



# KEEPING THE PEACE WITH WEAPONS



The Peacemaker Colt .45

PHOTOS: DANIEL D'FRINIO @ ANTIQUE GUNS & STEAM ENGINE MUSEUM, MERRIA, CA

**E**arly in my law-enforcement career I learned an important principle: Meeting danger from a position of power can prevent resistance. One night my partner and I pulled over a traffic violator. Several red flags cautioned us to conduct further investigation. We discovered the vehicle was stolen and the driver had several outstanding felony warrants for his arrest. He was a dangerous man. Later, while inventorying the vehicle for impound, I found a handgun between the front seats, easily accessible to the driver. When I asked him why he didn't try to use it, he replied, "You guys were too good. Your positions of cover and advantage, your use of lights, the shotgun. I knew I didn't have a chance." In our business, a position of advantage coupled with a professional demeanor can actually prevent or reduce the need for the use of force. In this case, we avoided a shoot-out.

This month, *Law Officer* emphasizes weapons. Historically, weapons have always been associated with police work. Unfortunately, keeping the peace often requires the availability or use of a weapon to prevent or overcome force used by the law-breaker.

Two thousand years ago the connection between police work and weapons was documented in the Bible: "For rulers [police officers] are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same, for he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13: 3-4). This passage refers to the famous Roman Gladius, or short sword, a superior weapon of that time. After conquering a nation, the ancient Romans deployed contingents of soldiers to perform policing functions. Then, as

well as today, keeping the peace and deterring criminal behavior depended at least partially upon a superior force and a superior weapon.

The use of weapons, especially by government agents, generates public concern. In a democracy, this cautionary thinking can rise to a level where appropriate weapons are either prohibited or unduly restricted. The presence of a proper police culture can dispel or moderate this understandable fear.

Anthropology, the study of man, discloses a diversity of traditions and morals. However, a closer examination reveals a few core values weave a common thread through most cultures. One shared value is a high regard for human life. Even societies that practiced human sacrifice demonstrated, in a perverse way, the high value of life by making it their ultimate gift in a ghastly ritual.

Providing fallible humans with deadly weapons and the authority to use them must be balanced with strong ethical guidelines. Superior weapons in police work should be accompanied with superior training and an organizational culture supporting their judicious use. All those in leadership, from executives to field training officers, must support a profound respect for life that restrains the capricious use of force.

Weakness and passivity rarely result in peace and often lead to victimization. Strength and power tempered with good motives and proper control keeps the peace. Ironically, in the Old West it was a deadly weapon that earned the name "Peacemaker." The Colt .45, used by lawmen, won much of the credit for bringing peace to a lawless frontier.

Police officers who lay their lives on the line daily to protect society deserve the best tools necessary to do the job. Some of our tools are, of necessity, weapons. We face an army of criminals who often arm themselves and have little regard for the lives of others. They follow no laws, policies, training or inner voice that mandates control or hesitation. They act quickly without restraint.

In an imperfect society where evil ones abuse and victimize others, peace comes through the combined strength of the good. Building that strength involves equipping those who face the violent ones in our society with the very best in superior equipment, training and supporting culture—on point. **LOM**

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