

Idiom by Lon Yan

手起刀落

shou3 qi3 dao1 luo4

A woman burst into a Sheung Shui farm with a knife and started to hack everything that moves. At the end of her rampage, there were heavy casualties – five dead and five injured. Fortunately, those that demised under her sharp knife were dogs. It was, of course, still sad.

The woman, aged 71, was a pet breeder who was upset that the authorities confiscated some of her dogs and cats because they were not properly taken care of, and she took it out on the animals.

She was found to be suffering from mental illness, and the judge ordered six months hospitalization for her to receive psychiatric treatment. In any event, the idiom “手起刀落” (*shou3 qi3 dao1 luo4*) is a suitable one to describe the attack.

“手” (*shou3*) is “a hand,” “to hold,” “起” (*qi3*) is “to raise,” “to rise,” “刀” (*dao1*) is “a knife,” and “落” (*luo4*) “to fall,” “to drop”. Literally, “手起刀落” (*shou3 qi3 dao1 luo4*) is “hand rises, knife falls.”

The idiom describes an expertly attack by knife - just as one sees the knifeman raises his hand, the knife has already come down and found its target. “手起刀落” (*shou3 qi3 dao1 luo4*) means “to cut down with one swift stroke of one’s sword.”

It can be used to describe a knife attack. It can also be used figuratively to describe any swift and merciless action. When a downsizing company fired half of the employees in a day, one can say the management has “手起刀落” (*shou3 qi3 dao1 luo4*) in cutting the staff.

Terms containing the character “落” (*luo4*) include:

落後 (*luo4 hou4*) – to fall behind; backward

落實 (*luo4 shi2*) – to carry out; to fulfil

落選 (*luo4 xuan3*) – to lose an election or contest

日落 (*ri4 luo4*) – sunset