

Hopping on the money plane

Senior T.F. cops earn the most OT pay for airport security

By Jared S. Hopkins • Times-News writer

The Twin Falls Police Department has limited the ability of high-ranking officers to work airport security shifts on overtime, a practice that cost taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars last year.

The *Times-News* last month reported that the city was paying top dollar for airport security because of the practice, while other Idaho airports get more police protection by assigning lower-ranking officers to their airports. Twin Falls officials maintain that the practice was the most cost-effective way to meet a federal mandate.

While the city defended its approach toward airport security, it initially refused to say which officers were working the overtime shifts. Earlier this month, however, the state attorney general's office issued an advisory opinion to the city saying the information is a matter of public record.

Those records, obtained under the state public records act, show a disproportionate amount of Joslin Field, Magic Valley Regional Airport security shifts — nearly 70 percent — were worked at time-and-a-half pay, and the department's high-paid brass picked up most of the lucrative extra work. The average overtime rate for those officers was more than \$40 per hour, compared to an entry-level patrol officer's straight time pay of about half that.

Twin Falls Police overtime pay at Joslin Field, Magic Valley Regional Airport

Fiscal Year 2008: Oct. 1, 2007 to Sept. 30, 2008

Officer and rank as of Dec. 1	Total airport overtime pay	Overtime hours	Annual salary
Staff Sgt. Terry Thueson	\$7,650	193	\$75,471
Staff Sgt. Dennis Pullin	\$7,406	166	\$77,152
Sgt. Mark Marvin	\$6,051	142	\$75,059
Capt. Bryan Krear	\$5,549	101	\$82,912
Staff Sgt. Dan McAtee	\$5,050	125	\$67,380
Staff Sgt. John Wilson	\$4,293	117.5	\$64,902
Capt. Brian Pike	\$3,750	69	\$81,619
Patrol Officer Brian Maughan	\$3,715	121.5	\$54,749
Lt. Craig Stotts	\$3,663	82.5	\$67,560
Patrol Officer Daniel Clements	\$3,598	130	\$49,220
Det. Chris Fullmer	\$3,499	89	\$65,907
Sgt. Dan Rinehart	\$3,124	72.25	\$70,672
Patrol Officer Jerry Hutchison	\$2,879	101.25	\$39,180
Det. Robin Parker	\$2,675	85.25	\$56,060
Sgt. Chuck Garner	\$2,554	71.5	\$61,645

Source: City of Twin Falls

Magicvalley.com

SEE: A monthly
breakdown of all Twin
Falls officers'
overtime airport shifts.

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In fiscal year 2008, which ended Sept. 30, 15 officers worked 1,667 hours on overtime, earning more than \$65,000. Meanwhile, more than 40 other eligible officers combined for just 940 hours and \$28,249. Of those 15 most active cops, only three were low-ranking patrol officers.

"What you're gonna find out is those are the 15 individuals who want to work out there," said Capt. Brian Pike, who noted the same officers have taken the majority of the shifts since the program began in 2003. "It's not like they're working out there and someone else can't sign up for it."

"It is an opportunity to go out and make a little extra money," said Pike, who was paid \$3,750 in overtime, the seventh-most in the department.

Captains and lieutenants are salaried employees and otherwise are not eligible for overtime pay, but Police Chief Jim Munn and City Manager Tom Courtney made an exception to that rule five years ago — for airport shifts only. They said the extra work from the top brass was necessary to cover all of the shifts.

But Pike and Munn said the captains will no longer volunteer for the extra work, in part because more junior officers are now available. Pike also cited the newspaper's inquiry about the program.

"I don't want the fact that we're out there to deter from the program," Pike said. "No one told us to make this (decision)."

The airport work is not only well paid but also less demanding than patrolling city streets. Airport officers check traveler IDs and assist Transportation Safety Administration screeners, usually working just two-hour shifts to meet a rule that a sworn officer must be present at security screening. Most of the \$153,000 cost last year was reimbursed by the federal government, though nearly \$50,000 was paid directly by city taxpayers.

