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A New Approach To Firearms Training: The S.M.E. Simulator

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Assume that you are patrolling in a one-man car on an arterial street in your district. It has been a quiet, uneventful evening, and none of the neighboring patrol cars have been busy either. Radio traffic has been at a minimum—just routine traffic stops and warrant requests. Suddenly, the quiet of your patrol car is interrupted by the dispatcher with a call of a robbery in progress at a convenience store in your district only a few blocks away. You acknowledge the call and head toward the store.

As you proceed, you are informed by the dispatcher that this is a "possible robbery"—a citizen is observing the situation from across the street. The suspect is described as a white male about 6 feet tall, wearing a blue coat. The citizen thinks the suspect is armed, but he is not positive.

You continue on toward the store, and as you radio your arrival, you are informed that your backup unit is only three blocks away. The door to the store opens and a man matching the suspect's description walks out, looking in each direction as he leaves. He is carrying a brown bag in one hand; the other hand is in his coat pocket. You step from your patrol car and confront the suspect.

The officer in the preceding situation has reached a critical point in this particular officer/suspect confrontation. The decisions the officer makes in the next few moments, the actions he takes or fails to take, may well affect his very survival.

One of the biggest single questions that police administrators may have is, "How does a police department adequately train an officer to react properly in a situation such as this?" Those same administrators may have been involved in similar situations themselves during their careers. If so, they are probably aware of the shortcomings of most methods of firearms training when it comes to assessing when to shoot or whether or not to shoot at all.

This is not to say that past training tactics were bad, but rather they did not go far enough in portraying a setting that actually presented an officer with a realistic situation calling for a decision on his part. In short, most firearms training modes have stressed



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proficiency and left the decisionmaking aspect of the application of deadly force to be forged by classroom theory.

Throughout its history, the Seattle Police Department has relied on a variety of methods to instruct its officers in firearms use. Given the technology and training methods known and available at any given point in time, the majority of these methods were adequate.

Nine years ago, the Seattle Police Department's firearms segment of academy instruction consisted of 5 days of range training stressing accuracy, proficiency, and firearms safety. The matter of instructing new officers on when they could use deadly force was covered primarily in classroom study of the department manual section regarding arrest and use of force. That training extended to defense of self or others and to effect the arrest or recapture of suspects in one of a number of enumerated felonies, provided that certain criteria were present.

Beyond that, training consisted of a series of "shoot/don't shoot" films which again were adequate in light of what was available, but did not actively draw the officer into any dynamic situation of deciding for himself whether or not the use of deadly force was appropriate. There was no interaction between the officer and the training he was receiving.

What we have experienced over the years then are several methods of firearms instruction which fall short of an ideal model. Combat and target ranges have taught *how* to shoot, and classroom training, films, and theory have taught *when* to shoot, but there has never been a viable mechanism by which these two very important aspects of the job could be brought together into one training function.

Although the combat ranges can never be replaced for one very important reason—an officer, in the final analysis, must possess a reasonable degree of proficiency in striking his

target—they are deficient in the same respect as are other training modes in that they lack the most important elements of a shooting situation. That element is the decisionmaking process and its direct product, stress.

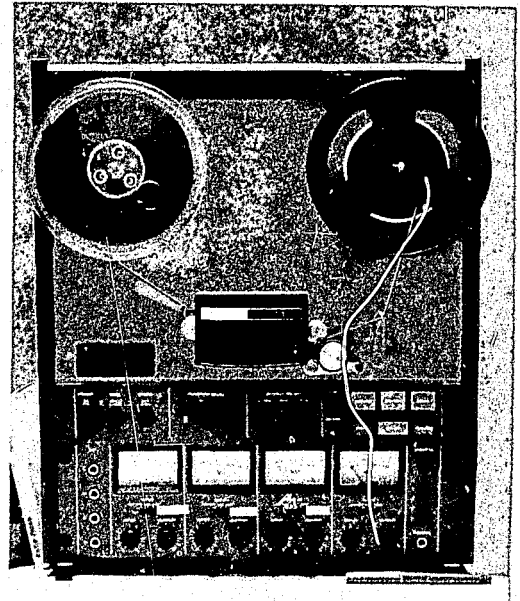
Since stress was recognized to be part of all life-threatening incidents, what was needed was a mode of training that would teach both when and how to shoot, while simultaneously introducing a degree of realism sufficient to induce stress. This could only be achieved by creating an environment similar to what an officer could expect to encounter on the street.

