

Law Enforcement Session

Stress Survival Tactics

Cinda A. Brooks, *Game Warden Training Academy, 100 West 50th Street, Austin, TX 78751*

Abstract: Stress Survival Tactics is a program developed as part of an officer survival in-service program for Texas Game Wardens. This paper presents a training technique that works well when dealing with the emotion-laden issue of survival stress or critical incident stress. Hormones released in a survival situation have a tremendous effect on emotions, sensory perceptions, psychomotor skills, and on one's ability to process information. Stress Survival Tactics mentally, psychologically, and physically prepares officers to train for a survival situation such as a use-of-force situation. A critical incident can be any incident, personal or professional, that pushes one to the limit and challenges the ability to endure. Mental rehearsal and preparation is a technique that can be used to prepare for an incident before it occurs. Mental implementation involves recognizing the changes that occur to the mind and body in a high stress situation and channeling these changes to the officer's favor rather than to his demise. Critical incident stress management prepares officers for the trauma of the aftermath by presenting the stages that a person commonly struggles through following a critical incident. Instruction and advice is provided by peers who have "been there" using videotaped interviews of game wardens who have experienced critical incident stress in their jobs.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 50:644-658

The theme for Southeastern's Golden Anniversary is "Fifty Years of Learning—Fifty Years of Understanding." During these 50 years we have made great progress in the development of training programs for conservation officers. The survival of our officers and our agencies depends to a great extent on good training programs that are based on current sound scientific findings and are adapted to specifically fit our profession. Our officers are now better equipped and trained than anytime in history. We are providing them with the tools, knowledge, and the skills to do the ever changing and ever expanding job of a conservation officer; but are we equipping our officers to survive the onslaught of threats from the emotional and psychological front?

In this paper, the Stress Survival Tactics (SST) training program (Brooks 1995b) will be presented along with the training model it is based on. This program was developed to prepare Texas Game Wardens to handle survival level stress before it happens, while it is happening, and then to deal with the aftermath. The intention is

to present a training technique that can be utilized by other states to prepare their conservation officers to deal with survival stress. The way an officer deals with the aftermath of a highly stressful situation can be as deadly to a person or a career as a knife or a bullet—it's just slower and not as easily recognized and therefore dealt with. It is much easier to develop training programs to teach knowledge and skills, but the area of emotional or psychological well-being is not as easily or as often addressed. As conservation officers we will at some time in our careers face critical incident stress if not in our jobs, certainly in our role as parent, spouse, friend, child, or peer.

In the area of stress survival, science has taught us a lot about how people react under extremely high levels of stress, and we are beginning to change the way we prepare our officers. When an officer faces high level stress, such as in a use of force situation, experience has shown that an officer's ability to perceive and process information is very different than in a low stress training environment.

If an officer were just a reservoir of all the skills learned throughout his or her career, the officer's behavior would be somewhat predictable when faced with a real field situation. The simplicity of "single direction of change" thinking where focus is on the skill and the behavior alone doesn't explain the disparity between classroom performance and the dynamics of scenario training or actual situations. Behind those skills and uniform is a man or woman with feelings, fears, preconceived ideas, attitudes, and perceptions that could be a hinderance in dealing with or recovering from a critical incident. The Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977) is a model that helps us to understand the dynamics that affect behavior and to develop more effective training programs to address the needs outlined in this paper. An underlying concept of Social Learning Theory is that behavior change is a dynamic interaction between the person, environment, and the behavior. These 3 components are constantly interacting. Training programs that influence only 1 of these areas will influence the other 2, but the most effective programs that produce lasting change will address all 3 areas.

This model where training is designed to affect the person, the environment, and the skills, was utilized in developing the SST Program. The SST program was part of a 2-day officer survivor course and utilized a combination of lectures, practical skill building, and videotaped interviews. First of all the SST program prepares the "person" by explaining what happens to a one's mind and body during and following a critical incident. Adrenalin and other hormones that are released when faced with high level stress greatly impact emotions, sensory perceptions, and one's ability to process information. It has been shown that people can tolerate and function at higher levels of stress if they know what to expect and can maintain a perception that they have some control over what is happening. If an officer does not realize that these are normal reactions to an abnormal situation, it can cause a significant amount of avoidable secondary trauma and slow the recovery process. Finally, SST prepares the environment or the officer's support system, such as peers, by letting them know what happens during and following a critical incident so that they can better understand what is happening and assist in the recovery process.

