



WSTOA

Newsletter

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President's Message

By: Thomas Fitzgerald, President

2010 was probably the most difficult year for me as a SWAT Operator. Being on a Full-Time SWAT Team for over 20 years, I have had many duty related injuries. I would say that I have had the same amount of injuries most operators have had. Starting in August of 2009, was probably the busiest five months in my time in SWAT. From increase of mobile take-downs to many officers' deaths, we were doing SWAT stuff almost daily. My back had been hurting for probably 10 years prior, but the pain didn't stop my training or missions. In December I felt that I could not be 100% for my Team and I knew that mentally I could but I may get stuck physically and not be able to react quickly to a threat to my Team or self. My doctor put me on light duty. Then I became a glorified office boy. I was determined to get this fixed but I had to go to doctor after doctor for more tests. This whole time sitting in the office while watching the guys go out on mission after mission. Finally on July 28, I got a fusion of my L-2/3. Now that hurt quite a bit after surgery. I thought I had made the wrong choice and I screwed up. As the days went on I was able to bend more and more and started to see the light at the end on the tunnel. Now as of January 7, 2011 I am finally signed off, Full Duty no restrictions! My back hasn't felt this good in about 15 years.

Why am I writing this? I want you to train smart. Some things to think about

When lifting, check your ego at the door. Warm up properly. Don't arch your back or lift your butt off the bench to get extra pounds on a bench press, just drop the weight a little, have better form and add a few reps. Same with any lifts, strict proper form. Also work on the core, not just sit-ups but hit them from all angles. Like the name implies, the core (and back) is what makes everything work. From holding up a rifle for long periods of time to ramming a door and even lifting a Sniper pack over a fence.

Heavy Vests:

Yes it is important to work in full gear but every minute of every training day? Are you wearing them to be hard on the guys or can you maybe take the plate out now and then to work with bulk?

Most new guys, like I did, want to be the biggest, strongest, fastest, SWAT operators they can be.

I want that for my guys too, but do it smart, don't go through what I had to go through.

Do the right thing.

If you any comments or suggestions you feel could help the WSTOA improve, please contact Tom Fitzgerald at thomas.fitzgerald@seattle.gov

Screening Missions

By: Evan Ehring, District 6 Representative

While on your 1500 coffee stop your Blackberry buzzes and the detective on the line has a mission for your team. His suspect is a two striker, known to be violent with the police and was last seen purchasing body armor from the CI's friend. They believe that he may be a suspect in the recent murder of a state's witness for a fellow gang member but the details are sketchy

The detective has set up a meeting at the local strip mall with the suspect and the CI at 1700hrs and he believes that the suspect will arrive in a stolen car. The detective requests that your team arrest the suspect for the possession of the stolen car to buy him time to put the rest of the pieces together for his case. Right now you know that you only have four fellow team members on duty. What now?

We all like to get missions, but it can be a struggle to balance the detective's needs with the team's tactics. Declining this detective's mission is a last resort; he may not call with more work, or worse, he may try to execute a dangerous mission himself with no training, experience, equipment, or with an ad hoc team. We all agree that the suspect is dangerous and needs to get taken off the street, but at what cost? Safety of the team, the citizens and the informant all need to play a part in site location and time. What may be good for the detective may be horrible for tactics. You know you need more team members. You know that strip mall is packed at 1700. Why there? Why 1700? Is it going to be suspicious to change the meet time?

The best option is to meet with the detective in person and delegate some planning responsibilities to another team leader to get the basics rolling. Work with the detective to come up with a mutually agreeable plan that is safe and effective. Help the detective understand why certain aspects of the take down are important to you and your team. It does not need to be an arrogant dissertation on tactics, but be sure to point out why things like back drop, escape routes, staging locations and population density are crucial to the mission. Be flexible in planning with the detective but do not let yourself get pressured into narrow thinking.

It is a delicate tight rope to walk between politics and safety. A little bit of education, cooperation and tact can go a long way in mission success. But don't wait for a mission plan – be proactive and work with your detectives and taskforces ahead of time. Meet with them to discuss the basics and train with them if you can. Remember the primary goal of every successful mission is the safety of the team.

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Training: Partner Assisted Weapon Retention

By: Chris LeBlanc, Uniformed Patrol Advisor

Law enforcement officers nationwide were profoundly impacted by the murders of four Lakewood, Washington officers in November 2009. We learned once again, the hard way, that officers can face encounters of extreme violence, often at very close quarters, and significantly behind the curve in terms of surprise and positional disadvantage.

As an officer and force tactics instructor in Washington State, I was continually

distracted by thoughts of what happened at Lakewood. Were we preparing our officers for something like that? Would Lakewood be the 21st century “Newhall” with lessons learned reverberating throughout the profession? How could we draw from those lessons, and our training in police combat disciplines, to find ways of dealing with a situation like that?

