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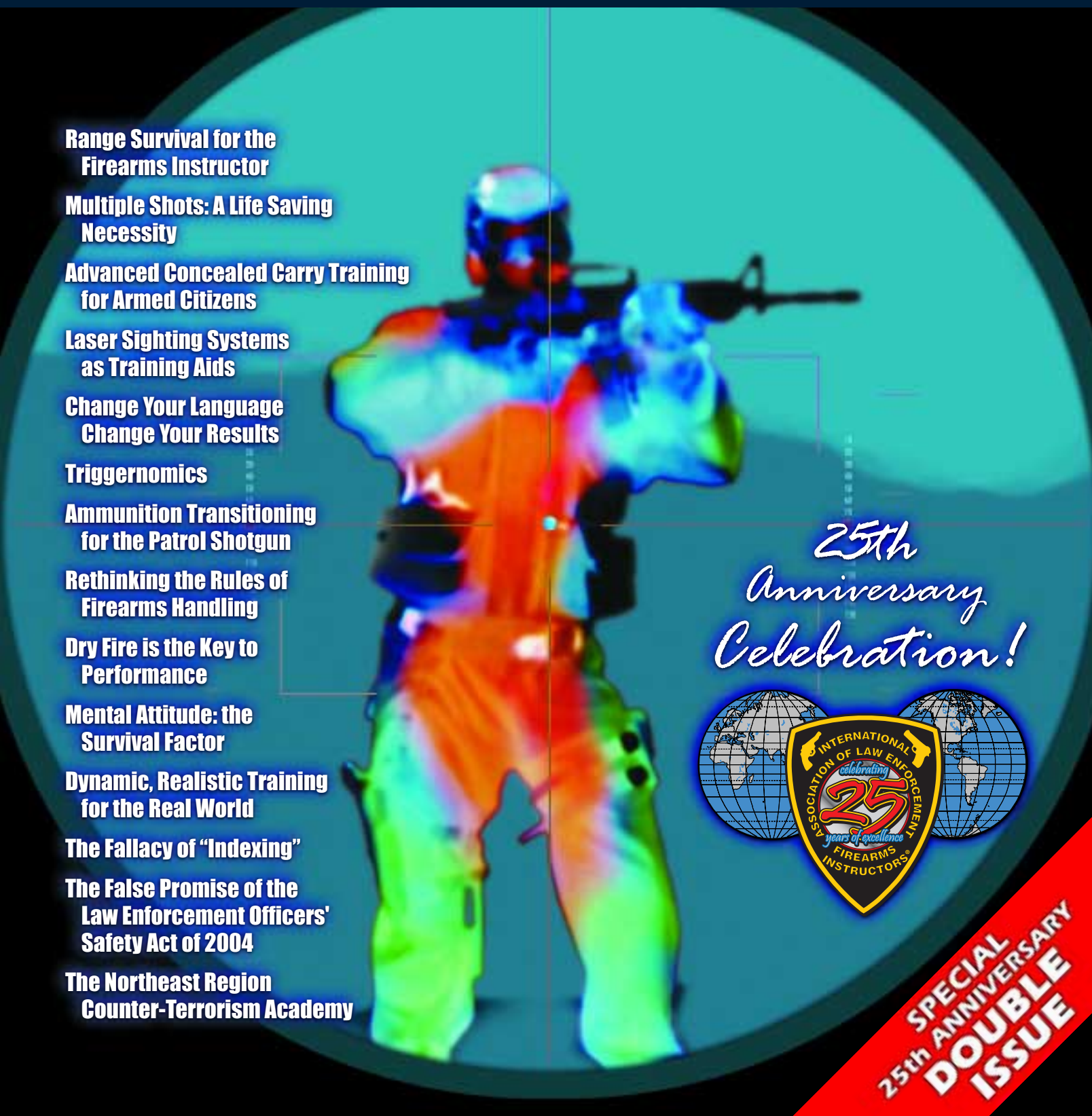

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25th Anniversary Celebration!

