

Responding to lethal violence

RCMP use of deadly force

by Rick Parent

Contemporary police officers face the challenge of intervening in community crises while maintaining public and personal safety. Unfortunately, this sometimes includes precarious life and death encounters which require using deadly force.

The very nature of a police officer's duties will at times place them in immediate risk. In other instances, they will be required to use deadly force to save the life of a citizen or fellow officer.

Police use of lethal force can only occur in those few situations where no other reasonable option is available. An officer is issued a firearm with the expectation they will use it only in very limited circumstances; the vast majority complete their entire careers without having to use potentially deadly force. However, in those rare instances where it must be used, an officer's decision-making is often complex, multifaceted and instantaneous.

Deploying force requires "reasoned discretion," depending upon the unique circumstances of an incident. Operational street level police are often the first to encounter intoxicated, mentally ill, suicidal or aggressive individuals.

In recent times, the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, increased use of hallucinogenic drugs, wider availability of methamphetamine and other factors have added to this situation, forcing police to deal with more disturbed and violent individuals.

Large numbers of distressed individuals suffering from mental disorders such as schizophrenia have been released from institutions over the past 20 years. Many now live on the streets and are frequently encountered by police, placing officers in the precarious situation of being required to correctly and instantaneously assess the people they confront.

In other instances, convicted violent offenders are released back into the community to, in some cases, offend once again. An officer may unknowingly deal with a hardened individual who, well aware of the consequences, may resort to extreme methods to avoid apprehension if found committing a crime. Now, more than ever before, police are likely to frequently encounter violent or dangerous individuals.

Decision making and force response

Prior to reacting to a situation with force, a police officer is required to analyze all of the known information and attempt to select the most appropriate use of force response. By law and profession, the response must be the least violent option available that will safely gain control of the situation.

When police face a violent individual or su-

perior numbers, the level of potential danger increases significantly and they must quickly disable the attacker(s) and improve the likelihood of control. In some instances, less-lethal compliance tools such as pepper spray and impact weapons may achieve this objective; in other instances, only their firearm will incapacitate the lethal threat they are facing.

Confronted individuals can demonstrate various levels of potential danger, typically in the form of weapons or levels of resistance. Both the type of weapon and the manner in which it is carried or held can influence an officer's perception of potential danger. It is important to emphasize that the dangers associated with non-compliant or irrational individuals can quickly change within the context of any particular incident, so police must be alert to all possibilities.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Fatal Shooting Incidents: 1980 to 2000 (52)

