

The Patrol Rifle: Considerations for Adoption and Use

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A significant issue confronting law enforcement agencies today is the question of whether to arm patrol officers with rifles. The debate over the proper weapons for police use is not a new one, for the discussion of how officers should be armed has been going on for decades and continues as new weaponry is developed. Most recently, changes in criminal activity and threats have caused many police departments to question whether the traditional patrol officer handgun-shotgun combination is adequate armament. The weapon most frequently being considered for use by patrol officers is the .223-caliber rifle, commonly referred to as the patrol rifle.

To many observers, the interest in issuance of rifles to patrol officers is perfectly clear: often American police are being out-gunned during confrontations with adversaries. Many practitioners believe strongly that the traditional police sidearm—once the revolver but now most often the semiautomatic—does not provide police officers with the necessary firepower to meet and overcome the increasingly heavy firearms being employed by violent individuals and gangs that are being encountered.¹ There is considerable evidence to support this view.

Criminals have been using military-style armament for years. Most conspicuous perhaps was the preference of gangland criminals for the Thompson submachine gun, better known as the tommy gun. The response from some state and local law enforcement and certain branches of the federal government was to follow suit and provide similar weapons for their personnel. Again, in more recent times, the issue

of police armament became topical after the 1966 Charles Whitman sniping incident at the University of Texas. Armed with several rifles and a large quantity of ammunition, Whitman shot and killed 15 people and wounded 31 others from the university's 27-story tower before Austin police were able to kill him by climbing the tower to gain access with their handguns.

Perhaps the best-known event that brought the discussion of the patrol rifle into greater relief was the North Hollywood shootout. On February 28, 1997, in North Hollywood, California, two bank robbers armed with assault rifles engaged Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers in an extended shootout. The officers were initially overwhelmed by the sheer volume of fire and found that their handguns were insufficient to counter the hitting power and rapid rate of fire of the fully automatic high-capacity .30-caliber weapons employed by their criminal adversaries. While the LAPD and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) maintained several full-time special weapons teams, none of them were available for the first several minutes of this encounter. Indeed, the 9mm rounds the officers were firing, even when accurately placed, were unable to penetrate the heavy body armor the bank robbers were wearing. By the time the gunmen were subdued, 11 police officers and six civilians had been wounded, and a national television audience had witnessed one of the most horrifying shootouts of modern times. Around the country, many police executives and other members of the law enforcement community viewed the videotaped replays of this incident and

vowed that their own personnel would not be placed in a similar situation. Indeed this was the triggering event that persuaded both departments, the LAPD and LASD, to adopt patrol rifles.

Unfortunately, the North Hollywood shootout has not been the only incident that has highlighted the issue of police armament. Violent encounters in Dallas and other American jurisdictions have also underscored the problem. Increasingly, American police are being faced with new situations, new adversaries, and a critical need for new means to combat these developments.²

Purpose of This Article

This article is intended to assist law enforcement agencies as they address the question of whether to rearm their officers to meet the challenges posed by more dangerous firearms on American streets.³ It is important to note that this article makes no specific determination concerning whether officers should be armed with rifles. The position of chiefs and sheriffs nationwide on this matter varies widely, from full acceptance of the rifle for all patrol officers to outright ban of such weapons for police. Many of the arguments both for and against the use of patrol rifles have merit, and the decisions of law enforcement chief executives must be viewed from the perspective of local needs and restrictions. However, some arguments for and against the patrol rifle require additional scrutiny. Moreover, the decision to adopt patrol rifles does not have to be an all-or-nothing one. There are other options that should be considered.

The purpose of this document, then, is to present many of the pros and cons of arming patrol officers with rifles, examine the logic of some of the arguments both pro and con, explore potential options for arming police, offer some guidance that may help departments decide whether to pursue this course of action, and suggest practices for police agencies that have already chosen to adopt the patrol rifle.

Advantages of the Patrol Rifle

1. Increased Protection against Superior Firepower

This is one of the most common and most strongly argued reasons for providing patrol officers with rifles. There are several factors involved, including the nature of the adversaries being encountered by the police on today's streets, and the nature of the weapons being employed against the police by those adversaries.

Weapons Used against Police: Perhaps the greatest single impetus for arming patrol officers with rifles has been the corresponding increase in their use by criminals. The 1994 federal ban on assault rifles was not effective in keeping these weapons out of the hands of criminals, and the result has been an increase in the use of these weapons in confrontations with police.

The term *assault rifle* is used here generically. There are many different weapons that meet this definition, and most of these types have been employed against police at one time or another.⁴ Regardless of the type used, however, any rifle in the hands of a criminal places a handgun-armed police officer at a potentially fatal disadvantage.

The validity of the latter argument is borne out by the statistics. Studies indicate that in recent years, approximately one in every five police deaths in the line of duty have been the result of shots fired by assault rifles.⁵

An assailant armed with a rifle of any type will have a disproportionate advantage over any police officer armed solely with a handgun. Whereas most police handguns have a combat-effective range of perhaps 25 yards, almost any rifle likely to be used by a criminal may have an effective range of 500 yards, will have far greater stopping power, will have much greater magazine capacity, and will be capable of a considerably higher rate of fire. It will also be likely to penetrate standard-issue police body armor.

Proponents of the patrol rifle argue that equipping street officers with rifles (the .223-caliber weapon is most often mentioned) will do much to redress this imbalance and thus will save many officers' lives, as well as civilians' lives, by enabling police to subdue such violent criminals more quickly.

Confrontations with Multiple Adversaries: It is also pointed out by advocates of the patrol rifle that one must consider the nature and number of adversaries now being confronted by police. Police today have to contend not only with lone gunmen, whether engaged in specific criminal activity or simply mentally disturbed, but also with larger numbers of opponents operating in gangs. A recent example is an encounter in the Dallas area in which a gang of fleeing bank robbers armed with assault rifles opened fire on the police patrol cars that were pursuing them, riddling the police vehicles and enabling the gang to escape.

Because of changes in the nature of the adversaries being faced and the type of firepower they often employ, provision of better protection in the form of the patrol rifle is considered in many quarters to be essential to officer safety, effectiveness, and morale.

2. Protection of the Public

It seems undeniable that when police officers are better armed and therefore in a better position to oppose and subdue violent criminal activity, public safety is greatly enhanced. Incidents like the North Hollywood robbery pose a high degree of danger to the public, as witnessed by the fact that six civilians were wounded in that encounter. Had the LAPD officers involved been better armed, these civilian casualties might have been prevented. With better police weapons capability, the duration of a violent confrontation and the volume of gunfire may be reduced, thus limiting civilian casualties during the encounter. There is also a better chance that the criminals involved would be subdued and apprehended, thus eliminating the possibility of more civilian casualties in future incidents perpetrated by the same violent individuals.

