

THE

ISSUE 63

FIREARMS INSTRUCTOR

MAGAZINE



THE **FIREARMS** INSTRUCTOR

ISSUE 63

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NOTE FROM THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

We encourage you to submit articles and photos for publication as well as letters and comments on articles which have appeared in previous issues. We can also use short “Training Tips” and “Safety Tips,” cover photos, and news items of interest from a training perspective. Please refer to the Editorial Guidelines below for details on format for your submission. Take advantage of this opportunity to share information with other instructors and see your work in print!

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1. Articles should be submitted in Microsoft Word. Please have your article free of spelling and grammatical errors. We encourage you to support your article with photos and/or illustrations, if applicable.
2. A photograph of the author, along with a brief biographical sketch, should be included.
3. Any photographs submitted should include captions. Photos will be returned on request. For optimal print quality, digital photos should be a minimum of 6 megapixels.
4. Submitted manuscripts will not be returned. The author should retain a copy of the manuscript.

Articles should be directed towards law enforcement firearms training, trainers, instructional methods, and officer survival. The specific techniques and practices proposed in the article may be original, unconventional, or controversial, but should reflect sound training and safety principles. IALEFI® will publish product reviews and evaluations, provided they are directed to the interests of the professional firearms instructor and are not derogatory of other products or manufacturers. Articles on other subjects may mention and discuss the use of specific products including limited professional critique of the products, but the thrust of the article must be one of training methods, firearms techniques, and officer survival.

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The President's Message

June 2023

Over the past few years, we have witnessed incredible changes to our profession including several high profile incidents that have shaped the face of law enforcement. Everything we as law enforcement professionals do is now being recorded, somewhere, by someone. The split second decisions our officers are making are immediately judged and critiqued by anyone seeing the video. Many will argue that we need sweeping changes to how we conduct business. Some will argue we need to defund or abolish the police. I will argue that now, more than ever, we need to invest in our officers to better prepare them for the world they face every day.

For many years, training has been the first area of an officer's background to be attacked. "Was the officer properly trained?" "Did the officer have the proper equipment, and were they trained to use in appropriately?" Unlike so many other questions, these get to the very fiber of what this great organization is. A training opportunity for our trainers. IALEFI® offers firearms instructors the opportunity and ability to hone their craft as a shooter, a trainer, and a mentor for those they instruct.

IALEFI®, as with many organizations, struggled through the pandemic. As an organization, we had to work to find creative ways to connect with our members. This was a difficult task when dealing with a discipline that requires in-person contact. As we emerge from the ashes of COVID-19, the need to re-engage and re-connect is incredibly important.

Now is the time to get involved. Over the past 18 months, the Board of Directors has worked to look at the organization and see where we can make improvements. We know there are areas where we can do better. We acknowledge there are spaces where we need to be more active. However, we as the Board cannot do this without our members. This is a membership organization. Members are the lifeblood of the organization. How do you help? By getting involved. Attend a class. Host a class. Submit an article. Submit a training proposal to share your knowledge with other by teaching at an Annual Training Conference.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Tell me and I will forget, teach me and I may remember, but involve me, and I will learn." So, please get involved in this incredible organization.

As always, be well, be safe, and take care of each other as though your life depends on it...because it does.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'GTP' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal stroke.

Greg Pickering

A LEGALLY DEFENSIBLE FIREARMS PROGRAM



**BY LT. MATT BORDERS
LT. JOHN WEINSTEIN, PHD**

The operation and maintenance of a law enforcement firearms program is an extraordinarily complex operation¹. Questions of equipment, training, back-up weapons, inspection programs, documentation, and safety are only a few of the crucial issues faced by police chiefs and sheriffs. Weapons proficiency is an essential component of officer safety, but proficiency by itself is not enough. Officers must also become proficient in making life-or-death, shoot-don't shoot decisions, both to protect themselves and the citizens they serve.²

Intense public scrutiny of use of force decisions pales to insignificance in comparison to that exercised in incidents involving deadly force. The ability of an officer to take a life in the line of duty is the most awesome example of a society's public trust in law enforcement and, therefore, is rightly accorded intense scrutiny and understandably surrounded by emotion.

In such an environment, it is hardly surprising that individual officers, law enforcement agencies, and the communities and institutions they serve find themselves as defendants in criminal and civil legal proceedings. Whether charged with the violation of an individual's civil rights under federal statutes or civil charges of wrongful death, gross negligence, vicarious liability, etc., a legally defensible firearms program is necessary (though not sufficient) to protect officers and departments from legal assault and maintain public trust in law enforcement.

Elements of a Legally Defensible Firearms Program

Eight safeguards can support a department's claim of legal defensibility. Readers should review the court cases below for a full understanding of the rationale behind their decisions. Also, these decisions, having been made 28-42 years ago, are well-established and therefore legitimate bases upon which to judge a firearms program.

1. Don't just qualify. Train! There is a big difference between punching holes in a target and shooting in a combat situation. Successful qualification means an officer has some minimum level of proficiency in the components of firing a weapon (grip, sight alignment, trigger control, follow-through, etc.). Qualification does not say much about *why* an officer decided to use his or her weapon or *how* they employed it. Firearms instructors who simply proctor qualifications and score targets are helping their officers meet minimum state standards; they are not teaching their officers how to survive because gun-fighting bears little resemblance to qual-

ifying. Further, target scorers are doing nothing to help their officers or departments survive a legal challenge. *City of Canton v. Harris* requires training; simple qualifications do not reduce a department's liability. Prudent department leaders should expect firearms (and other) training records to be subpoenaed. A lesson plan and documented training for each officer will be paramount in protecting an officer, trainers, and the entire department from criminal and/or civil suits.

2. Low-Light Training, Shooting in Residential Areas, and Engaging Moving Targets. The range is not the street. Shooting at the range is artificial because it often avoids the very characteristics found in actual combat: screaming; confusion; citizens running for cover, possibly within an officer's field of fire; inordinate stress; the need to clear malfunctions while under fire; fear; etc.³ Consider, for instance, an officer required to conduct a building search at midday. There is a significant chance the officer's life may rely on his or her ability to shoot with a flashlight, employ it to discern adversaries from innocents, and to employ it in a way that does not reduce officer safety. Further, how many officers train on engaging a legitimate moving target, one that is moving laterally and not just turning in place? In *Popow v. City of Margate* (1979), the court found a program "grossly inadequate" because the officers received no training on night shooting, shooting in residential areas, and moving targets. The court further found the officers had not been exposed to

films or simulators designed to explain how the laws are applied⁴.

3. Shoot/Don't Shoot Training. The vast majority of officers never fire their weapon (apart from training) in the line of duty. However, many officers draw their weapons but never shoot. This fact suggests officers must make frequent "shoot/don't shoot" decisions. In the case of a "don't shoot" decision, are the officers being trained to articulate what the suspect must do in a clear and understandable way? What if an officer has occasion to holster his or her weapon but then must go "hands on" to cuff a suspect? In other words, an officer does not fire a weapon each time it is drawn, so training must also anticipate and train officers for both lethal *and* non-lethal outcomes, when to know when the latter is required, and how to execute that decision. Too often, firearms training is divorced from defensive/control tactics training. The use of AirSoft, blue guns, and other non-lethal weapons, preferably with role players, is an essential part of a well-balanced firearms program. *Zuchel v. Denver* and a subsequent appeal affirmed the need to conduct live fire training with shoot/don't shoot drills. Training films and firearms simulators, while useful, do not suffice by themselves.

4. Review the Department's Use of Force Policy. Officers must remain current with their department's use of force policy. As with every general order, each officer should review its content and then formally acknowledge by signature his or her under-

"There is a big difference between punching holes in a target and shooting in a combat situation."



standing. Like firearms proficiency itself, which is perishable in the absence of regular training, familiarity with firearms and use of force general orders should be maintained on a regular basis. The best way to do this is to review key guidance and responsibilities each time the officers go to the range or engage in other related training, such as defensive tactics. A one- or two-page summary of each policy is helpful. At each training session, officers should sign and date one after reviewing it and retain the other. The signed copy should be placed in their training folder. Other topics meriting review include important case law, such as *Graham v. Connor*, *Payne v. Pauley*, *Tennessee v. Garner*, and *Montoute v. Carr*. It is also a good idea to review policies covering different less-lethal weapons officers may carry. This review should include what level of force they are considered in the department's use of force policy, the proper use of these assets, and

other reporting and medical responsibilities.

5. Back-up and Off-duty Weapons.

Many officers carry back-up and off-duty weapons. Some departments prohibit the former while others allow them. Is there a program to inspect off-duty weapons? Are they carried in a location that ensures their security? Are double or triple retention holsters required? Are there caliber limitations? Are single-action weapons allowed? Must the weapons have a manual safety? All these considerations may be challenged if a back-up weapon is used in an armed on-duty encounter. Regarding off-duty weapons, if used in conjunction with an officer's police authority, certain dangers and liabilities may attach themselves. A weapon used off-duty but under police authority is subject to many if not all of the considerations discussed above. Furthermore, how will the officer, presumably out of uniform, prevent being mistaken for an assailant by responding uni-

formed officers? What training has been provided on how to draw a concealed weapon? How will the officer communicate with local dispatch without a radio? What documentation is required and how soon? What are state and federal rules regarding off-duty carry? For instance, some states only permit their officers to carry hollow-point ammunition, possibly subjecting an out-of-state officer who uses approved duty ammunition from his or her department to arrest. These questions have answers but the topic needs to be addressed as part of a comprehensive firearms program. Indeed, *Young v. City of Providence* identifies off-duty weapons requirements and responsibilities.

6. Weapons Inspections. Weapons must be maintained in clean, operational order at all times. A weapon that fails to fire or is challenging to sight due to non-functioning night sights for instance can risk an officer's life or result in shooting an innocent

“Weapons carried daily by officers are subject to the accumulation of lint, moisture, grime (especially if the weapon is not cleaned regularly), and the failure of internal parts.”



person. Weapons carried daily by officers are subject to the accumulation of lint, moisture, grime (especially if the weapon is not cleaned regularly), and the failure of internal parts. Holsters can fail too. It is imperative that all weapons (both handguns and long guns) and associated equipment be inspected annually by a certified departmental armorer. Additionally, firearms instructors should inspect weapons, holsters and associated equipment at each range training or qualification session. Finally, supervisors should perform visual inspections (after weapons are made safe) as part of regular uniform and equipment inspections. All inspection results should be documented.

