



Roll Call Training Bulletin

Produced by: Captain Rudy Chan, Training Division
Prepared by: Officer Jeff Kuhlmann, PSU

Katherine Lester, Chief of Police
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Deadly Force and Edged Weapons-Best Practices and the Twenty-one Foot Rule

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The “Twenty-one Foot Rule,” also known as the “Tueller Drill,” was a range drill developed in 1983 demonstrating that an average attacker armed with a knife would be able to close a distance of twenty-one feet before a defender could react and fire a holstered handgun. The reactionary drill soon became a “rule” and was subsequently taught by police trainers and agencies as the closest distance an officer should allow a knife-wielding suspect before it would be too late to fire an effective shot to stop the threat.

Issue: Unfortunately, this drill resulted in an overly simplistic “rule,” which became a problematic tactic because officers might be inclined to apply it in all circumstances involving an edged weapon and rely on it to use deadly force without considering any other options. Based on best practices and our Use of Force policy, police officers should instead be taught to “slow things down” and “create distance,” attempting to de-escalate an encounter before it becomes a confrontation. Instead of following an arbitrary rule that says an officer can shoot if anyone with a knife is within a certain distance, officers should try to find cover, when feasible. Additionally, if deadly force is necessary from the onset of an attack due to the particular circumstances, the officer can best articulate their use of force based on describing the circumstances and conditions unique to the situation at that time, rather than reciting an arbitrary rule based on an overly simplistic mathematical solution that takes critical decision-making out of the equation.

Best Practice: In keeping with best practices and for the reasons articulated above, the Sacramento Police Department has not taught the “Twenty-one Foot Rule” in use of force and firearms training for many years. Instead, critical decision-making involving the totality of circumstances, objective reasonableness, the immediacy of the threat presented, and other tactics and techniques in consideration of the particular facts of an incident, are emphasized in the decision, employment and reporting use of force. Succinctly put, **the “Twenty-one Foot Rule” (Tueller drill) is an exercise on reaction time in a static environment under unrealistic conditions and does not independently justify a use of force decision.** Conversely, officers’ critical decision-making process, based on the unique circumstances presented to them at that time, such as time, distance, cover and other relevant factors, should be the basis and articulated justification for their use of force.