

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

A REPORT IDENTIFYING
HANDGUN RETENTION TECHNIQUES

A LEARNING CONTRACT
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MODULE II

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INTRODUCTION

Handgun retention is a subject that few officers think about and some are so naive as to believe that their handgun will never be attacked or taken from them. Officers, who have survived an attack on their handgun, or have lost a fellow officer to such an incident, know how wrong such beliefs can be.

To cite only two examples which illustrate the seriousness of this problem, the following Associated Press News items are included to demonstrate that police loss of weapons can occur in small as well as large cities.

June 5, 1980, "The District Attorney in Terrell has taken charge of the investigation into the overnight slaying of a police officer. Patrolman William Robert Stout, who had been with the Terrell force since last August, was shot with his own revolver."1

"Chicago Police Department advised two officers, white male, 43, white male, 46, both with 20 years experience, were shot and killed approximately 9:10 P.M., May 14, 1990. Victim officers responded to a domestic disturbance between grandmother and grandson. Suspect, white male, 23, surprised victim officers in the garage area of grandmother's home and apparently seized one of the officer's service revolvers. Victim officers were shot in the head, back and chest area with what is believed to be .38 caliber rounds. Suspect subsequently arrested and charged with both murders."2

Regardless of the size of the department, if a police officer loses just one violent physical confrontation, they too, could become a victim slain with their own handgun. The number of police officers killed in this manner has increased with the expanded use of the one-man patrol unit and more lenient physical requirements of modern law enforcement.

"FBI Uniform Crime Reports Statistics indicate that between 1970 and 1975 the number of officers slain with their own weapon increased 111 percent."³ Since 1980, an average of 10 officers annually have been disarmed and killed with their own weapon.

Texas Penal Code Provisions

Although complacency may have played a part in the continuance of attacks on officer's handguns, an attempt to address this dimension of the problem began with the 71st Legislature in Texas. In 1986, the 71st Session enacted: Article 38.16 of The Texas Penal Code. "Article 38.16, taking or attempting to take a weapon from peace officer.

- (a) In this Section, "Firearm" has the meaning assigned by Section 46.01 of this code.
- (b) A person commits an offense if the person intentionally or knowingly and with force takes or attempts to take from a peace officer the officer's firearm with the intention of harming the officer or a third person.

- (c) The actor is presumed to have known that the peace officer was a peace officer if the officer was wearing a distinctive uniform or badge indicating his employment, or if the officer identified himself as a peace officer.
- (d) It is a defense to prosecution under this section that the defendant took or attempted to take the weapon from a peace officer who was using force against the defendant or another in excess of the amount of force permitted by law.
- (e) An offense under this section is a felony of the third degree."⁴

Article 38.16 became effective September 1, 1989, thus giving Texas Peace Officers, for the first time, a felony grade offense in which to arrest for attacks on their weapons.

Handgun Retention Training

In order to prevent police officers from being the victims of assaults with their own handguns, training is imperative. Various methods of handgun retention training are available to law enforcement officers. However, any method taught has to be simplistic enough to be retained and still be effective. The Koga Institute technique is one such method of instruction, but this method appears to be impractical for police work. It seems impractical unless there is an inordinate amount of time spent on training and follow-up training, or the officers involved have a background in the martial arts. If these factors are lacking, the retention level of the Koga method will be limited for the officers, defeating it's intended purpose.

The handgun retention system developed by James W. Lindell appears to be the most effective handgun retention method at the present time. The effectiveness of the Lindell method lies in its simplicity. Although training and practice is vital, the level of knowledge retention from the initial training remains high. The Lindell method fits modern law enforcement because it addresses the condition of more lenient physical requirements for police service. Lindell shows how to generate power and not rely simply on strength. In order to assist with training Lindell incorporates Dr. Kevin Parson's "Seven Components of Power."

Dr. Parson, president of the Justice System Training Association, states that "Power is distinct from strength." He contends that power is generated through the combination of seven forces. Strength is but one such component of power and should be developed together with the other six competencies enabling an officer to generate power.

Balance is the most basic component of power. It must be automatic and present during continuous movement and also sustained as momentum increases. Balance is linked with timing and is improved by working with moving targets.

The power of endurance and the power of flexibility are the next vital components of power. Endurance is improved through aerobic exercises, running or swimming. Flexibility relieves many problems during a confrontation. Rigidity, caused by tension, fear or lack of confidence could be fatal during a violent encounter with a suspect. Flexibility may be improved by stretching and relaxation.

Along with these components, the fourth necessary element is focus. Proper mind-body coordination occurs when the mental and physical systems complement each other to the point that total concentration can be directed to a specific technique for a short period of time. The officer must be sure to avoid the barriers of hesitation and overcompensation. Hesitation is often tied to lack of flexibility which would be dangerous for the officer. Likewise, to overcompensate would prove the officer ineffective.

Next the element of speed is important. It is generated through continuous repetition until a technique is physiologically and psychologically routine. Speed is crucial to the generation of power.

Sixth in the ranking of power is strength. The reasoning for ranking strength lower in the power typology is due to the other factors which can make up for the lack of strength and the manner in which alternative components can impair power if not present with strength. The strongest officer possesses little power when off balance, exhausted or inflexible.

