

COMMENTARY

Active Shooter: Who Are We Preparing?

BY KENNETH E. LOTT

The law enforcement response to active shooter events has greatly evolved since the mid-1960s. Programs such as Texas State University's Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training Center (ALERRT), DHS Active Shooter Threat Training and contributions from the NTOA have highlighted modern police tactics while compelling police instructors to utilize a variety of skill sets in their curriculum. This type of training must include such tactical dilemmas as those experienced and trained by SWAT teams, as well as officers who may find themselves in a position of solo engagement, where they don't have a partner (or five) watching their backs and covering exposed angles.

There have been valuable lessons learned about self-aid and buddy aid, rescue techniques concerning officer down and citizen down, the transition recognition ability needed when an incident goes from active shooter to barricaded subject, and the responding officer's ability to communicate and lead under duress. As a veteran police officer and trainer, I would follow up with this question: Who are we preparing?

Police response times vary depending upon the size of your force, the size of your city, the time of day, what day it is, holidays, festivals, sporting events, etc. The city I work in has a population growth of about 111 percent during the standard work week from 0730 to about 1800. Apart from various other sworn members (traffic, SRO, NRO, administration) we have a minimum of five officers on patrol, which includes the patrol shift supervisor. Considering the average response time is about five to six minutes, and an event lasts an average two to five minutes, this math does not lend itself to a positive outcome.

If you look at the active shooter incidents that took place at the University of Texas in 1966, Columbine High School in 1999, Virginia Tech in 2007 and Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, you will see a distinct shift in the law enforcement mindset and training methodology. In fact, it was not until the Sandy Hook shootings in 2012 that we as a nation, under the direction of President Obama with the creation of the Readiness in Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) document, began to see a shift in who we are preparing for success in active shooter response.

This is not to say that the arrival of law enforcement does not interrupt the plan of shooters who

then stop killing others and turn the gun on themselves; however, to evoke a tangible difference, we must turn that instruction focus to our citizens, who are the real first responders. What they do in that moment of crisis will determine the survival rate for them and those around them. Who better to provide that training than the people who have been trying to perfect a response to this problem for more than 15 years?

It is simply not enough to tell people to secure in place, lock down and wait for the arrival of police. We must provide the citizens of our communities with the knowledge, authority and physical tools to fortify their positions while always looking to improve that position, or possibly transition to another response based on the situation as they see fit.

This mentality is in direct correlation with the ideology of leading under duress. It is a simplified version of commander's intent and decentralized command. If we provide the *why* and the *how* to our citizens (commander's intent), then give them the authority to proceed as the situation develops (decentralized command) we may be able to affect a difference.

TRAINING CITIZENS TO RESPOND

When citizens who are in harm's way do something to prolong their own life or the lives of those around them, they also provide emergency responders with a bit more time to join the fight. We must also consider providing them with the training to apply the principle of *care under fire* because simple first aid is not adequate. While the standard operating procedures involved with getting aid into the hot zone have started to change, a time delay still exists. If we can get citizens to take responsibility for starting triage, then emergency responders

can focus more attention to pressing matters such as finding the gunman or level one trauma care.

Much like providing stranger danger or rape aggression defense (RAD) courses, law enforcement should offer active shooter response training through public forums. In my city, our SROs are trained to deliver civilian active shooter response training in our schools to administrators, faculty, staff, parents, and when age appropriate, to students. We offer this training through our Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, our citizen's police academy and our city's website.

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Classes are held regularly and prepare our citizens for what they can expect from a police response, as well as what we expect from them until we arrive on scene. These classes open a dialog between emergency responders and citizens, business owners and other city employees, which helps create a more cohesive approach to a very probable issue. The partnerships created during these community trainings open doors for the police to come in and conduct threat assessments (another citizen learning opportunity) and possibly

secure future active shooter training venues with willing role players, participants or observers.

Today's active shooter instructor must be well versed in the evolving trends in mass killing events. They also must be current on the federal mandates/recommendations that exist about organizations providing option-based training to their work force and within the educational environment. These mandates/recommendations are direct reflections of the number of incidents in which people responded proactively, showing a higher survival rate verses remaining idle and waiting for law enforcement intervention.

The police departments in this country are the industry leaders, but we need assistance. We cannot do it all. Who better to provide assistance than those we see, educate and work with day in and day out?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kenneth E. Lott has been a police officer for 13 years, beginning in San Jose, California, and currently in Redmond, Washington. He is assigned to the patrol division and training cadre (firearms, less lethal), and is a member of the North Sound Metro regional SWAT team. He has worked as an active shooter training coordinator for both sworn and non-sworn personnel since 2007, and continues that work as a national trainer/independent contractor for the Alice Training Institute. In 1998, he received bachelor of arts degree from the University of Central Oklahoma. He served from 1992 to 2000 in the U.S. Army reserve.