3. The Threat of Terrorism

The potential for encounters on American soil between police officers and bands of armed terrorists is another matter of great concern. In such instances, it is highly probable that the terrorists involved would be heavily armed and easily able to outgun patrol officers armed only with handguns or the traditional police shotgun.

The threat of terrorist confrontations is made all the more serious by the possibility that the terrorists concerned may be in possession of biological, chemical, or radiological weapons, or be conducting a suicide mission as a bomber capable of inflicting huge casualties upon the civilian population. Therefore, neutralization of such a threat is of paramount importance. In this regard it is important to keep in mind that, should such encounters develop in the United States, in most cases first responders would be local police officers, not the military. In this event, it would be essential that the responding police officers have the capability to deal

with this type of threat from standoff distances considerably beyond the range of most handguns and shotguns and considerably beyond the distances that have been involved in the traditional police firefight. For example, should a suicide bomber be encountered, a police approach within handgun range would be a prescription for disaster. Response to these and related types of situations will likely require quick response by officers present whose only reasonable choice may be the placement of an accurate disabling shot by rifle from a substantial distance. This and other scenarios, of course, underscore the importance of training for taking full advantage of the patrol rifle's accuracy and range capabilities.

4. Response to Active Shooters

In the past, most police departments have relied upon special weapons and tactics (SWAT) units to respond to, and neutralize, major threats to the public. The traditional approach for patrol officers encountering a particularly dangerous situation has been for patrol officers to contain the threat and await the arrival of a SWAT team. However, as the North Hollywood incident, the 1999 massacre at Columbine High School, and other situations have clearly revealed, violent criminals, active shooters, and terrorists will not wait. For this reason, current thinking holds that all officers—not just special units—should have the capability to defend themselves and take immediate offensive action to prevent additional loss of life pending the arrival of special response units and emergency medical assistance. In order to be able to do this, it is argued, every police patrol unit needs to have prompt access to weapons that will enable them to meet the threat effectively. The patrol rifle is regarded in many quarters as one of the most important components for the solution to this problem.

5. The Deterrence Factor

The ability to deal with a violent incident once a firefight has begun is only one aspect of the matter. It is felt by many (although difficult to support empirically) that criminals and other violent individuals will be more reluctant to initiate gunfire if the police confronting them are well armed. It has been said that this deterrence factor—preventing a violent incident from ever occurring—is at least equally as important as successfully concluding an armed confrontation once it has started. However, when dealing with terrorists, it is less likely that deterrence would be an operative factor.

6. A Safer Weapon?

There has been some debate about whether a rifle would or would not present a greater hazard to the public, particularly in an urban environment, than would a police handgun or shotgun. Arguments in favor of the rifle include the following:

Greater Accuracy: Proponents of the rifle point out that not only will the rifle be effective at longer ranges than the handgun or shotgun but will also be more accurate at a distance. This will reduce the possibility of an officer who is firing a handgun or shotgun missing the target and hitting bystanders. A pistol is rarely used to shoot more than a very short distance, often no more than a few yards. It is far more likely for an officer to miss his target with a handgun in a combat situation and strike an unintended target. Where a precise shot is required, the rifle is far superior.

With respect to the shotgun, this argument is enhanced by the fact that since the

rifle employs a single projectile, it eliminates the danger that the shotgun's multiple pellets, which spread out in a very wide pattern at long range, will miss the intended recipient and strike innocent persons.

Easier to Use: Most people will agree that the police shotgun is a difficult weapon to master. Shotguns are heavy; some models (including those most commonly carried in patrol cars) can be challenging to manipulate; and the recoil of a typical 12-gauge police shotgun is considerable. All of these factors affect the ability of an officer to employ it effectively, and this is particularly true for officers of small stature. One can add to this that the majority of police shotgun courses

of fire employ fewer than 25 rounds for the entire year's training cycle. This training is often as limited or more limited when it involves training with rifled shotgun slugs that are often advocated as alternatives to the use of patrol rifles. As a result, confidence in the officer's ability to use the shotgun effectively may be lowered, with a corresponding reluctance to employ the shotgun in a given situation. Proponents of the patrol rifle point out that the .223-caliber rifle is more accurate, lighter, easier to operate and reload, and far easier to control than the shotgun. These characteristics, it is felt, tend to increase both officer proficiency and officer confidence—critical factors in the effective use by police of any weapon.⁶

Less Excessive Penetration: Some opponents of police use of rifles have argued that a rifle, particularly when used in urban locations, has a much higher risk than either a handgun or shotgun of penetrating into unintended areas such as nearby buildings. However, many rifle proponents assert that rifle rounds of .223 caliber may actually present less of a hazard in this regard. This is particularly the case when ammunition of certain types is employed, because of the high-velocity .223 round's tendency to fragment upon striking solid objects. A number of authorities who have addressed this very point have concluded that the typical .223 rifle round, while effective in piercing a criminal's body armor, is in fact less likely to penetrate walls or other environmental obstacles than standard issue police duty handgun ammunition, and are therefore actually safer in the urban environment. One solution that has been adopted by some departments is to have more than one type of round available in patrol cars.⁷

Other Factors Favoring the Patrol Rifle: The points set forth above are merely examples. Other factors supporting the issuance of patrol rifles can be enumerated. Individual departments will also find that local conditions give rise to additional pro-rifle arguments, including budget considerations, strong police association support, and political advantages that may be perceived by local governmental officials. This is not to mention geographical considerations where departments operating in rural areas may be more likely to deploy rifles against aggressors and be less concerned that errant rounds will have unintended negative consequences.

Individual and Organizational Support: Support for the issuance of rifles has come from a number of sources. Police executives, police associations, and many individual officers feel strongly that rifles should be approved for patrol car use.⁸ Support for the issuance of rifles to police has also come from citizens' groups, the National Rifle Association, and even, in some instances, the media. Thus it must be conceded that the patrol rifle issue, although controversial, has drawn a

great deal of support across a broad spectrum of our society, a reflection, perhaps, of our citizens' desire to be better protected from harm due to violent criminal activity.

Disadvantages of the Patrol Rifle

Although there are many perceived advantages to issuance of patrol rifles, there are also serious concerns about it. Like the advantages discussed above, these concerns have been expressed by many observers, including politicians, antiviolence groups, and even police agencies themselves. As is the case with advocacy for patrol rifles, it can be said that there is also some misinformation concerning the disadvantages of patrol rifles that will be mentioned here.

