

# THE SNUBBY REVOLVER

The ECQ, Backup, and Concealed Carry Standard

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Ed Lovette

Paladin Press • Boulder, Colorado

*People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.*

—George Orwell

To all of those rough men from the military, police, and intelligence services—of both my own and other countries—with whom I had the honor and privilege of serving, this book is respectfully dedicated.

*When you go home  
Tell them of us and say  
For your tomorrow  
We gave our today.*

—From the British military memorial  
Kohima, Burma

*The Snubby Revolver:  
The ECQ, Backup, and Concealed Carry Standard*  
by Ed Lovette

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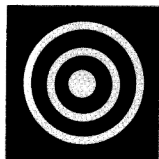
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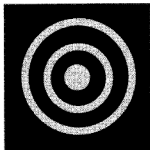
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## Foreword

**THE SUBJECT OF THE** short-barreled, or snubby, revolver is unwisely overlooked by many people who are otherwise well prepared to deal with criminal attacks. The self-loading pistol, even with all of its advantages (particularly in the more recent compact models), still cannot match the ratio of power to size and weight the snubby offers.

Particularly when unusual concealment requirements exist, the snub-nose revolver will often be the best armament available. With its rounded lines, the small revolver just doesn't show through a concealing garment or pocket as severely as a pistol does. As pistols are scaled down to approach the snubby's level of compactness, the grip surface area of the weapon is often severely compromised. In order for a pistol to be more concealable than the five-shot snubby, it must be chambered for a cartridge proven to come up short in terms of effectiveness. In short, for very

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discreet carry or for use as a second to a larger belt gun, the snubby is the standard of comparison, and for good reason: it is very difficult to beat in those applications. I predict that, in this form, the revolver will continue to be used by professionals in the field for the foreseeable future.

For those of you who are instructors, recognizing this is critical. If your student is most likely going to be using a snubby, then revolver technique should be taught with that type of weapon. At least three of the fundamental skills of shooting are affected by switching to a small revolver from a larger handgun. Loading techniques, in particular, should be chosen to maximize the effectiveness of the short extractor rod that accompanies the short barrel. In addition, sight radius is shorter with the snubby than with other handguns, making proper instruction in that area more critical. (Sight movement appears to be extreme due to the short sight radius, which increases the temptation to jerk the trigger as the front sight crosses the target.) The gripping technique must also be adjusted on the smaller guns, particularly for students with large hands.

Using the snub-nose revolver to its full potential is a challenge, but one that is well worth mastering. Ed's book will give you a head start down that path.

—Bert DuVernay  
Director, Smith & Wesson Academy  
Springfield, Massachusetts



## Acknowledgments and Disclaimers

**I WOULD LIKE TO THANK** Harry Kane, editor of *Combat Handguns*, for permission to use material in this book that was previously printed in my "Last Shots" column.

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In accordance with the policy of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which requires its employees, past and present, to submit specific types of written material to it prior to publication, a copy of the manuscript for this book was sent to the agency's Publication Review Board. It asked that I include the following disclaimer:

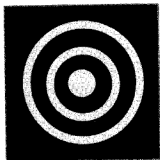
The CIA's Publications Review Board has reviewed the manuscript for this book to assist the author in eliminating classified information, and poses no security objection to

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its publication. This review, however, should not be construed as an official release of information, confirmation of its accuracy, or endorsement of the author's views.

### WARNING

Firearms are potentially dangerous and must be handled responsibly by trainees and experienced shooters alike. The technical information presented here on firearms handling, training, and shooting inevitably reflects the author's beliefs and experience with particular firearms and training techniques under specific circumstances that the reader cannot duplicate exactly. Therefore, the information in this book is presented *for academic study only* and should be approached with great caution. This book is not intended to serve as a replacement for professional instruction under a qualified instructor. It is the reader's responsibility to research and comply with all local, state, and federal laws pertaining to concealed firearms carry and the legal use of a firearm in self-defense.



# Introduction

**WHY IN THE WORLD** would anyone in his right mind choose to write a book today on the snubby revolver? Good question. If we can just skip over the right mind part for now (the jury's still out on that one!), I have to say that I wrote it because it seems to me we're slowly losing all that good revolver "how-to" we learned the hard way over a good many years, often at great risk, sometimes paying the ultimate price. I am concerned that the requisite revolver skills are not being passed on to those who need them. When was the last time you saw an advertisement for a "revolver only" course? Where do you go today to learn about the care and feeding of your pet revolver? This is in spite of the fact that the short-barreled wheel gun is very popular with the legally armed citizen and remains a favored backup gun for police. (For now, this probably applies mostly to those officers who transitioned from

revolver to pistol. As their numbers dwindle, I suspect, so will police interest in the revolver for any purpose. (Just the other day I had a police instructor tell me he used to talk with his students about a gunfight he'd been in armed with an S&W Model 60. He said he got so many questions asking what kind of gun it was that he stopped telling the story.) Since the 4-inch revolver has been replaced by the pistol in police and military service, and since the big magnum revolvers are mostly used by hunters, it is possible that the mainstay revolver—the one most purchased, most carried, and most used—will become the snubby.

Consider this my effort, then, to ensure that the revolver, specifically the snub-nosed revolver, gets full credit for long, faithful, and continuing service (Part I: The Gun). With a little luck, it might also inspire some of those old-time revolver hands with considerably more knowledge than I have to share their experience and expertise. Consider also that this text will serve to highlight the tactical strengths that the little gun brings to those all-too-common personal-protection situations that blow up right in your face (Part II: The Tactics).

From 1975 until 1982, I was a police firearms and tactics instructor at the New Mexico Law Enforcement Academy. It was my job to teach police recruits in our basic classes and veteran officers in our advanced classes how to use lethal force to appropriately and effectively—how to survive the before, during, and after of an armed confrontation. The primary police-duty sidearm during this time was the double-action revolver. The S&W Model 19 4-inch backed up by the Model 36 Chiefs Special 2-inch was the most popular combination with the officers I trained. An NRA poll during those years showed that something like 97 percent of the police agencies in America issued the revolver.

As part of my duties, I was able to develop a program that allowed me to interview those police officers in our state who were involved in a shooting. Interestingly, not

once during my conversations with more than 75 officers did anyone suggest that he or she would have been better served with a pistol. In fact, we had only one instance in which an officer had to reload. We had another incident in which the officer needed to reload but chose to run back to the patrol car and continue the affray with a double-barreled 20-gauge shotgun. All of the federal agencies carried revolvers and appeared to feel appropriately armed. During this time I was also privileged to be selected by the NRA's Police Instructor Program as an adjunct instructor. This experience allowed me to meet with officers from all across the United States and learn from them. Several of these officers belonged to agencies that had switched from the revolver to the pistol and back to the revolver.

The biggest problem we all shared was the ineffective terminal performance of the common duty rounds, the lead roundnose .38 Special and the semi-wadcutter lead .357 Magnum round. The FBI-designed 158-grain +P lead hollowpoint (LHP) solved the problem in both 4-inch and 2-inch .38 Special revolvers. By the time this round had gained national acceptance I had contacts within the firearms training units of most of the big city agencies that had adopted the LHP. Their reports were always the same: "Given good shot placement on the part of the officer, the LHP is a very reliable duty load in both our 2-inch and 4-inch service revolvers. One or two shots to the upper torso generally stops the actions of the bad guy."

So by the time I left the academy in 1982, we had a wide selection of revolvers from which to choose, an effective .38 Special load for the most popular police handgun, and the 125-grain jacketed hollowpoint in .357 Magnum, which promised to take care of the performance problems in that then-popular caliber as well. At this point I could say with considerable authority that with average shooting skill, sound tactics, and the survival mind-set, if the officer (armed with a revolver) did his part, he was likely to come through an armed encounter just fine. I had also learned

that the little five-shot Chiefs Special was a sound concept as a bottom-line life insurance gun, especially in its role of backup. When you desperately needed "five for sure," this tough little revolver wouldn't let you down.

I left the academy to join CIA as what was then known as a paramilitary operations (PM) officer. To my great delight, I soon learned that one of the functions of a PM officer was to conduct firearms training for agency personnel. When I joined, agency-issue handguns were the Browning High Power (BHP) and the Smith & Wesson revolver in a variety of "K" and "J" frames. My firearms education continued.

Part of this education was the opportunity to pursue my avid interest in all things related to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). I read everything I could get my hands on pertaining to OSS in the agency's extensive library. I had the opportunity to meet and talk with OSS vets. The confidence these men had in training that was about 40 years distant was incredible. As they talked, their hands still traced deadly patterns of long-ago-learned open-hand, knife, and handgun skills. They all remembered their chief instructor, William E. Fairbairn (as the Shanghai Buster), and my impression was that, among his many skills, he may have been the foremost combatives instructor of our time. He knew what to teach, how to teach it, and how to ensure that his students retained their skills and could produce them on demand in a tight situation. I also learned that the most frequently used skill among OSS operatives was the unarmed combat techniques they had been taught, with the handgun being a distant second. The firearm, usually the little Colt .32 ACP, was primarily used to prevent capture or facilitate an escape subsequent to being captured but before being incarcerated. Unfortunately, I was to learn that this is still a valid reason for an intelligence officer to be armed in a high-threat operational environment. This knowledge, coupled with my New Mexico experience, was to have a significant influence on the handguns I chose to carry when I had the option.



In early 1983 I spent several months in Beirut, Lebanon. While we were there my teammates and I were asked to provide firearms instruction for most of the agency officers in Beirut. During our stay we got to know them pretty well. Hence, the range training had a festive quality, and we wrapped it up with a superb Lebanese meal at a restaurant near the range. Several days later we flew back to headquarters (HQ). On 18 April, about 10 days after I had left Beirut, I stepped into an elevator at HQ and found myself sharing it with one of our secretaries. I knew by looking at her that something was very wrong. She had lost all of her color and appeared to be in shock. In a voice barely above a whisper she asked, "Have you heard? The Beirut Embassy has been bombed. They don't think any of our people survived."

William F. (Bill) Buckley, a senior paramilitary officer and one of my bosses at the agency's Counterterrorist Group, volunteered to go to Beirut as the new Chief of Station. Bill was frequently called back to HQ during this assignment, and on one such visit I bumped into him in the hallway and we talked shop for a few minutes. During the conversation, I noted that his hair had almost overnight gone gray. (NOTE: This year I had the opportunity to talk with Lieutenant Commander Mike Walsh, author of the book *SEAL!* Mike had served with Bill during Vietnam and was also in Beirut during this time. He made the same observation. Buckley was under enormous pressure.) On 16 March 1984, while watching CNN as I went through my morning exercise routine, I heard the announcer say that William F. Buckley, a Department of the Army civilian assigned to the Beirut Embassy, had been kidnapped. Buckley was tortured to death in captivity. One particularly haunting memory of this episode that remains with me is that of seeing Buckley's name still carried on the station's personnel roster as "COS-Missing" during subsequent trips to Beirut. His name was not removed from the roster until his body was returned to the United States in 1991. By all accounts, he was not armed when the kidnap-

pers grabbed him as he walked from his apartment to his car to drive to work. To this day, I go over the events of Buckley's kidnapping in my mind, and I can't help but wonder how history would have been written had he been armed with a Chiefs Special stoked with LHPs.

Later, when I was an instructor at "the Farm" (the agency's training facility), I used Bill Buckley's story as one of about 25 case studies to remind our personnel of the realities of working overseas as an intelligence officer. At that time, all of our operations officers going to high-threat posts were trained in the use of the Browning High Power and the S&W Model 640. On their end-of-course critiques, they were likely to say that the BHP was a great gun, but they could see little use for the 640. "Hard to shoot" and "not enough bullets" were the most common complaints. Usually, we would travel twice a year to various stations to check on the training and to see if it was meeting the needs of the officers in the field. During these visits we would find nearly everyone had opted for the 640 when a gun was needed because it was easier to carry and conceal than the Browning was.

But I suppose the seed for this book was planted in the early 1990s during a visit to Quantico to discuss training issues with the DEA firearms staff. I had recently completed an overseas assignment that had required me to work closely with DEA agents responsible for conducting Operation Snowcap. I came away from the assignment with a much greater understanding of and appreciation for DEA's overseas counternarcotics enforcement efforts. Typically, once they found that I was being assigned to the agency's training facility, they offered me the full cooperation of their staff at Quantico.

It so happened that a Basic Agent class was in progress, and the instructors invited me to watch a raid exercise being conducted at their training "town." The students were a bright, fit mix of young men and women. (Actually, young is an understatement. They all looked to be about

15. But about then I'd noticed that everybody was starting to look younger than I did.) The "raid" took place with great enthusiasm, ending up in a major Simunitions shootout. Needless to say, the students had not done anything right, and the instructors pointed out their errors in excruciating detail. One of the major issues arose over an overlooked or ignored Model 65 S&W revolver that was lying on the floor beside some "dope." The instructors advised the students never to leave a firearm found during a raid unattended. The students were then ordered to set up outside the residence and told they would keep doing this until they got it right. This time they corrected all of the mistakes from their previous effort, and one young man policed up the revolver. Of course, there still ensued another substantial exchange of "FX" rounds as the raid team swept through the back rooms of the residence.

The instructors pretty much led the students to believe they would have to train for another year or two to get it right. Undaunted, the young student with the Model 65 proudly held it up and exclaimed, "Well, at least we didn't leave this lying around!" To which one of the instructors responded, "Good job. Now make it safe." Basic Agent Trainee Whoever looked at the revolver pretty much like a mule looks at a wristwatch. A small voice said, "Sir, I don't know how to get it open." Some guys tell me they know their age is starting to show the first time a young girl addresses them as "Sir." I gotta tell you, for me it was a young federal agent-in-training who didn't know how to open the cylinder on a handgun that had been the sidearm of choice for America's police only a decade earlier. Which, of course, was the point of the training. One of the instructors then gave an impromptu class on the revolver—much the same, I reminded myself, as we had conducted a similar class during the dark ages, only using a semiauto pistol.

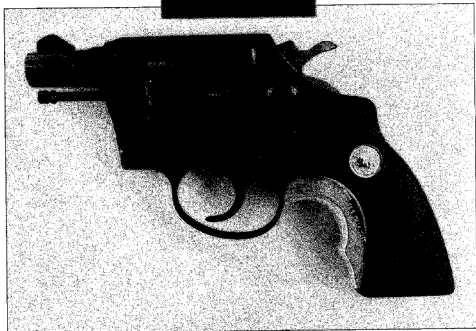
This book assumes you have already determined whether the little revolver does or doesn't fit into your personal protection plan. (My one and only sales pitch will be

to hope that you have also read *Defensive Living* (Loose Leaf Law, 2000). Dave Spaulding and I wrote that book, like this one, primarily for the private citizen. *The Snubby Revolver* is intended to complement *Defensive Living*.) You have my solemn oath that I will not try to sell you a snub-nosed revolver. (Actually, they're doing just fine without any help from me.) I also promise not to bore you with any sort of comparative debate over revolvers, pistols, ammo, and such. My only goal is that, after having read the following, you will be better equipped to maximize the tactical strengths of your snubby revolver, if that is your weapon of choice. I am going to pay particular attention to what I believe we now call extreme close quarters (ECQ), or from six feet (the reactionary gap) to contact, since this is prime street crime territory. It is also prime snubby territory.

