

In Part One of this article, we took a look at some effective methods to mentally train and prepare ourselves to confront and win a lethal-force encounter. Practically all of our

Mental PREPARATION: The Foundation for

what it takes." This philosophy, along with the advanced training methods, tactics and techniques that have been developed over the past years, has enabled us

rolling him over with a strategically-placed foot and looking into his cold, lifeless eyes. Add a Dirty Harry-voiced, "Have a nice day," and you've got all the elements for a heart-warming scene.

The problem, however, is that if this is how we envision a lethal-force situation, then we are setting ourselves up for a severe crash when we do (God forbid) run into

SURVIVAL



PART TWO

firearms and tactical training is geared toward helping us achieve this end. The twisted thinking imbued in the old belief that getting shot, injured or killed is "your job" has, hopefully, been buried along with the unfortunate individuals who were trained in that fatalistic atmosphere.

As most of us in law enforcement are aware today, our "job" is to "protect the innocent against deception, the weak against oppression or intimidation and the peaceful against violence or disorder; and to respect the Constitutional rights of all men to liberty, equality and justice." That quote is from the original Law Enforcement Code of Ethics. If you were to read it in its entirety, you would not find one word about any injury or harm being done to the law enforcement officer as being acceptable or "part of the job."

On the contrary, our mind-set today should be to "finish our shift of duty and return home to our families in the same, healthy physical (and mental) condition as when we left them—no matter

to not only achieve this goal more readily, across the boards, but it also helps us to do our jobs in a safer, more efficient and professional manner. According to recent FBI statistics, it would appear to be working since the number of police officers killed in the line of duty has been declining in recent years.

There is, however, one aspect of the lethal-force encounter that is often overlooked, yet is as serious a potential threat to us as is the individual we may face who is holding a weapon or otherwise placing our life or someone else's life in jeopardy. It is sometimes referred to as the "Aftermath" or the "Afterburn," and unless we prepare ourselves for it, we leave ourselves prey to an attack from an enemy we may never escape—ourselves.

Practically everyone who wears a badge has at one time or another envisioned themselves in that "once-in-a-career situation." The most common theme to these violent-encounter fantasies is that the officer runs up against a real bad-guy—a violent, career criminal who is well-armed and menacingly dangerous. After a spectacular gun battle, the bad-guy is "blown away," being knocked off his feet and propelled backwards by a few well-placed shots from the officer's duty pistol. This mental "home movie" may even finish off with the officer walking over to the large, dead scumbag, maybe

that individual who presents a threat to us or someone else. The sad truth of the matter is that the subject we will more than likely have to employ deadly force against will be someone who is either mentally unwell, desperate, stupid or simply at the end of their rope. The subject may be a man, but could also be female, elderly or a young adult. The subject may be armed with something like a knife or a pipe or, in some cases, with nothing at all.

The fact that our actions as police officers depend not only upon the situation as it exists, but also upon our perceptions of the situation as it unfolds moment by moment, is something often overlooked or ignored by the media and the public. If it is a well-armed, well-trained criminal that you encounter, and you do fire those two rounds and then stop to watch the subject, waiting for him to be knocked immediately off his feet or thrown 15 feet backwards, you may be infinitely (possibly terminally) surprised when the subject not only continues to march in your general direction, but gets more pissed off in the process. Hollywood doesn't direct real-life encounters. (That's why we shoot and keep on shooting until the threat is stopped.)

No matter what the situation, we are now at that moment just after we have had to employ lethal force. Our ears may be ringing,

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we may or may not be injured, and there is a human being laying before us with blood spilling out of his body. The person is dead and nothing will bring him/her back. Our training has worked and allowed us to function during the incredible stress of a life-threatening situation, and we have done what we had to do.

Once the threat has been stopped, we are faced with the enormity of what has happened—of what we have done. As the reality of this suddenly sinks in, the stress of the entire episode may cause a number of physical reactions to occur. We may suddenly burst into tears, vomit or lose control of our bladder or bowels. We may experience uncontrollable shaking or feel suddenly drained. The effects may not be that severe or immediately evident and may fester for days, weeks, sometimes even years. This psychological reaction is the "Afterburn," and if not dealt with beforehand, by mental and spiritual preparation; and afterward, by counseling and therapy, it can destroy our careers, marriages and lives. Having now identified this subtle threat, we can take a look at some methods that have been developed to deal with it, counteract it and, hopefully, minimize the damage.

