

## **“FIREARMS AND FIREARMS TRAINING”**

by

Earl P. Coleman  
*Assistant Superintendent of Protection*  
*Missouri Department of Conservation*

A few years ago at a meeting of the Midwest Law Enforcement Officers Conference an administrator spoke on the subject of firearms. He left the impression that there was little need for a wildlife law enforcement officer to be armed; that on the whole, it might be better if they never wore sidearms.

In talking with non-enforcement personnel, I have heard the same idea expressed.

To me this viewpoint is ridiculous and the only reason I mention it is that if there is anyone in the room with that attitude, this talk is not for him. I would invite the person to accompany me or any of our agents on enforcement patrol for giggers - spotlighters - deer hunters - firebugs - or for that matter, to serve arrest warrants on Twelfth Street in Kansas City or Biddle Street in St. Louis. I'll risk it once if they will.

Wildlife law enforcement officers have traditionally been armed in Missouri. The authority of our Commission to arm its agents was confirmed shortly after Constitutional Amendment number IV was implemented in 1937.

For many years there was no Commission policy on the matter, but I believe that all of the agents wore sidearms most of the time when on enforcement duties. One or two who didn't learned the hard way that a revolver, worn openly, tends to keep down arguments and prevent assaults.

In recent years in Missouri, we have had an increasing number of incidents indicating the desirability of having a dependable sidearm handy. After due consideration, our Commission adopted the following policy pertaining to sidearms:

“The official sidearm shall be worn by uniformed Protection law enforcement personnel at all times when on duty except;

- (a) When attending funerals or other religious services, or
- (b) When prohibited in magistrate, circuit or Federal court, or
- (c) When traveling out of state on non-law enforcement assignments.

“When on official assignment in civilian dress, Protection Section law enforcement personnel shall wear or carry firearms suitable for their protection, but in accordance with the above exceptions.”

Within our experience, there is no instance where a troublesome incident was caused by an agent wearing a gun. There have been numerous incidents that were at least partially caused or aggravated by the fact that the agent was unarmed.

What I will say about the selection of sidearms will be of little importance, since most everyone has rather definite ideas on the subject. In any case, let's review some of the options.

Handguns are made in three actions—single, double and semi-automatic. Despite history and legend, I don't believe anyone would seriously consider the single action revolver for general use—except “Mr. McCloud”.

Throughout Europe, except in England, the semi-automatic is used by just about all police officers. The usual calibers are the 7.65 and 9mm. The best European guns are compact, dependable and accurate. The gun manufacturers in Europe concentrated on the development of semi-automatic arms and the revolvers they made were usually of poor design or cheaply made.

The opposite was true in the United States. While the models and calibers

available in the revolver were almost unlimited, until recent years there were only one or two semi-automatics manufactured in this country that were suitable for police work. The 1911 model Colt is about the only one that won any degree of popularity.

About the only advantage to be gained by using a semi-automatic is ease of reloading. The Government issue 45 has many distinct disadvantages. As issued, it is not a very accurate gun, but it will function dependably under almost any condition. When clearance of working parts is reduced to improve accuracy, and it can be made into an extremely accurate weapon, it must be carefully cleaned and handled to prevent malfunctions. Many people feel that it is unsafe to carry a round of ammunition in the chamber of the model 1911 with the hammer locked in the safe position. Unless this is done, a considerable delay is experienced in firing the first shot. Several semi-automatic pistols made on European patents and the Smith & Wesson model 39, 9mm overcome this disadvantage by an ingenious arrangement. These guns may be carried with a round in the chamber and the hammer lowered. They are perfectly safe to carry this way because of the design of the gun. The first round is fired by pulling the trigger as with a double action revolver. Subsequent rounds are fired in a semi-automatic fashion.

The 1911 model has one further disadvantage. It does not point naturally for most people in instinctive or combat firing. This can be overcome, of course, through practice; but it does have a tendency to shoot low in the hands of the average person when used in this type of shooting.

For purpose of law enforcement, I will eliminate the Smith & Wesson 9mm a little later. This leaves us with the double action revolver. It is accurate and dependable. The first round may be fired quickly and the subsequent rate of fire is equal to the semi-automatic. It is easier to grip in the holster for fast drawing than a semi-automatic.

It would take a small book to discuss all of the calibers and models available in the double action. In the interest of time, I will arbitrarily eliminate all calibers and loads that produce less energy than the factory load for the .38 Special. This does away with discussion on the .22s - .32s (7.65mm) - 38 Longs and Shorts - 9mm. It is true that the Germans made a very hot load for military use in the 9mm Luger and Walther P-38, but it is not manufactured in this country. This arbitrary division eliminates the Smith & Wesson model 39.

Many authorities maintain that the .38 Special is not adequate for the job of stopping an angry or frightened man, and there are many instances on record where it was not.

The .41 and the .44 Magnums certainly have plenty of shock power. I've inspected several deer that were killed with the .44, but there are two or three factors that more or less disqualify them for the average officer. They are comparatively difficult to shoot and, if one does practice enough to become proficient, the ammunition is expensive. The heavy recoil prevents a fast rate of fire.

There are many reasons why the .38 Special has been selected by the majority of law enforcement departments as the standard sidearm. They are accurate, easy to shoot, most of the larger double action revolvers in this caliber point naturally and practice ammunition is economical. It is only in rather recent times that any other caliber met all of these requirements.

Nonetheless, the stopping power of the .38 Special is borderline. This may be overcome somewhat with service ammunition such as Super Vel, the new addition to the Remington line, or by judicious handloading, but most authorities agree that a heavier load is desirable. There have been many gunfights where this need was obvious.

