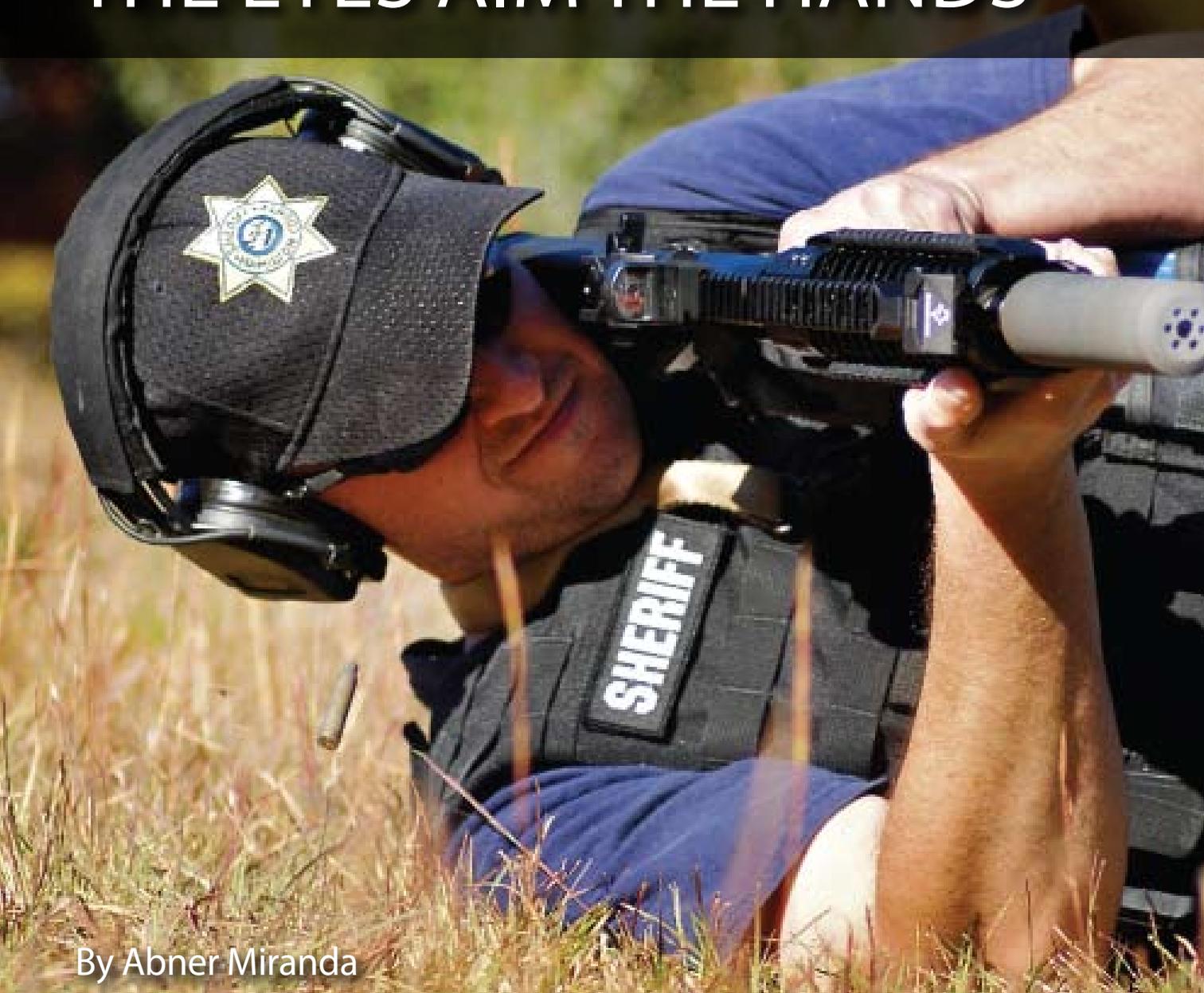


THE EARS AIM THE EYES; THE EYES AIM THE HANDS



By Abner Miranda

The other evening I was watching my kids playing in the yard. They were utterly oblivious to what their cats were doing, but I was watching the cats with rapt interest. We live in a rural area, which means that we have to contend with field mice.

Watching the cats at the tree line as they began their nightly hunt, I was reminded of the importance of hearing in a combat environment. I watched as their ears would triangulate a sound; their eyes would then turn toward the source. Finally, their bodies would track the unsuspecting mouse, and that was that.

