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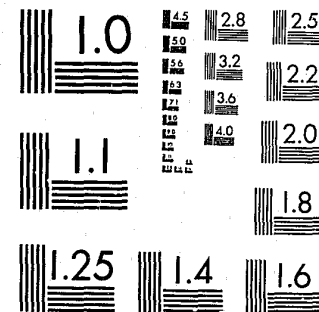
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ACQUISITIONS

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Cooperation

Spokane's Robbery Education Program

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Armed robbery is one of the most frightening experiences an employee could possibly encounter while working for almost any type of business. The crime prevention unit of the Spokane Police Department has developed an armed robbery education program for banks, which has also been adapted successfully for employees of high-risk retail establishments.

The program is designed to educate employees in their current work environment, breaking away from the sterile settings of auditoriums and classrooms. It was believed, upon implementation of the program, that environmental design characteristics inherent in the structure of the building can be of benefit to employees, if they are aware of them and know how to use them. Therefore, this program

goes right to them, in their work location, where the actual robbery would take place.

The current program addresses two goals. The first is to educate employees and/or managers of banks and/or high-risk retail businesses to the dangers inherent in an actual robbery situation. The second goal is to improve the abilities of affected personnel in describing suspects and securing evidence and to familiarize them with the investigative needs of law enforcement officers.

To initiate the program in a particular bank or retail business, the law enforcement coordinator meets with the manager, and in some cases, the security officer. This pre-program organization is necessary to establish a convenient time for the program, either before the business opens or after it closes so that no customers are present. This will ensure total control and safety during the program. The manager is instructed by the coordinator to inform all employees of the program, in which a "mock robbery" will be staged. Pre-program

Robert D. Panther
Chief of Police

Officer Moore (the author) addresses the participants prior to the exercise.

organization also includes establishing a schedule of mock robbery programs to be distributed to all local law enforcement agencies and personnel involved in the program, so they can organize their schedule accordingly. The alarm company *must* be notified of the time and date and be contacted again on the actual day before the robbery program commences.

The law enforcement coordinator and the "bad guys" should arrive at the "robbery" site a half hour before the employees. After being admitted by the manager or security officer, the bad guys familiarize themselves with the layout of the business and then find a place to hide until it is time for the "holdup." Employees do not see the bad guys until the actual exercise takes place, since prior visual contact between employees and the robbers will drastically affect the description phase of the exercise.

In any program where a mock robbery is used, a uniformed police officer is required to be present before, during, and after the exercise to assist in securing the building and to assure any passerby that the program is a planned security exercise. It should be noted that during 61 such programs presented in Spokane thus far, the law enforcement coordinator has had to use more than one officer, based upon the size of the building, location of doors, windows, etc. Security is extremely important during the exercise, and a program should not be attempted without an adequate number of uniformed police officers. A marked patrol vehicle, parked in the most prominent or visible place, is also important for security on the outside of the bank or business.

The actual robbery education program begins with a 25-minute employee briefing by the law enforcement coordinator. All employees are informed of the program's educational intent and that a mock robbery will be performed. Officials stress that nobody will be hurt and ask employees to act as they would in a real situation. To familiarize the employees with guns used in holdups, weapons are displayed and the differences between

Security is provided during the course of the program. Uniformed officers are necessary to assure customers the bank is not open, the exercise is not a real robbery, and that this is just a training session.

them, i.e., automatics, revolvers, sawed-off shotguns, etc., explained. Tips on how to respond to commands in a holdup and how to observe, describe, and remember descriptions are given. Also discussed are suggestions for using design characteristics of the building to enhance their abilities to describe a holdup man. The design characteristics discussed will attempt to aid in the description of robbery suspects. The height of countertops, location of signs, and tape markers on doors are some of the things mentioned by the coordinator.

Employees are also urged to remember exactly what was said during the robbery. Words, phrases, etc., should be written down, so that a law enforcement investigator will know what was said during the incident. Additional time may be allotted for instruction on how to adequately prepare their building for a holdup. Also included is a discussion on protecting evidence for the investigator. This is a major part of the critique process and

should always be discussed before the robbery exercise commences.

