



A Date With Destiny

Five Phases of The Active Shooter Update!



By Lt. Dan Marcou

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Once Upon a Time in America:

Picture yourself attending a lecture in an auditorium of a local College, where you are taking classes to complete your master's degree. You are an off duty police officer seated in the audience listening to a presentation on community policing by a highly esteemed professor, when suddenly a heavily armed man dressed in black bursts through the door of the auditorium and opens fire with a Remington model 870 12 gauge shotgun.

The auditorium transforms from the picture of decorum to bloody chaos immediately due to this ultimate act of terrorism. The killing is not for a country, it is not for a cause, it is not for Allah, nor even on behalf of a domestic radical group. The killing is for one thing and one thing only, "achieving a top score."

You are already on the move, before the killer has fired his first shot. The shooter is oblivious to your presence, because he has an entire auditorium full of victims that he has turned into a swirling twirling mass of confusion and he is experiencing tunnel vision. He is in the midst of his twisted ecstasy.

You are on the move, being careful to stay beyond his peripheral vision and you have thankfully chosen to be defiant. Your college has declared its campus a gun free zone and has made the carrying of a firearm to your class an act, which could lead to your expulsion even though you are a full time police officer. You have chosen to follow your department's policy and disregard the college's mandate.

You move quickly to a position of advantage and take careful aim with your off-duty Glock. You have been trained in "Responding to an Active Shooter." You have prepared by training with your off duty weapon. You do not identify yourself. You do not ask him to drop the gun. You take careful aim and fire once. Your bullet enters the suspect's left ear, expands and severs the

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brain stem, lodging against the skull on the opposite side of the entrance wound. The killer crumples instantly lifeless before he hits the floor.

There are casualties, but because you know how to save lives as well as end them, you immediately apply pressure to the wounds of the injured and direct aid calmly to your location with your cell phone. No one dies except the shooter, who has now, thanks to you, discovered whether or not there is a hell for people who shoot kill innocents. He has had his question answered. The answer is yes. He has also learned there are no virgins for the murderers of innocents, no exercise hour, no television, no conjugal visits, no cafeteria and no parole.

Obstacles

There are some truths to the fictional account you have just read. Police Officers are more prepared than ever to respond to the ever growing phenomenon of the Active Shooter. Training is available and is being attended by officers all over the country. Legislators have made it easier than ever for highly trained officers, who are on duty and off duty as well as retired to carry concealed weapons and possibly be in a position to do something in the event of an active shooter.

Colleges, which have become targets, have mandated with their own rules and regulations the disarming of those, who could and would protect them if this death and destruction were visited upon them. Some colleges all over the nation have their police and security patrolling “*unarmed.*” The college administrations write rules and regulations that if followed to the letter would disarm police officers attending classes at their facility.

Trainers are experiencing cases where college police attempt to attend active shooter classes and SWAT classes, but are blocked by deans who over-see college police and security. The college administrators feel that these classes will create an overbearing and heavy handed police force on campus. They do this in the wake of the deaths on campuses at Blacksburg, DeKalb and even the University of Montreal in Canada.

Mental health professionals are routinely failing to properly diagnose the degree of danger in many persons who are mentally ill. Many officers have stories of subjects they put mental holds on who were immediately released by mental health professionals and shortly thereafter went out and killed. The irony is in many of these cases, after the killing, when the subject is about to be tried for their crimes, the same mental health professionals, now enlightened, will diagnose the same subject as too mentally ill to stand trial.

In spite of these obstacles law enforcement continues to prepare for the active shooter. Agencies are now aware that they do not have to wait until the crying and the dying starts to intervene effectively in these cases of the active shooter. Rolling out the yellow crime scene tape is not the only option for law enforcement.

