

PLEASE NOTE!

This is an excerpt from

**POLICE PISTOLCRAFT: The Reality-Based
New Paradigm of Police Firearms Training**

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Published by Saber Press, a subsidiary of Saber Group, Inc.

Available exclusively through www.sabergroup.com

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Preface

What is the “New Paradigm” of Police Firearms Training?

Quite simply, the new paradigm, or model of police firearms training is a reality-based approach to firearms training for police officers. It was created because the currently entrenched sight-oriented, marksmanship-based approach hasn’t been working.

This opinion is based upon the data regarding actual police-involved deadly force encounters that has been collected and analyzed for more than thirty years indicating that the average officer misses with more than 80% of the rounds he fires at threat subjects.

This poor performance record is compounded when you consider that the vast majority of police-involved shootings have always been, and continue to be, close-range affairs, with more than 80% occurring with the officer and offender twenty feet and closer, and more than half taking place within a distance of *five feet*. (FBI Uniform Crime Reports).

How New is New

While the reasoning behind its development is explained in detail on the following pages, in the interest of accuracy I am compelled to note here that the “New Paradigm” program is—in many ways—simply the latest rebirth of a system of combat pistol shooting and instruction that reached its apex more than sixty years ago! How can this be, you may ask?

In the review of the history of the development of police pistol training provided in Chapter Three, it will become apparent that two distinct approaches to this subject—one marksmanship-oriented, the other combat-oriented—have been struggling for dominance since the beginning of the twentieth century.

One of the main reasons the struggle has gone on for so long, I believe, is because like the two entwined snakes in the illustration, both approaches appear similar at first glance. Closer examination, however, reveals that one is better suited for mortal combat than the other.

Since the occupation of the law enforcement officer inevitably brings him or her into contact with dangerous situations and people, the need for a system of weapons training that allows officers to develop reliable, life-saving skills with their most commonly available firearm—the handgun—is imperative.

And, as these skills will overwhelmingly need to be employed against other human beings during terrifying instances of close quarter violence, logic demands that the combat-oriented training approach be embraced as the only sane choice.



Incredibly, this argument between marksmanship-oriented and combat-oriented training approaches has been fought and won in a repetitive cycle throughout the past century and into the new.

Each generation of police officers and trainers has had to relearn this simple truth—or deal with the consequences. For me, the process took many years and an incredible amount of frustration, research and labor, only to discover, at its conclusion, that my questions had all been asked decades before, and that the answers I so painstakingly arrived at had been discovered by others long ago.

One of the primary reasons for this constant struggle has been the fact that there has never truly been a system of pistol training designed exclusively for the members of the civilian police profession.

Police officers' training programs have always been derived from, or at least heavily influenced by, outside sources. Both military

and non-police civilian influences, while well-meaning, have generated a great deal of confusion in this regard.

This confusion has also undoubtedly been compounded by the tremendous volumes of work produced by numerous authors, trainers, and pundits in the field, all extolling the universal virtues of their own particular brand of pistolcraft.

I would ask the reader to consider this, however: of all the books that have been published on the subject of pistolcraft over the years, this is *the first* to bear the simple and specific title, *Police Pistolcraft*.

In addition to providing an objective perspective to this particular body of knowledge, it is my sincere hope that *Police Pistolcraft* will help the members of the law enforcement profession untangle the symbolic snakes, recognizing and appreciating both for what they are, and realizing that while similar, they are as different as life and death.

Author's Notes Regarding Book Composition

Gender Consideration: Throughout this book I have avoided the use of compound gender references such as his/her, s/he, etc., and used the masculine references he, his, him. This has been done solely to simplify the text and make the reading easier. I trust my sister officers will understand I mean no disrespect in this, and will not feel excluded from the materials in any way.

Age Consideration: The size of the font used throughout the book has intentionally been selected to be easily read by those of us in the “over 40 years of age” category. A reduced font would have allowed the book to be produced in a smaller size and at less cost, but I understand the pleasure of being able to read a book while holding it a reasonable distance from the eyes and without the aid of the \$9.95 pharmacy reading glasses. If you're laughing, you understand. If you're not, don't worry—you'll get it eventually.

