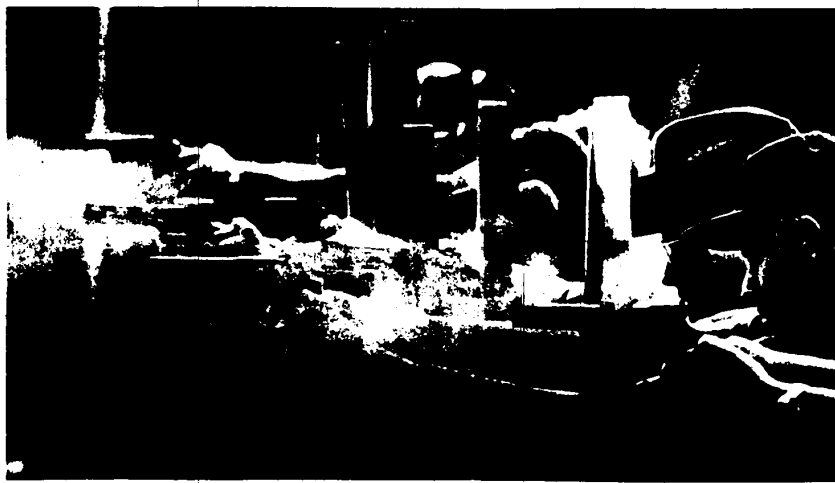




Being quick on the draw is part of the skill required to score points on the Hills police pistol team, as demonstrated by Niemisto. Note the sunglass, eyebinder and earmuffs, all designed to aid in safety.



Ready, aim, fire
A volley of fire and smoke rings out during matches when the Hills departmental team meets with other team from around the United States in competition.



Ray Marchewitz, a longtime member of the Hills pistol team, enjoys the off-hours hobby.



Farmington Hills pistol team's only female member is Linda Harris, who has proven to be a formidable opponent in matches against her male counterparts. Note the chalk marks on her target which indicate numerous hits in the high score range.

Precision It's a police sharpshooter must

By STEVE BARNABY

Being a member of the Farmington Hills Police pistol team is a challenge.

An afternoon on the range with Sgt. Richard Niemisto demonstrated the discipline and concentration needed to become a consistent marksman. Not only is it important for team members to be accurate shots, it is also critical for police officers who face the day to day dangers of patrolling the streets, he says.

"Most shoot-out confrontations take place less than 10 yards away. An officer doesn't have time to reload or re-sight in those situations," says Niemisto. "Recently, we have altered our training so officers can better deal with these situations."

The force is stressing the importance of developing an instinct to foresee a dangerous situation.

"These guys should know when a situation may call for the use of his weapon. Under these circumstances, his gun already will be drawn," he says.

BUT FOR RELAXATION and enjoyment, the Farmington Hills team finds shooting at silhouette targets a great pastime.

Niemisto is joined in team competition with patrolmen Ray Marchewitz, Charles Archambeau, Linda Harris and auxiliary police officer Paul Phillips. The team competes in regular matches against other police force teams throughout the United States.

Hills Public Safety Director Ron Holko also adds his talents to the team by competing in matches. He recently won the rapid fire competition at the 18th Annual Pistol Match sponsored by the Oakland County Chief of Police Association.

Niemisto joined the team in 1965 as a police cadet. At that time the team concentrated on regular bullseye competition, but has since developed into a combat shooting team. Combat shooting revolves around aiming in at a human silhouette target at various yard markers in different positions.

"I love it and have always enjoyed shooting on the team," he says. "Actually, I wish I could spend even more time at it."

Niemisto and his colleagues spend several days a week before matches sharpening up their target skills. Weapons used are varying types of .38 caliber handguns. Brands used depend on the team member.

"Everyone has a preference. Some feel more comfortable with one than another type. But you can be sure of one thing, none of these weapons are Saturday night specials," he says.

Each weapon is finely crafted, with some being sent away to experts to be worked on.

With speed an essential part of combat shooting, the team has developed a number of aids to lessen time at each position.

Loading six bullets into a cylinder under normal circumstances takes time, but with the aid of rubberized speed loaders, the cartridges can be loaded in less than one second. Wrist bands strengthen the arm which become easily fatigued when wielding the hefty weapons under the hectic time trials.

TO CUT DOWN on distractions and keep out the sun, eyebinders are used on the side on eyeglasses.

"Anyone using a weapon should wear eyeglasses to protect from accidents," he says. "Wearing protective ear muffs also is essential. Guys that don't use them find they soon have hearing problems from the continual noise."

A typical match starts at seven yards. A competitor must shoot 12 rounds in 25 seconds. The next phase is shot at 25 yards in 90 seconds with 18 rounds. Positions used are kneeling, and left and right standing behind a barricade.

"A police officer must learn how to shoot with both hands. Sometimes he won't have the chance to change in an emergency situation," says Niemisto.

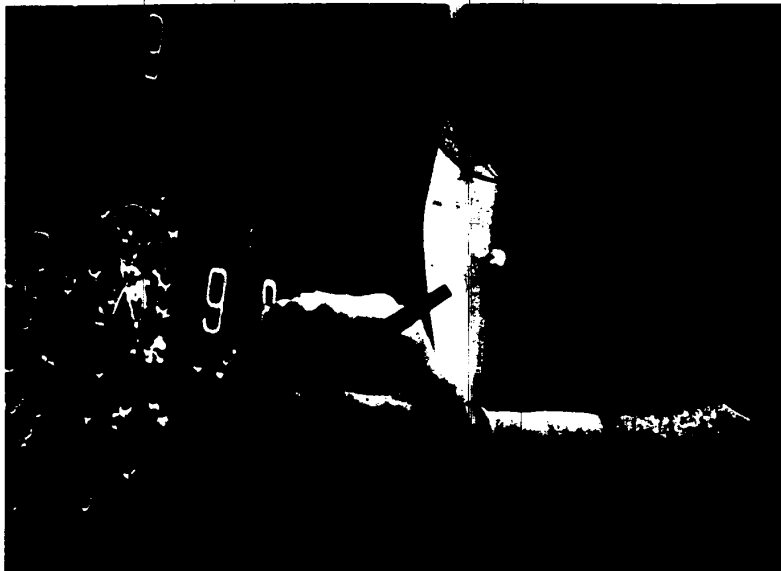
The third phase is shot at 50 yards in two minutes and 45 seconds. The participant must shoot 24 rounds from the sitting, prone, standing left and right hand from behind a barricade.

Final position is shot from 25 yards, six rounds standing in 12 seconds.

Staff photos by Harry Mauthe



Being familiar with a variety of shooting positions is essential to be on the pistol team. It's also important for the officer on the street who must be prepared to shoot from any position.



Keeping score after the grueling timed exercises often brings a feeling of self-satisfaction after hours of practicing for the matches.