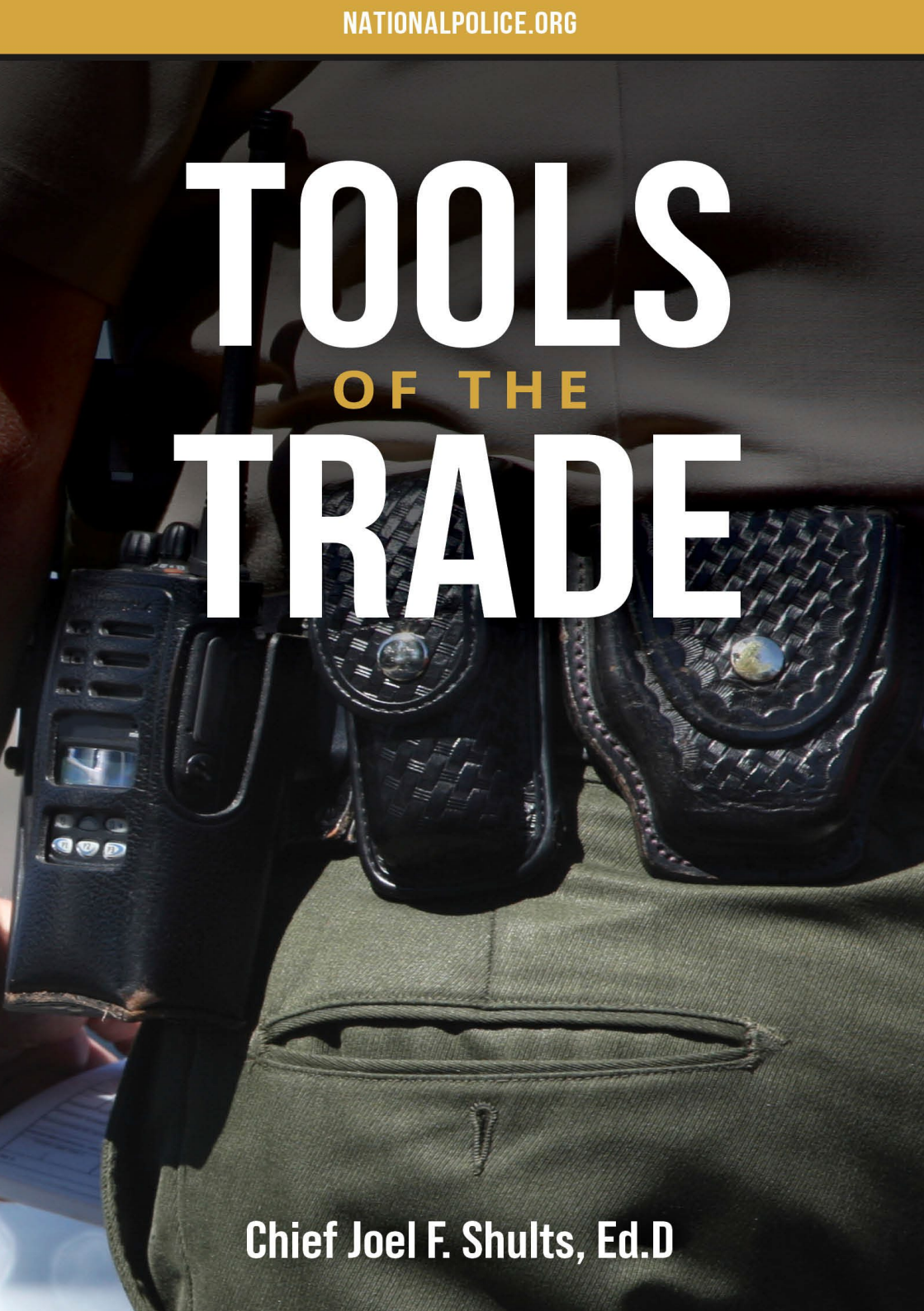


# TOOLS OF THE TRADE



Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D

The National Police Association's free Law Enforcement education series is designed for home school, classroom, or independent learning. As part of our nonprofit educational mission, it prepares you for careers in public safety. This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#)

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## Police Stations: Fortress or Visitor Friendly?

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If you're like me, you hate trying to talk through a slot or even a microphone to communicate with someone behind a sheet of glass, whether it is at a bank, a ticket booth, or in the lobby of a police station. Unfortunately, it is a fact of life that the people working behind those prison-like barriers deserve protection.

While victims and witnesses deserve to feel safe and comfortable when they come to a police station, security concerns can be intimidating. Perhaps, once inside, there are inviting spaces but barriers to attack are a necessary part of police station design.