Since stress is not the event itself, but a person's perception of that event (Blod-

gett 1989), it is vital that a stress management program deal with perception. An effective way to deal with the emotion laden issue of critical incident stress is to have someone that has “been there” to teach it. The experts call it vicarious learning—we learn from the lessons of others (Bandura 1977). Videotaped interviews of game wardens who have faced critical incidents in their jobs are interspersed throughout the program to enable this peer instruction to take place. Based on this training model, a presentation of the course in the form of the course lesson plan follows (Brooks 1995b).

Stress Survival Tactics Lesson Plan

The goals of the Stress Survival Tactics Course are:

1. Explore ways to mentally prepare and rehearse use of force tactics
2. Examine what happens physically, emotionally and psychologically to a person during and following a critical incident
3. Explore ways to prepare and assist yourself or someone else cope with a critical incident with a minimum of pain and scarring

Characteristics of survivors

The foremost goal of this training program is survival. It is to help prepare you mentally, physically, and psychologically for surviving every situation you may face. Looking at incidents where people have faced survival stress and faced the reality of a life or death situation there appears to be some common traits about the survivors that made the difference (Mueller 1994). When people face the same set of adversities, some keep fighting and others don't. What makes the difference?

Survival is an attitude. Training gives you skills, but it must be added to the attitude and the confidence that “I will survive no matter what, I will survive every single time.” The will to live is a vital trait. Interviews with survivors indicate that many have made this conscious decision before the survival situation occurred. This attitude and confidence is often developed after the person has faced a physical or mental challenge such as running a marathon, completing boot camp, or going to college.

A factor that appears to be basic to every survivor is the ability to switch game plans. Survivors are able to recognize other options and adjust. A way to illustrate this is to compare life or even an incident requiring escalating use of force to a baseball game. Training teaches you the rules and where the bases should be. However, the bad guy doesn't have to play by the same rules as you. He can move the bases and he doesn't even have to tell you where. But every time you play, you will make a home run—meaning, you will survive to go home to your family. The bad guy may get away, you may get hit, hurt, or cut but you will survive. Success is survival—surviving the immediate threat and survival through the physical and psychological aftermath.

Another common trait is the ability to keep cool under pressure. That doesn't

mean people don't experience fear, but survivors are able to control what is happening to their minds and bodies and to channel these changes to their favor instead of their demise.

Survivors develop and nurture a stable balanced base. This balance can be illustrated as 4 interacting and overlapping areas of a person's life: mind, body, social, and belief system. A survivor ensures that mentally he or she is prepared by ensuring that he obtains and rehearses the knowledge necessary for survival. He develops a self confidence and a survival attitude that becomes deeply ingrained. He learns how to use the mind to control or channel the bodies reaction the body to ensure survival. The mind is the most valuable tool and weapon we have for survival. All the equipment, strength, and techniques in the world are useless if the mind becomes too overwhelmed to process information and choose appropriate options.

Interacting very closely with the mind is the body. Our body is our vehicle through life. Some of us are issued a sports car, others a Mack truck or a bulldozer. Some of us are built better to run, some to haul, and some to play pro football. Our bodies have innate abilities that can only be altered to some extent. Just like the way we maintain our vehicles, our bodies can be developed, toned and cared with proper fuel, rest, and exercise. Given this care, our bodies can be relied on when extreme demands are placed on it. On the other hand, our vehicles can rust and fall into a state of disrepair and may falter when called upon to perform above the ordinary daily performance demands. The benefits of a fit body have positive spin offs in all of the other areas. Cardiovascular fitness, strength, speed, flexibility, and agility are vital in a survival situation both in a brief life or death encounter and for the long haul. A fit person has a higher capacity to endure a challenge to the system—the mind/body system. A survivor learns the physical skills necessary for survival, then mentally and physically rehearses these skills to make them quicker and more efficient.

The social loop is very important to humans and is very strong in the conservation officer profession. Officers tend to socialize with officers, this begins with bonding in the academy and continues to develop as the career progresses. This is a group where there are common experiences and coping strategies, trust, and understanding. These peers can have a very strong influence, negative or positive. Also part of this loop is our family, friends, and community. Peer counseling programs are an effective technique that uses this social support system to assist officers to cope with situations that others may not understand or be able to relate to. It is important to nurture the social part of you because you may need to rely on it some day.