7. Document, Document, Document!

In *Young v. City of Providence*, the court mandated the need for documentation. In this case, shoot/don't shoot training had been properly documented and as a result a summary judgement was granted to the city of Providence. Documentation should include, at a minimum, the following:

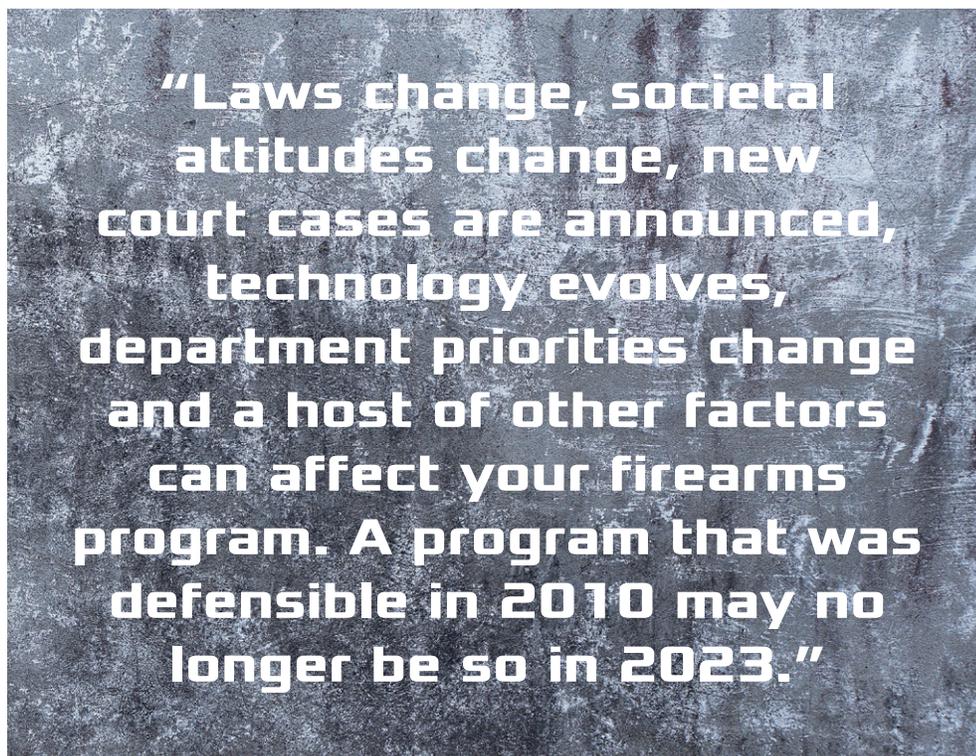
- Firearms training lesson plans, including each course of fire
- Attendance rosters
- Signed acknowledgements of firearms safety rules, range rules and other policies such as use of force and firearms
- Range safety plan (i.e., location of hospital, who transports, etc.)
- Courses of fire
- Officers' performance
- Instruction given or remedial training for any officer

8. Periodically Evaluate Your Program.

Laws change, societal attitudes change, new court cases are announced, technology evolves, department priorities change and a host of other factors can affect your firearms program. A program that was defensible in 2010 may no longer be so in 2023. A chief or sheriff, unless he or she is a qualified firearms instructor, is in no position to evaluate the department's firearms program; it is up to you as the firearms instructor. There are many moving parts to a firearms program, with more than 100 variables falling into one of five categories: personnel, procedures, facilities, equipment and communications. A comprehensive assessment should be conducted on a regular basis, say every 5-10 years, to ensure the department's program is both effective and defensible⁵.

A Final Word

There are few activities in law enforcement as important, dangerous, and final



as the use of firearms. As a result, firearms policies, equipment and practices are often subjected to social and judicial scrutiny. Any use of force involving the discharge of a firearm will end up in court. Protecting your department, yourself as a training, and your officers demands a comprehensive and well documented approach to firearms training. The points discussed above serve as a starting point. **TFI**

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The authors have served as senior firearms instructors at a large Virginia college regularly teaching firearms to recruits and instructor candidates at several police academies. They may be reached at jweinstein0602@gmail.com. The views expressed herein are their personal views and should not be construed as representing an official view of their agency or college.

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- Leo and Arlene ZUCHEL v. The CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER, COLORADO**, Nos. 91-1379, 91-1395 and 91-1400. United States Court of Appeals, Tenth Circuit. June 23, 1993. Rehearing Denied Aug. 23, 1993.
- POPOW v. CITY OF MARGATE**, 476 F. Supp. 1237 (D.N.J. 1979) US District Court for the District of New Jersey - 476 F. Supp. 1237 (D.N.J. 1979) August 31, 1979

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ENDNOTES

1. See Weinstein, John, 2014-5, "Considerations When Developing an Officer Firearms Program", parts 1 and 2. https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/news/5_considerations_when_developing_an_officer_firearms_program/; https://www.campussafetymagazine.com/safety/5_more_considerations_when_developing_an_officer_firearms_program/
2. Throughout this essay, officers is used to signify police officers, deputy sheriffs, and other armed sworn personnel at local, state, tribal and federal levels.
3. Weinstein, John, 2021, "Are We Failing Our Officers?" The Firearms Instructor, IALEFI® (forthcoming).
4. Officers trained only twice a year at the range. Although the court did not specify a minimum number of training dates per year, Popow suggests that semi-annual training may not be enough to protect a department from accusations of failure to train.
5. An assessment methodology was presented by Lt. Weinstein at IALEFI®'s 2021 Annual Training Conference. Contact him (jweinstein@nvcc.edu) for information on how to conduct this assessment.





THE EFFECTIVE DRAW FROM THE DUTY HOLSTER

by John Hilliard

It may seem obvious, but carrying a gun indicates the intent to deploy it should the need arise. Let's face it. If you need to draw your gun, there's a good chance that you need to do so badly. Getting your gun out of the holster in a timely fashion can mean the difference between a good or bad outcome.

It never ceases to amaze me when I see folks qualifying and some of them struggle to get their gun out of their holster. If it was not such a serious matter, it would almost be amusing. There is no legitimate excuse for being unable to get your gun out of the holster in under a second from the time you put your hand on the gun. If you cannot do it in under a second, you need some serious practice time. If the holster requires multiple manipulations to retrieve the gun, maybe it is time to look for another holster. If that is not an option, then practice is the only solution. We like to think that under stress we "rise to the occasion." In reality, we default to our lowest level of competence. If we are not competent in our draw, we are starting out even further behind the curve when bad things happen.

I recall seeing a dash cam video several years ago that showed Highway Patrol Officers on a car stop that went sideways in a heartbeat. Apparently, the department had recently transitioned to a security holster that required a series of manipulations to retrieve the gun that differed from the previously issued holster. The video shows an officer desperately trying to get his gun out of the holster and actually hopping up and down yanking on the gun while under fire. Fortunately, the officers survived. But that was an eye-opening video for me. I tried to mentally put myself in that officer's boots, and I vowed that I would do whatever I could to try to avoid being caught in that situation.

One of the features of a "security" holster is that it is designed to make it hard for someone else to disarm you. By virtue of that design, it makes it inherently more difficult for the you to draw the gun. Practice is essential. You need to ensure that, when you have to draw your weapon under stress, it is a natural series of motions that you do not need to think through. The

only thought required in order to effectuate a draw should be the thought that says “draw.”

Some security holsters incorporate a rotating hood design, an active or passive retention system requiring pressing on a lever with the thumb, or a paddle-like button that is pressed by a finger in order to release a retention device. Whatever holster you use, keep your finger off of the trigger until you are on target. Revolver holsters sometimes require releasing a snap and then using a forward rotation of the revolver in order to clear the security feature that engages the trigger guard. Whatever holster you carry, you need to be intimately familiar with it. If you do not practice enough to make it “second nature” to deactivate the safety mechanisms and get the gun safely out in under a second, you are risking your life.

In general, the draw should be smooth and formed by one motion as much as possible. The gun hand should be able to obtain a firing grip on the gun while it is still in the holster, and the draw should proceed only after the proper grip is obtained. This proper grip includes keeping the finger off of the trigger throughout the entire drawing and reholstering process. If you do not have a proper firing grip on the gun, you will find yourself trying to manipulate the gun during or after the

draw to fix your grip or shooting it without a proper grip. That takes time away from getting the sights on target and can result in misses even at close range. The draw should be accomplished in a manner that gets the muzzle downrange and on target as soon as possible, enabling you to fire the gun when engaging targets that are close enough to effectively hit prior to obtaining a sight picture. Contact or close quarter shots require different techniques but getting the gun out of the holster should be the same every time.

Let us start with the basics. First and foremost, before any practice UNLOAD THE GUN or use a training gun that allows the holster to engage all the retention mechanisms. Make sure the gun is safe and clear before proceeding with any steps described. Do not plan on pulling the trigger during these evolutions. This is not about dry firing on a target. It is about the draw, period. You do not want to build a routine that involves you pulling the trigger every time you draw the gun.

The draw can be broken down into several individual steps. Each step requires proficiency before moving on to the next one. Do not involve more steps in the process until you are absolutely competent and comfortable with what you are practicing. What you

are trying to accomplish is the development of what some call “muscle memory” which theoretically can develop shortcuts in the synapses in the brain enabling you to perform actions without consciously thinking about each step in the process. Multiple repetitions of the same task develop proficiency as long as the task is performed the same way each and every time. The old adage “practice makes perfect” should probably read “perfect practice makes perfect.” If you continue practicing bad habits or form, they can become “muscle memory” just as easily as good ones and that can be hard to overcome.

With the gun confirmed to be unloaded (or using a training gun), put on your duty gear and security holster. You may want to wear all of your duty load out for practice, but that can come later. Right now, we are working on the draw. Make sure your practice area is safe, and keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction at all times. Place the unloaded gun into the holster and engage all security devices on the holster. This first drill is going to be done slowly since speed is of no concern when developing muscle memory (at least according to the “experts”). Standing in the “interview stance,” move to the “defensive tactics” stance and place your hand on the holstered gun obtaining a firing grip. Do this slowly, taking time to recognize the movements necessary to get your hand onto the gun in a proper firing grip. Keep your strong side elbow tucked in close to the body, and then release the grip, returning to the “interview stance.” Do this until you feel comfortable and can get the same grip each time. Take as much time as you need in order to feel comfortable with the movements. I cannot emphasize enough the idea that with this learning drill, SLOW IS GOOD. Economy of movement is critical and eliminating extra movements cuts down on the effort required to effect a good draw, as well as cutting time off of it. Pay attention to the movements required to get a good firing grip on the gun. Do this drill at least ten times or until you feel comfortable enough to do it without looking at the gun.

When you are comfortable getting a firing grip on the gun, move on to the next step which involves deactivating the retention mechanism(s). If you have multiple retention mechanisms on your security holster, just incorporate the first one in this drill. Start from the “interview stance,” then drop back to “defensive tactics” stance, place your hand on the gun obtaining a firing grip, and deactivate the security device on the holster. Again, take your time, you are not going for speed at this point, just building your

“First and foremost, before any practice UNLOAD THE GUN. Make sure the gun is safe and clear before proceeding.”





“Do not look at your gun when you are drawing it, and do not watch your gun as you bring it up. Watch the threat. Bring the gun up to your eyes as you watch the threat.”

“muscle memory.” If you have more than one retention device (for example a rotating hood and a thumb lever), only deactivate the first one in the series. Once you have the security device deactivated, stop. Reactivate the security device to secure the gun in the holster, then return to the “interview stance.” Do this at least 10 times or until you feel comfortable. Again, start at “interview stance,” move to “defensive tactics” stance, obtain a firing grip, deactivate the safety(s), reactivate, return to “interview stance.” Remember, this is all done slowly (think slow motion videos). Your brain does not care how quickly you are moving. It develops a “memory” for the movement and homes in on tactile cues. Now, start again, this time going through the steps required to deactivate all the security mechanisms, and repeat the entire drill drawing at least ten times.