The homey image of a precinct station housed in brick buildings with an outside globe with the word Police stamped on it is still a reality in some places. In those iconic relics, the citizen walks in to see the desk sergeant behind a massive, raised wooden desk waiting to receive your report or complaint. Perhaps the theory is that with armed officers in the area, safety is ensured. That is wishful thinking.

Brandon Stine drove his truck to the Lewistown barracks of the Pennsylvania State Police in Juniata County, started shooting at patrol cars, and shot and killed Trooper Jacques Rougeau Jr., 29, and wounded Lt. James Wagner, 45.

A woman waiting in the lobby of the Westborough, MA police department set fire to clothing in a donation box,

then fled. She was later arrested. Damage is estimated at \$250,000.00.

A man in Youngstown, OH walked into the lobby of a police station and demanded to see the Chief. When asked to leave, the man refused and attacked the desk officer and struggled for the officer's gun before being subdued.

A 50-year-old man is accused of driving his car into the Eaton, Colorado Police Department and throwing rocks through the station's windows before he was arrested after crashing his car.

In Independence Township New Jersey, a car crashed into police headquarters after leaving the scene of crashing his vehicle into a private home. He was arrested on multiple charges after blasting Guns n' Roses and pointing his fingers toward the ceiling of the station.

In Warren, Michigan a 29-year-old Warren man is receiving a mental health evaluation after entering Warren police headquarters Thursday morning carrying a large sword and allegedly making verbal threats to the front desk officer on duty.

Another police station attack occurred in Bristol, Connecticut. Suzanne Laprise drove to the police station and opened fire against bulletproof glass at the desk officer apparently hoping to be shot by police in a suicide attempt. She was subdued with a less lethal weapon with no further injury.

Benson, Arizona police arrested 47-year-old William Stephen Bagger accused of setting off a small homemade explosive outside the department, possibly as retaliation for a recent arrest.

An Oakland, CA police sergeant in the Internal Affairs division drove up to City Hall to begin his shift when a man with a pistol began shooting at the officer, who returned fire, killing the shooter.

Alarmingly, all of these attacks occurred in 2023 alone. The riots sparked by the death of George Floyd in 2020 saw attacks on police stations around the country. In Aurora, Colorado, rioters chained exits to a police station, trapping officers inside for seven hours. Later, incendiary materials were found indicating a plot to set fire to the building with the officers unable to escape. When assisting officers were removing the chains and ropes to free the trapped officers, rioters fired mortar-style fireworks and attempted to assault the escaping officers with fireworks and discharging fire extinguisher chemicals.

In Oregon, the police and adjoining buildings were boarded and fire-charred in Portland from agitators among protestors. In Minneapolis, rioters forced the abandonment of a district station that was subsequently destroyed by arson.

It would be nice to be able to saunter into the neighborhood station and chat with the friendly, gray-headed desk sergeant. But those days are gone.

## California wants to decrease officer safety by banning K9s from arrests and crowd control

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In Birmingham, Alabama, sixty years ago, Eugene Connor, known by his nickname “Bull”, was in charge of the city’s police and fire department. These were intense days throughout the south as acts of civil disobedience were being organized and carried out. Bull Connor, an avowed segregationist who closed the city’s parks rather than obey a court order to allow blacks to use them, notoriously used police dogs and fire hoses to quell any uprising.

Those snarling, snapping dogs are embedded in the imagery of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The iconic photos of Selma, Birmingham, Chicago, Watts, and other marches and riots include helmeted police officers with nightsticks in the air and tear gas rolling from the pavement. Those are images that history should not forget as a reminder of the progress we have made.

In large part due to those images policing in America drew the attention of politicians on the federal level. The 1960s were not far from the era of the Great Depression, during which time the federal government stepped in to intervene in daily life not seen since the Civil War (and the 1930s were not so far removed from the Civil War era). The role of the federal government was tested in the courts and many programs were determined to overstep the bounds of the Constitution.



In post-WW2 America, the black experience included fighting in segregated military units only to come home to find that the freedoms for which they fought, and the prosperity of a nation with newly flexed international muscle and pent-up economic energy, were out of reach. With little generational wealth and widespread government-enforced separation from whites in housing and public accommodation, the call for civil rights became a major political movement.

Even though the 14th Amendment mandated that all rights afforded under the Constitution and federal law applied to state and local governments as well, the application and enforcement of the 14th Amendment was not widely applied to matters beyond slavery until the 1960s. Until then, the 10th Amendment regarding states' rights ruled. This meant that local law enforcement was of little concern to federal courts and Congress.

As white political and economic rule was threatened by activists demanding equal treatment, disturbances percolated and erupted at a time when the Vietnam War was also being called into question. The citizenry could not consider these movements in the casual reading of newspaper reports days or weeks after major events as they had for the first 180 years of nationhood, but was confronted by them every night on the news now that 90% of Americans had a television as the focus of family life. Never before had war and riots been displayed so vividly or so frequently.

