

I held my pistol down alongside my right leg as I slipped through the shelving to return to the front of the store. No one noticed the gun, but several people saw the badge. I held my finger to my lips for them to be quiet and motioned toward the back of the store. None of the few people I saw panicked and ran. They moved quickly but they did not make a sound or run. Maybe it was because I was not panicky or maybe it was the big gun. Probably a bit of both!

As I got to a point where I had a direct view of the front of the store the four thugs were standing together in front of the small bank branch that used the space. They looked at the bank and then one of them surveyed the store. Their coats came open and weapons appeared. One hard looking guy, with prison tats and older than the rest swung out what appeared to be an AK-47 and I figured that it was not a legally obtained civilian semi-auto version. One more of them produced an AK and the other two swung out pistol gripped pump shotguns. I might have been wrong, but I was guessing that none of them had undergone a background check. I heard the distinctive thunk of an AK safety going to the fire position and the leader yelled something that was for all practical purposes incoherent but sounded vaguely like Spanish, then he fired a burst into the ceiling, that is when the screaming and mad rush for the back of the store started. He had accomplished his first goal. FEAR and confusion! He thought he had control of the situation.

Stepping into one of the checkout lanes I kept the bulk of a cash register between me and the shooter. People who had not gotten away when the guns appeared were now on the ground and trying to crawl toward the back of the store. Everyone I could see had dropped to the ground when the gunfire began.

“Federal Marshal, drop your weapons.” I shouted, extremely loud and in my best command voice.

The one who had fired the burst lowered his weapon until the muzzle was pointed slightly downward and turned to me. Two of the others looked nervous, the last one looked panicky. “Four of us and one of you. Besides you can’t hurt me.” His left hand thumped against his chest. From the sound that his hand made as it hit his chest, I knew that he was wearing body armor of some sort. Never give away your advantage, especially to someone willing to kill you.

“Last chance. Drop the guns and down on your knees.” My sights were centered on the shooter with the fiber optic front site glowing green in the overhead fluorescent lights and the green dot was situated on center of mass, the center of his chest. My gun was rock steady. Been there done that before. He had had one advantage, body armor, and he had given it away.

“Screw you Gringo,” he shouted as he tried to raise the muzzle of his weapon. I raised my point of aim just over a foot and fired one round.

Even before I saw the bullet impact his head, I was turning toward two of the others. A bad joke flitted through my mind, “We need a cleanup at checkout.” Experience had shown me who the real problems were. I had made my targeting decision before the first shots were fired. My planned order of fire was decided as soon as I had gotten them into my field of view. Still keeping most of the cash register between me and my targets I fired at the first of them as my sights came to bear. My two targets of choice were fumbling with their weapons, obviously in need of more training. I fired two sets of two shots, changing my point of aim between the sets. Bang, bang, pause as the front site settled on a new target then again bang, bang. An even rhythm so long practiced that it was practically reflex. Their fumbling had cost them any opportunity for return fire. Thugs seldom do any drilling or practice with their weapons. My bet was that the safeties were on. The rounds struck them both squarely in the center of their body armor. They went down hard. Even if they had been wearing the best armor available, the stuff rated for rifle rounds, they would have felt that impact. 10mm is a thumper of a round, especially at less than ten yards and I was firing the serious manstopper loads. The slugs were probably still at close to muzzle velocity on impact. Two rounds center mass was going to hurt, quite possibly cause broken ribs. If the impact hit them in just the right place and at the right time it might even stop their hearts. That thought only came to my mind later and the only

because of instructors drilling into my head that avoiding getting shot was preferable to depending on your vest. My personal experience was that it hurt like hell. No exaggeration, it really, really hurt like hell! I turned to the last of the crew who was also the youngest. He was not even sure how to hold his pump shotgun and from the look of his pants he had lost bladder control. He was still fumbling with the weapon as my front sight centered on his chest.

“Drop the weapon.” He hesitated in his fumbling and looked up at me. His eyes locked with mine. I said, “Son, do I look like a man who won’t shoot you? Drop the gun and get on your knees with your hands-on top of your head. The shotgun rattled to the floor and he fell onto his knees. His hands were shaking so badly that he had trouble keeping them on his head. I moved forward and made certain that the two that I had double tapped were separated from their weapons. Both were gasping for air between making painful noises. I didn’t bother to check the first man. No reason to. There was no doubt that he was seriously dead. Any danger from him was neutralized in a permanent manner.

“Can someone get me some large zip ties?” I said, to no one in particular, in a loud and commanding voice. Slightly to my left I saw someone in a store employee vest get up from the floor and run toward the hardware department. When he got back I had him zip tie the hands and feet of the two were gasping for breath. We had rolled my last two targets onto their sides after zipping them up and the gasping was beginning to diminish. I only had him do the hands of the fourth one. He was too scared to even try to run, much less go anywhere. I flipped the thumb safety up and holstered my gun. The store employee who had fetched the zip ties had also thoughtfully brought back a blue tarp. We put that on the cooling body. Head shots with powerful guns do make an ugly scene.

“Dispatch what is the ETA on the units? The situation inside the store is contained but I do not know about getaway vehicles outside.” I said after pulling my cell phone from my pocket.

“First unit reports on scene. It is unmarked but has a uniformed officer. Stand by. Marshal Thomas, the unmarked supervisor unit reports more officers on site and two vehicles stopped and both drivers in custody. No shots fired outside.” The voice was calm and professional.

“Be advised that shots have been fired inside and one perp is down. He will not require an ambulance. He will need a coroner. We will need an ambulance to transport two others. Thank you for your assistance dispatch. I am terminating this call.”

“Thank you, for telling me that shots were fired sir, but I heard the shooting. It sounded as if you may have interrupted something nasty. AK fire still makes me cringe. Several deployments in the sandbox will do that to you.”

“Roger that! Been there done that did not want the damn t-shirt but got it anyway. Thanks for the assistance”

“Our pleasure sir.” With that I disconnected my phone from the call, holstered my weapon and sat down on one of the chairs in the small bank branch.

Officers with shotguns and AR-15s, maybe even M-16s, moved quickly through both sets of doors in a proper manner for entering an unknown situation. I kept my hands in plain sight. The entering police relaxed when they saw the hogtied perps and the blue tarp that had a blood stain creeping from beneath it. One of the local law enforcement was wearing the stripes of a sergeant. She walked over to me.

“Anyone need medical treatment?”

“Those two might. They are wearing body armor and each got hit with two ten mil rounds center mass. They don’t feel too good, but they should live. The kid there was probably new to the gang. He pissed himself when the others went down. The joker under the tarp made the mistake of trying to kill me and trying to kill me really pisses me off. He as good told me he was wearing body armor. That’s the reason for the mess, head shot. Let’s wait on the investigators for any more details. No

point in repeating myself. Before you ask, my weapon has five rounds expended and is holstered.” I swung the right side of the flannel shirt away, so she could see the butt of the pistol.

“The detectives are already rolling and should be here anytime.” She turned away and got the youngest looking member of her crew to string crime scene tape. He turned a bit green at the sight of the blood pool forming as it ran from under the tarp, but he was not the only one. The paramedics got there about two minutes later. The coroner took a bit longer. The detectives got there between the medics and the coroner. The older of the two detectives stepped up to the blue tarp and looked under it. He stepped away after lowering the tarp again shaking his head. The paramedics had the easier job since no blood was involved. The coroner’s job was much messier.

