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LAPD Instructor Shoots Colleague In Training Exercise

By Richard Winton
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles police are investigating how a veteran department firearms instructor shot and wounded another officer in the left hamstring at a training facility this week when he mistook a loaded handgun for a mock version of the weapon.

The incident occurred about 4 p.m. Monday at the Edward M. Davis Training Facility in Granada Hills as the two instructors, who train new recruits, were transitioning from teaching a class with live firearms to an exercise using mock handguns that look and sound like real weapons but do not discharge bullets.

Parts of the non-firing weapons are marked with orange paint, but the instructor failed to notice he had picked up the wrong handgun, police said. The bullet struck Officer Peter Lee, 42, a 15-year veteran. The gun was fired accidentally by Hector Villanueva, 35.

"Unfortunately what occurred violated protocols," said Capt. Bill Murphy, head of the Los Angeles Police Department's Training Division. "When an officer picks up the [non-firing] weapons they are supposed to secure their live firearms. But one officer here didn't secure his live firearm and confused it. When he went to test the [mock] weapon he instead fired his real Glock and hit his fellow instructor."

"This is a bad thing," Murphy said, "but it could have been a lot worse." Sources involved in the investigation said there was no animus between the officers and it seemed to be, as one person said, a "boneheaded" mistake.

LAPD Sgt. Lee Sands said Lee was listed in stable condition at a hospital. Murphy said the injured officer was expected to return to duty.

What disciplinary action Villanueva will face depends on the outcome of an internal investigation. "The biggest punishment here is the knowledge he shot his fellow instructor," Murphy said.

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The incident is being investigated as a serious use of force by a special LAPD division that probes all officer shootings. As a result of the incident, Murphy said, the department has decided to use orange paint not only on the magazine and muzzle tip of non-firing weapons but also on the hand grip to make it clearer to the user.

"This is the first negligent discharge we've had since we opened the training facility eight or nine years ago," Murphy said. "But annually, nationwide, three officers are killed in training."

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