1. Danger to the Public

Many of the arguments against issuance of rifles to police center on the possibility of increased risk to the general public. While almost everyone concedes that police need better weapons to protect them against violent criminals, some individuals and entities fear that rifles in the hands of the police would present a significantly greater hazard to innocent civilians than either the handgun or the shotgun. These concerns are largely based upon the following.

Higher Volume of Shots: There is some concern that the use of patrol rifles necessarily results in a higher volume of fire. Fire control by supervisory officers is a key ingredient in efforts to control unnecessarily heavy volumes of fire. Aside from that, there is the contention, backed up by case examples, that the increased accuracy of rifles actually reduces the number of rounds required to be put on target.

Greater Travel Distances of Rifle Rounds: All ballistics can travel relatively long distances—buckshot for a quarter mile, a .40-caliber pistol round for 6,800 feet, and a .223-caliber round up to 8,600 feet. The ability to cause injury is based more on the mass of the round and its velocity rather than solely on distance traveled. Here again, fire control and the accuracy of fire are key components. The firearm that will provide the greatest accuracy is often the more logical choice from a safety perspective.

Risk of Penetration of Homes and Passing Vehicles: Some opponents of police rifles maintain that rifle rounds are likely to penetrate objects beyond the immediate target; such excessive penetration could place innocent persons at risk.⁹ Nevertheless, because of the high-velocity .223 round's tendency to fragment upon striking solid objects, the rifle could actually be less prone to excessive penetration than other police firearms.

2. Civil Liability Exposure

It is felt by some that the issuance of rifles to patrol officers will increase the risk of civil liability for the department and the officers

employing the rifles. This concern is related to such matters as greater volume of fire, greater range and penetration of obstacles by rifle bullets, and officer competence with the new weapons. These arguments have to be considered in light of information previously provided on these subjects in this discussion.

3. Friendly Fire Casualties

There is also concern that it is not only bystanders or other innocent civilians who may be placed in jeopardy by the use of patrol rifles. Police themselves may be at risk of being struck unintentionally by friendly fire, that is, rounds fired by their fellow officers. Again, such matters as volume of fire,

greater range and penetration, and officer competence are cited as factors. In particular, it is feared that rifle fire, although better able to penetrate body armor worn by criminals or terrorists, is equally capable of penetrating the body armor worn by police officers participating in the incident who may unintentionally be struck.

4. Budget Constraints

Financial considerations may lead to reluctance to employ patrol rifles in a given department. The types of rifles that are both best suited and most likely to be chosen for the purpose are expensive—\$1,000 and up per rifle—with high ammunition

costs a factor as well. In addition, training department officers to use rifles safely and effectively may also be costly. Local governments may balk at approving rifles solely on financial grounds, and in some cases it appears that even where the governing body has approved the patrol rifle concept, actual acquisition and deployment has been materially delayed due to a simple lack of funds.¹⁰

5. Training Requirements

Before rifles are deployed to patrol units, all officers who may be using the rifles must be trained in their use.¹¹ Although in many respects the .223 rifle may be easier to use than the handgun or shotgun, the use of high-powered rifles, particularly in full automatic mode, can be challenging. Therefore, before any department can proceed to issue rifles to patrol officers, a considerable amount of training time, effort, and expense will be (or at least should be) involved. Some observers have expressed the fear that due to cost, the complexity of training large numbers of officers to the proper degree of competence, or perhaps by just plain impatience to get the rifles onto the street, the department's training in the proper use of rifles will be inadequate. This would degrade the effectiveness of employing the weapons and raise both the level of danger to the public and the likelihood of friendly fire casualties among the police.

6. Political and Public Opposition

It is possible, if not likely, that some segments of the population may have strong objections to the issuance of rifles on political, ideological, or emotional grounds. Antigun groups, journalists, and other organizations and individuals have warned of the danger that American cities will be turned into war zones if police are allowed to have rifles. Whatever the merits of this fear may be, the argument has a considerable emotional impact in some quarters, and local politicians may feel obligated to respond to it by barring the use of rifles by the local police department.

It is also predictable that once rifles have been issued to the police in a given jurisdiction, sooner or later a shooting incident involving police rifle fire will lead to innocent casualties or, at best, damage to civilian property or sensibilities, with a resultant increase in political pressure and the filing of civil suits.

Because of the variety of concerns regarding patrol rifles, and the many advantages and disadvantages involved, each department considering the issuance of such weapons to patrol officers must weigh the conflicting considerations and reach its own decision. Again, this article takes no position as to whether rifles should or should not be issued by any given

department. That question must be decided by each individual department in light of its own local needs and circumstances.

Even after a decision has been made to acquire and issue patrol rifles, many matters remain to be addressed. Because some departments, after due consideration, will ultimately opt to acquire and issue patrol rifles of some type, the remaining portions of this article will be devoted to a discussion that may assist these departments in evaluating their various options, choosing the right weapon for purchase, and deploying it safely and successfully.

Basic Considerations for Deployment

In deciding what weapons to issue and how to deploy them, certain basic factors must first be considered:

1. Nature of the Jurisdiction

The type of community in which the weapons will be deployed will affect the department's decisions.

Urban vs. Rural: Is the jurisdiction urban or rural? Typically, armed confrontations in urban jurisdictions tend to occur at short range, whereas in rural areas a higher percentage of such confrontations may occur at greater distances, and many authorities feel that the greater the distances at which patrol rifles are likely to be fired, the greater the advantage that the rifle will have over a shotgun or a handgun or any other short-barreled weapon. This may tend to make predominantly rural jurisdictions feel more comfortable about issuing rifles than localities that are primarily urban in nature. Nevertheless, many observers also feel strongly that rifles can be very effective at close ranges too, due to their relative lightness, quickness, and so on. Thus, the urban or rural nature of the jurisdiction and the normally anticipated distance of engagement are not necessarily determinative in the choice and use of new departmental weapons. Further, even in urban areas, where use of weapons is usually at shorter ranges, situations will inevitably arise where the distances involved are quite long, and in such situations the .223 rifle will normally have an advantage over a shotgun.

Other Environmental Factors: Other environmental factors may need to be considered. For example, is the community large or small? Is it predominantly residential or industrial? Are there special environmental conditions in the jurisdiction, such as extremely crowded areas or facilities involving volatile or otherwise hazardous material, that present special dangers if long-range or high-penetration weapons are employed? The type of area in which the weapons will be used will influence many of the department's decisions regarding type of weapons to be issued and how to allocate and use them.

Possible Adversaries: An additional consideration that may be related to the type of jurisdiction and its environment is the question of the number and type of adversaries that may be expected to be encountered. Further, what weapons are these individuals likely to employ, and how heavily armored are they likely to be?

