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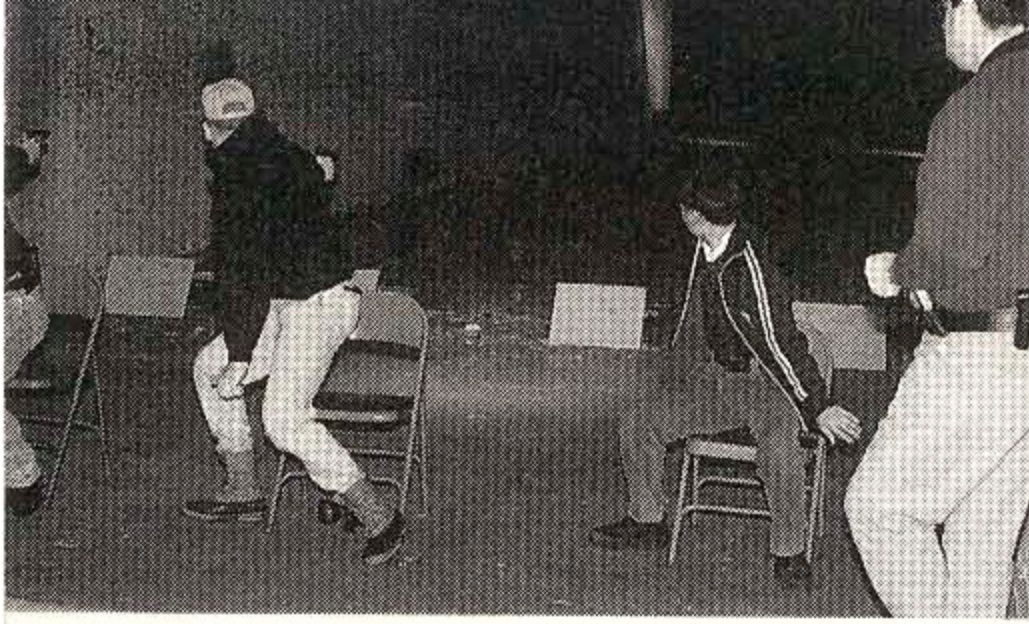
A black and white photograph of a three-story brick building. The building has a prominent sign on its upper right side that reads "Smith & Wesson ACADEMY" next to a circular logo. The building has several windows on the upper floors and a covered entrance area on the ground floor. In the foreground, there are several cars, including a dark Chevrolet with a license plate that partially reads "1823 169". The ground appears to be covered in snow.

