

The Armed Citizen – A Five Year Analysis

OVERVIEW OF SURVEY

For the period 1997 - 2001, reports from "The Armed Citizen" column of the NRA Journals were collected. There were 482 incidents available for inclusion in the analysis. All involved the use of firearms by private citizens in self defense or defense of others. No law enforcement related incidents were included. The database is self-selecting in that no non-positive outcomes were reported in the column.

DATA ANALYSIS

As might be expected, the majority of incidents (52%) took place in the home. Next most common locale (32%) was in a business. Incidents took place in public places in 9% of reports and 7% occurred in or around vehicles.

The most common initial crimes were armed robbery (32%), home invasion (30%), and burglary (18%).

Overall, shots were fired by the defender in 72% of incidents. The average and median number of shots fired was 2. When more than 2 shots were fired, it generally appeared that the defender's initial response was to fire until empty. It appears that revolver shooters are more likely to empty their guns than autoloader shooters. At least one assailant was killed in 34% of all incidents. At least one assailant was wounded in an additional 29% of all incidents. Of the incidents where shots are fired by a defender, at least one assailant is killed in 53% of those incidents.

Handguns were used in 78% of incidents while long guns were used in 13%; in the balance the type of firearm was not reported. The most common size of handgun was the .35 caliber family (.38, .357, 9mm) at 61%, with most .38s apparently being of the 5 shot variety. Mouseguns (.380s and below) were at 23%, and .40 caliber and up at 15%.

The range of most incidents appears to be short but in excess of touching distance. It appears that most defenders will make the shoot decision shortly before the criminal comes within arm's length. Defenders frequently communicate with their attackers before shooting.

The firearm was carried on the body of the defender in only 20% of incidents. In 80% of cases, the firearm was obtained from a place of storage, frequently in another room.

Reloading was required in only 3 incidents. One of those involved killing an escaped lion with a .32 caliber revolver, which was eventually successful after 13 shots.

Multiple conspirators were involved in 36% of the incidents. However, there were no apparent cases of getaway drivers or lookouts acting as reinforcements for the criminal actor(s) once shooting starts. At the sound of gunfire, immediate flight was the most common response for drivers and lookouts.

When multiple conspirators were involved, the first tier was a two man action team. If another member was available, he was usually the driver of the getaway car and remained in the car. If a fourth conspirator was involved, he was stationed immediately outside the target location as a lookout for the

police or other possible intervening parties. The outside conspirators do not generally appear to be armed. It does appear that the trend over the period has increased from one weapon in the action team to two weapons.

The largest group of violent criminal actors was 7, a group that committed serial home invasions in Rochester NY. An alert and prepared homeowner, who saw them invade an adjacent home, accessed his shotgun, and dispatched them (2 killed and 1 seriously wounded) when they broke in his door.

Incidents rarely occurred in reaction time (i.e., ¼ second increments). Most commonly, criminals acted in a shark-like fashion, slowly circling and alerting their intended victims. The defender(s) then had time to access even weapons that were stored in other rooms and bring them to bear.

The most common responses of criminals upon being shot were to flee immediately or expire. With few exceptions, criminals ceased their advances immediately upon being shot. Even small caliber handguns displayed a significant degree of instant lethality (30 per cent immediate one shot kills) when employed at close range. Many criminal actors vocally expressed their fear of being shot when the defender displayed a weapon. Upon the criminals' flight, the "victims" frequently chased and captured or shot the criminals and held them for the authorities.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1) Even small caliber weapons are adequate to solve the vast majority of incidents requiring armed self-defense.
- 2) Mindset of the potential victim was far more important than the type of weapon used. All the victims were willing to fight their opponents in order to survive. Although not common, in some cases bridge weapons, such as pens, were used to gain time to access the firearm.
- 3) Frequently, the defenders were aware that something was amiss before the action started and then placed themselves in position to access their weapons. Awareness of the surroundings appears to be a key element of successful defense.
- 4) The defenders had some measure of familiarity with their firearms. Although perhaps not trained in the formal sense, they appear to be able to access a firearm and immediately put it into action. At least one defender learned from a previous experience and made the firearm more accessible for subsequent use.
- 5) Training or practice with a firearm should include a substantial amount of accessing the firearm from off body locations, such as drawers, underneath counters, etc.
- 6) This analysis does not present a view of the totality of armed self-defense in that non-positive outcomes were not available for inclusion in the database. The analysis may, however, be useful in helping to describe a methodology for successful armed self-defense. This methodology might be described as:
 1. Be aware,
 2. Be willing to fight,
 3. Have a weapon accessible,

4. Be familiar enough with the weapon to employ it without fumbling,
5. When ready, communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, to the attacker that resistance will be given, and
6. If the attacker does not withdraw, counterattack without hesitation.

Data Tables

Location of Incident	
Business	32%
Home	52%
Public	9%
In or around Vehicle	7%

Shots Fired by Type of Location	No	Yes
Business	33%	72%
Home	25%	75%
Public	29%	71%
In or around Vehicle	35%	65%
Grand Total	28%	72%

Number of Shots Fired	
Average	2.2
Median	2
Mode	1
Max	20

Gun Type	
Handgun	78%
Long Gun	13%
Unknown	8%

Body Carry by Type of Location	No	Yes
Business	69%	31%
Home	94%	6%
Public	49%	51%
In or around Vehicle	65%	35%
Overall	80%	20%

Multiple Assailants by Type of Location	No	Yes
Business	76%	24%
Home	72%	28%
Public	62%	38%
Retail Business	52%	48%
In or around Vehicle	49%	51%
Overall	64%	36%