The fourth loop is the belief system. The belief system primarily involves spirituality, your belief in God. Your belief about your family, your profession, and your self are also part of your belief system. This area, not often discussed in training programs, may affect an officer's ability to survive to a great extent. A person who has nurtured this area of his or her life knows what he or she stands for—and stands for it. The Belief System Loop gives meaning to the other 3 loops: social, mind, and body. A balance in all 4 of these areas help to dampen the effects of high level stress and serves as a resource in combating life's daily stresses.

Effects of Survival Stress

When there is a perceived threat the nervous system and hormonal system, using adrenalin and a cocktail of other hormones, create drastic changes in all body systems. The heart rate, breathing rate, and blood pressure escalate rapidly. Blood is shunted away from small muscles and nonessential areas to the large muscles. There is a resulting loss of coordination to the smaller muscles which could affect abilities such as trigger pull or radio operation.

Do you remember the first ticket you wrote or your attempt to double lock handcuffs on the first person you had to cuff? The lens of the eye adjusts for distance viewing making it more difficult to focus on rear sights. Blood clots more easily and muscles automatically tense up. A high dose of adrenalin will cause the bladder to empty if it contains over 300 ml (Siddle 1994). This system works well for us. It sharpens our mind and body preparing us for the unknown while the mind is processing information. The elevated heart rate and alerted mind and body can cause changes in the way we perceive and process information. These effects can be described by an inverted "U" shown in Figure 1 (Siddle 1995).

As the heart rate climbs our ability to perform physically and process information improves up to a point then starts dropping off. The fine motor movements deteriorate first, followed by complex motor movements with gross motor movements remaining functional at high levels of stimulation if the mind is still processing.

Siddle (1995) illustrates the effects of escalating heart rate on motor performance, visual processing, and cognitive reaction time (Fig. 2). For example, at 115 beats per minute (BPM) fine motor skills which are required for precision and accuracy deteriorate. When the heart rate exceeds 145 BPM, complex motor skills deteriorate and the visual system begins to narrow which is called tunnel vision. But when the heart rate exceeds 175 BPM, an officer can expect to experience auditory changes, loss of peripheral vision, and depth perception. The officer may then experience catastrophic failure of the cognitive processing capabilities leading to fatal increases in reaction time or hypervigilance. Hypervigilance is freezing in place or repetitive irrational behavior. Our declining ability to mentally process information in a use of force situation appears to be directly related to the escalating heart rate. A fit person is able to perform the same level of exertion as an unfit person but with a lower heart rate (Katch et al. 1986). This is another way that fitness is related to survival. It is vital for an officer to be able to control heart rate and degree of arousal to remain in a state where he or she can process information and react appropriately.

A brief look at how our memory works shows that learning and memory are directly related to the connections between the neurons of the brain. When the brain is exposed to a new stimulus or experience, a complex pattern of neurons are activated which is known as a program (Siddle 1995). This program is slower when the experience is new. With repetition the response time becomes faster. While learning a psychomotor skill, a picture is developed in the mind's eye using words. It has been said that a picture says 1,000 words. In an emergency we take that picture and put it into action without a lot of words. Repetition makes this picture clearer and it can

