

09-17 - Officer Safety-Ambush Attacks on Law Enforcement Personnel

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

NEWSLETTER

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OFFICER SAFETY - AMBUSH ATTACKS ON LAW ENFORCEMENT

PERSONNEL

Ambush style assaults on peace officers have occurred with increasing frequency nationwide.

Contemporary history has shown that many police officers have been targeted with violence simply because of their chosen profession. Incidents such as the tragic murder of four Lakewood police officers in Washington State, 2009; the murder of three New York police officers in 2014 and 2017, as they sat in their patrol vehicles; and the recent ambush of our own deputies at the Compton PAX, serve as stark reminders these events can happen anytime and anywhere. Regrettably, intense public media coverage of such events can often inspire deranged individuals to engage in "copycat" behavior.

An essential element of an ambush attack is *Surprise*. In a conflict, the person who utilizes *Surprise* to its fullest potential is at a significant tactical advantage. The inverse of surprise is *Predictability*. Those who engage in predictable behavior are at a severe disadvantage and vulnerable. Historic Chinese warrior Sun Tzu made mention of the ambush style attack 2500 years ago in his book *Art of War* - "attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected."

All ambush style attacks are premeditated. Premeditated attacks are usually always preceded by a period of observation, study and planning.

During these times of international terrorism, random acts of violence from domestic extremist groups or infamous suspects seeking notoriety, it is imperative that all of us in the law enforcement community remain constantly vigilant of our surroundings and deploy sound tactical principles consistent with Departmental training while both on and off duty.

Defending against ambush style attacks:

- Avoid establishing patterns and routines. Predictability is the "Achilles Heel" of any warrior.
- Maintain a proper mind-set at all times. Without the realization and appreciation that you could be harmed

without cause or warning, apathy will erode your perceptions and responses to the subtleties of a pre-ambush style attack.

- Ambush attacks require surprise. Avoid being surprised by anticipating or visualizing potential hazardous situations and then identifying the appropriate response well before the threat materializes. Engage in “what if” mind mapping exercises.
- Ambush attacks are the preferred technique of the weaker force. Weaker adversaries are often discouraged by perceived alertness and strength (command presence, superior tactics).
- Summon back-up deputies when appropriate. Stay alert, utilize sound tactics, be friendly but wary of unknown persons, remain physically fit and have your defensive weapons with you at all times. Appear formidable.
- Adversaries always strike first in an ambush attack. Action is always faster than reaction. Mitigate that fact by placing suspicious persons in a position of disadvantage or direct them away from you. Distance equals time. The greater the distance the greater the time. More time allows you an opportunity to defend against or avoid an ambush attack.
- Avoid locations that severely restrict your movement or channel you in a predictable direction (choke points, alleys, extended hallways).
- Direct suspicious persons away from the area they anticipated encountering you and call them into the space you control.
- Take varying routes to and from work/home.
- Ambush attacks are deliberate violent acts intended to be swift and decisive. If victimized by an ambush attack, respond aggressively and decisively. Counterattack with fierce opposition or immediately vacate the area of attack in an unanticipated path. The circumstances of the event will dictate the appropriate course of action.
- If your daily duties require a regulated routine (such as in a custodial environment), then remain hyper-vigilant as your adversaries are constantly assessing you.

Although the vast majority of society is comprised of law abiding community members who support peace officers, deputies must consciously remain vigilant, alert to persons in proximity to them and avoid routines that allow an adversary to predict daily activities.

“Complacency and apathy are fraternal twins and the children of disaster.”

Charles “Sid” Heal (LASD CMDR., RET.)

Information regarding the content of this Newsletter may be directed to Field Operations

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