

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

**USE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE HANDLER-12
FOR TRANSIT POLICE**

**A LEARNING CONTRACT
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FRANK/ HUERTA

METRO TRANSIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The use of force by police officers is a subject preeminent in the minds of police chief executives and law enforcement officers. The use of deadly force, in particular, has received and will continue to receive the closest scrutiny, not only by police agencies, but by the courts and the community. The spiral in the cost of liability insurance premiums, and the inability of some police agencies to purchase coverage, is additional testament to the problem associated with excessive use of force. It is not surprising in this context that a number of less-than-lethal weapons and defensive physical tactics for police officers have been introduced recently. Some have proven useful and effective while others have been discarded as ineffective or excessively dangerous.

Nevertheless, police agencies must remain abreast of emerging technologies in the less than lethal product area. To help avoid lethal confrontations, officers need an array of alternatives to the use of deadly force. If an officer is trained only in the use of the sidearm and baton, for example, his options in a confrontational situation is limited and may even serve to escalate rather than de-escalate or contain the use of force. Over the past years a low-profile, one-man restraining defensive device known as the Handler-12 Grip Action Baton has been introduced to law enforcement agencies. The Handler-12 has been field tested, evaluated and is currently in use in several police departments in the United States.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Handler 12 Grip Action Baton was invented in 1980 by Al Wong, who for many years has been a provider and consultant to the California Board of Corrections, teaching the "Control of Aggressive Behavior" Program. Al Wong is also the inventor of other law enforcement devices such as the Immobilizer, a two-man restraining device currently in use by several law enforcement agencies throughout the United States. Al Wong also instructs at various institutions the techniques to restrain and control juveniles without the use of weapons and has also been a "Hands On" trainer for many years.¹

In 1986 the manufacturer of the Handler 12 introduced the Grip Action Baton Nationwide at such conventions and seminars as the International Security Conference in New York City, New York; the American Security for Industrial Security Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana; the International Association of Chiefs of Police in Nashville, Tennessee; the MILIPOL conference in Paris, France; the American Correctional Association Winter Conference in Atlanta, Georgia; the Ordinance and Safety Counter Terrorism Conference in Washington D.C., and the International Security Conference in Anaheim, California. The response at these conventions and subsequently to date, has been overwhelming with numerous organizations seriously considering the Handler 12 for adoption.² The Handler 12 has been field tested for over four years and is currently being used by several law enforcement agencies, correctional facilities, and security organizations in several states with excellent results.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE HANDLER 12

The Handler 12 is anatomically designed to be a natural extension of the arm and hand. The Baton is short handled with a question mark shaped hook at the end. This innovative instrument intensifies the strength, leverage and power of its user in restraining and defensive situations. The effectiveness of this device is achieved through leverage. The instrument combines centuries old martial arts techniques with the modern day needs of today's law enforcement, corrections, as well as security professionals (public and private) without the need for extensive training required to learn martial arts techniques.

Its' design is unique and patented and it is not a recreation of an ancient Oriental Martial-Arts Device. The grip action feature can quickly subdue and restrain an un-corporative suspect in several hold positions. As a result, immediate compliance is achieved humanely and without the need for excessive force. A professionally trained officer need not be strong or tall to effectively utilize this device.³

The Handler 12 - A Word from the Media

Today few law enforcement agencies/personnel could be considered hunter-gatherers, and their equipment reflects that. Although the Handler 12 can be used to strike somebody; according to recent studies, the curves of the rubber and steel baton are designed to allow an Alda or an average-sized woman to hook and pull down a belligerent, drunken behemoth in two or three seconds with no physical harm.⁴

The Handler 12 is 16 inches of lightweight heat-treated aircraft steel bent into the shape of a hook and encased in black plastic. In the hands of a trained police officer, it is designed to efficiently subdue and control a rowdy bad actor by putting a lock on an arm and applying pressure. No injuries, to date, has been reported.⁵

USES OF THE HANDLER 12

HANDLER 12 AS A CONTROL AND RESTRAINT DEVICE

The Handler 12 unlike other batons, is designed for effective use and mobility in confined areas. It is remarkably flexible, easy to use and is capable of being utilized as both a close and intermediate range tool which can increase an individual's controlling strength many fold. These advanced restraining and defensive techniques allow law enforcement, corrections, as well as security professionals to apply the Handler 12 and quickly subdue and restrain a suspect.