Inverted “U” & Performance

Affects of Heart Rate on Physical Performance

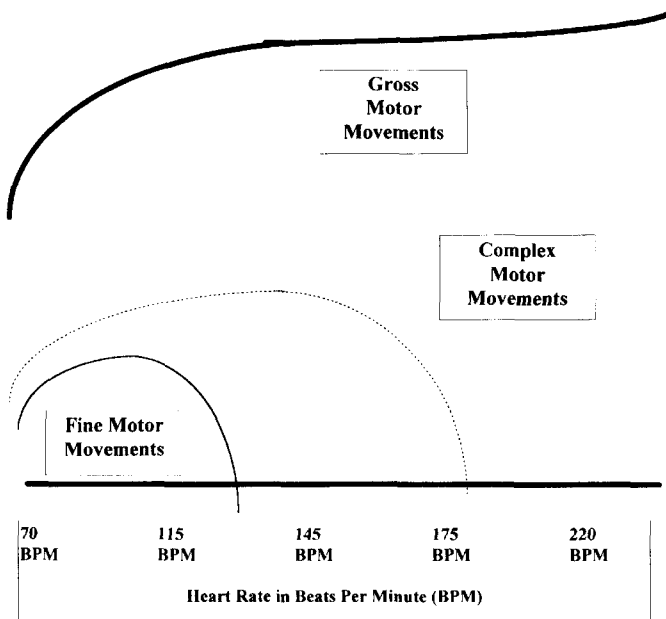


Figure 1. The affect of heart rate on physical performance during a stressful incident (taken from Siddle 1995). Note the inverted “U” on the affect to fine and complex motor skills and, to a lesser extent, to gross motor movements.

almost become automatic given a stimulus that has been faced either in experience, in training scenarios, or with mental rehearsal. This “mind’s eye” is the cerebellum, which is the portion of the brain where memories of frequently practiced behavior are stored. It coordinates the movements in a psychomotor skill (Topper 1994). This portion of the brain is at work when you drive home from work and you can let your mind drift to other things. You respond almost automatically to the visual cues and become consciously aware only if something out of the ordinary happens. The cerebellum allows you to react to an imminent collision even before the conscious mind is fully aware of a problem. Psychomotor skills such as defensive tactics or firearms techniques need to be programmed so that this can happen. An understanding of these concepts will give you a better understanding of how the techniques in SST work.

The SST Program is divided into 3 sections: mental preparation, mental implementation, and critical incident stress. Mental preparation is the preparation that

Heart Rate Affects On Survival & Combat Performance

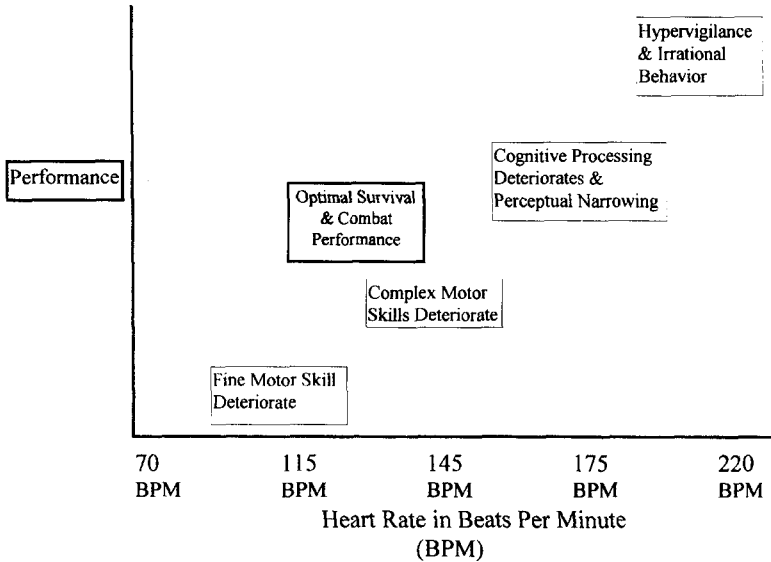


Figure 2. The affect of escalating heart rate on motor performance, visual processing, and cognitive reaction time (taken from Siddle 1995).

should occur before a critical incident such as a use of force situation. Mental implementation is a technique of using your mind to control what is happening to your body, while the incident is occurring, and channeling these changes to help rather than hinder. Critical Incident Stress Management is a set of techniques to use to survive emotional, psychological, and physical aftermath, after the dust has settled and everyone has gone home.

Mental Preparation

Mental preparation should happen on daily basis. You must ensure that your mind is programmed for survival. Take a look at your picture stored in your emergency file on physical fights and gun fights. These pictures should be painted very clear in your mind so that given the right cue or stimulus the right response will occur. Probably if you ever have to put this picture into action you will be operating under a large dose of adrenalin and stress. Now, take a look at some of your initial programming. Did you play cowboys and Indians when you were a kid? What happened when you got shot? You might have groaned, hollered, flopped, and twitched a bit, but 1 shot

and you were dead—right? If that programming is in your picture even if it was painted long ago—it's time to change that. There is a likely chance that if you get into a situation requiring use of force, you will get hit, cut, or shot. It is important that you prepare your mind and body for this and program it so that you will survive—it will make a difference.