Smith & Wesson
ACADEMY

D G U N

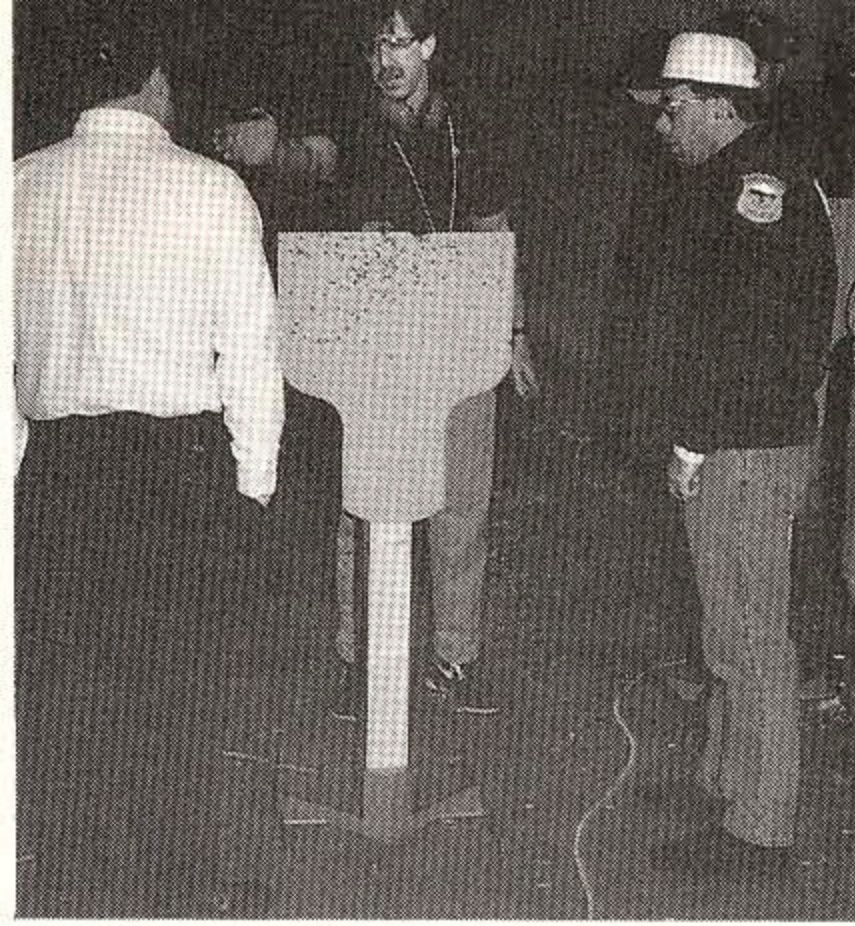
**PROTECTIVE
SPECIALIST
COURSE**

by Michael Conti



The elevator doors slide open just as the team leader has completed checking with the three agents assigned to protect the principle. Every one of them, including the principle, has indicated that they understand what is expected of them should there be any trouble. The advance man, who was sent ahead to check the route down the crowded corridor, is waiting by the elevator.

Peering down the hallway toward their destination, a large room off to the left at the far end of the corridor, he advises the team leader that there is some activity, but nothing to indicate a problem. Looking back for the final time, the team leader asks, "Ready?" The three agents and the principle nod silently, forming up as they do so. The leader pushes the "stop" button in the elevator as he exits, locking it into place and insuring a way back out should things go bad. Walking with purpose down the hallway, the agents form a protective shield around the principle. Every one of them is alert, watching for anything that seems out of place, watching for any sign of danger or threat.



Halfway to their destination, one of the maintenance workers, who is pushing a cart down the narrow hallway, turns toward the group and begins to yell something about losing his job. One of the agents moves into position to intercept this subject as the rest of the team keys in on the other people moving about the hallway, simultaneously placing themselves between these individuals and the principle. The door to the large room—and safety—is only a few feet away when one of the agents yells, "Gun, Gun Right!" indicating that the threat is coming from the right side of the entourage. The principle is quickly covered by two agents and hustled into the room while the agent, who sounded the alert engages, the assailant.

The would-be assassin fires two wild rounds that strike no one. The agent fires four rounds, three hitting the assailant who falls to the ground. The agent's fourth round strikes the far wall, leaving an angry red



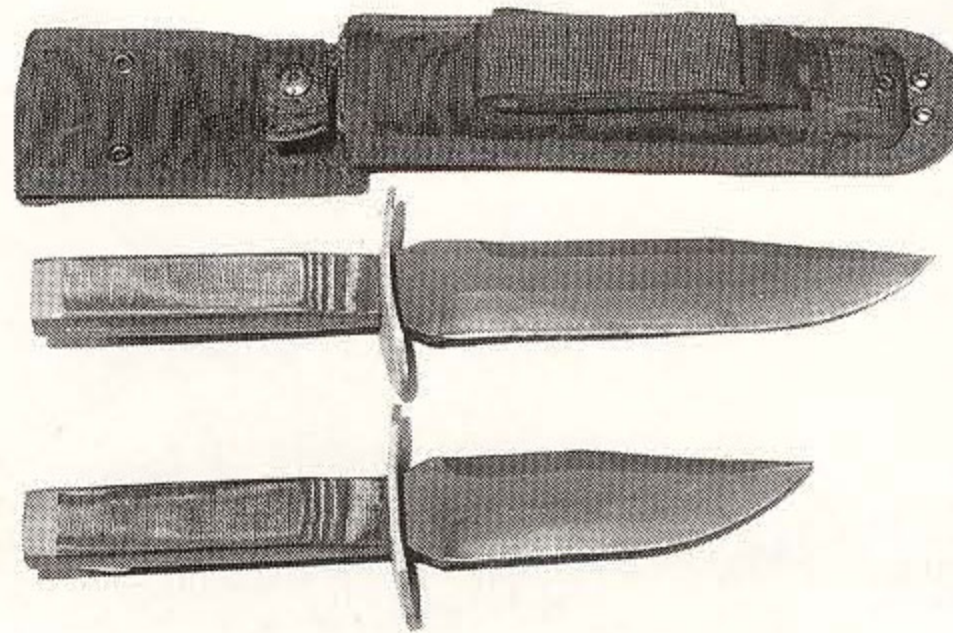
mark. The maintenance worker who had been yelling at the entourage is also forced to the ground and secured. He is later found to have had no connection to the assailant. The principle is delivered to his destination unharmed. So ends the last scenario of this cold and snowy January training day at the Smith & Wesson Academy in Springfield, Massachusetts.

One of the benefits of being a member of a police security or tactical team is having the opportunity to attend advanced training courses such as the one illustrated above. I was recently assigned to attend the "Tactical Handgun for the Protective Specialist Course" that was administered at the Smith & Wesson Academy in Springfield. I was impressed with both the Academy and its staff.

