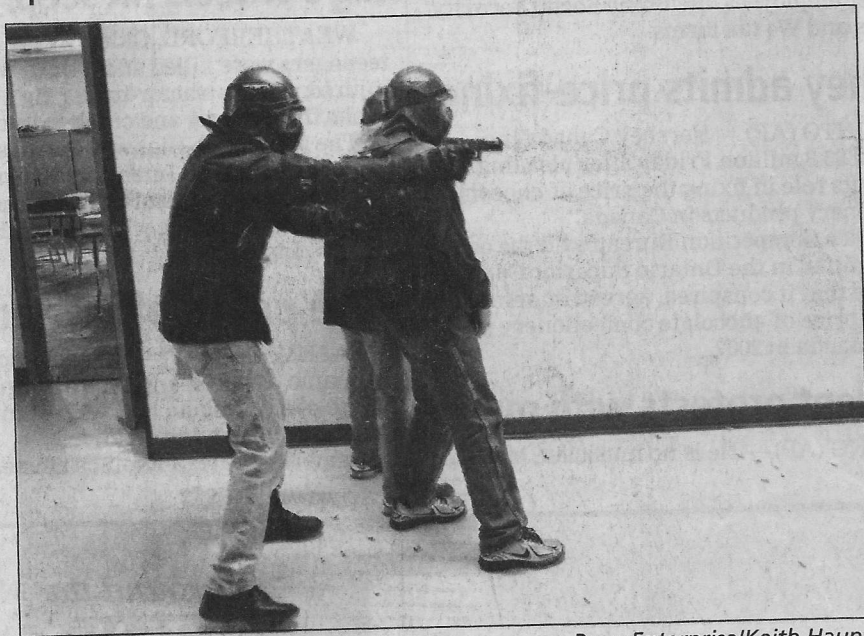


# In mass shootings, rules change

Speed comes first, officer safety second, trainer tells police at Danville drill

By **CHRIS KREPICH**

Press Enterprise Writer



**RIVERSIDE Police Officer Jerry Zeidler, left, uses P.J. Belling and Robert Blee as a shield during "active shooter" training at Danville High School.**

Press Enterprise/Keith Haupt

DANVILLE — When a shooter starts killing people in a school, hospital, office building or mall, there's no time for police to wait for SWAT team snipers or backup.

Patrol officers will be the first ones in the door and often the first to engage a gunman, so they have to be ready, said Joe Deedon of Colorado. He trained officers at Danville High last week, complete with mock scenarios that included people — armed with real guns and paint rounds — playing shooters.

Responding to an incident where the death toll could be high requires officers to disregard many of the things they have been taught.

Statistically, one person dies every 15 seconds in a mass shooting, Deedon said, so there's no time to repeatedly warn a suspect to drop a gun or get on the ground.

## 'Target identification'

If a suspect doesn't comply fully and immediately, he should be shot to end the threat, Please see **SHOOTINGS** page 6

## Playing gunman doesn't feel like game

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Armed and dressed in protective gear, reporter Chris Krepich took part in a police training drill. His report:

DANVILLE — Officers search room by room until they hear gunfire and shouting in a classroom down the hallway.

They make a beeline for the

commotion, stepping over bodies in the hall, and find a shooter in a room shooting students.

The officers file in like a stampede of armed cattle, then fan out, all the while shooting at the target until he is down.

The officers training at Danville Area High School hope they never have to use the training they re-

ceived last week, but they are getting ready nonetheless.

About a dozen were learning how to handle an active shooter in a building with a lot of people, such as a school, hospital or office.

## They don't stop

Seeing a team of armed and Please see **GUNMAN** page 6



**CHRIS KREPICH**

# Shootings

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said Deedon.

Even shooting a suspect in the back if he may be going to ward more victims is justified.

"You have to drop them," he said. "There's victims everywhere and you're by yourself."

If the lone officer is injured or killed because he failed to shoot quickly, the school goes back in the shooter's control and he can continue killing at will, Deedon said.

"It's all target identification. Who's the guy with the gun?" said Danville Ptm. J.D. Stanley, who took part in the training. "You have limited information, which may be wrong, so you have to determine who's shooting and who's a bystander or hostage."

That can be assessed only by going inside the building and locating the shooter. "You're throwing a patrol officer in a school by himself," said Deedon. "That's the most dangerous thing you can do."