Any choice is a compromise, but if an officer wants a little better weapon one is available. The .357 Magnum has all of the advantages of the .38 Special,

plus almost double the striking force: A bullet speed of 1400 feet per second as compared to 1100 and 690 foot pounds of energy, compared to 377 for the .38 Special. The Combat Magnum model 19 is only one ounce heavier than the Combat Masterpiece model 15. Mid-range .38 Special loads may be fired in the .357 Magnum for practice.

Test firing to obtain the above figures was done with a six inch barrel, and effectiveness is reduced as the barrel is shortened. If the .38 Special is marginal for a self-defense weapon with a six inch barrel, it is even more so with a two inch barrel. Four inches should be the minimum barrel length for a service revolver worn with an official uniform.

I believe that the .357 Magnum approaches the ideal sidearm for an enforcement officer when fired from double action revolvers such as the Smith & Wesson models 19 or 27, or the Colt Trooper. Some persons might object to adjustable sights on a combat weapon, but I do not believe this is a fault. After all, every military rifle that I am familiar with has adjustable sights.

Regardless of the type of weapon selected by the conservation agent, the most important question is: Can he shoot it with reasonable accuracy? The average trainee that goes to work for us cannot. This means that he must be taught to shoot the revolver.

Under ideal circumstances, the new officer should become reasonably proficient at shooting conventional targets, single action, and then progress to combat or instinctive firing. We just don't have the time in our training program for this. About the time the man is ready for combat shooting, the class graduates - so we tried a different approach with our last group.

Despite what I have said above, our official sidearm is a .38 Special, Smith & Wesson or Colt revolver, with a two inch barrel. An agent may carry any model that meets those specifications. For training, we purchased 15 Smith & Wesson Combat Masterpieces, with the 2" barrel. All firing was double action with mid-range wadcutter reloads. To reduce possible mishaps, each trainee was required to fire a shell with no powder charge, so that he could be aware of this possibility during shooting. After the bullets were removed from the barrels where they had lodged, the trainees fired twelve rounds on plain silhouette targets, double action at seven yards, using both hands. They were encouraged to shoot slowly. This was done to let them get the feel of the gun as well as to build their confidence. Even those who had never fired a pistol, and we had one or two, had twelve holes in the target. That completed the firing for the day.

In subsequent firing, we shot the N . R . A . 25-yard combat course,

12 rds	crouch	7 yds	double action	25 sec
6 rds	crouch	25 yds	double action	12 sec
6 rds	sitting	25 yds	double action	
6 rds	prone	25 yds	double action	2 min
6 rds	Barricade RH	25 yds	double action	
6 rds	Barricade LH	25 yds	double action	
6 rds	kneeling	25 yds	double action	
6 rds	Barricade RH	25 yds	double action	90 sec
6 rds	Barricade LH	25 yds	double action	

for a total of 60 rounds with a possible score of 300. The course was fired on the B-27 target. This is the standard silhouette target with scoring areas designated.

We used the 25 yard course because our range does not permit firing at greater distances. Each trainee fired this course eight times, or a total of 480 practice rounds. The following classifications were used:

Over 267	Expert
246 - 267	Sharpshooter
180 - 245	Marksman

Of the ten trainees who completed training, there were: 2 - Experts; 6 - Sharpshooters; and 2 - Marksman. The highest score was a 294 fired during qualification. I am sure the average final score for the group would have been much higher had we had a really competent instructor in combat firing. Unfortunately, the instructor had little or no experience in this type of shooting.

There was a tendency at first for the trainees to shoot too fast and reload too slowly. Practice with dummy rounds improved the speed of reloading and when the trainees learned that it was not necessary to rush through the shooting to finish within the time allotted, accuracy improved. After firing the course three times, none of the trainees had difficulty with the time limit.

Training should be continued with practice in firing in combat situations and night firing, but we were unable to do this before graduation. Nonetheless, each of the trainees enjoyed the service practice, improved their skill, and gained confidence in their ability to use the revolver in self-defense. Each of them has a good basic understanding of combat firing and with a little additional practice each of them could qualify as expert. I have every confidence in their ability to give a good account of themselves, if called upon to do so. Continued training in the use of sidearms may well be one of the most neglected phases of in-service training, for wildlife law enforcement officers.

I believe that every administrator has the obligation to insure that armed personnel under his direction have the ability to use those arms wisely and accurately, if the need arises. Firearms and ammunition should be furnished and there should be some incentive to encourage the individual officer to become proficient with the official sidearm.

References:

"Combat Shooting for Police"- Paul B. Weston

"Police Firearms" - Instructor's Manual, National Rifle Association

"The Handloader's Digest"

## **FEDERAL MAGISTRATES ACT**

*by*

William R. Kensinger

A landmark in the United States judicial system was established through Congressional approval on October 17, 1968, of the Federal Magistrates Act. The passage of Public Law 90-578 by the 90th Congress will have far reaching impact and implications in the administration of Federal laws.

Until passage of this Act, officials in the field of conservation law enforcement operated within a restricted boundary in regard to availability of courts for case litigation. Prior to enactment of this law, violations of Federal wildlife regulations covering migratory birds or interstate transportation of fish and game animals, had to be processed in State courts, in United States District Court, or if the violation occurred on Federally owned lands, terminated in a United States Commissioner's court. These avenues for case disposition had several effects.

First, faced with ever-increasing crowded court dockets of pending cases, United States Attorneys have been confronted with a multitude of pending cases of a grave nature, such as organized crime, corporate conspiracies, bank robberies involving Federal lending institutions, and the like. Secondly, many court officials have not had an objective appreciation of the severity of wildlife violations and their impact on this dwindling renewable resource. Considering these two factors alone, it was obvious to the framers of this