All of these images have been regurgitated by anti-police politicians in California who are attempting to

ban K9 use in arrests and crowd control. This misguided use of history is a frequent tool of those who desire the elimination of law enforcement. The civil rights era brought about the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice resulting in the seminal report *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*. The report made monumental suggestions for the reorganization of policing, reforming juvenile justice, and increasing education and training for police officers. The result was the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 which, in part, authorized massive funding for state and local policing.

The major gains in professionalism, training, education, and technology that have been achieved over the past half-century are worthy of celebration. There is no doubt that the job of perfecting our justice system is far from over. There is no doubt that equal treatment of all citizens has yet to be obtained. But if we continue to focus on the stains of history, we may be doomed to live in those failures with no hope for the future. Where police operations need improvement we must improve, but punishing today's police officers for the sins of their grandfathers is no way to build a more just society.

## Tools of the Trade

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As a walking piece of police history, I remember the days when my duty belt consisted of my Colt .38, a pair of handcuffs, some tear gas, and a baton ring. How things have changed! I also added wrestlers' knee pads for doing CPR while kneeling on broken glass, and an athletic cup for unfair street fights and more confidence when jumping fences.

My rural deputy friends look like a one-man band bristling with accessories on their tactical vest. One thing I learned about equipment is that if it is not accessible when you need it, it might as well not be there. That's why I started carrying a flashlight even during the day (after searching for a fugitive on the day shift in dark basements and sheds) and started wearing my baton all the time instead of tucked beside the seat in the patrol car. It was way too far away from the upper floor of the bar where the fight was going on to run and retrieve!

But the deputy simply has too many tools to be relegated to a belt. I admit that as my career advanced, so did my waistline and my belt space, but today's officers are ornamented like a Christmas tree. When I was a public relations officer, I often took audiences on a tour of my equipment belt. That could take much longer nowadays.

Let's take a look. On the uniform epaulet may be attached a shoulder mic for the radio, a rank insignia, a second cell phone (using a personal cell for police

business subjects it to seizure as evidence), and possibly placement of a body-worn camera. In addition to the shoulder mic, many officers have an earpiece fitted to one ear. The earpiece prevents citizens from being distracted by radio traffic, allows the officer to focus away from the noise that is often present at incident scenes, and keeps a suspect from knowing that the officer just got confirmation from dispatch that an arrest warrant exists.

Most body-worn cameras are located in the center of the chest. Some are even connected to the duty weapon holster so that they are activated automatically if the gun is drawn. Some Taser models have had built-in cameras during Taser use as well. The wiring for these devices is part of the tedious task of putting on the modern uniform layers of undergarment, ballistics vest, uniform shirt, and load-bearing vest.

For the outer vest – which may be of ballistic material (I use that term rather than bullet-proof vest because none of them really are bullet-proof) or just a vest with pockets – the deputy needs a place for their Taser or other electrical conductivity weapon (ECW), holders for multiple ammunition magazines for both handgun and patrol rifle, a trauma first aid kit for immediate attention to gunshot or other major bleeding wounds, an extra ECW cartridge or two, perhaps the radio, multiple sets of protective gloves, a second set of handcuffs as well as flexible handcuffs, collapsible baton, mini-flashlight, pepper spray, and maybe even a canteen and an energy snack.

The equipment belt is still built for utility and may hold the duty firearm and other items. The multi-pocketed pants that officers wear can hold anything from their reflective vest for accident scenes to extra radio batteries. A multi-use tool with a knife blade that includes a seat-belt cutter and window break tool, along with the Swiss Army knife-type collection of little helpers comes in handy. Many officers also carry a backup weapon somewhere on their person in case their primary weapon malfunctions or is taken from them. They also need room for additional writing instruments, a notebook, a dental mirror for checking around corners, and other items of personal preference.

Deputies and troopers may be far from assistance and drawn into rescues and pursuits that take them far from the supplies that are in their patrol vehicles. Many will look at the combat-ready police officer and assume that the tactical vest is a product of ego or paranoia, missing the reality that this well-equipped officer is ready for any emergency they are likely to face and often to face alone.

## Uniforms: Function or Theater?

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The Montgomery County, Maryland police recently announced that they are exploring a “lighter” uniform look that is less intimidating. A notable experiment in Lakewood, Colorado put their officers in sportscoats rather than the traditional uniforms. They returned to the uniforms when they discovered that the public wanted their police to look like police. Uniform controversies are not new.

Given the legacy of oppressive redcoats at the dawn of the United States, the founders wanted no part of the royal military in their new government. There was even debate about whether there should be a standing army. A few federal agencies were early in their inception including the U.S. Marshals and the Secret Service. The FBI evolved from an unarmed investigative force much later in our history. Uniforms for law enforcement were not standard or even expected.

