
LAS VEGAS SUN

Law enforcement officers learn fine art of making a forceful entry

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At police raids, as in cocktail parties, your entrance is everything.

First, don't linger outside the doorway. It's just fatal to stand still. Instead, elegantly and immediately kick in the door. Or use a cop key if you must; be it a battering ram or a thoughtful garland of plastic explosives.

In police jargon, these surprise entrances are "dynamic entries" that "overwhelm a room." Strategic arrivals catch criminals off-guard in their homes, sort of like a debutante's stunning stop-you-in-your-tracks dance floor debut - but with weapons.

More specifically, with blue plastic machine guns that, as one police instructor put it during a seminar on dynamic entry Tuesday, "make everything sexier."

Sexier, you must prop up this machine gun next to your cheek, holding it poised, a police pirouette. Now cross under the archway, hunched nearly in half, into the dark room where your audience waits: criminals, presumably, cradling ammunition. With your backup (never enter alone) you must file forward, splay out across the closest wall and wait, briefly. This is a symphony composed in seconds; you make sure no one, nothing, nobody is approaching. Then you move forward in neat rows across the room.

The seminar, taught by instructors from Controlled F.O.R.C.E., a professional police training company whose acronym stands for "First Officer Response in a Critical Environment," was staged in a casino convention center, low-lighted to create shadows. (One instructor's shirt explained, "We fight what you fear.")

The students, some of whom were Metro cops, spent over an hour taking turns busting into a fake building and crossing the simulated floor. (One student wore a shirt that read: "Crowd control: Our job is to save your ass, not kiss it.")

Your job is to stutter-step, heel to toe, across an unknown floor. Your job is to snake into the shadowy corners with your weapon held high and straight. You're crop-dusting a dark room for crooks, you're flying in close formation and waiting - guns cheek-high, to spray.

Controlled F.O.R.C.E. instructor Lee Frank called it a "duck walk," this hunching, halting routine. From shadowy corners, dynamic entry instructors popped out and shot orange plastic handguns, faux-slaying any cops who couldn't keep time with the dance.

"It's close-quarters combat," Frank said. "Inside a house, it's all up close and personal."

Police are often at their most vulnerable when passing through doorways; the rigid, rectangular portal frames the officer as a target for whomever's on the other side.

Metro officers on patrol can expect to enter an unknown building almost nightly, said Dennis Durfey, a seminar student and Metro Police tactics instructor. So while entering a room correctly might be a soft science, it's serious.

"You could go into the same house night after night and nobody's there," Durfey said. "Then one night, somebody's inside..."

In February, Metro Sgt. Henry Prendes was fatally shot when he crossed before the front door of rapper Amir Crump, who was waiting inside for someone to walk in front of his firing line.

"As soon as he saw Henry, he fired," said Jeff Roch, director of Metro's Risk Management Bureau.

At the seminar, a doorway with police piling through it is called a "fatal funnel." Enter a building full of bad guys incorrectly, Frank said, and then, "*Bam!*"

"Where there's a dark hole, there's a gun," Frank said, catching himself. "There *could* be a gun."

There could be a gun, so forget about walking any farther than the next cop's muzzle. Slowly, gently, ease forward. If someone shoots at you, shoot back, and keep moving. Your gunman might have lousy aim, so start bobbing and weaving already.

"Don't vapor-lock if something happens," instructor Jim Rowcal barked at students who froze when they were fired at. "If you stop and stand still, you're a silhouette!"

And nobody likes a stiff silhouette. Line up like a row of geese with guns, or an artillery-heavy conga line, and then - as a group - introduce yourself to everyone in the room. Force yourselves on them.

"If you're going to ambush somebody in your own house, you're going to hide in that corner, right?" Frank said. "Do a visual scan, and if you don't see anything, boom! Go into the unknown."

Metro's SWAT team is called to bust through barricaded buildings three or four times a week on average. Police who kick down doors and find nobody home are required to board up the doorway before leaving. Roch estimates that Metro Police board up 125 to 150 buildings a year this way - a slim sampling of the innumerable doors officers kick down.

And opening all those doors, whether with a key or a swift kick, is the easy part! It's what happens once you're inside, be it a barricaded building or a birthday party, that's somewhat more complicated. You must imagine that someone beyond the next wall is gunning for you. Frankly, you must be prepared to shoot first or shoot back.

At the seminar, Frank tried to keep this all very simple.

"We're going to have some friends and foes in there," he said. "Don't carry your gun up in your face all Hollywood-style."

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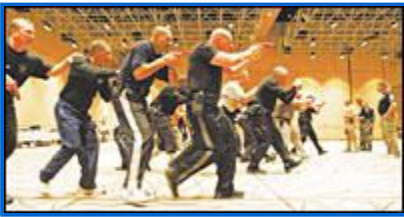
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LAW enforcement officers participate in a "dynamic entry" seminar at the Rio on Tuesday. It was taught by instructors from a professional police training company.

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LAW enforcement officers from various agencies learn the best techniques to enter and search a building at a seminar at the Rio.

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