Now look specifically at your picture on gunfights. A typical gunfight, if there is such a thing, lasts 3 seconds, and there are 2.8 shots fired from 5 to 12 feet (Walker 1993). That is not much time to process options, so your picture better be painted right because a lot is going to happen automatically in a short amount of time. The way you train is probably pretty close to the way you will respond. Is your picture painted with an "X ring" shot? "X-ring" shots take a lot of time requiring time to focus on the sights. When your picture is put into action your sights will be fuzzy because your attention is going to be acutely focused on the threat (Topper 1994). Common mistakes made in training are to start a firing sequence with the pistol unsnapped, no verbal commands, no time limits on firing sequences, and firing every time the weapon is drawn. Adrenalin is good for helping us to escalate, but it doesn't help us to de-escalate. If during training, you pull the trigger every time you draw the weapon it could be an automatic action even if the violator has complied.

Mental preparation involves mental rehearsal. In a gunfight, 2 triggers must be pulled. One of these you've been trained extensively to pull: the one on your weapon. Before this can happen you have to pull the one in your mind. In other words you have to be sure that when it comes time, you are willing to pull that trigger. You can't wait until the gunfight to struggle with that issue. If you have already dealt with that during mental rehearsal, your response time will be much faster. Mental rehearsal allows the opportunity to "experience" escalating and de-escalating use of force, verbal commands, sight picture, calling for back-up, seeking cover, and use of deadly force. Learning by actual experience is too rare and can be too expensive on life and limb. Mental rehearsal is the technique you can use to program your mind and body so that it can respond faster.

You can use mental rehearsal to train your mind when you are out "10-8" at night on a hilltop watching for spot lighters. Your coffee is gone, and there is no action. In your mind, imagine a scenario that will require use-of-force. Work through it step by step with detail. For example, you are checking a group of fishermen for licenses and the situation deteriorates. Imagine what your response will be. Picture yourself issuing verbal commands, seeking cover, calling for backup. Imagine scanning constantly during the contact to counteract the tunnel vision. Imagine escalating up the force continuum to the point of your drawing and firing your weapon. You are programming in your mind that you will do this if necessary. Try different scenarios with different threats and change the number, sex, size, and race of assailants. It's important that you change scenarios so that you will have "experienced" in your mind as many different possibilities as possible. Imagine yourself getting hit or cut but still fighting and surviving. One thing in all the scenarios will be constant: you will survive no matter what. Make that conscious decision, and program it over and over in your mind.

Mental rehearsal is a technique that allows to integrate your self defense and survival skills with department policies and the laws of your state and country. This must be done before an incident happens to ensure that a given stimulus or cue, triggers the right response on your part and is not delayed by thoughts or hesitation that could have been handled earlier. Hesitation could make the difference between life and death.

Mental Implementation

Mental implementation involves recognizing the physical and psychological forces that affect you while facing a threat and channeling them to your favor and survival. It's controlling what is happening so that you can keep your mind operating and processing instead of reaching blind panic. The technique involves using your mind to make a conscious effort to slow and deepen your breathing which will control the amount of adrenalin release. You can keep your heart rate from escalating as high which will reduce the amount of tunnel vision and the degree of deterioration of fine motor movements and mental processing functions (Siddle 1995). There are many ways to accomplish this technique. You can practice the technique by breathing in slowly while counting to 2, then slowly exhaling while counting to 4. Another technique is to repeat a word slowly while breathing deeply such as "calm."

Another useful technique is to utilize your inner voice to assist you in controlling your mind and body. This is the voice you talk to yourself with. Use it, tell yourself to slow down, and tell yourself you're handling the situation. This inner voice can help you when the situation is unfolding as well as help or hinder you in the recovery process. Use it to your advantage.

The use of both mental preparation and mental implementation techniques will ensure that the correct shooting reflex, defensive tactic, or other response is triggered by a certain set of circumstances. Some scenarios may require de-escalating and controlling with just verbal commands, but adrenaline tells your body to escalate. Mental implementation techniques will give you a calmer mind and body so that there will be room for rational thought and judgment. Use your brain to train. It is your most valuable weapon in your arsenal.