Local law enforcement was vested in the elected sheriff, with municipal town watchmen eventually becoming formed into paid police. As seen on television westerns, the only mark of most lawmen was some kind of badge hanging from their shirt or vest. In various shapes, the badge has an ancient history of being associated with loyalty and even magical power. The oval badge is often called a shield, as a miniature representation of the ancient soldier’s shields before the days of modern ballistics, and representing the force of arms of a tribe or nation.

Uniforms became more acceptable after the Civil War where virtually every male in the country had served in one. With the increase in larger metropolitan police forces like New York City and Boston, Massachusetts, uniforms became standard as a way of identifying them in a crowd, aided by distinctive headgear. Since there was no national police force and no affiliation with the military (contrary to most countries), each agency selects its own appearance.

The value of wearing a uniform is in its utility. It serves to be a clear indicator of the wearer's identity and authority. Beyond that, an officer needs immediate access to certain equipment. They also need protection from the elements and risks of the job. From the simple shirt, pants, shiny shoes, and equipment belt has evolved more complex solutions for the officer's daily job. This is especially true for law officers working in remote areas.

Whereas the equipment on the belt was once a pair of handcuffs, a holstered sidearm, maybe a baton ring, and some ammo pouches, today's uniform must accommodate body camera equipment, a Taser, multiple rounds of ammunition, a tourniquet, expandable baton, latex glove pouch, high-intensity flashlight, and radio. Rugged boots suitable for walking around in broken glass, muddy fields, and burned-out structures often replace the spit-shiny oxfords. Add a ballistics vest and we have the officer carrying 30 pounds or more on their body just to go to work.

Adoption of modified battle dress uniform (BDU) to a civilian police design has given officers more utility with

space for equipment and ruggedness for duty. We might like the sharp military inspection ready look, but officers are often off the concrete and asphalt and into harsh environments where dressing in your Sunday best is impractical. Few citizens noticed the change from the gold-stripped polyester dress pants to the more user-friendly police BDU.

If a police officer's uniform looks "intimidating", that may be unavoidable and not necessarily undesirable. They aren't there to deliver pizza, they are present to deal with any sudden disturbance or act of violence. Recent research has shown that there are health benefits to load-bearing vests, like those worn formerly only by SWAT members. Police officers have notoriously frequent back problems from sitting against equipment pouches pressed against their lower back when seated. Allowing load-bearing vests that can not only prevent chronic injury but also allow an officer to carry more vital equipment should outweigh any public relations problems. The public, which has shown over and over that they want and appreciate quality policing, can be informed and educated about the utility and benefits of any uniform change.

No one objects to a firefighter in bunker gear, a surgeon in scrubs, or a builder with a helmet and tool belt. A police officer deserves to have a uniform that is practical and safe.



## What's All That Stuff?

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One of the things I did, to most kids' delight, when I was "Officer Friendly" visiting schools, was to give them a tour of my "batbelt". Even today, as a School Safety Officer, the question "What is all that stuff" is common.

As a walking piece of history, I can tell you that there is more to carry now than ever. When I started, I carried a revolver and ammo, a nightstick, a flashlight, some Mace, a radio, and a set of handcuffs. Those are still the essentials, but if you've noticed more cops wearing vests with more things hanging than a Christmas tree, you know there is more to carry.

Let's start with the sidearm. My revolver held six rounds. In my double ammo pouch, I had an additional dozen bullets. To reload, I had to dump the loose rounds in my hand, eject the spent shells from the cylinder of my Colt Police Positive, and load each round. Under pressure, that is not an easy task. Before transitioning to a semi-automatic over a decade later, I acquired Speed Strips™ that held the cartridges in a row, and allowed loading two at a time. Then I used the Speed Loader™, a cylinder that held all six cartridges that could be injected into the revolver cylinder, but were bulky on the belt.

Transitioning to my Glock semi-automatic sidearm, I now had 18 rounds in the magazine and carried two spares with 17 rounds each. I went from having 18 available rounds with two reloads to 52 rounds. While most gunfights are resolved with just a few rounds,

there are situations where more ammunition might be called for, especially in jurisdictions where assistance may be scarce. Therefore, many officers carry a second concealed weapon, or more than two “spare” magazines.

I replaced the old CN (Chloroacetophenone, known as tear gas) chemical spray (brand name Mace) after FBI tests confirmed the efficacy of OC spray – the OC stands for Oleoresin Capsicum. The tear gas formula relied on flakes suspended in a liquid. Sprayed near the eyes it causes irritation, blurred vision, pain, and breathing strain, hopefully disabling an attacker soon enough to keep them from doing harm. The challenge with CN is that it takes a little time to have an effect, and the flakes often contaminate the officer as well. OC’s effect is more immediate and sticks to the other person better than CN, reducing, but not eliminating cross-contamination.