Finally, go through the steps including

deactivation of all the security mechanisms and then draw the gun from the holster, slowly and smoothly, repeating at least ten times. When drawing the gun from the holster, drop your elbow as soon as the muzzle clears the front of the holster. Do not sweep the gun up in an arc as this wastes time getting the muzzle on target (it is a gun, not a bowling ball!). Dropping your elbow allows the muzzle to go downrange and in the direction of the threat more quickly than an upward sweep. Do not look at your gun when you are drawing it, and do not watch your gun as you bring it up. Watch the threat. Bring the gun up to your eyes as you watch the threat, then move your support hand to the gun (if time allows) keeping it behind the muzzle and obtain your grip, find the front sight, obtain a sight picture, and then prepare to engage the threat if warranted. Keep your finger off of the trigger until you make a conscious decision to

engage the threat. When reholstering, do not look at the gun. Reholstering should be as natural as drawing the gun after practice, and always remember to keep your finger on the index point and off the trigger.

If need be, you can fire on a target if it is close enough to allow “point” or “reactive” shooting. If you do fire a semi-automatic from a position close to your body, you will want to tuck the arm and wrist tight into the body while canting the weapon to the outside, so the slide does not impact your vest or body during the recoil cycle. If the gun is not canted and the rear of the slide strikes your body or vest, it can cause a malfunction due to the short stroke of the slide and can prevent the gun from cycling properly. Remember, when firing from this position (as from every position) you are responsible for ALL rounds fired from your weapon. If there is any doubt about your hitting the tar-



Photo: Todd Fletcher

get, aimed fire is critical. If the target is at a distance requiring aimed fire, keep your eyes on the target or threat and push the gun up to your eyes, bringing the sights into alignment as you bring your support hand up (if time allows), always keeping it behind the muzzle and taking a two-handed grip on the weapon.

Once you are comfortable with disengaging the security devices on the holster and drawing the gun, put it all together and practice until you are tired. Put it away, then practice the next day. Keep practicing until you can draw without consciously thinking about disengaging the security features on the holster. The only thought you should need would be one that says, “draw the gun.” An old instructor of mine used to say, “slow is smooth and smooth is fast” and I have heard that time and time again from many experienced instructors. Work hard to eliminate extra movement during the draw and presentation to cut critical time off deploying your weapon. All other things being equal, and luck not included, I am a firm believer that the first one to obtain a good sight picture and squeeze the trigger properly will prevail. You cannot do that if your gun is still in the holster.

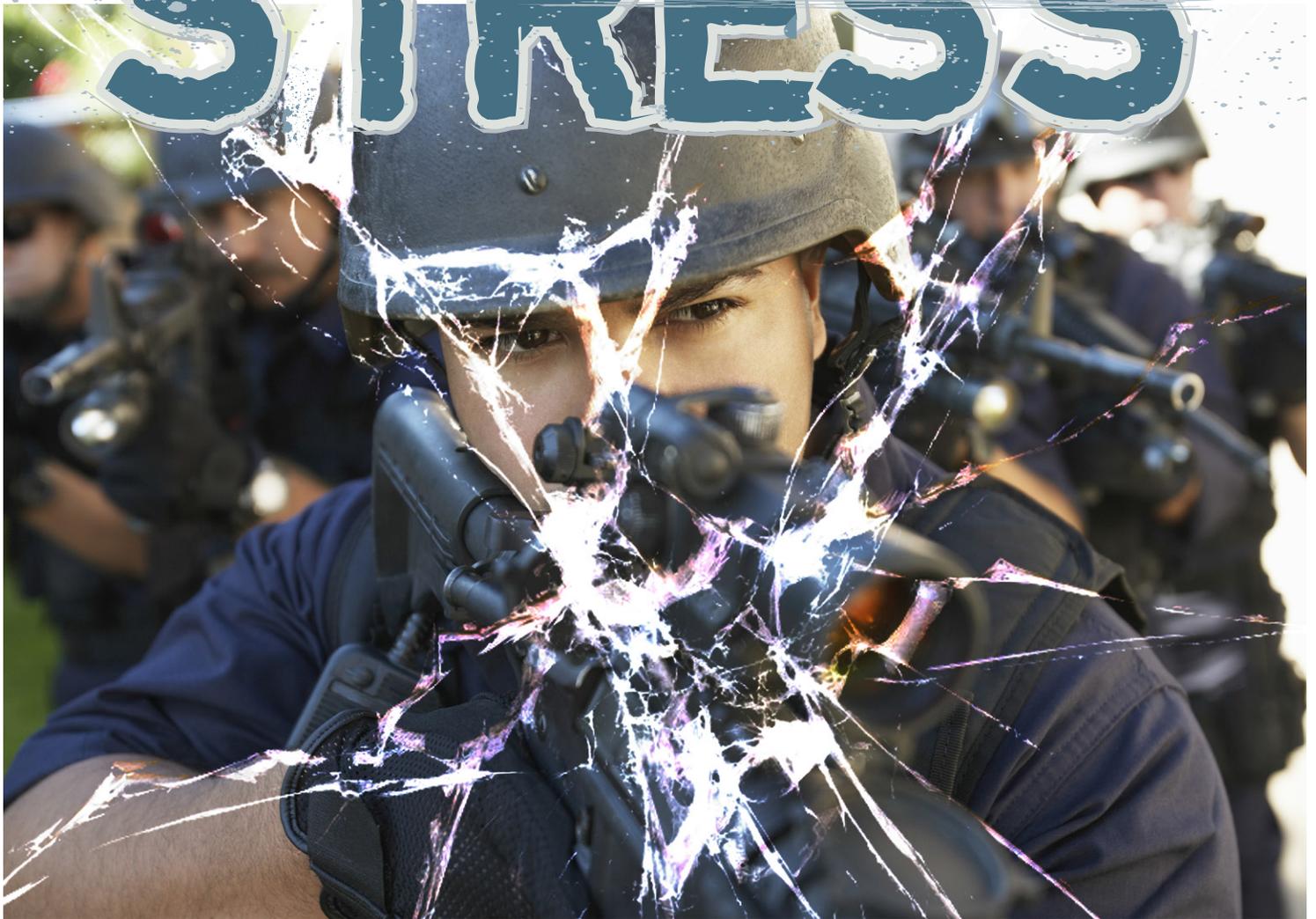
Practice slowly at first to get the mechanics down, and then work on increasing your speed. It is not an old west quick draw contest. Getting the gun out of the holster safely is just as important as doing it quickly. I remember “back in the day” when revolvers reigned supreme. I knew a Border Patrol agent who told me some of the guys practiced drawing by placing a quarter on the back of their hand and then held it at waist level. They would “go for their gun” and some would be able to draw and fire before the quarter hit the floor. Being young and eager, I decided that might be a good skill to replicate so I practiced, a lot. Eventually, I was able to clear the holster before the quarter dinged off of the floor and of course, I had to show my coworkers. Needless to say, sometimes things do not go as planned. As I was demonstrating my newfound “skills,” the unloaded 4-inch Ruger revolver came out of my hand and bounced all the way across the floor in front of a suddenly loud and very appreciative crowd. I am thankful that I had not tried that stunt when my life depended on it, but it taught me two very valuable lessons that I am reminded of every time I see that ding in my front sight: “Slow is smooth and smooth is fast” and don’t

be in such a hurry that you throw your gun at the bad guy.

One last thought. After you finish a practice session, put the gun away and decompress for a few minutes to get your mind out of training mode before you head out. I received a call once from a man who shot his neighbor’s house. That prompted me to ask what seemed to be the obvious question, “Why?” He told me he had landed a job as a security guard, had just gotten his pistol permit, and he wanted to practice his draw before he went to work. So far so good, except he then loaded his gun, holstered up, and, when leaving the house for his first day on the job, decided to take one more “practice draw.” Unfortunately, he had a loaded gun in his holster and his practice “draw” included pulling the trigger. He drew the gun, obtained a sight picture, and then shot through his closed window into the house across the street. When I asked him if he had checked to see if anybody over there was dead, the silence on the other end of the line spoke volumes. Fortunately for all concerned, nobody was hurt or killed and his career as an armed security guard was very short-lived. Put the gun away after you practice and get out of “practice mode” before you walk out the door. **TFI**



Re-Creating STRESS



BY DAVID SOHM

Several dictionaries define stress as: *Any real or perceived (adverse) stimulus, physical or psychological, that tends to disturb an individual's performance or operation. An exaggerated physiological or psychological response or reaction to stimuli, beyond what is needed or necessary to accomplish a given task or goal.*

Stress has long been considered a detriment to effective operation and optimal performance for law enforcement personnel as well as creating a barrier and destructive environment to learning and task accomplishment in training. Critical Incident

Performance Stress has the potential to take any officer capable of effectively performing routine duties under normal circumstances and creating an overload condition. This results in ineffective, delayed or, worst case scenario, a lack of response during critical moments or events.

The training standard for years has been that stress has a debilitating effect on officers' abilities and ultimately results in diminished performance on the physiological, psychological, and cognitive processing levels. That stress must be eliminated from training to afford the officer the opportunity to success-

fully complete the required training task. Secondly, officers under high stress are unable to perform fine and complex motor skills as well as complex cognitive processes creating a less effective and capable officer.

Stress, wrongfully or overly applied in training, can detract from, deteriorate, or defeat an officer's ability to perform optimally, fully process cognitively, and ultimately survive an encounter. Such stress can also morally defeat an officer. Training stress that focuses upon "messing with the officer" as demonstrated by "no win" scenarios or purposeless training can have significant short

term (demoralizing effects) as well as long term ramifications (inability to respond or ineffective response to threats or situations) This training failure can also create a cognitive reset upon the officer and their operational performance setting the stage for later failure or hesitancy in action.

The short- and long-term effects can be seen and shown in a variety of training and real-life consequences. First, we do a huge disservice to our officers by allowing static (“stressless”) programs and exercises to make up the majority of our training plan. Bland, outdated, or oppositionally static training may meet department or state guidelines but can break down morale, create apathy, and stifle the learning process. Not to mention this is also a failure to prepare officers for real life duty.

Second, by improperly employing stress, we fail to challenge officers to reinforce and practice task mastery of previously learned skills and tactics (perishable skills set). They do not have the opportunity to rise to the next level of their abilities without such practice. Third, when we fail to provide the officer the opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge, we also fail to help them develop technique and decisional confidence in their abilities and chosen tactics. They need to work through what techniques can be

applicable to a given situation, if they really work or not, or if the officer can really win or succeed by applying the techniques we teach them.

Fourth, we do not prepare the officer for the “real life duty” challenges they face that will most assuredly fall outside the static drills and sterile responses they learn in the “classroom threats.” This certainly does not train them for the dangerous and dynamic situations that evolve in seconds. Training is static, real life is always dynamic.

Lastly, we fail to prepare officers for the real response stress that they will face operationally. They need the time to learn to manage those stressors to develop an effective, trained response both during and after an encounter. Surviving the encounter is many times only half the battle and the most serious fight is likely yet to come.

We have bought into a “stress less” training concept as fact for years without venturing outside the box to see whether or not it is true. We also needed to figure out if the theory is changeable. It clearly is. Consider the introduction of managed stress or the role of stress acclimation (we cannot be inoculated from it) training in developing officer performance. These critical considerations and components can have immeasurable benefits for the officer and the outcome of any encounter.

