

Incident Summary

Officer A deployed his/her patrol rifle when backing-up officers who had stopped an occupied stolen vehicle. Once it was determined the suspect had fled the stolen vehicle, and the scene was secure, Officer A returned to his/her police vehicle to secure his weapon in its mounted rack. Even though Officer A had placed the weapon's Safe/Fire selector switch on "Safe", the weapon discharged as Officer A struggled to place the weapon into the rack. Officer A had mistakenly thought the weapon was to be secured in the rack with a loaded magazine in the weapon's magazine well and with a round in the firing chamber.

The investigation revealed how it was possible to inadvertently move the rifle's Safe/Fire selector switch during the process of placing the weapon into the rack. Additionally, the investigation determined that when the weapon was on the trigger guard post in the rack, with the safety selector lever on "Fire" mode, the trigger could be depressed. Based on the available evidence, the investigation determined that this was likely how the trigger was pressed in the instant case.

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 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. Drawing and Exhibiting

Does Not Apply.

C. Unintentional Discharge

The BOPC found Officer A's unintentional discharge to be Negligent, warranting a finding of Administrative Disapproval.

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 subject 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

- 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 to attend a Tactical Debrief. Therefore, the BOPC determined that it would be appropriate to recommend a Tactics finding.

During its review of this incident, the BOPC noted the following:

- Firearms Manipulations – Department-Wide Loading Standards.

B. Drawing and Exhibiting

Does Not Apply.

C. Unintentional Discharge

- **Officer A** – (rifle, one round)

According to Officer A, he/she struggled to put his/her patrol rifle into its fixed locking mount in his/her police vehicle. Subsequently, he/she pushed and pulled the weapon back and forth, in an effort to seat it properly in the rack. When Officer A pulled the rack's locking lever down to secure the weapon in place, the patrol rifle's trigger was depressed and a round was unintentionally discharged.

Upon reviewing the evidence, the BOPC determined that the Unintentional Discharge was the result of operator error. Officer A failed to download his/her rifle to patrol-ready condition prior to placing it into his police vehicle, as he/she was trained to do. As a result, a round was discharged.

The BOPC found Officer A's unintentional discharge to be Negligent.