

Wellbeing Check to Knife Attack: Anticipation-The Double Edged Sword and its Affect on Winning and Losing, Up Close and Personal

By Fred Leland

The location and assailant was a home and person we frequently went to and dealt with. In this case we received a call for a “wellbeing check” a person possibly in emotional distress. The officer went and talked with the WOMAN who said she was fine and that she did not need our services. After his initial assessment the officer felt she was OK so he cleared the scene. No sooner than he left, a friend of the woman called the station and stated, she had lied to the cop and that she was going to kill herself (again routine for this location...I HATE THE WORD ROUTINE!

The same officer goes back and called off back-up stating *it would just be a transport to the hospital!* He goes to the door which is open and begins to speak with the woman who is angry and states she does not want to go to the hospital. The officer continues the conversation in an attempt to get her to go.

The officer steps inside the cramped apartment kitchen (approximately 8ft by 10 feet). In the kitchen, the officer is positioned with a fridge to his left, a kitchen table to his right (with just enough walking space between the two), and a counter behind him making it difficult for him to move freely. She reaches behind her back, lifts her shirt, and quickly draws a large knife to her front, removes it from a sheath, and thrusts it towards the officer’s chest.

This cop is a big kid and he is a 3rd degree black belt and continually trains. He quickly grabbed the knife hand and swept her off her feet by kicking her leg out from under her. She continued to struggle and he used several strikes to get her to stop as she was still actively attacking him.

In the end the officer in this scenario fulfilled the number one rule in law enforcement. **“He went home at the end of his shift!”** All too often this where the learning ends, a cop comes out alive and we rightfully celebrate the victory. We owe it to ourselves those we care for and those we serve to learn the most from each experience. Direct experience with deadly force situations is extremely limited even in the most active law enforcement officer career, so we must take advantage of the opportunity to learn from each and every experience to become more effective.

Lessons Learned:

“The greater value of indirect experience lies in its greater variety and extent. History is universal experience, the experience not of another, but of many others under manifold conditions.” ~B.H. Liddell Hart

Anticipation, the double edged sword: Anticipation can be the key to winning, but if anticipation is based on yesterday’s situation it can be deadly! Never anticipate the outcome unless it’s based on the current situation. It is great to anticipate trouble but anticipation of the outcome of any encounter should be based on clear sight and cool minded orientation as to what’s going on! All situations we respond to are unknown risks so we must be constantly

vigilant. Your Boyd Cycle must be fluid! It is important to understand both the science and art of tactics and how to apply what we know to the current circumstances. Fighting today's battle with yesterday's tactics could be deadly!

In the case described above the officer's mindset of " **this was just another transport to the hospital**" is an example of an unhealthy anticipation that led to a typical approach we see in law enforcement. Yesterday's car stop, warrant arrest, drug arrest, transport to the hospital may have something different in store for you today!

Positioning, make sure when you move to a location it is one you can get out of. Positioning is a key missing component of police operational art. When done correctly it gives us the advantage. No one thinks about it! Instead keep your objective always in mind while adapting to the circumstances. Be open to options and understand there is more than one way to gain the advantage and resolve a problem.

Taking a position in a small kitchen with no room to maneuver, up close and personal with the subject reduced this officer's options to that of physical, hand to hand or hand to knife tactics. This option is not one we often survive! Other options would have been to bring the subject to you. Get the subject to come outside on ground of your choosing and then where you can observe more and then maneuver utilizing all your skills, awareness, verbal, psychological and physical to bring a safe resolution.

Continually assess via the Boyd Cycle, Non-verbal communications. Reading body language is critical to understanding what's going on. Always watch the DEADLY HANDS! Every cop will tell you this. But the trick is in training and conditioning yourself to do it! Most cops still look people in the eye while talking with them which is the habit they have developed while growing up. I can still hear my mother and father to this day shouting Look at me when I am talking to you! We must retrain ourselves to focus on the hands while maintaining awareness of our surroundings and the overall behavior of the subject we are dealing with. In this case the officer did use his awareness and know how to watch deadly hands, which ultimately saved his life.

Back-up never call off back-up and back-up officer **always** keep coming even if called off! You can keep moving, if necessary, to a better position but do not call back-up off!

When the time for talk is over and you must fight! Do not dance...FIGHT! Napoleon said, *the whole art of war consists in a well-reasoned and extremely circumspect defensive, followed by rapid and audacious attack.*

Reasonable force in this case could have been deadly force but the officer was positioned in a tight location and was too close to the assailant. So he used his physical abilities and knife disarming techniques (REMEMBER HE IS CAPABLE of doing this 20 years of REAL martial arts training) not all of us are trained at this level! When he quickly decided to fight he did until he had complete control and the threat was stopped.

ALWAYS THINK ADAPTATION! And then ADAPT! Your plan should foresee and provide for a next step be it success or failure, If then thinking! This type of thinking allows adaptation to be fluid and quick based on the current situation in the shortest possible time. Why? Because we are expecting the unexpected and prepared to act accordingly!

"The most complete and happy victory is this: to compel ones enemy to give up his purpose, while suffering no harm oneself." ~Belisarius

Stay Oriented!

Fred