Fiscal Consideration: The price of this book has been intentionally set much lower than the current market would indicate. I understand that funds for training materials of this type are usually in short supply, and more often than not are drawn from the police officer's own pocket. I wished to ensure that the information would be available at a reasonable price. That is one of the reasons why I have published *Police Pistolcraft* myself, under the Saber Group, Inc. banner.

Introduction

Order and simplification are the first steps towards the mastery of survival—the actual enemy is the unknown.

– Thomas Mann
The Magic Mountain

The New Paradigm

The New Paradigm Police Firearms Training Program has come about as the result of many years of work conducted by professional police officers, trainers, and researchers. Among these people are individuals such as Steve Barron, Clyde Beasley, Bill Burroughs, Lou Chiodo, Jim Cirillo, Paul Damery, the late Roger A. Ford, Dave Grossman, Donna Losardo, Gregory B. Morrison, and Bruce Siddle, to name but a few.

All have influenced my work in this area, both through their efforts in their own unique disciplines and by the personal examples of courage and tenacity they set.

The single greatest influence on my efforts however, has been the tremendous volume of work produced, and unwavering determination exhibited by one man, the late Colonel Rex Applegate, whose contributions are more fully noted in the text.

To their credit, most of the people involved in the work that led to the New Paradigm—including, incredibly, Rex Applegate—have been regarded by many within the professional firearms training community as iconoclasts. That is because their ideas and research methodologies are often in direct opposition to much of the dogma laid down by some of the highly regarded “gun gurus” who rose to prominence during the past few decades espousing the supremacy of the police firearms training methodology embodied in the system commonly referred to as the Modern Technique.

The Modern Technique, in fact, became so firmly established in the collective minds and culture of US law enforcement toward the end of the Twentieth Century that to challenge its viability was likely to get you branded as a heretic, or at the least, as one who was sadly ignorant and unenlightened.

I know this because I was once a firm believer in the Modern Technique, its highly stylized, Weaver-based stance and reliance on marksmanship-oriented, qualification type programs, and shared this view.

I can still recall the frustration I felt more than a dozen years ago during a firearms qualification program while trying to explain to a veteran state police officer why the Weaver stance was superior to the Isosceles. This veteran officer, initially trained to use the Isosceles position years before, argued that the Weaver didn’t feel “natural.”

My arguments, founded in pure Modern Technique doctrine, were obvious and predictable. As he listened politely on the 25-yard line, I patiently explained how the Weaver position provided better stability and control, worked off the bladed body interview position that keeps the holstered weapon away from suspects, allowed you faster acquisition of the sight picture and faster follow-up shots.

“But,” the unenlightened veteran replied, “the few times I’ve had to pull my gun for real I know

I didn't stand like that, and I know I probably won't in the future either—so why should I stand like that here while training?”

“Because it gives you the best chance of hitting the target, especially from this distance,” was my reply.

And to this day, I do still believe that. The problem however, and one that I could not see at the time, was that should that officer need to pull his gun for real again in the future, he would probably not be standing 25 yards away from his target, and his target would not be paper, metal, cardboard or plastic, but flesh and blood, close and dangerous.

Motivations

There are two levers which move men: fear and self-interest.

– Napoleon Bonaparte

While many people have written about police firearms training for a variety of reasons, my own interest in this subject is purely selfish. As I acknowledged in an article published in *Guns & Ammo*, my motivations here are as base as Napoleon's description of what motivates men—fear and self-interest.¹

My fear, I wrote at the time, is of attending more funerals of murdered police officers.

My self-interest lies in my desire to avoid having others attend mine.

While that basically sums it up, there are additional considerations involved here beyond funerals, however, that I would like to expand upon.

Like all members of the law enforcement profession, I depend upon my ability to properly handle a firearm under stressful conditions for both my life and livelihood.

As a member of the law enforcement community, I have also been exposed to the

reality of personal loss suffered when a brother or sister officer is taken by violence while performing their duty.

