The chase began in a small city about 30 miles outside Los Angeles in 2012.

A robber was exiting the California Bank and Trust in Chino, California, when he opened fire on a police officer with the AK-47 rifle he had in his possession. With this act, he became known as the AK-47 Bandit.

Six rounds were shot at the police car. Four hit the car and one of the four hit the officer in the leg. The officer almost bled to death but was able to drive himself to a local hospital while using his radio to notify the police department about the robbery.

The AK-47 Bandit escaped and went on a spree of robbing, or attempting to rob, five other banks in three different states over the span of two and a half years.

Trying to catch this dangerous serial criminal has proven difficult for all agencies involved, including the Chino Police Department, who has taken the lead on the investigation.

“We’ve had, to date, more than 170 leads or tips that come in and each one of them have to be completely investigated,” said Jeff Chase, a Detective for the Chino Police Department. “We have to look at each one objectively and we have to follow through because the one time you don’t take one of them seriously, that could be the key piece of evidence that leads you to the suspect.”

The leads have caused Detective Chase to travel to Sacramento and Vacaville, as well as other states around the country, including Washington, Idaho and Nebraska. These are the other five locations where the AK-47 Bandit has struck, with Sacramento being his only failed robbery attempt.

The AK-47 Bandit executed all the robberies in 2012 except for the one in Nebraska, which occurred in late August 2014. Even though the AK-47 Bandit went seemingly on hiatus for nearly two years, lessening media coverage, the Chino Police Department has been actively on this case since the robbery in Chino on February 29, 2012.

“We were a regional story and more because an officer was shot,” said Detective Chase. “But as this series has expanded, we no longer are talking about local or regional. We are talking about a suspect that has taken this crime spree north and east where several states are now affected.”

Detective Chase said that there is often a delay in determining whether the AK-47 Bandit has robbed a bank because most of the nation isn’t aware of the crime spree that he has been on.

An example of this is that it took nine days after the Nebraska City robbery to identify the bank robber as the AK-47 Bandit. The news about his criminal activity had not reached a national scale and Chino Police Department only discovered the robbery due to its investigation.

“What happens unfortunately sometimes it takes a while to connect the dots,” said Detective Chase. “The folks in Nebraska haven’t been privy to our local and regional news coverage. Although we have now had some national coverage, if it’s one exposé, really how much is the word getting out there.”

To help connect the dots, Detective Chase recently held a meeting with the FBI’s Bank Robbery Coordinators to advise many national agencies about the AK-47 Bandit crime spree. As a result of the meeting, a “media blitz” has taken place as articles and videos about the criminal are now present throughout the country.

The Chino Police Department has also created a website dedicated to identifying the AK-47 Bandit. The purpose of this website is to coincide with the media coverage and achieve the Chino Police Department’s main objective: raising national awareness about the AK-47 Bandit.

“Our goal is, we want to keep this series alive and in the eyes and on the minds of as many people as we can,” said Detective Chase. “The more information, the more input that we can get, the more data points we have coming in, the better chance we have of figuring out who this guy is and tracking him down before he’s able to rob another bank.”

The Chino Police Department understands that finding the AK-47 Bandit will require national assistance, but Karen Comstock, Police Captain for the Chino Police Department who will become Police Chief in December, said the Chino Police Department has taken the lead in the investigation because one of its officers was shot.

“To date we hold the most serious charge that he will stand trial for,” said Capt. Comstock.

The Chino Police Department believes the AK-47 Bandit’s looks and clothing work in their favor in tracking him down.

“He has such a unique appearance about him,” said Capt. Comstock. “If we were to get other bulletins nationally where his picture were to be posted, we (federal law enforcement) would recognize him.”

The unique appearance Capt. Comstock speaks about goes beyond the AK-47 rifle, bulletproof mesh vests, and ski mask that are common in all the AK-47 Bandit’s robberies. He is also identified as having piercing blue eyes and his movements seem to mirror someone who has advanced weapon training of some sort, although the Police Department can’t speak to whether that is true.

“I’ve heard the same thing (that the AK-47 Bandit has police or military training) and there are some things that have occurred during the investigation that would say, hey yeah that could be the case because he actually stated something along those lines in one of the robberies,” said Detective Chase. “But as far as the gear goes, a couple of things are odd and wouldn’t naturally point towards that (advanced weapon training).”

Detective Chase said that the outer vest that the AK-47 Bandit wears is not a vest that is common in local law enforcement, but more for journalists that are reporting overseas. Also, the mesh vest that the AK-47 Bandit used that said “sheriff” along the back was blue, and that is inconsistent with what is commonly used in a police raid. These discrepancies lead to discussion of whether the AK-47 Bandit really has advanced training.

What is not up for discussion is that the actions of the AK-47 Bandit have increased in their severity.

“He’s gotten more brazen, more vocal about his intentions. During the commission of the last robbery he drove up right in front of the credit union and got out and was very vocal, very demanding with the tellers,” said Capt. Comstock. “The mere fact that he is wearing body armor in commission of an armed robbery is a statement that he is willing to shoot it out with somebody.”

“This is a very threatening, intimidation and very, very aggressive and violent manner with which he is committing these robberies.”

Because of this recent uptick in violent behavior, the Chino Police Department hopes the surge in media coverage will help bring this chase to a peaceful end instead of an intense shootout.