British Columbia - "E" Division (27)			Manitoba - "D" Division (3)		
Year	Date	Location	Date	Location	
1980		One Person Killed - No further information known.			
1981		No Fatal Shootings	87-06-13	Moose Lake	
1982	82-04-18	Campbell River	92-05-06	Rapid City	
1983	83-03-27	Chilliwack	92-10-30	God's Lake Narrows	
	83-05-28	Richmond			
	83-10-29	Williams Lake			
1984		No Fatal Shootings			
1985		One Person Killed - No Information.			
1986		One Person Killed - No Information.			
1987		One Person Killed - No Information.			
1988		One Person Killed - No Information.			
1989	89-08-23	Prince George			
	89-12-04	Revelstoke			
1990	90-May-31	Entrance to Manning Provincial Park			
	90-July-24	New Westminster			
	90-Aug-02	Grassy Plains - Burns Lake Det.			
1991	91-Feb-05	Nanaimo (2 Persons Killed)			
	91-Feb-20	Pinchi Reserve - Fort St. James Det.			
	91-April-18	Surrey			
1992	92-Oct-01	Coquitlam			
	92-Oct-11	Hazelton - ERT			
1993	93-Dec-24	Lillooet			
1994	94-Aug-03	Courtenay			
1995		No Fatal Shootings			
1996	96-Aug-26	Vancouver Drugs Section			
	96-Dec-10	Nanaimo			
1997		No Fatal Shootings			
1998		No Fatal Shootings			
1999	99-Jan-22	Kelowna			
	99-Dec-17	Langley			
2000	00-Sept-26	North Vancouver			
Alberta - "K" Division (7)			New Brunswick - "J" Division (4)		
	Date	Location	Date	Location	
	90-10-13	Caroline - Sylvan Lake Det.	90-10-10	Sackville	
	95-03-12	Little Smoky	85-02-07	Grand Falls	
	95-06-25	Assumption	85-08-03	Clarendon	
	97-04-13	Jasper	86-05-17	Sticksney	
	98-03-24	Tsui T'ina Reserve (2 Persons Killed)			
	99-10-03	Pincher Creek			
Saskatchewan - "F" Division (5)			Nova Scotia - "H" Division		
	Date	Location	No Persons Killed		
	81-11-08	Black Lake	Prince Edward Island - "L" Division		
	84-01-15	Meadow Lake	1980 To 2000 No Persons Killed		
	85-01-23	North Battleford	Newfoundland - "B" Division (5)		
	93-06-08	North Battleford			
	94-05-11	Fond Du Lac - Prince Albert Sub Div.			
			Year	Date	Location
			1981	81-02-27	Holyrood Det.
			1986	86-04-18	Port Basques
			1993	93-06-08	Makkovik, Labrador
			1996	96-03-02	Point May - Grand Bank Det.
			2000	00-08-26	Little Catalina - Bonavista Det.
			Northwest Territories - "G" Division		
			1980 To 2000 No Persons Killed		
			Yukon - "M" Division (1)		
			1998	98-Sep-07	Whitehorse
			RCMP - Federal Positions		
			1980 To 2000 No Persons Killed		

RCMP

A recent research project examined the instances of deadly force by RCMP members. A detailed record of fatal shootings was tabulated and analyzed using coroner's inquests, interviews with individual members, media reports and information obtained from governmental and other sources.

This analysis revealed RCMP officers were involved in 52 fatal shootings during the 21 year period studied (from Jan. 1, 1980 through Dec. 31, 2000). The majority (27) occurred in British Columbia and the officer was typically alone when suddenly confronted with a lethal threat. In many instances, they attempted to resolve the threat against their life with a less-lethal means of intervention. However, as the attacker increased their deadly intent to the officer or another, they were left with no other option.

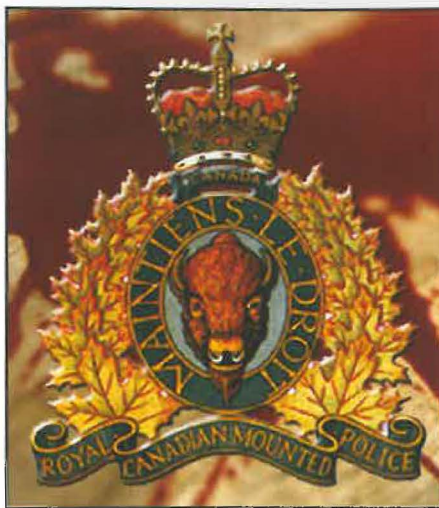
During one incident, a lone RCMP officer shot and killed a father and his son after responding to the report of a disturbance involving drunken males. One individual fought him on the street when confronted and the other joined in, causing the officer to perceive that he was in imminent danger of grievous bodily harm or death, forcing him to shoot them.

In another incident, a lone officer shot and killed a mother and her nine year old son after responding to a request for assistance from a tribal police officer. The female fired on him with a high powered rifle when he arrived; in an attempt to maintain cover, the officer returned fire by firing one round from his shotgun. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to the officer, the son was standing beside his mother and both were hit and killed by the pellets.

Media reports exacerbated the incident by initially reporting that the female was pregnant. The media also highlighted the fact that the officer was Caucasian and the two deceased Aboriginal. A subsequent inquiry exonerated the officer.

