

Don't Snub that Snubby!

By Roger Lanny,
Contributing Editor
photos by Lanny Photographic

Revolvers are dead. Everyone uses semi-automatics. Carry a wheel-gun? Never.

Well, don't believe everything you read or hear. Revolvers are very alive and well, thank you, and thriving



Michael deBethencourt making a point about pocket holsters.

in all the best places. They are used for both back-up guns and primary guns, with snubbies—those cute, little, short-barreled guns—making



Danielle and Jackie practicing southpaw reloading with dummy rounds.

up a goodly percentage of those being carried in harm's way.

Of course, in spite of what many folks think, the snubby is actually an expert's gun. Although easier to carry and conceal, they are more difficult to shoot accurately (not anything inherent, it's just that with such a short sight radius, any slight

misalignment is magnified), more difficult to hang onto due to the smaller grips, and more uncomfortable to shoot due to increased recoil (the lighter the gun, the more recoil you perceive in shooting it).

So, what to do....just buy one, load it, and shove it into your pocket or purse? Since you are read-





Jackie, Jackie, Lyn and Karen on the line during a drill.

ing this fine magazine, I'll warrant not. Proper training is the answer, and one of the solutions takes the form of Michael J. deBethencourt, and his two courses of "Essentials of the Defensive Snub Revolver" and "Mastering the Defensive Snub Revolver." These were held on two consecutive days in July at the excellent Smith & Wesson Shooting Sports Center in Springfield, Massachusetts. Our own Lyn Bates and your intrepid author went there at deBethencourt's invitation to participate in this particular, mostly woman class. These participants ranged from relative newbie's to gun store staff, and in age from twenties to sixties.

"Michael deBethencourt is a nationally recognized defensive revolver, weapons disarming-retention trainer, and an internationally recognized tactical folding knife instructor trainer. He is the lead instructor of Northeastern Tactical Schools, a 19-year student of police defensive tactics, and a 28-year student of martial arts." He is also

a law enforcement officer, with responsibilities in some of Boston's troubled neighborhoods.

Day one began in one of S&W's classrooms, with deBethencourt setting the tone for the next two days. He is colorful, direct, and self-effacing, but very knowledgeable. Aside from the very important

safety considerations, Michael had three general rules:

1) "If anything doesn't ring true, tell me, and I will change the course to the 'best way.'"

2) "Make certain that you aren't conditioning yourself to do something on the range that will get you killed in a 'death match' (his description of a potential gunfight)."

3) "Who is responsible for safety? Each individual!"

Next, we covered dos and don'ts for gunsmithing. He strongly recommends rendering your defensive revolver double-action-only (DAO) for accuracy via surprise break and court survivability. Chamfering the cylinders for ease of reloading is also recommended....nothing else.

Regarding holsters, Michael had five criteria for them, aside from buying top of the line. Holsters must:

- 1) Hold the gun until you want it
- 2) Keep the gun where you put it
- 3) Give you the gun when you want it
- 4) Take the gun when you're through with it
- 5) Resist another's draw



Lyn firing her S&W 640 using a Surefire 6P in a flashlight technique.

Ideally, the grips on your snubby should neither impede a reload via speedloader or speed strip, nor hang up on clothing to prevent “printing.”

Of course, one perennial question is what is the best ammo to use for self-defense. The definitive answer is, “It depends.” The best ammunition should be:

- 1) Reliable
- 2) Not entice the ACLU
- 3) Accurate
- 4) Controllable
- 5) Low light friendly by having a low muzzle flash
- 6) User friendly in that it is reasonably priced to practice with

We did a lot of practice with inert, dummy rounds, first in the classroom, and continuing on the range as a tune-up prior to going live fire. This reinforced the lectures and started ingraining muscle memory. The first dummy round practice involved deBethencourt’s brand of reloading, that of keeping the revolver in your dominant hand throughout. This was very difficult for me, having over 25 years of ingrained muscle-memory of doing it “conventionally.” The rationale behind this method has many good arguments: commonality with the semi-auto manual of arms, fewer manipulations, greater retention, and the gun can be almost instantly fired with only one round on board. We practiced both with speedloaders and with speed strips.