Hearing Is Everything

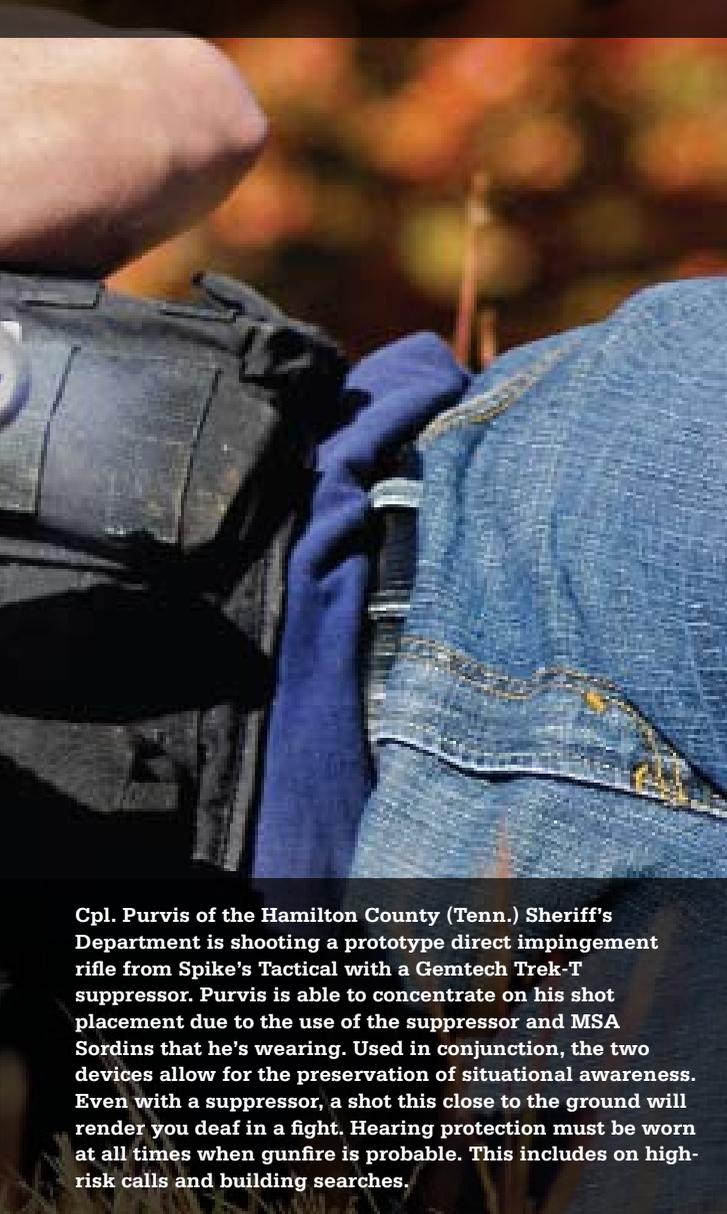
The ears aim the eyes; the eyes aim the hands. What this means is that without situational awareness (SA), we're lost in a fight. In recent years, I've experienced ringing in my ears after close-quarters combat (CQC) training.

Double protection is mandatory at such times. However, plugs and muffs render you utterly deaf. One option is to spend money on sound suppression, but there are many different options.

Here's my opinion as an LEO, tactical rifle instructor and AR manufacturer. In the past two years, I've spent

TECH CHECK

How to protect your hearing



Cpl. Purvis of the Hamilton County (Tenn.) Sheriff's Department is shooting a prototype direct impingement rifle from Spike's Tactical with a Gemtech Trek-T suppressor. Purvis is able to concentrate on his shot placement due to the use of the suppressor and MSA Sordins that he's wearing. Used in conjunction, the two devices allow for the preservation of situational awareness. Even with a suppressor, a shot this close to the ground will render you deaf in a fight. Hearing protection must be worn at all times when gunfire is probable. This includes on high-risk calls and building searches.

PHOTO: ADNER MIRANDA

considerable time working with suppressed weapons and have reached several conclusions. The most important one is that suppressors have limited applicability in LE work because they're not *silencers*.

Learning about Suppressors

I grew up in the era of James Bond films. Such movies propagated the myth that suppressors meant stealth. So when I got my first suppressor, I installed it on my AR and squeezed off a hail of rounds without hearing protection—big mistake! Through my ringing ears, I thought I heard my wife call out

from the house, "That is so quiet; I love it." My response was, "What was that?"

