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Firearms



POLICE COUNTERSNIPER TRAINING

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The role of the police in hostage and armed-barricaded individual situations is one of those critical areas of law enforcement which requires constant training and refinement. With the emergence of negotiations as a viable procedure in handling these incidents, the role of the police countersniper has been considerably diminished. The goal of the training officer in hostage and armed-barricaded individual situations is to develop and impart the discipline and knowledge necessary to conclude successfully these incidents without resorting to the use of firearms by police.

A law enforcement agency's reputation and civil liability lie in the hands of the officer assigned countersniper duties. Good community and media relations can turn into a hostile environment over a marksman's error. Not only must this officer have the discipline and training to refrain from shooting when it is unnecessary, but he must also possess the skills necessary to place with precision a shot if the situation absolutely demands it.

Years of excellent work by an agency can be negated by one ill-timed or misplaced shot by a police officer. It is imperative that a department be prepared not only to justify the use of a countersniper, but to justify the choice of a particular individual assigned in that capacity. A lawsuit, in such circum-

stances, would place the individual officer and the agency's training program under public scrutiny. The agency would be called upon to show that it exercised good judgment in selecting a countersniper and in his subsequent marksmanship training. This article outlines a countersniper training program that minimizes expense and loss of man-hours while increasing the efficiency of agency marksmen.

This training program identifies several crucial questions which define the goals of countersniper training.

1. Is the officer familiar with the weapon he is assigned? Does he know how it functions?

2. Does he understand the ballistics of the bullet his weapon fires? Does the bullet have range and penetration restrictions?

3. Is the officer routinely, sporadically, or rarely given the opportunity to train on the range?

4. Has the officer fired his weapon at varying ranges? Is he capable of judging distances and interpreting their effect on his weapon?

5. Does he realize that wind, mirage, range, and/or obstacles, such as glass, can influence the effectiveness of his bullet?

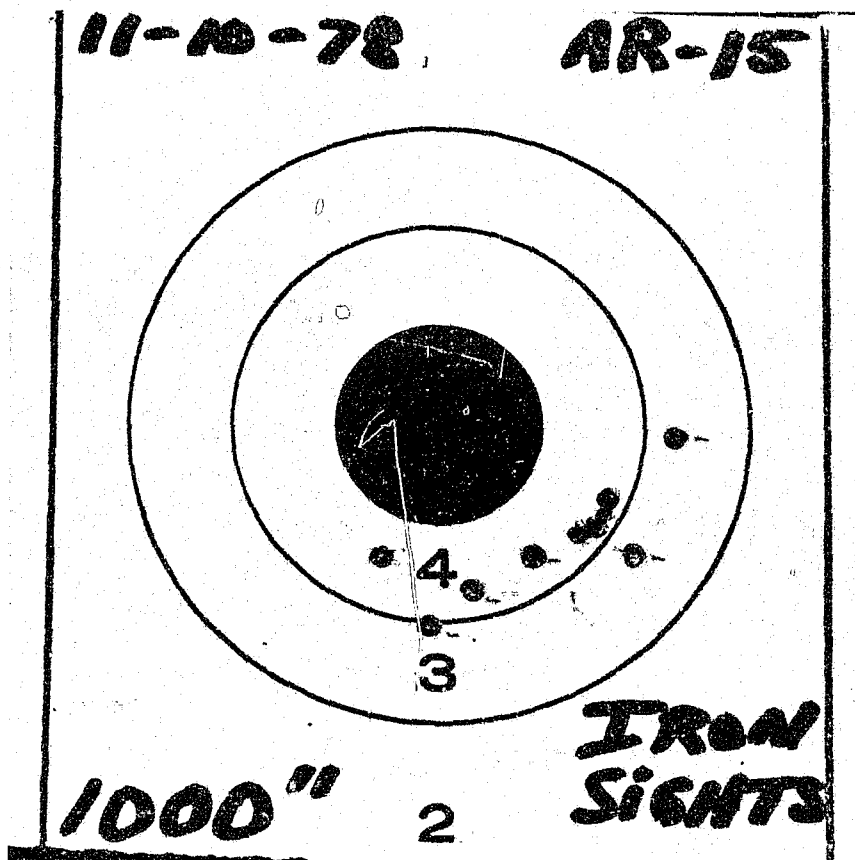
6. Does he have a cold bore zero?

7. Does the officer have a weapon data card stored with the weapon which cites specific range or ballistic data?

8. Does the agency train a two-man countersniper observer team for long range or special circumstances?

9. Does the training provide shoot/no shoot situations and require the officer to articulate the reasons for his actions?