My nightstick was my old Army MP wooden billy club until I started carrying the legendary PR24™ side handle baton, and then to a collapsible straight baton that was much easier to carry on my equipment belt. The PR24, in the hands of one properly trained, is a very effective tool for restraint and, when necessary, as an impact weapon. After its use in the Rodney King arrest in 1991 that was caught on video and replayed repeatedly, many agencies stopped carrying it as it was unfortunately associated with brutality.

Handcuffs haven’t changed much, but the addition of plastic zip-tie restraints allows officers to carry multiple sets of restraints tucked inside their equipment belts.

These devices have a metal strip that reinforces them more than the zip ties available at the neighborhood hardware store.

From the thick “bulletproof” vest that was kept in the trunk of the patrol car, I was supplied with the more modern, thinner, and more flexible ballistics vest that was suitable for daily wear. During the years that I was a part-time officer and a little more aware of my age and fragility, I added an athletic cup and wrestler’s knee pads to my protective gear for vaulting over fences and kneeling on pavement.

Modern officers have added tourniquets and bleeding control packs, the now ubiquitous body-worn cameras, cell phones – personal and agency, and their electronic control weapon (usually TASER™) along with other miscellaneous gear choices. The load-bearing vest, which had been used only by tactical teams, has been proven to have back health benefits in addition to their capacity for more gear. Add to that the more common use of so-called tactical pants with their many cargo pockets, and today’s officer will have almost everything they need without humping back to their patrol unit for equipment.

The extra 30-40 pounds of protective and response gear may be a literal burden to carry, but for the citizens needing assistance, they’re happy to have what they need at the moment they need it.

## Mayor Shocked that Law Enforcement Agency Had Rifles

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A subtle subset of the defund the police movement is efforts to defang the police by reducing the types of weapons available to them. During a recent decommissioning of a park police program in Chicago Heights, a suburb of Chicago, Mayor David Gonzalez shocked to find rifles in law enforcement agency's inventory. "They're meant for, I believe, military. I don't see any reason why a part time park district officer would need that type of arsenal."

First of all, Your Honor, we don't have to do much math to compare the crime rate in your suburb of Chicago to Chicago's crime rate. They are a very close match. And considering the violent crime rate, whose perpetrators don't care about city limit signs or whether their victims are in the park or on the street, you can hardly blame even a small, part-time agency for wanting the proper equipment.

Secondly, there are thousands of different communities with different needs where law enforcement is desired. The list of specialty agencies is long including school and university police, hospital police, transit police, and policing in recreation areas. While traditional municipal police may be considered "regular" cops, they don't get all the bad actors. Some of these specialty locations are uniquely attractive to criminals and pose threats to any citizen protected by any police officer regardless of their badge or uniform color.

Thirdly, access to a rifle is not an extravagance for a police officer. The unique places for basic patrol weapons, including the duty weapon, a shotgun, and a rifle, are for versatility in responding to a threat. While most officer-involved shootings, as well as most homicides, the handgun is the weapon of choice and immediate availability. Handguns are limited in at least two ways. One is their accuracy, which suffers significantly as the distance to the target increases. The other is their effective range. The popular police sidearm Glock using a 9mm cartridge has, for example, an effective range of under 60 yards. It can certainly be lethal at much longer distances, but relying on the ability to stop a deadly threat at even half that distance is tenuous.

Despite popular misconceptions, the most used rifle type is the AR-15 which is not a machine gun. It fires one bullet with each independent trigger pull.

While most officer-involved shootings happen at distances of less than 30 feet, there are deadly adversaries putting the public at risk well beyond that distance from responding officers. Offenders using rifles can easily outdistance officers with only handguns, a particular concern with active shooters where officers must move in as soon as possible to stop the threat. Suicide bombers must be dealt with from a distance. An offender using body armor can withstand typical handgun ammunition but will be much more vulnerable to a rifle round. Safely detonating a suspected explosive device may require a distant round from a rifle as well.

The needs of law enforcement are defined by the threats that they must face in order to protect the public from violent attacks. The use of rifles for patrol officers, rather than just special units like SWAT, came about as offenders began using rifles in their criminal activities. Notably, the event known as the 1997 North Hollywood shootout was a tipping point in providing rifles in addition to the shotguns long provided as an accessory in patrol cars. When 2 robbers with modified rifles and homemade body armor were caught exiting a bank robbery, they exchanged gunfire with arriving officers. Because responding officers had only their handguns and shotguns the gunfight extended for nearly a half-hour with an estimated 2,000 rounds being exchanged and a dozen officers injured. In addition to the arrival of SWAT with A-15, other officers had hastily obtained heavy rifles from a nearby sporting goods store.