Preparation

The reality-based thought of taking a human life is not a pleasant one. Our society struggles with it constantly in the form of the death penalty. No matter what your personal point of view on the matter may be, it is a core dilemma that we must face and come to terms with individually.

The question, "Can I take a human life if I have to," must be answered honestly, long before the moment is at hand. If the answer is a definite "no," then you are endangering not only yourself but your fellow officers and the public—consider another line of work. Once this question has been settled in your mind, you should

then take it to the next, "If I do have to kill someone, how will it affect my family and me?"

Discussing this subject with your family is unique to our profession, but actually no stranger than insuring that our spouses, parents or children know what to expect or where the important papers are kept should something happen to us. Our families will surely be greatly affected if we are involved in a lethal force situation and should be forewarned of the possible media coverage and social repercussions.

At the Scene

At the scene of a shooting, the officer involved will more than likely be extremely shaken. We all have our individual departmental rules and regulations to guide us through the mechanics, but we must also be aware of other considerations. The following suggestions are offered for consideration.

An officer who is shaken may make a simple statement such as, "I didn't mean to shoot him," when his actual intent was to convey that he didn't want to shoot him. This statement could come back to haunt him in the form of an attorney saying, "Well, officer, if you didn't mean to shoot my client's brother, what did you mean to do?!"

The first thing we should do when we respond to a scene where one of our people has been involved in a shooting is to separate the involved officer from reporters, suspects and crowds. Allow them to speak to no one. A support officer should be immediately assigned to the officer involved, preferably a friend. Psychological services and a union representative or attorney (for union members) should be advised immediately. The officer should be removed from the scene and taken to the station as soon as possible. For nonunion members, a personal attorney should be contacted immediately.

At the station the involved officer's family should be contacted

and advised. Another officer should be assigned to the officer's home for media screening, to provide departmental support to the family and to act as a communications link. The involved officer should be kept isolated at the station and should answer no questions regarding the incident until he has spoken with counsel. When the appropriate investigatory personnel are assembled, the officer should make a detailed statement once only. A high-ranking departmental officer should make support contact with the officer during this time period. An evaluation should be done to determine the most appropriate time for the involved officer's written report, and the officer should then be secured from duty and taken home. The support officer and psychological services contact should be maintained for as long as possible, and immediate professional counseling and therapy is often recommended.

Attitudes

A very important part of helping an officer deal with having employed lethal force is the attitudes of his fellow officers. The Hollywood image of the stone-cold cop dispensing death while chewing on a hot dog is best left in the video stores—not projected on ourselves or one of our people. Many officers, who have had to take a life in the performance of their duty, find it extremely disconcerting, even offensive, to have their fellow officers regard them with a sense of hero worship or awe.

Far from celebrating, most officers feel very badly about the experience, no matter how justified their actions may have been. Extreme guilt and anxiety are also very common because most police officers have a very black and white perception of the world and what is right and wrong, and for the most part, our society still deems the act of killing as wrong. Add to this the fact that the involved officer will more than likely be experiencing flashbacks, nightmares and a host of other psychological, trauma-

induced reactions, and it's easy to see why someone who will just lend a sympathetic ear or a supportive word would be much more welcome than someone slapping them on the back and saying, "Good shot! Wish I'd run into that situation!" Remember, it can happen to any one of us. To quote Lucius Annaeus Seneca: "Do not ask for what you will wish you had not got."

Aftermath

No matter how well justified a shooting may be, we must eventually come to terms with the fact that we have had to kill someone, learn to accept it (not forget it) and go on with our own lives. If you've never had to take a life in the line of duty (thankfully, I have not) and you think, "No problem, as long as it's justified," then consider that one study indicated that approximately 70% of law enforcement officers involved in lethal shootings end up leaving the profession within seven years of the encounter due to personal, emotional or other problems related to or generated from the experience.

That is why it is so important that we are prepared not only for the possibility of having to employ lethal force, but also to live with our actions after the smoke has cleared and we return home to our families. As always, we must take care of ourselves and watch out for each other, in every facet of our job, not only while we're "out there," but also during those times when the "out there" follows us home to our doorstep. Remember, too, our chances of successfully dealing with the most difficult aspects of our profession are significantly increased as long as we have faith in our training, continually develop true faith in ourselves and keep faith with each other. This is our responsibility to ourselves, our families and to each other.

We've got a long ride ahead of us before we reach the river, brothers and sisters, and we need every officer we've got. ●