



FORCE SCIENCE[®] NEWS

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New books offer guidance on career survival, deadly force

Two more new books that hit our desk recently focus on survival, but against life threats of a very different nature.

One offers strategies for prevailing against the “hidden” dangers of a law enforcement career, the “true killers” of cops.

The other concerns using deadly force to win out against a violent attacker.

Read...learn...live!

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INSTITUTE

1. Armor Your Self: How to Survive a Career in Law Enforcement

Armor Your Self is a treasure trove of tactics for controlling perhaps the greatest risk in law enforcement—the toxic atmosphere of the job that can rob you of health, happiness, and even life itself.

Across more than 400 pages, author John Marx details myriad strategies for building what he calls “Tactical Resilience” that can fortify you, your family, your peers, and your agency physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually against the silent toll of “hidden dangers” prevalent in a modern law enforcement career.

In the absence of an effective program of resistance, Marx writes, “Simply being a law enforcement officer may be enough to make sure that you won’t live a long, happy and healthy life.

“A growing body of research indicates that our profession is very toxic to those who enter it, as evident in higher than average rates of heart disease, diabetes and cancer, and a lower-than-expected average life expectancy. Police officer suicide, on-the-job fatigue, alcoholism, domestic violence, divorce, depression and PTSD are additional serious problems.

“The real dangers lie not with the bad guys but within the stresses of the job. Those are the real cop killers.”

With the right countermeasures, however, you can “survive and thrive in this career,” Marx says. The methods he suggests are practical, can be learned quickly, and can be applied immediately.

His approach, he promises, “will provide you with insights and strategies you haven’t considered before” and will “increase your satisfaction with life,” while challenging you to develop “completely as a person and as an effective law enforcement professional.”

BEEN THERE. In the past, Marx has been in desperate need of such “how-to” guidance himself, he told Force Science News. A veteran of 23 years with a sheriff’s office and a municipal PD in Colorado, “I went through some pretty dark times in my career,” he says.

Symptoms of his dysfunctional periods included a crumbling marriage, acrimonious combat with his administrators, an exhaustive, hard-charging workaholicism that kept him trying futilely to juggle every extra shift he could grab plus a series of sideline entrepreneurial ventures and his regular, demanding duty assignments. He was wrenched especially hard emotionally by a seemingly endless spate of on-the-job tragedies involving children, including the decapitation of a toddler in an auto accident.

“Like a lot of cops, I did a good job of masking my pain,” he says. But he scored alarmingly high on testing for PTSD and twice he seriously contemplated suicide.

After Marx finally retired from law enforcement in 2002, bone tired of “seeing the worst of the human condition,” a close friend who’d been a popular, life-of-the-party “golden boy” patrol sergeant on another department shot himself to death.

The sergeant left no note of explanation. But given how he himself had teetered on that precipice, Marx suspected what he calls “Blue Trauma Syndrome”—the cumulative,

corrosive stresses of a law enforcement career.

It was a critical turning point for Marx. He set aside a nascent business of customer-service consulting and began devoting his full effort to researching and then independently training officers in practical, effective ways to strengthen their defenses against the non-felonious hazards of policing.

Under the auspices of his organization, the Law Enforcement Survival Institute, he and a training staff have conducted classes throughout North America and he appears annually as a speaker at the conference of ILEETA, the International Law Enforcement Educators & Trainers Assn.

Armor Your Self, which he says took eight years to assemble and write, encapsulates the best of what he has learned about “saving the lives of the people who save lives.” It offers, he says, “the bright sun of a new day.”

CONTENT FOCUS. Written in the style of a good trainer talking to you face to face, this comprehensive volume provides tools for doing “a realistic threat assessment” of your current life and career.

Then it sets forth a seven-point system for personal protection—how to consciously develop and reinforce the ability to withstand extraordinary physical and psychological stressors “and still bounce back to your normal state—or something even stronger.”

Four fundamental building blocks—physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual strength—Marx considers the essential

foundation of this Tactical Resilience. The three other key factors—a positive mind-set, self-mastery (willpower, self-control or self-discipline), and positive social support—he positions as “the glue to hold the Tactical Resilience system together.”

The heart of the book, he says, is the development of a working understanding of each of these elements, complete with practical exercises that can cement them as guiding principles in your life.

For example, in chapters on creating “mental armor,” he explains up front that he’s “not talking about improving your mental health.” Instead, he concentrates on “improving your brain’s cognitive abilities.” The training exercises he prescribes—some active, some passive—focus on tactics and techniques for:

- heightening your situational awareness skills
- increasing your memory
- expanding your language skills
- advancing your skills of anticipation and mental flexibility
- enhancing your problem-solving and decision-making abilities
- amplifying your cognitive processing speed, and so on.

To equip yourself with “emotional armor,” he recommends exercises that “improve your management of negative emotions” while promoting positive substitutions, such as tactics for:

- managing anger and fear
- maintaining calm
- quieting your overactive “monkey mind”
- defeating despair and finding hope
- dealing with grief
- setting a positive mind-set, etc.

All the information is valuable not only for cops, Marx says, but “also for family members, to help them learn how to survive a law enforcement career.”