You will also have a fuller appreciation of what others have done with the little gun, which has written, and continues to write, a rich history all its own. I am guided in my preparation of this book by some mighty good advice given to me years ago by an agent of the FBI: "Police don't need to be issued better weapons. They need to learn to better use what they are already issued." Certainly words to live by, and not just for police.

**PART**

**1**



**THE GUN**



## Why the Snubby?

**BY WAY OF GETTING STARTED** with this subject, let's take a little stroll down memory lane. We'll begin in 1930 with a book entitled *Shooting*, by J. Henry Fitzgerald, an employee of Colt for many years, and the designer of the "Fitz Special," a customized short-barreled Colt .45 New Service revolver:

Some of the advantages of the 2-inch barrel are: in a scuffle the barrel is so short that the man holding the revolver has far more leverage than the man who is trying to take it away from him. As an arm to carry in an automobile the barrel is so short that the revolver may be swung either right or left across the steering wheel without striking it. . . . Sometimes even with new ammunition a defective shell is encountered and then

the two-inch barrel will help. I have never had a bullet stop in a 2-inch-barrel revolver. It is an undisputed fact that the short barrel is faster on the draw than the long barrel.

Next we have Fairbairn's classic *Shooting to Live*, published in 1942. He thought quite highly of the Fitz Special:

Let us consider first the case of the detective or plain-clothes man. Here the weapon must be carried concealed and the wearer must be prepared for the quickest of quick draws and an instantaneous first shot, most probably at very close quarters. For that purpose, our own choice would be a cut-down revolver of heavy caliber [which he goes on to describe and credit Fitzgerald with].

Following World War II, one of the best books available on the snubby was *The Handgunner's Guide, Including the Art of Quick Draw and Combat Shooting* by Chic Gaylord, the famous holster maker:

Handguns for concealment can be divided into two categories, the "carry gun" used by off-duty police officers, detectives and plain-clothes men; and the "hideout" used by undercover men or, as a secondary emergency weapon, by police officers desiring the insurance of a second gun. No carry gun should be of less than .38 caliber. A .38 Special is even more desirable. . . . One of the most effective carry guns that I have ever seen is the Webley & Scott .455 caliber Irish Constabulary model. This British handgun is not much larger than a Colt's Detective Special, yet it packs a wallop like Ingo Johansson's.



Early snubby examples: The Colt Agent and the S&W Model 12.  
Both of these are easy-to-carry air-weight revolvers.



In Col. Rex Applegate's classic *Kill or Get Killed*, he applauds the introduction of the S&W Chiefs Special and the Centennial. It wasn't until a good many years later that we were to learn of his role in the development of the Centennial, based on an incident he was involved in using the .38 S&W cartridge in an S&W Safety Hammerless, the forerunner of the Centennial. As I understand it, Applegate was working in Mexico following World War II. He and a companion were attacked by a *campesino* wielding a machete. Allegedly, Applegate fired all five rounds of .38 S&W into their attacker with no effect. His companion terminated the incident with his .45 Colt 1911. Applegate talked S&W into bringing out the Centennial chambered for the .38 Special. His thinking was clearly guided by how he saw the small revolver:

Any revolver so small that it can be covered by an ordinary man's hand, weighing 21 ounces or less and shooting the .38 Special cartridge, can hardly be considered as the ideal target weapon. Even though creditable scores can be achieved by using their fixed iron sights against conventional targets, such guns are designed, manufactured and intended for use against targets *that can shoot back*.

Bill Jordan, the famed Border Patrol officer, is considered by many as the dean of American combat revolver shooters. His law enforcement experience, combined with his U.S. Marine Corps wartime service, gave him a depth and breadth of gunfighting knowledge that few of us can ever hope to match. In addition to having Olympic-class hand-to-eye coordination, by all accounts, Jordan was also warmly regarded as a true Southern gentleman. His book, *No Second Place Winner*, is a treasure trove of useful information that may be beyond the skill level of most of us mere mortals. In it, he tells us what he sees as the role of the snubby:

These small, light guns (the airweight S&W Chief Special and the Colt Agent) have a definite value in plainclothes work. . . . When I am on duty and wearing a coat, I prefer to carry my regular service .357 Magnum. Off duty, or when the weather is hot, there is great temptation to conclude that there won't be any trouble anyway and go unarmed rather than either wear a coat or look conspicuous wearing a big gun without the coat to conceal it. That's the time when the little airweight model, slipped into a trouser pocket, is worth its weight in gold. And for such use, the smallest and lightest gun available, provided it has reasonable power, is best.

Some things endure because they do what they do better than anything that can be designed to replace them. And so it is with the short-barreled revolver. This little gun is so imminently suited to do what it does that its function has often doubled as its name, as in pocket pistol, hideout, backup, off-duty. These names also describe the tactical niche that this type of revolver fills. Today, at a time when the semiauto pistol has become the issue handgun for our police and military and the handgun of choice for a lot of our citizens, the snubby holds its own. It is available in a wider range of calibers, weights, and finishes than at any time in its history. It continues to serve as a dependable backup weapon for the police officer, and it is a highly popular choice with the legally armed private citizen.

Nowadays, the most popular snubby is probably the five-shot version, so I will pay a little extra attention to it throughout the book. But to be fair, by definition we will include in this category any five- or six-shot double-action revolver of caliber .38 Special or greater, with a barrel no longer than 2 1/2 inches and weighing 30 ounces or less. This allows us to include S&W's Model 19 2 1/2-inch .357 in the snubby category, as was the case in some of the old

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Practical Pistol Course (PPC) matches. With its adjustable sights, this has to be considered a real Cadillac snubby. But more to the point of this book, we should not quickly forget that for a good many years this revolver was the standard-issue sidearm of the U.S. Secret Service. This was the gun that protected the president.



## The Gunfight and the Snubby

**FIREARMS TRAINING PHILOSOPHY** {courtesy  
of California Highway Patrol Officer Lou Chiodo}:

The purpose of firearms training is to prepare an officer to use firearms in a fight against an adversary in what usually begins as a spontaneous attack initiated by the suspect. Our firearms program is not about shooting. It is about fighting. When the concept of fighting is taken out of firearms training, we have forgotten the purpose of our training.

I can clearly remember the first time I ever held a handgun that had been used *in extremis*. I was about 14, and we were visiting some friends. My dad and our host, both career Marines, were discussing their Korean War experiences, something my Dad never did with me. A mule team couldn't have pried me off the couch. Somehow the con-

versation turned to handguns, and in short order a Chiefs Special was produced. I now know it had to have been one of the early production models, complete with the diamond-style checkering, flat thumb piece, and all. According to my dad's friend, his unit was responsible for deactivating booby traps left behind in villages the Marines entered. A rifle got in the way due to the nature of the work, so everyone in the unit carried a handgun, most often the issue Colt .45 ACP 1911. However, getting the old warhorse into action with the flap holster and cold hands was a problem, which the Chiefs Special resolved. As I remember the story, upon entering a factory building of some type to check for booby traps one day, our host surprised one of the saboteurs in the act, and the little .38 Special rose to the task quite nicely.

It is interesting to note that while gunfighting equipment and training have evolved considerably over the years, the gunfight that is resolved by a handgun today looks no different than its historical predecessors. In its most common form, you will face a single assailant, and you will be alone as well. Your assailant will probably be armed with a handgun but may possibly be armed with a knife or blunt instrument. The distances will usually be less than 10 feet. It will be over very quickly. Reloading is rarely an issue. The confrontation may resemble nothing you have ever done in training.

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The uniformed patrol officer, one of the department's few females, observed suspicious activity in the parking lot of a fast food restaurant. She parked the cruiser, got out, and approached two male subjects. A fight ensued, and the officer found herself down on all fours with one of the subjects straddling her back as he attempted to choke her to death with her nightstick. She drew her service revolver, a Model 15 .38 Special, brought it up in a motion similar to saluting, and thrust it back over her right shoulder. The gun was

now upside down, and the muzzle was pressed against her assailant. She pulled the trigger twice, killing him.

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If your gun doesn't work or stops working, you may not have time to correct the problem.

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Two plainclothes officers attempting to arrest a subject ended up fighting with the individual and were forced to shoot him. One officer was armed with a Browning High Power, which failed to fire. The second officer was carrying a two-inch Colt Lawman .357 Magnum. Fortunately, his gun worked just fine. Subsequent investigation revealed that during the struggle the BHP magazine popped out just far enough to activate the magazine safety. The culprit turned out to be poor holster design. A Tap-Rack-Bang would have gotten the BHP into action, but time had run out. The second officer saved the day.

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All of which brings us to the three rules of gunfighting.

- 1) *Always have a gun.* The snubby is reliable, small, light, and powerful enough to ensure that we have no excuses for ever violating rule number one.

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A community relations officer, he was one of the most popular officers in the department and well known throughout the city. He had just completed a crime prevention seminar at a civic group luncheon. He walked out of the building and into the armed robbery of a shoe store. The bad guy ran out of the store and jumped into a waiting car. The officer pursued the suspect and managed to get him to pull over. He approached the car and was gunned down.

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Subsequent investigation revealed that the officer was not armed. (I wonder how this would have ended if he'd had a Colt Agent stuffed with LHPs ?)

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2) *Always gain and maintain the tactical advantage (cheat).*

• • •

A detective who had just parked his car was locking the door when he was confronted by an armed robber who asked him to hand over his wallet. The robber was standing to the left rear of the officer, who was carrying a Chiefs Special in a shoulder holster. The officer cleared the handgun from the holster and fired through the back of his suit coat, killing the robber.

• • •

3) *Never give up.*

• • •

He was an aggressive state trooper with his department's record for number of stops and number of citations. On this particular day he had stopped three cars at once. As he sat in the patrol car writing the tickets, one of the drivers walked back to him armed with a handgun. He ordered the officer to remove his duty sidearm from the holster and to dump the ammo on the floor of the car. He then ordered the trooper out of the car and made him undress. In an inside pocket of his jacket the officer had a Chiefs Special loaded with the new Remington 95-grain JHP. As he dropped his coat to the ground, he drew the little gun and fired, killing his assailant.

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In the next chapter we'll take a look at the requirements for the gun to be used in extremely close quarters, and you'll see why the snubby is a natural.



## Requirements for the ECQ Handgun

**BEFORE I DISCUSS** the requirements for a handgun to be used in extremely close quarters, or why I chose the snubby, further explanation is in order. Specifically, during my agency service, unlike the police officer, I had the options of confrontation avoidance and strategic withdrawal (running away) available to me. Mainly this was because, contrary to the image of the international secret agent as depicted by Hollywood, the intelligence officer is often unarmed. For a variety of reasons, he may not have a handgun available to him. (If you think going into an "iffy" situation when armed makes you nervous, try it without being able to take comfort in the fact that at least you have a fighting chance!) So for those times when I was approved to carry a sidearm, I stuck with revolver simplicity over the Browning. Unlike the police officer, who becomes familiar with his sidearm through constantly carrying it and using



it in high-stress situations, the intelligence officer is seldom able to "bond" with a handgun. (I know, I know, but bad puns are a habit I picked up from Charlie Phillips.)

Another tool I relied upon heavily was tradecraft, or the ability to conduct an intelligence operation or operational act without being detected. My whole lifestyle was low profile. My work required me to be constantly aware of what was going on around me. As one of my Special Air Service (SAS) friends likes to say, "We had to be invisible, not invincible." This is an especially important distinction to make because, in theory, if you practice good tradecraft as well as good personal security, you should be able to avoid any unpleasantness. Hence (according to the standard doctrine), a handgun is unnecessary. And in practice the concept actually works quite well. Most of the time. Unfortunately, nothing is Murphy-proof. You can do everything by the book and still get jammed up.

• • •

There was yet another crisis brewing, and Washington was screaming for more information. All leads, however small, were being followed up. This set of circumstances found a CIA operations officer and two military debriefers sitting in a hotel room waiting for an individual who claimed to have information on a terrorist attack that was about to take place. When it became obvious to them that the caller was a "no-show," they left the room. The two debriefers walked out of the room first, followed by the agency officer. As the case officer was pulling the door to the room closed, the trio came under fire from two men at a distance of about eight feet. The agency officer shoved the debriefers ahead of him as they ran away from the gunmen and toward the door to the hotel stairs. By the time they reached the stairs, the agency officer had been wounded. Their attackers, following closely behind the trio, tossed a hand grenade down at them as they raced down the steps. The only good news in the deal

was that the grenade was of inferior quality, and no one was injured when it exploded. In the ensuing confusion, both parties got away. (Yep, you guessed it—I wonder what the outcome would have been if he'd had a Centennial stoked with LHPs stashed in a coat pocket).

• • •

- 1) *So my first requirement for the ECQ handgun is that it must be reliable.* We're talking reliable not only in terms of function but also in terms of reducing the chance for operator error, in terms of reducing the number of things that can go wrong. In a word, simplicity. In a word, operator-proof.

• • •

The undercover narcotics officer sat across the table from the subject of a "buy-bust" operation. As the situation began to fall apart, the officer drew his handgun, a stock 1911 .45 ACP. He pointed the pistol at the bad guy, who was now standing up firing, but the officer's pistol failed to fire and he was slain. According to witnesses, the top of the slide struck the edge of the table as the officer was drawing the pistol. Whether this caused the officer to inadvertently push the safety back on or whether it caused his thumb to miss the safety completely could not be determined.

• • •

- 2) *Since a holster may not be available or desirable, the handgun must be reliable if stored in nonholsters such as pockets, purses, and so forth.* (I've known police officers, acting as backup for another officer, to hide a snubby in a popcorn box, paper bag, lunch bucket, and such, when they needed to blend but be able to respond quickly.) Safeties don't change position, magazines

don't fall out, pocket lint doesn't gum up the works, and so on.

- 3) *The handgun must be reliable when fired from unusual positions, through coat pockets, and the like.*
- 4) *The handgun must be reliable if the muzzle is jammed against your assailant.*
- 5) *The handgun must be reliable if you can't get the proper grip or lock your firing wrist.* This is a concern if you are forced to draw and fire while seated in a vehicle or during a struggle with your assailant.

I know of three cases in which officers were forced to shoot someone who had grabbed them from behind. (One of those incidents is described in an earlier chapter.) In two cases, the officers with revolvers (one used a 4-inch S&W, and the other had a Colt Detective Special) solved the problem. In the third instance, the officer was using a Colt 1911 and his hand position kept forcing his grip open to the point where he could not depress the grip safety and fire the gun. He finally solved his problem too, but it took some doing.