Patrol rifles are now a standard issue in many police departments, carried either inside the cruiser in a secure rack or in the trunk. While visibly mounted rifles and shotguns upset some tender eyes, the accessibility to the officer and security of the weapons are the primary concern for their use. No officer should be denied a reasonable weapon where the possibility of its availability could mean life or death for themselves and the public they protect.

## Law Enforcement Needs Rescue and Response Tools – Don't Call It “Militarization”

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Soldiers wear helmets. Does that mean that police officers should not? So do carpenters and motorcycle riders. The purpose is to protect the head from injury. In case no one noticed, police officers on the front lines of this season of protest have been the target of bricks, bottles of frozen liquid, and a variety of home-made missiles. Should firefighters run bareheaded into unsafe structures to avoid looking intimidating?

Soldiers carry rifles. Does that mean that police officers should not? Before the news was full of protests, it was full of stories about mass casualty shootings at schools, workplaces, and public places. Given the relative short-range effectiveness of handguns, shouldn't the police have at least the level of weapons wielded by those who would destroy dozens of lives using rifles? Weren't there rifles seized from lawbreakers in the violent outbreaks of the last year? Very few select law enforcement units carry fully automatic weapons. What makes a rifle look scary doesn't make it a machine gun.

Soldiers ride into hostile territory protected inside armored vehicles. Does that mean that police officers should be deprived of vehicles that are able to enter into areas where active gunfire is occurring or likely to occur in order to be deployed and, more importantly, to rescue the injured? Issued a challenge to anyone who could prove that any of these civilian law enforcement vehicles was configured with an automatic weapon, there was no one able to collect on the offer. Rescue

vehicles are available for entry into high water areas as well as being a barrier for armed attacks against citizens and police officers engaged in their essential duties.

Should police officers stand between protestors and targets of violence with no shields to prevent being disabled by caustic chemicals and objects launched against them? Should they have no protection for their knees, shins, and eyes? Agencies are criticized for the aggressive look of this protective gear if things remain peaceful. They are blamed for the protests that turn violent for provoking civilians with their protective gear. And they are condemned for not standing at the steps of the Capitol wearing their protective gear to prevent the very thing that happened.

Should tear gas be banned for crowd management? Tear gas is not an offensive weapon intended to harm or punish. It is used to protect space and to redirect crowds. In a well prepared and trained crowd management operation, it is used to protect vulnerable areas without injury to lawful protestors. Its effects are temporary and preceded by warnings to those who want to be out of the area when deployed.

When professional agitators and insurgents are a known component of violent action during peaceful protests, should law enforcement be prohibited from using video surveillance of the crowds to hold the true lawbreakers accountable at the same time they are mandated to wear body cameras to hold their own behavior accountable?



No one should question the need for careful review of law enforcement's response to civil unrest. Long before the call for police reform, this has been standard practice both internally and externally. The purpose of these after-action analyses is to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the tools and tactics involved. Mere Monday morning quarterbacking to place blame and impose punishment will not do. An objective examination of every event, whether violent or entirely peaceful, can reduce errors and injury. Whether that can happen in today's superheated political environment where success is never recognized, and finding fault to lay at the feet of a particular political party or group is the goal, remains to be seen. Whether these data-informed examinations can take place before unnecessary and knee-jerk legislation is passed is unlikely. Whether there are enough people, policymakers, and leaders willing to listen to rational analysis is another unknown.

Taking useful tools from those who need them to accomplish their lawfully mandated mission can only lead to failure.

## Why Police Prefer the TASER over Stun Guns

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When the headline talks about police using a “stun gun”, you know the reporter doesn’t know much about the subject. While there are stunning devices on the market for both private and law enforcement use, the differences between a stun gun and a TASER used by law enforcement are significant.

The TASER device was patented in 1974 but didn’t become popular with law enforcement until the early 2000s. There are other manufacturers of similar products, but the TASER brand is so ubiquitous that it has practically become the generic label for all devices that use an electrical shock to control behavior. To include all makers the term electronic control weapon (ECWs) or conducted energy devices (ECDs). It is important to know that ECWs do not electrocute people, but uses voltage to cause muscles to seize up without serious after effects other than injuries that might be sustained from falling after immobilized.

TASER devices used by law enforcement do their job when the operator pulls the trigger. This activates a nitrogen cartridge that propels two barbed probes attached to wires toward the target. The barbs remain attached to the ECW and spread slightly away from one another. When contact is made with the target, a 5-second cycle of 50,000 volts locks interferes with the nervous system in such a way that locks the muscles of the body into immobility. While the target experiences pain with the shock, the pain is not the primary reason for ECW use. The main purpose is to immobilize the

person long enough to get them into restraints. The length of the wires trailing the barbed probes varies from fifteen to thirty feet. This allows the officer to maintain some distance from the target.

