



TACTICAL CONCEPTS

By Sid Heal

TOPIC AREA: PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION (DIVERSIONS)

One of the most useful enhancements to tactics is a diversion. Diversions can be anything that distracts or diverts the attention and take many forms. They provide “windows in time” that can be tactically exploited. While diversions can take many forms, they are generally grouped into two broad categories. These are deceptive diversions and physiological diversions.

A deceptive diversion (sometimes known as a psychological diversion) works by fooling a suspect. Consequently, it requires the suspect to form a false conclusion, no matter how brief. They frequently take the form of a ruse, trick or misrepresentation. Deceptive diversions do not need to be loud or violent — just misleading. But deceptive diversions don't always work because individuals use different rationale to reach conclusions. The possibility always exists that the suspect won't be fooled because the ruse was too complicated or he simply used the same information but drew a different conclusion. In fact, suspects often have an inherent distrust of any information that can be attributed to the authorities and that makes deceptive diversions even more difficult to achieve. The problem is further complicated because oftentimes a suspect's reasoning ability is clouded from drugs, emotion, fatigue or mental deficiencies.

Deceptive diversions are appealing because they provide a major advantage over physiological diversions. Once people are convinced of an appropriate course of action they almost never change their minds unless they have reason to doubt or receive conflicting information. As a result, deceptive diversions last longer than physiological diversions. This is offset however, by another disadvantage because “once fooled, twice shy.” Hence, deceptive diversions are almost impossible to

achieve more than once in any given operation.

Even so, sometimes deceptive diversions offer advantages which would be otherwise unavailable. For example, suppose during negotiations a suspect in a building with alarmed doors is told that an audible alarm with a preset time will go off because there is no way to shut it off. In reality, at the given time, a tactical team opens an alarmed door and gains entry despite the alarm. Because of the deception, the suspect may ignore the alarm in the belief that it was inevitable. Because he “explained it away,” he was fooled.

The other type of diversion is called a physiological diversion because it works directly on people and requires no thought whatever. Animals experience and interpret their world through information acquired by stimulating one or more of the five senses. Humans are no exception. The most important is sight, which accounts for about 85 percent of the information we use, followed by hearing, touch, smell and taste. Physiological diversions work by overstimulating the senses which requires the brain to recover before moving on to other tasks.

Probably the best known physiological diversion is a distraction device, sometimes called a “flashbang.” When these devices

explode they create an intense, dazzling light, intense sound and an over-pressure of several pounds per square inch. Furthermore, they do so in about 50 milliseconds. Consider that it takes the average person between 200 to 250 milliseconds just to blink his eyes! Immediately after a flashbang is deployed, everyone in close proximity is awash in sensory stimuli and, in attempting to make some understanding of it, the brain simply shuts down the higher cognitive processes which are needed for an effective reaction.

While physiological diversions work well time after time, the major disadvantage is that the effects are very short-lived. Because the human body has a tremendous ability to recover from shock, the effects of a physiological diversion almost never last more than six to eight seconds. It is important to understand that a physiological diversion will not prevent a suspect from reacting. In fact, they may cause an involuntary “startle response.” What physiological diversions do best is prevent an effective reaction because the suspect temporarily loses the ability to engage in rational thought.

An understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the two types of diversions is critical in deciding which is more likely to accomplish tactical objectives. For example, some would automatically place flashbangs in the physiological diversion category without considering other possibilities. But a flashbang can also be used as a deceptive diversion if employed to fool a suspect into believing that an entry is taking place in another area. Deceptive diversions are more complex and require a commensurately greater effort to achieve but may provide a longer window of opportunity. Regardless of which type of diversion is employed, the surprise that results can provide tactical advantages out of all proportion to the effort required to achieve it and there are few tactics that won't benefit from a diversion. ■

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