Mandatory safety precautions must be taken during the program itself. Employees and any observers must be asked if there are any firearms or weapons in the building, and any weapons must be secured by the coordinator before the exercise begins. Employees are automatically exempted from participating if they have any medical condition (heart condition, pregnancies, etc.). Any employee not wanting to participate is also exempted, and all observers or exempt employees are assigned to a neutral or nonaffected area of the business. They may watch the exercise, however, and not become part of the mock robbery. The coordinator should inform the robbers of the location of the neutral area prior to the start of the exercise.

After the briefing and confirmation that the alarm company was notified, the employees return to their work areas. The exercise, basically, is known as a "total branch holdup," in which the bad guys take control of the whole business and involve everyone. If any employee is able to activate the alarm, they are to do so, as if the robbery were real. It becomes obvious to many employees how simple tasks suddenly become difficult to perform under the circumstances.

The exercise commences with the appearance of the bad guys who, very convincingly, holdup the bank or business. The holdup is usually over in less than 2 minutes, and the bad guys exit the bank area and return to the original place of concealment. At no time do the robbers leave the building and no money is taken from the building.

The holdup begins with the robbers entering the work area, armed with revolvers or sawed-off shotguns. There is shooting and blanks are used in the weapons. At no time are any weapons fired at or near an employee. Mock robberies have been done without gunfire, although it tends to add an authentic touch to the robbery. It definitely adds to the intensity of the exercise.

During the holdup, the coordinator's responsibility is to evaluate the

performance of the employees and observe their reactions. There are occasions when the coordinator has had to reassure an employee who may have been startled by the frenzied activity. The coordinator's evaluation continues after the holdup as the employees secure the building and protect any evidence which may be present. All employees are given time to fill out description forms provided by the bank management. There have been some cases, when dealing with retail businesses, that description forms are not available. On those occasions the coordinator should provide sample forms for the employees to use. Employees are given a shorter period of time to fill out the forms than would normally be given because of the limited amount of time available. After this is done, they are reassembled in the area where the coordinator addressed them before the holdup. The coordinator can also ask the employees to estimate the total time of the holdup and should have each group of people in the bank or business mark their forms differently. For example, the victim teller should mark her form with a large V, other tellers with an X, others at desks with a Y, and so on. This makes it easier to show how different groups and areas will pick up different characteristics of the holdup men.

The employees are then reintroduced to the robbers, so they can see how they did on their descriptions. The holdup men come into the assembly area and give a brief physical description of themselves. The weapons used during the holdup exercise are now shown to the employees, and the coordinator reviews all description forms, comparing them to the actual robbers. This part of the program demonstrates what people can, and in actuality, do recall during a period of stress. Many characteristics are usually noted by the employee, and they re-emphasize the fact that human beings, when exposed to the same situation, will see and remember things differently.