Force Continuum Practicum

The force continuum practicum was done at the end of the skills training portion of an officer survival training course. During the course game wardens had training and practice in defensive tactics, expandable baton, and handcuffing skills along with a program that explains how these integrate with policies and laws related to the force continuum. The game wardens were asked to demonstrate their skills in a scenario where they contact a well padded instructor posing as a violator. The scenario was videotaped and shown to the class to demonstrate the effects of stress on the ability to perform as well as provide them some feedback on their techniques. In the following scenarios look for the officers verbal commands, power generation, use of distance, judgment in escalating and de-escalating use of force, and use of angles. The scenarios are specifically chosen to demonstrate the effects of adrenalin. Watch for hypervigilance or "freezing up," inappropriate verbal commands, delayed reaction, and prob-

lems in "proprioception," the "6th sense" that tells you where your body or your weapon is without actually seeing it. This sense at work allows you to go to the bathroom at night without turning the light on. This sense is probably associated with the cerebellum (Topper 1994). Proper distance, a wide stable stance, holding the baton in the right position has to just "feel right" because your mind cannot be crowded with those details when the adrenaline is flowing, this is where cerebellar learning and proprioception comes to work. A person who has learned a new skill and has a new piece of equipment on the gun belt may have difficulty finding it under the influence of adrenalin. Mental and actual practice will remedy this.

Critical Incident Stress

The third part of Stress Survival Tactics is critical incident stress. This is the stress after the dust settles. Our bodies are pretty good at handling stressful situations that are over in a small amount of time but the wear and tear after the event can take a tremendous toll. A critical incident is any situation that causes an unusually strong emotional reaction which has the potential to interfere with an individual's ability to function at the scene or later. (Walker 1993) It can be any incident that disrupts your everyday life and forces you to face death, pain, severe loss, or horror. You may say, "This will never happen to me," but most of us will have to confront personal or professional stresses that may push us to the limit and challenge our individual capacity to endure.

A critical incident for one person may not be for another. There can be contributing factors that affect responses to a critical incident such as past experiences, current stress level, health, psychological associations, degree of fatigue, personal coping strategies, and adequacy of the officer's support system. For example, recovery of a body of a 45-year-old male may not be as stressful as body recovery of a 3-year-old boy that looks like your 3-year-old son. A critical incident could be an assault, serious illness, car accident, loss of a partner or child, or a divorce. It can also be an accumulation of stressors, as one conservation officer said, "It was one rifle pointed at me too many" (Walker 1993).

Although there are many types of critical incidents there are predictable stages that a person works or stumbles through following the incident. People may not experience all the stages and may spend different lengths of time in each stage or may never recover from a critical incident. In order to bring to you an expert that has "been there," interviews with Game Wardens that have experienced critical incident stress on the job is presented to you on videotape. The interviews are divided into the stages that a person generally goes through following a critical incident. A representation of the emotional time line is taken from the Street Survival Seminar attended in 1993 but the stages have been renamed (Walker 1993). The stages are: alarm, impact and recovery from impact, crash, growing and building, and acceptance (Fig. 3).

Stages of Critical Incident Stress

Alarm Stage. The first stage is the alarm stage. This is where your flight, fight, or freeze reaction occurs which is a description of the way your body and mind is put on alert as a result of changes in the nervous and hormonal system. Your heart rate

Critical Incident Stress Emotional Timeline

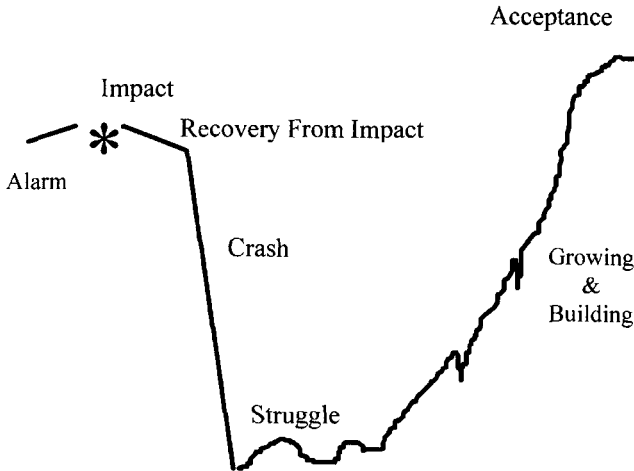


Figure 3. Emotional stages, going through time, of an individual experiencing survival or critical incident stress (Adapted from Remsberg 1993 and Walker 1993).

and breathing increases, blood is shunted to muscles and vital organs causing a deterioration of fine motor movements. The sensation of pain disappears as a result of the release of a morphine like chemical called endorphin. Your senses are keyed up but focused on the threat itself which can cause tunnel vision or perception. This is when you get that “something is not right here” feeling. The experts will introduce themselves and tell you about this stage in the videotape.