• • •

A number of years ago, the New York City Police Department (NYPD) did a study of a 10-year period during which officers of the department were involved in 6,000 armed confrontations. They could not document a single instance in which an officer's revolver failed to fire during one of these confrontations. Given the endless variety of things that can go wrong in a gunfight, I take great comfort in such information.

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He was an officer in the U.S. military, assigned as an advisor to the host government's military. The country in which he was stationed was combating a highly aggressive terrorist group that had killed 12 American servicemen in the last 18 months. Unbeknownst to him, he was next on their list. Two men followed him home on the day of the hit and rode up in the elevator with him. At the door to his apartment, they made their move. He sensed or heard them and turned. As he did so the shot intended for the back of his head struck him in the side of the face. He instantly attacked the two would-be assassins with the only weapon he had . . . his briefcase. They fled. (I wonder how this story would have ended had he been armed with a Ruger SP 101 stuffed with 110-grain SJHP .357 rounds.)

• • •

6) *If you are forced to grapple with your assailant, the weapon must have strong retention capabilities and still be able to fire.* To me this is the toughest gun fighting test—"kicking and gouging in the mud and the blood and the beer," but able to come up shooting.

• • •

. . . He began shooting at me, hitting me once in the back, the gas pumps a few times, and then me one last time in the chest as I turned to shoot him. However, my Beretta would not fire; the struggle had deactivated the trigger by releasing the magazine.

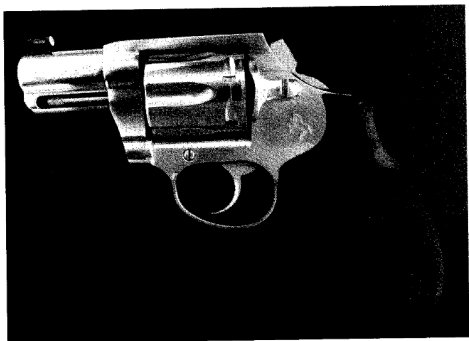
(From the February 1994 issue of *Combat Handguns* describing a shooting at a filling station.)

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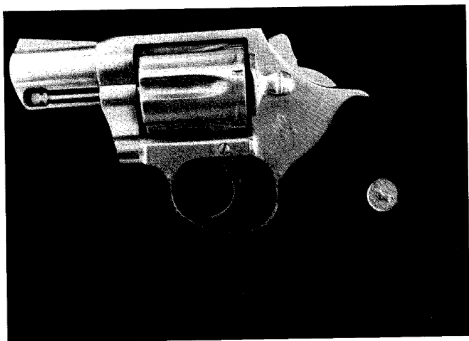
7) *After-market grips, especially rubber ones, should not stick to clothing or otherwise interfere with concealment.*

- 8) *The gun should have no sharp edges that could get caught in clothing.*
- 9) *If your choice is a revolver, the grips should not interfere with speedloaders.*
- 10) *The handgun should have a rust-resistant finish.*
- 11) *Elmer Keith's idea of the perfect carry handgun was the largest caliber you could shoot well. I would add that it should also be of a size, weight, and concealability that will encourage you to always have it with you, on your person.*
- 12) *The ECQ handgun should be capable of firing a bullet that has a documented gunfighting history of performance that meets or exceeds that of .45 ACP hardball.*
- 13) *Unless there are considerations that force you to choose otherwise, stick with the all-steel versions. The all-steel five-shot revolvers, such as the J frame Chiefs Special, weigh about 20 ounces. With practice, you can learn to control +P .38 Special ammo in these little guns. Below this weight level, recoil becomes unpleasant and makes practice a grim event. Suggestion: give serious consideration to the six-shot snubby, especially if you are only going to carry one gun. The D frame Colt Detective Special weighs about the same as the Chief, while giving you a little more gun to hang onto, hence enhanced recoil control. The extra shot is a bonus!*

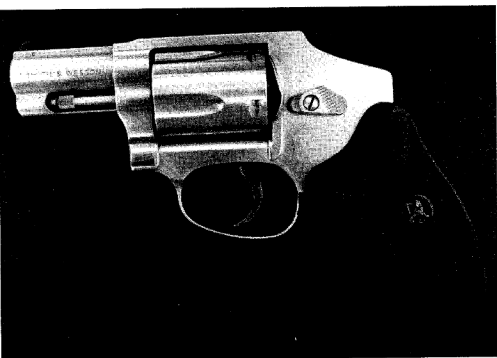
These requirements apply equally to the handgun you choose as a backup to your primary sidearm if you carry two guns. As the name implies, a backup gun becomes the cavalry if your primary sidearm is taken away, out of action, empty, or inaccessible. I have a photo of a revolver that took a direct hit in the front of the cylinder during a



Colt .357 Magnum Carry with an Ashley Big Dot front sight.



Colt Detective Special with factory night sight.



S&W 640 in .357 Magnum.



This officer's revolver was taken out of action by an assailant's bullet, which struck the front of the cylinder and lodged in the charge hole. A good reason to carry two handguns.

traffic stop that erupted into a gunfight. The bullet went straight into one of the charge holes, effectively locking the cylinder. The officer, standing at the driver's window when his gun was hit, was not carrying a second weapon. He was saved by his partner. It is generally agreed that if you need a handgun, you tend to need it in a hurry. So, by extension, when you need a backup, chances are you need it in a real big hurry. Or you may have to arm another officer, or a friend, or a family member. The simplicity of the revolver really proves its worth here. Why complicate your life if you don't have to?

• • •

The off-duty officer was en route to the garage to have his take-home vehicle serviced. His shift lieutenant called for assistance on the radio. The officer met him and learned that he needed backup to handle an armed robbery in progress. When the officer informed the lieutenant that he was unarmed, the lieutenant handed him a five-shot Charter Arms .38 Special. The officer was about to get into a gunfight with a handgun he'd never fired before. As luck would have it, he was able to apprehend one of the subjects after a short foot pursuit. He put the person on the ground and then realized he had no handcuffs. As he knelt beside his prisoner, he heard footsteps. Before he could turn around, he heard the sound of a handgun being cocked. He spun quickly and fired at his assailant from a distance of about two feet, killing him. This one made the TV show *Top Cops* as the Danny Hawkes story. I was pretty happy with the outcome as well, since Danny had been one of my students at the academy.

• • •



# 4

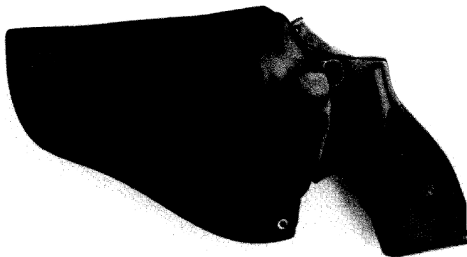
## Holsters

**BECAUSE OF ITS SIZE,** the snubby conceals well in some holsters but is very tough to hide in others, especially when worn on the belt. And because holster preference is a personal issue, you're simply going to have to experiment. Every holster choice we are discussing here is a compromise of retention, concealment, speed, and comfort. The following, then, should not be taken as solutions to your requirements as much as they are to mine. The best I can hope for is to maybe save you a little money.

An absolute requirement for me is to be able to put my hand on the gun I'm wearing under a coat, with seatbelt, and so on, while seated. I'm also averse to leaving a handgun in my car, so I don't rely on a separate handgun as a "car gun," nor do I rely on "car holsters." Everything must be on my person, close at hand, and when I leave it comes with me. The following three holster styles let me access



Clockwise from upper right: Mika pocket holster, Alessi Talon (Inside-the-waistband) new style, Uncle Mike's pocket holster, Bell Charter Oak IWB holster, Alessi Talon (old style).



Close-up of Bell Charter Oak IWB holster.

the snubby with either hand, while seated, in close quarters, even on the john:

*Inside-the-waistband crossdraw:* This is my favorite carry method. I prefer the Alessi Talon, closely followed by the same model produced by Bell Charter Oak. This is worn under a loose-fitting garment, shirttail out. The popular Latin *guayaberras*, tee shirts, pullover sweaters, and the like all work well. The gun doesn't "print" when you reach or bend, a problem you experience with the hip holster.

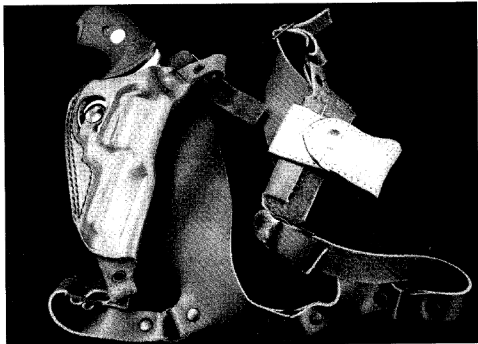
*Horizontal draw shoulder holster:* Also by Alessi, for those coat-and-tie days because the crossdraw is hard for me to conceal under a jacket.

*Ankle:* This is my preferred carry option for a backup revolver. For me, the Renegade is the most comfortable of the breed. This allows me to keep two guns close at hand while seated.

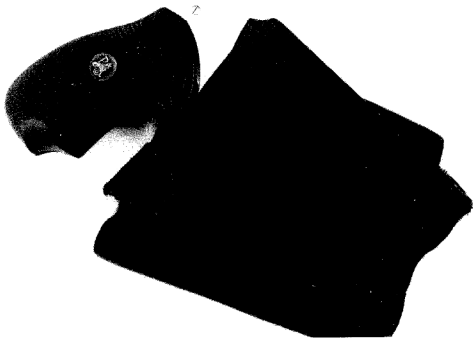
While these three holsters meet the majority of my requirements, once in a while I need some alternatives. As I picked these alternatives over time, I tried to keep everything on the same side of my body and as close as possible to the same place as the above, while not giving up my seated requirement. As you will see, I wasn't always successful. Such is life.

*Belly band:* For a higher level of concealment and a corresponding tradeoff in quick access, I have frequently relied on an old Bianchi belly band (no longer available). Later versions that work well are offered by Uncle Mike's and Gun Video.

*Pocket:* Although it doesn't meet my seated requirement, it is certainly otherwise very handy for the lightweight backup revolver. I like the Uncle Mike's version best, followed by the Mika.



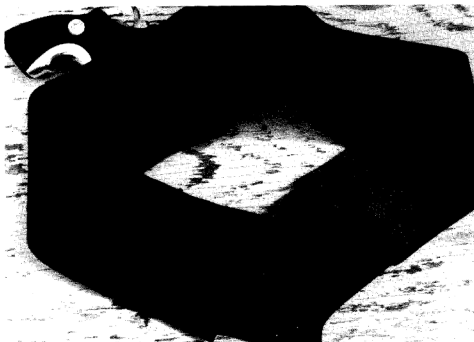
Early Alessi horizontal shoulder holster to which I added a speedloader pouch.



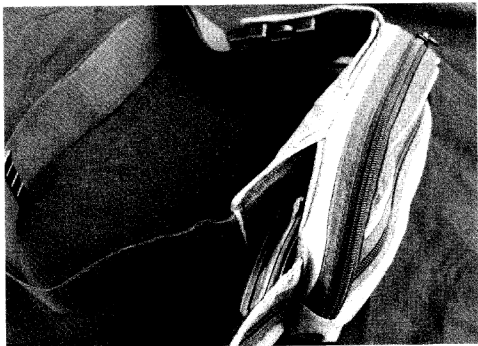
Renegade ankle holster.



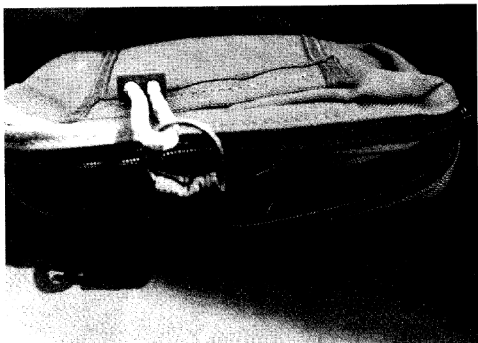
Early Bianchi belly band.



Gun Video belly band.



Bianchi fanny pack.



Uncle Mike's belt pack.

*The Confidant:* The holster in the tee shirt. Well-known holster designer Greg Kramer markets this nifty idea. It is especially useful for the traveler who wants to loss-proof his passport, traveler's checks, and such.

*Barami Hip Grip:* A handy option when you can't wear a holster and works very well in the car.

*Belt pack:* I've used the Gun Pak by Uncle Mike's and much prefer it to any of the fanny-pack concealable-carry methods. The fanny pack can be cut off of you and gone before you know it. We never lost a gun, but several cameras and wallets made somebody's day. The Gun Pak lets you carry your spare ammo easily and gives you an excuse to reach for your gun during a situation, as in, "Hand over your wallet !" OK, fine . . .

For the ladies . . . in my humble experience, the male who can tell the female of the species what type of holster to wear does not exist. It is definitely a female thing. For example, my favorite holster is the IWB crossdraw. I thought this might have possibilities for our female officers. When I asked them to try it out, to a woman, guess where they positioned it? Over their appendix. They could get away with it in some clothing styles, but it didn't give them much versatility. Next we tried the purse, which makes me especially nervous. They just seem to be trouble magnets. In my police days we had an officer lose her gun from her purse, in a vehicle during a prisoner transport. And, oh yeah—a shot was fired but no one got hit. In another instance, a narcotics officer ran out of ammo in a gunfight and his nearest reload was in his shoulder bag in the car. The shoulder strap is easily cut, the . . . well, you get the picture. As it turned out, my fears were groundless. The ladies didn't like them either. Not for any tactical reasons, mind you, but because they didn't go with their outfits! The closest we ever came to sort of a grudging acceptance

were the Alessi horizontal shoulder holster and the Galco thigh holster.

Alessi Holsters, Inc.  
2465 Niagara Falls Blvd.  
Amherst, NY 14228-3527

Barami Corporation  
6689 Orchard Lake Road #148  
West Bloomfield, MI 48322

Bell Charter Oak Company  
P.O. Box 198  
Gilbertsville, NY 13776

Galco International, Ltd.  
2019 W. Quail Ave.  
Phoenix, AZ 85027

Gun Video  
4585 Murphy Canyon Road  
San Diego, CA 92123

Kramer Handgun Leather  
P.O. Box 112154  
Tacoma, WA 98411

Mika's Pocket Holsters  
Rt. 1, Box 1234  
Readstown, WI 54652

Renegade Holster and Leather Company  
P.O. Box 31546  
Phoenix, AZ 85046

Uncle Mike's  
P.O. Box 13010  
Portland, OR 97213





## Grip, Front Sight, Trigger

**THE GRIP, FRONT SIGHT, AND TRIGGER** are three of the four most common complaints about the snubby (the fourth being ammo capacity—see Chapter 6). In this chapter we'll take a look at what we can do to remedy these issues.

