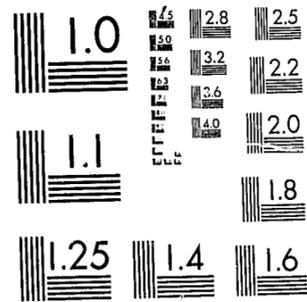


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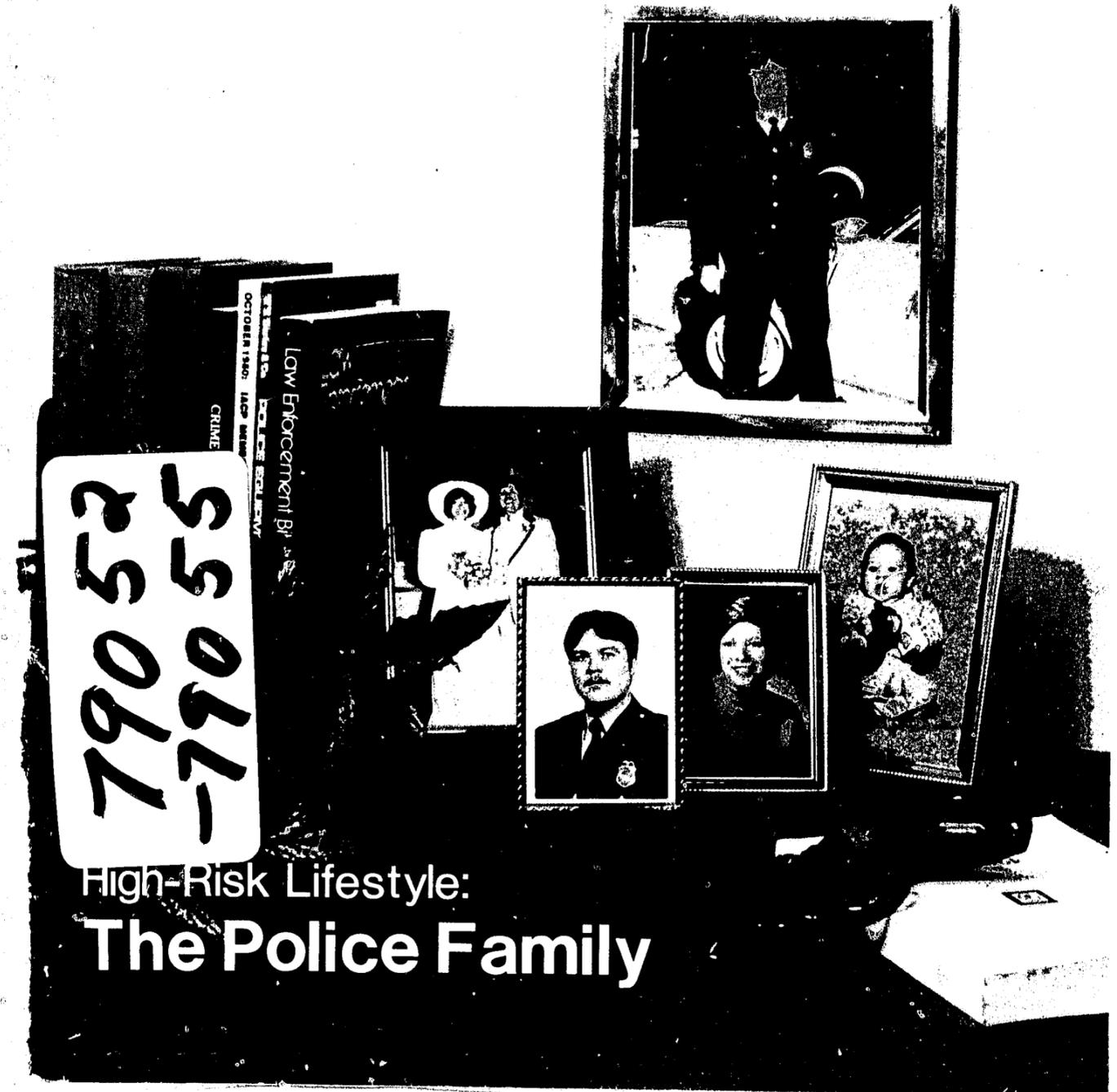
National Institute of Justice  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D. C. 20531

DATE FILMED

11/20/81

**FBI** LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

AUGUST 1981



# FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

AUGUST 1981, VOLUME 50, NUMBER 8 U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Justice

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Federal Bureau of Investigation  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D.C. 20535

William H. Webster, Director

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through December 28, 1983.

