

TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS

SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS

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IN-EXTREMIS

SHOTGUN BREACHING

BY: KENT O'DONNELL

I was fortunate to have been in U.S. Marine Corps units that had good budgets and were well trained.

When I became a police officer, I was shocked that the PD I had joined had a great budget, but was ten years or more behind on skills. The lead trainers were comfortable doing the same thing over and over, and the administration was made up of officers who had seen new tactics poorly applied. One such tactic was shotgun breaching. The Chief at the time had seen it used one time, where the shotgun was placed

on a door handle and sent the other side of the door handle flying across the room. The Chief felt the potential for injuring a person was too great to ever warrant shotgun breaching. As a financially aware administrator he also felt the cost of the commercial breaching rounds was cost prohibitive.

In April, 2007, the Virginia Tech Shooting occurred. We learned quickly that the suspect had chained doors closed behind him

to prevent or delay the police response. SWAT teams were on campus looking for a double homicide suspect, so when reports of an active shooter were received the teams responded to the building. SWAT operators used shotguns to breach the doors, shooting the padlocks off and entering the building.

At that time I was on SWAT and assigned to the Training Division as the lead firearms and tactics instructor. *continued on next page*

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STANDOFF DEVICES ARE MARKETING TO LET GASES ESCAPE AND NOT OVER PRESSURE THE BARREL, THOUGH THIS IS NOT AN ISSUE WHEN PROPER TECHNIQUE IS USED.

I approached the command staff with the information from Virginia Tech, a proper lesson plan on breaching, types of rounds that can be used for breaching and a "blue" inert shotgun. I demonstrated that the lock/door knob should not be shot but the "throw" or bolt going into the door jamb should be the target. I explained my experience using birdshot, buckshot, slugs and commercial breaching rounds to breach using this technique. I requested to train all officers on shotgun breaching for active shooter situations. Much to my surprise there was no resistance; I was given the go ahead to include shotgun breaching in our annual firearms training. I was told to get breaching rounds for SWAT operators, but the rest of the department would have to use buckshot or the slugs carried in the side saddle of the shotgun.

The method I instructed was to hold the shotgun at a 45 degree down angle, envision the projectile hitting the "throw" or the bolt, the small thick piece of metal that goes into the door jamb. Then, envision where the round and pieces of the bolt will go to after it hits the bolt; so bring your weapon between 45 and 30 degrees out from the jamb so you are shooting down and into the jamb. The projectiles and debris should be focused toward the floor, inside the room being breached and close to the threshold of the door.





WITH BIRDSHOT, MULTIPLE ATTEMPTS WERE OFTEN NEEDED TO BREACH METAL FRAME DOORS.



COMMERCIAL BREACHING ROUND.

They make “breaching stand-off” devices in all kinds of shapes and sizes. The stated reason for a stand-off device is to let gases escape and not over pressure the barrel. They often have teeth for holding against wood without sliding. I have never seen a barrel damaged by breaching without a stand-off device using the proper technique of 45/45. Adding a stand-off to a non NFA 18.5 inch barrel will increase the length of the barrel by two or more inches. I would rather spend the money on ammunition to train with.

At that time, the county sheriff's department was training hand-in-hand with us. The SWAT lieutenant was also the lead firearms instructor, and reserved a county building that was going to be torn down for breaching training. Breaching was done with birdshot, buckshot, slugs and commercial breaching rounds. The building had solid wood doors and metal doors, wood and metal door frames. Empty cardboard boxes were placed inside the room so that any ricochet rounds would be noted. The floor for all rooms was tile on cement.

Birdshot, 2 3/4 inch, 7 1/2 size, 1 1/8th ounce. Results: A few pellets hit the boxes with no way to tell the velocity of the ricochet pellets. When shooting wood doors with wood frames, one shot and a foot kick opened the doors. We found when breaching metal doors, with metal frames, often required two rounds (one time, three rounds.) We observed that solid wood doors in a metal frame may require two rounds to positively breach, not relying on physically kicking the door after shooting the lock. This is noteworthy as some commercial structures, like hotels, use

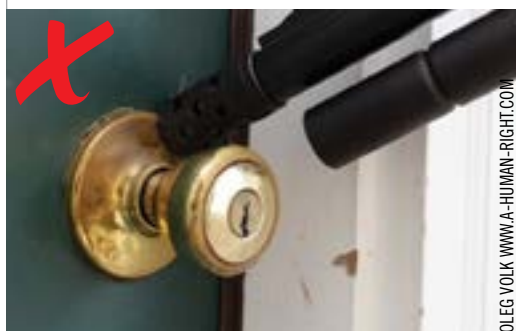
this type of door. In my testing, birdshot was sufficient for most residential doors, only the odd metal door with metal frame would create issues. The metal frames did cause some of the small pellets to ricochet.

