

# ICPS

## **NYPD SOP 9 - ANALYSIS OF POLICE COMBAT**

In 1969, the Firearms and Tactics Section of the New York City Police Department instituted a procedure for the in-depth documentation and study of police combat situations. It was designated Department Order SOP 9 (s. 69).

Data gathering began in January 1970, and over 6000 cases were studied during the 1970s. The study results and findings were released in 1981. The following sets out many of those that focus on shooting situations and shooting techniques.

Since the results became available, pistols have replaced revolvers in most agencies, and the results are dated. However, based what one reads in the literature, and sees in police videos, the elements and conditions of shooting situations have changed little over time. As such, the results can be expected to prevail today. At a minimum, they form a solid and scientific basis for self defense training and action until new study results and findings come along.

Also, it is likely that the results are applicable most anywhere, as New York City, in addition to tall buildings, has numerous suburban communities, beaches, large parks, remote areas, highways, rivers, ocean fronts, etc.

All of the results and findings applicable to police combat situations, are not provided here. Hopefully, the snippets below, will serve as a spur to those in need of that information, to get, study, and act on it.

### **Shooting Distances**

From Sept 1854 to Dec 1979, 254 officers died from wounds received in an armed encounter. The shooting distance in 90% of those cases was less than 15 feet.

Contact to 3 feet ... 34%  
3 feet to 6 feet ..... 47%  
6 feet to 15 feet..... 9%

The shooting distances where officers survived, remained almost the same during the SOP years (1970-1979), and for a random sampling of cases going

back as far as 1929. 4,000 cases were reviewed. The shooting distance in 75% of those cases was less than 20 feet.

Contact to 10 feet ... 51%  
10 feet to 20 feet.... 24%

### **Lighting Conditions**

The majority of incidents occurred in poor lighting conditions. None occurred in what could be called total darkness. It was noted that flashlights were not used as a marksmanship aid. Also, dim light firing involves another element which is different from full light firing, muzzle flash.

### **Weapons**

Firearms accounted for only 60% of the attacks on police. However, in the 254 cases of officers killed in an armed encounter, firearms were used in 90% (230) of them, and knives in 5% (11).

The service revolver was used in 60% of the cases. The authorized smaller frame civilian clothes revolver was used in 35% of them.

In all cases reviewed, an unauthorized or gimmick holster (ankle, shoulder, skeleton, fast draw, clip-on etc.) was involved when the revolver was lost, accidentally discharged, or the officer was disarmed.

Unintentional discharges averaged about 40 per year. This number is relatively small given: the size of the force (28,000), that all officers are required to be armed at all times when they are in the city, and that 4,000 non-police firearms are processed each year.

### **Sight Alignment**

In 70% of the cases reviewed, sight alignment was not used. Officers reported that they used instinctive or point shooting.

As the distance between the officer and his opponent increased, some type of aiming was reported in 20% of the cases. This aiming or sighting ran from using the barrel as an aiming reference to picking up the front sight and utilizing fine sight alignment.

The remaining 10% could not remember whether they had aimed or pointed and fired the weapon instinctively.

### **Quick Draw**

65% of the officers, who had knowledge of impending danger, had their revolvers drawn and ready.

This is proper tactically for several reasons, the first being that holsters which are designed with the proper element of security in mind, do not lend themselves to quick draw. The old bromide, "Don't draw your gun and point it

at anyone unless you intend to shoot" is a tactical blunder.

Situations in which rapid escalation occurred, were most often activities considered routine, such as car stops, guarding, transporting or fingerprinting prisoners or handling people with mental problems.

Family disputes did not prove to be high on the police danger list. Sniper and ambush incidents represented less than 1% of the cases reported.

Reports on incidents involving police death revealed that the officer was

alone more often than not and that he was confronted by at least two people.

### **Cover**

The element reported as the single most important factor in the officer's survival during an armed confrontation was cover.

In a stress situation an officer is likely to react as he was trained to react. There is almost always some type of cover available, but it may not be recognized as such without training.

### **Positions**

In 84% of the cases reviewed, the officer was in a standing or crouch position (supported and unsupported) when he fired.

