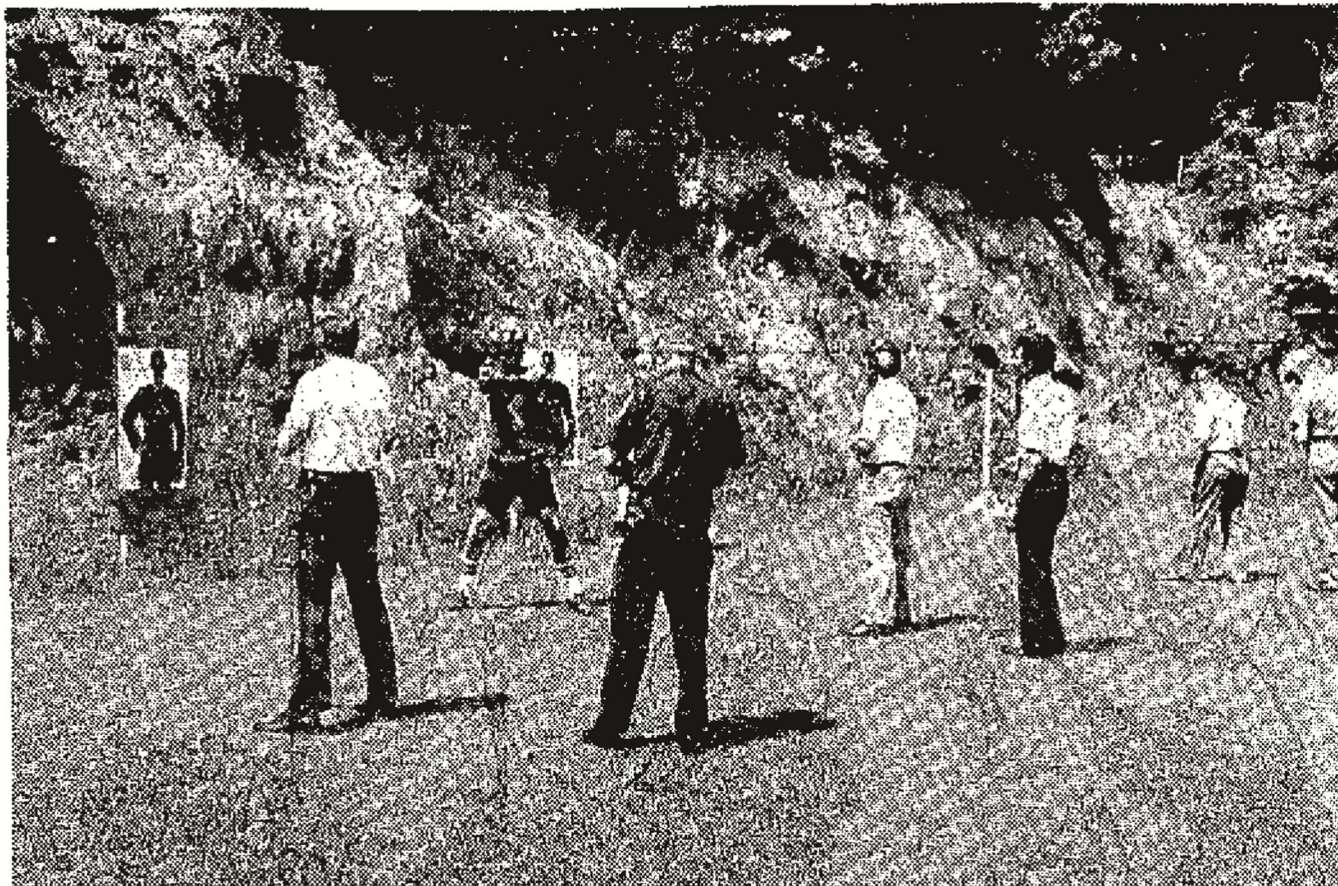


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BREATHE OUT. . . HOLD IT. . . FIRE. — Sgt. C. D. Huffstickler, expert marksman, (in shorts facing camera) instructs members of the City Police in basic marksmanship. (Gazette photos by Gary Green)

Marksmanship test flunks a reporter

By GARY GREEN
Gazette Staff Reporter



FATAL SPOTS — Only the spots marked "5X" or "K5" on this target are counted as "hits" in Gastonia Police pistol qualifying.

"Ready on the right? Ready on the left? Ready on the firing line?"

With those three command-questions, City Police expert marksman C. D. Huffstickler blows a shrill "tweeccc" through the chromed whistle hanging around his neck, and 25 men shoot one shot each.

Wednesday and Thursday of last week, Gastonia Police officers under the direction of Huffstickler tested their sharpshooter skills, firing 50 rounds of .38-special wad-loads into human-shaped targets.

Regulations require that each officer "qualify" on the target range at least once a year.

"Qualifying" requires a score of 75 per cent direct hits into the most fatal areas of a human-form target.

Each officer is allowed 50 rounds, with each shot having a point value of two. A "perfect" score would be 100 per cent, which would require all 50 shots to hit one of the "deadly" areas of the target.

Six rounds are fired, one at a time, from a seven-yard line, then six rounds from a 15-yard line, and six from a 30-yard line.

Next, six rounds are rapid-fire from the 15 and 30-yard lines.

The next test involves firing, reloading, and firing again, a total of 12 rounds in 25 seconds. This is done from the 15-yard line.

The last eight shots are at a moving target. At a command, the officer walks forward until he hears a shrill from Huffstickler's whistle. He then has two seconds to draw his gun, fire, and hit the target.

The national average for this test is 75 per cent, and that national average is the lowest score that a Gastonia policeman can score and still be qualified as an active police officer.

In an effort to determine, first hand, just how hard the shooting requirements really are, a Gazette reporter stood on the firing line and, with Huffstickler's guidance, went through the first part of the qualifying test.

Firing 12 rounds from the seven-yard line, the reporter scored 25 per cent . . . the other nine rounds missed the target altogether.

Huffstickler then paced back just beyond the 30-yard mark.

"Do you see that head?" he asked pointing toward the target.

He released five rounds and all five found their mark in the center of the target's head . . . all packed so close that they could be covered with a silver dollar.

He squeezed the trigger a sixth time. "Ugh!" he groaned, seemingly before the bullet hit the board.

It had missed the target completely, flying through the white space beside the figure.

"I saw that one happen," he said.

"For me that would have been a good shot," remarked the reporter.



GETTING A BANG OUT OF LIFE — Sgt. Huffstickler demonstrates proper firing position during qualifying tests.