Stun guns typically have two probes that may or may not be sharp to add additional defensive authority since these devices must be pressed onto the target and make full contact. The voltage may or may not immobilize the target and rely mostly on the pain and psychological shock of the stun gun to cause them to retreat. Stun guns have fixed probes and unlike the law enforcement ECWs, those probes do not spread. Probe distance is essential in ECWs in order to complete the electrical circuit for the voltage to have an effect. Lacking this, the stun gun cannot reliably cause immobilization.

Stun guns must back solid and sustained contact with the target to have an effect. This can be difficult if the user is engaged in a fight with an attacker. A sharp movement by the attacker can thwart its use. Like the TASER, some stun gun devices have a laser light sight to create the sniper effect of a red dot on an adversary that may cause them to flee. Stun guns can also be triggered to create an imposing mini-lightening bolt to arc across the probes that is very intimidating.

Law enforcement ECWs can also arc, but, on most models, only if the cartridge that contains the probes are removed or already discharged. The laser light on the ECW can be used as a warning to “paint” the target and often brings compliance from the mere thought of being “tased”.

ECWs can fail if the probes do not penetrate heavy clothing, don't achieve an adequate spread, or if one of the probes fails to make contact. A highly active arrestee can prevent the probes from making their target. An officer can manually attach a new cartridge or use the exposed conductors of the ECW for a contact shock, known as a drive stun, to either complete the circuit when one probe has engaged or as a pain compliance technique accompanied by verbal commands.

Once attached, the probes can be activated for additional 5-second cycles up to department policy limits or it become obvious that the cycles are not causing compliance.

ECWs are not a substitute for deadly force. If confronted with a deadly weapon by an assailant, an officer should not rely on the ECW, but engage their firearms. If there is time and adequate backup with available deadly force, an officer may attempt to deploy an ECW knowing that if the device fails other officers can engage the armed assailant.

ECWs are very safe based on a multitude of studies. Although in custody deaths after ECW deployment have been recorded, complicating factors like drug use are the true cause. Many tests and studies have shown that there is little to no risk of the heart being stopped or harmed by ECW use. ECWs have proven to reduce death and injury to both officers and offenders compared to other restraint strategies. The ability to immobilize a person resisting arrest laying hands-on is a major factor in the safety of these devices.

The public can be assured that good training and clear policy prevents overuse or misuse of ECW technology for safer policing to officers and arrestees.

## Sunglasses and Stern Expressions

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We all know the image of the trooper peering in the driver's side window asking for license and registration. The stereotype is the officer leaning from the doorpost wearing mirrored sunglasses, no hint of joy in his heart, and a cop mustache. It may not be far from reality and there is a good reason for it. Well, maybe not the mustache, but the sunglasses and straight face.

The interaction between a nervous driver and a cautious cop is a mix of body language, microexpressions, sensory inputs, emotions, vocal tone, and expectations. It is the officer's responsibility to manage all of that to the best of their ability.

So why the stern expression? Just as words communicate, so do body movements, especially facial expressions. Humans have a set of mental templates that help them define situations so they can mold their own behavior accordingly. When a driver, as well as passengers, see an approaching officer the neurons that fire in the brain are likely to be centered on the fear response. Even after years of being the one peering into the driver's side window, I still feel that way when I get pulled over. We all associate flashing red and blue lights with some kind of emergency unless they are Christmas decorations. We see an armed government agent walking toward our car and begin calculating what is wrong. A taillight out? Do we match the description of a fleeing felon? Expired tags? Did we miss that speed limit change or stop sign? The average brain is not going to be filled with good and comforting thoughts.

If the driver then encounters a smiling, gregarious, officer with a smile on his or her face what happens to the brain processing this image that is contrary to expectations? There will be cognitive dissonance, a period of mental puzzlement when reality conflicts with expectations. This is accompanied by tension as the brain tries to sort things out. Why is the trooper grinning? Why are they happy? This feeling that something isn't right can create much more volatile emotions than just the normal fear factor. This is a good reason for an officer to have a neutral, professional approach, and ditch the good 'ol boy howdy grin.

On the officer's side, a smile creates a bit of biochemistry that is inconsistent with the necessary alertness that police officers must maintain. Even if the officer wants to tell the motorist of a low tire or no tail lights as a safety courtesy, they know that officers have been attacked and killed on even the most benign of circumstances. Escapees, felons, and drug transporters can have a flat tire or run out of gas, so even the public service of assisting a motorist can turn deadly.

Experiments show that clenching a pencil in one's teeth simulates the muscle movement of smiling. Even these forced movements create feelings of happiness. Therapeutically, smiling regardless of one's feelings at the moment has the effect of tricking the brain into feeling happier. That's great if you're having a bad day. Not so great if you are approaching someone who might possibly want to do you harm. An officer's smile can delay recognizing and responding to a threat.