Several months ago Seattle's former Chief of Police, H. A. Vanden Wyer, approached a Seattle multimedia production firm with the idea of using multimedia techniques to overcome this obstacle and perhaps create a more efficient method of deadly force instruction. The reason for this was not only because of the inadequacy of past training methods, but also because the police department was, at that time, undergoing a change in shooting policies. Where the old policy was directed at defense of self or others and certain felony suspects, the new policy was somewhat more restrictive, and there were many questions about when deadly force could be used. It was hoped a new training method would resolve these questions. The result was the birth of the Synthesized Media Environment (S.M.E.) Simulator.

To research this new concept (when it was nothing more than a concept) the multimedia firm's personnel spent approximately 400 hours riding with patrol officers in Seattle in an effort to assess needs from the working officer's point of view. At the same time, research data from the University of Washington on how people receive and process information were obtained and proved to be of great value in determining how the concept would be developed into a working training mechanism. While running the risk of being accused of oversimplification, it can be said that the information a person receives ends up being transmit-



This microprocessor enables the operator of the S.M.E. simulator to control completely the settings to which an officer is exposed.



One of the components of the S.M.E. simulator.

ted to the brain as "burst information," that is, entering the brain in the form of short bursts of electrical energy. Following this premise, different media possibilities were examined and tested, and film was ruled out because of its continuous flow of presented information. It was finally decided that a complex slide presentation would be the most feasible way of presenting the desired information in a training situation, since slides could be presented as individual pieces of visual information.

Let us say, for example, that we wish to present an officer with a training situation in which he responds to a possible armed robbery, such as the one described in the beginning of this article. First, a site is selected for the development of a scenario and then the crime is acted out "on location" and photographed as it takes place with a high-speed, motor-driven 35mm camera shooting at five frames per second. The crime can be an armed robbery, a rape, a burglary, or any other potentially life-threatening situation that an officer may encounter.

The slides are then placed in order and numbered, and command staff and training personnel identify which slides appear at critical decisionmaking stages, whether the decision should be to shoot or merely issue an oral command. Realistic sound is added, complete with police sirens, dispatchers, car-to-car communications, and anything else to add the dimension of reality to the scenario and affect the stress-loading of the officer undergoing training.

The present system in use at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center in Seattle consists of three 6- by 6-foot rear projection screens for showing the scenarios, the sound system, and a microprocessor computer to control the entire operation. Although the actual "guts" of the system (its computer) are complicated, its makeup is remarkably simple. The simulator is, in effect, a large room by itself housing this apparatus.

When the officer enters the simulator he is given six blank cartridges for his service revolver and steps to a spot on the floor facing the center of the three huge screens. He is immediately surrounded by an envelope of complete darkness and silence while he stands and waits for something to happen. After a brief lapse, standing in

blackness, speakers from both sides and behind begin to bark out information and instructions, setting up the scenario and finally giving the admonition, "Remember! In the final analysis you are responsible for your own actions."

There follows another period of darkness. The officer is alone in the room and he has been primed to anticipate something. The information he received has his imagination working, and the anticipation and darkness help to simulate a stressful street encounter. Suddenly, the screen comes to life with images directly in front and to either side of the officer. Quickly an armed robbery unfolds, and the officer must react, based on information he has received.

