IS THE .45 ACP PAST ITS PRIME?

SWAT

SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS

"FOR THE PREPARED AMERICAN"

JULY 1987

FDC 51074

U.S. $2.95

CAN. $3.95

COLT'S 9mm Suppressed Submachine Gun

GEO AND UEI Spain's Antiterrorist Elites

THE DELTA ELITE 10mm Auto Pistol

STRESS SHOOTING

RUGER'S MINI-14'S RIFLES FOR ALL APPLICATIONS

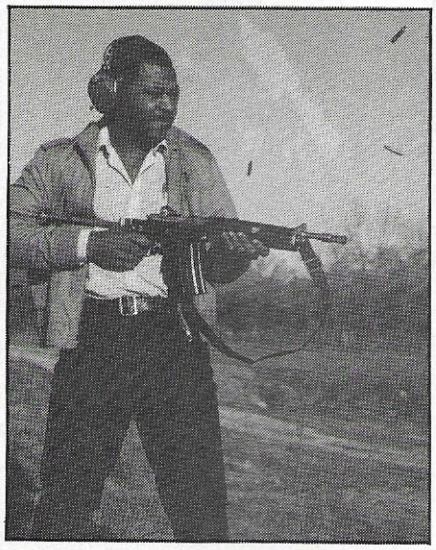
THE KNIFE THAT SHOOTS

07

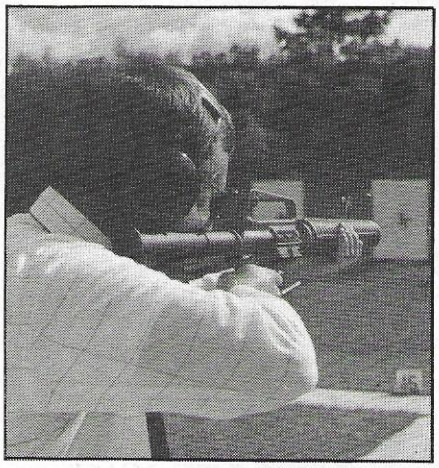
0 71658 51074 6

SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS

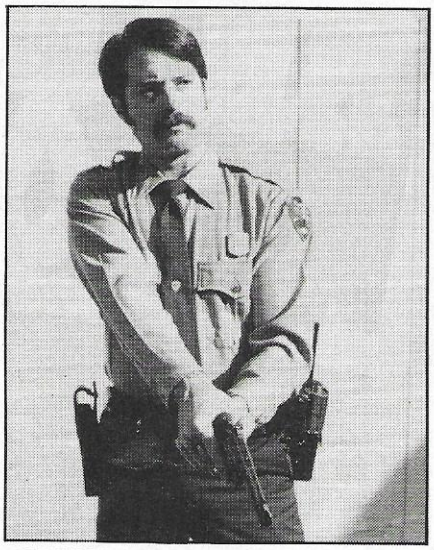
JULY 1987
VOLUME 6, NO. 7



RUGER'S MINI-14'S 22



COLT'S 9mm SUPPRESSED SUBMACHINE GUN 40



SERVICE REVOLVER 52

THE LINEUP

DEPARTMENTS

MODERN TECHNIQUES for the SERVICE REVOLVER

PART I

Combat shooting over the last twenty years has made remarkable strides, both in equipment and technique. This progress is most readily seen in activities such as I.P.S.C. matches and other stress type shooting events. Schools advancing this modern technique are accessible to nearly every motivated law enforcement officer. Probably most notable among these facilities is Jeff Cooper's American Pistol Institute. Yet with A.P.I., as well as most of the other reputable advanced training facilities, the emphasis is on the combat semiauto (usually Govt. model), and here is where most uniformed American police officers are left behind.

Like it or not, the vast majority of the United States' and Canadian law enforcement officers are saddled with the double action revolver, some form of uniform service holster, belt and other related gear. Custom-tuned combat autos and exotic (albeit functional) accouterments are simply unavailable options, ruled out by departmental policy.

This article will attempt to share various techniques and training points which can help maximize revolver handling efficiency in a manner consistent with the modern technique and its goals of *power, speed and accuracy.*

Prerequisite for efficient pistol handling is a weapon that fits properly in the shooter's hand. This point is probably one of the most overlooked in contemporary

by Paul Berkowitz

police revolver handling. If the revolver doesn't fit the grip of the individual shooter, he or she is handicapped from the start. Small hands call for small stocks. Likewise, large hands may call for oversized stocks with extra material covering the backstrap. One revolver with factory stocks will no more fit a wide range of men and women than will one pair of shoes. And like shoes, stocks should be selected by-and-for the individual, with fit and comfort in mind.

