

FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

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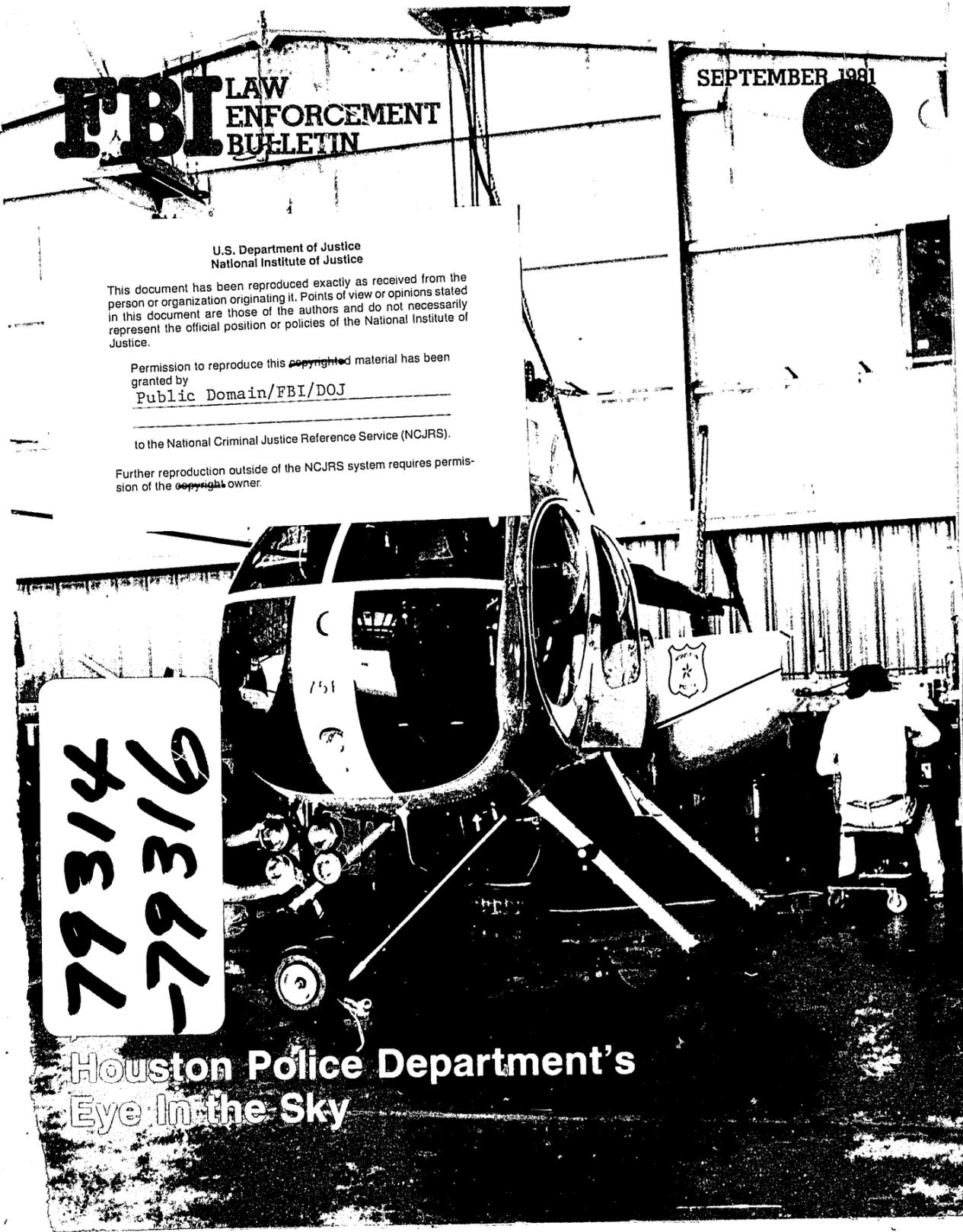
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Houston Police Department's
Eye In the Sky



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Helicopters are effective tools of law enforcement. See article on the Houston Police Department's Helicopter Patrol Division on p. 1.

