

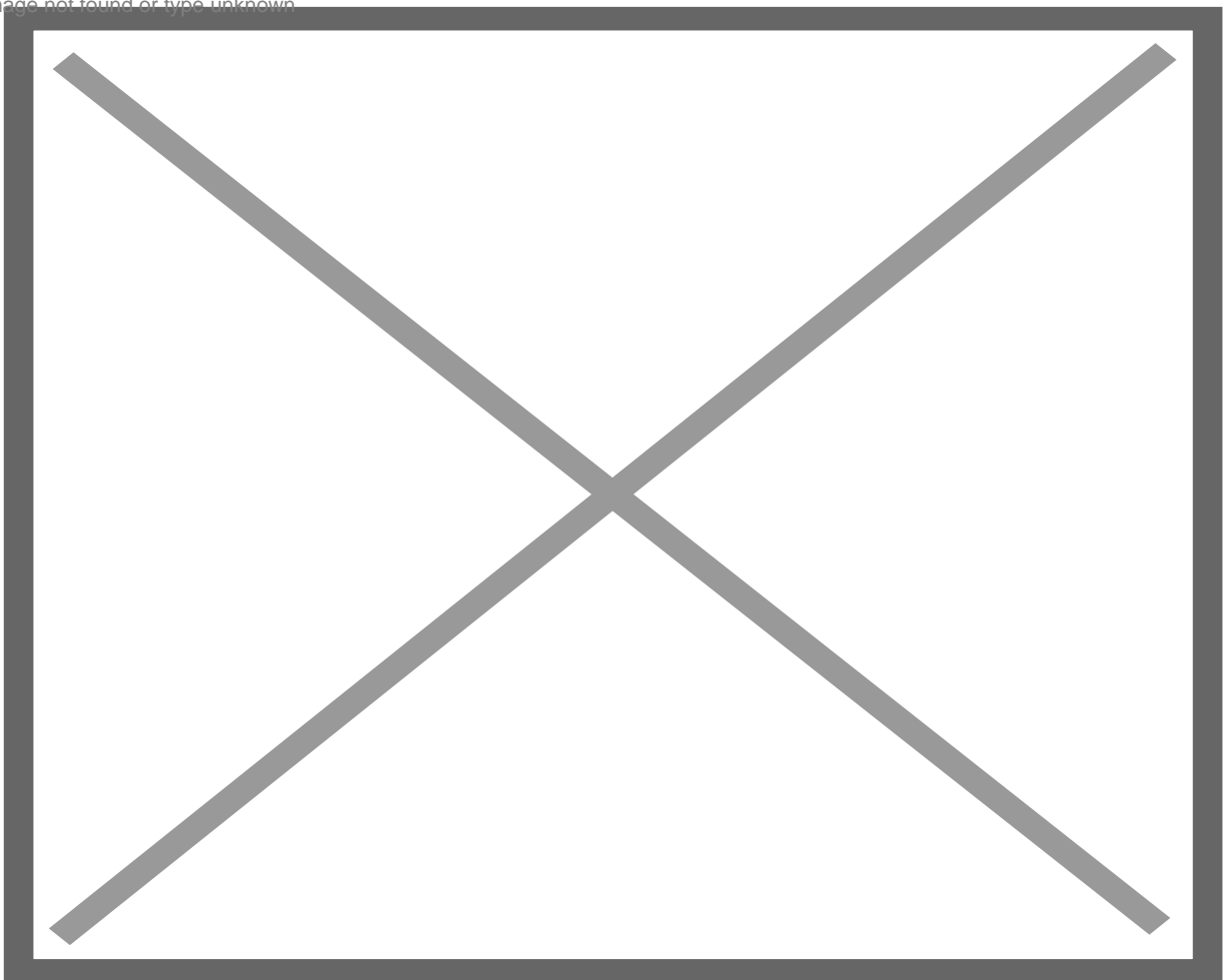
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Virginia Company Launches Island-Wide Digital Dragnet to Identify and Track Potential Witnesses – Or Possible Participants – in Hospital Ground Killing Spree

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Robert Moore **April 27, 2020**

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OEX Global conducted a high-tech analysis of mobile device data to help provide information about potential witnesses - or possible participants - in the string of shooting in the historic Hospital Ground neighborhood. By. OEX GLOBAL

ST. THOMAS — Approximately 2:00 a.m., April 6, 2020.

Police reports say a masked gunman in Hospital Ground lay in wait for Lyle Bryan. As Bryan ambled past the stand of rusty, galvanized fencing on Glass Bottle Alley, the gunman emerged and

opened fire. Bryan was struck twice, wounded and left for dead.

The sidewalk ambush casts a grim spotlight on the violence consuming St. Thomas's historic Hospital Ground neighborhood. Over a 72-hour period earlier this month, three people were shot to death and two more, including Bryan, were injured but survived. As usual, the unsolved murders occurred 'Round de Field,' or within a few blocks of the Lionel Robert Stadium and the basketball courts where gang warfare and drug dealing gone bad routinely produce casualties.

A third of the nine murders on St. Thomas so far this year occurred on the narrow streets of Hospital Ground. Police found Junior Akimo Freeman, 35, dead of multiple gunshot wounds near the basketball court after sunrise on April 10th. Two days before that, authorities found 44-year-old Deshaune Harrigan face-down in the street just after 4 a.m. Four hours later police were again dispatched to the area of the Fish Market where Michael McKie, 42, had been gunned down.

If the shootings are related, police won't say. Police Commissioner Trevor Velinor conceded in a recent interview that the targets were not random, but he would not speculate about motives. The investigations are still underway, he said. Meanwhile, law enforcement temporarily flooded Hospital Ground. Cars flowing into the neighborhood were stopped, drivers were questioned. One vehicle with heavily tinted windows reeked of marijuana when police approached. A search of the car yielded a cache of unregistered firearms. Still, no arrests have been made in the fatal shootings.