Published by the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs,  
Roger S. Young  
Assistant Director

Editor—Thomas J. Deakin  
Assistant Editor—Kathryn E. Sulewski  
Art Director—Kevin J. Mulholland  
Writer/Editor—Karen McCarron  
Production Manager—Jeffery L. Summers



ISSN 0014-5688

USPS 383-310

MFI  
79054  
Firearms



## Developing An Inservice Firearms Training Program

By  
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and  
DEPUTY MARTIN R. WOLINSKI  
Erie County Sheriff's Department  
Buffalo, N.Y.





Sergeant Phillips



Deputy Wolinski

Every community deserves a professional and well-trained police department. To further this goal in his department, the sheriff of Erie County, N.Y., restructured the firearms training program. He issued an internal order requiring every deputy who carries a weapon as part of his official duties, or who has the authority to do so, to qualify with that weapon.

When developing an inservice firearms training program, several factors must be considered if the program is to be successful. They include:

- 1) The degree of support given to the program by the head of the agency;
- 2) Availability of funds for ammunition;
- 3) Availability of manpower for training purposes;
- 4) Availability of suitable range facilities (both indoor and outdoor); and
- 5) The nature of the population to be trained.

The first four factors posed no problems. The sheriff not only endorsed the program but also obtained the ammunition and assigned the manpower necessary to accomplish this training. However, particular attention needed to be directed to the fifth point noted—the nature of the population to be trained. If officers did not support the program or believe it worthwhile, it would founder.

By way of background, New York State has mandated police training. Within a year of the time of appointment, all police officers are required to complete successfully a prescribed course of training provided on a regional level at the Erie County Department of Central Police Services Training Academy. The firearms portion of this training consists of 8 days of range time and a total of 1,350 rounds of 38 wadcutter, as well as familiarization with the shotgun and other weapons. An officer cannot complete the academy course without attaining reasonable proficiency with the handgun.

However, proficiency with a firearm may not always be the case with some officers assigned to the department. Several veteran officers have had only minimal firearms training. In the past, holding center personnel were not required to qualify with a weapon since they did not carry one. Only in recent years have holding center personnel been detailed to court duty and/or to transport prisoners, requiring that they be armed when serving in this capacity. Accordingly, officers who *might* be assigned these details would have to be qualified with a weapon.

The Erie County Sheriff's Department is divided into four primary divisions: Road patrol, 160 deputies; holding center, 208; court detail, 83; and civil division, 18. Historically, only those deputies assigned to road patrol and the civil division received annual firearms training, while deputies assigned to the court division received this training less frequently. However, within recent years, efforts have been made to train the court detail on the same basis as the road patrol and civil division. Holding center personnel have never received firearms training, except in rare instances. If they desired training, they would have to report on their own time and furnish their own weapons and ammunition.

The problem, then, was to develop a course of fire which would be practical, interesting, and yet challenging to those who had recently completed the academy. However, it could not be so difficult that officers with minimal or no training would be unable to qualify, thereby destroying their self-confidence and jeopardizing future training efforts.



Sheriff Kenneth J. Braun

The course previously used for firearms training was a modified police "L" 25-round course fired on bullseye and silhouette targets. The ranges, while far from ideal, were nonetheless adequate. And since they were the only ones available, they would continue to be used.

Separate indoor and outdoor courses were designed. The indoor course outline is as follows:

Distance—50 feet

Target—B 21 reduced

Scoring—K values

Total rounds—25

Five rounds in 5 minutes, one hand, single action;

Five rounds in 20 seconds (one or two hands), point shoulder position, double action;

Five rounds in 20 seconds (one or two hands), point shoulder position, double action;

Five rounds in 10 seconds (one or two hands), point shoulder position, double action;

Five rounds in 10 seconds (one or two hands), point shoulder position, double action.

With K values, a perfect score, 25 K-5s, is 125. The qualifying score on this course is 75 points raw score or 60 percent. This, of course, was not particularly difficult. However, we believed it necessary to obtain an evaluation of the officers' proficiency without destroying their confidence.

From the outset, two range instructors were used for groups consisting of approximately 6, but not more than 10, deputies. Considerable time was spent with each group on basic safety procedures and firing positions. As the entire department fired the course, those officers recognized as somewhat less than proficient were afforded remedial training. In most cases, after remedial training, these same officers were able to fire not only qualifying but good to excellent scores.

Everyone in the department qualified, including management personnel. Unfortunately, the indoor course generated little enthusiasm. In general, deputies simply believed it was too easy, although it did aid in identifying those officers needing extra help.



The outdoor course included the following specifications:

Target—B 21 reduced

Scoring—2.5 points per hit in the black, all double action, qualifying score 70 percent

Rounds—40 total

21' one hand, hip shooting, load four—one on each whistle;

Load 6—10 shots in 30 seconds (6 reload 4);

40' point shoulder position (one or two hands), five rounds, strong hand (no time limit), load five, five rounds weak hand (no time limit);

50' kneeling position, five rounds, strong hand (no time limit);

60' five rounds, strong hand, barricade.