Five Phases of the Active Shooter

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A simple view of the active shooter was developed and is being trained by Lt. Dan Marcou retired from the La Crosse, Wisconsin Police Department. He developed the program while working for the La Crosse Police Department and was able to apply the philosophy with real world success. One of the successes earned Officer Bob Michalski and Lt. Marcou the Associate of SWAT Personnel Officers of the Year in 2004 for their response to an active shooter, who was killing innocents with an Uzi in a hotel in Oak Creek Wisconsin.

In the discussion of the active shooter “he” will be utilized because generally these are males, but the killing of innocents is not a male-only club any more. The five phases of the active shooter are:

The Fantasy Stage

During the fantasy stage the shooter pictures himself doing the shooting. He fantasizes about the headlines he will receive. The shooter might draw pictures of the event and make web site postings. He has been known to write stories about the shootings and turn them into schools for a grade. Often he predicts, promises and warns people about the impending event. If law enforcement is notified in advance and takes actions there is a strong possibility tragedy will be averted with **zero casualties**.

Planning Stage

In this stage the subject is deciding on the who, what, when, where and how of his joyful killing spree. He most often will put his plans down in writing. He will decide the time and location of the event and what weapons they will need to carry out the carnage. He will design his response to inflict as much death and suffering as possible. He may prepare a shopping list of items needed to carry out the plan.

The shooter will determine how to travel to the location and how to conceal his weapons. He will decide on whether to commit the crime alone, or to confide in and utilize an accomplice. The internet affords the opportunity for dangerously unstable persons to communicate.

If a police officer is notified by a family member, friend, teacher, school liaison or anyone else who discovers the plans, then the officer will have an opportunity to intervene before the event - with once again **zero casualties**.

Preparation Stage

During this stage the suspect will buy, beg, borrow and steal items that he needs for the event. He might buy guns and ammo. He might purchase materials for explosives, which when observed separately look innocuous, but when combined is deadly. He often steals what he cannot buy, often stealing from family members.

He will assemble his improvised explosive devices and train with his weapons. He may detonate some explosives to insure that they will work.

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The active shooter will visit the sites he will attack and do drawings and schematics of the areas. He will conduct reconnaissance as if he is preparing for a military operation.

The potential shooter might be arrested by police after they receive a call from a friend, family member, or suspicious citizen. The potential shooter might be apprehended by an alert officer, after a traffic stop or during an in-progress theft or burglary. If done with caution and alertness the suspect can be taken into custody with **zero casualties**.

Approach Stage

The closer to the event, the more dangerous it will be, when officers take action. When the subject is approaching the target he will be very dangerous, because he has his eyes on the prize. He has made his plans, armed himself and he has made his decision to kill. He may be walking, riding, or driving to the target carrying his implements of death.

Officers might be prompted to contact the subject because of the sheer alertness of an officer or as a result of a traffic stop by an officer practicing interdiction. A citizen might make a call of a suspicious person.

The officer or officers making contact, during the approach stage are in danger, but as long as the officer(s) keep an open mind on every stop they can be kept safe by their superior tactics, skills, and will to survive. There is a fine line between an officer having his/her name etched into an award or his/her name etched into a wall. This contact, handled in a tactically sound manner can save many lives, prevent carnage, and end with **zero casualties**.

Implementation Stage

When the active shooter opens fire immediate action needs to be taken. The ingredient that ties all of these incidents together is the active shooter will continue to shoot until he runs out of victims or ammunition, or he is stopped by his own hand or an effective and efficient act of courage.

The quicker the actions of an honorable gunfighter in the guise of an on-duty officer, off-duty officer, armed retired officer, or armed security guard the fewer funerals there will be. People ask, "How many gunfighters should you have before you advance?" The answer to this question could be answered by potential victims who are about to succumb to the mad man's desire to achieve "Top score." The potential victims would say, "six is better than five, five is better than four, four is better than three, three is better than two, two is better than one and one honorable gunfighter is better than none."

There is an old cavalry adage that goes, "when the battle begins and you do not know what to do, Ride to the sound of the guns."