A Digital Dragnet for Eye-Witnesses or Persons of Interest

In the minutes before and after Lyle Bryan was shot, eight nearby people – potential witnesses or possible participants – carried mobile devices that were on and emitting digital signals. The devices were, in effect, electronic beacons that time-stamped the owners to the immediate vicinity that early morning in Hospital Ground.

Based on the movements of those electronic devices that night and over an earlier, extended period of tracking, we know:

- One person in the vicinity strode back and forth about the area leading up to and after the shooting, moving around Goat Street and Jah Yard. Down by Glass Bottle way.
- Four individuals clustered a block south of the shooting.
- One person near the scene likely resides up the nearby mountainside, where they spend multiple hours each night.
- Another person shows up routinely at one of St. Thomas's marine terminals. The mobile device tracks a path consistent with a ferry route. That pattern of travel suggests the device owner may work on the water.

The identified electronic devices and their proximity to Bryan's shooting do not mean the device owners were involved in the attack. Their presence close by, however, strongly suggests those individuals are potential witnesses to one in the string of unsolved Hospital Ground shootings.

Provided police have a subpoena, court order or warrant, tracking a person's cellphone is a commonly used tool for gathering evidence against a suspect. Using open-source data unique to every mobile device is relatively new ground when it comes to identifying potential witnesses and perpetrators. And broadly speaking, warrants from a judge are unnecessary because the users have opted into time and location data harvesting by an application on their phone.

The Virgin Islands Police Department has not tapped into the technology.

OEX Global says it can help. The Leesburg VA “human tradecraft and technology company” with deep ties to the Virgin Islands learned of the Hospital Ground crime wave through local media reports. On its own dime, the company launched a Special Projects Group investigation resulting in a 15-page initial report that offers near real-time crime-scene data rarely collected by Virgin Islands authorities.

“We looked at device activity within the hour, in most cases far less, before the crime occurred up until the police responded,” the report states. “Our team then ran advanced Pattern of Life analytics to determine the device users most likely bed down location (Residence) or a place the user frequents so law enforcement can conduct follow up investigations and/or questioning as the reason these device users were in the area at the times of these crimes.”

The VI Consortium was provided an exclusive look at the OEX Global data on the Hospital Ground shootings and other crime hotspots on St. Thomas. For privacy purposes, the granular detail available through the OEX data — such as potential residences and apparent places of employment — was omitted from this story.

OEX Global examined two homicides in addition to the Bryan shooting. Among the findings:

- In the minutes before and after Deshaune Harrigan was gunned down around 4 a.m. April 8th near the Queen Louise, six people had active mobile devices in the immediate vicinity. Likely residences of two of the device owners were tracked down by interpreting the time, frequency of movement and the location activities.
- In the shooting of Michael McKie, also on April 8th, one mobile device was active at the relevant time. Certain movements by the device owner strongly suggests a place of employment, based on the time and frequency of device movements. Other locations around the east end and downtown were mapped out, as well.

Doing Good, Helping to Solve Crime

Among other things, OEX Global analyzes millions of data sources from across the worldwide web, including the deep and dark web, in near-real time to investigate and identify high-value intelligence for clients around the world. The clients? Law enforcement. Attorneys. Preservationists. Non Governmental Organizations.

The company is staffed up with data scientists, engineers and the ex-military and U.S. intelligence types. To be clear, said Matthew May, founder of OEX Global, his company is about “doing good” across the globe by helping to solve crimes and provide positive solutions to nagging social problems.

The analysis of targeted digital data in the territory is a “cursory technical exploitation analysis of mobile devices discovered in a proprietary data repository.” In this instance, the report focused on electronic devices active in the immediate area of the Hospital Ground shootings between April 6th and April 8th. The robust, connect-the-dots analyses by OEX Global can expand to crime hotspots across St. Thomas, St Croix and St. John.

A Question of Privacy

The OEX data analysis does not identify mobile device owners by name, address or phone number. The company only tracks the unique identifiers of each device. Those identifiers were then used to place the user at various locations around St. Thomas. That is, of course, the simplified version of the deep-dive data parsing OEX specializes in.

The use of mobile device tracking to break open cases is not new in law enforcement circles. And for good reason:

As of 2017, there were more cellphones than people in the United States. Nearly 70 percent of those were smartphones. And according the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, over 90 percent of millennials carry a smart device.

As devices grow smarter, people are increasingly dependent on apps for routine activities, such as texting, emailing, Facebook socializing, and lots, lots more. Technology also allows service providers to collect a wealth of information about where the device user goes, with whom and even why. Mobile devices provide virtually unlimited, detailed information.

Mobile devices go nearly everywhere, including crime scenes. As a result, the use of mobile phone data by law enforcement creates a host of privacy concerns.

The Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects you from unreasonable government searches and seizures, and this protection extends to your computer and portable devices. How, exactly that works in the real world is complicated, but simply put, with the right warrant and the right circumstances, police can obtain almost everything on your mobile device or data stored from your device that is stored elsewhere.

The Special Report by OEX is different. No warrants, subpoenas, or court orders were required because the information examined is open-source. Device users gave permission to various app makers to collect, warehouse and later sell the data. Mr. May said OEX also strictly adheres to the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) compliant, the gold standard for protection of privacy rights.

According to OEX, the Special Report on Hospital Ground is an initial set of findings. Additional research could be done on request, the company said. “We believe we can help gather significant leads that may result in disrupting the network operating in the Hospital Ground area,” the report stated.