### GRIPS

One big advantage of the revolver is that you can change the grips on the handgun to better suit your hand. The grip can be made bigger or smaller, longer or shorter, skinnier or fatter, harder or softer. The real importance of this is that you will always do your very best work with a gun that fits your hand. A good fit helps the gun point better and allows you to control recoil better, which means you can shoot faster. These factors become especially critical if you are forced to shoot with only one hand.

Almost all of today's snubbies come standard with some sort of synthetic grip. That's the good news. In addition to helping dampen recoil, they keep the gun from twisting in your hand. This aids in rapid-fire control of the weapon as well as handgun retention. For all the above reasons, if I have wooden stocks on a revolver, I prefer them checkered, not smooth. They are a little tougher on your hand during a range session, but that's a small price to pay.

The single biggest complaint I have against most grips available today is that many of them still interfere with the smooth operation of the speedloader. (The mastery of the speedloader is a critical skill for the revolver shooter. I'll go into more detail on this in the next chapter.) It is usually not possible to check this out until you bring the gun home. Be prepared to replace the grips if you can't experiment on someone else's gun before you buy.

Another thing to consider in grip fit is how much concealment you really need. Many of the grips designed to help you conceal the small revolver do not leave any room for your little finger. In my case, other than for ankle carry, I have found that proper holster selection will allow me to conceal the extra grip length required to give my pinky finger purchase. Being able to use your whole hand to grab and grip the snubby will be a big aid in your ability to shoot it quickly and accurately.

How do you know if you have a grip that fits your hand? Try the following:

- The simplest test is to determine whether your grip allows you to control the double-action trigger. So, with an empty gun in hand, assume a proper firing grip. You should then be able to wrap your trigger finger around the trigger easily, almost up to the first joint (in my case), without having to adjust your grip on the revolver. This grip must allow your finger to pull the trigger easily while keeping the gun on target.

- Now try dry-firing the gun. If you are at home, remember—no distractions, empty handgun, **EMPTY handgun, EMPTY HANDGUN!!!** Come to the ready position, pick the target you want to hit, close your eyes and quickly bring the gun up to the target, open your eyes and check the front sight. Is it on target, up, down, left, etc.? Once this starts to feel right, do the same thing but pull the trigger twice before opening your eyes.
- Now start with the weapon holstered. Pick the target you want to hit. Draw the weapon, closing your eyes when your hand wraps around the grip. Open your eyes and check your front sight. Draw as quickly as you can. Try one hand first, then two hands. Every time you open your eyes you should see your front sight on the spot you picked to hit.
- On the range, from the ready and from the holster, shooting at an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of typing paper as quickly as you are able, you should be able to keep all of your shots on the paper out to 21 feet. If you have to readjust your grip after drawing the weapon, you may need to change the grip. (Before changing anything, have someone who knows what to look for watch your drawing procedure. You need to be able to obtain the correct firing grip from the holster. Once your hand grips the revolver and withdraws it from the holster, nothing should move or change position.) If you have to readjust your grip after firing the revolver, you may need to change the grip. Shoot using one hand and then both hands. If you shoot using both hands exclusively, you may mask the problem. These simple tests will quickly reveal grip defects.

## **FRONT SIGHT**

The front sights on the short-barreled revolver have traditionally been hard to acquire in a hurry. Such is not the case

with today's little revolvers. Most have a decent front sight. Some even have a black front sight on a stainless gun, which takes care of the problem of trying to find "stainless on stainless." For me, this has all become academic. Just before I switched to bifocals, most front sights disappeared on me.

We are now much smarter on how the eyes function under stress, which helps us to understand how generations of gunfight survivors failed to see and use their front sights during confrontations. Fortunately, today we also have solutions to the front sight problem, one from the gunfight survivors (point shooting), and another from the African professional hunter (the Ashley Big Dot tritium front sight). The point shooting definition that follows is the one Lou Chiodo and I use for our presentation on the subject, which we have been privileged to give at the training conferences held by the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers (ASLET) and the International Association of Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors (IALEFI): "Point shooting is a technique designed to allow the user to respond quickly and with combat accuracy when confronted with a spontaneous unanticipated attack by an assailant within 30 feet, and possibly in poor lighting." This is another essential skill for the snubby user. It takes care of those situations in which you can't or don't use your front sight. And the Ashley Big Dot is guaranteed to give you a super-quick "flash" sight picture in good or poor lighting when you are able to use your front sight. (NOTE: For those of you interested in point shooting, I highly recommend that you read *Bullseyes Don't Shoot Back*, by the late Col. Rex Applegate and Michael D. Janich. It is available from Paladin Press at [www.paladin-press.com](http://www.paladin-press.com). Please note the emphasis on bringing the gun to eye level.) The Ashley Big Dot is available from Ashley Sights, 2401 Ludelle, Ft. Worth, TX 76105.

## TRIGGER

While the snubby can be purchased with both double-

and single-action capability, I prefer the double-action-only version. The ability to cock the revolver and fire it single-action is an option that some favor in case they have to make a precision shot with the snubby. My concern stems from the problems arising from our training in the days when we used to teach both methods of firing the revolver. Invariably, during a critical incident, when the adrenaline was flowing and the fine motor skills were gone or going, an officer would cock the revolver and then cause it to fire when he didn't mean to. Or he would forget—again under stress—to decock the revolver and would put it back in the holster, still cocked. Once in a while he would discover, much to his dismay, that certain holster configurations or misplaced fingers would snag the trigger, now requiring about three pounds of pressure to fire, and . . . I know one highway patrolman who discharged his revolver in this fashion. He was involved in a felony stop and cocked his revolver in the process. The bad guys gave up without a fight, and the officer covered the two felons while his partner handcuffed them. The officer then reholstered his weapon to help his partner put the prisoners in the patrol car. As he inserted the revolver into his holster, still cocked, it discharged. The round traveled down the stripe on his uniform trousers before burying itself in the ground next to his ankle. (Which brings up the subject of decocking the revolver. Please see the photos on pp. 44–45, which illustrate the proper decocking sequence when the revolver is cocked and you decide not to fire.)

The double-action-only trigger does not make the gun safe. Even when many of the major departments issued double-action-only revolvers, there were still negligent discharges. The double-action trigger does provide the user with a little greater margin for error. I recall several cases in which officers told me they were able to stop the double-action firing stroke before firing the handgun when a suspect dropped the gun or knife or their partner stumbled into them. In other situations they were able to block the trig-



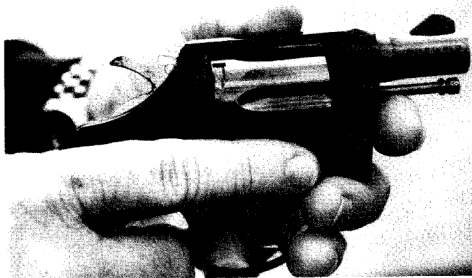
Cocked revolver.



Place your weak-hand thumb between the hammer and the frame.



Pull the trigger, take your finger off the trigger, place strong-hand thumb on hammer spur, remove weak-hand thumb from under hammer.

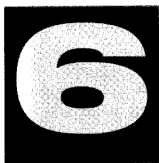


Hammer is now returned to double-action mode.

ger during a struggle for the weapon by inserting a finger into the trigger guard behind the trigger. The double-action-only trigger system has become popular today with the pistols carried by many police agencies because it is more stress-proof than a single-action trigger. This is an especially important feature in a handgun that will frequently be pointed at people in high-stress situations.

The mastery of the double-action trigger requires the shooter to pull the trigger straight to the rear smoothly without stopping. Yanking the trigger and pulling or pushing it to one side or the other (instead of straight to the rear) can cause a miss even at close range. Good trigger control depends on the proper grip and fit.





## **Snubby Loads and Loading**

### **DEFENSE LOADS FOR THE 2-INCH BARREL**

During the time I was an instructor at the academy we made several trips to Chihuahua, Mexico, to train the police there as part of the "sister state" agreement. Each U.S. border state had a Mexican sister state, and there were a number of different exchange programs. These trips were very educational for me, and the Mexican hospitality was absolutely first rate. In fact, on one trip they even invited my family down. My wife and daughters still talk about probably the closest thing to a vacation we enjoyed when the girls were little.

During one of these visits, I had just completed a class and we were getting ready to take a lunch break when one of the students walked up and handed me a Colt .45 1911

with very ornate silver grips. I thought he wanted me to look at his weapon, but it turned out he just wanted me to hold it for him as he unbuttoned his shirt and then pulled it up. Through the translator I learned that this officer had been in a number of confrontations. He pointed to one scar and said, ".38 Special [lead round nose], no problem." He pointed to a second scar and said the same thing. He pointed to a knife scar and said, "Knife, small problem." Then he showed me two scars on his right forearm that matched a corresponding scar on his abdomen. The translator said that the officer had been hit in the arm by a .45 slug, which had gone through his arm and into his stomach. The officer then pressed his arm to his stomach to show me the path of the bullet and said, ".45, big problem."

This was a defining moment for me. As a serious student of terminal wound ballistics, I had spent years studying charts and tables of muzzle velocities and foot-pounds of energy, ballistic gel photos, and so forth (most of which I didn't understand, truth be told). Yet here everything I really needed to know on the subject was summed up by a tough Mexican street cop with the scars to prove it. Assuming the shooter does his part and delivers the round(s) to the appropriate area on his assailant, is the bullet in question highly likely, likely, or highly unlikely to cause the recipient "big problems?"

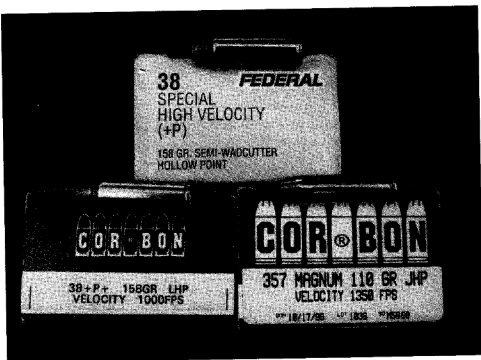
While 230 grains of full-jacketed .45 ACP hardball may not be a death ray ("They don't always fall to hardball"), it certainly has a proven track record in a lot of close-quarter confrontations, including those of Alvin York, W.E. Fairbairn and the Shanghai police, the Texas Rangers, the U.S. Army's Special Operations Forces, and LAPD SWAT. It is a pretty good place to start as a stopping power standard for an ECQ handgun. It has caused a lot of bad guys "big problems."

We drew the line under .38 Special in our definition of what a snubby is because little guns provide little stopping power. I am also not very much into trends. I prefer to have

a lot of documented field testing on the guns and loads that I select for personal protection. And such is the case with the 2-inch revolver and the lead hollow point (LHP) +P .38 Special. We now have about three-quarters of a century of experience with the Colt Detective Special, half a century with the Chiefs Special, and a quarter of a century with the LHP. Most all of the studies of actual street shootings (regardless of whose study it is) agree that the LHP (regardless of manufacturer) from a 2-inch revolver performs very much like .45 ACP hardball. It may not be a giant killer (depending on your definition of giant); however, according to an FBI agent I knew, the first man they shot with the LHP weighed about 300 pounds. He took one hit "plumb center," attempted to take a step, and fell flat on his face. Initially produced for the FBI by Winchester, it is now also available from Federal and Remington. This round was used by many of the major U.S. police agencies, the FBI, and a number of other federal agencies, plus the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Actually, I think the Canadians used a slightly hotter version of the U.S. loading.

Once I get away from the LHP I have to plead ignorance. I have very little firsthand performance info on other bullet styles and weights. I do know that as revolver weight diminishes the LHP becomes less fun to shoot. More to the point, it becomes hard to control. Since bullet placement is the key to stopping power, ultimately you will be the judge of what you carry. If you can't shoot your load of choice quickly and accurately, keep practicing. If you still aren't satisfied you may get better results with a change in ammo. Usually (but not always), going to a lighter bullet will help. There are some really dandy new rounds available to us today in the 110- to 125-grain bullet weights that are probably going to become increasingly popular with those favoring the titanium revolvers.

If you are not comfortable with the .38 Special, the short-barreled revolver is also available in .357, .44 Special, .41 Magnum, and .45 Long Colt. As a great fan of the British



My preference is the +P or +P+ 158-grain lead hollowpoint in .38 Special and the 110-grain semijacketed hollowpoint in .357 Magnum.

bulldog concept, when Charter Arms produced its .44 Special Bulldog, I had to have one. This little gun was my close companion for several years, and just looking at those big 200-grain Winchester Silvertips gave me great peace of mind. The Charter Bulldog also established my preference for a concealed-carry gun weighing no more than 25 ounces.

Today, with the variety of "pocket rockets" we have available, if I feel I need to upgrade the horsepower available to me in a snubby, I go straight to the .357. I am very fond of the .357 (you have to be to shoot it in a snubby!). This is another round for which we have excellent street documentation. Although the 125-grain semijacketed hollowpoint (SJHP) is king in this load, I prefer the 110-grain semijacketed hollowpoint (SJHP) because it produces less recoil, especially in the snubby. On reflection, a pocket .357 Magnum may be an oxymoron. But it is a truly bad-to-the-

bone streetfighter, especially when employed in the ECQ snubnose concept. Select the brand that produces the least muzzle flash or at least the dullest muzzle flash. Federal and Cor-Bon are probably the most popular choices in this load. There ain't much you can do about the ferocious muzzle blast, and yes, it kicks, but THIS is a bulldog . . .

## **SPEEDLOADING THE REVOLVER**

We need to keep this in perspective. Most gunfights are resolved within the capacity of the five or six rounds the revolver carries. Reloading is necessary in about 10 percent of the documented gunfights involving revolvers. There is also a great deal of truth to the fact that if you have to reload *during* the gunfight, you are either missing a lot or you brought the wrong weapon. Reloading *after* the shooting stops amounts to good tactics. So when you practice, spend most of your time on hitting. Get in the habit of reloading quickly, whether you need to or not, during range training (the reason being that if you need to reload, you'll probably have to do it pretty quickly), and your speed will develop naturally.

The fastest revolver reload is a second revolver, a.k.a. "the New York reload." I should think that the little featherweight titanium revolvers are going to be very popular in this role. I don't guess they weigh much more than a speed-loader! If you shoot your primary gun empty, shove it in a pocket and get the lightweight backup into action. Two little guns equaling the weight of one big one should also do away with any excuse for not carrying something with you at all times.

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Two big-city cops responded to a man-with-a-gun call. They encountered an individual armed with a handgun on the steps of an apartment building. The officers were using

the vehicle for cover—one behind the trunk and one behind the engine compartment—when the shooting started. Both officers emptied a six-shot service revolver and a five-shot Chief before the subject went down. Out of the 22 shots they fired, they had hit him 18 times. One of the officers told me they never could have reloaded as fast as they were able to get the backup guns into action. They knew they were hitting their attacker, but he continued to fire as he came toward them. This was possibly one of the very first shootings involving an individual on PCP.

