



News, Information, Features, Opinions and Letters Related to Law Enforcement

TROOPER NEWS

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE OREGON STATE POLICE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

Volume 7, No. 7

July, 1990

Expandable Baton Update

by Larry S. Cole
(Sr. Tpr. Game - Sweet Home)
OSPOA Vice President

There has been a need for far too long for an impact weapon which would be readily available under any circumstances, and at all times. This need has been most critical for Game Bureau personnel, entry teams and Executive Security. Due to the nature of these assignments, carrying the current issue 26" polycarbonate baton is impractical and in many instances unsafe. We have been forced to forgo carrying a baton for reasons of safety, or simply in the interest of accomplishing our assigned mission. However, the current state of civil liability and standard police practice requires the use of an intermediate use of force between empty hand control techniques and deadly force. There are a great many chemical weapons and other devices which have been developed to meet this need, but the one device which has proven to be the most reliable under the widest range of circumstances has been the venerable impact weapon, or police baton. It has undergone few changes over the years, with a few improvements in construction materials. Some efforts have been made at performance improvements, such as adding a slide handle (yawarra) to increase the striking force. The main problem with that design is that it became even more unwieldy to carry.

Many people and organizations have been involved in efforts to develop newer and more effective impact weapons. Most "new" designs were simply adaptations of some types of martial arts weapons.

Our own agencies' Defensive Tactics Committee has examined and evaluated several less lethal weapons in an effort to solve the problem of the baton being left behind, in far too many situations. Our number one concern is the safety of our members. Our secondary concern is the potential liability factor.

Expandable batons have been around for many years and in several forms. Most were developed and manufactured in Asian countries and suffered from poor design and materials, which did not endure well under the rigors of typical law enforcement use and abuse.

A fairly recent development in the evolutionary process of the baton is the Armament Systems and Procedures (ASP) expandable baton. This baton was developed in collaboration with Dr. Kevin Parsons, a highly prominent expert in police use of force methods and litigation. The ASP baton was developed to overcome many of the shortcomings of the other expandable batons. Research developed a metal alloy which overcame the propensity for splitting at the taper lock joints. Sharp edges were rounded off and lengths and materials were adjusted to develop the finest balance for striking with minimal tissue damage and developing the highest fluid shock response. A balance was also achieved between extended reach and a convenient carrying size in the collapsed condition. In the collapsed condition the baton also makes an effective impact weapon for confined spaces such as a hallway or boat cabin.

The ASP expandable baton was evaluated by the Defensive Tactics Committee whose members felt that it has merit, and in particular meets the special needs outlined in the beginning of this article. It also happens to be very practical for the members of our Patrol Bureau, who must get in and out of their patrol cars many times each day. It eliminates the clutter associated with inserting the present baton in the carrying ring at a crucial moment when attention should be focused on the violator and the highway traffic. You all know the problems. The expandable baton is the solution.

The evaluation process was expanded to include members of the field. Three sizes were issued to defensive tactics instructors to carry for several months and to demonstrate during their classes. A questionnaire was distributed to the instructors and members of the field. The response favoring conversion to the expandable baton was overwhelming. Of those responding to the survey, 98.4% of Patrol Bureau personnel strongly favored conversion, 100% of the Detectives, 95.6% of the Game members, and 100% of others responding. A total of 426 people have responded to date. Usually those responding to surveys feel very strongly about the subject, and those who do not respond really don't much care one way or the other, and are happy to go along with the majority. None of the respondents voiced a strong dislike for the expandable baton after having an opportunity for hands-on evaluation. Of 426 responses only 7 people did not want to convert to the expandable baton, and even their criticism was not very strong.

During the evaluation period, the ASP baton was used once by an instructor to strike a combative individual. This was a rather large person who had been fighting with other officers, and had been sprayed with a chemical agent to little effect. When the suspect continued his resistance, a quick blow to the suspect's leg put him down and ended the confrontation. The baton was deployed on three other occasions that have been reported, but when the baton was snapped into the locked position, the suspects immediately surrendered. The psychological impact of the baton locking in the open position is tremendous.

During the evaluation process by the Defensive Tactics Committee, impact studies were conducted on three devices designed to measure different types of impact forces. The ASP expandable baton was compared to the current issue polycarbonate straight baton, and a polycarbonate side handle (PR-24). The tests were conducted utilizing both police officers and civilian martial artists to do the striking. The ASP expandable baton generated impact forces equivalent to the straight baton currently issued. The real surprise was the side handle baton, whose claim to fame has been the much greater impact forces generated due to increased striking speed. During our tests, the impact forces it registered were significantly lower than the straight batons that we tested.

Now for the bad news. As you are all aware, we are currently experiencing our regular operating budget shortfall. Even though all of the management people I have discussed the expandable baton with agree that it is an advancement in design, and a badly needed piece of equipment, there is simply no money available until the next biennium. Even then, I am concerned that more personnel may take higher priority.

I would like to extend my appreciation to: Perrys Karate in Albany for the generous use of their studio and impact measuring devices, and to several of the black belt instructors who helped with the testing; to Armament Systems and Procedures of Appleton, Wisconsin for providing 30 expandable batons and carrying cases, free of charge, for our evaluation; and to Dr. Kevin Parsons for the free training of three Defensive Tactics Committee members, and helpful tips on training techniques.