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William H. Webster, Director

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Firearms

Officer Disarmings and Revolver Retention

5 Years Later

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Mr. Lindell



Chief Norman A. Caron

In August 1976, the Kansas City, Mo., Police Department instituted training in the Revolver Retention System as a response to the alarming increase in the number of officer disarmings. Beginning in January 1976, nine disarmings took place in 18 months; one officer was killed with his own handgun, while several others were wounded.

To determine why officers were being disarmed and what could be done to prevent it, a study was conducted by the KCPD planning unit. Research revealed that there apparently was no existing system of techniques to counter effectively holstered and drawn gun assault attempts.¹

The Revolver Retention System emerged from trial-and-error experimentation with various defensive and offensive techniques, including wristlocks, blocks, and throws. Revolver retention techniques differ from defensive tactics routinely taught police officers in that the former are gun defense-oriented rather than person defense-oriented. If the techniques are thoroughly learned and properly applied, personal defense becomes a natural consequence of the procedure.

The ultimate goal of revolver retention training is to allow police officers to perform their duties with confidence in their ability to protect themselves and others, whenever necessary, without an undue amount of concern about their ability to defend their sidearm from assault. Since the original system was developed, improvements have been suggested by continuing research, practical training applications, and actual revolver defense situations experienced by the officers in the field. The revised system of revolver retention is proving to be even more effective in training and application.

Handgun Defense

In order to develop a system of handgun defense, certain principles of leverage, speed, force, body movement, and mechanics must be practiced so the officer is always able to generate more force against an assailant than the attacker has the physical ability to withstand. To simplify the Revolver Retention System, a three-step integrated action sequence was devised. Regardless of the kind of attack, the officer's initial response is always appropriate to the situation and provides the best opportunity to defend safely the gun and himself. However, before practicing the techniques, the three principal objectives of the Revolver Retention System should be understood and applied in the proper order as each technique is practiced.

The Three-Step System of Handgun Defense

Secure The Gun Since the attacker is concentrating on grabbing the gun from the holster or hand, an officer must counter the attack by securing the gun in the holster with one hand, while preparing to use the other hand or arm to complete a release. In the event a drawn gun is grabbed, check the attempt to disarm with the free hand and then complete the release. In every instance, secure the gun first and then prepare to apply the release technique.

Position As the gun is secured, it now becomes necessary to move in a manner that offers the greatest opportunity to exert maximum leverage and physical stress against the attacker to insure that the release is accomplished, and at the same time, provide body movement that will protect the officer against further assault as he applies the release. The various foot, leg, and body movements serve two purposes as each technique is applied; both position and protect the officer as he moves to apply the release technique.

Figure 1—Rear Gun Hand Grip. Bring right hand up behind holstered gun, with right thumb between gun and holster. The right index finger wraps around and on top of hammer so that palm covers entire trigger guard. The two bottom fingers grasp top front of holster. Now, exert force on gun to prevent it from being drawn or fired in the holster.



Release By the time the trained officer prepares to apply the release technique, approximately one second has elapsed and the attacker is already at a considerable disadvantage, because he has been checked in his attempt to gain control of the gun and has also been restricted from any continued assault on the officer. At this point, as the officer applies the release with the appropriate technique, he will simply be applying more leverage and physical stress against the attacker than the assailant has the ability to withstand, assuring the release of the gun.

Holstered Gun Security Grips

As noted, it is imperative to secure the gun in the holster during an assault to prevent it from being drawn or discharged in the holster. Two methods of gripping the holstered gun accomplish this goal. The right hand grip is referred to as the rear gun hand grip (see fig. 1); the left hand grip is called the front cross grip (see fig. 2). The proper application of these grips will make it impossible for the attacker to pull the gun from the holster or cause it to discharge in the holster should the trigger be pulled during an assault.