In a jurisdiction where experience or analysis of potential adversaries being confronted by patrol officers are liable to be more heavily armed and perhaps more heavily armored than the police, the patrol rifle becomes even more important than in an area where military-level armament and armor are less likely to be encountered. However, it must be remembered that in today's increasingly violent and dangerous world, no area is immune to the possibility of an armed confrontation similar to the 1997 North Hollywood incident, and even small or rural communities that in the past have been relatively quiet must now anticipate such a scenario.

In addition, it must be kept in mind that an encounter with terrorists bearing chemical, biological, or even nuclear weapons (such as dirty bombs) is always a possibility today, even in a small community. Such a situation requires that the police are equipped with weapons capable of accurate fire at long range.

In short, in deciding what weapons to issue and how to deploy and use them, departments must bear in mind the grim but fundamental principle that anything can happen anywhere at anytime. All decisions regarding the type of weapons and armor to be acquired and the extent of their distribution through the department must be based on an evaluation of what could happen rather than what past experience indicates is likely to happen. There is no perfectly safe place.

2. Department Size

The size of the department will affect the number of weapons that must be acquired and how they will be allocated. In a small department, it may be feasible to purchase enough weapons to assign one to every department member. In larger departments, this may be more difficult.

3. Budget

Even where funds are available for the purchase of new weapons, the number and type of weapons to be acquired may be affected by financial considerations. Departments with limited funds may have to choose less expensive weapons or limit the number to be acquired, and this in turn may determine to how many members of the department the weapons can be issued.

4. Local Political Support or Opposition

The attitude of the governing body

toward the issuance of rifles or other new weapons to patrol officers in the jurisdiction should, if possible, be evaluated in advance. A governing body may oppose any such move entirely, support only a limited acquisition and issuance, or prefer that the department acquire shorter-range weapons. Advance coordination with the local governing body, whether city council, county board of supervisors, and so on, is essential.

Rifles, Shotguns, or Both?

Once the decision to upgrade patrol officers' armaments has been made, the next step is to decide upon the type of weapon that will be acquired. One of the first questions here is whether patrol cars should be equipped with rifles, shotguns, or both. Many if not most departments already issue shotguns for patrol cars, and some of these agencies may consider merely upgrading the department's shotguns to a different type or adding more of them, rather than switching to rifles. Alternately, a department may consider eliminating the shotguns from the patrol cars entirely and substituting rifles. In recent years some departments have done exactly this. Still another option is to deploy both rifles and shotguns in the department's vehicles. Thus there are several choices to be made.

To assist in this rifle-shotgun decision, it may be helpful for a department's planners to consider the following arguments that have been made in the rifle's favor. The .223 rifle, in addition to being more accurate and more effective over a much greater range than either the handgun or shotgun, is typically much lighter than a 12-gauge shotgun, is easier to operate and reload, and has a much lighter recoil. It also has a higher magazine capacity than the shotgun (which in the absence of magazine extensions is usually limited to five rounds), or even the modern police autoloading pistol, which has a greater but generally still limited capacity. The .223 rifle, on the other hand, typically employs 20-round or even 30-round magazines, a crucial advantage for a besieged officer. In addition to providing greater firepower, higher magazine capacity reduces the frequency of reloading, an important feature when it is remembered that while pausing to reload their weapons, police officers may be extremely vulnerable to assailants in a firefight.

Still another advantage of the .223 rifle over the handgun or shotgun is the rifle's ability to penetrate body armor. The wearing of body armor by criminals is common today, and the inability of the handgun or shotgun to penetrate such adversaries' armor places the police officer at greater risk in armed encounters.

Although many of the arguments in favor of the rifle over the shotgun focus

on the rifle's advantages for long-range engagement, some experts believe that the rifle may actually be safer and more effective than the shotgun for use at shorter distances. For example, because the rifle is lighter and more easily handled than the shotgun, use of the rifle tends to be quicker at close quarters than deployment of a shotgun—a factor that could spell the difference between life and death for an officer.

Despite the foregoing, it is also true that the shotgun has its own set of advantages. One of these is the fact that most officers are already familiar with the shotgun, which eliminates the need for the extensive (and expensive) training that is required for a transition to rifles. The shotgun is also generally less expensive to acquire than most .223 rifles. Unquestionably, in the hands of a skilled officer the shotgun can be a highly effective weapon. With the proper sights, rifled barrels, and modern ammunition (including slugs) the shotgun can be used accurately at distances as great as 100 yards. In addition, whereas the rifle fires only one projectile at a time and thus must be sighted with great accuracy, the shotgun can fire a spread of shot, thus increasing both the striking radius of the weapon's ammunition, particularly over longer distances, and its stopping power at closer ranges. Additionally, the shotgun can deliver nonlethal ammunition. This is often considered to be a point in the shotgun's favor.

Another of the shotgun's potential advantages is the deterrent effect that the sight of a shotgun may have on some individuals when confronted by police. The shotgun is still a feared weapon, and while some heavily armored individuals may have anticipated and discounted police shotguns as a threat to them, a substantial number of the adversaries faced by police today may still feel more intimidated by the shotgun than the smaller, lighter, and (to the uninitiated) apparently less fearsome .223 rifle. The rifled shotgun slug can cause adversaries understandable caution even when outfitted with ballistic body armor.

Because of the differing characteristics and capabilities of the shotgun and the rifle, some departments have elected to add the rifle to the patrol car while retaining the shotgun as well. In a number of these agencies, the shotgun has been reconfigured to fire solely nonlethal projectiles such as the beanbag, while the rifle is added to the patrol car's arsenal for use in deadly force situations.¹²

1. Rifle Types

If the decision of the department is to issue rifles instead of or in addition to shotguns, department planners will find that a wide range of rifle types will be available to choose from. No attempt will be made here to catalog the many excellent models

available, but a few of the more commonly employed types can be mentioned:

- M-16
- AR-15 or its carbine version the CAR-15
- M-4
- H&K MP5
- SKS

These five models appear from random sampling to be at present the most commonly acquired rifles for patrol car use, with the AR-15 and CAR-15 being perhaps the most frequently chosen. However, there are many other rifle types, both military and commercial, that may be considered by a given department to be more suitable for its particular needs.

2. Rifle Variants and Accessories

Selective Fire: Most police-suitable rifle models can be ordered and operated with certain firing options. For example, some .223 rifles can be fired in either semiautomatic or full automatic mode. A three-round-burst option may also be available. In these cases the desired option is chosen by the rifle's user by moving a selector switch on the weapon.

However, it should be noted that, because of the war zone argument, some municipal governments may not wish to allow the department to deploy weapons that can produce full automatic fire.