While the exercises Marx advocates are not complicated, they require commitment to be effective. “You have to consciously, intentionally, and regularly practice strengthening your resilience on a daily basis,” he emphasizes. “Essentially you’re installing new habits to replace defective ones. And that takes consistent and concerted repetitive conditioning.”

AGENCY SUPPORT. A valuable component of Marx’s book is the guidance he offers for creating a comprehensive, agency-wide system for supporting officer wellness. Organizational support, of course, makes the personal task of building resilience easier and likely more lasting.

Getting that vital collaboration involves nothing less than “strengthening and conditioning your agency’s culture so that it is positive and works in conjunction with your personal wellness tactics”—a daunting undertaking, he acknowledges.

He identifies more than 30 elements an agency needs for a “model” support system.

Being a realist, he strategizes how to get these factors in place “from the bottom up” as well as (ideally) from the top down as well.

Copies of *Armor Your Self* can be ordered from Amazon in paperback or Kindle formats (click here to go to the Amazon page) or directly from the publisher in paperback at: www.armoryourself.com.

John Marx can be reached at: director@copsalive.com. For a full menu of police training offered by his organization, visit its website at: www.LawEnforcementSurvivalInstitute.org

2. Straight Talk on Armed Defense: What the Experts Want You to Know

For his twentieth book, venerable trainer and firearms master Massad Ayoob has solicited chapters from nearly a dozen other well-known professionals skilled in training cops, including Force Science faculty member Dr. Alexis Artwohl.

Firearms instructors, police psychologists, current or former officers, behavioral scientists, and defense attorneys, along with Ayoob himself, they share their special insights in individual commentaries about an important array of deadly force topics. These include:

- How the mind and body work in a crisis
- Who wins, who loses in a gunfight—and why
- What’s critical to know about the mind-set and tactics of violent adversaries
- What kind of training leads to victory

- How to manage “postvention,” the psychological aftermath of lethal force
- What to expect in a shooting investigation—and how to handle it
- Post-incident legal challenges
- Lessons learned from real-life fights for life, and more.

COP BENEFITS. Straight Talk on Armed Defense, 256 pages in soft-cover, is written for civilians who carry or have home access to firearms. But it can be a useful tool for officers, as well.

- It’s a good refresher on the essentials of winning life-threatening confrontations and surviving the challenges that follow, from the perspectives of knowledgeable subject-matter experts in a variety of disciplines.
- If you teach civilians in concealed-carry classes or in private range instruction, it’s a concise, easy-to-read guide for what they most need to know about the realities, responsibilities, and potential surprises of pulling the trigger.
- And it’s an excellent primer for your family to help them better understand your deadly force decision-making and consequences. It’s best read, of course, before they get the call that you’ve just been involved in a shoot-out!

MYTH & REALITY. Ayob identifies Dr. Artwohl as one of the authorities on the psychological and sociological aspects of deadly force. In her 15-page commentary, she explores aspects of decision-making and memory under stress that most people, including many officers, investigators, and

trainers, have little accurate comprehension of.

For instance, thinking of your brain as a “computer” where you fully “store” and reliably “retrieve” intact memories, she writes, “is not at all accurate. Major memory gaps, inaccurate details, and false memories are common in everyday life, and can become worse during stressful situations,” such as a life-threatening encounter.

In her crash course of reality, she draws the distinction between “narrative truth”—what people think they saw or experienced—and “historic truth”—what really happened. And she explains factors that can lead to troublesome discrepancies between the two. These include:

- the brain’s involuntary “selective attention” in moments of crisis, which can result in “inattentive blindness” that prevents you from forming a memory of some things even though they occurred within your visual range;
- stress-induced distortions of what you see and hear that may inaccurately shape your recollections later;
- biases, expectations, and experience-based “schemas” that can innocently result, without your conscious awareness, in “perceptions that are not entirely accurate.”

“The criminal justice system you encounter may be unaware of these normal, and sometimes severe, biological limitations of memory,” Artwohl warns. “It’s important that you and your legal representative understand the basic science about selective attention, perception, and memory, so that you can respond appropriately during

statements, and defend yourself if others try to use these normal memory processes to discredit you.”

OTHER RESOURCES. In the last chapter of *Straight Talk on Armed Defense*, Ayooob identifies a variety of additional sources where readers can gain more knowledge and training about the use of deadly force. As a repository of valuable information, he recommends the Force Science Institute website, <http://www.forcescience.org>.

As a tease at the end, he provides an excerpt from another of his books, *Deadly Force: Understanding Your Right to Self Defense*. Included is discussion of a subject that was vigorously debated recently in *Force Science News*—whether warning shots are a good idea. Ayooob offers 10 reasons they’re not.

Copies of *Straight Talk on Armed Defense* can be ordered at a discount through Amazon. com. (Click here to go to the Amazon page) Massad Ayooob can be reached at: mass@massadayoob.com.

Note: An expanded version of Artwohl’s commentary on memory and decision-making appears in a new book by Drs. Darrell Ross and Gary Vilke, *Guidelines for Investigating Officer-Involved Shootings, Arrest-Related Deaths, and Deaths in Custody*, which we reviewed in *FSN #345* (08.23.17).

Written by Force Science Institute
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