

| Firearms Skills: Saving More Than One Life

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Some law enforcement officers retire without having had to shoot their **weapon** during a criminal incident, but others are not so lucky. In 2012, in Chicago alone, “there were 50 incidents of police officers shooting individuals and causing injury, which means a police shooting occurred on average of once a week” (“IPRA Releases Report,” n.d., para 2). In New York City, “in 2012, city police officers shot and killed 16 people, an increase from nine in 2011” (Goodman, 2013, para. 3). No sane officer wants to be involved in a shooting; however, thinking that it can’t happen is delusional and could have fatal consequences for the officer and the public. To be successful in their chosen field, those who are preparing for a career in law enforcement need to have first-rate **firearms** skills.

Comment [JV1]: What changes to the introduction have been made to make the paper stronger?

Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) must be able to shoot **accurately**. Once a bullet is fired, it goes somewhere, perhaps into the target, perhaps into another person. Even “misses” count, as they may ricochet off an object, maybe damaging property or, even worse, hitting an innocent bystander. While criminals may not care where their shots land, LEOs must. Poor shooting skills, combined with stress, have led to many innocent victims being hit by law enforcement bullets. For decades, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) has been particularly infamous for their lack of shooting skills. “Over the past 10 years, city cops fired 4,702 bullets ...and missed 78 percent of their intended targets” (Blau, 2011, para. 1). In August 2012, two NYPD Officers fired twelve shots at a knife-wielding assailant, hitting the suspect only seven times. (McGeehan, 2012, para. 2). Where did the other five shots go? In August 2012, at a call near the Empire State Building, two NYC Police Officers fired 16 shots. Three bystanders were directly hit by police bullets, and six others were wounded by police bullet fragments that had hit other targets. (Ariosto, 2012, para. 1 & 3). In March 2013, NYPD Officers killed a suspect

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who pointed a gun at officers. The officers fired 11 rounds, but hit the suspect only “several times.” (Goodman & Stelloh, 2013, para. 5).— In December 2013, NYPD shot at a suicidal man, missed, and hit two nearby women instead.—(Rawlings, 2013, para. 2).—In each case, shots were fired, but often no one knows where all of them went or what they hit.—Even when the police do not hit innocent civilians, the potential is there when they fire at suspects who are near others, such as the case in New Mexico where officers fired at a van containing children.—Fortunately, that time no one was hit (Rhodan, 2013, p. 1).—The ability to accurately hit the target is absolutely essential for an LEO.

While inaccurate shooting is always a problem, another issue that LEOs face is being sure that they are aiming at the right person.—In a moment of stress, being absolutely sure of the target is essential.—Shootings are always investigated, and there may be consequences for shooting the wrong person.—Fort Myers, Florida, Police Officers were investigated and cleared by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and their own department, as well as a Grand Jury, for the death of a man in 2007.—Other departments have had mishaps, too.—October 2011, in California, “Downey police fatally shot the wrong man in its pursuit of an armed street-robbery suspect whose description matched the victim's” (Romero, 2011, para. 2).—July 2012, in Florida, Lake County Sheriff’s Deputies raided a Leesburg apartment complex.—When they knocked on a door at 2 am, the resident answered with a gun in hand and was shot and killed by the officers.—“The ACTUAL suspect was arrested in the apartment NEXT DOOR without incident” (“Florida Cops,” 2012, para. 2, 5, & 7).—California had a few such incidents during their problem with the renegade former Los Angeles Police Officer Christopher Dorner. February 2013 in Torrence, LAPD shot at a blue pickup they thought was driven by Dorner. Because of the misidentification of the truck, two civilians were wounded.—In a second incident,

“Torrance police also fired on another blue pickup, but no one was injured” (Vercammen, Pearson, & Botelho, 2013, para. 9 & 10).—In Lebanon, Tennessee, police shot and killed a 61 year old man “during a drug raid on the wrong house.—Police admitted their mistake, saying faulty information from a drug informant contributed to the death.... They intended to raid the home next door” (Brown, n.d.,—para. 1 & 2).—Not only may there be legal consequences for shooting the wrong person, but the officer has to live with that death for the rest of his or her life.

While it may seem difficult to accurately hit the bull’s eye at the shooting range, it is even harder during a stressful situation.—Physical preparation is necessary.—Practicing, becoming comfortable with the firearm, is one way to avoid accidental discharge and will help improve both accuracy and the time it takes to draw the weapon.—An officer is more likely to do what he or she has practiced over and over.—Plus, the moves will become smoother, causing less stress than if the officer is fighting to get the weapon out.—Mental preparation is also needed. Most humans have a prohibition against harming other humans.—Taking a life is not easy, not even when it is necessary.—If the officer has not considered that taking a life may become necessary, that officer may hesitate, not pulling the trigger, losing his or her own life or failing to protect another’s.

No matter how accurate an officer is with the firearm, shooting may cause other problems, such as psychological effects, including symptoms of PTSD.—There are also life and family effects.—Usually, the shooting is publicized, and some members of the public, particularly the suspect’s family, want the officer to “pay” for murdering their loved one.—News agencies may hound the officer, and charges and law suits may be brought even when the officer was justified in using the weapon.—Those who plan on a career in law enforcement need consider all of these issues before stepping out on to the street with a badge and a gun.

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Comment [JV4]: The References page has been revised since the Unit 6 draft to follow APA formatting. Has the writer added or changed sources since then?

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