this. I can get Jason to the hospital quicker.’

“I started dragging him along the floor, but I was simply stuffed. I couldn't do it. I didn't actually realize then that I'd been shot in the head.”

Doig was suffering his heaviest blood loss from the wound to his upper torso. With bare-handed pressure, both Cass and Hutchinson tried desperately to stem the flow. Soon, however, Hutchinson sensed that Doig had stopped breathing.

“I put my head to his heart, started CPR, and got him back,” he says. “But he stopped breathing again soon afterwards, so I did CPR again, and got him back again.”

No matter how ferociously Hutchinson tried to save his mate and colleague, it was never going to be enough. Doig soon stopped breathing again. It appeared to Hutchinson that he had died but, despite his own injuries, he refused to stop trying to resuscitate him.

Ambos soon arrived and made equally valiant attempts to try to revive the slain Doig with CPR and a defibrillator. And after the ambos came paramedics who took over but could not save Doig.

“We cut open his vest, took off his gun belt, and saw the significance of the wound,” Hutchinson says. “We didn't realize the significance of the injury until that was all cut off.

“My guess is he (Stimson) must've been only 30 centimetres or less away when he shot Jason. It was a full blast.”

Finally, Hutchinson had to step away, not from his duty but from Doig. He went about contacting his inspector and briefing police communications. One comms operator, whose brilliance he still remembers from that night, was Senior Constable 1C Jon Fuller.

"He was great," Hutchinson says. "His professionalism was spot on. His calmness helped me to stay calm. I wasn't bombarded with questions. It was clear, concise feedback."

Back-up officers were soon on the scene with their expertise too – Brevet Sergeant Kirsty Wood, Senior Constable Dan Coventry and Constable Rick Hornberger. For them, and other officers who would respond to the incident, police procedures were now critical.

"Obviously, they separated us (Bek and me)," Hutchinson recalls, "and Dan Coventry took my firearm. (Senior Constable 1C) Tenille

Schmidt, (based) at Bordertown at the time, had been recalled. She came in and took Bek into town.

"I went with (Senior Constable 1C) Luke Hutchesson, who was a traffic member. He brought his own brand-new, private car and took me in (to hospital). On the trip, I was just concerned about putting blood over his new car.

"On the way in, it was broadcast officially over the radio that Jason had passed. But I knew that already. And I thought: 'If I had the same situation, I would never take anyone in the house with me.' My greatest regret of the whole thing is losing Jason on my watch."

At Bordertown Hospital, Hutchinson underwent urgent treatment. He never knew until then that shotgun pellets had grazed the top of his head. It was not his most painful injury, nor was the one to his abdomen, in which eight shotgun pellets had lodged. Most agonizing was the damage to his knee.

In any case, he was soon on a Royal Flying Doctor Service plane headed for Adelaide. On board with him was a young girl who had injured herself in a fall. The plane got to Adelaide at 5:15am on November 17 with Hutchinson bound for Flinders Medical Centre.

There, he underwent surgery to remove two of the eight shotgun pellets from his abdomen. The medical advice was that extracting the other six was likely to cause more damage than would leaving them in place.

"The only thing I wanted was to see my daughters," Hutchinson says. "They all came down and saw me at Flinders. When they came, I said: 'You tell me what you want and don't want to know,' and I walked them through it (the shooting).

"There might have been a couple of tears, but they were fairly stoic. My wife, Debbie, was very stoic too. It's not the first time I've been injured at a job."

Discharged from hospital after a few days under observation, Hutchinson moved to a nearby hotel. Police nurse Sarah Thiele called on him every couple of days to check and redress his wounds. He stayed in Adelaide on and off up until, and after, the Doig funeral.



11 – 13.
Gunshot wounds to Hutchinson's abdomen and head.

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It suited him not to return to Bordertown too soon. He suspected that, back there, life for him would be like “the goldfish in the bowl”. Avoiding the curious was his strong preference.

When he eventually did return to Bordertown, he “basically hid in my little cocoon until I was ready to come out”.

“Probably the first time I actually met anyone in public was on Australia Day (2024),” he says. “That was about the first time I actually spoke to the public about the incident, as much as I could. And that was tough.

“They were looking for everything (as far as detail) and, obviously, you can’t say too much. All I could say was: ‘I’ve got my injuries and I’m recovering. Jason’s obviously died and he was a great fellow.’ And I just said: ‘Thank you,’ for the community support. That helped get me through everything.”

And get through everything he has, although not without lingering physical and psychological scars. Images from the shooting were always going to remain with Hutchinson – everything from the shotgun muzzle flash to Doig near death on the floor.