Tragically, in some instances the officer was murdered. In one case, a detained individual killed the arresting RCMP officer and then took his own life.

In another case three RCMP officers responded to a routine domestic dispute. The senior officer arrested the male subject and placed him in the rear of a squad car. The suspect suddenly produced a handgun and fatally shot the officer in the back of the head through the Plexiglas barrier. He then got out and shot at



the other two officers, who were nearby, before turning the gun on himself.

Interestingly, the very next day two RCMP officers who were at that scene were forced to shoot a male armed with a knife, resulting in a serious head wound. It was alleged in a lawsuit that the two officers had used excessive force and over-reacted during the shooting as a direct result of witnessing the previous day's fatality.

Conclusion

This research study revealed that individuals acting in a violent or irrational manner have frequently confronted members of the RCMP,

resulting in their death. Typically, the offender's actions, or inaction, will ultimately determine the level of force the officer is required to use.

Should the offender choose to attack the officer or display a potentially lethal threat towards them or another individual, police are likely to have to respond with their firearms. In many instances, the assaultive individual was noted to have been drinking or taking drugs, suicidal or have a mental disorder; this added to a complex picture of violent and irrational behaviour.

These findings also illustrate the complexities that surround lethal threats to police and how individual officers are often given few options to resolve a potentially lethal conflict. In many instances, police have no other option but to use deadly force. Their failure to do so may result in their own death.

References

- Griffiths, Curt and Parent, Richard and Whitelaw, Brian (1999) *Canadian Police Work*. Scarborough: ITP Nelson.
- Parent, Richard (1996) *Aspects of Police Use of Deadly Force In British Columbia: The Phenomenon Of Victim-Precipitated Homicide*. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University. (Master's thesis).
- Parent, R. B. and Verdun-Jones, Simon (1998), "Victim-precipitated homicide: police use of deadly force in British Columbia," *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 21, 432-48.
- Parent, Richard (2004) *Aspects of Police Use of Deadly Force In North America: The Phenomenon Of Victim-Precipitated Homicide*. Burnaby, BC: Simon Fraser University (Doctoral dissertation).
- Whitelaw, Brian and Parent, Richard and Griffiths, Curt (2006). *Community-Based Strategic Policing In Canada*. (Second Edition). Scarborough: Nelson.

Sgt. Rick Parent, Ph.D., a 26-year serving police officer, recently completed a research project examining more than 800 police shootings in Canada and the US. The manager of research and academic development at the Justice Institute of British Columbia - Police Academy (www.jibc.bc.ca), Parent can be reached at parent@jibc.bc.ca.

SCHMIDT & BENDER®
3 - 12 x 50 PM II

with "double turn" elevation adjustment

Exclusive Canadian importer and distributor for all tactical models

WOLVERINE SUPPLIES
Web page: www.wolverinesupplies.com

PO Box 729, Virden MB R0M 2C0
Phone: 204 748-2454 Fax: 204 748-1805
e-mail: john@wolverinesupplies.com

BLUE LINE News Week

A Weekly Chronicle of News for the Law Enforcement Community

Sales of smuggled rings helps police force's bottom line

Sarnia police are claiming finders keepers and selling off about 1,000 semi-precious gold rings that were confiscated during a failed smuggling attempt in 1999.

Police Chief Bill O'Brien says the rings were recovered after arresting men who were trying to enter the U.S. under the St. Clair River.

Police contacted jewelry stores across Canada and the United States and checked with insurance companies to see if any claims had been made for a large quantity of missing rings.

The rings are all made of yellow gold inset with a variety of semi-precious gemstones including ruby, amethyst and topaz.

After several years of fruitless searching, the rings have become the property of the Sarnia Police Services Board through the official board policy of finders keepers.

Any future revenue from the sale of the rings will be put into an equipment reserve fund.

O'Brien is hoping the rings' revenue will somewhat help the force's bottom line.

"We bought low, but hopefully we can sell high."