The retraining of the stress process starts by simply rearranging and reframing the officers’ thought processes and considerations of stress. They need to rethink its influence and purpose. We change not only how they view stress and stressors, but the officer’s mental picture, the purpose of stress, and how it is used to enhance their abilities. True fear is a motivational factor for survival; stress is no longer considered a negative but a positive factor and motivator to effective performance and higher levels of operation.

Second, stress introduced into any training program in structured levels starts a process that will, in effect, begin to acclimate the officer to some or most of those physiological responses. In turn, this allows or trains the officer to learn to control or manage stress to their benefit. Since the mind does not differentiate real from artificial stress, the benefits in training are the same as in real life. Though the physiological responses cannot be stopped, per se, they can be controlled or managed to the officer’s benefit. This allows the possibility of functioning and performing well under high stress circumstances. As Sgt. Matt Beckman of the Chisago County Sheriff’s Office so often states: “it’s not stress inoculation but stress acclimation. We cannot stop it, but we can manage it!”

Training stress appropriately applied using



“Bland, outdated, or oppositionally static training may meet department or state guidelines but can break down morale, create apathy, and stifle the learning process.”



“Training should always have a further purpose or objective and that purpose or objective should create a new or greater destination for the officer.”

a *Stair Step Stress Training Model™* can have a profound effect on an officer's critical incident response (decisional), critical incident performance (operational) and cognitive (critical thinking) abilities during high stress activities.

Likewise, stress education is not necessarily best using CISM. Through an *Assessment Options and Crisis Response Model™* and using a “threat vs. challenge” assessment, thinking, and response, officers can reorient their processing of any event. Such stress education can have a profound influence on the critical moment (in time) event assessment and the mental follow through (through time), reaction, and response to that event. It simply becomes a problem to be solved and our training provides methods of resolution.

By introducing innovative and creative stress acclimation training criteria and programming for our officers, we begin a process of “Fire and Wire” training. This type of training is a restructuring that realigns thought processes and reframes the pictures of the process, activity, and outcome for the officer. We not only reframe the pictures but an officer's process of thought, meta-cognition strategies, and self-talk. This sets the

officer up for positive completion by training to a new destination and force outcome.

When we conceptualize stress in this new light, we reframe our training and our officers' thinking. The old deficiencies of most training programs become easily correctable.

Training for the sake of training (simply mandating action) is ineffective and a waste of everyone's time. Our programs must reflect true “training with intent.” **Training should always have a further purpose or objective and that purpose or objective should create a new or greater destination for the officer.** Training with intent sets and defines the goals and outcomes and creates cognitive pre-programming on an unconscious level.

Depending on the type of training being presented, the program should (as reasonably as possible) contain three components to be an effective training endeavor. Classroom with visual demonstrations (cognitive), hands-on with practice (operational), and scenario or experienced-based with dynamic application (experiential). The last two components should always utilize training stress factors to enhance the training goal and process. The old adage really becomes true during the last phase: if it doesn't work

on the street, it's not worth teaching in the classroom. Adding stress is one of the most important ways to help validate a training program. Officers must have the opportunity to break it, bend it and dynamically apply it to test if it works for them and develop the confidence that they can make it work successfully in dynamic application.

Training (and trainers) should become that cause or influence of illumination, awakening or discovery for the officer. The training discomfort, pain, stress, or tension that they encounter during a challenging course is a motivator. We want this to be a driving force or positive influence to move officers towards new knowledge or skill and task mastery. Stress is the catalyst that becomes the force of positive change towards that destination.

Training programs that do not challenge the officer, do not contain at least incremental stressors, or do not provide a “stair step” building process of stress acclimation, progressive training, and skill acquisition will only serve to reinforce the five previously highlighted training areas of failure.

The “certification for the price of admission” (credit to my partner Sgt. Brian Reed) training philosophy cheats the department of competency and the officer of the opportunity and challenge of preparing for, improving upon, and surviving the real world they face in critical moments. We must reconsider and retrain stress not only from the standpoint of its influence and effect but as a positive training motivator. This is a new opportunity and a positive driving force to change, improve, and expand the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual boundaries and capabilities of the officers we train. Simply stated we need to frame stress in a different light and make it the positive and necessary force of training, change, and survival for our officers.

New dictionary definition: Stress: An external force or condition that harnesses the biological and physiological reactions motivating the body, mind, and spirit to optimal performance during high or critical stress situations or circumstances for effective response. TFI

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Sohm has over 20+ years' experience in Law Enforcement and has been training and consulting in the areas of Pursuit and Emergency Response, Use of Force, Firearms CISM, and Special Operations for over 20 years. He is President of Mission Critical Concepts and can be reached at his office 763-205-2079 or by email at Trainer716@comcast.net.



Photo: Todd Fletcher





WHEN YOU NEED TO DEFEND YOUR CORNER

By George T. Williams

Perhaps it starts as a call of a “[man with a gun](#).”¹ Or maybe a [traffic stop](#).² It could be in the midst of a [running gun battle](#).³ You are in a “position of cover,” using a wall, building, or your patrol car as protection against the suspect’s gunfire. You are shooting at him when suddenly his bullets slam the edge of your cover, with some zip-ping past you, forcing you back. There is a slight pause in the suspect’s fire, and you are just about to “pie around the corner” to get back into the fight when more rounds again slam into the corner. Your breath ragged; you thank goodness you did not stick your head around the corner as you strain to gain some control over the situation. Suddenly, you sense movement at the corner. You gasp in surprise and fright at the realization you are too late just as you see and feel the muzzle of his weapon flash.

It has happened more than once: an officer at a corner is murdered by a suspect who maneuvered while shooting at the officer moving obliquely, directly at the barricade, wall, or patrol car rather than directly at the officer. The suspect’s fire drives the officer behind cover. The officer remains rooted behind the obstacle, just like they have been trained, waiting for the firing to abate to more safely locate and again engage the suspect. The suspect then either uses the same corner the officer backed away from or comes around a different corner to get a new angle of fire. The officer, who did not expect the suspect to suddenly appear, is shocked and is shot down.

Commonly, the surprise is complete, and the officer is unable to fire back. This suspect is universally military trained, often with combat experience in infantry tactics. This is a basic fire suppression problem for the suspect through the use of angles and surprise to take possession of that cover and murder the officer.

1. Ceres, CA, 2005: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SPI4uljUP8>.

2. Rural Georgia, 1998: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mssNOhv1UMc>.

3. Dallas, TX, 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpb-mtjN9q8>.

Surviving This Threat

How do you survive this aggressive threat? By using the same principles the suspect is employing against the officer. Rather than making this a “technique” needing to be remembered during some distant life-or-death adrenaline-hazed event, tactical principles can be habituated, or made habits, by routinely applying tactical principles when responding to every call for service. Those tactical principles which may be helpful in this case are:

Angles of fire. Every physical threat to an officer’s life or safety involves a beginning point, a direction of movement, and an end-point. In a shooting, the beginning point is the muzzle whose direction is determined by the bore-axis of the barrel with the bullet moving in a straight line from the muzzle to the strike point.⁴ The angle of fire between the suspect and the officer determines where each may operate safely or be shot. If you can see the suspect, then both of you are vulnerable to being shot. Ask yourself, “From where

can I be shot?” or, “Can I shoot the bad actor from this position?”

Fight to or from corners. In a tactical sense, an officer’s world is comprised of vertical corners (e.g., the edge of a building, a wall, or an open doorway) or horizontal corners (e.g., a windowsill, solid deck railing, or a ditch). It is binary: there are only cleared corners and uncleared corners (all corners are considered to contain threats until the corner *as well as all the angles of fire threatening that corner* are cleared). Corners may be cover, capable of protecting the officer from fire or the effects of fire, or concealment, hiding the officer from the suspect’s view yet having no ballistic protection value.⁵

Problematically, corners are psychologically comforting. We hide behind them because we believe they keep us safe—especially when rounds are impacting on the other side, and we are safely sucked up against it. It is like being held in mom’s arms again and, while the situation is dangerous, it is as if our brains are telling us, “I’m safe as long as I stay here.”

This psychological dependence on this feeling of universal safety afforded by solid cover in this high-threat situation (being shot at) tends to root officers into place. All humans are reluctant to abandon cover when being shot at because “I’m not shot yet.” Stubbornly remaining attached to the obstacle allows the suspect to flank the cover and gain a new angle exposing the surprised officer to the suspect’s fire.

This false sense of security is reinforced by training. Almost all firearms and scenario training involving the use of a barricade is static. Once the officer is at a corner, that is their final fighting position until the exercise is over. The mindset behind the use of cover cannot be stressed enough: fight from cover, do not hide behind cover. Cover is temporary: if the corner is no longer tenable, then fight your way away from it.

Cover is useful only from a specific angle of fire. As the direction of threat changes, the value of that cover rapidly decreases. The higher the suspect’s firing angle (e.g., positioned in a fourth story apartment window above you), the greater the exposure of the officer’s head and upper body. Flanking creates a sharper lateral angle to the cover making the officer vulnerable because there is nothing between the suspect’s muzzle and the officer’s body. Failing to recognize the changing of the value of cover and evolving threat and not moving in response is what the suspect is betting his life on as he maneuvers to obtain that fatal angle of fire.

Move in angles or circles. *Movement is life.* Train to move with a firearm in your hand rather than rooting in place and being a good target. Moving makes you harder to hit. Train to move *then* hit with your weapon. Train until “Move!” is a reflexive response to threat. Moving changes the fight and it disrupts the suspect’s expectations by slowing him down and giving you time.

Rather than moving directly forward or back, angular movement creates a more difficult target. Moving at an oblique angle (e.g., 45 degrees to the suspect) while firing creates more difficulty than hitting lateral movement (e.g., a 90-degree angle).

For our purposes, the use of a corner disrupts the suspect’s angles of fire by making the officer a smaller target. Problematically,



4. For purposes of defending a corner, we disregard trajectory and other factors that may affect a projectile in flight, the angle of fire is a straight line of sight from the muzzle of a weapon to the strike point of the projectile and may not necessarily be the terminal resting point of the bullet. It may also involve penetrating fire through a material that cannot contain the energy of the bullet.

5. For this article, the terms “corner” and “cover” are used interchangeably for convenience and may or may not have any ballistic protective value. The ballistic value of “cover” is contextual and can only be determined by the specific material and thickness available to the officer at that moment, and the weapon, ammunition, and the distance from which the suspect is firing. The tactical value of “cover” is dependent upon the angle of the suspect’s fire.



the corner also prevents observation of the suspect once the suspect moves out of the officer's field of fire. This occurs because: 1) the officer is driven back from the corner by fire losing sight of the suspect; 2) the suspect's angular movement masks the officer's view of the suspect protecting him from the officer's view and field of fire; and/or 3) the suspect continues to fire preventing the officer from fighting from the corner.

The same angular, oblique movement the suspect is using can also be employed by the officer to defend the corner against a suspect. Upon realizing the suspect is maneuvering against the corner, moving away from the barricade at an angle provides a lack of predictable positioning and the beginning of turning the tables when the suspect enters the officer's new field of fire.