Magazine Capacity: Police-suitable rifles may offer a variety of magazine capacities. The typical magazine for the .223 rifle holds 20 or 30 rounds. Some rifles may offer larger capacity magazines. Whatever type of magazine is chosen, a plentiful supply of magazines should be ordered for each weapon being purchased, because, one, each officer employing the rifle will need an adequate supply of loaded magazines available to permit reloading during an encounter, and, two, some magazines, particularly those not actually made by the manufacturer of the rifle itself, may prove unreliable and may have to be discarded or sent for repair. There is also the possibility of damage to a magazine. Thus, funds should be committed to allow for the purchase of a sufficient surplus of magazines per rifle.

Regardless of the stated capacity of the magazine, some departments have found that light loading—that is, loading the magazine to less than capacity—can reduce the possibility of jams. This practice may be made a matter of policy or left to the individual officer. In either event, some sources have suggested loading 19 rounds in a 20-round magazine and 28 rounds in a 30-round magazine. Individual departments and individual officers may determine that other loadings are more appropriate for their purposes.

Sights: Most rifle models can be ordered with a choice of sights. These may range

from simple open iron sights to highly sophisticated telescopic, illuminated, laser, or night sights. A department must choose which type of sight, or variety of sights, is appropriate for the intended uses of the rifles in that jurisdiction. Again, budget considerations may control these decisions, as the more sophisticated sights are often very expensive.

Ammunition Types: As noted earlier in this article, .223 ammunition is available in a variety of configurations. One that has already been mentioned is the type of round that has a bullet that is designed to fragment upon contact with an obstacle such as the wall of a building.

Departments concerned about the use of rifles under conditions where the homes of innocent persons may be struck by police fire may prefer this type of round. Such high-fragmentation-rate ammunition reportedly can puncture armored vests without difficulty but is less likely than alternative types of .223 slugs to penetrate walls or other surfaces excessively.

There are, however, other ammunition configurations that may be chosen depending upon the intended use and the perceived nature of the target. Some departments that have deployed the .223 rifle to patrol cars have addressed the penetration problem by

providing each vehicle with ammunition of different types, supplying some magazines loaded with cartridges of the more easily frangible type and some magazines with other types of ammunition, such as armor piercing, for use in situations where high penetration is needed.¹³

Cost may again be a factor, for .223 ammunition is expensive, particularly the more exotic types, for which a price of \$250 a box would not be unknown, and the procurement budget must make allowance for ammunition costs and provide for acquisition of adequate supplies of all needed types, both for training and for operational use.

Modifications and Accessories: Today there is an almost limitless variety of opportunities to customize a particular rifle. These features may be available factory installed, or they may be aftermarket equipment that can be purchased from the rifle's manufacturer or third-party suppliers and added to the rifle. Extended magazines, laser sights, high-powered flashlights slung beside or beneath the barrel, folding stocks, slings and swivels, recoil cushions, and so on, are just a few of the options available.¹⁴

Standardization and Interchangeability: Many authorities express concerns about the excessive customization of police rifles in a given department. One of the main consid-

erations is that of interchangeability, both of parts and of operators. It may be desirable that a certain degree of standardization be maintained so parts will be interchangeable to the greatest possible extent between rifles in the same department and every officer can, if necessary, pick up and use another officer's rifle without excessive difficulty. Each department will, of course, have to make its own decision as to the degree of standardization that will be required in that department.

Department Issue or Individual Purchase?

As noted earlier in this article, the cost of equipping an entire department can be substantial. Where budget factors are critical, a department may choose to allow officers to purchase their own weapons and, upon completion of the necessary training, carry the weapons in their patrol cars. This method has advantages and disadvantages. First of all, it relieves a cash-strapped department of some of the burden of acquiring the rifles, and it encourages officers to obtain, train with, and carry the weapons on duty. It also may ensure that the officers who purchase their own weapons take better care of them than might be the case with a department-issued weapon. On the minus side, this policy may make

it impossible for the desired number of officers to be equipped with rifles, for not every officer will have the funds to spend on such expensive equipment.

If departments permit officers to purchase patrol rifles, they should impose specific restrictions and requirements on those purchases to include the manufacturer and model as well as equipment used. The department should retain full authority to inspect such firearms on a routine basis, take them out of service if they do not meet specified standards, and to make other such binding requirements on their use and carry that are in the best interest of the department.

To Whom Should Rifles Be Issued?

One of the more difficult decisions that must be made by planners in a department that is acquiring patrol rifles concerns which officers will receive the rifles issued by the department. There are many viewpoints on this, and little agreement.

1. Issuance to SWAT Teams Only

Some departments limit issuance of rifles to SWAT-trained officers or other special units. This may be an attractive compromise in a jurisdiction where there is political or social pressure not to arm

all members of the department with rifles. However, one of the disadvantages of this approach, and indeed one of the very reasons why departments decide to issue rifles to all patrol officers, is that such limited issuance means that there will inevitably be a time lag between the time the first responders, armed only with handguns, shotguns, or both, encounter a shooting situation and the time that the rifles arrive on the scene in the hands of the SWAT teams.¹⁵ Many critics of the SWAT-only plan point out that it is precisely to eliminate this time lag that the movement toward issuance of patrol rifles was conceived.

2. Retention of Rifles at the Station

Where possession of rifles only by SWAT teams is considered insufficient, another option is to store rifles at the station for issuance to all officers, or to specified officers, when an incident occurs. However, like the option of limiting issuance to SWAT teams, centralizing the rifles at a station or stations creates the problem of lack of immediate access by the first responders. For that reason, this option is not often a popular one and is generally considered only when budgetary considerations or other aspects of the political and social climate make universal distribution to patrol officers impracticable.

3. Issuance to Selected Officers or Teams of Officers

Departments that do not desire to issue rifles to all officers, but wish to deploy rifles to more personnel than just SWAT teams, may elect to provide the rifles to a number of selected officers or to specific units in the department (in addition to the usual SWAT units) that the department feels are most likely to encounter situations where the additional firepower will be needed. Selection may be based upon varying factors, such as the following:

- Function or assignment of the officer or unit (such as the robbery, homicide, narcotics, or counterterrorism unit)
- Rank or seniority in a unit or in the department as a whole (sergeants, the senior officer in a car or unit, and so on)
- Prior experience with the rifle in a military or police setting
- Demonstrated ability with the rifle during department training
- Other criteria determined by the department to be proper

4. Issuance to All Patrol Officers or Vehicles

The plan of deployment that seems to be currently most popular is to issue the

weapons to every officer, or, failing that, to every patrol car. This ensures that one or more rifles will be immediately available to any unit when trouble starts. Not surprisingly, this appears to be the plan that is most favored by patrol officers. If such a plan is employed, it is best to assign specific rifles to individuals who retain responsibility for those firearms. Since rifles need to be sighted on a routine and individual basis, this will also help to ensure that if needed, greater accuracy can be obtained.

