



Stunning Debut

New weapon deployed to stun, subdue and safely restrain violent suspects

by **Greg Johnson**

Staff Writer

Cpl. Andre Hancock stood about 15 feet from his supervisor. He was handed a plastic knife by another member of the police training unit, who told him to charge.

He didn't get far.

Taking a few steps toward his intended victim, Hancock was struck by two darts fired from a M26 Advanced Taser handgun. The darts were connected to wires that sent 50,000 volts of electricity into the officer. Hancock winced, stopped in his tracks, and fell to the mat.

"There's the initial feeling of pain and then you freeze," Hancock said. "It's like you hit a wall. The next thing you know, you're dropping—you're going down."

The demonstration Monday at the Prince George's County Police Department Training and Education Division showed off the capabilities of the new weapon that police hope will help them make arrests of violent and uncooperative suspects safer for all involved. Capt. David C. Morris, head of the training division, said the department plans to

equip 50 sergeants in the patrol division with a taser gun in the near future.

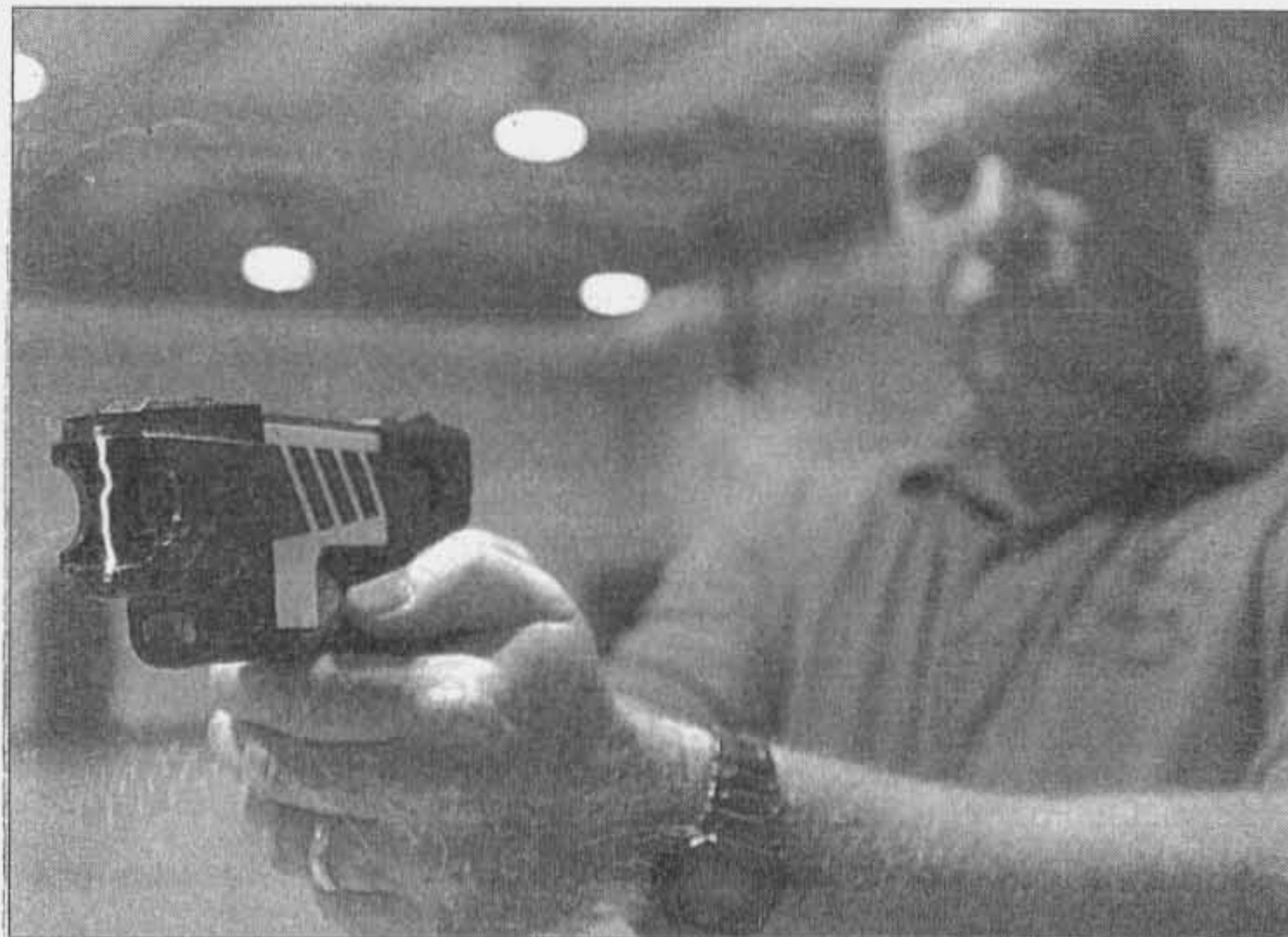
"It's just another less (than) lethal option," Morris said "It reduces the risk of injury to the suspect as well as the officers."