Proper fit of the stocks and revolver calls for the weapon to be gripped so that the barrel extends directly in line with the forearm, with the recoiling edge of the grip frame, or recoil shoulder placed against the web of the hand. Simultaneously, the first joint of the index finger should rest fully against the strong side, forward edge of the trigger, allowing plenty of leverage to pull the trigger by flexing only at the index finger, middle joint. As you pull the trigger, there should be no flexing of the index finger knuckle. Flexing at the knuckle results in pushing or pulling the weapon from side to side and is an indication that the stocks are too small. In this instance the stocks should be replaced with others that expand the trigger reach, by placing extra material over the backstrap. Where hands are small, the shooter may be better off with stocks that leave the backstrap exposed. In extreme instances, hand and finger reach may be so small that a smaller-framed weapon should be selected.

SEE PHOTO #1

While a revolver's stocks should fit the hand properly, they should also, by design, encourage or at least allow the shooter to grip the stocks at the highest possible point. I call this "Choking" the grip and its purpose is two-fold:

1) Recoil forces of the exiting bullet and powder are directed rearward, straight in line with the barrel. By gripping the weapon at the highest point possible, we tend to minimize the amount of muzzle flip experienced. Ideally, we would grip the weapon directly behind the barrel, eliminating any pivoting of the weapon and resultant muzzle rise as the weapon recoils. This same principle is utilized in modern rifle designs, such as the M-16 where the shoulder stock is directly in line with the barrel. Since present day pistol design precludes this, we should attempt the next best thing which is to choke the grip as high up as possible.

2) With contemporary police handgun design, some muzzle flip is inevitable. With this muzzle flip (and recoil), especially with revolvers and their arched gripping surfaces, there is a resultant tendency for the stocks to be pushed down further and further into the gripping hand(s) with each shot fired. This is, particularly, so with most stock designs which flare out at the bottom. The net result is that the shooter, who begins firing with a low positioned grip, will likely end up a string of fired service loads with a grip higher than that with which he or she started—AND a different pointing angle of the weapon. This all means that from shot to shot the revolver tends to be fired from a different grip and pointing angle. Such inconsistency in grip and angle must inevitably have a detrimental effect on practical accuracy. The solution to this problem is, therefore, to initially hold the revolver stocks with the highest possible grip so that as the gun is repeatedly slammed into the hand with each shot, it has no further place to go. Hence . . . "Choking" the grip.

SEE PHOTOS #2,7,8

There are basically two ways to ensure a consistent and proper high grip. One is to utilize stocks which incorporate some form of finger ridges. These ridges serve as index or reference points for the fingers and also offer resistance to the stocks being pushed further and further down into the hand with recoil and muzzle flip. Unfortunately, however, most such stock designs place the ridges too low, compelling a grip which is suboptimal, by locating the hand lower than necessary in relation to the barrel. As noted earlier, this tends to create more muzzle flip than need exist.

Another alternative is to utilize conventional nonridged stocks, but ensure that they are always

grasped with the highest possible grip. This is accomplished by indexing the grip via placement of the middle finger—middle joint—leading edge firmly against the highest underside portion of the stocks. When so gripped, the middle finger—middle joint—will practically be touching the rear outside portion of the trigger guard. You know you have an optimal grip when the weapon can be shoved no further into your shooting hand by either recoil or manually applied forces.

It is worth pointing out that choking the grip is more important with a revolver than with most semiautos. They tend to have flat and consistently angled stock designs, so that while a low grip may not be optimal for managing muzzle flip, the pointing angle will still be the same as it would with a high grip. But with the revolver, as placement of the grip changes from low to high, the effective pointing angle DOES change from low to high also.

The important point here, then, is to hold the stocks at the highest possible point from the onset (as you acquire your grip with the revolver still in the holster), and to maintain that same grip as you shoot, reload and on through, until you place the weapon back in the holster.

SEE PHOTOS #3 THRU 8

The type and make holster you wear may or may not be dictated by departmental policy. If you are locked into a specific model you have to make do as best you can. Hopefully, it is of proper design and lends itself to efficient technique. If you have more flexibility and can more or less pick your own, there are still several key points to consider.