In addition, I have also been witness to the tremendous toll that is taken when an officer is forced to employ deadly force against a person perceived to be presenting an immediate threat—only to discover afterwards that the reality was different from the perception.

Finally, I have grown from being perplexed by the actions of officers who do not fire their weapons when faced with a person who presents an absolute immediate threat of death or bodily injury to the officer—but rather allow themselves to remain in the line of fire while ordering the subject to “Drop the gun, drop the gun, drop the gun...” over and over again—to a deeper understanding and respect of what makes the best of us sometime act that way, and why our training must enable us to overcome these “better angels of our nature”.

All of these factors have contributed to my sincere belief as a trainer in the critical importance of properly preparing police officers to deal with the dangerous realities of the law enforcement profession.

Years of studying the data gathered about actual police-involved shootings combined with my personal experiences as a police officer and interviews with hundreds of other officers, however, convinced me that the Modern Technique-based training programs we employed—and I had embraced—were not filling the bill.

Enlightenment in a Darkened Hallway

One evening in the early 1990s I was participating in a stealth entry as a member of my department's tactical team. The covert entry had been successfully made well after dark into a two-story residence. Inside the house was a self-proclaimed suicidal individual armed with a shotgun. As he spoke with a police negotiator on

¹ In the Line of Fire, *Guns & Ammo* Magazine, February 2001.

the telephone upstairs in his bedroom, we positioned ourselves downstairs to ensure he could not exit the house and present a danger to other residents in the densely populated neighborhood.

After many hours the negotiator had succeeded in calming the distressed subject a bit, and we were instructed over the radio to prepare to take him into custody so he could be transported to a medical facility for further care.

Several of my teammates and I then quietly ascended the staircase, our presence in the house still unknown to the subject. The plan was to take him into custody as quickly and calmly as possible, so as not to unravel all the fine work the negotiator had accomplished.

As two of us rounded the corner in the upstairs hallway, the subject, still on the telephone speaking with the negotiator, suddenly walked out of his bedroom into the hallway and looked—very quickly and with a shocked expression—first at us, then at a 12-gauge shotgun propped against the wall next to him, then back to us.

Operating in an adrenaline-fueled heightened state of awareness and a bit startled at the sudden appearance of the subject in the hallway, my immediate reaction was to raise my pistol to eye-level and simultaneously focus on the front sight as it came into view between my eye and the subject's upper torso.

In that fleeting moment as the subject cast those seemingly desperate glances first at us, then the shotgun, and then back to us again, however, I experienced an epiphany of sorts as I felt my eyeball's focus literally RIPPED off that front sight and placed on the subject. It was an intense and uncontrollable physiological response that made a lasting and indelible impression on me. For even though I immediately *consciously* chose to lower the weapon and refocus on the subject to determine if he presented an immediate threat, my momentary startle-induced reaction allowed me

to personally experience something that ran directly contrary to my training and the Modern Technique doctrine.²

What it came down to was this: I had been thoroughly trained to hold my weapon below my line of sight until an immediate threat was identified. Once identified, the Modern Technique dictated, the weapon would be raised to eye level, the sights would be acquired, centered on the threat, and rounds would be delivered.

Yet, there in that hallway, facing a potential close quarter threat, my body reacted in a way that I believe would have not allowed me to focus on those sights at all should I have needed to fire. My training had been overridden by something more powerful and base.

This seemingly innocuous experience that undoubtedly occurred in less than a tenth of a second caused me to begin questioning not only the training I had received, but more important, the training I had provided to other officers as a departmental firearms instructor.

As I reflected on this incident over the next few months, many of the inconsistencies that had bothered me for years about both police firearms training methodologies and actual police performance began to make sense. The deeper I looked into the subject, the more I began to understand. Gradually, my experience in that hallway turned into a somewhat obsessive investigation into these matters, the culmination of which has resulted in a new police firearms training program that has been developed and successfully administered to over 2,500 police and military personnel as of this writing.

This book is intended to document the investigation and the results produced by it to date.