Opt-Out Provision: Even though the basic plan calls for issuance of rifles to all patrol personnel, there may be officers in the department who do not want to be issued rifles. Thus, where the department selects a plan whereby all personnel are to be issued rifles, the department may wish to include an opt out provision for officers who prefer not to be issued rifles but to remain armed only with handguns or the traditional patrol car shotgun or both.

Issuance to Each Patrol Car: A deployment method used by many departments is the issuance of one rifle per patrol vehicle, rather than per each officer. One officer in each patrol car or unit is then designated as the user of the rifle carried in the car. This relieves budgetary pressure by reducing the number of rifles that must be procured. But strict guidelines must be established concerning which officer or officers in a patrol unit may use the rifles, and care must be taken that any officer, whether the primary designee or not, who may have to use the rifle in an armed encounter involving that vehicle, is fully trained in the weapon's use. This is necessary because if the officer designated to use the rifle is absent, injured, or otherwise unable to deploy the rifle, another officer in that vehicle or unit may need to take over and fire the weapon. Thus, every officer who may have access to the weapon carried in the patrol car must be thoroughly trained in its use, even though he or she is not the primary designee to use the rifle.

5. Issuance by Rank and Seniority

Despite the general desire of most beat officers of all ranks to have a rifle available to them when on patrol, various factors, including an insufficient quantity of rifles to make distribution universal, has led some departments to issue the rifles according to rank or seniority. Thus, as noted above, typically when there is only one rifle to be carried in a patrol vehicle, that rifle is assigned to the senior officer in the vehicle.

Supervisors may also be assigned rifles for themselves or their cars, so that when they respond to an incident scene to take command and control, they will have the necessary firepower to protect themselves and to support the officers already on the scene.

High-ranking officials or other headquarters personnel may also desire issuance of a

rifle for their own use, even though they are seldom deployed to the field. The number of rifles available will presumably govern the department's decision on this point.

6. Transportation

The question as to where and how the rifles will be carried in the patrol car is an important consideration. Some departments require that the rifles be carried in the trunks of the patrol cars, but opponents of this method point out that this limits and slows access to the weapons in an emergency.

In addition, rifles carried in a patrol car's trunk may be more vulnerable to dust, moisture, and damage (to the sights) than rifles carried securely in racks inside the vehicle. Some departments have addressed these concerns by having rifles stored in steel boxes when placed in the trunks of the patrol cars, but critics of this approach note that placing the rifles in containers further delays access to the weapons in an emergency.

For those departments that prefer not to store rifles in the trunks of vehicles, rifle racks similar to those long used to secure shotguns in the passenger compartment of patrol cars are readily available and relatively inexpensive. In many cases, the use of rifle racks in the vehicle passenger compartment will be favored as a solution by the patrol officers themselves, due to the easier access to the weapons that this type of storage provides.

Rules of Engagement

Once the chosen rifles and accessories have been acquired, but before they are deployed to cars or personnel, every department should identify and disseminate to all personnel information regarding the conditions under which use of the patrol rifle will be permitted. These guidelines are the rules of engagement that will govern when, where, and how patrol rifles will be put into action. These rules of engagement must be carefully drafted, and they must take into account that in the modern era of terrorism and heightened violence, older standards for engagement may no longer be appropriate. As one authority of long experience has observed, "the rules of engagement have changed," and this requires that new rules, suited to both the current and anticipated future situation on the streets, must be crafted.¹⁶ Local conditions will dictate the exact nature of these new rules for each department, but some of the considerations and possible restrictions are set forth below.

1. Type of Incident

It is apparent that display and use of patrol rifles must be limited to situations where serious crimes carrying the potential for violence against officers or civilians are suspected or are in progress. Use or even display of a patrol rifle in incidents such as routine traffic stops

or minor, nonviolent offenses is seldom going to be appropriate and may lead to escalation of the incident and injury to officers, suspects, or passersby.

2. Type of Adversary

The type of adversary confronting the officers will often dictate whether the use of patrol rifles is appropriate. For example, it would likely be considered inappropriate to even display a patrol rifle in a confrontation at close range with a single individual who, though possibly mentally disturbed, is unarmed, unarmored, and not displaying any intention to fire upon officers or third persons. By contrast, should the officers be confronted with several individuals, heavily armed, leaving a bank or other facility where a major crime is suspected of having occurred, and brandishing heavy weapons at the officers (or even opening fire on them), then immediate deployment and use of the rifles would usually be considered entirely correct. Similarly, any threat to the officers by an armed individual prepared to fire upon the officers from a distance that precludes the accurate use of handguns would presumably justify deployment of the patrol rifles and preparation for their use. And, clearly, when officers are confronted with adversaries who are themselves armed with rifles or other varieties of heavy weapons and who show intentions to employ them against the officers or others, the use of the patrol rifle is likely to be justified.

In particular, if officers are confronted with adversaries who claim to have, or appear to have, biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons, that is perhaps the clearest situation where the deployment and use of patrol rifles may be considered justified.

Note that the examples used above suggest only the circumstances that may justify the use of patrol rifles. Depending upon the characteristics of the specific incident, the actual firing of the rifles may or may not be appropriate even in these situations, and any such actual discharge of the rifles should occur only within the guidelines of the department's shooting policies. The bottom line in these as in other situations of deadly force is that the use of force must be reasonable in light of the facts known to the officer at the time.

3. Incident Environment

In addition to evaluating the type of incident and the type of adversary involved, officers preparing to employ patrol rifles must consider the environment in which the incident occurs. Opening fire with rifles in a crowded area such as an airport terminal or sports stadium would clearly be highly dangerous to bystanders and should be avoided if at all possible. On the other hand, use of rifles in open country, where the adversary is at a great distance and no bystanders or buildings

appear to be in the line of fire, would present a much easier situation for decision.

As with any type of police firearms use, the background conditions are crucial. For example, should the adversaries be encountered in a location where there are fuel tanks or other volatile facilities in the immediate background, maneuver would normally be employed by the police to alter their shooting angle and prevent an explosion, a fire, or the release of toxic fumes into the air.

4. Officer Discretion

As will be immediately apparent from the foregoing discussion, departmental policies for the use of patrol rifles must necessarily cover a variety of scenarios and provide clear guidance to the extent that is possible. However, because not every possible situation can be anticipated in any policy, some room must be left for officer discretion.

