



LOS ANGELES POLICE PROTECTIVE LEAGUE

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The aftermath of police encounters with “unarmed” individuals — 57 murders

By LAPPL Board of Directors on 08/26/2014 @ 04:44 PM

Repeated descriptions of a suspect as “unarmed” when shot by a police officer *does not*, contrary to the belief of the *New York Times* and others who use the term without further describing the facts of the encounter, determine if the force used by an officer was lawful or reasonable. Labeling the suspect as “unarmed” does not begin to answer the question of the danger they posed in each instance where deadly force was used.



According to the FBI's online database of officers feloniously killed, as well as the Officer Down Memorial Page, since 2000, there have been at least 57 occurrences where the suspects have taken officers' weapons and murdered the police officer with it. Fifty-seven times, loved ones of those officers heard the awful knock on their front door, notifying them that their husband, wife, father, mother, son or daughter would never be coming home again. Fifty-seven times, the threat that some loudly continue to claim does not exist, ended with fatal results.

While statistics for officers killed with their own weapons are hard to find, we know from the FBI and www.odmp.org that between 2000-10, at least **51 officers** were killed by suspects who used the officer's own gun. **Four officers** were killed in 2011, **one officer** in 2013. While the data for 2014 is not final, we know that Johnson City (New York) Police Officer David Smith was murdered this past March with his **own weapon**.

Thus asking, “What justification do the police have for killing an unarmed suspect?” and answering “none” as former Police Chief Joseph McNamara did in this [blog](#) is pointless. Twenty-five years ago, in the case of *Graham v. Connor*, the United States Supreme Court set forth the **legal standard for evaluating a use of force**. The U.S. Supreme Court wrote an officer's action is judged in light of the facts and circumstances confronting them, without regard to their underlying intent or motivation. Crucially, the “**reasonableness**” of a particular use of force must be judged from the “perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene.” The U.S. Supreme Court recognized that 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 reality is that police officers need and wear guns. Those firearms can be taken by “unarmed” suspects and turned against the officer. Many armchair experts across the country sit around their air-conditioned conference rooms, pondering their views on how police officers could kill an “unarmed suspect” and the non-existent threat they pose to officers. We must ask, what did they use to as the factual basis for their conclusions? Is it from fictional police dramas on TV? Gut instinct?

We won't be so crass as to suggest that we give a gun to the columnists and editorial writers who equate “unarmed” with “not dangerous,” and then tell them that although we are unarmed, we are going to try to take that gun from them. If successful, we will use the gun to shoot them. While we are confident this scenario might slightly affect their mindset on “unarmed” suspects, the tragic reality is that scenario has happened at least 57 times in 14 years.

Until all of the facts surrounding the use of force by any officer are known, the urge to decide whether the **use of deadly force** was reasonable and lawful is simply a “rush to judgment”—no matter how many times the suspect is referred to as “unarmed.”

We invite you to share your thoughts by leaving a comment below.

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- 8/26/2014 6:23 pm amen! — bill [\[Reply\]](#)

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- 8/26/2014
6:46 pm



Eula Love was killed by LAPD officers in an extremely well known "bad shooting" in 1979. Love had threatened the officers with a knife and threw it at them when they told her to drop it. While the officers were cleared of any wrong doing, her survivors won a big settlement against the city with the help of attorney Johnnie Cochran. Love's death was the first in a long line of officer involved shootings that eventually lead to a complete revamping of how law enforcement deals with "use of force", especially in how it relates to people not armed with guns and people who are mentally ill.

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8/26/2014
9:38 pm



Thank you LAPPL for reminding people that a person does not have to be armed to be dangerous. I just hope people other than cops read this.

[\[Reply\]](#)

8/27/2014
1:25 am



Well said! Wish safety and justice for all of the law enforcement officers... I wish there was also a campaign in favor of justice for officers who endanger their own safety and lives for a better, safer society... for us to sleep at night... Thank you for your brave article

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8/27/2014
4:12 am



A few years ago, long before I retired from the Department and during arrest and control school, we were taught that convicts practiced the art of taking our weapons from 20 feet away from us. They did this on their gym breaks while they were in prison, they had all the time to do it and all their resources on their side. The use of the Simulator aided us somewhat, but never to the extent to be that proficient in recognition as it was only used once every so often. As suggested before, lets put the reporters through it and give them a taste to see what they do and open their eyes. Some will, but still more will not. Some are better than none.

[\[Reply\]](#)

8/27/2014
6:13 am



"OLD ADADGE" Let the worthless reporters have a gun so they can go out and do the job of a POLICE OFFICER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[\[Reply\]](#)

8/27/2014
8:55 am



Going to Joseph McNamara on gun issue is pointless. He is a non elected politician that even think citizen's gun choices should be restricted. He would rather have officers carry revolvers, because revolvers carry less rounds.

most people think they know what is going on and they are "experts" because they saw it on episode of CSI and Law and Order.

[\[Reply\]](#)

8/27/2014
11:52 am



There is no denying there are uncivilized people within our civilized society that think adhering to the law and respecting authority and order is beneath them. These people need not have a gun to be dangerous; their mindset is already dangerous enough! These are the people who foolishly opt to engage with law enforcement not only putting our officers at risk but also our communities and our societal peace. My husband, as a police officer, has just as much a right to self preservation as those so called "unarmed" or "honest, hard working husbands/fathers/sons and brothers".... If not more so! Because he is not only a law abiding citizen simply carrying out the duties of his employment but also a civil servant working to uphold the laws, keep our communities safe and protect residents property and lives. And yes, I fear that knock on my door every night he's at work; above owing society his 100%, he owes our children and I a future that involves him in it 110%! I am all for him doing what God directs him to do in order to ensure he returns home to us after every shift. It's beyond sickening to see societal outrage over police shootings where this outright "bad guy" who attempts against my husband and the countless other husbands/fathers/sons and brothers who are selflessly serving their communities as law enforcing productive members of society, is portrayed as an innocent victim. I pray for God's soldiers in uniform, may he keep you all safe under his wings.

[\[Reply\]](#)

8/27/2014
1:47 pm



There is a need to have media to start reporting these incidents with better rhetoric. They all refer to them as killing an unarmed person which is inflammatory. Why not shot a suspect who was unarmed but had just beaten the officer?

[\[Reply\]](#)

8/27/2014
3:57 pm



You DON'T have to be armed...to be a deadly threat or to inflict great bodily injury...a screw driver or a brick can be just a deadly as a semi auto in the wrong hands.

[\[Reply\]](#)

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