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The second fastest way to load the revolver is with a speedloader. For the last quarter century or so, my preference has been Safariland. I've carried them in all sorts of climates, usually in a pocket, and they've never failed to function. Another reason I like them is because they do not require your hand to change position to activate the loader. Reloading the revolver has sufficient complexity without adding to it. Once you get your hand on the Safariland speedloader, you simply "dump and go."

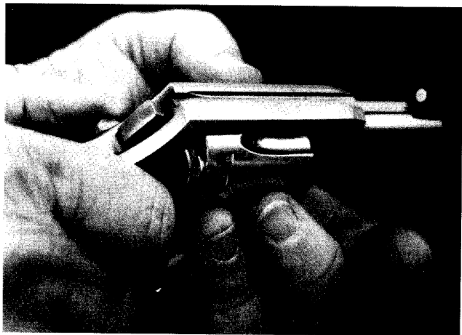
When I went through the academy, we were required to reload revolvers from our pants pockets, although we would be carrying our spare ammo in loops or dump pouches. Fifty rounds of wadcutter, yessir. This experience gave me a whole new definition of slippery. Then we went through a period where speedloaders were specifically not allowed. They were OK for competition, but not for duty. Loops, dumps, and strips only were acceptable. Finally, the manufacturers got the bugs worked out and speedloaders were approved for duty use. Some of us never looked back. So step one is getting the (Safariland) loader loaded. A Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department range officer showed me this technique a good many years ago:

- Make sure the "star" is flush with the front of the loader.

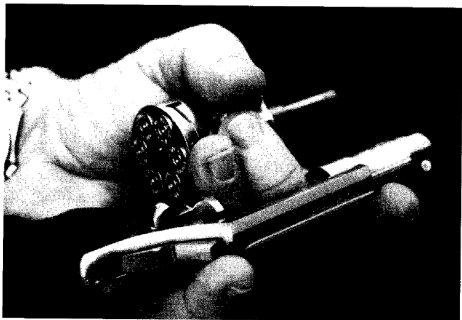
- Insert the rounds.
- Using a "C" clamp grip, pinch. This depresses the speedloader spring.
- With your free hand, turn the body of the speedloader counterclockwise until you hear it click.
- Put the speedloader wherever you normally carry it. Revolver ammo is usually carried on the strong- or gun-hand side, especially if you carry the speedloader in a pocket. There are several speedloader carriers on the market. If your snubby is a six-shot, the little belt clip that Ayoob sells is secure, fast, and concealable. (Available from Police Bookshelf, P.O. Box 122, Concord, NH 03301.) Yet another advantage of the Alessi shoulder holster is that it comes with a speedloader pouch.

At this point I need to acknowledge that 9mm and .45 ACP revolvers use full- or half-moon clips, and they are considered by those who use them to be even faster than speedloaders. My impression is that they see little use outside of various competitions. I also need to acknowledge that there are several other methods of using the speedloader. This particular method is probably the most commonly used because it is about the most fumble-proof of the speedloader techniques.

A couple of other considerations: You reload because you *have* to (all rounds have been fired). Or you reload because you *feel the need* to (your assailant is down and you can't remember how many rounds you've fired). If you *think* you have to reload, you probably do. Remember also that when you reload, your revolver, unlike certain of the pistols, is out of action. You can't fire it. So you should reload behind cover. And finally, the revolver takes more concentration to reload than the pistol. Possibly for this or a variety of other reasons, we all have the tendency to look down at the revolver at about waist level while reloading. This habit causes us to take our eyes off of our assailant or,

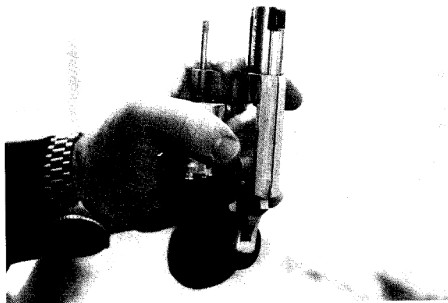


Hand placement to begin the revolver reload sequence.



Cylinder open.





Muzzle up.

worse yet, the last place we knew our assailant to be. Adjust this technique, keeping the snubby at chest level so you can see to reload and also keep an eye on the bad guy.

Assuming you are right-handed (left-handers need only read 4, 5, 7, and 8, then proceed to the next section, which is just for you), place the bottom of the trigger guard in the palm of your support or nonfiring hand.

Position your fingers as shown in the photo.

Activate the cylinder release and open the cylinder.

Place the elbow of the hand holding the gun on your stomach (not your side). Point the barrel of the snubby straight up. (This keeps the gun about chest level. Don't forget the bad guy!)

Smack the extractor rod with the heel of your free hand. This "spank-the-baby" technique is intended to make up for the snubby's short extractor rod. It forcefully expels the empty shell casings from the cylinder. Don't push the rod



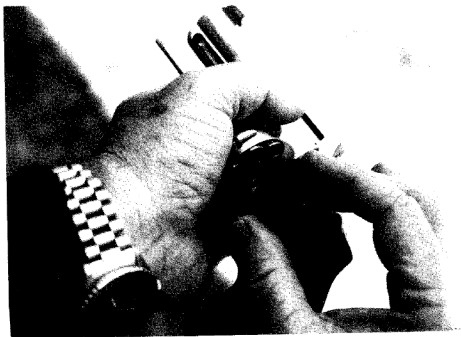
Strike extractor rod sharply with heel of free hand.



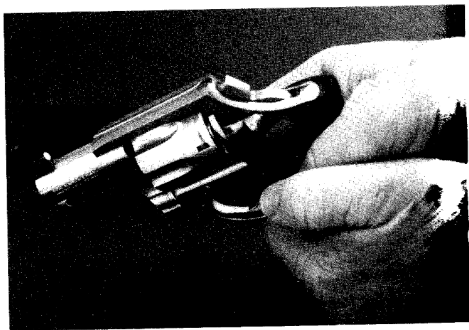
Bring revolver into body at chest height, muzzle down.



Focus on two charge holes under your thumb and insert rounds.



As soon as rounds release into the cylinder, drop the speedloader.



Regrip revolver, close cylinder, and get back in the fight.

and hold it down. Forcefully smack and release because the "smacking" hand now has to grab the speedloader.

Point the barrel down at the ground. (Don't forget about the bad guy. Where is he now?)

You have the speedloader in hand. A helpful hint passed on to me back when we were all pretty sure the earth was flat: Don't attempt to load all five or six rounds (depending on your revolver choice) into all five or six charge holes in the cylinder. Just concentrate on loading two rounds into the two charge holes under your thumb. (The one wrapped around the cylinder) Trust me, the rest will follow. This will help steady you in a low-light situation because you can always see or find your thumb.

Push the speedloader until the rounds are ejected into the charge holes, *and then forget about the speedloader*. I've seen people throw the loader with great gusto at every point on the compass. Don't do this. You're wasting time. Gravity will take care of the empty loader.

Push the revolver grip firmly into the firing hand while at the same time closing the cylinder on the snubby, and you are back in the fight.

If you are left-handed . . .

- Place the bottom of the trigger guard in the palm of your support or nonfiring hand.
- Position your fingers as shown in photo.
- Activate the cylinder release and open the cylinder. (You'll have to decide which is easier, thumb or forefinger.)
- Place the elbow of the hand holding the gun on your stomach (not your side). Point the barrel straight up.
- Smack the extractor rod with the heel of your free hand.
- Grab the speedloader with your free hand.
- Point the barrel at the ground.
- Focus on loading two rounds into the two charge holes directly under your thumb.

- Push the speedloader until the rounds are ejected into the charge holes (see 8 above).
- Push the revolver grip firmly into the firing hand while at the same time closing the cylinder on the snubby, and you are back in the fight.

... And if you are injured and have only one hand available, don't give up! There is a solution for that situation too, but it is mighty slow. (This is a situation that is obviously best solved by having a second revolver readily available. Titanium anyone?) You may also find that you need to find a way to have a speedloader available to either hand:

- Open the cylinder and dump the rounds. (This actually works better for me if I can use my left hand.)
- Stick the gun into the waistband and wedge the cylinder open.
- Grab speedloader and reload.
- Close cylinder, grab gun, and get back into the fight.

## **SHELL CASING UNDER THE EXTRACTOR**

This is a problem that may occur with the 4-inch-barreled revolver. It usually occurs during the rapid reloading procedure when you push the extractor rod to eject the spent shells. (Another reason for the "spank-the-baby" method—it seems to eliminate this problem.) It has happened during gunfights and resulted in the death of at least one officer that I am aware of. Shortly after this incident, a California company (if memory serves) came out with a collar that you could put over the extractor rod of the 4-inch revolver, which shortened the extractor rod's stroke, thus eliminating the problem. I don't recall ever seeing it happen with the 2-inch revolver, but just in case ... the offending cartridge is easily removed with a ball-point pen. Massad Ayoob's Dejammer also clears this problem up handily.

## THE ADMINISTRATIVE RELOAD

You may have unloaded your revolver to clean it, for example, and now you have to put those five or six loose rounds back into the gun. Or you have been doing some dry-fire practice. In this instance I suggest that you reload by hand, one at a time. Do NOT use the speedloader. (In fact, if you confine *all* of your speedloader practice to the range, you will go a long way toward reducing the possibility of a negligent discharge.) This will help condition your mind to the fighting reload response (load quick and get back in the fight) as opposed to the administrative reload response (load the handgun and put it directly into the holster or a safe storage device if you intend to store it loaded). Loading the rounds one at a time forces you to *slow down and think about what you are doing*. As with the speedloader, always load the charge hole under your thumb and rotate the cylinder to bring a fresh charge hole under your thumb. To force yourself to *really* concentrate on what you are doing, rotate the cylinder *opposite* the way it normally turns when the gun is fired.

Before the speedloader era, when all reloading was done from dump pouches or belt loops, this technique was taught to deal with the possibility of a situation in which an officer has to reload during a gunfight and before he can finish doing so he has to close a partially loaded cylinder and engage his assailant. By rotating the cylinder opposite the way it normally turns, you will just about guarantee that you will be able to fire the partially loaded snubby. I suggest it here as a safety measure because it forces you to *think about what you are doing*. It makes you *think* tactically even when the situation doesn't call for it. The administrative reload process (load by hand one at a time, rotate the cylinder counter to the way it turns normally), then, is intended to remind you that you are "going hot." With practice, it will force you to consciously pay attention to what you are doing and

why. It will force you to remind yourself that you cannot and must not close the cylinder and bring the gun up one more time for that last shot at that target you've got taped to the door of the closet in your bedroom . . .



PART

2



**THE TACTICS**



## Intro to Tactics

### **BEFORE WE GET INTO SNUBBY TACTICS, I**

need to remind everyone that this book is intended to complement *Defensive Living*. Thus, a lot of essential info on awareness, danger signs, the force continuum, legal aspects of deadly force, and so on will not be included here. *The Snubby Revolver* is intended to highlight the virtues of the snub-nose revolver and the tactical strengths it brings to the use-of-force requirement in a comprehensive personal protection plan.

The greatest asset of the 2-inch five- (or six-) shot revolver (in my opinion) is that it allows us to be armed when we otherwise might not be. Like the pocketknife, it may not be the best tool for the job, but it is the one we are most likely to have with us all the time. In this role it will almost always be carried concealed. This defines the snubby's second greatest asset: it affords you the element of sur-

prise, and surprise is one of the ingredients of a winning plan. The surprise factor may only last for a couple of heartbeats, just time enough to allow you to do what you have to do in order to gain tactical dominance over the situation.

Although no two gunfights are alike, it seems to me that the little revolver is always present in the worst-case last-ditch scenarios. Movement is restricted, cover is not available, and if you don't do something *right now*, your situation is going to rapidly get a whole lot worse. You will not have this window of opportunity again. NOTE: The following incident happened to NYPD Lt. Adam Kasanof, who described the events during an "Off-Duty Officer Survival" seminar he gave at the 1994 ASLET conference.

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The police officer was off-duty and enjoying the first day of a well-earned vacation. He was in civilian attire and had a Colt Detective Special handily stashed in the pocket of his winter coat. While seated on a subway train, he was accosted by two men. One of them had a handgun and the other had a knife. They sat down, one on either side of him, and the one with the pistol ordered him to hand over his money. The officer reached into his pocket and got a firm grip on his revolver. As he drew the Detective Special, he grabbed the gunman's wrist, knocked the pistol aside, and fired a single shot. As his assailant rolled off of the seat and onto the floor, the officer turned and fired a shot at the knife wielder, who was now running toward the subway door.

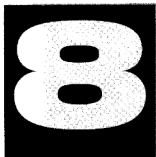
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The off-duty police officer was working as a cab driver to make extra money to support his growing family. He was left-handed; thus his Chiefs Special hung in a shoulder holster under his right arm. The fare he had just picked up was

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sitting in the right rear of the cab. He produced a handgun and demanded money from the driver of the cab. The officer drew the revolver and fired through the seat. The robber never saw the gun that killed him.

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## Tactical Planning

**WE'VE ALL HEARD THE SAGE ADVICE** of those who have "Been there, done that, got the tee shirt." They tell us, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

Prior Planning Prevents P--- Poor Performance." "A hasty plan initiated right now is preferable to a perfect plan initiated too late." "Success favors the prepared mind." You get the point.

When you take the time to "what if?" (creating your various tactical plans to handle specific scenarios), you should give equal time to Murphy, who has a few quotes of his own. (This is best done in the privacy of your own home with a frosted glass of whatever helps the creative process along.) This exercise will identify the strong points and the weak points of a plan. Murphy will remind you that "no plan survives the initial contact." What we are going to examine here are those little details that are the Murphy

hallmark. Because we all know—yeah, you guessed it—“The devil is in the details.”

We'll begin with your lifestyle. You need to look at where you live, work, and play to find the weak points in your security plan. For example, your lifestyle should be low-key. You don't do anything that might attract attention to yourself, and you stay away from the known trouble spots in your town. Unless, of course, you can't. Your job may require you to work nights in a major metropolitan area. You may be the CEO of a big corporation. You may have a parent friend who is frantic over his or her runaway teenager and asks you to venture out to a “fun” part of town to help check the bars. You don't go to the ATM after dark—a good rule of thumb, but what if you have to because of some unexpected family emergency? Life demands that we key our awareness level to the situation at hand and use large doses of common sense.

