

**BALTIMORE POLICE DEPARTMENT
TRAINING BULLETIN**

Guidelines

EDWARD T. NORRIS
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ESPANTOON

HISTORY

The espantoon according to Webster's Dictionary is: "in Baltimore; a policeman's nightstick." The term is a derivative of the word "Spontoon" that dates back to the weapon and symbol of authority the Officers of the Roman Legions carried..

In 1784 Baltimore appointed paid police officers. From that time until the middle 1960's when the department switched to motorized patrol units the sight of the officer "walking the beat" was a commonplace reassurance. One of the most unique elements of a foot patrol officer in any large East Coast American City was their ability to twirl the "nightstick" until it literally danced.

Obviously then, as now, the espantoon is a defensive weapon. The purpose of twirling the espantoon was multifold. The days before the portable two-way radio, the officer was alone and the "twirling" created and protected a "personal zone." Another benefit of twirling the espantoon was that a familiarity was gained with the "stick" that developed confidence carrying the espantoon.

The espantoon was also used for communications. A rapid tapping of the espantoon signaled a warning to others or a call for help. A flip of the espantoon, falling free of the hand striking the concrete, created a unique "ring." Even today foot patrol officers use this technique to signal each other. It is extremely effective on quiet nights. Even when "tapped" in a large crowd, usually another officer is the only one to notice.

Departmental regulations allow an officer to substitute a personally purchased espantoon for the one issued by the department, provided the substitute is similar in size, composition and design to the issued equipment.

The departmental issued espantoon is 22" long by 1 1/4" in diameter and is solid wood. There is a handle on one end with a groove to attach a leather strap or thong. The thong extends from the groove to the bottom of the espantoon.

COME-ALONG AND HANDCUFFING ASSIST TECHNIQUE

There are a variety of uses for the espantoon as a come-along or to assist in the handcuffing of an arrestee. Most are too complicated to describe briefly here. A key element to all of these techniques is for the officer to retain control of the espantoon at all times. The espantoon is primarily used as a lever to add power (torque) to the officers hand and arm movement.

The speed of the top of the espantoon is essential. Bring the espantoon (with one hand) in a cocked position and strike forward in a slashing move. Make sure the wrist is snapped forward to accelerate the top two inches of the espantoon for maximum power. Do not snap back after impact. Follow through across your body. If a second immediate strike is required, deliver it in a back hand method, again snapping the wrist for maximum power.

JABBING AREAS AND TECHNIQUE

To jab an assailant with the espantoon is an alternative method of stopping an assault to gain control. Jabbing is especially effective in close quarter confrontations such as a small hallway or in a large crowd. This would include any situation where "swinging" the espantoon would not be effective and/or would endanger others.

The most effective target area for using a jab is the stomach area.

A jab with the espantoon when carried in a single hand short reach position, is very effective against a sudden assault. A jab in the single hand long reach position has limited applications, such as keeping a subject or assailant at bay.

The most effective jabbing technique is utilizing both hands. One hand close to the top of the espantoon while having the other hand at the bottom; gun away from the assailant. The technique is identical to using a bayonet on a rifle. Step forward to the assailant thrusting the end of the espantoon in the stomach area while lifting upwards. Both maneuvers are done with power.

Historically, most officers have made or purchased their own espantoons. While all are required to be made entirely of wood and similar to the size of the issued model, each one is unique. The variations of wood tones, size and shapes make them very personal. Often the same espantoon is carried for an entire career regardless of rank attained or duty assignments. The espantoon has sometimes become a family heirloom and passed on to younger generations of officers.

The term “nightstick” was derived from the fact that officers were required to carry the espantoon during the “night-time” hours i.e.:4 x 12 and 12 x 8 shifts. It was optional during daylight hours.

Police Officers are encouraged to have their espantoons with them whenever on duty. In the escalation of force, the use of espantoon is a step below the service revolver. The espantoon gives the officer the option and a greater degree of safety in the use of force. If the assailant is overpowering the officer’s attempt to defend himself, the espantoon can be utilized effectively to gain control. If the espantoon is left in the car or has otherwise been disregarded, the options for self-defense are severely limited..

DEFENSIVE USE

The proper method for carrying the espantoon is in a “short reach” position in the weak (non gun) hand with the index or middle finger through the leather thong. When interviewing one or more potentially hostile suspects, the espantoon may be placed under one arm. This enables the officer to utilize both hands to write information.

STRIKING AREAS AND TECHNIQUES

Often the question is asked, “Do I strike with my strong hand?” Most officers will use their strong hand because it is a natural tendency in high stress situations, but your weak hand is also acceptable. If you spin or twirl your espantoon, use the hand that will be utilized for striking. The twirling of the espantoon will enable you to learn its exact length. This knowledge will increase familiarity and confidence as an extension of your arm. Care and consideration should be given when and where you should “twirl the stick.” The espantoon should not be spun in close areas to avoid the possibility of injury to others or property damage. In some situations the espantoon may appear better left in the ring. If the espantoon is too heavy or feels uncomfortable, the officer should obtain a lighter espantoon. The power of the espantoon is developed by the speed not the mass. An espantoon that is too heavy for the officer will be ineffective.

Whenever an officer is forced to strike a person, he must only hit as hard as necessary to stop an assailant in an effort to gain control to effect an arrest.

The best target areas are the legs. The point of impact should be on the outside rear quadrant of the upper leg about four inches above the knee. That is where the common peroneal nerve branches off from the sciatic nerve. Striking this area will cause an involuntary bending reflex action of the leg. In a sympathetic nerve reaction the other leg will also “buckle” causing the assailant to fall to the ground. On top of the calf has the same stunning effect. Do not strike for the knee joint which can cause permanent damage to bones, tendons and muscles. While the legs are the best target areas, an officer is not limited to the legs. Any strike to the head must be avoided. Courts have held that a strike to the head with an impact weapon is tantamount to using deadly force.

To strike with the espantoon an officer should hold same in the “long reach” position. The hand should be at the base with the index finger through the leather thong. The striking point should be the top two inches of the upper section. These methods leave the hands free and gives immediate access to the espantoon. These techniques are not offensive but helps the officer to control a situation better and with more confidence.

If the officer is in a situation where the escalation of force seems imminent; drawing the espantoon from the ring tends to be offensive and aggravates the situation. When attempting to control a person or a situation, neither “slapping” the free end of the “stick” into an open hand nor pointing the espantoon in a threatening manner is advisable. These actions provoke people and place the officer in greater peril.