When an officer's holstered gun is grabbed and the officer uses the proper grip to keep it in the holster, the gun remains in a relatively fixed position on the hip, which allows for control and sufficient force to be developed against the attacker's hand(s) or arm(s) by the officer's hands, arms, and body to apply a release technique. The holster's tight fit to the gun also helps contain and prevent the gun from being drawn, so long as the gun is being held down with a proper grip and the holster does not tear out in back.



Figure 2—Front Cross Grip. Reach across waist with left hand, palm down, and place palm on hammer, with thumb between gun and holster. Simultaneously insert index finger into the trigger guard behind trigger and middle finger into the trigger guard in front of trigger. Exert pressure on the gun to prevent it from being drawn or fired in the holster.

When the dominant-hand grip is broken, the other hand (weak) also simultaneously loses its grip because of the resulting sympathetic nerve action.

Strong-hand (dominant) and weak-hand grabs are present in every two-hand assault situation, because the gun butt or barrel/frame is too small for both attacking hands to get a strong grip on it. With practice, an officer will be able to feel the difference in dominant- and weak-hand gripping power. If he attempts to apply a release against the wrong hand (weak), he must quickly shift his grip to the other hand (dominant) and apply an appropriate release.

If the attacker has drawn the officer's gun, the dominant hand will be holding the gun butt. To counter this attack, the officer will grab the entire gun barrel with the near hand as he simultaneously reaches for and grabs the same (dominant) hand with his far hand and applies the correct release technique. This action allows the officer to exert superior force and leverage at all times, because both of the officer's hands are dominant hands during each handgun defense, while the assailant is always limited to one dominant gripping hand.

Drawn Gun Control

As the drawn gun in the officer's hand is grabbed, an assailant may attempt to gain possession of it by pushing, pulling, lifting, or forcing down on it with one or both hands. In every such instance, the officer will maintain a one-hand grip on the gun butt and use his other hand to counterattack the assailant's dominant gripping hand or arm to effect a release. By doing so, both of the officer's hands become dominant, while the attacker is always limited to just one dominant gripping hand or arm.

Step A



Revolver Retention System Techniques

The revised revolver retention training bulletin consists of five holstered-gun retention techniques, four drawn-gun retention techniques, and three disarming techniques. These particular techniques were selected because they form an integrated system of gun defense that provides the most effective and easiest-to-apply techniques for officers, regardless of height, weight, age, or sex. The 12 basic retention techniques are designed to provide protection in a multitude of assault situations from the front, side, or rear.

Step C



For example, the upper forearm strike is a holstered handgun retention technique used against an attempt to grab or draw a holstered gun from the front or side with a straight arm(s). When a frontal attack occurs, the officer is very vulnerable to injury from the attacker's free arm or legs, even his head. Therefore, the officer not only wants to free his seized gun from the attacker's grasp but also to move out of the line of attack quickly, while effecting a release. The purpose of the upper forearm strike is to gain as quick a release as possible, using effective foot and body movement that will enable the officer to maximize force against the attacker's arm(s) (elbow), while minimizing additional assault from the front.

This particular technique is recommended because it's easy to apply and the dynamic force that can be generated against the attacker's elbow by the officer's forearm the instant he is assaulted from the front or side.

In the upper forearm strike, there are four steps which are to be performed simultaneously, or in sequential order, without any hesitation.

Right Hand Grab/Rear Gun Hand Grip

Step A—As the attacker reaches toward the gun with his right hand or both hands or grabs the gun butt, grasp the gun below the butt with the right hand, from the rear, and exert force on it to keep it in the holster. The right index finger should be placed around and on top of the hammer so that the palm covers the entire trigger guard and the two bottom fingers grasp the top front of the holster. The thumb wraps around the opposite side of the gun, making it impossible for the assailant to draw the gun or fire it in the holster.