On Day One we were briefed on the course curriculum and introduced to the instructors and to one another. The Academy's director of training, Robert E. Hunt, gave this briefing and spoke with the quiet authority of a man in command. His presence and input held special significance for me, because he retired from the Massachusetts State Police as a Lt. Colonel, and is widely regarded as the

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Previous page: The Smith & Wesson Academy in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Inset: Instructor Bert DuVernay demonstrating pistol disarming techniques that were practiced daily during course.

This page, left to right: Students practicing engagement techniques from seated positions. Great care must be used to ensure that safe muzzle direction is maintained during presentation of weapon.

Instructor Brent Purucker explaining course of fire that involves use of Reactive Target System pop-up targets.

Students draw and fire while moving backwards away from target. Note safety "assistants" holding onto belts of shooters to prevent unwarranted mishaps. Safety is always a primary concern in any type of firearms training.

"father" of the Massachusetts State Police Special Tactical Operations (STOP) Team to which I am currently assigned.

The instructors, Tom Aveni, Bert DuVernay and Brent Purucker were all very competent individuals and exuded both the enthusiasm and professionalism required to make the training both interesting and enjoyable.

The eleven members of the class were no less enthusiastic than the instructors, and I must admit that I was surprised to find such a diverse group of individuals from so many different parts of the globe in attendance. Students had come to frozen, snowstorm-weary Springfield from as far away as Hong Kong, Greece, Switzerland and Canada. The more "domestic" participants included police and security personnel from Missouri, New Jersey and New York, with only two of us being true "locals," that is, from within a 200-mile radius.

Very often, courses that are billed as being oriented toward "tactical handgun" put most of the emphasis on the tactical, relegating the handgun aspects to the use of Simunition training gear or paint-ball guns, with perhaps a few hours of actual live-fire range work. Not so with this course, which put the training emphasis very much where it belongs—on the primary defensive weapon that would more than likely be employed while protecting a VIP, and on the skills of the operator of that weapon. From Day One, throughout most of the rest

of the week we shot, and shot, and shot some more. There was not much static bull's-eye shooting involved, save for an initial accuracy drill to gauge where everyone in the class stood in regards to basic marksmanship skills.

After that, the drills all involved tactical shooting, which as anyone who has been involved in any way with the police, military, security or personnel protection industries can tell you, means shooting while moving—while you're moving, or the bad guy's moving or you're both moving. To do this, and do it well, requires a great deal of practice and the employment of proper techniques; techniques that must be mastered and then continuously reinforced until they are ingrained and become a part of you.

Most of the students in the class that I attended had a great deal of prior training and experience in these areas, but gladly, everyone came to this class with open minds and a willingness to try new and different techniques. The pursuit of new and better tactics and advanced training techniques is a never-ending process. Exposing ourselves to different tactics, techniques and training philosophies is always beneficial. Trying new things and experimenting with different ideas we often find that even just one new or different way to perform our duties makes a positive difference. During the five days of this course, just about everyone commented on some new or different aspect of training or some technique that was just a "bit different" from

what they had been doing for years. This is, in my opinion, a good thing.

The training program administered during the five days of the course addressed many specific "problems" that may be encountered in the protective services field, and a number of solutions that have been developed to neutralize them. Courses of instruction ranged from a review of the basics, such as the function, design, safe handling and use of weapons, to the drawing of the weapon from concealed positions.

Incorporated throughout the week were numerous live-fire pistol speed drills. Several of them were timed to induce a bit of stress as well as to give the shooters a chance to see how proficient they could be while drawing and accurately firing from concealed-carry holsters. Pivots and turns were demonstrated and practiced. A good deal of emphasis was placed on one-hand shooting, the other hand being used to control a protectee or push away an assailant prior to engaging single or multiple targets.

Seated shooting and the many forms of retrieving and employing the concealed handgun were also explored. Assailant disarming techniques, specifically geared for a protective agent, were demonstrated and practiced daily. Action Target training systems were used to create reactive moving target and moving-target-with-hostage scenarios. Reactive Target Systems pop-up reactionary targets were also utilized.

Reduced-light shooting techniques were also explored, dramatically illustrating the great advantage of having some type of tritium night sights on the handguns. The difference in hits while using night sights as opposed to not was impressive and quite an eye-opener for many in the class.

Protective detail analysis was also explored but, as stated earlier, the course's focus and strength lie on its ability to emphasize the employment of the handgun in a critically close, tactical situation where the goal is not simply to keep the person or persons you've been assigned to protect alive, but yourself as well.

All in all, I found it to be a full week's worth of training, and one that left me with a desire to do more of it. This is always a good sign, especially after having to chip my car out of a block of solid ice for five straight days. New England—You gotta love it!

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