Impact and Recovery Stage. This is a 2-part stage that begins when the incident occurs and continues through a period of time which can last hours to several days. This is when the shots are fired, the physical confrontation is occurring, the heart attack is in process, or you’ve just received news of the death of a partner or family member.

During the initial impact of the incident, training and learned procedures will dominate. The picture in the emergency file that you painted in training, mental rehearsal, and experience is pulled out and played. Blood and electrolyte changes cause distortions in thought processes. Time appears to slow down (Topper 1994). A person in a physical confrontation may remember seeing a fist coming to the bridge of his nose inch by inch and wonder why he couldn’t stop it. They remember seeing a bullet enter a person or object in slow motion. An incident lasting seconds may seem to last hours. The incident unfolds in their memory a frame at a time as if watching a slow motion movie.

Although vision is relied on more than any other sense, distortions are very common (Breedlove and Siddle 1995). Tunnel vision—loss of peripheral vision and depth perception—occurs as the heart rate rises above 145 (Siddle 1995). There can

also be a blocking of the memory of what happened (Topper 1994). An officer may have fired rounds and not be aware of it or face a weapon pointed at him at point black range and not be able to remember it. The visual focus is usually acutely on the threat itself. A pistol barrel may appear to be as big as the inside of a coffee cup or an incident may be remembered in black and white instead of color.

Auditory distortions are also common. Sounds can be intensified or muffled. A person may not hear shots fired but remember seeing the smoke and feeling the recoil. An officer that receives a hit may remember it being as loud as a drum but other sounds are muffled.

Thought processes can range from rational thought to blind panic. During a confrontation a person may remember a verbal exchange going on in his head as he processed information and weighed the choices. Some people remember phrases they were exposed to during training. It is common to clearly visualize your family as you face the reality of a life or death situation.

It is important to understand that the changes are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. An awareness of these changes may help you in the recovery process and be useful information if you have to testify to defend your actions in court. These perceptual changes could affect the accuracy of a witness' statement in a hunting or boat accident investigation. A person may have difficulty describing the color of clothing or remembering the number of shots fired. It is especially important to avoid writing a report during this time when there may be perceptual changes and memory blocking. As the mind and body recovers, the memory will probably return with frame by frame accuracy (Remsberg 1993).

During the recovery stage, the body must recover from the effects of the adrenalin surge before the mind will begin to recover (Walker 1993). The mind will stay in a state of denial interspersed with periods of panic or fear. The mind will say "I'm OK, it's all in a day's work." Physically a person is in a high state because of the stimulant effect of adrenalin and other hormonal changes. A person may experience internal and external shaking, rapid speech, muscular weakness, appetite changes, difficulty sleeping, nausea, dizziness, a feeling of unrealness, or swinging or inappropriate emotions such as anger, crying, or laughter as they are recovering. A person may be on this high for several days. During this time a person is very sensitive to criticism and other people's opinions of how he reacted. Armchair quarterbacking is important for us to learn from the experiences of others but this should be done with caution if in front of someone recovering from a critical incident.

This stage is notorious for secondary trauma which is avoidable stress brought on by the actions of peers, the department, the justice system, or the media (Walker 1993). Investigative procedures, the use of humor, and second guessing can also cause a lot of trauma. An officer that is being investigated feel like they are the bad guy when their gun is taken from them for investigative purposes.

The Crash Stage. The crash stage is characterized by confusion. The person goes to the bottom, and is often overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and unrealness and is very sensitive to criticism. This usually occurs 2 to 3 days after the incident but can be delayed by a funeral or court action because of the extended period of busy activity

and support (Walker 1993). Even justifiable use of force can cause these negative effects. A recurring piece of advice from those that have experienced this is to "be there." If you wonder if you should call a friend that is going through this, do. The notes, cards, and calls make the difference.

