**Arrest Situations - *Understanding the Dangers***

Would it surprise you to know the leading circumstance in which officers are feloniously killed each year is during arrest situations?[1] I was a uniformed officer for 18 years before I joined the FBI‘s Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) Program. It wasn’t until then that I learned arrest situations have been the most common circumstance during which officers are fatally wounded by offenders.

Data collected by the LEOKA Program from 2003–2012 show that 535 officers were feloniously killed within this 10-year period. Of the 535 officers, 124 were killed during arrest situations—approximately 23% of officers killed. During the same 10-year period, 581,239 officers were assaulted. Arrest situations accounted for 18% of the assaults that took place.[2]

The numbers demonstrate *how* these officers were hurt or killed (as a result of arrest situations), but it is critically important to look behind the scenes and explore *why* these incidents happened. Understanding *why* can change an officer’s mindset to better prepare that officer to avoid or survive potentially deadly encounters.

**Offender Motivation: Freedom**

The offender’s desire to remain free is a primary motivating factor for *why* an offender decides to attack an officer. In one LEOKA study, researchers asked offenders what their intentions were at the time they assaulted officers. Nearly 40% of these offenders stated they wanted to avoid arrest.[3] Comments made by the offenders during interviews capture this sentiment. One offender said that the officer would have to kill him “before he locks me up. Trying to take my freedom away from me, you’ll die, you know.”[4] Another offender reported that he “was looking at doing at least 8 years in the joint,” and he “really didn’t want to go to jail.”[5]

Once offenders believe they’re going to be arrested, the greater the risk that they will attack. The offender doesn’t have to explicitly be told he or she is under arrest; it could be the perception the offender has at the time.[6] They may perceive an arrest is imminent when an officer arrives at the crime scene, during a traffic stop, or during any other interactions with an officer. If officers believe every situation they encounter could result in an attack, it puts them in the right mindset to prepare for or prevent an assault.

**Officer Preparation: Training**

In one study, most of the offenders facing arrest (two-thirds) were looking for an opportunity to assault or kill the officer.[7] Because of findings like these, the LEOKA Program developed the Officer Safety Awareness Training (OSAT) course. The OSAT course is offered to law enforcement personnel to train officers in understanding *why* attacks occur. Throughout my travels across the United States leading OSAT, I have met law enforcement personnel from agencies of varying sizes and resources. 2

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While speaking to officers, most of them say they received some type of training on arrest situations (e.g., defensive tactics, handcuffing, etc.) during their certification processes to become police officers. Several of these officers acknowledge that they have participated in additional, updated, or more effective training. However, during these discussions, some of the officers also report that they do not handcuff according to their training.

Training is designed to prepare and equip officers with the techniques and procedures to perform their duties without being critically injured or killed. When officers deviate from the methods they are taught, it creates an opportunity for an offender to assault them. LEOKA case studies found some common procedural errors, including acting alone prior to the arrival of backup, placing vehicles improperly during traffic stops, neglecting to notify the dispatcher of traffic stops, not searching offenders thoroughly, and handling prisoners without proper restraints.[8] All officers train for arrest situations, yet arrest situations account for almost a quarter of law enforcement officers feloniously killed over the past 10 years. Some attacks cannot be prevented, even using proper procedures. However, I can’t help but wonder how often officers deviate from areas of training, which creates an opportunity to be assaulted.

As you might expect, LEOKA case studies include several arrest situations during which the use of proper procedures have saved officers’ lives. For instance, one officer was attempting a misdemeanor arrest when the offender took his firearm. As the officer reached to grab the weapon, the offender fired one round, striking the officer in the chest. The force of the round hitting his body armor knocked the officer back approximately six feet. At that point, the officer did not have a weapon and the offender was shooting at him, so the officer relied upon his training. The officer stated he was trained to close in on the weapon and regain control but only if he was near enough to the offender. After being knocked away, the officer felt closing in was no longer an option. So he did what his training indicated as a second option, seek cover. As the officer ran for cover, the offender discharged four more rounds, striking the officer in the leg, thigh, arm, and back. The officer believed that seeking cover, as recommended by his training, saved his life.[9]

**Conclusion**

As soon as an officer decides to arrest a person, it is important to follow training procedures before, during, and after the arrest is made to prevent vulnerability. There is no singular profile of an individual who feloniously assaults or kills law enforcement officers.[10] An arrest for a minor infraction of the law can result in an assault against a police officer. During an unplanned encounter, an officer does not often possess prior knowledge of the violator’s willingness to use force and violence against law enforcement personnel.[11] It’s up to officers to maintain the proper mindset each and every time they put on the uniform. Understanding that every situation could result in an assault gives the officer the upper hand. Officers owe it to their families, and to themselves, to make every effort to return home safely after each tour of duty.

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