Forensic Force Series ®

Edward Flosi

Cuffing Under Power
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Recently our Training Unit staff was asked by our chief to design and deliver training regarding the concept of "cuffing under power." For those unfamiliar with the term, it is simply a phrase used to describe the actions of law enforcement personnel taking control and handcuffing a person while that person is being subjected to the current from an electronic weapon, which in our case is the TASER X-26. This tactic was introduced to; (1) help reduce the number of electronic weapon cycles needed to get a subject under control and handcuffed, and (2) mitigate the perception of some groups that officers are overusing the electronic weapon in order to gain complete compliance through multiple cycles. If there are several cover officers on scene and "standing by" waiting while the multiple cycles are delivered, the claims of excessive force – along with claims of the cover officers failing to intervene – will certainly occur.

I am extremely lucky to have a staff of outstanding and creative instructors that work for our agency. I must give credit where credit is due, it is these officers that brought this idea to life and made it work with incredible results and positive feedback from even the most malcontented of personnel. I am only the author of this article, not the creator of the training that was delivered.

At one of our unit meetings prior to this delivery, it was Officer Jimmy Hoag that first brought his idea forward on how to deliver this training. He proposed to take a cuffing dummy and wire it up along the back so that is would be "live." The trainee officers would be put into a scenario while they would work in pairs to control and handcuff the dummy while an instructor cycled a TASER device into the dummy. The idea was that if the trainee placed a body part between the probes on the dummy, a self-correcting charge of electrical current would remind them that it was not a good idea.

I must admit that at first I was apprehensive of the idea. The reasons I was apprehensive were quickly dissolved after doing some research on the feasibility and some rethinking of the solid benefits of the proposed training. Officer Hoag and Officer Pat Comerford came up with a sound lesson plan with outstanding learning points to deliver the training in a manner that the trainees could learn the concept and remember – and apply – it in a field situation.

After some lecture covering the concept and discussion of the benefits in using the technique, the trainees were given two scenarios to practice the skill. The first scenario used officers in a team concept and a live role player in a FIST® suit and a Simunition® helmet. We chose this

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configuration based on price and overall protection and safety of the role player. Officer Hoag is shown in the picture wearing the suit and helmet.

The trainees were placed purposefully into the scenario at a point where the TASER device would be a reasonable force option. One trainee was given a TASER X-26 with a training probe cartridge to fire into the role player. The safety officer would cue the role player to react based on the probe placement or misses. Once the role player fell, or was taken to the ground in the case of a probe miss, the trainees would practice putting the role player into a prone control position. After the exercise was complete, the instructors would discuss issues regarding probe placement and how the trainees can avoid getting "bitten" by the TASER while controlling and handcuffing the subject. Another topic that was discussed was using the TASER in a drive stun mode to extend the affected area by touching it to the lower extremities of the subject while cycling the device, as long as at least one probe was still attached to the subject.

The next scenario involved using the dummy. The idea was to have the trainees enter a scenario in pairs. They were dispatched to an emergency cover response for a fellow officer. An instructor would be inside the room with the TASER activated and wires attached to the dummy. The pair of trainees would have to control and handcuff the dummy. There will be more on the scenario later but first a discussion about the dummy is needed.

We decided to use a Cuffman® dummy to start with. The arms of this particular dummy were flexible enough yet the wrists were durable enough to withstand multiple handcuff applications. A ballistic vest was placed on the dummy and a single bare copper wire (6 gauge) was threaded into the vest cover. The probes from the TASER were then attached directly to each end of the copper wire. When we tested the configuration to determine if the copper would give the proper self-correcting bite, we were puzzled (I would have said shocked but that seemed cliché) as to why we were getting no current when we touched the copper wire during the TASER cycle.

Officer Franco Vado examined the configuration and concluded that the current was indeed traveling through the copper wire but since it was such a good path for it to follow that it would not jump to the body. Officer Franco came up with a better plan. He stitched two separate bare copper wires (12 gauge) to the outside of the vest cover, approximately 1 ¾ inches away from one another and running almost the entire length of the rear vest cover. The stitching was to prevent the wires from separating more than 2 inches and from coming into contact with each other. He attached an alligator clip to the top of one copper wire and the bottom of the opposing copper wire. The assembly was then covered with a sweatshirt and the TASER probes could be easily attached to the copper wire with the alligator clips while still being visible to the trainee.

This ease of attaching the probes to the clips became very important as the training progressed. It was decided to use a TASER cartridge with the standard wiring to add to the realism and to be

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able to demonstrate to the trainees that the current would not "bite" them through the TASER wires if the wires were undamaged. This assembly and configuration worked extremely well in allowing the current to jump to the trainee – by interrupting the circuit – if he/she placed a body part between the visible probes. Now back to the scenario.

The pair of trainees would come into the room and need to negotiate a proper route to the subject without damaging the TASER wires on the ground. Once at the dummy, the trainees would take control of the dummy's arms in a prone control hold. Once prone control was established, the trainees were to tell the instructor role player to turn off the TASER device. This was done to reduce the amount of time the person would be subjected to the current and to allow the subject's muscles to relax in order to get the arms behind the back into a handcuffing position. If the trainees brought the dummy's hands to the lower back where the lower TASER probe was located, they quickly found out that holding a metallic set of handcuffs within 2 inches of the current was not a good idea.

When all was said and done, we trained over one thousand officers in this important concept. Many of the trainees told the instructors that prior to the training they were absolutely hesitant to even touch a person during a TASER cycle let alone use a prone control technique and handcuff the person. The training was highly instructional in a critical area of training that I believe will reduce risk of exposure to the officers and to the agency. It was professionally delivered in a realistic manner and even when a trainee was bitten by the TASER current, it was done in a manner that did not cause shame or humiliation to the student and strong learning points were brought forward.

Thanks are well deserved to San Jose Police Department Officers Jimmy Hoag, Pat Comerford and Franco Vado for their insight and creativity in developing this training. Their efforts to provide quality training to the department and willingness to share this information with other agencies are noble and selfless.

About the Author

Edward Flosi is a police sergeant in San Jose, California. He has been in law enforcement for over 25 years and is currently assigned as a supervisor in the Training Unit. He teaches use-of-force and arrest control/defensive tactics for the academy and in-service training. He has been retained in several cases to provide testimony in cases when an officer was alleged to have used excessive force. He has assisted the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in providing expertise on several occasions related to use-of-force training. He has a Master of Science degree from California State University – Long Beach and holds an Adult Learning Teaching Credential from the State of California. He teaches at West Valley College and serves as the Law Enforcement Training Coordinator for Martinelli and Associates: Justice & Forensic Consultants, Inc.

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