Are We Preparing?

In discussions with other trainers, a question often posed was why one or both of the officers that fought with the suspect at Lakewood did not simply engage the shooter from a distance with their firearms. Having been to that Forza coffee shop, the distance is not great, and it is a logical question. We now know that Officer Owens elected to go hands on with Clemmons as Officer Richards approached from his position at the counter.

In light of this, we have look at how we train. No agency would put an officer down range, standing next to a target, and allow another officer to fire at that target, even from a few yards. If a firearms cadre did do something like that, they would likely be met with a storm of protests from the students and soon find themselves out of their training units.

So, can we expect that officers will see another in direct physical contact with a suspect and fighting over a weapon - with all the chaotic, jerky movement that this would produce - and have the ability to engage with rounds from any distance?

Partner-Assisted Weapon Retention

We came up with one alternative response in some weapon retention training shortly after the details of Lakewood were known. One drill that we performed was met enthusiastically by numerous officers, and I offer it here for interested trainers to try, and to improve upon.

The genesis of this drill came from training on our regional SWAT team. Like most, our team trained in hostage rescue, which included contact shooting and a drill known as “covered pile.” Both of these involve getting in close with a suspect in physical contact with a hostage and engaging with contact shots in order to stop the threat. Due to the fact that these are hostage situations, the hostage had to be kept out of the line of fire and the “backstop” on the other side of the suspect. Partner Assisted Weapon Retention draws from these principles, seeing the Officer as the “hostage.”

The drill is presented this way:

- 1.) Officer A is retaining his weapon — either in the holster or in hand — against a suspect that is attempting to disarm.
- 2.) Officer A calls “he’s got my gun” or otherwise communicates the situation.
- 3.) Officer B moves in and engages by getting hold of and manipulating the suspect’s head or body, or by moving/manipulating their fellow officer’s head or body out of the line of fire, and fires contact shots.
For example, Officer B moves in behind the suspect, taking the suspect’s hair or grabbing the head (by the forehead, or by driving the fingers into the eye sockets to gain purchase), and pulling the suspect’s head backward while placing the muzzle of the firearm below the base of the skull. This will present a near-contact shot to the base of the brain or top of the spinal cord.

Alternatively, Officer B can push Officer A’s head down, or lean over Officer A’s head and back so that the head could not rise, and fires into the suspect’s head/face at near contact range.

- 4.) Officer B may have to intersperse his body between the suspect and Officer A, even assisting in controlling the suspect’s arms on A’s weapon, and fire multiple low

line shots into the suspect's abdomen and pelvis until the threat ceases.

After initial familiarity training, the suspect role player can and should move and react to disrupt Officer B's movement and field of fire, and even attempt to use Officer A as a shield. This creates a challenging and dynamic situation for Officer B to respond to, and is realistic.

Some General Notes:

In presenting this training, some general rules and observations were noted and shared within our groups.

Officer A's weapon retention efforts must be effective. If Officer A loses his weapon it will be used against him and against fellow officers.

Officer A must participate in his own rescue, helping to move or control the suspect's body, and/or getting his own head or body out of the line of fire.

Officer A must communicate to Officer B. Rescue Officers could fail to recognize that a weapon retention situation is occurring, or have some hesitation as to whether Officer A's efforts are effective and whether they should engage. If Officer A communicates "he's got my gun" the response should assume that the officer is in danger of losing control of the firearm.

Similarly, Officer A can communicate "I've got him, he won't get my gun" if the weapon is under control, and alternative force options should be used to control the suspect.

Officer B should avoid projecting his weapon toward or "stabbing" the suspect with his weapon. While this is commonly seen as soon as the contact and speed picks up, it is less than optimal. Projecting a weapon at the suspect may see the weapon's muzzle averted, thus limiting the ability of Officer B to engage, or perhaps create a malfunction after one round if the weapon is fired while the suspect is holding onto it. As well, under extreme stress and chaotic movement, a weapon could be forced out of battery through stabbing into the suspect, or could be cycled/partially cycled if a suspect twists or moves while the slide is in contact, also inducing a malfunction. Having to rescue a fellow officer in such a situation is the very definition of a "bad day," attempting to do so with a weapons malfunction takes that even further, and loses critical time.

For added realism, cycling/firing training weapons can be used. It should be noted that Airsoft weapons tend not to be robust enough for realistic weapon retention training actually wrestling over guns, and firing training projectiles at these distances is not recommended by manufacturers such as Simmunition.

Conclusion

There will always be times when officers will be killed regardless of their training and experience. No training covers every conceivable situation, and the nebulous factor Luck presents is always a reality in dynamic lethal force encounters.

But Luck favors the prepared, and by training more realistically, we may improve our chances and allow officers to decisively take advantage of a lucky break when it presents itself.

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