Next, let's take a look at you. What kind of physical condition are you in? What about your clothing and shoes—can you run and/or fight in them? Does your clothing restrict movement? Do your shoes and clothing enable you to drive without hindrance? Are your shoes noisy when you walk? Are the soles slippery even before it rains? Are they soft or hard enough to protect your feet should you have to kick, stomp, and boogie? How about your wristwatch? Do you have one of those digital types that take two hands to read in poor lighting? Does it have an alarm that may go off when you are holding your breath, hidden in the shadows, trying to evade your pursuers? Do you carry a pocketknife? The folding clip knives that hook into your pants pocket are all the rage these days, and with good reason: easy to reach, easy to open with one hand, and easy to cut with, especially the ones with the serrated edge. A jammed seatbelt, clothing caught in the door of a moving car, and so on are all good reasons to have a knife on you at all times. Likewise your trusty pepper spray. Pepper spray is your alternative to deadly force if you're carrying a

sidearm. It is especially comforting to have along if you don't/can't carry a firearm. How about a shoulder bag or briefcase? Lots of working folks carry one or the other. The briefcase ties up one hand and can be a loose projectile in a car crash unless seat-belted in or stashed in the trunk. On the other hand, it has been used to successfully drive off an attacker. The shoulder bag leaves both hands free, you can take things from it without setting it down, and it is easier to run with. You can also use it to mask the fact that your hand is reaching for your crossdraw-holstered revolver. Either can be taken away from you (or cut away from you) pretty quickly. They do allow you to carry some useful items you might not otherwise have, such as a cell phone (assuming you can't or won't carry it on your belt or in your pocket). These handy little phones have been lifesavers in any number of tough situations, especially with people forced into the trunk of a vehicle. In your bag or briefcase you may also wish to consider carrying a small flashlight, some duct tape, and some compresses for medical emergencies. The rule of thumb is to only put in your briefcase or shoulder bag what you can afford to lose in case they are lost or stolen.

In your car, you need to know where everything is and how it works, especially at night. Consider having your dash lighting as low as you can set it and still read the gauges. This is easier on your eyes and poses less visual distraction than a brightly lit instrument panel. Know how the door locks operate so that if you have to leave the car in a hurry you can. Same with the windows. I prefer the old-fashioned do-it-yourself style. However, every once in a while the cuff of my left trouser leg will hook on the window crank handle as I step out of my truck. (Murphy never sleeps.) Can you quickly unlatch your seatbelt release? When your seatbelt strap locks at impact does it prevent you from reaching necessary knobs and levers inside the car? I like to have a real flashlight (3-4 cell, C or D battery, Maglight) inside the car in case I can't use the gun. If the

problem is in the car with you, the flashlight is the alternative to the pepper spray. And, just as you have a plan of action to counter a carjacking attempt, you oughta have one that allows you to give up your car while keeping with you all family members and/or passengers, big and small.

Lastly, let's consider your firearm. There is much to consider before strapping on your favorite shootin' iron. As I have stated in an earlier chapter, I want to be able to put my hand on the gun while seated. The problem may be outside of the vehicle or in the car with me. I also want the gun on my person. If I have to slam on the brakes to stun an assailant in the car with me, if I have to abandon the car quickly, whatever the scenario, I want everything with me, on me. The snubby is right at home in the close confines of your vehicle. A crossdraw, ankle, or shoulder holster allows you to keep one or two guns accessible to either hand.

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The two officers were sitting in the patrol car discussing the shift's events. At 2 A.M. they thought the parking lot was vacant. Out of habit, the passenger officer sat with his left foot crossed over his right knee so he had quick access to the Chiefs Special he carried in an ankle holster. They noted the lone individual crossing the parking lot and had just enough time to wonder where he had come from when they saw the gun. The officer jerked the Chief from his holster in time to resolve the problem. They never would have made it to the revolvers holstered at their sides.

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# 9

## Surveillance Awareness

**THE WOMAN HAD A LEGAL** restraining order against her estranged husband. For the last several months he had not bothered her at her apartment. She had finally begun to relax a little at work, the only place where she felt truly safe. Several times a day when she took her breaks, she would walk the few short steps from her office building to a nearby set of picnic tables, which was the company's designated smoking area. She knew that cigarettes, like her former husband, were a bad habit she would have to give up. But not today. As she concentrated on lighting the cigarette, the man approached her. While her horrified coworkers looked on, he shot her and then turned the pistol on himself.

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*Defensive Living* discussed increasing your awareness

and the danger signs of an imminent street-crime assault. Now I want to kick it up a notch. Surveillance detection (SD) seems to be one of those terms, like terrorism, that everybody defines differently. For our purposes, SD is what a lone individual can do to determine whether he or she is being watched. It is one of the components of an intelligence officer's tradecraft, an essential skill for the protective operations specialist and, lest we forget, commonly used by serious criminals. SD is an art form and can get pretty complicated. Surveillance awareness (SA), on the other hand, is the intro to SD and is useful to us all because it is simple and straightforward. It helps us sort out the known from the unknown, the familiar from the unfamiliar, especially in the two areas we spend most of our waking hours, our home and our workplace. Once mastered, it allows you to deal with a variety of threats, such as stalking, carjacking, and kidnapping. It can keep you out of trouble by serving as an early warning of the fact that someone is interested in you. It is the weakest link in the planning phase of a criminal act. Someone may watch you for months (kidnapping) or for seconds (carjacking). But in either case, for violent crimes against your person to take place, the bad guys have to get close to you, or let you get close to them. So (to paraphrase the bomb tech's sage advice, "If you can see the bomb, the bomb can see you"), if the bad guys can see you, you can see the bad guys.

For most of us to get good at any skill, we need training followed by lots of practice. As with any type of awareness training, the tough part about SA is not the technique but the concentration that it requires. You must constantly pay attention to what is going on around you, and you must not ignore what you see. (Sounds a lot like Condition Yellow, doesn't it?) People untrained in SA often see the threat but attach no significance to it and fail to catalog it properly. (Sounds a lot like Condition White, doesn't it?) So, for SA to work for you, you need to know **WHAT** to look for, **WHERE** to look for it, and **WHAT** to do about it.

So let's say you are under a real or perceived threat. Consequently, you have decided to ramp up your personal security habits. You are varying your routes and times to and from work. You have a choice of three routes, and you drive a different one each day. Let's say these routes allow you to maintain a fairly constant speed, so it would take some work for someone to stop you (speed is your ally). You still must contend with the roadways near your home or office, because they usually force you to come and go pretty much the same way all the time, and you have to slow down or stop frequently. Here you need to take advantage of what appears to be a disadvantage. Guess who's going to be there with you? Sure, because they want you to make their job easy. So you are always watchful, but you are extra alert near these two areas.

To determine WHAT to look for, you need to understand a couple of things about surveillance (and again, everybody's definitions are different). For our purposes, we'll concern ourselves with three types of surveillance:

- *Foot* (this is the stuff you see in all the private eye shows, where someone follows someone on foot).
- *Fixed* (the person watching you is not moving and thus pretty tough to spot).
- *Mobile* (the surveillants are in a vehicle following you). For example, if the surveillants are in a van, parked so as to be able to watch you leave for work in the morning, they would be considered fixed surveillance. If they use the van to follow you to work they would be considered mobile surveillance.

Some examples of WHERE you want to focus your attention near your home, near your work, while in your vehicle, or while approaching your vehicle would be parked cars containing people, park benches, phone booths, bus stops, and restaurants with outside eating facilities. Now,

out of all the people we are likely to see, how do we tell who is interested in us? We have three indicators:

- Location
- Correlation
- Demeanor

Let's look at an example: The CEO of a small corporation had taken a personal security course at his wife's insistence. The training taught him the value of SA. On his way to work after the training, he began to notice a man sitting on a bench (fixed surveillance) at a bus stop near his home. Something about his clothing just didn't fit the neighborhood (*location*). Over a period of several days, each morning as the CEO left for work he noticed the man was always there (*correlation*).

Since his house overlooked the bus stop, one morning the CEO stayed home and watched the man from a second floor window. Once the surveillant realized the CEO was not leaving for work at the usual time, he became visibly nervous and kept glancing at his watch. Finally, he got up from the bench and walked over to a bicycle hidden in some bushes. The man got on the bike and pedaled away (*demeanor*).

Faced with a similar situation, what do you do? *Take action!* Tell someone who can follow up on what you've seen. Do not ignore this series of events. In this case the CEO called the police, who arrested the man and uncovered a kidnap plot.

POP QUIZ: You have one person watching your home and two people following you to work. They are checking to see if you are a hard target or an easy one. How many of these people do you need to spot to know you've got a problem?

ANSWER: Just one.

# 10

## Basic Tactics

ACCEPT THE FACT THAT IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU!

BE PREPARED!

HAVE A PLAN!

TAKE ACTION!

DON'T FORGET THAT TAKING ACTION MAY MEAN  
BEING THE VERY BEST WITNESS YOU CAN BE WHILE  
GIVING UP YOUR CAR OR WALLET.)

To successfully manage an armed confrontation requires a working blend of mind-set, tactics, and shooting skill that you must be able to apply under extreme stress. In theory, these three are equally important. In reality, I think mind-set and tactics weigh in much heavier in the equation for a lot of reasons—not the least of which is the

fact that they often keep you from having to resort to firing your weapon. Poor marksmanship and lousy shot placement can get you into trouble. But improper or nonexistent mind-set and failure to use sound tactics collectively cause more grief in the majority of deadly force encounters. Consider the following errors, which quite often snatch defeat from the jaws of victory: failure to correctly assess the threat, failure to control the subject, failure to watch the hands, failure to use cover, failure to shoot soon enough. Obviously, then, failure to hit and failure to stop are often the end result of a chain of events that began when you either lost control of the situation (tactics) or never saw it coming (awareness, one of the components of mind-set). In fact, basic lethal force tactics (distance and cover) take into account the marginal stopping power of the handgun and the difficulties of shooting a handgun accurately under stress.

Further, basic tactics that enable you to manage an armed confrontation have a couple of distinctive characteristics. One is that if you don't adhere to them your chances of being injured (or worse) are virtually guaranteed. Second, like the firing stroke, they must be a conditioned response. If you start behind the curve and you have to stop and think about what you are going to do, you'll never catch up.

I like to tie tactics to the Color Code. As your awareness level goes up, so does your tactical response. This also helps to ensure that the tactics are taught in the proper mental state. Condition Red tactics, for example, need to be practiced under conditions that simulate a gunfight. So consider the following list as more than simple tactical procedures; think of it as a tactical thought process to assist you as you mentally race from Yellow to Orange to Red. While gunhandling and shooting skills are blended or used together with tactical skills in practice, I try, where possible, to distinguish them. Finally, it is understood that you may not have time to do all of these tactical procedures by the numbers.

- 1) Realize that you have a problem.
- 2) Make effective use of available time.
  - a. Breathe.
  - b. Quickly assess the situation.
  - c. Make a hasty plan. (What are my goals?  
What are my options?)
- 3) Use clear verbal commands.
- 4) Identify and use cover.
- 5) Gain and maintain distance.
- 6) Know where the exits are.
- 7) If shots have been fired and your opponent is down or gone . . .
  - a. Do a quick "+1" scan (see below) to make sure there are no more bad guys.
  - b. Reload.
  - c. Check yourself to make sure you have not been hit.
- 8) Call the cops as soon as possible.

*Realize that you have a problem:* This is your situational awareness at work. You pick up cues or danger signs that signal that you have a problem. You go from Condition Yellow (generally alert) to Condition Orange (specifically alert). Your training, mental preparation, and mental conditioning have prepared you to deal with this eventuality.

*Make effective use of available time:* Critical incidents usually take place within a very short timeframe. They are extremely unforgiving and leave little to no room for error. If you have any time at all to make a hasty plan, take full advantage. Failing to make a plan just adds to the confusion and creates more room for mental stalling. Try to slow the clock. Controlling the clock is easier to do than beating the clock. Don't forget to breathe.

*Use clear, concise verbal commands (if time allows):* Don't just point your trusty snubby at someone and say nothing. Take charge. Tell him what you want him to do.

Keep your commands short. Don't exchange dialogue with the individual.

*Identify and use cover:* Again, this only applies if time allows. There are times when moving to cover is simply not an option. Given the time-distance factor, your best/only option may be to shoot—*NOW*. Know what cover is, because if you have to move you want to move from concealment to cover or from cover to better cover.

*Gain and maintain distance:* Distance + Cover = High Probability for Survival. Where handguns are involved, anything past 21 feet greatly increases your chances of not being hit.

*Know where the exits are:* See Chapter 12.

*IF* shots have been fired: Do a quick "+1" scan to make sure there is no additional threat, reload, then do your quick check to make sure you're O.K.

*Call the cops:* Massad Ayoob makes the point in his LFI-I class that the sooner you call the police, the better your chances of establishing yourself as the victim.



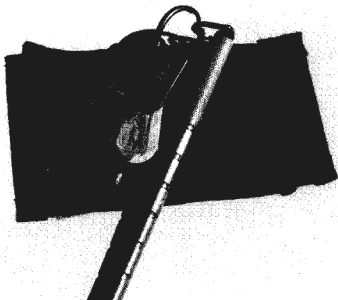
# 11

## Derringer Tactics

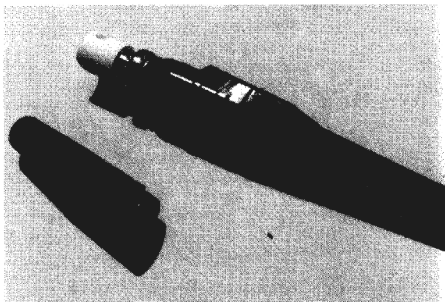
**TO ME, THE FIVE-SHOT SNUBBY** is the modern-day equivalent of the riverboat gambler's derringer. Like the derringer, it is light and small enough to always have with you. But, also like the derringer, it and the word firepower should not be used in the same sentence (without including the phrase "lack of"). Effective confrontation management with the five-shot revolver places a premium on strong tactical skills.

What I want to discuss here is an extension of the previous chapter on tactics. Those are the basics. These are specifically for the pocket revolver—things you might wish to consider before you find yourself in a situation where your keen intellect, sparkling wit, and track and field skills are all required to offset the fact that you are mighty light on firepower.

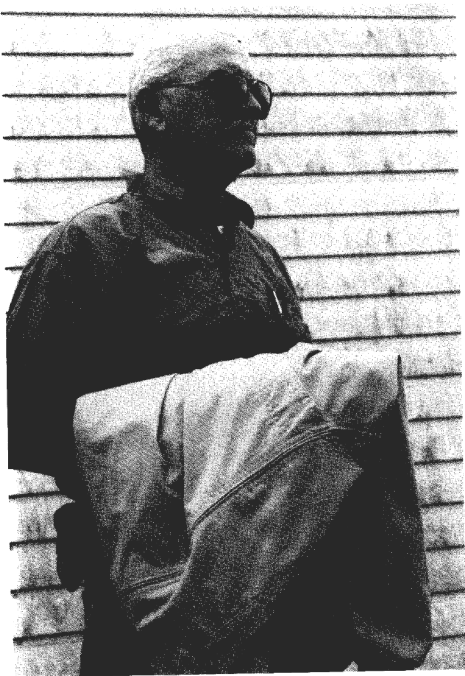
- 1) Plan A—Don't forget that your best tactic may be to avoid the fight if possible. If the little .38 Special is your only



The Ayoob Dejammer with keys can be used as a flail.