Target-specific cover fire. Normally, officers fire directly at suspects they reasonably believe represent immediate deadly threats to their safety. There is an exception to this, however. When an officer has probable

cause to believe the armed suspect remains an imminent deadly threat and is tactically maneuvering or hiding (i.e., a reasonable belief the gunfight is on pause but not over), then the officer may employ target-specific cover fire at the suspected location of the suspect to prevent him from firing.⁶

Surprise. Surprise in a combat situation is jarring when suddenly confronted by an unexpected threat. There is a moment of disbelief of what is happening combined with a frantic, desperate mental effort to contextualize this change. Humans optimally function when their expectations match their environment and anticipated scenarios. Change disrupts expectations forcing the attempt to orient to the new reality and put a suddenly different situation into context. It takes time to determine what just changed. If surprised in a gunfight, the perception of time is often experienced as compressed without enough time to put the changes into context and respond in time. Time in any fight is a luxury that, if lost, cannot be recovered.⁷ Causing

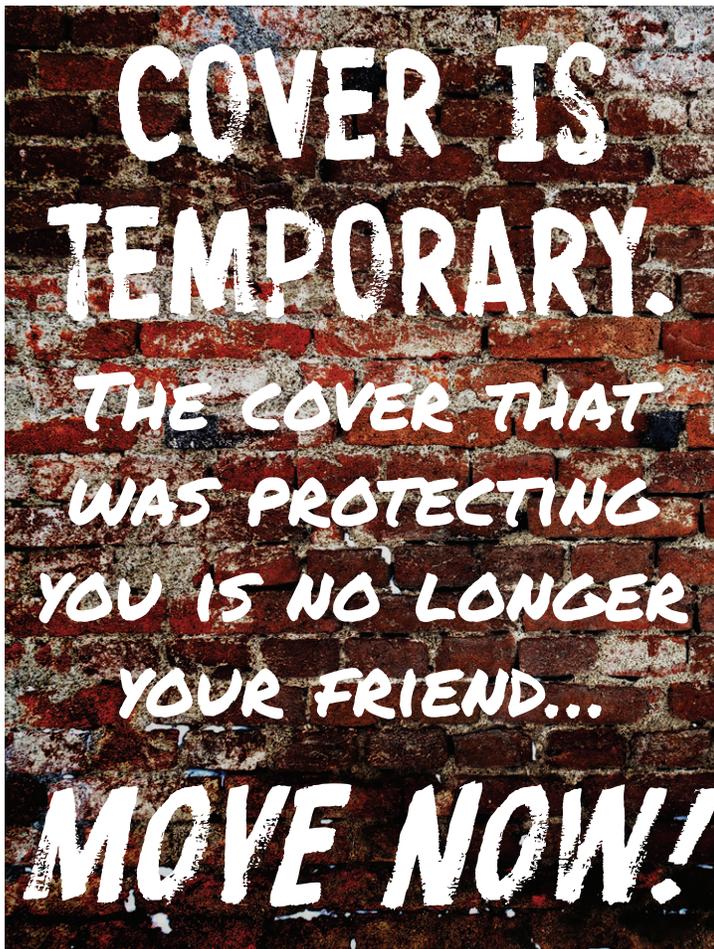
mental processes to pause and recalibrate the change in circumstances—the time it costs—is why surprise is fundamental to successful tactics.

The Practical Application of the Principles Orienting to the threat. You are at a corner, firearm in hand, perhaps pointing it at an armed suspect while ordering him to drop the weapon. Suddenly, he simultaneously begins moving obliquely while shooting *directly toward the wall* (or the other side of the patrol car) rather than at you. He quickly disappears, the edge of your cover masking him—yet he is still firing at the corner. You need to make a choice: stay in the gunfight by stepping out into his line of fire to locate and shoot him or remain behind the false safety of the barricade and see what happens next.

Rapid orientation to change is fundamental to survival. He is not just statically staying in position and shooting at you. His movement combined with fire is not away from you in an attempt to escape. Instead, he is

6. This is not military-style "suppression fire." Rather than firing at a possible suspect position and laying down overwhelming, non-specific targeted fire, this is target-specific fire based on the officer's reasonable belief that 1) the suspect is an imminent deadly threat based on the totality of the facts at the time and 2) the reasonable belief the suspect is a continuing public safety threat (per *Tennessee v. Garner* (1985) requirements). The officer will be required to articulate that any officer with similar training and experience, given a similar circumstance, would have reasonably believed the suspect was continuing the gunfight.

7. Napoleon Bonaparte.



moving very aggressively coming *towards* your cover at an angle oblique to you. Even though he cannot hit you through the cover, he is continuing to fire at and past the corner where you were just positioned. This guy is going to take your corner from you and kill you from it if you stay where you are!

Responding to the change in threat: *Change the fight.* Your desired end-state in every gunfight is to obtain an angle of fire and hit the suspect without your being harmed. If you are able to surprise him, you earn a few more tenths of a second before he is able to orient to the change and return fire. In this circumstance, this is achieved by *taking the cover back from him* and shooting him.

Sometimes cover is not your friend in a gunfight. As long as the obstacle can contain the round without danger of spall⁸ striking you and the suspect remains in a static position, there is nothing wrong with remaining behind cover. This changes when the suspect is maneuvering on you by moving toward your cover and past your line of sight. This is essentially a flanking move to rob you of the corner. The fight has now changed: whoever controls that corner and obtains an angle of fire on the other by surprise will likely survive. *When cover is no longer viable, change the fight: MOVE AWAY FROM COVER!*

Some solutions officers have discovered in unscripted force-on-force exercises using marking cartridges are:⁹

- At a barricade with two corners, such as a wide column, if the suspect is firing at the left side corner, move to the right-side

corner, rapidly pie out and fire upon locating him;

- At a wide column, if the suspect is firing and apparently maneuvering to the right-side corner, aggressively blow past the left-side corner into the open, flanking and shooting the suspect;
- At the end of wall, such as a rock or block wall, as the suspect is firing and moving on the corner, rapidly move away from the corner out of the suspect's sight to a nearby car, tree, power pole, etc. Quickly set up and ambush the suspect as he turns the corner hunting for you.
- At the end of a wall, as the suspect is firing and moving on the corner, time a pause in the fire at the corner. Then, move hard at an angle into the open on the same side of the wall as the suspect turning it into a gunfight where you depend on your mobility (moving in an arc to his flank or back) and accurate fire to survive;
- At a wall, as the suspect is firing and moving on the corner, back away and begin firing at the corner of the wall, preventing his freely moving past the corner to locate you. If the background permits it, shoot just past the corner so there is no question that moving into that space will be deadly. Do not run out of ammunition and do not trip moving backwards;
- At a vehicle, upon the suspect disappearing to the other side of the vehicle, pop up, locate the suspect, and shoot through the windows; and
- At a vehicle, upon the suspect disappearing to the other side of the vehicle, drop down, firing on his feet. Change fire to more effective targets after he falls.

Conclusion

Whether the threat is a terrorist with foreign combat experience, a US military-trained-now-criminal suspect, or a suspect who plays a lot of first-person shooter video games and is now going live, you need to change the fight and take the initiative away from him to prevent his murdering you. Upon recognizing aggressive movement toward your position of cover combined with accurate fire driving you behind your corner and continuing fire even though you are no longer visible, you may have only seconds to live unless you defend your corner.

Cover is temporary. The cover that was protecting you is no longer your friend...move now! Change the fight: do something the suspect is not counting on. Quickly moving to another position, whether it has ballistic properties or not, may surprise him. It may include moving hard past the corner at an angle into the open and shooting on the move. It may mean going around a different, unexpected corner to take him by surprise. Or shooting him from under the patrol car or through its windows.

While not an everyday occurrence, this tactical assault by suspects has been tragically successful and used often enough that officers require training to recognize and respond to successfully defend their corner. This training, if only principle-based, permits officers to work their own individual solutions as they will be compelled to do under fire. Only after being prepared tactically, through mental and physical rehearsal, and having learned what works and what does not in unscripted force-on-force exercises, can officers recognize the unfolding attack in time to change the fight and prevail in this deadly situation. **TFI**

8. When a projectile strikes the face of material sufficiently thick to contain the bullet but insufficient to contain the energy of the round, the back face of the cover breaks, or spalls. The material that breaks off (spall) flies out at the same speed as the bullet hitting the face of the cover. This spall can seriously injure or even kill up to four feet behind cover.

9. These solutions are not suggested as techniques to "learn." Each is an application of the principles discussed in this article and resulted from the creativity of the individual officer solving this problem during scenarios.





Photo: Mike Williams



Marksmanship Fundamentals for the Remedial Shooter: An Instructor's Guide

By Rom Ranallo

As a firearms instructor, you are often judged by your peers on your ability to deal with “remedial shooters.” They exist in virtually every police department in the world. The purpose of this article is to define what a remedial shooter is and why they exist; review the fundamentals of marksmanship; and provide solutions to decrease the number of remedial shooters in your department.

What is a Remedial Shooter?

A “remedial shooter” can be defined in several different ways. For the purpose of this discussion, this shooter is a police officer who

is not able to achieve the legislated standard (course of fire or COF) for re-certification on a departmental authorized/approved firearm. The COF is essentially a “test” that legally entitles a police officer to possess and carry a firearm in the execution of his/her sworn duties. The COF assesses an officer’s baseline marksmanship proficiency skills and basic gun-handling. Any COF used to authorize police officers to carry a firearm in the course of their duties must be “task oriented” on a photorealistic (humanoid) target requiring 100% hit accountability. An aggregate COF where a pass can be defined as 70%, 80%, etc. no longer has a place in our profession.

When it comes to “remedial shooters,” we need to expedite their learning curve so they don’t become a perennial problem. The less time we spend on remedial training equals more time doing the real training.

Why do Remedial Shooters Exist?

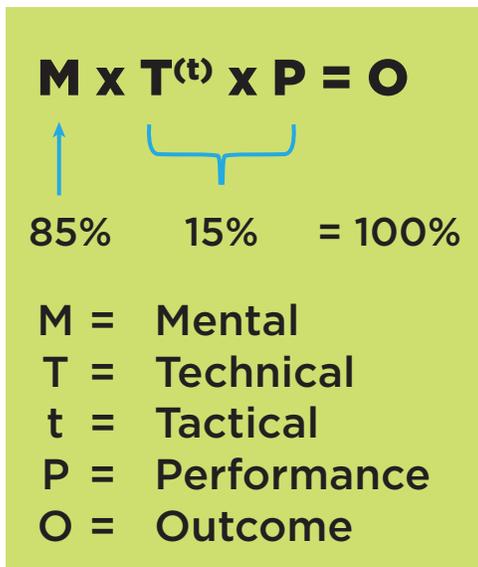
I can assure you that every generation has had their fair share of remedial shooters. My first question is: “How were they taught?” My second question is; “What are you as firearm instructors doing about it?”

Remedial shooters exist for three primary reasons: high anxiety, negative attitude, and lack of understanding or poor execution of

the fundamentals of marksmanship.

Every police recruit who is hired attends basic training. Some attend a police academy “outside” of their respective departments while others receive the training “in-house.” Regardless, the recruit training program will obviously contain a firearms component. Granted, hours dedicated to firearms training have decreased in some regions over the years and most of us are being asked to do more with less. However, every police recruit MUST achieve the designated standard of firearms training and qualification.

There is a tremendous amount of anxiety some police officers experience when being “tested” i.e. having to pass the COF. According to psychologist Dr. David Cox, the outcome to any event is based on the following equation:



A small percentage of remedial shooters simply do not have the right mind-set (mental focus) which equates to 85% of the process. They approach the firearm re-cert as an experience (unfortunately in their mind a negative one) instead of a performance. In my opinion, they lack the proper mental mindset.