According to city records:

- A dozen of the 15 highest-paid officers at the airport are captains, detectives and sergeants. Pike worked the airport at an overtime rate of about \$54 per hour, for example. Capt. Bryan Krear pulled shifts at \$55 per hour and was paid \$5,549. Lt. Craig Stotts was paid \$3,663 at a rate of more than \$45.

- Staff Sgt. Terry Thueson pulled in the most overtime at almost \$7,600. He was at the airport more than any other officer — 193 hours last year — and averaged 16 hours per month, typically at a rate of more than \$40. Staff Sgt. Dennis Pullin, who oversees the program, was second at more than \$7,400 — about 10 percent of his \$77,000 gross salary.

- Even seasoned veterans from the investigations unit work at the airport, where crime is lower than other parts of the city. Det. Chris Fullmer, a 17-year employee, worked 89 hours of overtime last year and was paid nearly \$3,500, usually at about \$40 per hour.

- Of 68 city officers, 14 logged fewer than 20 hours all

year; 23 worked fewer than 60 hours; and 16 officers never worked an airport security shift.

The TFPD said all officers can volunteer for airport shifts, which are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis, and a sign-up sheet is posted on a wall. Munn said the only explanation for why most shifts go to senior cops is that other officers don't want the shifts.

"I guess the question is, why wouldn't they sign up? I would," he said. "Maybe they don't want to. That's the deal. I mean, it's not like 'don't sign up because we want it.' We're not gonna tolerate that."

"There's a big sheet in the officer's room and it's open for you to sign up," Munn said. "There's open shifts right now people can sign up for. I think it would be a little bit odd if we were assigning specific people to that and it was the 15 highest paid people in the organization. It would be something the city manager would say is odd. But it's a voluntary program, so I just don't see where the problem is."

But while Twin Falls pays top dollar for airport security, other Idaho airports are getting more police protection at comparable rates. Until June, when SkyWest Airlines dropped a flight, the city provided a police officer, usually for 10 hours each day at the

airport, and was paying \$42 per hour to officers.

Pocatello Regional Airport tried using overtime police, but stopped when it became too costly. It now has three full-time and two half-time officers who cover the facility for 18.5 hours per day — or a cost of about \$44.50 per hour of coverage, based on *Times-News* calculations. Pocatello's airport is similar to Joslin Field, with just four daily departures, though it has to meet a slightly higher security standard because it once had more.

Twin Falls Police say they would need about four full-time police officers assigned to the airport to follow the staffing patterns favored by Pocatello. An entry-level TFPD officer costs the city about \$46,000 per year in pay and benefits so four positions would run \$184,000.

Officers occasionally perform the shifts while on patrol duty — a worst-case scenario police say happens when no one volunteers. Financial documents show the hourly rate equals or falls below the federal reimbursement rate of \$25.94.

At that rate, the overall cost of providing security at the airport — since June the monthly average is 240 hours — would drop significantly.

The city has since April been discussing ways to reduce the number of hours that officers are stationed at the airport, instead having city police present only for large flights — all while on overtime.

Federal and city costs for airport coverage in Fiscal Year 2008

Fiscal Year 2008: Oct. 1, 2007 to Sept. 30, 2008

	Total hours	Hourly rate feds cover	Fed share	Actual cost	City share
Oct.	443	\$26.92	\$11,926	\$15,750	\$3,825
Nov.	414.5	\$26.92	\$11,158	\$14,779	\$3,621
Dec.	428	\$26.92	\$11,522	\$16,124	\$4,602
Jan.	417.5	\$25.94	\$10,830	\$16,386	\$5,147
Feb.	372	\$25.94	\$9,650	\$13,822	\$4,172
March	342.5	\$25.94	\$8,884	\$12,664	\$3,779
April	308.5	\$25.94	\$8,002	\$11,308	\$3,305
May	309	\$25.94	\$8,015	\$12,390	\$4,374
June	243.5	\$25.94	\$6,316	\$10,218	\$3,901
July	239.25	\$25.94	\$6,206	\$10,129	\$3,992
Aug.	246	\$25.94	\$6,381	\$10,244	\$3,863
Sept.	230	\$25.94	\$5,966	\$9,702	\$3,736
Totals	3,993.75	\$26.185	\$104,856	\$153,516	\$48,317

Source: City of Twin Falls