The Handler 12 can be used in several hold positions for restraint, cuffing, come-alongs or vehicle extraction without the need for excessive force. For example, a suspect can be placed in a back arm lock (modified hammerlock) or prone position on the ground in seconds, ready to apply handcuffs.⁶ This device also permits its user to extract offenders in confined areas (such as bus shelters and buses) and lift them to their feet, under their own power, and move them with minimum effort.

HANDLER 12 AS A DEFENSE DEVICE

An officer can keep an aggressive offender at bay by utilizing the defensive and extended reach capabilities of the Handler 12 while simultaneously maintaining his balance and coordination.⁷ The Handler 12, held in different positions, allows an officer to be very discreet, while maintaining a state of readiness. This ability makes it ideal for dealing with situations that must be handled in a media conscious manner. For example, the device can be held in the hand, in the ready position when writing traffic citations or reports during an investigation. Yet, if the officer needs immediate protection, it can easily and instinctively be utilized as a defensive device for blocking and parry blows. It is also used to jam or break doors, windows or door knobs in emergency situations.⁸

THE HANDLER 12 AS AN IMPACT DEVICE

The Handler 12 also offers unique striking capabilities. The device can be used quickly both in close and at a distance with the snap action of the wrist. Upper body strength is not as important with the techniques employed in striking.

Because of the designed and weighted end of the device, coupled with the fluid shock wave properly and high velocity of the striking area, an average officer can deliver strikes more powerful than with a straight or side handle baton with one hand. The advantages of the defensive techniques of the Handler 12 go beyond the norm of other batons. This is due to its ability to deliver the strikes within close quarters, or where

an officer has another officer or innocent by-stander next to him.⁹

THE HANDLER 12 AS A LOW PROFILE DEVICE

The Handler 12 is designed to allow convenient and comfortable carrying at all times. It can easily be concealed because of its compact size, and the contoured shape blends easily into the profile. The quick-release holster keeps it easily accessible. The Handler 12 is comfortable in both sitting and standing positions and does not get in the way. The low profile presentation provides a humane, non-threatening appearance, but allows the device to be quickly drawn for action when needed.¹⁰

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY STUDIES

Atlantic City Police Academy

On October 17, 1988, the Atlantic City Police Academy, Northfield, New Jersey initiated a nine(9) month evaluation of the Handler 12 Grip Action Baton. The primary testing consisted of twenty-five (25) units, which were assigned to various members of the department. On January 24, 1989, an additional twenty (20) units were assigned to patrol officers. For all officers testing the device, eight (8) hours of training were provided. During this evaluation period the following statistics were recorded with no injuries to suspects or the officers involved:

Control Situations - 107

Striking Situations - 22

Also during this period, there was only one internal affairs investigation conducted concerning the use of the Handler 12 Baton. In this particular instance, the officer involved was exonerated. The Atlantic City Police Academy staff believes this device provides a viable alternative for the physical control of suspects in arrest situations, and for controlling of persons in order to prevent unnecessary injuries.¹¹ The field test report submitted to the staff of the Atlantic City Police Department support the effectiveness of the Handler 12 to be primarily a restraining device with defensive capabilities, in actual field tests as follows:

During the aforementioned period, 29 officers used the device one-hundred and seven (107) times for control and restraint and only twenty-two (22) times as a defensive measure....

The report further supports the conclusions that with the use of this device, the potential risk of injury and associated liability is minimized. This conclusion is based on the fact that during the above referenced control and striking situations, there were no reported injuries to the officers or suspects involved. The report also verifies that the device provides officers with greater versatility and confidence in control and restraint situations, and that the training techniques are easy to learn and retain. This is based on the fact that of the twenty-nine (29) officers, 86.2% stated that they would rather not go back to their baton or PR-24, 96.5% of them stated that they would recommend the device to other police officers, and 86.2% of them felt that the Handler 12 provided them adequate protection and was a useful tool for the street.