Police officers have the following advantage:

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- They are highly trained, honorable gun fighters.
- The active shooter will be focused on his dastardly deed.
- The active shooter will be creating a scene that will be loud and chaotic -- the perfect diversion.
- The initial responder(s) can use the chaos to identify the location of the shooter.
- The initial responder(s) can use the chaos to move quietly to a position of advantage.
- Terrified victims will be able to direct officers to the location of the shooter.
- If the shooter is located in the act of shooting, officers do not have to verbalize they can take the shot and make the shot.
- If the shooter is contained by the actions of the officers in a non-violent pose, officers may initiate a classic SWAT response.

On Duty Tactics

Officers responding to a call of an active shooter must realize they have been thrust into a position that calls for decisive action and what they decide to do can save lives and minimize casualties.

Training can help prepare the first responding officers for the moment they arrive at the scene of such an incident. This is a dire situation and that may result in casualties. A key decision has to be made instantaneously on whether to contain and await other units or move to contact, because defenseless citizens that officers are sworn to protect are dying with each shot.

When the first responding officers arrive they should remember to use long guns for long halls. Officers should choose to put superior fire power into their hands. Breathe and try to control the heart rate on the approach as you use your radio on the move, directing additional units en route and notifying others of the actions that are being taken.

Do not throw lives away, breathe, think, advance, using the chaos as a diversion. Officers may have to pass wounded, conduct quick interviews on the move and encourage direct fleeing individuals to continue their flight, while advancing on the shooter.

Gather as much information as possible and then attempt to move to a position of advantage that affords a field of vision, clear shot and cover if at all possible. Attempt to do this without alerting the suspect.

Quickly assess the actions of the suspect and if he is in the act of shooting, and endangering innocents of death and or great bodily harm, need not advise warn or request. Take and make the shot. The officer should then break up his/her tunnel vision and look for additional shooters. The officer should communicate his/her location and actions and reload in the lull. This should be done while covering the downed suspect. Secure the suspect and assess his condition.

Off Duty Tactics

As you read this you either carry off duty or you do not. If you carry off duty ask yourself these questions:

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- Do I carry a weapon and holster I have trained with?
- Do I have a way to identify myself as a police officer?
- Do I have a way to secure a suspect I have arrested off duty?
- Do I have a way to communicate off duty?
- Do I have reload capability?
- Have I participated in hands on “Active Shooter Response” training?
- Have I read and digested my agency’s off duty policy and deadly force policy?

If you answered no to any of these questions you need to take some kind of action to answer yes.
If you do not carry off-duty, take the time to ask the following:

- Should I carry off duty in a post 9-11, post Columbine world?
- If someone was shooting in my child’s school would I take action armed or not?
- Do I possess empty hand deadly force options for the worst case scenario?
- If I were about to be shot by an active shooter, would I refuse to go quietly into the night?

The Law

Due to changes in the federal law it is much easier for officers to carry concealed weapons off duty. Retired officers can also carry off duty, when they have received proper training and carry identification with departmental authorization. Officers should check their local policies and procedures, before arming themselves. Many agencies do not allow officers, who are retired to carry concealed weapons out of concerns for liability. Administrators should ask themselves if this is prudent in today’s world.

Conclusion

Clearly this nation has not seen the last mindless homicidal act. It is a very real possibility that any police officer, on duty or off, regardless of their department size, rank, shift, or assignment might be faced with a suspect laying down a withering fire at innocent men women and children. These heartless killers might be a threat to you, your family, or the people you are sworn to protect.

The location of your date with destiny might be a mall, a church, a court room, a school, a hotel, or even a police station. **Prepare!**

About Author: Lt. Dan Marcou arrested his last felon in November 2006 after 33 years in Law Enforcement. He now is an extremely active police trainer. He is author of the highly acclaimed police novel, “The Calling. The Making of a Veteran Cop,” which is available now through Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble on-line. To contact “Lt. Dan” to arrange for training or to purchase an autographed copy of his book, he can be reached at marcoudj@charter.net.

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