

With this installment of the Indiana Law Enforcement Journal, we are publishing an article submitted through Dave Kipper by Benjamin Kurata who writes for Action Target Newsletter. These types of articles can be very helpful when department training officers are planning their training course for the coming year.

How Officers Are Dying: Trends in Felonious Officer Deaths

by Benjamin Kurata - Action Target Newsletter - 11/12/10

I recently received an alarming e-mail from one of Law Enforcement websites that I am a member of: “**Officer Deaths up 42% This Year**” from this time last year.

I have to admit that every time I receive an “Officer Down” e-mail I experience a knot in my guts, and hesitate to open the e-mail for a second, knowing that it details another death of a Law Enforcement Officer in the US.

The following are just my observations and opinions, not based on any rigorous statistical study, as that will be done by the FBI at a later date. That being said, in the latter part of this article I will quote some trends that are important to be aware of from the 2006 FBI Publication, “Violent Encounters”.

Observation 1: Multiple Officer Deaths / injuries per Incident

We are losing more officers per incident than in the past:

March 21, 2009: Oakland, CA, 4 Officers killed

April 4, 2009: Pittsburgh, PA, 3 Officers killed

April 25, 2009: Okaloosa County, FL, 2 Officers killed

July 26, 2009, Seminole County, OK, 2 Officers killed

November 29, 2009: Lakewood, WA, 4 Officers killed

May 20, 2010, West Memphis, AR, 2 Officers killed, 2 Officers severely wounded

Observation 2: More Officers are Being Ambushed

Whether pre-planned (Oakland, Spokane) or hasty (Arkansas), violent criminals are pre-planning aggressive, violent attacks on Officers. They have already made up their minds, mentally planned, rehearsed, and equipped their next encounter with Law Enforcement. They know what they are going to do the next time they are stopped on the street or a uniform knocks on the front door. They have an incredible tactical advantage when they initiate the attack as the Officer is on the wrong side of the action versus reaction curve. In a later article I intend to touch upon the psychological and perceptual aspects of ambush avoidance, but the important thing to keep in mind for now is that **THEY ARE BRINGING THE FIGHT TO US!**

Observation 3: More Officers are Being Killed by Rifles

The most popular rifle caliber used against LEOs is the 7.62 X 39 mm COMBLOC round. **In most variants, the projectile is steel jacketed and is an armor piercing round that will defeat all soft body armor and most parts of a patrol vehicle.** I have also personally seen the same projectile defeat cinder block and brick walls easily. The point is, when facing an assailant armed with a rifle, there is very little material that can be considered hard cover. Rather than

being pinned down behind something that will not stop the incoming projectiles, we might consider borrowing a page from the military and consider an aggressive counter attack with accurate, aimed gunfire as cover.

Learning points from the 2006 FBI Publication, “Violent Encounters”:

Please keep in mind that we are talking about officer deaths. The 2006 publication, “Violent Encounters” compares felonious officer deaths with similar studies conducted in 1992 and 1997. I will be comparing stats from the 1992 and 2006 studies.

Observation 1: Deaths at Disturbance Calls / Arrest Situations / Crimes in Progress Dropped from 52% to 38% of Officer Deaths between 1992 to 2006.

Observation 2: Deaths at Traffic Pursuits / Stops went up from 22% to 30%.

Keep in mind that a lot of officer fatalities may start as a traffic stop, escalate into a foot pursuit, and conclude as a hasty ambush set up by the attacker against the officer.

So What? Deaths at Disturbance Calls / Arrest Situations / Crimes in Progress and Traffic Pursuits / Stops accounted for 68% in 2006. These types of situations remain the most dangerous activities LEOs engage in.

Observation 3: Cop Killers are switching from Revolvers to Semi-auto Handguns.

In 1992, the most popular caliber with cop killers was the .38 Special, accounting for 41% of Officers killed, the 9mm 12%. In 2006, the .38 Special accounted for 13%, the 9mm for 32%.

So what? Officers may be facing the same type of handgun they carry or superior handguns.

Observation 4: Cop Killers Practice with Their Weapons More Often than most Police Officers.

In 2006, 81% of violent offenders practiced an average on 23 times a year. I know of very few departments that do in-service or qualification courses of fire 23 times a year.

So what? There’s a pervasive belief that “bad guys can’t shoot”. The truth is they practice just as much, if not more, than the average LEO. According to the 2006 study, with **the handgun**, the Officers were successful in putting rounds on their attacker(s) 39% of the time, but the violent attackers were successful in putting rounds on the Officer 68% of the time. The average distance for the officer delivering rounds was 25 feet, the average distance for the violent offender was 15 feet. Hence the saying I learned many years ago, “Proximity negates skill.” When **the shotgun** was the weapon of choice, the officers were successful 100% of the time with the average distance of engagement 23 feet. In this study, violent attackers were not able to put any rounds on LEOs with a shotgun. When **the rifle** was the weapon of choice, in this study (keep in mind that this study was prior to most of the recent Officer fatalities where Officers were killed with rifles), neither LEOs nor violent attackers were successful in putting rounds on each other, but **note that the average distance of engagement was 188 feet**, so operator ability may have been a factor.

In closing, there are several trends in Law Enforcement Officer deaths, some are familiar to us (most dangerous types of contacts) some may be new (the fact that violent offenders practice as often as they do). Whether confirming what we know already or giving us new information, the goal is to save officer's lives when the talking stops and the shooting starts.

Postscript:

I wrote this the week of 6 June 2010, after presenting the above information to a Rangemaster class at the Dallas County (Texas) Sheriff's Office. Two weeks later, on 21 June 2010, I received notification that a Lancaster, TX (Dallas area) Officer had been shot to death with a 7.62 X 39 caliber rifle. My deepest condolences and support go out to the surviving family of the slain Officer and his department.

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