A man comes running from the store. There is something in his hand. Is he a suspect carrying a gun or an innocent customer running from a robbery with his purchase? Whatever the case and whatever decision the officer makes, there will be no loss of life. It all takes place on a life-size screen so the officer, particularly the recruit officer, can see how quickly the nature of a call can change and he can learn to prepare himself properly and effectively for unpredictable situations.

The simulator was developed at a cost of approximately \$87,000, and the one used in Seattle is presently capable of presenting six different scenarios, each with five different variations of the same call. The training instructor operating the microprocessor has the capability of stopping the action at any time when the officer has made a decision and taken some kind of action. Further instructions can be given and the scenario continued. A command to halt can be ignored or obeyed, suspect information can change, the crime itself can change, and suspects can be armed or unarmed. Indeed, suspects can quickly become innocent bystanders. Because the operator is able to change what is presented to the officer with the push of a button, the effectiveness of the program is not diminished by repetition. If a film concept were used, it is possible that an officer could view a scenario, for example, and know that 30 seconds into the film the suspect in the blue coat will turn with a gun in his hand, because officers

ahead of him had seen it. Because the operator of the S. M. E. simulator can key any individual slide or group of slides, the officer undergoing training cannot make that assumption. One of the ideas of the program, of course, is to eliminate assumption and train officers to react based upon information they have received.

There are two basic factors which make the S. M. E. simulator such an effective training tool. One, already discussed, is the introduction of stress to add to realism. An officer who is faced with a potential shooting situation is under substantial pressure and the simulator comes very close to duplicating that condition. In such a way, the officer, by reacting to the scenarios, becomes conditioned to reacting properly, regardless of the situation.

The second important aspect of this program is its flexibility and adaptability. With the slide technique, the scenarios can be changed as it is considered necessary, adding to or deleting from what is presented on the

screen or developing entire new scenarios altogether. Also, the system is not limited to the three screens now being used in Seattle. The department has called for bids on an advanced simulator and hopes to obtain one consisting of approximately nine screens arranged in a 270° arc to virtually surround the officer with action.

The S. M. E. simulator is now used in conjunction with all other aspects of firearms instruction for Seattle police officers, including range training and departmental policy on use of force. As far as can be determined, the simulator is the only device of its kind in use in the Nation.

When the simulator's acquisition was announced, Chief Vanden Wyer said, "This gives our officers the experience before they have to go out and really do it. We can now expose an officer to realistic conditions where he will experience life-threatening situations under circumstances similar to real life without lives actually being at stake." **FBI**

Quarterly Stats Indicate Rise In Crime

Crime reported to U.S. law enforcement agencies rose 11 percent during the first quarter of 1979 when compared with the same period of 1978. When announcing the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports' statistics, former Attorney General Griffin B. Bell commented, "There have been indications in recent quarters that the level of crime was rising, and this significant upswing is very disturbing. The need for vigorous efforts at all levels of law enforcement to reduce the volume of crime—especially violent crime—is evident."

Increases were noted in both the violent and property crime categories that make up the Crime Index.

Collectively, the number of violent index crimes was up 17 percent. All offenses within that category increased: Murder rose 9 percent; forcible rape, 11 percent; robbery, 19 percent; and aggravated assault, 17 percent.

As a group, the Index's property crimes increased 11 percent in volume. Burglary was up 8 percent; larceny-theft, 11 percent; and motor vehicle theft, 15 percent.

A collection of statistics regarding arson, a newly established Index crime, has begun, but data on this offense are not yet available.

In cities with populations over 50,000, reported crime was up 11 percent. The suburban and rural areas also experienced increases, 13 and 6 percent, respectively. In cities outside metropolitan areas, the recorded rise was 12 percent.

FBI Director William H. Webster, in noting that increases appeared for all offenses in all regions of the Nation, said, "The problem is widespread and not limited to any particular area of the country." The increases were 15 percent in the Southern States, 13 percent in the Northeastern States, 8 percent in the Western States, and 6 percent in the North Central States. **FBI**

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