Sadly, there is also a tiny percentage of police officers who were raised with the belief that firearms are bad and therefore have a mental aversion to shooting that impedes their ability to perform. The sound of the firearm discharging terrifies them. Regardless, they did “just enough” to pass while completing their recruit training, but are not invested or committed. Others like the idea of being a police officer, but do not like the idea of having to carry a firearm or being tested on it for that matter. They are by far the most challenging remedial shooters to deal with because they simply do not want to be at the range and completely dread it.

In addition to the problem of a distaste for firearms, some recruits were turned off by their instructors. When I started policing just prior to the turn of the 21st century, some of the firearm instructors I came across were mentally abusive. This behavior led to officers experiencing high anxiety and, in some instances, uncontrollable hand tremors when being tested.

Considering that shooting accurately is largely mental in nature as highlighted in the outcome equation above, it is a topic that needs significantly more exploration. I believe there is a lot to gain by linking up and involving sport psychologists in our firearm programs to develop innovative strategies we can use to help motivate those officers who do not have the required mental focus. The few who persistently display a negative attitude need to be dealt with accordingly through informal action or formal process with your HR section. There needs to be accountability. Period!

There is a large percentage of remedial shooters that exist because they never established a solid baseline skill set or understanding as to how the fundamentals of marksmanship relate to each other when they completed their initial firearms training. However, they performed well enough or on a level where little to no coaching was provided to them because instructors were too busy (and sometimes literally overwhelmed) dealing with the extreme problem shooters. They performed good enough in the recruit training environment, but after graduation were

not able to transition and perform (pass the COF) in their new environment. Basically, they did not have a solid foundational skill set or true understanding. This lack leads to increased levels of anxiety which, when coupled with weaker or novice skill sets, is often enough to impede performance resulting in not being able to pass the COF.

What are the Fundamentals of Marksmanship?

When I started my career, I believed there were four fundamentals of marksmanship: STANCE, GRIP, SIGHT ALIGNMENT, and TRIGGER CONTROL. Over the years, I came to realize that there were four more: DRAW, POSITION, HOLD, and FOLLOW-THROUGH.

Stance:

When it comes to learning how to shoot a firearm, it's best to begin with a “fighting” stance (default stance). Every police officer will have a slightly different default stance. Don't try to impart your stance on someone else. A solid standing stance is when the feet are shoulder width apart; dominant side leg is back, arms extended with wrists, elbows, and shoulders locked; head is upright; upper body leaning forward; and the firearm is brought in line with the eyes.

Grip:

Grip entails maintaining physical contact of the firearm with your hand(s). Shooting hand placement must be established when drawing from the holster and is achieved



Photo: Todd Fletcher



Photo: Mike Williams

when the webbing of the hand is placed so there is complete contact with the tang (no gap). The trigger finger is isolated (doesn't play a role in the grip). The heel of the support hand should be in full contact with heel of the shooting hand (close the gap-no leakage). The support hand should form a mitten shape and curls into a clamp. Both thumbs placed on same side of the pistol with the support thumb "lightly" touching the frame. The thumbs must point forward with the support thumb in-line with the trigger finger. The support hand fingers must wrap around the shooting hand fingers with both hands applying equal grip force. The wrists, elbows and shoulders must be locked. A proper grip is established when there are no adjustments between shots.

Sight Alignment:

Sight alignment is the relationship of the front sight to the rear sight. The front sight must be centred from left to right in the middle of the rear sight. With open iron sights, the top of the front sight post must be level with top of rear sight posts. There

must be equal amount of space (light) on either side of the front sight when looking through the rear sight. The eye must focus on the top of the front sight. With closed iron sights (i.e. aperture) the top of the front sight post must be centered in the middle of the rear aperture.

Sight picture is defined as the relationship of sight alignment to the target. Just to be clear, if you refer to sight alignment, it has nothing to do with the target. Many instructors use these two terms interchangeably: They are not interchangeable. A shooter can have excellent sight alignment, but the gun is not aligned (positioned) with the intended placement on the target resulting in errors (misses) because of an incorrect sight picture. At the end of the day, it all comes down to position. In other words, where is the muzzle pointing? The muzzle always has a direction and it is incredibly important. There is a reason why it is the second universal firearm safety rule: CONTROL MUZZLE DIRECTION AT ALL TIMES! If I want to put a hole between the eyes of a photorealistic target, I must point the muzzle of my

firearm in that exact direction. The only way to accomplish this task with a high degree of certainty is to ensure that I have proper sight alignment, sight picture, hold, and follow through.

Trigger Control:

Trigger control describes the ability to press the trigger without moving the pistol (muzzle). The placement of your trigger (index) finger is typically on the "power crease" of the distal joint or the fat pad and towards the lower end of the trigger. The pressure applied to the trigger must be evenly, smoothly, and continually applied so it moves like a pendulum. The trigger is to be pulled straight back until you experience a "surprise break." That is, the shooter allows the firearm to fire, and does not force (anticipate) the firearm firing. Lastly, the trigger finger must maintain constant contact with the trigger during the entire shooting process.

Draw:

The draw is the presentation of a firearm from a holster and involves four steps: grip; rotate and present; meet and greet; and

extend and prep. Before I explain each of the four steps, I must mention something that is often overlooked by firearms instructors and that is the holster. The holster must be situated on a belt so that a “natural” grip can be achieved. The holster must be snug/tight on the belt and the belt must be snug/tight around the waist. Furthermore, the holster shank slits, loops, paddle, etc. must match the width of the belt. There can be no space. I have seen way too many officers wearing loose belts or holster shanks that do not match their belt causing the holster to “swim” resulting in holster hiccups when drawing the firearm. For a remedial shooter, this can be extremely problematic because they become fixated on whether their firearm is going to come out smoothly. They put so much effort in drawing the gun that they resort to the three Ps: point, press, and pray. The issue with this approach is their “point” is more like a wild punch and they have no idea as to the direction of the muzzle. Ninety-nine percent of the time, the muzzle is not pointing anywhere near centre of mass on the silhouette. A 1-2° angular error in the muzzle is inches downrange and clearly contributes to the difference between a hit and a miss. Please check the holsters and duty belts of your remedial shooters before you have them fire a single round.

Position:

Position is the spatial orientation (direction) of the firearm (muzzle) in relation to the intended point of aim on a target. Basically, it is the relationship of sight alignment AND sight picture.

Hold:

Hold is the position of a firearm at a designated point of aim during the entire shooting process and for 1-2 seconds post-firing.

Follow Through:

Follow-through is holding a firearm on target with index finger on the trigger (tactile feel) as the trigger is being released to the re-set point while re-establishing sight alignment and sight picture.

What are Some Solutions for Dealing with Remedial Shooters?

One of the best things you can do as a firearm instructor is to pose the following question to your remedial shooter(s): Do you control when a bullet leaves the muzzle?

Many remedial shooters believe they do because they do not understand “internal ballistics.” Knowing that the only time they have control of where the bullet will go is when it exits the muzzle. In other words, the

muzzle MUST be pointing in the direction of where they intended it to be when they made the decision to shoot and pressed the trigger. When the trigger is pressed, there are a series of events that takes place within the firearm that the shooter has absolutely no control over. I will begin at the event when the firing pin strikes the primer on the cartridge to avoid any confusion between hammer and striker fire pistols. The propellant ignites a flame; the flame burns the gun powder; gases expand inside the cartridge; increased gas pressure drives the projectile forward down the barrel; the projectile exits the muzzle (path of least resistance).

Remedial shooters have the impression that when they have sight alignment and sight picture and the trigger is pressed, that the bullet exits the muzzle at that exact moment in time. They remove their index finger by “flying off” the trigger and “move” the firearm off the target too quickly by bringing it to a combat tuck or low ready position immediately after the shooting sequence. Shortly after that, they are completely puzzled as to why they missed. They have no concept of hold, which I believe is one of the most important fundamentals of marksmanship and is often over-looked or not discussed at all by firearm instructors. Even with minor sight alignment errors and a poor sight picture, if the muzzle is pointing at the silhouette during the entire shooting process and 1-2 sec after, combat hits will be achieved. Period!

Here are drills you can use with your remedial shooters to help them work on their fundamentals (see the opposite page).

Conclusion

As a firearms instructor, coaching remedial shooters will be one of your most challenging, frustrating, and yet rewarding experiences. It is only a matter of time before the next remedial shooter will require your undivided attention. Gaining new information as to the reasons why some police officers struggle with their shooting: high anxiety; negative attitude; or a lack of understanding of the fundamentals of marksmanship will help you in your relentless pursuit to find the most appropriate solutions. Considering how difficult some remedial shooters can be, it is your passion, commitment, patience, knowledge, and coaching skills that can make all the difference the next time they are required to pass the course of fire (COF). A police officer having a positive experience on a remedial session could be the link to future and lasting success. Imagine a remedial shooter who year after year fails the COF and suddenly with your renewed guidance never

fails another one again. **TFI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rom Ranallo is the current Range Master for the Vancouver Tactical Training Centre (TTC) and has 16+ years of experience as a law enforcement firearms instructor in multiple disciplines (pistol, shotgun, and carbine). He was part of the Provincial Firearms Working Group where he was instrumental in establishing pistol training and qualification standards. He has trained peace officers at the provincial, national, and international level. Rom holds a Master of Science degree from the University of British Columbia and presented for the 2019 IACP Conference & Expo in Chicago as well as IALEFI's ATC's. He can be reached at romolo.ranallo@vpd.ca



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Trigger Exemplar Drill #1 (Ranallo's Version):

- Place a blank paper target @ 5 meters
- Select one of the remedial shooters
- Advise the class to pay close attention to your index finger (maintains contact with the trigger during the entire shooting process) and the pistol (held in position).
- Instruct the shooter to align the sights on the paper while indexing their trigger finger on the frame.
- Place your index finger on the trigger and face backwards (up range). As the instructor, you will work the trigger.
- Remind the shooter to keep the firearm pointed towards the target and not move it while maintaining sight alignment.
- While the shooter points the pistol at the target, press the trigger
- Ask the shooter the following question: Are you aligned on the original hole?
- Only press the trigger when the shooter answers: "Yes"
- Repeat the last two steps three times

As this drill is being conducted, you will typically hear the non-shooters laugh with joy as they observe the "magic." They are in total amazement trying to figure out why an instructor with his index finger on the trigger facing away from the target is able to produce a 1-2" group (often times even smaller) with their fellow officer holding the firearm. At this point, you ask the following question to the class? Does that look like a remedial shooter to you? The answer is always, "No." Most times someone will shout, "You have a good trigger press... that's why the shooting was so good..." This is where you drive home the following message: The firearm MUST not move during the shooting process and the finger MUST maintain contact with the trigger all the way to the end of follow-through.

Remedial shooters believe the key to shooting well is having a "good trigger press." I will probably shock a lot of you here and say that's BS. A shooter can slap, jerk, snap, crush the trigger all they want. The real key to shooting well is HOLDING the firearm in place and NOT moving it during the shooting process. If the firearm moves (change in direction) the muzzle moves. The bullet can only go where the muzzle is pointing at the time it exits. If you were to put a firearm in a vise so that the frame is clamped down and you slammed the trigger as hard as you can or a slow as you wish the bullets will go in the

exact same place (one hole) because the firearm (muzzle) DOES NOT MOVE!

