

OC to Gun and Back

I recently trained a group of in-service students using the PRISim® Judgment Simulator. The scenarios that we trained with required the officers to transition from less-lethal to lethal, and sometimes back again to less-lethal. Some of them had difficulty with the exercise, not so much from the standpoint of making the decision about which level of force to use, that was generally done quickly and correctly. No, the problems that they encountered stemmed from their inability to both deploy a piece of equipment and then re-holster it. I observed some of them simply drop OC canisters and/or flashlights, only to find that when the situation changed again and the item needed, they had no idea where it was. Others had little difficulty getting what they needed off their [belt](#), while some chose to keep two items out rather than holster one of them to give them a free hand. (That might be crucial if you need to use the radio to call for help).

For many of them it was a valuable learning experience. A few of them discovered that the manner in which they had their equipment configured on their duty [belts](#) was a hindrance to them when they needed to get to a particular item quickly. Others found that their OC and flashlight holsters were stiff and barely functional in an emergency. It's good to experience these things in a training environment rather than on the street.

The exercise that caused the biggest dilemma was one in which a subject appeared with a knife. Some of the officers drew their OC before they drew their handgun. We discussed this during the debrief - the importance of remembering the 21 foot rule, and that whenever possible, we try to answer a threat at least one level higher than what we are encountering, i.e., an edged weapon is addressed with a firearm. That aside, the real problem occurred when the officer had both the OC and the firearm pointed at the bad guy. We talked about the danger of a sympathetic reaction; an accidental discharge possibly occurring when the officer was squeezing off a burst of OC. (Especially dangerous if both items are pointed at the offender).

Another scenario involved an unarmed disorderly subject who refused to cooperate. Several officers drew weapons first and then OC, but kept both drawn,

tying up their hands. The subject then advanced toward the officer who delivered OC. I was surprised to find that when the OC was used on the subject, and it proved to be ineffective, the subject continued to close on the officer who then fired his handgun. I asked for the justification for using deadly force and was told that, *I had to shoot him because he was coming at me and I had my gun out. He may have taken it from me.*

At that point, I played devil's advocate, doing my best imitation of a defense attorney. I asked the officer if he had been trained in the use of less lethal options and defensive tactics. Obviously, none of the officers could come up with a compelling argument justifying shooting an unarmed individual. We then reviewed tactics and techniques suitable in situations involving non-compliant subjects who were not armed.

Another consideration when training using transitions, is the shoulder weapon - how do we best deploy and then transition from that to a handgun, or for that matter, to go hands on with a subject - especially to cuff? It should be standard practice by now that all of our shoulder weapons are fitted with slings. Whether you are using a tactical sling or the conventional rifle sling, you should be utilizing that weapon during your tactical training. Going into a situation carrying a shoulder weapon without one slinged is seriously limiting your ability to adjust to the fluidity of the situation. The worst thing you can do is to lay that rifle down and go hands on with someone. It's difficult enough to sling the weapon to free your hands for other things. You should be practicing handcuffing and transitioning to handgun while carrying the shoulder weapon slung to the rear.

The last thing that we worked into the training session was the use of the flashlight. Except for a very few who had obviously given much thought and training to low-light situations, most stood in one place with their flashlight held directly in front of their body. One of the advantages of scenario-based training is using a system that records the students' actions during the incident. I let them see for themselves the great target they presented to the bad guys by remaining static and holding a flashlight. Most were surprised when they viewed the playback of the scenario.

We then discussed ways to use the darkness to our [advantage](#), by utilizing practices such as strobing to disorient the subject, turning the light on and off and

moving to a different position, etc. Once they practiced that in a safe training environment, they realized the value of low-light training.

Transitions happen every day in police work. We ramp up quickly, only to have to de-escalate when we find the situation becoming less critical. On the other hand, something innocent suddenly starts to grow out of control and we find ourselves going from non-lethal to lethal in an instant. If we [train](#) to make those transitions smoothly, we gain an advantage over our adversary. The way we train is the way we fight. Let's not shortchange ourselves in any way when we have to make those adjustments.

Stay safe, brothers, and sisters!