SPECIAL 25th ANNIVERSARY DOUBLE ISSUE

DYNAMIC, REALISTIC TRAINING for the REAL WORLD

By John T. Meyer, Jr.
TEAM ONE NETWORK

It was the great eighteenth century Russian Field Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevich Suvorov (1729-1800), who first said, "Train hard, fight easy." I'm a great believer in Suvorov's philosophy. It's the foundation of the way I train—and the way I train others to train. After all, our number-one mission as trainers is to keep the officers we train alive, and the harder you work during training, the less you'll bleed on the streets.

That's why I believe in dynamic, realistic training. I believe that training should teach students not just how to handle weapons, but how to handle situations. That's the bottom line: realistic, dynamic training gives students the tools they need in order to survive and prevail in the real world. Realistic, dynamic training forces students to think for themselves, and to push themselves further and harder than they have ever before.

...FIRING AT A PIECE OF PAPER DOESN'T DO ANYTHING TO INCREASE AN OFFICER'S CHANCES OF SURVIVAL DURING A LETHAL ENCOUNTER.

Let's take shooting skills as an example. Most police officers qualify once or twice a year. They do so by shooting on a range in daylight, at a target from a fixed position—25 yards, 15 yards, 10 yards, and seven yards.

Now let's look at the real world. In the real world, most officer-related shootings take place in low light, with both the officer and the perpetrator frantically trying to find cover and protect themselves. In most officer-related shootings, the proper use of cover and concealment is critical to officer survival. Unfortunately, concealment, low light, and shooting on the move are rarely used as a component of the qualification process.

In my mind, that's negligence, because firing at a piece of paper doesn't do anything to increase an officer's chances of survival during a lethal encounter. In my mind, qualification should always be augmented by sessions of dynamic, realistic, interactive training that requires officers to hit their targets under real-world conditions. Remember, qualification is merely a test of basic marksmanship fundamentals.

Obviously, you have to start with the basic fundamentals: draw, grip, trigger control, and sight alignment and sight picture, breathing, and follow through. These are important. You can't run before you walk, and a straightforward "building block approach" to training is important for learning the fundamentals. The four point draw, for example, is composed of... four points: 1) Grip the weapon; 2) Draw to the belt level; 3) Add the support hand; and 4) Lock out.

When those four elements have been mastered correctly, you end up with a basic draw. You then move to the second part, the draw-and-fire process and the six fundamentals of shooting: **Continued on next page**

1) Stance; 2) Grip; 3) Sight alignment; 4) Trigger control; 5) Follow-through; and 6) Scan-and-breathe.

That's all well and good. But once a student has mastered the basics you have to, as Emeril Legasse is fond of saying, kick it up another notch.

How well does that four-point draw work when the officer is sitting in a car? What about transitioning from bright daylight to a low-light situation where the officer needs a flashlight in addition to their weapon? What happens when the officer is scrambling on hands and knees in the dark and someone's shooting at them from behind a car?

Now add a little more stress: How quickly will they be able to make that four-point draw and get a round off when a bad guy with a knife is charging them from fifteen yards away?

One way to determine how an officer might respond is to get away from the range, get into the street, or the shoot house, and use Simunitions® and professional role-players. If your people haven't had the opportunity to practice the four-point draw and hone their shooting skills under real-world conditions, then they're not going to know how to react when they're under the mind-numbing stress of combat. They will hesitate—and they may not survive.

Want to prove my theory? Try this. Provide two of your officers with water guns or marking cartridge guns and proper safety equipment the next time you're down at your range. Have them shoot at targets while moving from covered position to covered position, and video them as they do the exercise.

Then put them face to face, and do the exercise again, but this time have them shoot at one another. The difference will be night and day. The whole dynamic will change. There'll be a lot more scrambling Unique shooting positions, better use of cover—and a lot less hits.

ARE WE TRAINING FIGURE SKATERS TO BE HOCKEY PLAYERS?

We have been training students to do many techniques by the numbers, or choreographing many of our training drills, scenarios or courses. This is valid, as a part of the "building block approach." As Instructors, we MUST COMPLETE the scenarios by introducing dynamic interaction.