The first decision to make (if you have the choice) is between top-draw and breakfront design. The breakfronts are a relatively new concept, introduced primarily with weapon security in mind. Some of the older designs, as well as some contemporary models, carry the retention idea in the wrong direction by completely covering the back of the trigger guard with thick leather or plastic.

This, completely, precludes acquisition of a proper shooting grip while the gun is in the holster. Most of the bugs have been worked out of the new designs and some, such as the Nelson and Hoyt, are really quite good. They allow for acquisition of a full shooting grip from the holster, have well designed thumb-break safety straps, and, unless tampered with, perform reasonably in their claimed role of securing the gun.

All breakfront holsters, however, have several serious weaknesses. First, they are particularly vulnerable to spring tampering. Of the approximately 120 officers whose firearms use and training I supervise, about half are carrying breakfront design holsters. Out of these, I seize about five to ten annually from officers who have tampered with the springs in an effort to loosen up their holsters retention ability and supposedly speed their draw. This happens in spite of emphatic instructions not to tamper with the springs. Once so tampered or sprung, they are no longer safe to even hold the weapon and must be removed from service. We replace them, now, with less vulnerable top-draw models. Most all breakfront designs rely upon factory preset spring tension to make them work. They are more a machine than are

top-draw models. As such, they have that much more to go wrong.

SEE PHOTO #9

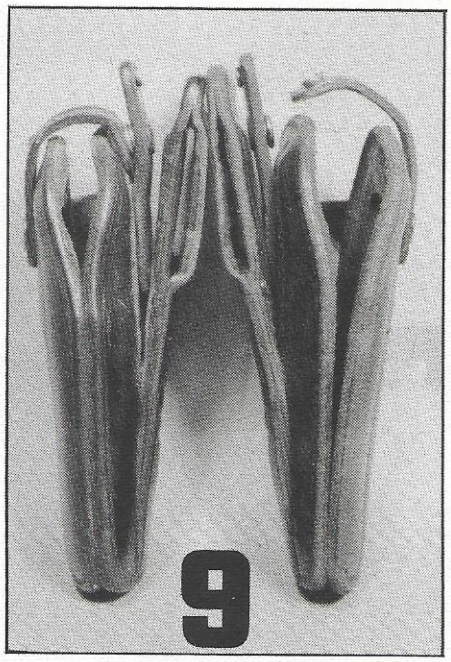
The second factor to consider in breakfront designs is the need to overcome spring tension resistance to bring the revolver out of the holster. This translates into a certain loss of immediate control of the weapon after it breaks spring tension and is swinging forward with momentum. While generally not a major problem, it is, nevertheless, an unnecessary obstacle to overcome. Additionally, there are occasions, such as when seated in a patrol car or in other confined settings, when that brief uncontrolled swing of the weapon out of the holster could prove a serious, if not lethal, handicap.

A third (albeit debatable), weakness of the breakfront designs is that they are really not any more snatch resistant than a well designed top-draw model. Both types require that the safety strap be snapped, if they are to perform their retention task. If neither type is kept snapped, and if officer affected retention techniques are not used, then it's just a question of the bad guy pulling forward versus pulling up.

With few exceptions, where police defensive equipment is concerned, simpler is better. And it's hard to conceive of a more simple or efficient holster design than the conventional top-draw. Some modern police top-draw holsters, and in particular the Davis line, now incorporate adjustable tension screw mechanisms which augment the already present safety strap, gravity and friction weapon security system.

Whether using a top-draw or breakfront design holster, certain wearing and use techniques can be assimilated to make the best of what you've got:

First, consider the positioning (location) of the holster on your duty belt. When standing with arms hanging limp, most will find their hands placed slightly forward of their hips or roughly over their front pants pockets. As you raise your arms using minimal effort and minimal motion or body contortion, you will find your



hands follow a path immediately over (if not just slightly forward of), your hip joint with wrists more or less straight (i.e., not bent or twisted). I.P.S.C. shooters have noted this and more and more utilize holsters which place their weapons with muzzles canted forward and stocks "waiting" in this natural grasping position. If speed is a goal, and we accept the notion that speed comes most easily through fluid and efficient movement, then it makes sense to position the duty holster in the same position. The result is a somewhat unconventional looking, but very fast and efficient holster design. Its use precludes the need to break or bend the wrist upon initially grasping the stocks, when the weapon is in the holster. It, also, practically eliminates the need for strong side shoulder contortion, attendant with traditional F.B.I. tilt designs. Other added benefits of this design are that the weapon muzzle is always pointed downrange, so that it need never cross over the shooter's body plane. Also, its use, while seated, is moderately comfortable. Weapon retention techniques are fully compatible as a result of the improved downward leverage the officer can exert with the weapon in this position.