This does not necessarily mean that the department's rules of engagement should permit an officer to open fire with a patrol rifle on every occasion when he or she feels it is necessary. Many departmental policies are drafted to require that, except in the direst emergency, authority of a supervisor or senior officer present be required before rifles may be fired. While policy and procedures are important in order to control the use of rifles, much of what must be imparted

to officers along these lines requires training in a variety of scenarios.

Whatever plan is adopted for deployment of rifles in the department, it will be necessary that any officer who is to be issued a rifle is fully qualified to use the weapon. Thus, the department must have a well-developed program for basic training and periodic requalification with the weapon. This program should include standards for qualification and for requalification, the frequency of such requalification, and the consequences of failure to qualify or requalify.

Training, including requalification, is discussed more fully in subsequent sections of this article. At this time, few if any state standards and training commissions set criteria for training and qualification for patrol rifles.

For some departments, the acquisition and issuance of patrol rifles may be a bargaining issue with local or national police unions or associations. These organizations may have concerns regarding to whom the rifles are to be issued, the qualification requirements, the rules for their use in the field, and other matters. Obviously, any such concerns may influence the decisions being made by the department as to the matters discussed here.

The Body Armor Issue

The developments discussed in this article, including the question of the acquisition and

deployment of patrol rifles, have raised concerns on the part of some agencies and their officers regarding body armor. These concerns arise in two contexts.

First, many feel that the increasing use by criminals of heavy weapons such as the AK-47 make it imperative that officers be equipped with body armor that is capable of withstanding impact from high-powered rifle bullets, something that standard-issue soft body armor cannot do.

In addition, there is concern that the issuance of rifles to many officers in the department will increase the risk of injuries to departmental personnel by friendly fire, that is, due to being inadvertently struck by rounds fired by other police officers on the scene. Therefore, it is felt, body armor issued to and worn by police officers must be of a nature and quality that will withstand hits from the rifles being issued to the department. This is a serious concern and one that should be addressed by every department. General wisdom holds that officers should wear body armor that will protect them from the type of weapon they carry.

The addition of rifles to the patrol officer's arsenal therefore mandates consideration for upgrading the quality and deployment of body armor—a matter that would involve significant additional expense as well as the necessity for developing policies to ensure proper use of such body armor.

The resolution of this question may not be a simple one. Some sources point out that armored vests sufficient to stop high-powered rounds such as the 7.62mm or .223-caliber cartridge may be heavy and awkward, too heavy and awkward to wear during routine patrol duties. If that is the case, plans could be made for the availability of suitable vests in the event of a sudden armed confrontation. Presence of such vests in each patrol car, ready to be donned when a violent situation becomes imminent, is one possible solution, but the sufficiency of this, or other options, as a solution is a matter that requires careful thought by each department.

A department policy or regulation requiring that wherever possible the heavier armor be donned when the patrol rifle is deployed should be considered for adoption.

Policy Issues

The decision to add rifles to the department's armaments will require drafting and issuance of new department policies. These policies will have to be carefully prepared and will need to include clear guidance on such matters as deployment of the rifles, training and requalification requirements, and use of the rifles on the street—when, how, and by whom they are to be used.

Further, like any departmental policy, these new policies must be fully disseminated, understood, and complied with by department personnel. The rifle training curriculum for each department must include full coverage of these new policies to ensure both understanding and compliance.

Training

As noted several times in the preceding sections of this article, addition of rifles to the patrol officer's armament necessitates the immediate implementation of a comprehensive and effective training program. Many of the concerns expressed by those who have reservations regarding the wisdom of the deployment of rifles to patrol officers may be met by ensuring that each and every officer is properly trained.

Rifle training is expensive, and the more rifles that are being deployed in the department and the more officers that will be using them, the more expensive the program will be. One of the cost factors here is that a rifle training program must necessarily be more extensive even than the standard department training for handgun and shotgun use. When computing the probable expense, the cost of training facilities and training materials for rifle familiarization courses must not be overlooked. Rifle ammunition is expensive, and ample supplies must be on hand.

In addition, range facilities for rifle training may present a problem. Many pistol ranges are inadequate for rifle training, so alternate facilities must be located or constructed. In addition, rifle training requires additional equipment, tools, targets, and target supplies beyond those normally employed for pistol training.

There are many resources that the department may draw upon in establishing its rifle training program. Many U.S. law enforcement agencies have already developed comprehensive rifle training curricula, and their lesson plans and other materials are often available either through the agencies themselves or on the Internet at law enforcement Web sites. There are also courses available through official and commercial agencies. In addition, the manufacturers of the weapons chosen for acquisition may be able to provide training assistance.

Some of these training courses may be offered at the department's own range; others may require travel to a central location. In the latter event, the expense of sending all personnel to the courses may be prohibitive, in which case it may be possible to send the department's own armorers and firearms instructors to the courses, so that they may then conduct the training for the remaining department personnel.¹⁷

Because of the availability of existing training courses and lesson plans, no attempt will be made here to provide a detailed training outline. However, certain elements

that are common to most training programs, and that are usually considered essential, can be suggested here as a general guide.

A typical training program may cover, among other matters, the following elements.

1. Classroom Phase

Rules and Policies: The training curriculum must provide clear guidance on when and how the rifles are to be employed. This phase of the training should be similar to the shoot-don't-shoot training already common among police departments, but more detailed and extensive than traditional handgun training due to the additional considerations involved in the use of a high-powered, rapid-fire weapon. The policies developed by the department for the deployment, transportation, and use of the rifle should be thoroughly explained during this phase, and testing procedures should be employed to ensure that all trainees are fully conversant with policy requirements.

Training in deployment responsibilities and procedures should be a major aspect of this phase. Officers must understand where weapons may be obtained, who may obtain them, and how they are to be transported to (and deployed at) the scene of the incident. In addition, there must be thorough instruction in the command and control procedures that will be in effect to control the firing of the rifles at the incident scene.

A highly emphasized aspect of this phase of training should be instruction in the avoidance of civilian casualties and friendly fire injuries to fellow officers.