Step B—While securing the gun with the right hand, step to the left front and pivot toward the attacker, keeping both knees bent. This movement positions an officer to the outside of the attacker's right arm, preventing additional assault by his other arm or legs.

Step B



This action also tends to straighten the attacker's arm(s), weaken his grip, and position the arm(s) for the release strike. Simultaneous with the step to the left front, clench the left hand in a natural position and swing the arm straight back 45° to cock it.

Step C—Maintain a straight locked arm and swing it forward and up, striking the attacker's right elbow as hard as possible with the upper forearm, which causes the elbow joint to hyperextend and effect the release.

Step D—As the strike is delivered, keep the knees bent and feet flat on the ground for maximum power, balance, and leverage.

Step D



If the attacker grabs the gun butt with the left hand, perform a left front cross grip and step to the right front while pivoting toward the attacker. (See fig. 3.) Now swing the right arm back 45° to cock it. With a clenched fist, swing the straight arm upward and strike the attacker's left elbow as hard as possible with the upper right forearm, causing his elbow to hyperextend and effect the release.

If the attacker grabs the gun butt with two hands, secure the gun in the holster with either hand and proceed into the appropriate body movement and strike release position. As the elbow is hyperextended by a hard sharp strike, the other hand will also lose its ability to hold. This sympathetic reaction functions only if pressure is maximized on the nerve at the elbow joint as it is struck. This technique is effective against either dominant or weak two-hand grabs of the gun butt.

It is important to step as far to the right or left front as possible in order to be positioned outside and opposite the attacker's elbow for maximum force and safety as the strike is made.

Figure 3—Left Hand Grab/Front Cross Grip



Instructors stress continuous practice of handgun retention techniques to reinforce comprehension and reflex actions. Yet, while practice is essential, there are several points to note.

1) Do not strike your partner's elbow hard, since it is easy to damage the elbow when it is locked in this position.

2) While practicing each release technique, exert force on the gun with both the rear gun hand grip and the front cross grip to insure that the gun cannot be drawn from the holster during an assault.

3) Practice the right-, left-, and two-hand releases until the hand grips, body movement, and strike release become second nature.

4) In certain attack situations, such as when the assailant grabs the gun butt with a thumb-down grip, causing the arm to rotate so that the elbow is positioned on top of the arm, it may be more effective to cock the striking arm upward and back and deliver a downward forearm strike to the elbow. Practice both release technique methods for maximum effectiveness.

5) It is best to use a practice gun when performing these techniques; however, if a personal handgun is used for practice, be sure to unload the gun before each practice session. Show your practice partner the open cylinder or chamber to insure that the weapon is unloaded.

The Kansas City Experience

Reports of disarmings among KCPD officers who were trained in revolver retention virtually stopped for a period of 52 months. However, during the first year, several officers who had yet to receive the training were disarmed with no serious consequences.

There were also a number of reported incidents where assaulted officers used the instructed techniques to retain their weapons. In fact, those officers reported using revolver retention techniques far more often than any other method of defense to retain their revolvers.

The notable reduction in disarming incidents among trained officers may be the result of officers being more aware of the potential for being disarmed, and therefore, avoiding dangerous practices. In either event, well-trained officers are better prepared to protect themselves and their guns at all times.

The most frequently used holstered gun defense technique was the lower forearm block against an attempt to grab the gun from the side or rear. About half the reported handgun defense incidents involved the quick forearm strike and turn into and then away from the attacker in one simultaneous action. A number of officers used the rear wristlock technique to remove the attacker's hands from the gun butt, and one officer employed a riere and leverage release to retain his drawn gun which had been grabbed by a mentally disturbed person. Also frequently reported was the use of the handgun disarming method to remove guns and other weapons from subjects' hands.