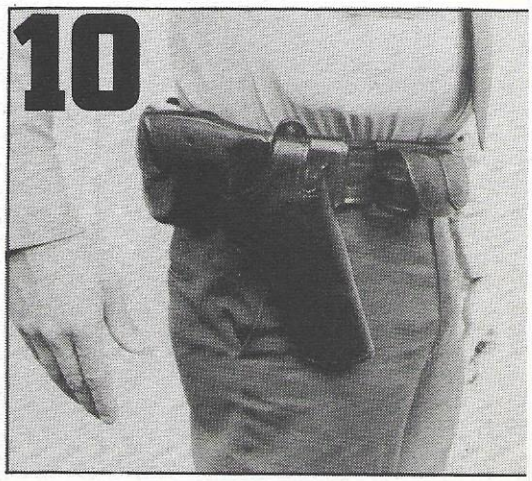
Davis Leather Company of Walnut, California, manufactures a custom-ordered holster, incorporating these design features, which has proven very popular. The holster is a modified version of their 3570BP incorporating their standard thumb-break safety strap, jacket slot, muzzle plug, rear sight protector, adjustable tension device, as well as the custom specified ten degree muzzle forward cant.

SEE PHOTO #10

A notable obstacle to proper weapon acquisition, or gripping of the revolver while in the holster, is misuse of the thumb-snap safety strap. All too often officers take the terminology literally and break the snap in a separate and distinct motion with the tip of their shooting hand thumb. As a result, time is wasted and the shooting hand is positioned too low on the stocks for efficient control of muzzle flip or consistent shot-to-shot pointing angle. The officer must then either proceed with a sub-optimal grip, or, waste more precious time regripping the stocks during the presentation sequence.

All of this is unnecessary, however, if the shooter will simply learn to use that portion of the thumb between the knuckle and the joint to separate or SPLIT the snap while simultaneously acquiring the noted high shooting grip, with the web of the hand positioned as high as possible on the recoil shoulder. This thumb placement encourages an optimal grip, at the same time eliminating the need for a separate snapping effort while grasping the stocks. Repeated practice with this technique will convince even skeptics that it is no slower to draw the *snapped in* weapon than one with

(Continued on page 68)



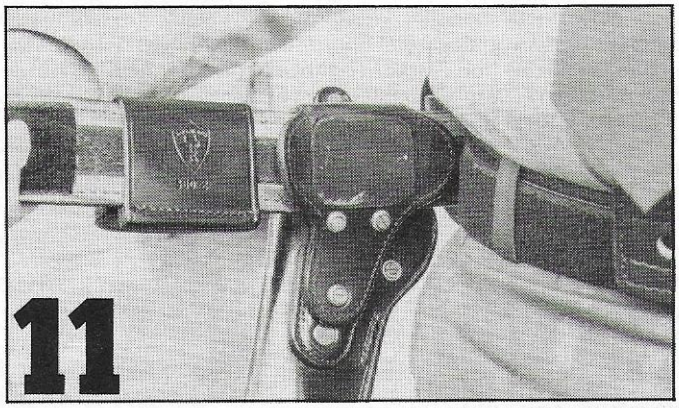
MODERN TECHNIQUES FOR THE SERVICE REVOLVER

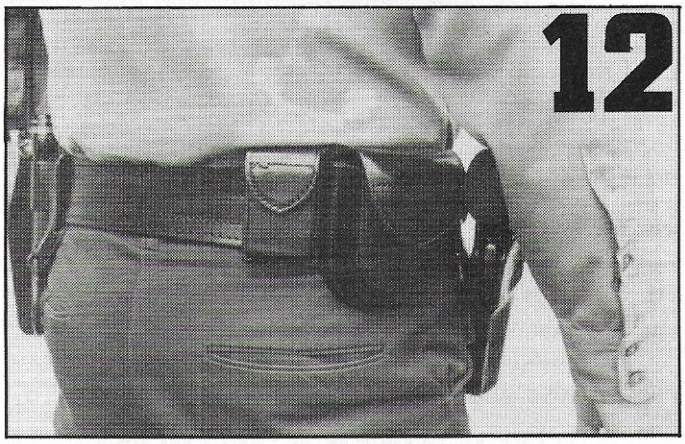
(Continued from page 55)