What I experienced was a greatly attenuated muzzle blast overshadowed by the hypersonic crack of the bullet streaking downrange. My wife, who's always in the house without hearing protection, heard something less than the bomb-like signature of a rifle going off. To her, it was quiet. To me, it was anything but quiet because I was accustomed to hearing rifles while wearing ear plugs *and* muffs. What I've learned since then is that even a \$1,200 suppressor can only tame the muzzle blast. No matter how much hype is thrown at the buyer, a suppressor can't beat the laws of physics and tame the hypersonic bullet crack.

Transitioning to subsonic ammo will eliminate the sonic crack of the bullet and achieve a greatly reduced sound signature. However, the rifle will no longer cycle reliably, if at all, and you might void the suppressor's warranty as well. I currently have eight suppressors in various calibers. Nary a one—not even the pricey .22 cal ones—are James Bond quiet. Suppressors are *not* silencers.

Nonetheless, I still suggest suppressors for LE work be considered because they're excellent at taming muzzle blast and lessening the possibility of hearing damage. However, in an enclosed CQC environment, they're still loud enough to severely affect SA. One great solution for maintaining SA comes in three simple letters—MSA.

The Butler Almost Did It

If you go into harm's way with a firearm, I strongly suggest electronic sound suppression that won't dull your SA. What you need is hearing protection that perfectly mimics real life, multidirectional sound. In other words, protect your hearing but still hear the slight sounds of a bad guy moving. MSA Sordins do this perfectly.

In 2009 I purchased a pair of MSA Sordin, Supreme Pro-X hearing protectors. What caught my attention was that the company offered a five-year warranty. Nobody does that anymore. If a manufacturer is willing to stand behind a product that is meant to be abused, then it has my full attention.

Since buying the Sordins, I've put them through six tactical weapons schools over a two-year period in *all* types of weather. The waterproof Sordins have sailed through without a hiccup. Then one day I found myself clearing a home at gunpoint due to an active burglar alarm. I thought to myself, "If we have to discharge our .45s in this house our hearing will be ruined!" That was it for me. As soon as I got home that evening, I placed my Sordins in my duty bag.

The first time I used them on an open-door call, my lieutenant looked at me and said, "Miranda, what's on your head?" I ignored the question. We stacked up and went in. As we entered the foyer, we announced ourselves and made our way into a garishly decorated living room. When we saw the butler statue standing in the corner, we nearly jumped out of our skin and cracked off a round. Accidents can happen, and that's exactly why hearing protection is a good idea.



On the range, we're required to protect our hearing from gunfire. Why wouldn't we do the same on a call where there's a high probability of having to fire a weapon? The answer is simple. It's not what we're accustomed to doing, and no one likes to rock the boat. However, we must be bold and set positive trends for our agencies.

Conclusion

I'm old enough to remember the introduction of body armor and the resistance that followed. However, mortality rates plummeted because of its introduction, and, over time, vest technology has improved dramatically. Likewise, the proliferation of

hearing-protection technology into the modern workforce has led to an increase in reliability and a decrease in size and cost. I can easily see a day when hearing protection becomes as normal as wearing body armor. My advice is this: Get ahead of the mandate, and take safety well in hand. Disregard the taunting because *it will* eventually go away—as it has for me.

Until next time, practice hard, and I'll see you on the streets.

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ABNER MIRANDA is currently a patrolman for Signal Mountain (Tenn.) Police Department. He's a Spanish interpreter, an FBI-trained hostage negotiator, and a Tactical Rifle Instructor.

TINNITUS [ti-nahy-tuhs]—*Noun: A ringing or similar sensation of sound in the ears.*

In 2008, I was testing an AR-15 in an indoor range. I poured 60 rounds through it, and as soon as I finished, I noticed that my ears were ringing. The problem remained well after two hours, and that's when I knew I was in trouble. In a moment of inattention, I voided a lifetime of careful protection of my hearing. The sound had tunneled past my muffs and ear plugs because neither one was properly fitted. I now have to live with tinnitus for the rest of my life.

When choosing hearing protection in an LE application, situational awareness must be maintained. You must be able to hear where your threat is coming from and where your fellow officers are. Here are the three do's and don'ts of hearing protection.

- 1. Choose hearing protection that allows for situational awareness.** This means that if you're going to use foam plugs, you must have high-quality digital earmuffs that can put out enough sound to be heard through the plugs.
- 2. If you're going with just plugs, then stick with something like SureFire, EarPro or Sonic Defenders.** Avoid wearing foam plugs alone because they'll steal your situational awareness and render you utterly deaf during a fight.
- 3. Don't skimp on your hearing protection.** If you do, you'll pay for it with either your hearing—or your life. Both are priceless.