In one instance, a reserve police officer who had yet to be trained in revolver retention reported that he had received a copy of the training text and periodically practiced the techniques with his wife. He was working in uniform at an art gallery when assaulted and disarmed. Following the attack, the officer said that as he struggled with the attacker and had the gun ripped from his holster, the pictures from the handgun disarming method flashed through his mind. He followed the procedure, disarmed the subject, and regained his gun. This, of course, is the kind of response all trainers desire and is directly related to the reason trainers recommend instructed techniques be practiced by officers on their own time.

In contrast to the use of revolver retention techniques to retain sidearms, a smaller number of officers reported a variety of other methods, including fists, feet, elbows, batons, and hand radios. These personal defense tactics have worked and should continue to be used by officers whenever applicable. There should be no reservation in the officer's mind about what he should or can do to protect his handgun. Basically, the Revolver Retention System has replaced personal defensive tactics as the most frequently reported defense of an officer's handgun simply because it is the most practical, easy to apply, and effective handgun defense tactic available to an assaulted officer in many instances. Without exception, those officers who defended their guns with revolver retention techniques reported that their defensive actions were spontaneous, appropriate, and effective.

Officer Disarmed

The first disarming of a Kansas City officer who had been trained in handgun retention techniques occurred after more than 4 years of success with the Revolver Retention System. On December 24, 1980, a probationary officer was disarmed by a burglary suspect as the officer tried to push him into a search position against a wall, while holding a radio in her left hand and a gun in the right. The subject suddenly turned and grabbed for her gun arm, and although she struck him on the head with the gun, it was to no avail. The subject left the scene with the gun, which has not been recovered. Later, while being questioned, the officer admitted not using her revolver retention training in order to retain her gun, noting that she could not use her left hand because it held the radio.

Conclusion

Despite all precautions an officer may take, attempts by assailants to disarm officers will continue to occur. For this reason, no officer can afford to become complacent about the possibility of being assaulted or disarmed.

The success of the Revolver Retention System as a means of protecting officers against disarming attempts is directly related to officers' acceptance and use of the tactics as superior and effective methods of weapon defense, when compared to other defensive actions they might otherwise employ. However, in the final analysis, only one criterion should be used to judge the merits of any system of weapon defense—results!

A growing number of officers have reported the successful defense of their holstered or drawn guns by the quick and effective application of a specific revolver retention technique. Similar results are being reported throughout the country by those agencies that now teach this system of weapon defense as a standard part of defensive tactics, firearms, or officer survival training.

In most weapon assault situations, it is not only what the officer knows about the dangers of being disarmed but also how well he is trained. However, what is most important is that the officer uses the information and training to react positively, correctly, and forcefully to defend his weapon when necessary. No amount of knowledge or training can replace a failure by the officer to react properly when assaulted. When a police officer is disarmed by an assailant, a number of things may happen immediately after the assault, but none will be good as far as he is concerned. The officer or others may be killed or wounded, or the attacker may leave the scene with the gun and use it to rob or kill in the future. A failure by the officer to take appropriate action to defend his weapon when assaulted may only leave others to extend condolences later.

The fact that no KCPD officer who used revolver retention techniques to defend the handgun in 5 years has been disarmed shows that effective training can help determine whether an officer prevents death or injury during such an attack. The end to a deadly trend of escalating officer disarmings by the formulation and implementation of a specific training program has proved to be more successful than expected.

As a result of the KCPD experience, other departments and agencies will now have access to this system of weapon protection for their officers without having to undergo a similar lengthy period of research and development.

The Kansas City, Mo., Police Department's continued commitment to annual revolver retention training and the officers' positive response to this training show that commitment, cooperation, and mutual dedication to officer safety have combined to help protect those who are sworn to protect others. The price the officer must pay for this protection is to be aware that his handgun may be subject to attack at any time and to stay prepared mentally, physically, and technically to prevent an assault from succeeding. **FBI**

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Footnote
James W. Lindell, "Officer Disarmings—A Response," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, vol. 47, No. 3, March 1978, pp. 8-13.