“It’s usually the first thing I’ll wake up and think about in the morning,” he says, “and it’s usually the last thing I’m thinking about at night. I’ll probably think about it six to 10 times every day.

“When I’m in bed, I’ll wake up during the night and, to stop thinking about it, put audio books onto my earphones and listen to that. And that gives me that distraction.”

And, of course, the shotgun blast came with lasting physical consequences as well. Since the surgery to remove pellets from his abdomen, Hutchinson has undergone two knee operations.

“I cannot sit down for more than an hour,” he explains. “I’ve got to get up and walk around. It’s a constant two on the pain scale on the side (of the abdomen) and it can spike up to a five.

“On bad days, I go to bed and basically just lie in the foetal position waiting for the medication to kick in. At one stage I think I was taking 17 tablets a day. Some days are better than others.

“I get anxiety with sudden, loud bangs and flashing. So, thunderstorms are great – not. (I wear) eye patches, earplugs.”

“I felt absolutely betrayed. I put my body on the line for that ... position and now they were ripping it away from me.”

While community support delighted and truly helped Hutchinson, he found himself let down by SAPOL. After the Doig funeral, he received no meaningful contact from management for five months.

Finally, in April 2024, a trio of SAPOL staffers, including a return-to-work co-ordinator, turned up at his home.

Hutchinson soon found that his visitors had not come to negotiate or even compromise insofar as his return-to-work arrangements. They insisted that his preference, to return to Bordertown on light duties, was out of the question. Adelaide was where they stipulated he would have to base himself.

“Then,” he says, “after the meeting, they went and had a conversation outside my house for 15 minutes. I don’t know what they were talking about, but I can guess it was me. I thought: ‘Yeah, not great.’ That was the first of many kicks (in the gut).”

The whole episode struck Hutchinson as simply not right. Left distressed by the staffers’ edict, he called on the Police Association for help. And the association responded immediately, referring him to law firm Tindall Gask Bentley Lawyers.

Police Association president Wade Burns spoke of the SAPOL treatment of Hutchinson as not just uncaring but also damaging to his recovery.

“Here was a member who had seen his colleague killed and had himself been shot,” Burns says. “It’s impossible to overstate the impact of a trauma that intense.

“Michael suffered, his family suffered, and SAPOL chose to add to their plight. He sought nothing more than to return to Bordertown on light duties.

“It shouldn’t have mattered whether or not that suited the employer. SAPOL should’ve been falling over itself with gratitude for Michael and his bravery and accommodated him accordingly.”

Not until nine months after the shooting did Hutchinson get to participate in his first “proper” return-to-work meeting. And the message was still the same: no light duties for him at Bordertown.

What he had been through, and his heroism, carried no weight with SAPOL – not when it came to the matter of his return to work.

Hutchinson “really did get annoyed” at that meeting and asked for the SAPOL edict in writing. He also made his feelings known.

“I feel ostracized and disenfranchised by everything that’s going on,” he told the meeting. “I want to get back to work at Bordertown. This is what I want.”

Then from SAPOL came the idea to appoint an additional sergeant to Bordertown. As Hutchinson understood it, that appointee would perform operational functions while he would return to his post but only perform administrative duties.

Both he and the association considered the idea completely unworkable.

Nonetheless, SAPOL advertised the position of Bordertown police station OC in the *Police Gazette* (September 18, 2024). And, at the time,

no medical evidence existed to indicate that Hutchinson would not, or could not, ultimately return to full operational duties.

So, Hutchinson again turned to the Police Association which took up the fight for him. That ended with the withdrawal of the advertisement. But then came another return-to-work meeting on November 19 – with five SAPOL representatives.

SAPOL seemed not to have considered the potential for that many of its people to intimidate Hutchinson and his wife. So, Police Association president Wade Burns and assistant secretary Steve Whetton both attended the meeting with him.

“So, thankfully, I had them with me on my side at that meeting,” Hutchinson says. “They (SAPOL) again said: ‘We’re going to do this (two-sergeants) proposal.’ It was such a kick in the guts.

“I’d spent 23 years looking after this town. I had this wealth of knowledge and experience I could pass on to my subordinates, but they (SAPOL) wouldn’t listen.

“I felt absolutely betrayed. It’s not my fault that I got shot. I put my body on the line for that town and for that position and now they were ripping it away from me.”

Hutchinson felt the meeting “going downhill badly”.

“It was probably one of the worst meetings I’ve ever had in my life,” he says. “I was just getting annoyed, getting overloaded, and my wife was almost crying.”