² The subject was subsequently removed from the house without incident.

A Homicide Investigation

In January 2000, while working as a death investigator for the Suffolk County State Police Detective Unit, I was tasked by the Superintendent of the State Police at that time, Colonel John DiFava, to organize, staff, and train a new Firearms Training Unit (FTU) for the department.³

Up until this time, the department's part-time tactical team had been responsible for conducting yearly qualification courses of fire for department personnel.

Prior to accepting the assignment, I requested clarification from the Colonel on the overall mission of the FTU. In particular, I was concerned that the FTU's function would be relegated to administering the standard types of Modern Technique-based, marksmanship-oriented firearms qualification courses that were still overwhelmingly prevalent both within our own department and the vast majority of other agencies nation-wide—and which I had lost faith in as being the best means for improving officer performance and ensuring the best chance for officer survival.

Colonel DiFava replied that the mission was to build not just a new unit, but a new firearms training program that would, in his words, “meet or exceed all the national standards and provide the highest possible liability insulation for the members of the department and the organization itself.”

Then came the hook. Colonel DiFava, known in law enforcement and community circles as someone who cares deeply not only about the mission but also the people who must carry it out, added, “But most of all, Mike, I want you to build a program that will make our people safe, make sure they get home at the end

of the shift. That's what I want.”

After accepting the assignment, I set out to do two things. First, I began to gather and organize all the research and training materials I owned or could get my hands on. Three years earlier a basic police firearms training manual I had written called *In the Line of Fire: A Working Cop's Guide to Pistolcraft* had been published by Paladin Press. I had kept all the reference materials collected prior to writing the book, and those combined with what I'd acquired since it was published filled two bookcases, a large locker, and several file cabinets in my basement. More than gathering data, I was gathering evidence.

In the intervening years since I had written *In the Line of Fire*, I had been assigned to a detective unit and had been working with, and trained by, some of the finest investigators on the department. During the 2 ½ years I was assigned to the unit, Detective Lieutenant Billy Powers and Sergeant Paul Hennigan had taken me under their wing and taught me the basics of conducting a solid homicide investigation. I was still in the process of benefiting from their experience and guidance when I was given the FTU assignment.

As I cleaned out my desk and case files, amid the pangs of guilt for the cases I would not get a chance to see through to trial came an idea: perhaps the way to understanding exactly what was wrong with the police firearms training model we employed nationwide wasn't by approaching the problem through the eyes of a firearms instructor. Perhaps the answers could be found by approaching it through the eyes of a detective—by conducting an investigation, leaving all suppositions and pre-conceived ideas behind, and letting the evidence and a careful analysis of that evidence tell the tale. In essence, I decided at that point to open and conduct this investigation as if it were a homicide investigation.

Days later out at the State Police Academy in New Braintree, as I stood alone at the front of

³ Colonel DiFava has since retired from the MSP and is currently serving as the Chief of the MIT Police Department. His retirement was postponed several weeks after the terrorist attacks on 9-11 while he served as interim Director of Aviation Security at Logan International Airport at the Governor's request.

the new range classroom looking over the empty tables and chairs, my eyes fell upon five brass plaques mounted on the rear wall of the room. Each of the plaques contained a portrait of a member of my department who had been murdered in the line of duty, and a short passage indicating the events that had led to their deaths.

As I looked at their faces, the data I had read many times in FBI reports and articles suddenly appeared before my eyes: *hundreds* of US police officers murdered in the line of duty in the past thirty years alone. More than fourteen thousand men's and women's names inscribed on the Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial in Washington, DC. That's when it truly hit me, perhaps for the first time.

It was a homicide investigation.

The FTU: A Team Effort

The second thing I needed to do was recruit a group of officers to form the nucleus of the FTU cadre. With over 2,000 sworn officers on the department, it might seem like this would be no problem. However, there were obstacles in the way...

Order your copy of *POLICE PISTOLCRAFT: The Reality-Based New Paradigm of Police Firearms Training* today and read the rest of the story of the development and implementation of this unique program...