Two of the taser guns were sent out on the streets two weeks ago with units of the Special Operations Division, though neither have not yet been used in a real-life situation, police officials said.

Retired Sgt. Charles "Bucky" Mills, head of judgmental training for the department, said the taser weapon has a nearly 100 percent success rate and can bring down even a very large person almost instantly. Each pull of the trigger emits a five-second burst of electrical power, but the sensation quickly passes and recovery begins immediately.

"There is no long-lasting burning sensation, there is no long-lasting injury," Mills said.

Mills said a violent suspect can be brought under control with a taser and the suspect would not suffer discomfort associated with pepper spray or physical



Greg Dohler/Gazette
Charles "Bucky" Mills, director of Judgmental Training, introduces the "Taser," a weapon that shoots electricity into suspects to stun and subdue them.

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injuries that can result from hand-to-hand struggles. No one has ever died from being hit with one of the new tasers, Mills said, and the weapon can be used safely in the rain and against people with pacemakers.

Morris said the department has been considering using electric tasers for a couple years. The current taser model was approved by county police, Morris said, because of the management devices built into the system.

A computer automatically keeps track of the date and time of each trigger pull, Morris said, and that information is stored in a computer at the Internal Affairs Division. Identification tags, containing the same information, are ejected from the device each time it is fired.

"If it didn't have that, we wouldn't be using it," Morris said.

In addition to features that prevent abuse of the weapon, Mills said the new tasers provide 26

watts of electricity that effectively incapacitates a suspect by blocking brain signals telling the body to move. Previous tasers lacked this power.

"With the old (models), if you were motivated enough, you could walk right through it," Mills said.

Officials with the department are aware, however, the use of electricity to subdue individuals makes people nervous about the potential for abuse.

Greg Shaffer, chairman of the Prince George's County chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said his organization has been encouraged by the department's interest in non-lethal technologies. But Shaffer said the use of tasers should be limited and strictly monitored.

"We really feel that there needs to be a strong focus on the types of situations in which tasers are used and on the training the officers get before they go out on the streets," Shaffer said.

Tasers should not be used in routine situations, Shaffer said, and county residents should be able to observe a demonstration of how the device works.

"Given the track record of the county," Shaffer said, "they have to be very careful when something like this is introduced."

Mills said a departmental policy on use of the taser has been

drawn. Under the policy, the taser would only be authorized if a suspect is acting aggressively toward an officer or another person. It would not be used against people who are only refusing to comply with police orders, he said.

Cpl. Tim Estes, spokesman for the department, said Police Chief John Farrell is reviewing the policy and is expected to approve it within days.

Morris said all officers would receive four hours of training before they are authorized to carry the weapon. A formal, written critique would document each use of the taser, Morris said, and a citizens' oversight panel would have full access to the critique if a complaint related to the use of a taser is filed.

The department would also try to accommodate any requests made by civic groups for demonstrations of the device.