After the description session with the holdup men, the mock robbery is critiqued. The coordinator brings out weaknesses and strong points during
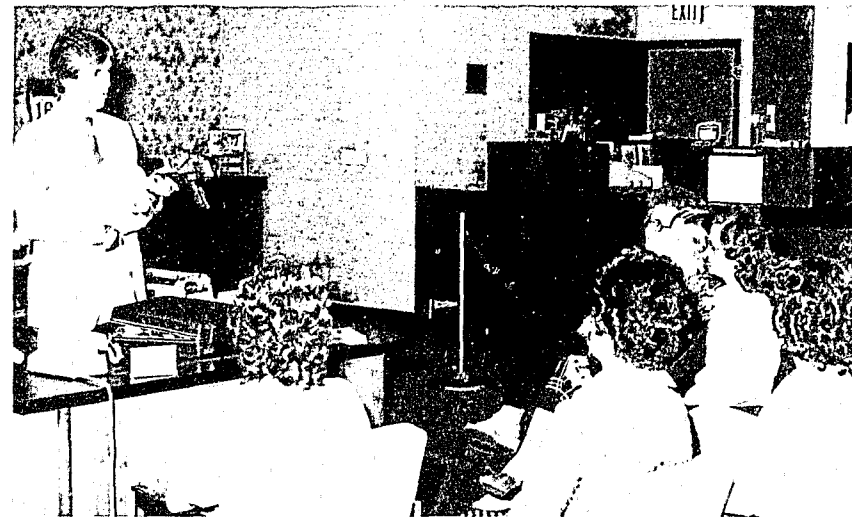
The law enforcement coordinator displays different types of firearms before the exercise begins.
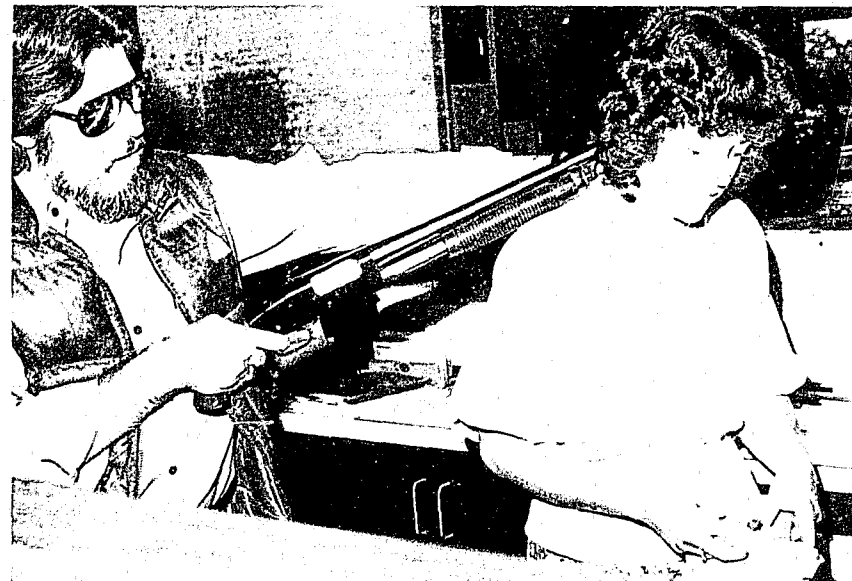
A cable TV employee "robbing" a bank employee.

the fake robbery, and the holdup men also give advice to the employees regarding their observations during the exercise. Generally, time is given for questions and answers before the program ends. All uniformed police officers are then advised so they can leave the area and return to regular duty. It must be emphasized how important it is to have uniformed police officers providing security during the actual exercise, especially when firearms are being displayed by the coordinator or his bad guys.

The overall program, as it is presently put together, is an example of a community effort which shows up in two major areas. First, all businesses and banks are sent a questionnaire 1 week after the exercise so they can critique the mock robbery. If they feel any changes are needed, they are asked to comment on them, as well as safety precautions, etc. The questionnaire is returned to the law enforcement coordinator so any necessary changes can be made. These questionnaires have been responsible for many changes which continue to point toward a very successful program. Second, a local cable television company has provided their expertise and one of their employees to assist in robbery education, as well as in the actual mock robberies. These two factors have made the Spokane Police Department robbery education program a continuing success.

If an employee or business is involved in an actual armed robbery after completing the education program, they are interviewed to determine if the training helped them prepare for the real thing. Patrol division officers, as well as detective division officers involved in the incident, are also consulted as to their reactions on how the training helped the employee or business. All this material is kept for documentation of the education program.

The latest robbery incident in Spokane involving a business employee who had been trained in the armed robbery education program shows a noticeable difference between trained and nontrained personnel. A female employee of a large retail store was the victim of an actual robbery 2 weeks after undergoing the mock robbery program. She was the second victim of the same robbery suspect in the course of an hour, and the differences between the first victim of this robber (who was not trained) and the second victim were very obvious. The nontrained employee panicked and was unable to cope emotionally with the robbery. In fact, the first victim could provide little information to the responding patrol division officers. The second victim not only was able to secure areas involved in the incident but also to provide a very complete and detailed description of the armed robbery suspect. In fact, she had the complete description written down prior to the arrival of the responding officers. Based upon the detailed description of the second victim, the suspect was arrested by detectives.

The ability to know how you are going to perform in an actual armed robbery is very difficult, if not totally impossible. Each person is affected differently, and by placing bank or business employees through as real an incident as possible, we hope to improve their abilities in a robbery, as well as to let them learn how they might react in a real situation.

The reactions from people during the robbery exercise have been similar to those seen on the faces of real victims. We have seen emotions ranging from nervous laughter to tears. Most have commented on their critiques that they now have a much better idea of how they might react and would now know how to control any extreme reaction.

The evaluation of the robbery education programs will continue indefinitely in Spokane; however, we are very confident that the results will continue to show increased employee safety and more definite data for law enforcement investigations. **FBI**

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