The Struggle Stage. In struggle stage, the person is at the bottom and struggling. It varies in length from person to person and unfortunately some never do get out of it. An officer must rely on coping strategies and resources to get on towards recovery.

Psychological symptoms cause physical symptoms through the mind body loop or interaction. Common symptoms are anxiety, high blood pressure, change in sex drive, difficulty sleeping, muscle aches, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and a loss of enthusiasm (Walker 1993). Nightmares may occur, which is the subconscious mind dealing with what the conscious mind won't or cannot deal with. Common nightmares for officers may be a gun barrel that is bent in a U shape and pointing back at the officer, or shooting a weapon and seeing the bullets drop out the end of the barrel. Flashbacks are a little different. They are often triggered by a sight, sound, or smell that occurred with the original incident. A person experiencing a flashback relives the incident as if they were there, they cannot distinguish reality from the memory. An officer can remain stuck in this stage by getting into an addiction loop. An officer, instead of facing his problems and emotions, may numb them with alcohol, drugs, or food. An officer may distance himself from significant others and will often lash out verbally or physically at those who are close to him.

Growing and Building Stage. The reality of coping is that how you deal with the event is more important to coping than the event itself (Blodgett 1989). A good coping strategy is to listen to the inner language or voice and make sure it is positive and realistic. Be sure that you are not judging your actions frame by frame when you did not have the benefit of time or the facts when the impact was occurring. Stay positive. Look at your resources and use them. We all need encouragement, someone to believe in us, to reassure, and reinforce us. We need someone to help us with determination in spite of the odds. This someone could be family, friends, peers, a supervisor, or a counselor. Some departments have an employee assistance program to provide confidential counseling and referral. Many departments require mandatory counseling for certain critical incidents. Peer counseling programs are extremely effective tools to help out. Professional or peer counselors can assist the officer in pulling his world together and can be in a position to assist supervisors and family. If counseling is voluntary there is a danger that the officer may decline it either because he is in denial or is desperately trying to convince himself and others that everything is all right.

Acceptance Stage—Getting On With Life. In the acceptance stage, accepting what happened and the decisions that you may have made is a key to coping with a critical incident. According to the Street Survival Seminar, in a use-of-force situation there can usually be 1 of 3 conclusions that end with the same decision.

"I know I did what was right—justifiable use-of-force. Accept it and get on with life."

“I know I messed up. Now its time to settle it and get on with my life.”

“I know I did the best I could. Accept it and get on with life.”

People who survive critical incident stress emerge stronger through the experience. They see life through a different pair of eyes, they develop new priorities and strategies for living. They may value training more than they did before the critical incident. They may treat every situation like it could go bad. They realize that they're not supermen anymore. They are always preparing by thinking of the “what ifs” which we call mental rehearsal.

Conclusions

Stress is with us. It's a fact of life and certainly a fact of our profession. Learn to recognize it, address it, deal with it. Recognize your strengths and weaknesses and draw on your resources. You've learned how to prepare for highly stressful situations such as a use-of-force situation by training and mental rehearsal. You can control what happens to your mind and body while under the influence of adrenalin so that you can still make rational judgements and be able to escalate and de-escalate appropriately. You now know what to expect and how to handle the aftermath of a critical incident stress.

You can still keep that “good ole boy or good ole girl” image to some extent, but training and readiness must go past that point. We can still be professional and friendly but at the same time be thinking and planning for our safety and survival. Remember that the violator also has a large dose of adrenalin on board so your commands should be very audible and clear. Each contact you make could be one that goes bad. Prepare and plan for it by thinking of your “what ifs.”

Remember to strike a balance and nurture all 4 areas: social, mind, body, and your belief system. A presentation on officer survival is not complete without a reminder of the primary cause of death and disability among officers: it's not bullets or knives, but cardiovascular disease. The daily decisions that become your habits can kill you just as “dead” as a bullet. All the best defensive tactics techniques won't do you any good if your cardiovascular system can't handle the load placed on it. These daily decisions you make are as much a part of officer survival as defensive tactics or expandable baton training.

Officer survival begins with an attitude, an attitude that you will survive no matter what. This is the base to which you add training and equipment. You need to avail yourself of the training you need whether or not the department provides it or not. Training gives you the techniques to help make this happen, but only you can train your most important weapon—your mind, and this should be done daily.

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