OC spray is a great deterrent when it works; this OC pen has a matchstick taped to the barrel of the pen so that you can tell by feel that the spray is pointed in the right direction.



The snubby is a natural for the Discreet Ready carry.

armament, maybe you should give strong consideration to Plan B.

- 2) Plan B—Always have an exit. Can you run away to fight another day?
- 3) Give yourself some tactical flexibility. In addition to your choice of "derringer," carry a less-than-lethal-force option such as pepper spray or a flail. Don't put yourself in the position of having to use a hammer when all you really needed was a screwdriver.
- 4) The plan that looks workable when you're by yourself is probably not the one you want when with your family.
- 5) Use surprise to your advantage. By the time your opponent learns you are armed, it should be too late for him to react.
- 6) The little Centennial, properly positioned, lends itself to discreet access. You can have your hand on the gun without your opponent's knowing it. Crossdraw or shoulder holsters (while seated) or pocket holsters (while standing) offer good examples of this.
- 7) The small revolver also permits you to use a Discreet Ready (e.g., the gun in the pocket of your windbreaker or the gun in your hand with a coat thrown over your arm). The gun is in your hand and pointed at your assailant without his knowing it.
- 8) In a confrontation, remember the "+1" rule: There is always the possibility of the bad guys you see having with them "+1" you don't. So protect your back. You will not be able to watch everyone/everywhere at once. As early as possible, get something solid behind you (e.g., a wall, a car, etc.).
- 9) Practice-Practice-Practice. You should be a serious threat to a target the size of an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet of typewriting paper from arm's length to 21 feet.
- 10) Always carry two guns or at least one speedloader.
- 11) Select ammo that maximizes the performance of the short-barreled .38 Special but remember, sexy ammo will not make up for lousy shot placement. Refer to #9 above?
- 12) Don't eat at anyplace called "Mom's." Never play cards with anyone named "Doc."

# 12

## Always Have an Exit

**WE SEE IT IN THE NEWS** all too frequently: people are trapped (or believe themselves to be trapped) in restaurants, office buildings, schools, and hotels. Maybe the restaurant they're in is being robbed, or perhaps their workplace is being shot up by a lone crazed gunman. What I'm going to consider in this chapter are the tactics you must employ in order to safely get out of a building containing a threat. Please note that your home is not included in the list of possible problem areas. Circumstances and situations may dictate otherwise, but as a general rule I am not advocating these tactics for home defense scenarios. Anyone who enters your house intent on doing harm to you and yours should be dealt with accordingly. One way or another, he leaves. You don't. 'Nuff said.

Common sense dictates that any time we are in a building we should always have an exit plan. Know where the

exits are. Know what you can use for cover as you move to the exit. If something happens that causes you to activate your exit plan, do a quick assessment of the threat (don't forget to breathe) and then act. To quote John Farnam's sage advice, "Don't be a gawking spectator. Get out at the first sign of trouble. Don't panic and don't dither. Take decisive action immediately. Anything is better than sitting there exclaiming, 'What should we do?'"

For instance: We've all heard that the best place to sit in a restaurant is at a table at the back of the dining area. This vantage point allows you to watch everything that is going on. You can cover the entrance while keeping your back to the wall. My buddy Dave Spaulding advocates sitting close to an exit. If something happens you're out the door before the situation develops. I know a father and daughter who beat the terrorist bombing of a fast food place by doing exactly that. The bad guys looked out of place. Something didn't feel right. As quickly as they entered through one door, dad and daughter left through another. Less than a minute later the building was in ruins.

There are two schools of thought as to *how* you should exit. (Again, since the emphasis of this book is on the private citizen, all of this presumes you are in civilian attire, hence more or less invisible.) One is to move quickly but in a nonalerting manner while scanning.

The other is to run for your life, literally. This is a decision only you can make when you do your quick assessment of the situation prior to implementing your exit plan. Perhaps your feet are ready to fly, but you note that the bad guys are *between* you and the nearest exit. Time for plan B. . . Or by the time you realize what is going on, everybody is running to the exit. You have no choice. If caught up in a panicked crowd, go with the flow while trying to work your way toward the edge of the frenzy. Especially if you have to negotiate stairs. Being at the edge of this human freight train may allow you to gain cover until the "train" roars past. Then you make

your way down the stairs. So running may be the correct (only) answer and the fastest way out. It may also induce panic, clouding your ability to make good decisions quickly. And it may be alerting at a time when you really wish to be invisible.

The "scan while moving" option assumes you know what is happening before most everyone else does. Or you're already moving while everyone else is trying to decide what to do. It is slower than running but allows you to look before you leap, think clearly and quickly, keep your balance, and so on (a couple of departures from the norm). This is *not* a building search or room clearing technique. This is simply watching where you put your foot down and checking the corners as you move. You are not stopping to do a textbook clearing exercise. You check the angles but stay constantly in motion. Anyone watching you would probably not notice anything unusual about your actions.

You are trying to avoid being surprised by the threat or mistaken as the threat. Use all of your senses. Don't rely solely on your vision. What you hear, for example, can help you keep moving away from or possibly around the threat. In hallways you need to check in front, but don't forget to protect your rear. Likewise, if you're using the stairs, you need to look down as well as up. In one instance, which I described in an earlier chapter, the victims came under fire as they exited a hotel room. They ran to the emergency exit and started down the stairs. The attackers knew they were unarmed and followed them. The victims beat their attackers to the street and were able to escape. Apparently the bad guys didn't mind shooting up the hotel but didn't wish to call attention to themselves on the street.

Another departure from the norm when implementing the "scan while moving" option is that, unless circumstances dictate otherwise, the handgun should not be displayed if you are armed. Here the snubby really comes into its own. You may have your hand on the gun in your pock-

et or shoulder bag. You may have a coat thrown over your arm and hand, concealing the gun. But unless you're a sworn peace officer in uniform or a plainclothes officer displaying your badge, you want to avoid being just another guy in civilian clothes waving a gun around in a pretty volatile situation! In the final analysis, the exit method you use may be pretty much self-selecting. If you're under fire or caught up by the crowd, you run. If the threat has not spotted you yet and the herd is starting to stomp their feet and mill around while waiting for the herd bull to tell them what to do, move so as not to draw attention to yourself.

If you are armed and circumstances force you to fire your weapon, you stand a good chance of being in a building full of people, many of whom you can't see, and many of whom may be in motion. Be sure of your target—what's in front of it, what's behind it (sound familiar?). Kneeling may give you a better angle with less chance of hitting an innocent party if your round(s) go through a wall. You want to be behind cover before firing. If you draw fire from the bad guys, you want to minimize the danger both to yourself and others around you. And again, especially in restaurants, don't forget the "+1" rule. There may be a backup shooter sitting at a nearby table sipping his or her ice tea when you go into action. Bummer. Especially if you forgot to get behind something.

And, finally, once you make it to the exit door, food for thought: Is your weapon concealed? Take a look outside and then walk out. If the cops are already in place and you come running out, gun in hand . . .



# 13

## Carjacking Countermeasures I

**DURING THE 1970s** there was a marked increase in the ambushing of police officers. Consequently, it was a frequent topic of discussion in the officer survival programs then being taught. In one such course I attended, the instructors used an incident involving one of their own officers to illustrate their point.

• • •

The rookie had all the makings of a first-rate officer. He was street savvy, tough, and highly aggressive. He just needed a little seasoning. They told us that he had responded to a report of a gang shootout and, as he approached the area of the shooting, came under fire himself. He immediately slammed on the brakes of the patrol car, jumped out, and shot it out with three gangbusters using a Ruger

Security Six .357 Magnum with a 6-inch barrel. He and the Ruger dominated the fight, and when it was over he calmly called for a supervisor, shooting team, crime scene technicians, emergency medical service, and the coroner. During his debriefing, the investigators asked him why he had stopped his car when he came under fire. The young officer replied that he had to stand and fight, otherwise his brother officers would consider him a coward.

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According to our instructors, several senior brother officers then pulled their chairs a little closer to the rookie, leaned across the table to get right in his face, and speaking very slowly for emphasis, advised him that he got an "A+" for testicularity and an "F-" for thought process and tactics. The correct response in such a situation was to DRIVE out of the @#&\* < ! kill zone and THEN call for backup. *Don't let macho be your epitaph.*

I include the use of the vehicle under available tactical options because it is relatively easy to find information or suggestions on when to use your OC spray or unarmed skills instead of the gun. It is not so easy to find such information on when to use the vehicle as a means of allowing your safe escape from a situation in preference to using a handgun. So in this chapter and the next I take into account the fact that, as a private citizen, you are going to find that the courts will look upon you more favorably if you can demonstrate that you did everything you could to get away from the threat. By doing this, I hope to also clarify when to use the handgun, when to drive, or when to simply let the perpetrator have the car. As a general rule, if you are in the car and the threat is outside the car, if you have room to maneuver and your car is running, then the car becomes your preferred response option. Simply by stepping on the skinny little pedal on the right, you can extract yourself from a good many problem situations.

Carjacking is the taking of a vehicle by force, or the threat of force, while the victim is in or around the vehicle. We suspect it to be a rapidly growing crime, but we cannot say with certainty because it is not indexed in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting format. Thus, police may report the crime as a car theft or an armed robbery. The most reliable source of information on the problem comes from the Bureau of Justice report *Carjacking in the United States, 1992-96* (March 1999). The telephonic survey used to gather the information for the report (a random sampling of 221,000 people) revealed that about 49,000 carjackings or attempted carjackings took place each year from 1992 to 1996. About half were successful. The study also identified the following carjacking characteristics:

- They usually involve a single victim.
- The carjackers' weapon of choice was a handgun.
- The carjackers' second choice was a knife.
- Most carjackings occurred within five miles of the victim's home.
- They took place on a public street near a bus, subway, or train station.
- They took place in parking lots or near stores, restaurants, gas stations, and office buildings.

The point we need to make here, as stated in our definition, is that the carjacking may take place when you are near or at, but not in, your car. So during your approach to the car you need to be practicing your "avoidance through awareness" skills. Pay attention to what is going on around you, pay particular attention to what is happening in your 21-foot/360-degree safety bubble, and use large doses of common sense. The carjacker may approach by simply walking up to you and displaying a weapon, or he may wait until you get the car door unlocked before making his move. Situational awareness is the key here.

If you are in the car, you are at risk when the car is not

moving, so you need to be especially watchful at stop signs and stop lights. Ask yourself: "Why is that person approaching my vehicle?" "Can I see his hands?" And don't forget the "bump and rob." This is where they rear end your vehicle, and when you get out to exchange insurance info you suddenly find yourself afoot. (As soon as you are "bumped" check the occupants of the car behind you using your rear view mirror. If you see two heads, consider the possibility that one of them may be about to become the proud new owner of your car and proceed to a safe haven before getting out of your vehicle to exchange insurance info.)

So if you feel threatened whether inside or outside of your vehicle, your response should be "Assess - Avoid - Evade - Counter." If your assessment tells you that you cannot Avoid, Evade or Counter, then you give up your vehicle.

Now it gets complicated. What if the person forces you into the car or gets into the car with you? You really do not want to stay in the car with the carjacker because this puts you at grave personal risk. There are any number of reasons for his wanting you to accompany him, and none of them are good. So if you are outside of your car when the carjacker makes his intentions clear, or if he gets into the car with you after doing so, the gun now becomes an option.

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The woman had been visiting a friend at the hospital. She walked to her car in the parking lot, opened the passenger door, crawled across the front seat, and unlocked the driver's door from the inside. She then got out and walked around to the driver's door and opened it. "I simply have to get that lock fixed," she thought as she slid behind the steering wheel. She was startled by the realization that there was a young man seated next to her holding a gun. He had gotten into the car in the time it had taken her to walk from the passenger's side around to the driver's side. They drove aimlessly for about 15 minutes, and then he ordered

her to drive him down a dirt road. Instinctively, she knew that her assailant had just made a decision that placed her in mortal danger. She had a .38 Special snub-nose revolver in her purse, which was on the floor of the car between the seats. She made the decision to go for the gun. Surprisingly, she was able to pull it out of the purse before her assailant could react, and she was struggling to pull the trigger when he shot her and fled. Seems a well-meaning family member had purchased a holster for the handgun as a surprise for her and forgot to mention it. Thus, she was unable to get her finger on the trigger. She survived her wound.

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The off-duty cop suddenly realized that the man seated next to him in the front seat was going to kill him and take his car. Both of the cop's hands were on the steering wheel. The man across from him held what looked like a .25 auto, but it was getting bigger by the second. The officer did not know what kind of gun the guy in the backseat had. The two had flagged the officer down, told him they had car trouble, and asked if he would take them to a filling station. Once the two got into the car, the guns came out. The off-duty cop had three things working for him. These guys weren't going to shoot him until they got off the busy street they were on. They didn't know he was a cop. They didn't know he was armed. He decided to go for it. With a draw that would have made the *Guinness Book*, he produced the Chiefs Special and, just as quickly, emptied it—three at the assailant next to him and two at the one in back. The carjacker in the front seat died where he sat. The one in back escaped into the crowd with a shattered left thumb.

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What about the kids strapped into their car seats? How do you give up your car but not them? You need to under-

stand that you have a very volatile situation here. You are probably a touch excited (ahem), but what about the person confronting you? He's scared, paranoid, and highly likely to be under the influence of alcohol and/or narcotics, i.e., he's "wired" . . . and he's got a gun.

- Do not make any sudden moves.
- Tell him he can have the car.
- Tell him you are unbuckling your seatbelt.
- Speak firmly and decisively but don't shout.
- Tell him you are taking the children with you; do not ask for his permission.
- Get the kids and walk away. Move toward the biggest concentration of people and lights (back to the mall, store, etc.)
- Contact the police.

# 14

## Carjacking Countermeasures II

**ON 4 OCTOBER 1989** in Lima, Peru, seven members of the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) kidnapped the owner of a local TV station. Hector Delgado Parker was leaving the TV station in a chauffeur-driven Mercedes Benz, accompanied by one bodyguard. The Mercedes had Level III armoring and, in addition to the standard door locks, had a deadbolt door-locking system that the chauffeur could control.

As the vehicle turned onto a main thoroughfare, a Volkswagen "bug" pulled in front of the Mercedes and stopped, blocking the roadway. A second vehicle may also have blocked the rear of the car, but eyewitness accounts differ on this point. The MRTA, two of whom were wearing Peruvian National Police uniforms, were armed with 9mm and .45-caliber pistols and an FAL rifle in 7.62 NATO caliber (.308). Although the FAL (Peruvian military issue) is

a popular weapon with MRTA, it is highly unusual for them to use it in an urban operation. The conclusion here is that they knew Parker's vehicle was armored.

