

The tactical trio

By Sid Heal

Law enforcement typically responds to one of three types of situations: natural disasters, such as floods and storms; mechanical disasters, such as car accidents and train wrecks; and conflicts, such as barricaded suspects and riots. Of the three, conflicts are the most complex because they involve an adversary who is in active opposition. Each situation is comprised of a temporary and unique set of circumstances that require somewhat unique tactics, but when the situation is a conflict, three time-tested tactics are predominant. These are the *hammer and anvil*, the *envelopment* and the *pincer*. When properly applied these tactics work by overwhelming a suspect's ability to effectively resist.

Hammer and anvil

The *hammer and anvil* is one of the oldest tactical maneuvers and was used effectively by Philip of Macedon and his son, Alexander the Great, during the Peloponnesian Wars more than 2,400 years ago.

The hammer and anvil tactic works by using two forces, one stationary and one mobile. The stationary force "fixes" the adversary and prevents escape while the mobile force moves toward it with the adversary caught between. The opponent, then, is caught between the two forces and can't flee because of the stationary force (anvil), nor can it stay because of the moving force (hammer).

In law enforcement operations, the hammer and anvil is commonly used against barricaded suspects where a containment team functions as the anvil and an entry team is the hammer. The more astute will quickly recognize the importance of terrain on this maneuver since a barrier can be used in place of the anvil.

The hammer and anvil tactic is simple to implement. The primary disadvantage of this technique is its reliance on overwhelming force, which requires a substantial amount of personnel and/or firepower to ensure success. Because these are normally not limitations for domestic law enforcement, hammer and anvil operations are both popular and common.

... all successful tactical maneuvers have two fundamental underpinnings: flexibility in thought and mind and mobility to create and exploit opportunities.

Envelopment

The second tactic is an *envelopment*. Like the hammer and anvil, it has been around for at least two millennia and was used successfully as far back as the Battle of Cannae in 216 B.C. when Hannibal used it to nearly destroy the Roman Army.

Unlike hammer and anvil tactics, envelopments do not rely on overwhelming force but rather seek to apply strength against weakness. It works by attempting to fix an adversary's attention on one area while the main force exploits a weakness in another. It avoids the "front," which is usually more heavily guarded, and strikes from one of the flanks. Thus, envelopments are more easily understood as flanking maneuvers.

Law enforcement frequently uses this method when serving search and arrest warrants and resistance is expected. One of

the most common adaptations is to give a "knock and notice" at the main entrance, and when a suspect refuses to comply, the entry team (main force) forces entry at a rear door or window while the suspect's attention is focused on the front. Another common method is to use a diversionary device to distract a suspect's attention while an entry team exploits the temporary confusion by flanking the suspect from a different direction.

The advantage of an envelopment is that it requires fewer personnel than the hammer and anvil. However, because of the high degree of necessary coordination, it requires more extensive and detailed planning.

Pincer

The third tactic is called a *pincer*. Fundamentally, a pincer movement is a variation of an envelopment, but instead of a single maneuver element, it has two. It works by employing two moving forces closing toward each other with the adversary caught between them; hence it is sometimes referred to as a "double envelopment." Like the other two tactics, pincers have been used since antiquity and are described in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* dating back to 500 B.C.

Law enforcement frequently uses the pincer tactic during foot pursuits when the rapid and unpredictable movements of a suspect make establishing a blocking force, such as a hammer and anvil or envelopment, impractical. The advantage of a pincer movement is that it is quick to set up and so provides an effective response. The movement's disadvantages must be thoughtfully considered, however. First, they are difficult to coordinate because keeping track of everyone is nearly im-



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possible. Second, broken terrain makes it difficult to ensure that all avenues of escape are covered because there is no containment. Third, shifting gun-target lines create potential friendly fire problems.

In summary

All tactical maneuvers unfold in both space and time. The tactical objective in space is to gain and maintain control of key terrain while the tactical objective in time is to create and exploit opportunities. Likewise, all successful tactical maneuvers have two fundamental underpinnings: flexibility in thought and mind and mobility to create and exploit opportunities.

A narrow understanding of the principles involved or a rigid application of tactics is a recipe for disaster and even the most insightful tactician is rendered powerless without the mobility to follow through. A shrewd commander is thoroughly familiar with the underlying concepts of the various tactics as well as the situational awareness of the present situation and thus enabled to make confident decisions for the best course of action.

As one general noted, "In tactics, the most important thing is not whether you go left or right, but why you go left or right." Accordingly, even a rudimentary understanding of how tactics work provides insight into both their selection and adaptation to specific situations. «