Buckshot, 2 3/4 inch, 00 reduced recoil rounds, usually 9 pellets: we tried several brands, to include the flight control wad that we issue. We found that 00 buck breached all wood doors with wood frames with one properly fired round. A misplaced barrel led to needing a second shot. We found that wood doors and metal doors with metal frames may require two shots. We found that some pellets had ricocheted from the floor and into the boxes, but they did not exit the boxes, so the velocity was very low after the breach and ricocheting off the floor. We found that some of the pellets pressed into the metal frame and almost looked welded into the frame. We were able to recover some 00 pellets showing how they had pressed together. The white perils in the photo are the packing perils that keep the rounds from rattling. The breach created by the 00 required less of a kick after the shot and is a more reliable option than birdshot.

Slugs, reduced recoil: we tried several brands, all one ounce. We found slugs to work well. On solid wood doors with wood frames the slug did the most damage to the lock, door and frame. The slugs even created a crater in the floor, but did not ricochet. On the wood doors with metal frames we found the slug to be effective and again do the most damage to the metal frames. We were starting to see the boxes hit by shrapnel from the lock, door and or frame—not lethal, but certainly enough to notice. Metal doors and metal frames, the most difficult to breach, may require two rounds to defeat. We again observed more damage to the door and frame and other parts hitting the cardboard boxes.

We tested our commercial breaching rounds as well. They did breach. Metal doors with metal frames did require two rounds on some tries. For the cost of each round you would think they would come with a welcome mat in the box too. Dollar for dollar, skill and 00 buck may be the most practical combination for most situations.

It is noteworthy that we, like many, carry our shotguns with buckshot in the magazine tube and slugs in the sidesaddle (SWAT has a “Stock Sock” with breaching rounds.) so officers must conduct a *select slug* ammunition drill to change from 00 buck to a different



Do NOT shoot the lock off the door - instead, aim for the bolt going through the door jamb.





Slugs worked well on and metal doors and frames.

round. We changed from doing speed loads with the weapon shouldered at the ready to holding the weapon with the support hand, weapon close to the body, loading with the strong hand. We have great success with this method.

We added two select slug drills to our annual firearms shotgun qualification course at the 25 yard line. Our select slug drill starts with a patrol ready shotgun, magazine tube fully loaded with buckshot, nothing in the chamber and safety off. This is how our weapons are carried in the patrol car. When we exit the unit with a shotgun, we immediately rack the weapon feeding 00 buck into the chamber. This leaves room for one round to be added to the magazine tube. On command to "stand-by" the officer racks the shotgun. On command of "threat" the officer shoulders the weapon, says "too far" then, holding the weapon by the fore-end, pointing down, stock on the strong side shoulder, loads the magazine tube with one slug, pressing the action bar release and racking the fore-end as they re-shoulder the weapon then fire the slug. This is the same skill

used by SWAT to chamber breaching rounds.

A shotgun is an effective tool for breaching in many circumstances. If you are a patrol officer (issued a shotgun) who may face an active shooter, you need this skill. All hazards must be considered and mitigated. Eye protection is important.

Whether you are a law enforcement officer or a citizen who would like to have this capability for contingencies, practice it with a qualified instructor first. Like many skills, the time to work out the details is not under duress. ✓

BIO

Kent O'Donnell is a former Recon Marine and a retired police sergeant. He spent most of his career on his department's SWAT team. Kent has done risk and security audits and training throughout west Africa, South America and Europe and provided weapons and tactics training around the world. Kent worked on a U.S. government project in Libya for six months and currently serves www.360worldwidesecurity.com.

GEARREVIEW



CAMJAM CORD TIGHTENER

The CamJam XT features a carabiner clip and gate on one end and a rotating cam mechanism on the other. This allows the CamJam XT to be configured in either a fixed end or a loop system to secure gear and other heavy loads. The CamJam is ideal for getting hammocks and shelters as tight as you want. The XT holds cord from 1/16"-3/16" (2mm-5mm) in width and the XT Large holds rope with a diameter of 1/8"-3/8" (3mm-9mm). Lighter CamJams are available in plastic, but the aluminum XT models secure loads up to 280 and 500 lbs. respectively. www.niteize.com