The report supports the effectiveness of this device in defensive

striking situations in that of the twenty-two (22) officers reporting, all said that this device was most effective for eliminating any further threat of harm.¹²

The Minneapolis Police Department

The Minneapolis, Minnesota Police Department has had good results with the Handler 12. The police officers in the department have been given a choice of the Handler 12 or the PR-24 Baton. Some officers who opt to carry the Handler 12 have had to change to the shoulder mike for their portable radios.¹³

The Fulton County Sheriff's Department

The Fulton County Sheriff's Department in Fulton, Georgia has found the Handler 12 to be useful and effective, especially in the tactical field. The officers like the way it operates and control violent suspects especially when used to remove them from a close area or from a vehicle. The only problem the officers have encountered is having to change to shoulder mikes for their portable radios.¹⁴

The Atlanta Police Department

The Atlanta Police Department in Atlanta, Georgia is currently using twenty (20) of the Handler 12's and find it to be a good restraint and control device. The officers feel that the device picks up where the PR-24 Baton leaves off in restraint and control capabilities. The officers

have found that most suspects drop whatever they have in their hands as soon as the device is drawn into a ready position. The department has found it easy to train the officers in the use of the Handler 12. The ACLU in Atlanta believes that the Handler 12 device is the most humane type of control and restraint device they have seen. The American Civil Liberties Union of Houston does not voice an opinion on police type tools, unless they start receiving complaints of abuse.¹⁵

West University Police Department

The City of West University, Texas Police Department has been using the Handler 12 with excellent results. The officers feel that the device fills a wider range of uses and are extremely happy with it. During the two (2) years the officers have been carrying Handler 12's, the device has been used only twice. The department used the PR-24 Batons prior to the Handler 12. During a six (6) year period the PR-24 Baton was used eight (8) or nine (9) times.¹⁶

San Benito Police Department

The San Benito, Texas Police Department has ten (10) officers carrying the Handler 12 Baton, who are pleased with the device, because of its low profile and non-threatening appearance. The device has been in the department for about one (1) year, with no complaints filed against officers for improper use of the Handler 12 Grip Action Baton.¹⁷

METRO Transit Police Department

The METRO Transit Police Department in Houston, Texas initiated a study on March 9, 1990, to determine the usefulness and effectiveness of the Handler 12 within the Transit Police environment. The primary testing consisted of five (5) units, which were assigned to various officers on different shifts within the department. During a three (3) month period, the following statistics were recorded:

Control Situations - 5

Striking Situations - 0

During the situations there were no reported injuries to either the suspects or the officers. Also during this period, there were no complaints filed against officers by suspects or citizens. The results of the study indicate that the Handler 12 is suitable for the type of incidents that may be encountered on a transit system. In many instances suspects seem to refrain from resisting officers once the device has been displayed. The public also seems to accept the device more readily than the impact weapons.

Correctional Institution Studies)

In June of 1989, a field test of the Handler 12 Grip Action Baton was conducted at three (3) Georgia State Correctional Facilities. The Georgia State Prison in Reidsville, the Georgia Diagnostic & Classification Center in Jackson and the Georgia Womens' Correctional Institution in Harwick were selected because of their mission, inmate population and age/sex of correctional officers. Twenty-four (24) of the

correctional officers participated in the field test. During the field test period the device was used on two (2) occasions. Each use involved the officer applying a rear arm lock to control an unruly inmate. There were no reported injuries to either the officer or the inmate.

It was also noted that on several occasions, officers simply drew the device, assumed an outside ready position, which seemed to control the situation without the need for force. Many inmates appeared to be leery of the device, not knowing exactly what it was. One officer stated, "the Handler 12 as an intimidating factor, is unsurpassed in its ability to deter violent behavior by being visible. I feel more confident". All the officers participating in the field test recommended that the department of corrections authorize and purchase the Handler 12 Grip Action Baton.¹⁸

HANDLER 12 TRAINING

BASIC TRAINING COURSE

The Handler 12 along with basic and advanced restraining and defensive techniques, can be taught in an eight (8) hour certified basic training course. Restraints, takedowns, defensive blocks and other maneuvers are easy to learn and retain, allowing the police officers to quickly adapt to the use and versatility of the device. Instructions in the use of this device is mandatory for certification by Gripton International Corporation. A basic course instructional video tape is also available which supplements the hands on basic training course, and

additionally, there are sixteen Instructor Training courses for qualified individuals.