(The training doctrine developed for use in an exposed condition involves use of the crouch/point shoulder stance. The feet are spread for balance and the arms locked at shoulder, elbow and wrist. The body becomes the gun platform, swiveling at the knees. Multiple targets can be fired on with speed and accuracy through an arc of 140 degrees without moving the feet.)

### **Strong Hand or Weak Hand**

Officers, with an occasional exception, fired with the strong hand. That was the case even when it appeared advantageous to use the weak hand. The value of placing heavy emphasis on weak hand shooting during training and qualification is subject to question.

### **Single and Double Action**

The double action technique was used in 90% of the situations and used almost without exceptions in close range, surprise, or immediate danger situations.

### **Warning Shots**

A warning shot may set off chain reaction firing.

Accurate fire from handheld weapons from a fast-moving vehicle is almost impossible, even by a highly trained officer.

Firing while running changes the situation from one where skill has a bearing into one in which the outcome depends on pure chance. It endangers the officer unnecessarily by depleting his ammunition supply, and increases the chance of shooting innocent persons who may be present.

### **Rapid Reloading**

The average number of shots fired by individual officers in an armed confrontation was between two and three rounds. The two to three rounds per incident remained constant over the years covered by the report. It also substantiates an earlier study by the L.A.P.D. (1967) which found that 2.6 rounds per encounter were discharged.

The necessity for rapid reloading to prevent death or serious injury was not a factor in any of the cases examined.

In close range encounters, under 15 feet, it was never reported as necessary to continue the action.

In 6% of the total cases the officer reported reloading. These involved cases of pursuit, barricaded persons, and other incidents where the action was prolonged and the distance exceeded the 25 foot death zone.

### **Bullet Efficiency**

During the period 1970 through 1979, the police inflicted 10 casualties for every one suffered at the hands of their assailants.

In all of the cases investigated, one factor stood out as a proper measure of bullet efficiency. It was not the size, shape, configuration, composition, caliber, or velocity of the bullet.

Bullet placement was the cause of death or an injury that was serious enough to end the confrontation.

### **Hit Potential In Gun Fights**

The police officer's potential for hitting his adversary during armed confrontation has increased over the years and stands at slightly over 25% of the rounds fired. An assailant's skill was 11% in 1979.

In 1990 the overall police hit potential was 19%. Where distances could be determined, the hit percentages at distances less than 15 yards were:

Less than 3 yards..... 38%  
3 yards to 7 yards... 11.5%  
7 yards to 15 yards... 9.4%

In 1992 the overall police hit potential was 17%. Where distances could be determined, the hit percentages at distances less than 15 yards were:

Less than 3 yards..... 28%  
3 yards to 7 yards.... 11%  
7 yards to 15 yards... 4.2%

### **The Disconnect Between Range Marksmanship & Combat Hitsmanship**

It has been assumed that if a man can hit a target at 50 yards he can certainly do the same at three feet. That assumption is not borne out by the reports.

An attempt was made to relate an officer's ability to strike a target in a combat situation to his range qualification scores. After making over 200 such comparisons, no firm conclusion was reached. To this writer's mind, the study result establishes that there is indeed a disconnect between the two.

If there was a connection between range marksmanship and combat hitsmanship, one would expect the combat hit potential percentages, to be well above the dismal ones reported. That is because the shooting distance was less than 20 feet in 75 percent of the 4000 encounters studied.

The **US Army** recognizes that there is a disconnect. Its training manual, FM 23-35 Combat Training with Pistols & Revolvers (1988), calls for the use of Point Shooting for combat at less than 15 feet and when firing at night. It does not call for using standard and traditional range marksmanship

techniques.

"The weapon should be held in a two-hand grip and brought up close to the body until it reaches chin level. It is then thrust forward until both arms are straight. As the weapon is thrust forward, the trigger is smoothly squeezed to the rear. The arms and body form a triangle which can be aimed as a unit." For shooting at 5 to 10 yards, a modified version of the technique is used.

Various Point Shooting techniques are available for use. They are simple, direct, easy and quick to learn, and effective. With appropriate emphasis and training time allotted to them, one can expect a better future than the past.

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