To further demonstrate this, I take possession of the remedial shooter's pistol selected to do the exemplar Drill #1 and unload a full magazine by pressing the trigger as fast as I can at the same target. The grouping is 3-4" (sometimes tighter). Once again, the class is in awe. I then reload another full magazine and do the exact same thing, except that I move the gun and the result is the "discount house of worship." Half my fired rounds or more are not even on paper. Just to be clear, tell your remedial shooters, "Don't move the gun... hold it in position". Both you and your remedial shooters will be amazed by the results once they accept the fact that the firearm cannot move and must be held in position during the entire shooting process.

Photo: Sara Ahrens



The 9/10ths Drill:

- Place a blank target for each shooter @ 5 meters
- Shooter fires one round anywhere on the target.
- Shooter establishes sight alignment on the first (original) hole.
- Instructor advises shooter to pull the trigger 8/10ths and then back to the re-set without losing tactile feel with trigger.
- Instructor to have the shooters do the same for 8 1/2, 8 3/4, and finally 9/10ths
- This drill continues until each shooter has fired five rounds into the original hole (or close to it).

NOTE: For striker fire pistols, instructor to advise shooters to press with 3 lbs of pressure followed by 4 lbs, 5 lbs, 6 lbs, and 7 lbs.

The purpose of this drill is to further demonstrate that the firearm must not move and there must be tactile feel with the trigger during the entire shooting process. This drill is also excellent to correct those remedial shooters who have significant anticipation problems. It is virtually impossible to gauge 9/10ths and therefore the shooters will experience what a "surprise break" feels like. The key here is that shooters need to understand that they cannot force or anticipate the shot. They must concentrate on pressing the trigger until the "surprise break" and then controlling the release of the trigger by maintaining contact to the re-set point.

The Eyes Closed Drill:

- Place a blank target for each shooter @ 5 meters
- Have the shooter point the pistol at the target
- With the pistol pointed at the target and finger on the trigger have the shooter hold the position, close both eyes and fire one round.
- Instruct the shooter to maintain contact with the trigger to the re-set point.
- The shooter can only open their eyes when they complete follow-through for each shot.
- This drill repeats until 10 rounds are fired



Photo: Todd Fletcher

YOU CAN STAY IN THE FIRE-FIGHT
EVEN IF ONE HAND OR LIMB IS INJURED

ONE HAND PISTOL COMBAT MANEUVERS

by Brian C. Smith

The one-hand pistol reload is a viable tactic in shooting that is necessary to address in officer survival and concealed carry survival. When shooting at the commercial range to sharpen the armed citizen's proficiency skills, little attention is paid to one-hand pistol tactics for combat. Think about your own familiarity with reloading the semi-auto pistol with one hand in the event the shooter's strong or support hand is injured...

Our training group, the Metropolitan

Police Self-Defense Institute, has designed a skills development workshop program where at least three topics are selected and presented in this program annually. The courses consist of two-hour workshops coaching shooters in a particular discipline of survival shooting. After research, practice, and course design, MPSDI presented a course titled, "One Hand Pistol Combat." The class is presented to law enforcement and in advanced civilian shooting classes preparing for the unthinkable. This topic is awkward because it is unfamiliar

and often overlooked. This is rarely taught in police academies and hardly ever presented in a basic concealed carry class.

In teaching psychomotor skills, I follow a martial arts philosophy that I learned many years ago. Learning and practicing a new technique or tactic is performed with the support side first and the strong side will automatically catch on. The one-handed pistol tactics of reloading or clearing malfunctions is not a new shooting concept. However, it is an unfamiliar and awkward skill to prac-



ONE-HAND PISTOL COMBAT

COURSE OUTLINE

STAGE 1: HAND SWITCH

Switching back and forth from strong to support hand after firing two rounds.



STAGE 2: ONE HAND PISTOL RELOAD

Support side – Magazine exchange, with pistol resting in waist belt, charging, and firing.

Strong side – Same drill and magazine exchange with pistol holstered, charging and firing.



STAGE 3: BETWEEN THE KNEES

Magazine exchange and charging between the knees (both support and strong side).



STAGE 4: MALFUNCTION CLEARANCES

Practicing with stabilizing pistol using holster and between the knees (support and strong side).

Class one: empty chamber or dead round

Class two: stove pipe or failure to eject

Class three: double feed or failure to extract



STAGE 5: SHOOTING DRILLS WITH DUMMY ROUNDS IN RANDOM LOCATIONS

Magazines loaded to capacity with dummy rounds interspersed randomly in the magazines. The exercise consists of discharging on command with clearing and reloading when necessary. This drill is first practiced with the support hand and the drill is repeated with the strong hand.

STAGE 6: ENGAGING A MOVING TARGET

The target facing the shooters moves from right to left down the shooting line of the range. The shooter must practice engaging the target as it appears in the shooter's firing station. The shooter's magazines are loaded with an undetermined ammo count in each, also with dummy rounds placed randomly in the stack at an unknown sequence to the shooter. As the target moves from side to side along the shooting line the participants must engage the targets as many times as possible. This drill also includes the manipulations of reloading and stoppage clearances with the one hand.



time for many shooters. The shooters always subconsciously revert back to their comfort zone of two hands during the handgun manipulation. Our curriculum consists of the following techniques that are first practiced in a dry-fire condition with clearly indicated dummy rounds. The exercises later progress to live-fire.

Please note that I suffered a strong side shoulder injury in February 2020 which needed surgery to repair. I had to rethink my process for easy access to my concealed carry pistol and was forced to carry on the support side. The thought immediately came to mind that I must practice what I preach. So, I scheduled some range time to reinforce my one-hand manipulations. I made a trip to the local range where I have access to practice shooting and reloading techniques. The drills included shooting, reloading, and malfunction clearing drills. I also practiced the drills from various shooting positions and from my vehicle to build my confidence should my appearance of wearing an arm sling be interpreted to mean that I am an easy target while tending to business in the Chicago Metropolitan area. Admittedly, I have cheated a few times in the past during practice when I had full use of both limbs prior to surgery.

After expending close to one hundred rounds performing pistol fundamentals with my support side, I left the range comfortable that I can defend myself during this rehabilitation period. Our motto at MPSDI is "... train as if your life depends on it." **TFI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian C. Smith is a retired police captain, former police chief, and is currently working as a campus police officer with a total of 42 years of police experience. He has served in patrol, investigations and as range master, training commander, and commander of a special operations unit. Brian was appointed an NRA firearms training counselor and has achieved approximately 18 firearms related instructor certifications. He also has an extensive background in martial arts. He is a graduate of the 184th session of the FBI National Academy along with an active membership in associations such as the Board of Directors of the International Association of Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors, NRA, ILEETA, Vice-President of National Association of Chiefs of Police, and President of the American Federation of Police. Brian can be reached at brownhor-net525@yahoo.com.



PROBLEM SHOOTER:



Photo: John Zamrok

WHAT DO YOU DO?

BY KEN FARREN

It's that time of year...you know he or she will soon show up and fail the firearms qualification once again. We all have them. Good, productive police officers who have valuable skills as investigators, traffic investigation officers or maybe even a really good supervisor. The department has invested thousands of dollars in training them in several different disciplines and it has paid off in every area but one. Every year, they struggle to shoot a passing score so they can keep their jobs. In most states, licensing agencies like P.O.S.T. or TCOLE require officers to shoot a course of fire approved by the state to carry a firearm and most states require an officer to be armed in order to be commissioned. So, we face the dilemma of

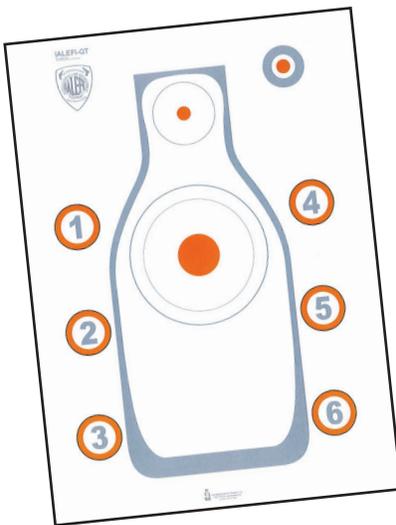
losing a valuable asset or, worse yet, allowing an unqualified or barely qualified officer to carry a gun that endangers themselves, their fellow officers, and the citizens they are sworn to protect. What do you do?

This problem is usually identified during the basic academy and should be dealt with there. Too frequently, problem shooters are passed along to their hiring agencies by a regional academy over which the agency exerts no control or a weak rangemaster willing to fudge a little. Qualification problems are often a matter of fear: fear of the gun, fear of embarrassment, or fear of failure itself. Once you identify the problem shooter, be a gentler/kinder instructor. Pull that student off to the side away from the other shoot-

ers and begin encouraging them that they are going to do fine. All of us have coaxed a confession from a bad guy by convincing him what he has done is not that bad. By giving this shooter encouraging verbal cues, you are preprogramming the shooter that they are capable of doing fine. Berating and screaming at a problem shooter in front of their peers is not a formula for success. Next, talk to the shooter and find out about their history. What bothers them about shooting a qualification? Have they failed in the past and expect to fail again? Have they had a bad experience with a firearm? Do they understand the fundamentals? Let the shooter verbalize without interruption and without leading questions. They may believe the gun

kicks too hard, the grips are too big, or their fingers are too short. The issues may not be mechanical at all. No matter what they may say, let them tell you what they think the problem is. Practice some amateur psychotherapy and let them vent.

If you know you have a problem shooter in advance, get them to the range as soon as possible, just you and them. If you have an interactive shooting system, start there. Do not run the scenario-based training but the static range drills starting with stance, grip, and sight alignment. I know these machines do not reflect true accuracy. But, if you can get your student to understand the relationship between the front and rear sight, you may have won the first battle. If you do not have one of these fancy contraptions, then I suggest the wall drill. Most of us are familiar with this time-honored training method. But, to recap, start with a safe weapon; one that both you and the student have checked and verified contains no live ammo, no magazine with live ammo, and no live ammo on either person. Have the student step up to a berm wall or safe exterior wall (no persons on the other side), draw the safe weapon, and, with a good stance and grip, bring the weapon to eye level to acquire their aim (see Issue #44



Insight Seibert & Siebert) about an inch from muzzle to wall. Tell the student to press the trigger at their own pace. If the student is improperly manipulating the trigger, both you and the shooter will see it instantly in the movement of the sights. The coach can take corrective action in response to a jerk, buck, push or mismanagement of the grip causing poor trigger control. Do these over and over again until you are convinced the student now understands, sometimes for the first time in their career, what it looks and feels like to properly and simultaneously execute

aiming and trigger control and why it is so important for well-placed shots.

If your problem shooter admits to being afraid of the gun, loud noise, muzzle blast and or kick, demonstrate to the problem shooter that the gun is not dangerous unless you are on the receiving end. Facing down range in safe manner hold the student's pistol between just your thumb on the back strap and your index finger on the trigger, press the trigger, and discharge the weapon several times into the berm. Then explain that the gun didn't jump out of your hand, twist to face you or explode because you were not holding it tight enough. Explain the physics of a controlled explosion and why a handgun operates the way that it does.