**'There's no time'**

Officer safety, which is usually a paramount concern in other incidents, takes a back seat in highly populated places where a threat must be stopped quickly, Deedon said. "You can't wait in the parking lot," he said. "You have to go in with a plan, but not a death wish, either. We throw officer safety out the window to stop the killing."

Gummen in such circumstances are usually better armed than police.

That's why the proper training is so important, Deedon said.

He stressed to the officers that they must communicate while searching rooms, and hurry because "people are dying."

"You can't take cover," he told them as they searched for the people playing shooters. "You can't wait like in other situations. There's no time. You have to be aggressive. There could be 20 more kids in that room."

## 'Lot of death'

Some officers, Deedon said, indicated they had no problem taking out a young shooter immediately if necessary.

But when put to the test in a hallway training exercise, many gave the gunman time to escape back into a room after he had dropped his weapon but refused commands to get on the ground.

Deedon said letting the gunman enter a classroom instead of shooting him immediately after disobeying orders could allow him to kill a dozen more students, and then the officer.

"You're justified in the use of deadly force," he said, given a scenario of several dead students and the presence of a firearm.

"In that environment, it ups the ante. There's a lot of unarmed victims and the po-



*Press Enterprise/Keith Haupt*

**DENNIS DERR**, right, Watsontown Police, and **James Link**, Altoona Regional Hospital Center Police, make their way through the halls of the Danville High School on Wednesday afternoon during training for school hostage and shooting situations.

tential for a lot of death."

## Teach others

Deedon used drills for teams of four, three, two and just one officer to simulate the probable number of first responders.

They practiced entering rooms and hallways, searching rooms, and taking down a suspect with hostages and bystanders nearby.

They trained mostly with handguns since that's what most officers are comfortable with and will probably have in such a situation, said Danville Ptm. Stanley.

The 40-hour class is designed so the officers can go back to their respective departments and train their colleagues.

Stanley said he can now train officers in his department and Mahoning Township as well as the Columbia-

Montour SWAT team.

## Marines mentor

About a dozen officers from several departments in Luzerne County, the York County Sheriff's Office, Altoona Regional Health System Police, Bucknell University and even Michigan attended the training.

Deedon is from Tac One Consulting, a Colorado firm which offers active shooter response and tactical training for law enforcement around the country.

As an officer for eight years and a SWAT member, he responded to two active shooter incidents and was deployed to Afghanistan in early 2011 as an Embedded Police Mentor with the Marine Corps.

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# Gunman

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armored cops entering the room where you are playing the role of a school shooter is an unsettling sight.

You, too, are armed and covered in protective gear, and you know they're coming.

Still, when they show up at the door you fight for your life, emptying the magazine of paint rounds from your firearm.

The exhilaration of the fight soon turns to dread because they don't stop coming at you; they keep advancing no matter how many rounds you pump at them.

Your only focus is on the black-clad enforcers who are intent on taking you down as quickly as possible.

## 'Drop the gun'

Their shouts and commands are merely background noise as you try to empty your gun before you go down.

Even simple commands such as "get down" or "drop the gun" are mostly just static.

The rounds you feel on your vest, helmet and arms act as a sort of timer to your inevitable demise.

It's amazing how a dry run of an exercise can seem so clear and simple.

But when it's show time, so to speak, you react without thinking.

Even the best-laid plans and intentions to do certain

things are instantly forgotten when the silence is broken by shouting and gunfire.

That's why the officers train, so the right moves become automatic.

Without that training, it's clear to see how easily mistakes can be made.

## Realistic

Even before the team enters the room, your body gets ready. Your heart rate and breathing increase, your muscles tense up and your eyes focus straight ahead.

You can hear the officers advancing as they communicate about clearing the rooms ahead of you.

Knowing they are coming for you probably makes it worse.

You know you're going to get shot with all the gear. And even with all the gear, you anticipate at least one will hit an exposed area and sting for an hour before leaving a round, black-and-blue welt.

Instructor Joe Deedon from Tac One in Colorado said the scenarios he puts the officers through are very detailed and purposeful.

"Otherwise, you're just playing an Airsoft game," he said.

Danville Ptm. J.D. Stanley, who set up the training course, said using real guns with paint rounds makes the training as realistic as possible, and therefore more effective.