Last, simplicity is the final component of power. Repetition of fundamentals combined with clear, systematic sequencing, gives tremendous power.

The seven components of power can then be summarized as:

Balance	Speed
Endurance	Strength
Flexibility	Simplicity ⁵
Focus	

Lindell also explains that another dimension of this approach is the three-step system of handgun defense. Officers should always practice this system so that, regardless of the kind of attack, the officer's initial response is always appropriate to the situation. The first step of the system is to secure the gun. Regardless of the events involved in a confrontation if the officer can secure the gun first, then he can apply the appropriate release technique. The next step is for the officer to position himself in a manner that offers the greatest opportunity to exert maximum leverage and physical stress against the attacker, to ensure that a release is accomplished. At the same time this will provide body movement that has the effect of protecting the officer against additional assault as he applies release methods. The last step is the officer applying the the appropriate release technique, which is simply more leverage and physical stress against the attacker than can be withstood. Release of the weapon should then be assured.

A third handgun retention system is the Pressure Point Control Technique (P.P.C.T.) Management System. This system seems to be only a modified version of Lindell's method of handgun retention. The P.P.C.T. method

of handgun retention relies on the proper employment of leverage and balance principals for its effectiveness. This system incorporates into its release techniques various striking blows. Thus if the officer is to become proficient in the use of this system repeated blows to various pressure points will be necessary and should supply a warning to trainers. The major problem connected to the P.P.C.T. system are injuries or medical complications to officers during training.

Handgun Holsters

Any handgun retention method has a degree effectiveness, but its effectiveness can be increased dramatically with the proper equipment, especially a holster. No holster is completely snatch proof, but a good holster will assist an officer in retaining his weapon by giving him additional time to react to an assault. A holster should be of good quality leather with design features that will contribute something to his ability to both draw the gun quickly and safely, and also secure it so that it stays in the holster when un-snapped, even during vigorous body movement. Any holster that is not specifically reinforced is subject to be torn apart when the holstered gun is grabbed violently during an attack. A holster that incorporates design elements which allow the gun to be drawn from the holster in one direction - forward - also can increase officer safety.

Officers who have leather equipment provided to them by their agency might formally request that holsters be evaluated for features that can provide the officer with greater holster safety and security. The

agency should honor the request since the cost differential of the various holster on the market today appears to be approximately \$30.00, a small cost for officer safety.

To assess the various methods of handgun retention used today by law enforcement agencies, approximately 95-98% of the agencies contacted that offer handgun retention instruction use the Lindell method. The Lindell method is used because of its simplicity, cost effectiveness and its overall proficiency. The Lindell methods knowledge retention level remains high eliminating the need for excessive follow-up training. In order to prove this point one must only look at the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department's study of officer disarming before and after the Lindell methods implementation. Nine disarming's resulting in one officers death occurred in the 18 months prior to the methods implementation. Five years later the fact that no Kansas City officer who used the method to defend their handgun had been disarmed shows its effectiveness.⁶

Handgun retention itself is extremely cost effective when compared to the loss suffered when a police officer is slain with his own weapon. It is a conservative estimate that it takes \$30,000 to \$40,000 to train and equip an officer in a small department for his first year of police service. The same department (manpower of 30) could spend less than \$10,000 if it chose to train all of its officers to be handgun retention instructors and purchase proper holsters for each officer.

When an agency chooses to train an officer or officers to become handgun retention instructors the best method appears to be exposure to the various methods. The officers can then develop a tailor made handgun retention course for the agency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, despite all the precautions an officer may take, all the training and equipment supplied by the law enforcement agency, attacks by assailants on officer's weapons will continue. These attacks have increased tremendously in recent few years and show no signs of decreasing. For this reason, officers cannot afford to become complacent about the possibility of their weapon being assaulted. Law enforcement agencies also cannot become complacent about training and equipment in this area.

Surviving a gun grabbing assault is a combination of reacting properly and carrying a good holster. Responsibility in this area is shared between the agency and the officer. The officer must remember that much of the agency responsibility ends once the officer is given the tools and training. Officers, themselves, must be prepared or else they will become victims.

Regardless of which handgun retention method is chosen by a law enforcement agency, the agency must make the initial investment of training and equipment. The agency must mandate follow-up training in order not to waste the initial training. Also, the agency must supply the best equipment currently available enhancing any and all training to provide a maximum amount of safety for departmental personnel.

ENDNOTES

¹ Associated Press, Texas Summary Law Enforcement Officers Killed, Dallas, Texas 1980.

² FBI Uniformed Crime Reports, Summary of Law Enforcement Officers Killed, U.S. Department of Justice, 05-28-90 (APB Summary).

³ FBI Uniform Crime Reports, Law Enforcement Officers Killed, U.S. Department of Justice, 1978.

⁴ Texas Penal Code (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing Co.), 1990 Edition, Section 38.16, pp. 78.

⁵ Handgun Retention System by James W. Lindell (Kansas City, MO: Odin Press) 1981, pp. 24.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 14-16.

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