Speaking about reloading, a deBethencourt admonition is not to reload “Irish Twins.” What’s that, you say? It stopped me, too. It means don’t load rounds next to each other in the cylinder—that way, if you only have time to get one or two rounds in, and don’t orient the cylinder just right, you’ll probably go bang quicker than having to click through almost a whole cylinder. Another salient point—one round loads the gun. If you’re



The six women who went through both days of instruction—you can see they had a great time and are ready for more: Kathy, Lyn, Karen, Jackie, Jackie and Danielle.

in a gunfight, you don’t have to load the full cylinder—you can load one or two, shoot, and load again. More than one good guy has been killed while still loading a partially filled cylinder. Would they have survived if they had fired the rounds already in the cylinder? No one knows, but, don’t try to find out. We ran “interrupted” reloading drills to reinforce that.

A different stance was advocated, that of having the dominant foot forward. DeBethencourt’s reasoning is that conventional doctrine dictates support foot forward for two-handed firing, and dominant foot forward for one-handed dominant hand firing. DeBethencourt reasons that you shouldn’t have to switch feet.

One-handed firing is essential and practiced more than in other training. “One-hand shooting skills will make you a stronger two-handed shooter. Two-handed shooting won’t make you a stronger or a better one-handed shooter.”

OK, it’s now day two, more fun and frolic. DeBethencourt strongly suggests checking five things every

morning before “strapping on” your snubby:

- 1) Make sure the cylinder release screw is tight
- 2) Insure the underside of the ejector star is clean
- 3) Assure the ejector rod is tight (and it works the opposite of most threads)
- 4) Make certain the yoke screw is tight
- 5) Insure the cylinder rotates freely

Day two went really fast. We had more in depth lectures on revolver “press checks,” holsters, grips, sights, safeties (yup, on revolvers), lasers and more.

Range time reinforced day one’s work, and expanded to include the best ways to draw from holster and reload with your non-dominant hand, flashlight techniques, and much, much more. We also shot through what was, in essence, a pants pocket. This gave everyone a chance to experience the heat and pressure of firing a revolver in an enclosed area, plus getting a feel for where the rounds are aimed when

firing from the hip area, either from a pocket or a purse. Most of the class had never shot without using sights, flash sight picture or the like.

DeBethencourt used an interesting and useful target he calls the negative target. A three inch by nine inch vertical hole was cut into an IPSC target, simulating the cardiothoracic target center mass area. This really sped up drills when we did our part by not straying outside of it. Even more importantly, it removes the temptation to shoot too slowly and too accurately, as now you can no longer see where your rounds are impacting on the target. In an exigent situation, where you are fighting for your life, every fraction of a second is critical. You need to fire as fast as you can get hits in this area, tight groups need not apply.

Lyn opined that “Michael is deeply knowledgeable about all aspects of snubbies and their uses. He conveys his information in ways that are effective, memorable and humorous.” He also practices what he preaches—he carries only wheel guns for both police and private use.

**Northeastern Tactical Schools
8 Kingsbury Lane, Dept. W&G
North Billerica, MA 01862-1820
978-667-5591
email: info@snubtraining.com**

For those equipment mavens out there, the students used the following over the two days: one S&W 36, one S&W 637, one S&W 342, five S&W 642, two S&W 640, two S&W 66, and one each Ruger 101 and Taurus 605. All guns functioned flawlessly.

Many women prefer revolvers because of their more straightforward manual of arms, diminished tendency of jamming, and ease of maintenance. I know several women who carry a revolver specifically because a revolver will shoot

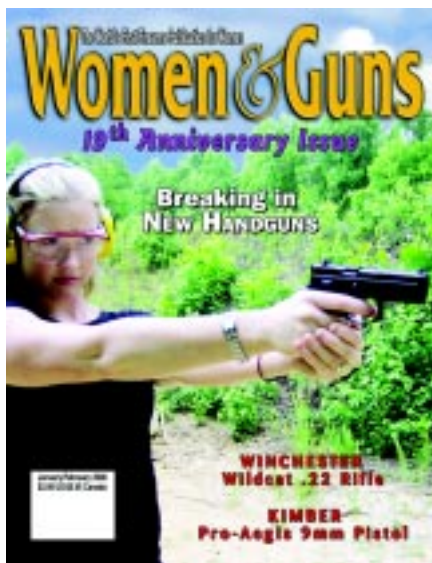
through a pocket or purse without jamming. Anyone who has a revolver, either for their primary or

their back-up gun, should take this course.

W&G



Danielle firing her S&W 66 one-handed with her non-dominant hand—great form.



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