Weapons Familiarization and Handling: Elements of this phase may include the following:

- Weapon familiarization, including nomenclature, functioning, disassembly and reassembly under field conditions, ammunition, magazines, and any accessories added to the weapons
- Weapon safety in all phases of storage, deployment, and use
- Loading and unloading of weapon and magazines
- Malfunction prevention and correction, including corrective measures under combat conditions
- Care and maintenance of the weapon, including cleaning (both periodic and after firing) and damage prevention, to include maintenance of ammunition, magazines, and any accessories added to the weapons
- Proper storage of the weapon in patrol cars, stations, residences, and any other locations where the weapons may be located
- The proper use of body armor, including the situations in which it is employed
- Such other elements as may be considered necessary to ensure an adequate understanding of the weapon and its use

2. Range Training

The range phase of the training should be similar to, but more extensive than, the traditional training in the use of handguns. Elements may include the following:

- Range procedures and safety
- Firing of the rifle in various modes, including automatic, semiautomatic, or three-round burst training if the rifles in question are so equipped
- Firing from various positions, including prone, kneeling, sitting, and standing positions, as well as firing from behind barriers and vehicles, firing in close proximity to other officers who are also firing rapidly, and

firing from unconventional positions, such as lying on one side after being partially incapacitated

- Firing at various distances
- Night and low-light firing
- Shooting techniques, including sighting, recoil control, and so on
- Transition from one weapon to another during incidents, as from handgun to rifle or vice versa
- Firing control procedures, which are first explained in the classroom and then practiced at the range in accordance with the established command and control procedures, under close supervision, and subject to directions

from range instructors using terminology similar to the commands that would be employed on an actual incident scene

- Practice in weapon malfunction avoidance and correction
- Operational tactics, to include both individual and unit tactics in various scenarios where deployment and use of the rifle may be required as well as selection and use of cover and concealment
- Advanced practical training in the avoidance of civilian and friendly fire casualties
- Training in the donning and use of body armor before and perhaps during live firing exercises

The foregoing are only examples of elements that could be included in the rifle training curriculum. Items may be added or subtracted as deemed appropriate. Actual training agendas will usually be far more detailed than this sample.

3. *Requalification*

Training in rifle use should include provision for periodic requalification firing. Current standards for requalification with the patrol rifle reportedly vary from requalification every month to requalification every year. Too-frequent requalification may be unpopular with department personnel and may even become a bargaining issue. On the other hand, infrequent requalification may allow skills to degrade and lead to civil liability if the contention is raised that an injury was due to a failure of the department to ensure that proficiency with the weapon was maintained over time. Quarterly requalification has been adopted by many departments as a workable compromise.

The requalification program should include provision for remedial training for those who do not meet requalification standards and, if necessary, decertification of that officer for rifle use and transfer of the weapon to another qualified member of the department.

Summary

This article has discussed the various considerations, pro and con, that may help a law enforcement agency decide whether to add the patrol rifle to its armament inventory. This article makes no overarching recommendation on the matter. There are simply too many considerations that must be weighed by each department before a reasonable decision can be made on this subject.

Nevertheless, a component of this article has been addressed to those departments that will acquire and deploy patrol rifles;

it discusses various matters that those departments will need to consider. Individual departments will discover other aspects of their particular situation that will have to be resolved if a successful and safe deployment is to be carried out.

One definite recommendation presented here and advocated by the IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center is that any department that decides to deploy rifles should plan and execute a comprehensive and effective training program. The safe, proper, and effective use of rifles is a complex subject, and even experienced officers will need firm and complete guidance in all of the aspects of rifle safety, maintenance, and use in the field. Although comprehensive training programs can be costly, particularly where large numbers of department personnel are involved, no expense should be spared to ensure that the department's training program accomplishes every necessary goal of that program before any officer is permitted to deploy and use a rifle in the line of duty. Thorough training protects both the department's officers and the public from injury and helps to protect the department itself from civil liability that may result from inadequate or improper training.

It is further recommended that every department that is considering the acquisition of rifles, or that has acquired them, should take advantage of the knowledge and experience of law enforcement agencies that have already deployed rifles. Most such agencies are ready and willing to share their experience with other departments, either on a one-to-one basis, through professional organizations, or through the medium of professionally recognized Web sites that deal with patrol rifle issues. ♦

¹The problem of disproportionate firepower used by criminals helped motivated the movement by law enforcement agencies some years ago away from the traditional police weapon, the .38-caliber revolver, to the 9mm pistol and, subsequently, to autoloading pistols of still heavier caliber. The addition of rifles to the police inventory is just another step in this progression.

²Some authorities point to the Columbine school shooting in Colorado in 1999 as an example of the necessity for the provision of new weapons to police and the development of new tactics to be used in similar situations. The phrase "post-Columbine tactics" has come into use to describe the developments in policy and procedure sparked by the Colorado incident.

³A large number of police departments and some federal agencies have already decided to arm their officers with rifles. Many other departments are currently considering their options in this regard. The intent of this article is to assist departments of both types.

⁴Perhaps the most common of these has been the Soviet-designed Kalashnikov rifle known as the AK-47, a 7.62mm military weapon of great range and striking power. Capable of automatic fire and equipped with 20-round or 30-round magazines or 75-round drums, the AK-47 leaves a handgun-armed police officer at a disadvantage. This is the weapon that was used by the bank robbers in the 1997 North Hollywood incident.

⁵According to reports, a study by the Violence Policy Center of Washington, D.C., found that of the 211 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty between January 1, 1998, and December 31, 2001, at least 41 were killed with assault weapons.

⁶See also the discussion of the relative characteristics of the rifle and the shotgun in the section on department options for choosing an issue weapon.

⁷See also the section on ammunition types.

⁸Many officers feel so strongly on the matter that, where permitted to do so, they have purchased .223 rifles with their own funds, often at a cost in excess of \$1,000.

⁹This concern is not without merit. For example, in one jurisdiction in 2005, state police opened fire (reportedly with M-4 rifles) on a murder suspect in a certain town. According to the reports, a local homeowner claimed that during the shooting incident his house was hit between 20 and 30 times by police bullets, although no one inside was injured. But there is some feeling that properly chosen .223 ammunition will in fact present a lesser, rather than a greater, hazard of excessive penetration.

¹⁰The initial purchase of firearms may be facilitated by use of the federal government's 1033 program. M-16s that can be easily converted to semiautomatic may be an answer to reducing high initial purchase costs for patrol rifles.

¹¹Training factors are considered further later in this article.

¹²Some observers have noted the potential risk of having too many different types of ammunition in one vehicle or location, thus raising the possibility of an officer inadvertently selecting the wrong type of ammunition in an emergency situation.

¹³Departments deploying more than one type of ammunition in patrol cars often color code the magazines so that the correct type will be easily identifiable when needed.

¹⁴The same is true for shotguns, for which a similar array of accessories is available.

¹⁵This was one of the factors that made the North Hollywood shootout so serious. In that incident the first responders had no rifles and were outgunned for many minutes while they awaited the arrival of the SWAT teams.

¹⁶Again, the Columbine and North Hollywood incidents are often cited by police authorities as the stimuli for crafting the new rules and tactics.

¹⁷Courses specifically designed to train and certify departmental personnel as patrol rifle instructors may be available through national police-related organizations or other sources.