INSTRUCTOR'S TRAINING COURSE

The Handler 12 Instructor course is a sixteen (16) hour program designed and developed to train the officer in the use of the device, as well as how to instruct the basic course. Detailed and extensive training is given in advanced training techniques with additional coverage in student teaching and problem solving. Training is also given in certification procedures, civil and vicarious liabilities and the ladder of force. After successful completion of the program and written and practical examinations, the officer is certified as an instructor by Gripton International Corporation and is qualified to train and certify others in the basic course. Recertification is provided in a four (4) to eight (8) hour course after the first year and every two years subsequently. Attendance for this program requires Basic Course Completion or certification at instructor level in defensive tactics.

The training is Certified by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TECLOSE), through Sam Houston Criminal Justice Center Police Academy, in Huntsville, Texas.¹⁹

LIABILITY ISSUES

The Police Control and Restraint Techniques Program addresses the Civil Liability issue head-on, with credible, documented professional

training in the controversial area of excessive use of force by police officers.²⁰ The Instructors course was developed after extensive research on officers injured in arrest/custody situations. The goal of this program is to provide specialized training at instructor level in the effective application of handcuffs, quickly and safely for both officer and suspect. The Handler 12 was designed from the viewpoint of today's law enforcement professionals concerned with minimizing the risk of injury to himself and others, as well as reducing potential public and personal liability. Most officer/suspect injuries occur in the handcuffing stages. With this device a suspect can be quickly controlled, restrained and secured with a minimum of force, thereby reducing the potential risk of injury.

Thus law enforcement, corrections as well as security professionals (both armed and unarmed) are provided with a clear alternative to the use of lethal or impact weapons and excessive force. This can help minimize the potential liability consequences of officer actions.²¹

HANDLER 12 COSTS

Normal cost of an individual Handler 12 Grip Action Baton is FIFTY-FOUR DOLLARS (\$54.00) per unit. The holster/handcuff case is TWENTY-EIGHT DOLLARS AND THIRTY-SIX CENTS (\$28.36) per unit, making the total cost per officer at EIGHTY-TWO DOLLARS THIRTY-SIX CENTS (\$82.36).

Gripton International Corporation provides for a discount per unit based on quantity purchased. For example, a department purchasing six (6)

to eleven (11) units will reduce the cost to FIFTY-ONE DOLLARS (\$51.00) per unit and a department purchasing thirty-six (36) units will reduce the cost to FORTY THREE DOLLARS (\$43.00) per unit. The cost of the holster and handcuff case is also reduced based on the quantity purchased.

For example, six (6) to eleven (11) units will cost TWENTY-EIGHT DOLLARS AND THIRTY-SIX CENTS (\$28.36) each, while thirty-six (36) units will cost TWENTY-FOUR DOLLARS (\$24.00) each.

The fee to train fifty (50) officers is normally TWO THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$2,500.00); however, Gripton International Corporation may waive the training fee and get officers trained at no cost. During the class the company will handpick two (2) or more officers to serve as Instructors and train them at no cost, at a later classroom session.²²

The METRO Transit Police Department in Houston, Texas was allowed to send one (1) officer to Instructors Training with the Harris County Sheriff's Academy. This officer in turn trained four (4) Transit Police Officers who were then assigned to conduct the test and evaluation program for the department to determine if the Handler 12 would be suitable for the Transit Law Enforcement Environment. The Transit Police study concluded that the Handler 12 is suitable for the type of incidents that may be encountered on a transit system.

CONCLUSION

The Handler 12 Grip Action Baton, invented in 1980, is believed to

be the most useful, effective control and restraint device for the Transit Police environment. The use of the Handler 12 can be initiated in situations where the straight-stick baton would be deemed over-aggressive or unnecessary use of force. The device is effective in all types of confrontations, i.e., on the street, buses, cars and in other crowded areas and bus scenes where space is limited.

The Handler 12 has been field-tested, with excellent results, which effected its adoption for use by law enforcement agencies throughout the country. There has been no reported injuries to officer or suspect, complaints or lawsuits for misuse or excessive use of force. Finally, with the results of the METRO Transit Police Department's 1990 Handler 12 study, and information gathered from other law enforcement and security agencies, the Handler 12's use and effectiveness in transit police environments should lead similar agencies to adopt the Handler 12 as a progressive law enforcement tool.

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