10. Does the agency keep records of the training an individual receives?

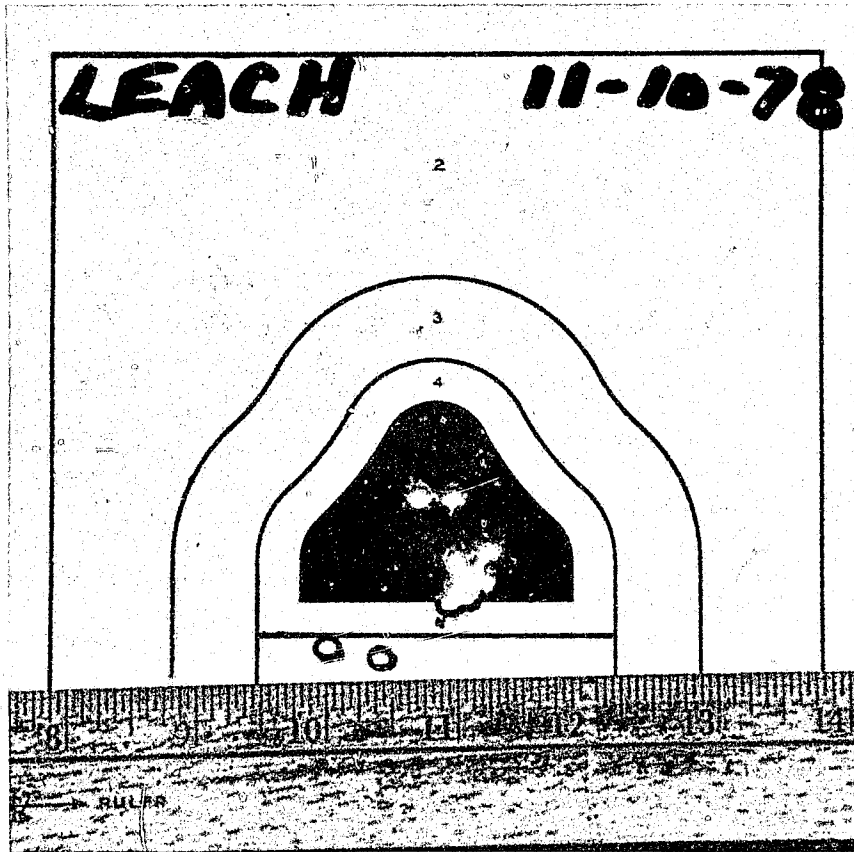


Target 1.

Range Training

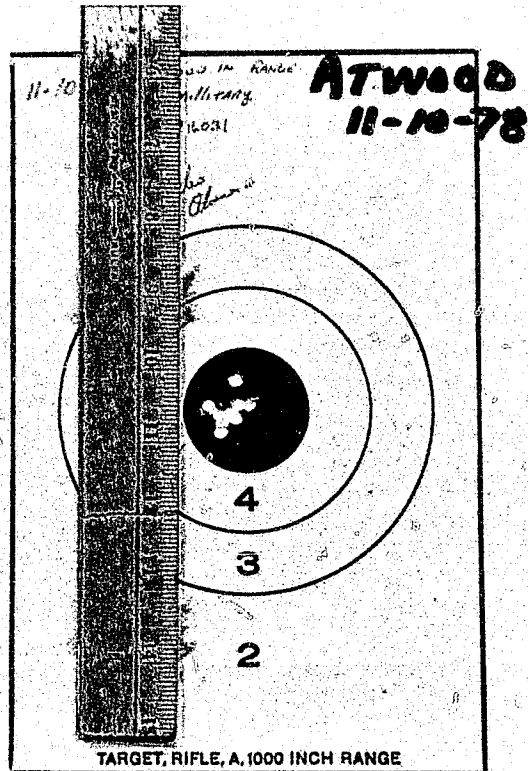
It is unnecessary that a countersniper shoot 100 to 300 yards or more every time he practices. Nor is it necessary that he fire a great number of rounds of ammunition each time. Since most law enforcement agencies have a 50-yard pistol range available, it is less time consuming to have all countersniper trainees begin by practicing positions, sight pictures, etc., and then shoot groups at 1000 inches (27.7 yards). Any shooter not grouping his shots so that they touch or make a large hole at 1000 inches should not be firing from any other distance. Failure to group shots, as shown in target 1, is an indication that the officer has not acquired the fundamentals of marksmanship and lacks concentration. These practice sessions should be kept at a leisurely pace, with emphasis placed on obtaining the best possible placement of each round fired.