Using a 40-round course made available 10 rounds from each box of 50 or a total of 20 rounds for familiarization purposes. Since some of the officers had never fired from these po-

**“[Officers] must see the progress they are making and the practical applications of the training. . . .”**

sitions, both dry and live firing practices were taken before attempting a course qualification.

Again, small groups of men worked with a minimum of two range instructors. An 8-hour block was allotted each group, enough time to cover the essentials of range safety, weapon familiarization and nomenclature, the basics of loading and unloading and blading while doing so, and the myriad of other basic instructions. Moreover, each group dry fired in each position, with care taken to explain the proper

position and the reason for learning to fire from that position.

Each part of the course was specifically designed to give the individual officer the edge needed on the street.

The first phase of the course, loading with four rounds, forced the officer to remember which way the cylinder turned. If the officer had a Colt whose cylinder rotated clockwise, the weapon should be loaded by rotating the cylinder counterclockwise. In this way, if the officer had to close the weapon and fire in an emergency situation and had only two bullets in the weapon, the two shots would go off the first two times the trigger was pulled. If the cylinder is not rotated in this manner, the officer might have to pull the trigger four times before striking a live round. This delay could cost the officer his life.

Twenty rounds, half of the outdoor course, were fired from the hip-level

position. Statistics furnished to the officers indicated that approximately 90 percent of shooting incidents in which officers lost their lives took place within 20 feet. In 1978, for example, 41 percent of these incidents occurred within a distance of 0-5 feet, 22 percent at a range of 6-10 feet, and 26 percent from a distance of 11-20 feet. This seems difficult to understand unless one considers the average room size is approximately 11 x 15. Moreover, a suspect will generally attempt to escape rather than kill, and it is only when convinced the officer will make an arrest that the suspect will panic.

The officers fired from hip-level position until it became obvious they had mastered the form necessary to strike the target accurately and consistently. Form rather than score was emphasized, since it was believed speed and accuracy would come naturally with practice once the officer mastered the form and position.

Officers were required to jettison their empty brass onto the ground, not catch it. Again, the reason was carefully explained. An officer who habitually caught his brass would do so automatically in the heat of a gun battle, and this action might cost him his life, as it has others in the past. Not only does catching empty brass cost time, but the possibility exists that the brass casings might be confused with live rounds in a highly stressful situation. Speed was emphasized in the loading and unloading sequences. The purpose of this was to teach the officer to load quickly and shoot slowly and to increase his proficiency so that should he have to reload in a combat situation, he would be able to do so under pressure and instinctively.

The entire department qualified in approximately 6-7 weeks. Because of time constraints and range availability, officers who were detailed to fire on specific days did so, regardless of weather conditions. Several of the officers who reported on extremely inclement days asked whatever happened to the old adage that a "good officer never gets cold, wet, or hungry."

**“The problem . . . was to develop a course of fire which would be practical, interesting, and yet challenging. . . .”**

The initial reactions of the men ranged from enthusiastic through apprehensive through reluctant. The reluctance was easily overcome because everyone, including top management, had to, and did, qualify, and the officers were aware of this.

The apprehension began to evaporate with explanations of the positions, dry firing, and actual firing of the course. Officers realized accuracy and speed were attainable with practice.

With very few exceptions, the outdoor firearms course was well-received. Many officers commented specifically on the usefulness of knowing why they practiced certain positions and range techniques. The explanations enabled them to see a practical application. They believed training would give them the edge they need on the street and would help equip them to react instinctively in a combat situation. They seemed to realize the training was being given for them—to save their lives.

#### The Future

These courses are a beginning in equipping our officers to handle effectively combat situations. They do not include shoot/don't shoot and use of deadly force situations. These topics are more appropriately covered in other parts of the training and will continue to be emphasized.

It is anticipated that the number of rounds available for each officer to fire will increase in the future and that the courses will be expanded to include some of the standard FBI combat courses, specifically the FBI Close Combat Course.

During the next year, we hope to incorporate firing service ammunition into the program. It is anticipated officers will fire off service rounds in their weapons and cartridge holders during training, and these will be replaced by fresh rounds furnished by the department. This will accomplish two things. First, the officer will be familiar with the differences in recoil between service and wadcutter ammunition; second, the ammunition which the officer carries will be changed at least annually.

We recognize the need for increased firearms training and the need for convincing the officers themselves that the training they receive has practical and useful application. Firearms training, in order to accomplish its purpose, should be something the officers look forward to. They must see the progress they are making and the practical applications of the training for, if not, firearms days will become just another chore that has to be done.

If these courses help to save one officer from serious injury or death, the program will have paid for itself many times over.

FBI



**END**