

58359

Survival Training for Narcotics Officers

by Peter J. Pitchess
Sheriff
County of Los Angeles



At 4:00 a.m. a Special Weapons Team Deputy crawled up the seemingly endless driveway to the residence. At the doorway he remained on his back to avoid television monitors. He was joined by another Deputy.

Hidden, a short distance away, the remainder of the Special Weapons Team waited. Also waiting were members of an L.E.A.-funded Narcotics Task Force: Drug Enforcement Administration Agents, Agents from the California Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Narcotics Deputies, and Narcotics Officers for the Los Angeles Police Department.

The Task Force set up the early morning raid in commando style for a reason: Information was developed that the dealer they were about to arrest had fortified himself with a machinegun and television monitors at strategic points around his residence.

The team eventually secured the house and arrested the dealer without injury or incident. An additional 36 suspects were arrested in other simultaneous raids.

It seems that the evolution of Los Angeles County as the marijuana and heroin distribution center for the nation has attracted illicit drug entrepreneurs with a flair for sophisticated yet deadly gadgetry.

Investigators more and more are finding themselves objects of counter-surveillance, being outrun by high-speed boats and aircraft, viewed on television monitors, and caught in the sights of the most advanced automatic weapons. All of this because Southern California has become a base of operations for a large number of "big volume" drug dealers who have found the political and judicial climate much to their liking. Successful narcotics decriminalization efforts, some of the most restrictive drug enforcement court decisions,

and a close proximity to the major source of supply have significantly contributed to this agreeable climate. Further, where drug merchandising is lucrative in Southern California, one finds that drug enforcement is difficult and dangerous.

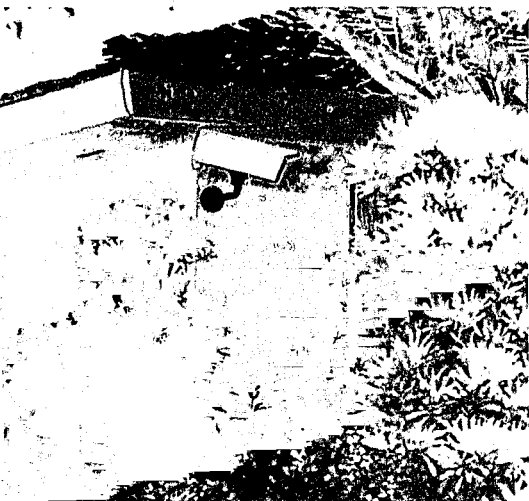
Recent seizures indicate that shipments into the Southern California area are becoming larger, and undercover officers are finding it necessary to flash larger sums of money in attempting to negotiate buys.

This escalation seems to be setting the stage for more than the anticipated drug-related street crimes. We can, as recent experiences have shown, expect an alarming proliferation of dangerous confrontations with dealers who, eager to protect their huge shipments, or eager to engineer a "rip off," will not hesitate to employ weapons, equipment, and tactics beyond the capabilities of most law enforcement agencies.

To combat today's elusive and highly organized drug dealers requires more than a joint effort if operations are to be successfully concluded without violence. In reality, a large-scale interagency operation increases the risk of violence as a result of inconsistencies in identification, weapons, and procedural policies.

Recognizing the gravity of this problem, the four member agencies of the Narcotic Information Network outlined the curriculum for a Non-uniform Officer Survival School.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department offered the Sheriff's Academy and the expertise of its training staff to develop and implement the school. Since the school's start in January 1975, 87 Drug Enforcement Administration Agents have attended as well as 21 State Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement Agents, 83 Officers from the Los Angeles Police Department, 69 Sheriff's



A man's home is his castle, and if he's in the drug traffic, it is apt to be well defended — this one with a set of TV monitors as well as a watchdog. Under the circumstances, well-planned safety precautions are essential.



Deputies, and 13 officers from other Police Departments.

The survival school commences with a chilling re-creation of an actual narcotics case where three undercover investigators were killed in a well-planned ambush. The students observe the incident in a shocked silence, realizing they would have in all probability reacted in the same manner as the slain officers.

Narcotics arrests resulting in officer deaths are researched, analyzed, and presented to the class, pointing out the need for constant awareness and control in each step of the investigative process. Although innovative survival techniques are offered, the emphasis is on utilizing well-established safety guidelines while drawing heavily from the personal street experiences of the instructors.

Every day officers are confronted with the hazardous task of arresting the narcotics offender in his domain, namely, in a dwelling. Experience has shown that information about the offender, or his residence, such as the floor plan of the dwelling and the suspect's possible armament — obtained from an informant, surveillance, or other means — is usually inaccurate. Therefore each entry should be viewed as an unknown entity, requiring extensive planning and uniformity of action whenever possible. As a result of this training, a multi-agency entry is now possible with complete uniformity.