"We do want to sell it in a favorable light," Morris said. "We don't want people to have the perception that we're going out there looking to electrocute people."

Mills said the second generation of tasers are already being used by about 1,000 departments nationwide including Baltimore County, Baltimore City and Montgomery County's special weapons team.

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It was all a fake, except for the Taser shot. The knife was a rubber dagger. Officer Boseman is a police computer forensic specialist who volunteered to be an M-26 target. Sgt. Mills is director of judgment enhancement training to help police deal with emergencies that threaten to get physical and deadly.

Chief John S. Farrell arrived yes-

terday just after the M-26 demonstration. He had come from the funeral for Metro Transit Police Officer Marlon Morales who was shot in the face while on duty the night of June 10.

"He was killed by some nincompoop out there," Chief Farrell said. Nevertheless, "The goal is to never use deadly force," he said, and the M-26 is a step toward that goal.

The M-26 Taser shoots out two darts, or probes, attached to filaments 21 feet long. The instant the

probes strike the target, 26 watts flow through to paralyze the subject. The paralysis from a 5-second pull on the trigger lasts between 30 seconds and one minute, Officer Mills said.

"It doesn't hurt," said Cpl. Tim Estes, police public information officer, who volunteered to take a 26-watt shot. "But you just can't do anything."

The probes penetrate only one-quarter inch into a subject's skin. The electronic jolt works even if it

sticks into a layer of clothing, even a ballistics vest, Sgt. Mills said.

"It will get 99 percent of the people down," Sgt. Mills said, then demonstrated how it might be used to stop blockades.

Five officers, arm-in-arm, kneeled on the mat. A probe was attached to the outer arm of the two officers on the end. One touch of the Taser trigger and they all fell on their faces despite Sgt. Mills urging to "fight it as long as you can."

The Taser shock will not interfere with pacemakers, but will stop drug addicts who often seem to be immune to pain, Sgt. Mills said.

After two years of study, Prince George's police bought 15 of the \$370 Tasers. They have been ready for use in the holsters of patrol sergeants for two weeks. So far, not one Taser has been fired on duty. The 50 patrol sergeants transfer the electronic guns as they change shifts.

The Tasers also shoot out a confetti that lists the exact minute, hour and day of the shot. The information will be helpful as police prepare reports of the incident, and if subsequent investigations of police behavior are conducted.

In effect, the Tasers are a last resort. All 1,420 police employees have been trained in the last year to try to talk subjects into peaceful surrender, Chief Farrell said.

From the first, officers have been trained to have their firearms ready to stop subjects who are intent on violence, to protect innocent bystanders and to protect themselves. Gradually, less violent weapons are being used.

Prince George's is the 800th jurisdiction in the nation, including the Baltimore city police and Fairfax County police and sheriff's office, to employ the Tasers. Sgt. Mills said the Montgomery and Baltimore county police are evaluating the Taser.

The Tasers will supplement, maybe eventually replace, the pepperball shots that Prince George's police have used since November when all other efforts fail to defuse potentially violent situations. The pepperballs, used 15 times in eight months, sting the flesh and eyes.

For the last eight months, Prince George's police have also used the WRAP Restraint 21 times on subjects, frequently suicidal, who physically resisted. The canvaslike cushions prevent subjects from kicking and striking.

The effort to reduce the use of deadly and lethal force is slowly succeeding, Chief Farrell said. Violent police contact is "at a 15-year low," he said.

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MARYLAND

Tasers touted as alternative to deadly fire

By Arlo Wagner
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Waving a knife over his head as he dashed forward, John Boseman was able to take only two steps before Prince George's County Police Sgt. Charles Bucky Mills pulled the trig-

"It doesn't hurt. But you just can't do anything."

—Cpl. Tim Estes

ger of his new Taser M-26 for a split second.

The knife-wielder fell immediately, before reaching Sgt. Mills. He lay on the mat in Prince George's police headquarters in Landover for 10 seconds, long enough for officers to grab hold and restrain him.

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