

NFTA police offer realistic training

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Luke Moretti

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The threats to your safety don't stop on the streets. In today's climate of terrorism, transit officers have to have the best possible training to keep you safe above ground, and under. And one way they're getting that is through a very realistic training simulator.

It's a split second decision.

NFTA Firearms Instructor John Yuhnke said, "You never know what you're going to do under stress."

Shoot or don't shoot?

Yuhnke said, "When this stuff happens on the street, you're going to be very stressed out."

The indoor firearms simulator used by the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority transit police department offers a realistic feel for what officers could encounter on the street.

NFTA Training Officer Mike Livecchi said, "No matter where we are, whether it's the subway system, the airport, the bus terminal, it's most likely going to be in a crowd."

News 4's Luke Moretti was put through a scenario in which a man is arguing with a ticket agent at the airport. He may have a gun. After some verbal contact, he gets off the first shot. Luke returned fire. His shots, and the gun's muzzle movement are tracked by the system. One out of seven shots he fired actually hit the guy, and he barely missed hitting innocent bystanders during the exchange of gunfire.

Luke's shooting was good for a few laughs, but for officers hitting the street, the specialized training is no joke. They have to be accountable for every shot taken.

In another simulation, instructor John Yuhnke encounters a hostage held at gun point. He takes the shot.

Yuhnke said, "I shot him in the head. If you wait too long, and try to negotiate with him, he would end up killing the hostage."

As the scenario unfolds on the big screen, there's another element that keeps officers on their toes. The system actually fires back.

Using a cannon, nylon balls are fired fast and directly at officers in training. Instructors in the control room take aim using a laser beam.

Livecchi said, "We've had a couple officers get hit in the hands. We've seen some actually drop their weapon because they got hit in the finger tip, and it's very painful."

The training is designed to be as close to reality as possible, right down to the air-filled cartridge that looks like a regular bullet. That is where the best techniques are learned and mistakes are corrected.