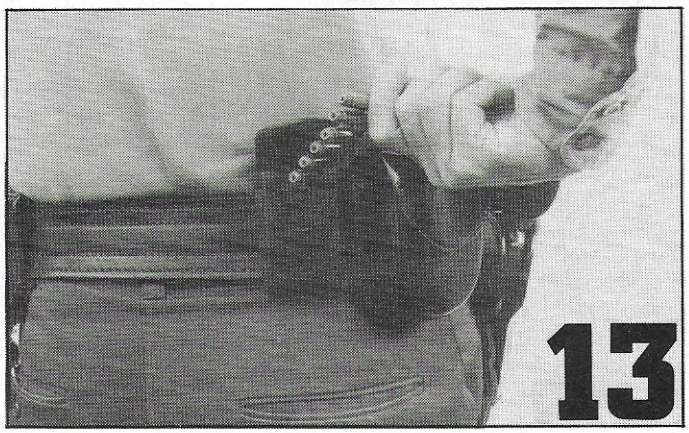
the safety strap already unsnapped or not utilized to begin with. A side benefit of this lesson is the elimination of the compulsion to unsnap the safety strap when approaching potential danger. The safety strap can remain snapped to perform its designed weapon retention task until the instant the officer decides to pull the weapon from the holster, with absolutely no loss of speed or facility.

SEE PHOTOS #3 & 4

No matter what type of holster is on a duty belt or its location, its use will be impeded if it is not located in *precisely the same position* every time you reach for your weapon. Breakfront holsters, in particular, are notorious for shifting and sliding around on the belt when the weapon is drawn. However, top-draw models, too, are subject to some slipping either on the duty belt or, perhaps, as a unit with the duty belt, lifting off of the inner belt as the weapon is pulled up.







There are two easily applied methods to remedy this problem. One is to ensure that keepers are securely positioned immediately fore and aft of the holster. This is more effective with top-draw models than breakfronts. A second (and *I* think better), solution is to apply hook and pile (or Velcro™, to cite one brand name) materials to that portion of the holster which normally contacts the inner belt. It's important to use one of the new cyanoacrylate ester super-type glues, specifically formulated for use with leather. Naturally, it helps to have an already piled inner belt such as Safariland's lined Model 99, but if necessary, the pile side of the Velcro strip can be glued and/or stitched onto most any other duty inner belt, as well. This method can be applied to other duty accessories, also, making for an extremely firm and adhesive arrangement without use of any keepers, whatsoever.

SEE PHOTO #11

Often overlooked in police revolver training is what has been termed the tactical reload. This is distinguished from the speed reload in that the shooter recharges the revolver with less than the six rounds called for with speed loaders. The tactical reload, as its name implies, is performed from behind cover during a lull in the shooting. This is done as a means of replacing spent rounds before the weapon is shot dry. It equates to replacing a partially spent magazine in a semiautomatic with a full one, as a means of keeping the weapon in optimal condition in preparation for a continued fight.

The tactical reload, when properly applied, makes a great deal of sense in light of statistics which cite the average police shooting incident expending only two to three rounds. Ironically, however, most police officers are equipped to perform either a speed reload OR a tactical reload, but generally not both, thereby limiting their tactical options in a gun fight. The officer who carries ONLY speed loaders is committed to recharging the cylinder with a full six rounds. If less ammunition has been fired, the shooter is forced to either eject and waste live rounds or take precious time and attention away from the combat matter at hand and sort through ejected casings and rounds to separate the two. Likewise, the officer who carries only dump boxes or ammunition loops is faced with a needlessly slow reloading process if the entire cylinder is shot dry.

Fortunately, it takes up very little space on the duty belt to augment carried equipment with either a single speedloader or single dump box with speed strip. Additionally, there are a wide variety of such products available which maintain a very low profile, reducing the need to appear as though the officer is a walking armory. Another option which I have yet to see manufactured is keepers which incorporate two or three loops for carrying as many rounds of ammunition. This would very effectively augment routinely carried speedloaders, and could be very easily and unobtrusively carried on the belt in-between more bulky items.

SEE PHOTOS #12 & 13