



# Edged Weapon Awareness

## Crucial Information At The Pointy End Of The Issue

By Richard Kay

There has been a great deal of information regarding edged weapons in the media over the past several years. The incidence of people carrying edged weapons is increasing, gaining access to such weapons is as simple as raiding the cutlery drawer at home, making a quick trip to the local hardware store, or using the grey matter to create innovative alternatives from everyday items.

One would naturally presume that people carry edged weapons with criminal, malicious or mischievous intent. But there is also a 'catch-22' trend emerging: some people carry edged weapons simply because they realise that others do too, and if they are attacked, they do not want to be caught defenceless. With more people in possession of edged weapons, the incidence of aggravated assault involving edged weapons is also increasing.

At a recent security industry forum, Victoria Police presented statistics showing that the most common item used to commit aggravated assault was, in fact, a pen. This innocuous, everyday item can hardly be regulated, yet it is a potential edged weapon that everybody has access to. This statistic highlights the very real threat posed by edged weapons in society.

In December 2009, Victorian Parliament passed new and wide-ranging laws, amending the Summary Offences Act and the Control of Weapons Act, to significantly broaden police powers to search people suspected of carrying illegal weapons. These legislation reforms are aimed at reducing the incidence of edged weapon violence in society.

For security and public safety officers who operate in the void between idealism and realism, understanding the threat posed by edged weapons is crucial. This means knowing the facts regarding edged weapon use, the effects of edged weapon attacks, and relevant training concepts.

There is a commonly held belief that someone with a knife is less dangerous than one with a firearm. The truth is that within their practical ranges, both weapons are capable of grievous and fatal wounds.

### Facts On Edged Weapon Attacks

- Edged weapons are the most commonly used weapon for killing people (seven in 20); in half the incidents of muggings the subject is armed with a sharp instrument.
- There is a one in three chance that if faced with an edged weapon, you will be attacked and injured.
- Edged weapon attacks are responsible for three per cent of all armed (fatal) attacks on officers (firearm attacks account for four per cent). Where the subject is shot, 10% die from wounds, where stabbed, 30% die from wounds.
- Since 1980 the number of people routinely carrying knives in the United States has increased by 92%.
- The most popular attack technique was found to be either straight down or diagonally.
- The victim tends to squat in an effort to take a path which offers perceived escape.
- Many people did not see the edged weapon that penetrated their body; they failed to recognise danger cues due to faulty perception.
- Knife attacks are exceptionally accurate, able to penetrate deeper than some bullets, creating remarkable permanent cavities that can rip through numerous organs in one stroke.
- In reality, within their respective ranges, knives are more lethal than firearms.

Within its range, an edged weapon never runs out of ammunition, jams or misfires; rarely misses its target; can cut bone, tendon, muscles, arteries, veins with one thrust; can bring about sudden shock, pain, and extended wound channels; is psychologically defeating; has better stopping capabilities and superior concealment capabilities; than a firearm and occupies a permanent wound channel until extracted, at which time, if the blade is withdrawn from a lung, consciousness is rapidly lost.

## Pathology Of Edged Weapon Attacks

- The typical depth of a stab wound is 1-1.5 inch through the rib cage.
- In most edged weapon attacks the victim received multiple knife wounds; the usual cause of death was the last few wounds of the overall attack.
- Even short bladed knives can penetrate the abdomen by 8-10cm; 3cm allows rib penetration, 4cm allows heart penetration.
- Because of the small surface area of a knife, the amount of force per unit area is tons/in<sup>2</sup>
- In most edged weapon attacks, the victim is already involved in the physical encounter way before he or she even has time to realise that a knife is being used.
- Most victims see a thrust or slice with a knife as just another punch or kick and not an edged weapon assault.
- It was difficult if not impossible for the victim to differentiate between an attack with an edged weapon and an attack using hands or feet; this is especially true when the victim is not aware from the start of the assault, that the attacker has a knife.

In one study, 85 officers participated in a scenario-based training session where they were unaware that they would be attacked with a knife. The attacker, who was dressed in a combative suit, was told that during the mid-way point of contact, he was to pull out the knife he had been concealing and flash it directly at the officer, saying, "I'm going to kill you" and then engage the officer physically. The results were as follows:

- Four per cent saw the knife prior to contact.
- Twelve per cent realised that they were being stabbed repeatedly during the scenario.
- Eighty-five per cent didn't realise that they were being assaulted with a knife until the scenario was over, and they were advised to examine their uniforms for the simulated thrusts and slices left behind by the training knives.
- Most attempted to disengage from the attacker by backing away from the threat; this usually resulted in the attacker closing on the victim quite quickly.
- Those officers that did engage the threat immediately, proceeded to block the initial strike of the attacker and then immediately began to grapple with the attacker using elbows and knee

strikes, but failed to control the delivery system resulting in a large number of lethal blows from the knife.

- Most of the scenarios ended up on the ground.

Research provides two clear messages about why people place themselves in bad tactical situations:

- The common phenomena of backing away under survival stress results from the brain demanding more information to deal with the threat; the officer will invariably retreat to widen the peripheral field of vision.
- Secondly, the brain's normal ability to process (analyse and evaluate) a wide range of information is quickly focused on specific items. Therefore, additional cues, which would normally be processed, are lost. This explains why people cannot remember seeing or identifying specific facts, which were relatively close to the threat.

The person who attacks with an edged weapon has two distinct advantages:

- *Psychological* – the presence of a blade conveys a high level of intimidation.
- *Physical* – the attacker generally possesses a first strike advantage.

## Training For Edged Weapon Attacks

Edged weapon defence comprises control tactics performed without benefit of other weapon systems, (firearm, baton, chemical sprays, and so forth). It is designed to address scenarios where alternative strategies, (creating distance, using cover, and disengaging) are not tactically plausible. Mastering the strategies in these worst-case scenarios will also make the officer more effective in situations where the alternative strategies can be employed.

The responses can be adapted to be effective against club weapons or unarmed striking attacks. This is a result of the commonality in the response steps. You should strive to link the skills of ground fighting, striking, handcuffing, and weapon-retention as well as other weapons systems. This facilitates the process of skill transference – when one motion or concept relates to another. An example would be the gross body movements of power generation using an expandable baton that are also used

in unarmed striking. The phenomenon of skill transference makes training time more efficient and subsequent field applications more effective.

The best defence against an edged weapon attack is to not get into one in the first place. To watch for edged weapons, watch the palms of the hands. Be aware of the ways a person may deploy an edged weapon. This may give you an advantage in a weapons encounter. Get to know the available technology.

Research how edged weapons are deployed. Listen for the unsnapping of a knife case, velcro opening or the click of a lock blade. Watch for the subject closing the distance, movement behind the back or a drawing motion of the arm/elbow. The way in which a person may be carrying a visible knife can give an indication as to their intent and possible experience. A knife case that is holstered with the snap opening downwards can indicate that the person has thought about using gravity to deploy the knife quickly.

## Surviving Edged Weapon Attacks

What if you get cut?

- Don't panic; consciously make yourself breathe slower (autogenic breathing).
- Inspect yourself for apparent and hidden injuries.
- Apply direct pressure to wounds; if the injury is to limbs, elevate if possible.
- If you have a chest wound, seal it and protect your airway in case you become unconscious.
- If you have a punctured lung, exhale first and use an airtight cover to seal the wound.
- Mentally commit to winning.

It is the desperation factor and not the technical skill alone that makes a person armed with an edged weapon so dangerous. You may get cut; you may not. You may feel pain; you may not. But you will be in harm's way. Find the right training program, keep it simple, practise winning, and expect to win.

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