Another area of extreme hazard to the plainclothes officer in an unmarked car is the pullover of suspect vehicles. The Sheriff's Academy Staff greatly assisted by initiating a comprehensive study into the basic proven techniques for vehicular pullover and approaches in everyday field situations. This information was then adapted in a flexible manner to the specific needs of the undercover or

plainclothes officer.

A class on officer survival field problems stressing proper vehicle pullover and approach methods may, on the surface, seem too elementary for experienced officers. But the importance of such a refresher course became apparent when, in the first class of 20 officers, acting in teams of two in role-playing felony pullover exercises, 18 officers were theoretically killed.

The subject matter is presented in two phases: a participative classroom chalk talk and role-playing in field problems, particularly vehicle pullovers. The latest methods of van approaches and "jamming" techniques are discussed and practiced.

The "jam" pullover is accomplished by numbering the law enforcement vehicles involved in a pullover and assigning each vehicle a specific responsibility. In a multiagency arrest effort, each officer should react in an identical manner consistent with the vehicle responsibility assigned to that designated number.

In many of these multiagency arrest situations, the problem of recognizing an officer from another agency has created a potentially hazardous situation wherein an armed suspect must be differentiated from an armed narcotics officer who has assumed an undercover role. Although not part of the school, we and other agencies have instituted procedures to minimize these hazards. In dealing with the problem of officer identification, each plainclothes officer has been provided with a highly visible, lightweight nylon jacket affixed with appropriate department insignia. This jacket is capable of being carried in a pocket and is large enough to be worn over a regular jacket or coat. The jacket affords the individual officer the resource of changing his identity at a moment's notice in any field situation.





Raid Jackets — a "must" for interagency operations.

One of the most interesting and well-received courses offered at the Narcotic Officer's Survival School explores the increasing problem of countersurveillance by the major narcotics violators. In-depth investigative research was initiated into reported instances of countersurveillance encountered during covert investigations in the United States and several foreign countries.

The survey pointed out dramatically that countersurveillance information was not being reported, compiled, or analyzed on a regular basis, permitting a void to exist in this vital area. Consequently, a system of reporting and documenting evidence of countersurveillance was established in Los Angeles County. These countersurveillance incidents are now reported regularly and are being discussed, analyzed, and shared by participating task force members.

The school provides an entire day of intense combat shooting and specialized weapons training at the Sheriff's All Purpose Range, located at Wayside Honor Rancho. The course of instruction includes: weapons safety; drawing and firing sidearms at metal silhouette targets from close range, left and right handed; shooting from the barricaded position; quick reloading techniques; supine shooting positions with each hand from changing stances; drawing and firing while walking; shotgun training utilizing clay pigeons; and firing at popup targets in simulated dwellings.

This comprehensive firearms training is a valuable and practical exercise de-

signed to reestablish weapons familiarity and good shooting habits under field-like conditions.

The survival school includes four hours of training by a qualified expert in making undercover narcotics purchases. During this technique session, video films of actual purchases by officers in the field are shown. The film demonstrates methods of testing various narcotics, such as cocaine, in undercover situations. The instructor not only draws on his own training and experience to convey safety techniques, but solicits from the class any information that might further the safety of officers acting in an undercover situation.

Sprinkled throughout the course are some basics in the sociological and psychological mechanisms which tend to precipitate certain thoughts and actions in both the violators and the narcotics officers and which could ultimately result in either the injury or death of the officer. Peer-group pressures and syndrome behavior patterns are analyzed in terms of their influence and effect on the safety habits of narcotics officers. In another segment of this presentation, video tape graphically illustrates a narcotics dealer arranging the sale of a large quantity of heroin to an undercover officer posing as a potential buyer. The skit depicts a dealer who had never thought of "ripping off" the buyer until the buyer gave him an offer he couldn't refuse. Our undercover officer, in his haste to make the deal, led the dealer to believe that when he met him, he would be bringing a large

sum of money to consummate the deal. The point was well made when the dealer soliloquized, "Why should I bring the heroin when I can rip off the money and keep the heroin, too?"

The interest and participation that has been generated by this school is outstanding, and the camaraderie developed by those attending, both as participants and monitors from various agencies, is a fringe benefit that will prove a priceless commodity for the future. The input received from the class members, either through discussion or a formal critique, creates a circumstance where the curriculum for each class is constantly changing. This is necessary and valuable because narcotics enforcement itself constantly faces new and different challenges; and without the dynamics provided by this constant review, the course would soon be sterile and outdated.

Since the inception of the school, virtually all the Sheriff's Department's plainclothes detective units have indicated an interest in the school with an eye toward modifying the curriculum of their individual needs. In addition, many inquiries have been received by law enforcement agencies from within California and several other western states. These agencies are requesting admission to the school as observers in order that they may return to their respective areas and utilize the information gained both for in-service training sessions and for the establishment of similar survival schools.

END