Although avoiding mirrored lenses and removing sunglasses after the initial contact is best for community relations, sunglasses have tactical value. They can help by keeping a driver and passengers from seeing the officer scanning the vehicle for weapons, contraband, and signs that it may be stolen. Just as a suspect's glance at an officer's weapon is a classic sign of impending attack, an officer's attention to some incriminating evidence in the vehicle may tip off a suspect who would then be tempted to fight or flee. Better to keep them guessing. Changes in lighting can be mitigated by sunglasses. Going from daylight to the interior of a vehicle can take critical moments for the eye to adjust. Those moments can be critical in recognizing and responding to a threat. Although conventional sunglasses don't protect against a laser pointer that might be used to temporarily blind or distract an officer, it may cause a potential harmer to abandon the tactic. There are special glasses that appear to be normal sunglasses but do provide laser protection. Glasses of any kind can present some defense against a cigarette butt or a liquid tossed toward an officer's eyes.

The motorist who is tempted to think that an officer is just trying to be a cool super trooper with their sunglasses and stern face, the greater probability is that the officer is just trying to remain professional and alive. As for the mustache....



## The Patrol Officer's Office – the Police Car

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As I review law enforcement news daily I am reminded of the role of the police car in the lives of officers working the streets of America. Just as the steeds of the cavalryman of old were essential to the troopers of the day, so are the glass and metal cages surrounding our troopers today.

That advent of the police car over foot and horse patrol meant faster response times and more area covered to keep eyes on the beat. It also meant officers zipping by their public rather than sauntering along with conversations along the way. Many officers are encouraged to park their cars and walk the streets from time to time, but the problem of finding time to do that in the press of calls, reports, and investigations is often a challenge.

Cars aren't just for the purpose of getting from one place to another speedily. If that were the case then the bold markings wouldn't be necessary. The public wants to know that the police are around, and to be able to identify them. Thus, police departments spend time choosing and designing the logos to mark their cars. Some states have laws that requires that police cars be marked, because as much as we want to be able to recognized the police, we don't like the idea of them sneaking around too much, either!

From muscle cars with a police package to today's SUV and crossovers, patrol cars change with the times. The gas shortage of the 1970s made auto makers switch to

fuel efficient cars before the technology to have both power and efficiency coexist. Officers in that period went from big engines to 4 cylinder Ford Fairmonts that seemed like part of the Matchbox toy car collection compared to the Plymouth Fury of just a year or two earlier. From the LTD to the LTD II, to the Dodge Diplomat to the upside down bathtub Chevrolet of the 90s, to the ubiquitous Crown Vic, every veteran cop had their favorite ride. The Dodge Charger and Ford intercept, along with Chevy's Tahoe, dominated the last decade. Along the way, agencies needing speed enforcement vehicles opted for Mustangs or Camaros to keep pursuits winnable on the interstates.

Specialty vehicles such as pickup trucks for rural and wildlife officers, or vans for crime scene or prisoner transport are also typical fleet purchases that have advantages and disadvantages. Purchasing, equipping, and maintaining police fleets is an expensive operational cost to police agencies. Allowing fleets to age past their safe, useful life, is a short-sighted cost savings that endangers officers and the public. Smaller agencies often buy used patrol cars from larger agencies whose fleet management plan calls for rotating their rolling stock based on mileage. An agency that retires cars at between 50,000 and 100,000 miles can be a boon to smaller agencies who can squeeze a few more thousand miles from a used car with a good service record if not pushed too far.

The patrol car is a vulnerable place for police officers. While it is their office, it can also be their coffin. Few police cars have much ballistics protection. Thinner metals don't allow doors to be much protection against

bullets, and only specialized vehicles have glass that is rated for stopping projectiles. The amount of equipment and electronics does not allow for especially quick exits when under attack while offering little protection beyond the engine block.

Assailants understand the vulnerability of the police officer in their car. Doing reports behind the wheel while parked is a good way to stay visible to the public, it is also a good way to be a sitting target for an ambush. Officers have been ambushed while on car stops, while at stop signs, while arriving on the scene of a crime in progress, or on stationary observation.

Spending a shift in a patrol car increases the odds of being in an accident. The number of officers killed or suffering debilitating injury from being slammed into, swept away in floodwaters, intentionally rammed, or crashing during adverse conditions is greater than the number of officers getting shot.

A citizen approaching an officer in their police car can expect to be eyed with caution. Pulling up beside a police car should be avoided, as an alert officer will feel confined and vulnerable even by the friendliest citizen. Don't be surprised or offended if the officer wants to move to a different spot and get out of their car to visit with you. No officer wants to be trapped in their office, even if it has wheels.

## About The Author

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This series is authored by [Chief Joel F. Shults, Ed.D.](#) Joel is a retired police chief. He is an award-winning writer, college professor, trainer, and first responder chaplain.