

Members of the School Security Working Group

As I am unable to attend to meeting on 1/25, I hereby submit my comments as a CT and US citizen concerning the above 3 topics, in the wake of recent mass shootings, including Sandy Hook School in Newtown, CT, the death of 2 firefighters in upstate NY, the seriously wounding of a Norwich Police Officer, and the killing of a family in New Mexico. All of these involved the use of semiautomatic assault style .223 Hi-velocity rifles. Three apparently involved AR-15 designs and one was a Ruger M 14. All are designed to use large cartridge capacity magazines, among others.

A) My background....

I come from a firearms manufacturing family. My father, Melvin M. Johnson Jr., designed the recoil-operated Johnson Semi-auto rifle which competed against the Garand M1 design for adoption by the US military during WWII. The rifle was ultimately not selected by the Army but was utilized by the Marines in some Pacific campaigns, along with a similarly designed Johnson Light Machine Gun, used by both the Marines and Special Forces in WWII.

Both weapons were used for "assault" or attack purposes....whether they were full or semi-automatic. Anyone trying to state that a semi-automatic rifle (like AR-15) cannot be used as an assault weapon....that only a fully automatic machine gun (like M-16) is an assault weapon...is wrong. And an "assault" is defined as a violent attack of some type....verbal or physical. Certainly, the Newtown massacre was an assault.

In the 1950's, my father served as consultant on several projects, including the Colt AR-15/M-16 rifle itself, which utilized my father's WWII rotary bolt design. Later, in the 1960's, I joined my father in business after serving in the USAF, where I qualified as an expert marksman in both the M2-Carbine and M-16 Rifle, which operate on both full and semi-auto configurations. In my father's business, we converted existing .30 caliber M1 carbines to use a high-velocity 5.7 mm cartridge, with similar performance characteristics to the Remington .223 cartridge used in the AR-15/M-16 rifles. We sold to police departments in semi-auto versions only, with 15 round magazines, such as New Haven, and marketed the same to varmint hunters in nearby states with 5 round magazines. However, the conversion process never really caught on with the public, and we closed the business 2 years later.

My subsequent career included 20 years in security, surveillance and armed guard response, plus an additional 20 years in the mental health industry involving security, monitoring and transportation of school children. I still have a CT carry permit and am a Life Member of the NRA. In any case, the preceding info above is by way of introducing who I am and what I know.

B) School Safety -

The Newtown massacre exemplifies the ideal conditions for a mentally disturbed, angry killer who wanted to inflict as much harm and horror publicity as possible as a final statement. He broke into a locked school door and cornered his victims in unlocked classrooms where they could not easily escape. He used a rapid-fire semiautomatic hi-velocity rifle with large capacity magazines to inflict maximum damage in a short period of time. He did this, even though...once notified...the police responded quickly....but they were too late.

The Groton School system, where I live, is adopting several security measures, including locked classrooms (which may have saved lives in Newtown), restricted and monitored perimeter door access, instant communication with the Police Dispatch Center and CCTV surveillance. Based on my experience, I agree with all of these items....provided that the surveillance equipment is actively monitored and not just placed where a school secretary might check it occasionally while doing other duties. And metal detectors ARE advisable...we use them in court houses to help protect staff and visitors....why not our children?

But we have to remember that the Police usually operate on a RE-active basis...responding to a call for help on an incident that is ALREADY occurring. Again, in a Newtown situation, major damage will already have been done before help arrives.

There is no substitute for having trained police IN the schools...prepared to use good judgement...and act decisively when called to do so. Anything less than that, in the short term, is not acceptable. It is fine to consider training (or re-training) school personnel and/or returning military veterans but there is a process to follow, which will take time to implement. The money needs to be spent NOW to put police in the schools as a deterrent to copycat crimes. The extra funding should be direct to the police departments and the officers placed in the schools must report directly to their police department commanders.

Later on, perhaps in a year, by that time perhaps some war veterans can have been properly trained and screened to gradually take over some of these duties...let's not rule that out yet.

C) Conclusion....

Our world population is growing....and we do have computers....so it is only sensible that we create the proper data program to watch this firearms issue more directly and carefully than we have. We already used technology to go to the moon....we are now even looking at Mars....so we surely have the technology to do a better job of protecting our citizens and especially our children. And a ban on the civilian use of certain types of firearms with high capacity magazines does NOT leave us standing naked and helpless in the wilderness with no protection.

Thank you for your time.

Ed Johnson

Edward R. Johnson, 100 Plaza Court #981, Groton, CT 06340 860 705 9160