One of the MRTA fired several shots from the FAL into the air and ordered the three men out of the Mercedes. The chauffeur froze, and the terrorists began shooting at the vehicle. Although there was evidence that at least 40 rounds struck the car, the only rounds that penetrated the armor were 7.62 NATO, and most of the firing was aimed at the chauffeur and the door locks. The chauffeur was killed, but the attackers could not gain entrance to the Mercedes. One of the MRTA went to the VW, got a large hammer, walked over to the Mercedes, and pounded on the upper right corner of the window on the driver's side of the vehicle. He finally knocked the corner of the armored window loose from the car body and pried it back, much as one opens a can of sardines, at which time the bodyguard fired a round—probably a .38 Special lead roundnose (LRN)—through the opening, striking one of the MRTA, who fell to the ground.

Again, at this point stories conflict. One says the victim surrendered and unlocked the car, while another says he fought the attackers as they dragged him from the car until one of them smacked him on the back of the head with the butt of a rifle, knocking him unconscious. The group then left the scene with the victim.

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I am pretty familiar with the Hector Delgado Parker incident because I was in Lima when it happened. I had the opportunity to inspect the car, visit the scene, and talk to the investigators. The terrorists surveilled Parker to determine where he was vulnerable and predictable during his daily routine. (See Chapter 9: Surveillance Awareness). By doing this, they also learned that his car was heavily armored, so they upgraded their weaponry.



The weak link here was the driver, which unfortunately is not unusual in these cases, even today. An armored car simply buys you time—time usually measured in seconds, but time in which the driver can put his skills to use. In this instance, the car was up for the job. The driver wasn't. Here we have a case in which a VW bug blocked an armored Mercedes, the modern-day equivalent of the mouse and the elephant. The Mercedes could have gone around (or through) the VW. My point is that even if the driver knew nothing about ramming, he still possessed sufficient driving skills to have extracted the executive from the situation.

Likewise, as a private citizen, if you have a couple of years of driving experience under your belt, especially in a major urban environment, you already have sufficient driving skill to get out of the vehicle crime scenarios you are likely to encounter. (Police officers, protective operations specialists, and those whose work requires them to live abroad will require some additional training.) But, as the Parker incident demonstrates, what jams the untrained driver up in a carjack/kidnap/assassination attempt is not driving ability. The skill that is missing is attack recognition. If you don't see it coming or you can't recognize what is happening, and if you have no conditioned response available . . .

Sheer luck can only do so much.

So carjacking presents you with a twofold attack recognition issue. The first is recognizing a problem when you are not in the car but walking up to it. As discussed in *Defensive Living*, here is where the danger signs can help. Your second area of concern is when you are in the vehicle. Here you need to be especially watchful when the car is not moving, for example at a stoplight or stop sign. Anyone who approaches your vehicle while it is stopped is automatically suspect. They may approach from the front, sides, or rear so you need to be using your mirrors. Watch their hands, look for weapons, and have your escape exit already picked out.

As with any motor skill, the ability to "do the necessary" during a critical incident requires a combination of soft skill/hard skill training. Soft skills include situational awareness, the survivor's attitude, route analysis, surveillance awareness, and attack recognition. Hard skills are the driving responses you apply when you must take action to avoid, evade, and/or counter a particular threat. The soft skills plus attack recognition scenarios are what you mostly pay for in evasive driving instruction. The actual driving is just the application of skills you already possess.

Since the current crop of vehicles most people drive these days can only do three things (go - stop - turn), your evasive responses are going to have to be pretty straightforward (no pun intended). A study of incidents in which evasive driving techniques have been used successfully will pretty much reinforce this.

What you will see, in order, will be the following:

Just step on the gas. If there is nothing blocking your vehicle's forward progress, this is as simple as it gets. Head for the nearest safe haven and tell someone you had a problem.

If someone is blocking your forward progress (accidentally or on purpose), simply drive around him. This is why you need to be able to see the rear tires of the car in front of you whenever your car is stopped in traffic, at a traffic signal, stop sign, and so on. This gives you the room to maneuver. Be prepared to run over a curb or even leave the roadway for a short distance.

If your forward progress is completely blocked, going backward may be an option. Go backward until you no longer feel threatened, then turn the car around and head for the nearest safe haven.

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The chauffeur for a wealthy Latin American businessman, he was taking the children to school in an armored

vehicle. As he approached an intersection, a car shot out from a side street and blocked his forward progress. He noted that two armed men got out of the car and started walking back toward him. Without warning, they began firing. As they got to the side of the car, still firing, the driver noted that one man even changed handguns. Suddenly, a round penetrated the armored window, striking the chauffeur in the arm. The impact snapped him out of his shock and amazement, and he slammed the car in reverse and backed up until he could no longer see the men. He then turned the car around and sped back to the family's residence.

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Note that all of the vehicle responses involve taking decisive action and either getting the car in motion or keeping the car moving. This gets you away from the attack site. It also provides you with another big plus that you should know about: You now become a lightly armored moving target. Not only are you hard to hit, but it is also tougher for rounds to enter your vehicle than it would be if you were sitting still. We can say that an armored car that does not move is at greater risk of bullet penetration than an unarmored car that speeds away. An armored car that is sitting still runs the risk of rounds "woodpeckering" their way into the car, which is exactly what happened in the case described above. The bullet just can't get a good a "bite" on the moving car. It really is that simple.

More good news: History suggests that, with proper training, you are highly likely to be able to execute your vehicle skills during a critical incident (probably because you drive every day). Trained individuals in vehicles defeat attacks about 90 percent of the time.

# 15

## Remember the Six-Shot Snubby?

**SINCE THIS BOOK IS ABOUT** the snubby, I thought I'd best wrap up with a chapter on the subject. It didn't seem like that long ago when we were debating the merits of the five-shot revolver vs. those of the six-shot revolver. Today, however, I feel like I'm writing a historical footnote. Two separate events forced me to give this issue some thought. The first was Colt's decision to stop production of the faithful Detective Special just about the time they got it right with such options as dehorned hammers, rust-resistant finishes, a front-sight-only night sight (my favorite), a smooth action, and a .357 Magnum version, which was long overdue.

The second was a class Mike Boyle, a senior official in the New Jersey Department of Natural Resources and well-known gun scribe, offered at the 2000 Tampa International Association of Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors (IALEFI)

entitled "Back to the Future: Snub Revolver for Pistoleros." I was unable to attend the class, but Mike recently mailed me a copy of his lesson outline, and it was chock full of useful, practical information on the short-barreled revolver. But the real point I need to make here is that hardly anyone attended Mike's class, which leads me to conclude that even the five-shot revolver's role as a backup handgun is rapidly becoming a thing of the past in law enforcement. I know that before I retired from federal service a number of government law enforcement agencies specifically prohibited their agents from carrying the little revolver as a backup weapon.

All of which leads me to further conclude that the snub-nose revolver market will soon be the exclusive domain of the private citizen, if it isn't already. Interesting. Certainly not something I would ever have considered seeing in my lifetime.

The good news is that the snubby is alive and well these days in more flavors of five-shooters than ever before. Smith & Wesson, Ruger, and Taurus offer something for everyone in a variety of calibers and weights. With space-age metals, these companies have developed revolvers that weigh about as much as a cylinder full of the ammo they carry! We may have just about perfected the design of a handgun intended to be "often carried but seldom shot." It is not too much of a speculative leap to entertain the idea that this may in fact be the new role of the .38 Special revolver, since hardly anyone is using the 4-inch-barreled version anymore.

As I pondered what all of this meant, it dawned on me that not having the Detective Special in the marketplace has severely reduced the availability of the six-shot revolver. To my way of thinking, this is not a good thing. Much as I love the five-shot, it is at its best in a backup role to a bigger gun. This was well known in police circles back when the revolver ruled. In fact, it gave rise to the (old) Conventional Wisdom (CW) that you shouldn't carry the five-shot 2-inch as your primary sidearm. Although plain-

clothes officers and off-duty cops frequently ignored this advice, it was reality based. It was recognition of the fact that an all-steel (20- to 21-ounce) five-shot snubby stoked with +P .38 Special ammo is right at the ragged edge of what most of us can control in rapid-burst firing.

This advice did not apply to the six-shot snubby. Why? The most obvious answer is that it gave you another round. True, but not the right answer. The strong suit of the six-shot snubby is that it is generally easier to shoot quickly and accurately than the five-shot version. The six-shot tends to give you a "fistful of gun." This pretty clearly defined the roles (old CW) of the two revolvers as: five-shot (backup) and six-shot (as the primary gun or if you are only carrying one gun). As a further example, if you have ever had the opportunity to see both guns at work on the range, you probably noted that while those using the five-shot had to really work to qualify, their comrades armed with the six-shot 2-inch shot about as well as they did with the 4-inch service revolver. The all-steel Chiefs Special weighs about the same as the all-steel Detective Special, but the slightly larger Colt gives you more gun to hang onto. More to the point, several officers I knew who were in shootouts with a Chiefs Special upgraded their choice of weapon. Not so with the six-shooters. They never seemed to suffer from performance anxiety before or after.

So much for the old CW. Today's (new) CW tells us that the first rule of gunfight survival is: *Always have a gun.* The gun manufacturers have taken away the weight factor as an excuse. Since most situations involving the lawfully armed private citizen are close-range affairs that are usually turned off by the display of a handgun, you are still on pretty solid ground with almost any type of small pistol or revolver.

The problems start if you have to take it to the next level, if you are forced to shoot. With practice, most people can manage the recoil generated by +P .38 Special loads in all-steel snubby revolvers. But if you choose to go below 20 ounces and carry the airweight or titanium guns, recoil

becomes grim. Practice with these flea weights is more important but less likely than with the heavier versions. They hurt! I know that you will probably not notice the recoil if you are forced to fire during an armed confrontation, but the laws of physics will still apply.

One suggestion may be to buy the lightweight to carry and the all-steel version to practice with. Since all of this is about the ultimate concealed-carry handgun and what we are looking for is something that packs like a Seecamp .32 but packs a wallop like a .357 Sig, we need to consider some possible compromises, which leads to my second suggestion. I'm as enamored with those gorgeous lightweight as the next person. For me, the midsize (six-shot) airweights have been a solution at times. During my law enforcement days, the off-duty gun I eventually settled on was a 2-inch S&W Model 12, the lightweight version of the Model 10. With a set of Herrett's Detective Grips, it was a shootin' machine. I found it much more controllable in rapid fire than my Model 60 Chiefs Special, and it carried effortlessly in a Don Hume IWB holster. Those favoring the Colt were quite happy with the lightweight six-shot Agent. (Although no longer offered by S&W or Colt, these slick little revolvers are fairly easy to find in gun shops and gun shows.)

Of course, the real solution is that someone needs to bring back the genuine article. Actually, the Colt Magnum Carry would be a good place to start if anyone were to ask me. My friends are all hoping this will happen soon. They're getting real tired of my drinking their beer and asking the inevitable question, "Does anybody remember the six-shot snubby?"

# 16

## The Saga Continues

**LITTLE DID I KNOW WHEN** I started this book with a story about DEA and revolvers that I'd be ending it with a story about DEA and revolvers. One of my old DEA colleagues told me about this incident, and when he learned I was writing a book about the snubby, he mailed me the related newspaper clippings. In truth, I could not have found a better example of the little five-shot in action. But more to the point, as you shall see, it is people, not guns, who win gunfights.

The following is a paraphrased version of a 31 December 2000 report in the *Chicago Sun-Times* (written about two weeks after the shooting, when the details became clearer).

• • •

It was the day after Chicago was hit with a



foot of snow. Trains were running late, and crowds were milling about Union station throughout the day. A DEA agent was working special detail with an Amtrak investigator and a Chicago police officer when they became suspicious of two Amtrak passengers.

The team agreed to approach the men (Daniel Wentworth and Andrew Ross) and question them after they stepped off in Chicago around 1 P.M. for a layover.

The DEA agent approached Wentworth when he walked into the station concourse. Wentworth began to open his jacket, revealing a pistol and alarming the Amtrak investigator and the police officer standing a few feet away.

"Gun!" the Amtrak investigator yelled.

The Amtrak investigator and the Chicago officers grappled with Wentworth and wrestled him to the ground. Wentworth pressed a .40-caliber Glock to the back of the police officer's head as the Amtrak investigator held the muzzle of the gun, sources said.

"Back off, or I will blow her f—— head off!" Wentworth allegedly said.

The police officer managed to hit a button that ejected Wentworth's ammunition clip, leaving only one bullet in the chamber, sources said.

As his friend struggled on the floor, Ross pulled his own Glock and scuffled with the DEA agent . . .

• • •

*Chicago Tribune* (14 December 2000):

A federal agent emptied his five-shot revolver at one suspect in Tuesday's shootout at Chicago's Union Station, picked up that man's gun after he fell

wounded to the floor, and then shot and killed a second suspect who had a weapon pointed at another officer, law enforcement sources said Wednesday.

• • •

*Chicago Sun-Times* (14 December 2000):

In the deadly gun battle at Union Station, a federal drug agent faced the situation of a lifetime. His five-shot pistol was out of bullets after he had wounded one gunman, but just feet away, a second gunman had a .40-caliber Glock trained at the head of a Chicago police officer. The quick-thinking federal agent grabbed the gun of the wounded man and used it to shoot and kill the second gunman, authorities said Wednesday.

• • •

*Portland Press Herald* (15 December 2000):

. . . A DEA agent emptied his five-shot revolver into him [Wentworth], then used Wentworth's gun to kill Ross, who authorities say was holding the gun to the head of the Chicago police officer. It was all over in a few seconds.

• • •

All of the news accounts agree that the two bad guys were both wearing body armor and were armed with .40-caliber Glocks and an undisclosed number of spare magazines. Obviously, they had considered the possibility of a shootout. And yet neither of them fired a shot, even though at one point during the confrontation they had their guns drawn and pointed at the officers. We might say that they were prepared but they weren't willing. Not so the DEA agent, whose intensive training gave him the mind-set and

the skills to do what needed to be done. As I read through the details of how this gunfight unfolded, I couldn't help but think that it could serve as a veritable checklist for Jeff Cooper's *Principles of Personal Defense*.

And so the five-shot snubby continues to write its own impressive history. For many of us, it is the bottom line in defensive handgun selection. It is the perfect combination of size, weight, power, concealability, and reliability. Street tough and combat proven. As I write this, it is comforting to know that the saga of the snubby continues.



## About the Author

Ed Lovette is a retired CIA paramilitary operations officer. He was also a captain in the U.S. Army Special Forces and is a 10-year law enforcement veteran. He has a long association with *Combat Handguns* magazine for which he currently writes the "Last Shots" column. He and his wife live in Laurinburg, North Carolina, with their two dogs and the occasional houseful of grandkids.