A resolution, which would satisfy Hutchinson, was looking unlikely – until Burns came up with one. He suggested to the meeting that SAPOL transfer Hutchinson to Nuriootpa. It was to there, after all, that he would eventually retire.

“Wade said: ‘He can go to Nuri and finish his time there under his own steam,’ ” Hutchinson recalls. “And, all of a sudden, the meeting changed, like completely 180 (degrees).”

The Nuriootpa resolution was one Hutchinson could accept. And by fronting SAPOL, Burns and Whetton had won it for him. His move to Nuriootpa went ahead.

So, that was the return-to-work dilemma overcome. But Hutchinson still felt continuously cast as the forgotten employee. It seemed to him that all he had risked, and the heavy price he had paid, meant little to SAPOL.

And SAPOL repeatedly showed his perception to be reality. In September last year, for example, it failed to invite him and Cass to one of the most meaningful tributes to Doig. It was the unveiling of the Jason Doig plaque on the police academy wall of remembrance.

Presented to members of the Doig family were the SA Police Bravery Medal and the Leadership & Efficiency Medal, awarded to Doig posthumously. Hutchinson and Cass never even scored back-row seats to the ceremony.

Of course, his colleagues assumed he had attended the event, and many sent him messages to ask how it went. “What are you talking about?” was all he could say.

“That (missing the ceremony) was probably the biggest kick in the guts of the whole thing,” he says. “It would have been nice just to be in the back of the crowd, to be a part of the process and part of the recognition. That probably hurt me more than anything else in the whole thing.”

Not until six weeks later did Hutchinson and Cass receive the SA Police Bravery Medal. He still laments the lost opportunity for them to receive their medals at the ceremony which honoured Doig.

Hutchinson faced further humiliation when, in September 2024, he attended police headquarters for an appointment with the police medical officer. Beyond the foyer, he could not access the building as SAPOL had revoked his police ID card.

So, police security officers called the PMO, confirmed the appointment, and escorted Hutchinson to the first floor, as they would an outsider.

“All my accesses were cancelled,” he says. “I got put to the side.”

Rather than give Hutchinson its support at every turn, SAPOL seemed to position one obstacle after another in his path.

“I honestly feel bullied out of my job. You need to be appreciated. You need to be recognized for the fact that you've been through a bad, bad situation.”

There was the medical clearance it demanded of him simply to attend the Police Remembrance Day service at the police academy. Another demand of him was to get a referral from his own doctor to see a SAPOL-appointed occupational health specialist.

It all created a stark contrast with the way in which the Police Association and the Police Federation of Australia looked after Hutchinson. The association protected him when he had to interact with SAPOL and Steve Whetton nominated him for the 2024 National Police Bravery Award.

The PFA ultimately named him and New South Wales Police inspector Amy Scott joint recipients of the award. Scott had brought the Bondi Junction stabbing rampage to an end when she fired on the attacker, Joel Cauchi, in April 2024.

The presentation of the award took place at a dinner in Melbourne on September 17. But no responsibility to make any arrangements for travel or accommodation fell to Hutchinson. The PFA managed and paid for everything for him and his wife.



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SAPOL on the other hand contributed nothing at times when it could have as a gesture of goodwill. Debbie Hutchinson many times drove her husband – who could not then drive himself – from Bordertown to Adelaide and back for medical appointments. Nothing from SAPOL toward travel costs.

And when Debbie needed a hotel room close to the hospital, while her husband underwent surgery, SAPOL refused to pay for one. So, from Two Wells, where she was staying with her daughter, she made the 50km trip to Flinders Medical Centre and back over several days.

14. Michael Hutchinson. 15. The state funeral for Jason Doig at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

16. The cortege leaving the convention centre.

Hutchinson has now lost any love he ever had for SAPOL. He feels it has robbed him of his “ability to leave with a bit of pride and dignity” when retirement beckons.

“I honestly feel bullied out of my job,” he says. “You need to be appreciated. You need to be recognized for the fact that you’ve been through a bad, bad situation.”

That was the reason Hutchinson spoke to the *Police Journal*. He wanted his story to serve as “a kind of debrief” to help those of his colleagues who, in the future, suffer critical-incident trauma.

What he has never lost is regard for his many friends in the job – friends who gave him support which SAPOL failed to deliver.

“The people who cared for me since the incident have been wonderful,” he says. “Major Crime (investigated the shooting and) has been fantastic.

“My life (purpose) from here will be to honour Jason. It’s my privilege to honour him in any way I can. His actions on the night probably saved my life.” **PJ**