

**ABRIDGED SUMMARY OF CATEGORICAL USE OF FORCE INCIDENT AND FINDINGS BY THE LOS ANGELES BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS**

**NON-TACTICAL UNINTENTIONAL DISCHARGE – 020-17**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duty-On (X) Off ( )</b>	<b>Uniform-Yes (X) No ( )</b>
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Topanga	3/15/17		
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<b>Officer(s) Involved in Use of Force</b>	<b>Length of Service</b>
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Officer A	7 years, 11 months
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**Reason for Police Contact**

Officer A was manipulating a weapon at the beginning of his watch when he unintentionally discharged a round.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Deceased ( )</b>	<b>Wounded ( )</b>	<b>Non-Hit ( )</b>
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Does not apply

**Board of Police Commissioners' Review**

This is a brief summary designed only to enumerate salient points regarding this Categorical Use of Force incident and does not reflect the entirety of the extensive investigation by the Los Angeles Police Department (Department) or the deliberations by the Board of Police Commissioners (BOPC). In evaluating this matter, the BOPC considered the following: the complete Force Investigation Division investigation (including all of the transcribed statements of witnesses, pertinent subject criminal history, and addenda items); the relevant Training Evaluation and Management System materials of the involved officers; the Use of Force Review Board recommendations; the report and recommendations of the Chief of Police; and the report and recommendations of the Inspector General. The Department Command staff presented the matter to the BOPC and made itself available for any inquiries by the BOPC.

Because state law prohibits divulging the identity of police officers in public reports, for ease of reference, the masculine pronouns (he, his, and him) will be used in this report to refer to male or female employees.

The following incident was adjudicated by the BOPC on February 13, 2018.

## **Incident Summary**

Uniformed Police Officers A and B checked out equipment from the station kit room. Officer B obtained his Patrol Rifle, a shotgun, and a camera. Officer A obtained a beanbag shotgun. After receiving their equipment, the officers walked to their assigned police vehicle that was parked in the Topanga Station parking lot.

The officers opened the rear cargo door of their vehicle, and Officer B placed the equipment he was carrying into the rear cargo area. Officer B walked to his personal vehicle to obtain his work bag.

Officer A obtained the shotgun from the rear cargo area and noticed the slide handle was up and the action of the chamber on the shotgun was closed. Officer A additionally noticed the side saddle contained six shotgun shells

**Note:** According to the kit room video, Officer B received the shotgun with the slide handle down and the action open. Officer B stated that he did not load the shotgun between the kit room and his vehicle.

According to Officer A, he grabbed the shotgun with his left hand and used his right hand to open the slide action as he walked along the passenger side of the police vehicle. He checked the magazine for any rounds, using his left thumb. He did not locate any rounds in the shotgun magazine and believed the shotgun was empty. He did not visually inspect the magazine or chamber for any rounds. He closed the action, and with the barrel pointing up, proceeded to conduct a firing pin test, consisting of disengaging the safety button and pulling the trigger. The result was an unintentional discharge of the shotgun.

Officer B entered Topanga Station and advised Sergeant A of the Unintentional Discharge incident. Sergeant A ensured that the necessary notifications were made.

## **Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners' Findings**

The BOPC reviews each Categorical Use of Force incident based upon the totality of the circumstances, namely all of the facts, evidence, statements and all other pertinent material relating to the particular incident. In every case, the BOPC makes specific findings in three areas: Tactics of the involved officer(s); Drawing/Exhibiting of a firearm by any involved officer(s); and the Use of Force by any involved officer(s). Based on the BOPC's review of the instant case, the BOPC made the following findings:

### **A. Tactics**

The BOPC found Officer A's tactics to warrant a Tactical Debrief.

### **B. Unintentional Discharge**

The BOPC found Officer A's Unintentional Discharge to be negligent.

## **Basis for Findings**

In making its decision in this matter, the Commission is mindful that every “use of force by members of law enforcement is a matter of critical concern both to the public and the law enforcement community. It is recognized that some individuals will not comply with the law or submit to control unless compelled to do so by the use of force; therefore, law enforcement officers are sometimes called upon to use force in the performance of their duties. It is also recognized that members of law enforcement derive their authority from the public and therefore must be ever mindful that they are not only the guardians, but also the servants of the public. The Department’s guiding value when using force shall be reverence for human life. Officers shall attempt to control an incident by using time, distance, communications, and available resources in an effort to de-escalate the situation, whenever it is safe and reasonable to do so. When warranted, Department personnel may objectively use reasonable force to carry out their duties. Officers who use unreasonable force degrade the confidence of the community we serve, expose the Department and fellow officers to legal and physical hazards, and violate the rights of individuals upon whom unreasonable force is used. Conversely, officers who fail to use force when warranted may endanger themselves, the community and fellow officers.” (Use of Force Policy, Los Angeles Police Department Manual.)

The Commission is cognizant of the legal framework that exists in evaluating use of force cases, including the United States Supreme Court decision in Graham v. Connor, 490 U.S. 386 (1989), that:

“The reasonableness of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight. The calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance for the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second judgments – in circumstances that are tense, uncertain and rapidly evolving – about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation.”

The Commission is further mindful that it must evaluate the actions in this case in accordance with existing Department policies. Relevant to our review are Department policies that relate to the use of force:

Law enforcement officers are authorized to use deadly force to:

- Protect themselves or others from what is reasonably believed to be an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury; or
- Prevent a crime where the subject’s actions place person(s) in imminent jeopardy of death or serious bodily injury; or
- Prevent the escape of a violent fleeing felon when there is probable cause to believe the escape will pose a significant threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or others if apprehension is delayed. In this circumstance, officers shall to the extent practical, avoid using deadly force that might subject innocent bystanders or hostages to possible death or injury.

The reasonableness of an Officer's use of deadly force includes consideration of the officer's tactical conduct and decisions leading up to the use of deadly force.

(Use of Force Policy, Los Angeles Police Department Manual.)

An officer's decision to draw or exhibit a firearm should be based on the tactical situation and the officer's reasonable belief that there is a substantial risk that the situation may escalate to the point where deadly force may be justified. (Los Angeles Police Department Manual.)

Tactical de-escalation involves the use of techniques to reduce the intensity of an encounter with a suspect and enable an officer to have additional options to gain voluntary compliance or mitigate the need to use a higher level of force while maintaining control of the situation. Tactical de-escalation does not require that an officer compromise his or her safety or increase the risk of physical harm to the public. De-escalation techniques should only be used when it is safe and prudent to do so.

(Tactical De-Escalation Techniques, October 2016.)

## **A. Tactics**

- In its analysis of this incident, the BOPC identified the following tactical consideration:

1. Firearms Manipulations – Four Basic Firearms Safety Rules.

Officer A's tactics were not a factor in this incident. Therefore, they were not reviewed or evaluated. However, Department guidelines require personnel who are substantially involved in a Categorical Use of Force incident attend a Tactical Debrief. Therefore, the BOPC determined that it would be appropriate to recommend a Tactics finding.

The BOPC found Detective A's tactics to warrant a Tactical Debrief.

## **B. Unintentional Discharge**

- **Officer A** – (shotgun, one round)

According to Officer A, he opened the action of the shotgun, but did not look into the chamber. He used his right thumb to push up the shell carrier and then used his thumb to push into the magazine just to verify there were no shotgun rounds in there. He then closed the action, pointed the shotgun straight up, and proceeded to conduct a firing pin test. He disengaged the safety and used his left index finger to press the trigger, resulting in a round being fired from the shotgun.

The BOPC found Officer A's unintentional discharge to be the result of operator error and, thus, negligent.