Let me put this thought another way: We conduct our drills as if we are teaching the basics of skating to a figure skater and a hockey player.

Both figure skaters and hockey players need to learn and apply the basics of skating: Go, Stop, turn left, turn right, jump, and spin, all while staying balanced.

The Figure skater then works on detailed skills that are choreographed, such as multiple jumps and spins.

The Hockey player works on detailed skills that are also choreographed, such as puck handling and offensive and defensive plays.

But figure skaters and hockey players operate under different mind-sets. If a Figure skater makes a mistake, judges take points off their score. If they fall down, they may still get up and finish, but the chances of winning are slim.

Hockey players fall down all the time. They get body-checked against the rail. They get smacked in the face with sticks and pucks—actually have their teeth knocked out. At the end of the game they may be bloody, but they're holding the Stanley Cup over their heads. This is why we see hockey players take all kinds of abuse, but get right back into the game—the fight, if you will. That's what's known as winning mindset. All the great hockey players have it. They do what they have to do to survive. They want to WIN.

How do hockey players develop that winning mindset? The difference is this: unlike figure skaters, who fine-tune their skating skills down to a minute detail while working in a vacuum, the hockey player tests his skating skills in an environment where other players try and interrupt his ability to perform. This kind of practice is called a scrimmage.

The scrimmage is a dynamic, realistic, interactive training session that simulates a real-life game.

As trainers, most of us conduct scenarios with Simunitions® and Active Countermeasures with Redman® gear. But in point of fact, we spend most of our time choreographing drills, in a vacuum, like the figure skater.

That's why I encourage the scrimmage. Scrimmages force the players to hone their skills under real-world conditions. It's one thing to diagram a play on the blackboard. Running that play when you're looking into the eyes of a 285-pound third-round draft pick defensive man who doesn't want to get cut is something else altogether.

You can scrimmage in any number of ways. To teach tactical use of cover, for example, you can use a paintball shoot-back system. There's nothing like a round of paint splattered on the piece of cover to convince a student to use proper cover, or "slice the pie" before making entry to an area containing a possible threat.

The scrimmage also allows us as instructors to measure our students' capabilities. After each training evolution, we should always ask some hard questions. When things go well, we have to ask why they went well. Was it because the officer did good, or was it because the officer was lucky? When things don't go well, we have to ask the same questions. That way, we can learn from our mistakes. After-exercise debriefings often provide some of the most important lessons about what works and what doesn't.

The final element of "Train hard fight easy" is flexibility. You can't pre-program. The great Wayne Gretsky never pre-programmed his game plan. He seized opportunities as they occurred by assessing the situation for opportunities, and then **Meyer, continued on page 53**

Meyer, from page 22 using the skills he's honed during basic drills and scrimmages to prevail over his opponents.

Dynamic, realistic training works because it completes the training cycle. It takes students beyond the building-blocks, beyond qualification and puts them inside scenarios where they have to apply the skills they have been practicing under real-world conditions.

It is the element of dynamic interaction in training that ultimately will—and does—save lives on the street. Why? I said it in the beginning, and I'll say it again, dynamic, realistic training teaches officers how to handle more than their weapons. Dynamic, realistic training teaches them how to handle situations.

To quote Russian Field Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevich Suvorov once again, "Win with ability, not with numbers." **TFI**

About the Author

John T. Meyer, Jr. is President of Team One Network, LLC a company established to test, evaluate, train and market various manufacturers' products to the Law Enforcement community as related to officer survival. He is also the Director of Tactical Operations for Fox Valley Technical College Tactical Training Division in Appleton, WI, responsible for the development and implementation of new curriculum offering tactical training courses. John spent 15 years with Heckler & Koch, Inc., ultimately rising to the position of Vice President of Sales and International Training. John was a Lieutenant with the DOD Police, where he served as a special reaction team leader. He is Vice President of the International Association of Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors® (IALEFI®) and a member of the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers (ASLET) Firearms Committee.