Once an officer consistently groups his shots, he has demonstrated the basic marksmanship skills necessary to begin shooting at greater distances. (See targets 2 and 3.) As with the errant shots in targets 2 and 3, the inability of a rifleman to group his shots is indicative of the need to improve the skills associated with countersniper training. The officers firing on targets 2 and 3 are ready to train at longer distances. It would be preferable, however, to have them shooting consistent groups before such a move. It should be noted that an officer who has not practiced for several months will rarely be able to go on a range and group his first three shots acceptably. This may be overcome by a 2 to 3-hour session per month for practice and rezeroing of



Target 2.

Target 3.



the weapon. All countersniper weapons should be periodically fired to verify the zero. It is potentially disastrous to leave a rifle in its case for months and count on it being zeroed.

Bad weather often seems to haunt any preplanned range time. A solution to this would be to seek access to a local indoor, small bore range operated by a gun club, Army Reserve, or National Guard Unit. Practice with a small bore rifle is an excellent substitute for outdoor shooting.

During training, a second countersniper should be used to coach the shooter. After the first man has fired, he will assume coaching duties while the second man fires. By training in this manner, the two men become accustomed to working together, and if they are kept together during various stages of training, the basis of a sniper-observer team is established. All long-range situations, i.e., ranges in excess of 200 yards, or unusual situations should involve an observer with binoculars to assist the countersniper. His job will be to reinforce the countersniper's sense of mission and assist him in making crucial decisions regarding range, obstacles, trajectory (point of aim), suspect identification, and movement, etc.

Ballistics

Specific ballistic characteristics of a countersniper's weapon should be researched. The Kansas City, Mo., Police Department found, in a series of tests, that the .223 bullet would disintegrate upon impact when fired at tempered safety glass. Further investigation revealed several types of thermal glass caused disintegration and deflection of the .223 projectile. Testing of this nature develops a police marksman's judgment about the limitations and restrictions of his weapon. Each marksman should have a data card with his rifle that lists information characteristic to that weapon. (See fig. 1.)

Once a weapon is zeroed at a certain distance, the marksman should print a good group at 1000 inches. To check the zero on a rifle it is only a matter of knowing that it prints groups at a certain measured distance, high or low of the center of a target at 1000 inches.

Rifles should be assigned to specific individuals, and after zeroing, the sights should not be changed by anyone else unless it is reassigned and rezeroed. When cleaning these weapons, the barrel and action should not be removed from the stock, as this can change the point of impact of the weapon's bullets.

Judgment

Scheduled training should place marksmen in situations in which their judgment is tested. A supervisor could pick a variety of structures, distances, etc., and require his marksmen to discuss the situation in terms of what problems the specific situation presents. Are they aware of the increasing use of tempered glass in business structures and its effect on ballistics? A countersniper should realize that the .223 bullet does not have the range capability of the .308 or .30-06. Likewise, he should know the .308 and .30-06 have considerably deeper penetration into structures than the .223. Would your countersniper attempt a 250-yard shot requiring precision

placement with a .223 bullet when strong, gusting winds are at a right angle to the line of fire?

During situational training, requiring a police marksman to articulate his reasons for firing a shot allows the supervisor to critique the officer's decisionmaking process. An added benefit is that the officer expects to be prepared to justify his actions by presenting a logical statement of events and reasons. This requirement of present-

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ing a statement prepares the officer for the day he may testify in court. The use of a police weapon demands that the marksman know that the suspect's actions pose grave personal danger to an officer or another citizen, and that no other course of action is possible. Regardless of how many or varied the reasons an officer may have in such circumstances, he must be able to articulate those reasons in court.

Conclusion

Retaining records of a marksman's training and practice serves three purposes. First, it provides data



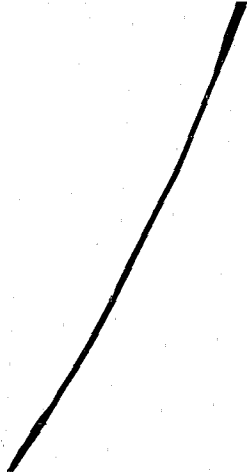
Chief Norman Caron

from which a training program can be constantly evaluated. Second, it provides the material needed to judge a marksman's progress. Inconsistencies in scores or shot groups reflect bad marksmanship habits and point to the need for further training. And last, these records may be used in court, if necessary, to show evidence of a continuing marksmanship training program.

Development of a training program can be tailored to the budget and manpower restrictions of the agencies involved. A regular interval of training sessions is the key ingredient of such a program and this requires only modest amounts of time and ammunition. **FBI**

Figure 1

1. Description of weapon:	Remington Model 700
2. Serial #:	A650311
3. Ammo:	Remington .223 PSP 55 gr.
4. Date of last zero:	March 27, 1979
5. Range zeroed:	100 yards
6. Point of impact:	50 yards 100 yards—zero 150 yards— 200 yards— 250 yards—
7. 1000 inches zero check	—2.4 inches



END