If you are still concerned about your student's fear of the weapon, many instructors now use .22 auto pistols to train problem shooters in the basics before moving to duty carry caliber. Glock even produces a drop in kit to convert both 9mm and .45 pistols to .22 caliber for training purposes. The shooter gets the feel of a full-sized frame while training without all the things that maybe hampering his ability to learn, grasp, and execute good handgunning skills.

Sometimes, students are trying so hard to

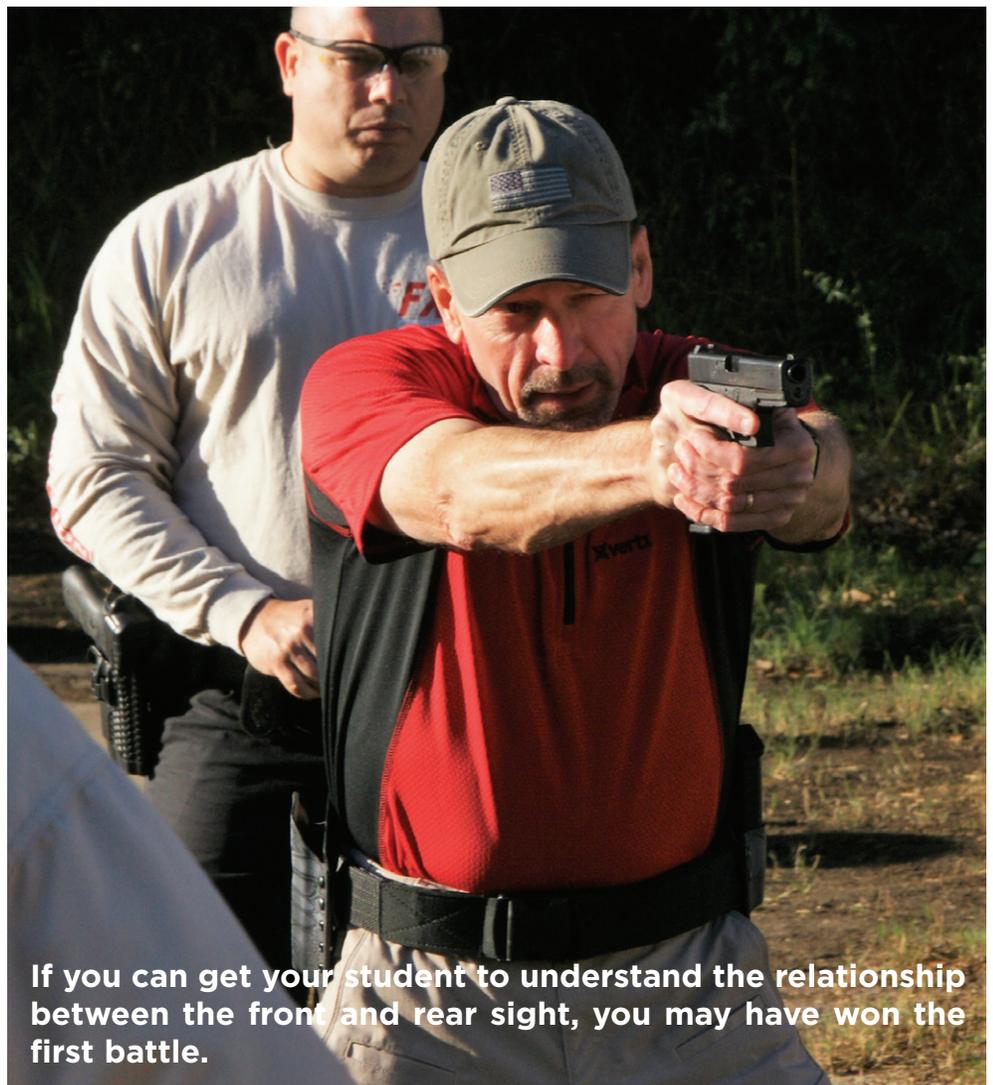


Photo: John Zamrok

aim the pistol at the center mass while lining up the front and rear sights while pressing the trigger that it may be the very act of aiming is causing them to miss. One cure for this is to reverse the target. Turn the paper target blank side out so there is no “x” ring, circle, or even reference point to aim at...just the center of a big white rectangle. All the efforts to aim at a certain point are now gone. The shooter is free to focus on trigger control as they shoot at the center of the rectangle. Scores can go up ten to twenty percent using this method. Taking a small piece of masking tape and taping the rear sight is another great way to get the problem shooter to press the trigger when the front sight is on center mass and will result in good hits.

Of course, target diagnosis of a string of shots observed by an instructor is still one of the very best ways to correct problems of heeling, pushing, poor grip or trigger control along with poor sight alignment and undetermined eye dominance. Read the target like a doctor and go over it with your “patient,” the shooter. Demonstrate whatever problems you identify with proper function so they can visually see what it is they are doing wrong.

Finally, we should look at the issue of scoring qualifications. Many innovative trainers have designed courses of fire that truly test the skilled shooter’s ability to show their proficiencies (See issue #44 Rethinking Qualification Courses). But the problem shooter is left in the dust. In the end, we lose some very good cops because we have put such emphasis on qualification that are meant to only show proficiency at a required percentile. I know great instructors like Jeff Hall who will get their hackles up and recommend washing them out if they cannot cut the mustard. But, I disagree. There certainly are police officers out there who should not be police because they either do not have the courage or the attributes to do the job. In a similar vein, there are many who simply do not have great handgun skills and never will to be highspeed low drag shooters. If we do not consider how to help them improve, we will miss all of the other ways they are real assets to their agencies. Some of the qualification courses offered in this magazine are great for SWAT teams, special operation units, gang units, and narcotics squads. They should be used to keep these people tuned up or required to make the grade. Remember, there are many officers who spend the better part of their careers sitting at a desk clearing burglaries, thefts, and hot check cases that would not get solved without their efforts. There are school resources officers, property officers and crime analysts who do jobs that



If you can get your student to understand the relationship between the front and rear sight, you may have won the first battle.

Photo: John Zamrok

most of us do not know how to do but make all the difference in the world to our customer: the public.

I am not suggesting we cheat or fudge or look the other way to push poor shooters through. Most state laws require that an officer prove they can shoot a 70 percent score out of 100 possible points. That means the shooter hits the target enough times in the right place to score a 70. Counting shots off target as punishment is not a percentage of hits on target; it is a liability issue that should be addressed in training, not in qualification. Do not create qualification that only your gun fighters can pass. Create a course of fire that is defensible in court and then hold that line. Create a course of fire that is achievable by the majority of your shooter and will qualify them to legally carry a gun. When your struggling officer passes the qualification course, congratulate them. Then train them to whatever level you believe will save his or your life. Train to the point that you can sleep at night knowing you as an instructor did all you could with their skill level and job assignment. Train to the point where you

believe they will survive and will go home safe. If you do that, you have done all that you can do. **TFI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Farren is a US Army Veteran with 31 years in Law Enforcement. Ken retired as Chief Deputy of a 202-person SO after previously retiring from Amarillo Police Department at the rank of lieutenant. Ken was a 15-year SWAT officer, 11 years as the Tactical Commander responsible for Collateral Supervision and Training for a 26 County Narcotics Task Force. He is a Certified FBI, DPS, and NRA Firearms Instructor who specializes in SWAT Tactics and has instructed teams across the US and abroad including ATF, DEA, and the FBI. Ken has instructed at over sixteen IALEFI® conferences in low-light tactics, confined space engagement, and instinctive shooting. Ken holds a master’s degree in criminal justice and co-authored the IALEFI® Firearms Instructor certification course. Ken also owns Shooter’s Edge, a private firearms instruction business.

360° CQD

PISTOL HAND SWITCH

BY DET/SGT JEFF JOHNSGAARD

Editor's Note: The first third of this article was originally published in IALEFF's Press Check, Volume 3 Issue 4. It is reprinted here as part of the entire article.

We have been getting a lot of great questions and feedback from the 360° Vehicle Anti Ambush training sessions we presented at the 1st Virtual Conference and the live fire session during the Florida 2021 ATC. Specifically, several questions about the optimal way to switch hands in order to defend in 360 degrees from inside your vehicle with the technique. This article will cover the concept of a "Final Firing Grip," then our preferred technique for switching hands (Rock - Grip - Place), and then our reasons for why we believe it to be the most optimal so you can judge for yourself. Finally, we will cover a few errors typically seen when live instructor feedback is not available.

While seated inside a vehicle there are two things necessary to be able to safely and efficiently aim and fire a pistol in 360 degrees:

1. A modification of the supporting side hand to increase stability. [FIGURE 1]

Called the "360 Grip" – Straightening of the support hand wrist and placing the firing hand's knuckles into the support hand palm.

2. The ability to quickly switch hands with the pistol to cover areas you are unable to rotate your body to when utilizing traditional Isosceles/Weaver techniques. [FIGURE 2]

FIGURE 1



Note the **left** wrist is straight



Note the **right** wrist is straight

FIGURE 2



A. Right hand hold



B. Threat on right side



C. Hand switch



D. Left hand hold

FIGURE 3



Photo #1 shows the pistol held completely inline with the bones of the forearm.



Photo #2 shows the pistol held at a slight angle by the same shooter.

There is a three-step embedded command to the hand switch:

ROCK - GRIP - PLACE

ROCK - This is where we allow the pistol to “rock” forward slightly exposing the backstrap of the pistol. This means the pistol temporarily comes out of a FFG. This means the process of switching hands puts us at a temporary disadvantage from firing immediately. Though the reason for switching hands when you are inside a vehicle means you are needing to gain the ability to aim at the threat or threat area, so the switch is necessary.



Regular right handed grip



Rocking forward slightly to expose the backstrap

To explain this technique effectively we first need to define the term “Final Firing Grip” (FFG) as it is a key component. FFG has two parts: the first is the pistol-holding hand needs to be gripping as high up as possible on the backstrap of the pistol. This means the webbing of the hand between the thumb and first finger is as high up on the pistol grip as possible, given the size and shape of the pistol grip and the person’s hand.

The second part of a FFG is the grip and is much less understood. The focus is on the placement and positioning of the hand and palm around the pistol grip. It may seem counterintuitive but hand placement resulting in the pistol being held directly in line with the bones of the forearm may not be the optimal placement for every person and we have rarely found that it is.

We find most people grip so the pistol is directly in line with their forearm which is typically good for grasping ability but then leads to non-optimal trigger finger placement and control.

See [FIGURE 3]. Photo #2 is the optimal hold for this person. To clarify, the just stated “optimal” for the person is defined as the ability to place both slow and rapid-fire shots down accurately. The first photo means that the person does not have enough trigger finger on the trigger for them to “Finish Flat” at the moment of shot discharge.

Please let us know if you would like further clarification on this or the drills we use to establish it for a person. Typically, firearms instruction teaches the person how to stand, then how to extend their arms then how to hold a pistol then finally how to manipulate the trigger. We believe this is completely backwards.

We teach the person to find where their finger needs to be to optimally work the trigger. Then that shows where you need to grip the pistol, then to the presentation and finally to whatever stance you are in (remember, typical gunfights are moving, not stationary). Next, I will describe our method for switching hands and some other fine details.

GRIP - This is where the other hand immediately goes for a FFG, just like if it was grabbing the pistol out of a holster. As the webbing of the other hand immediately moves to as high up as possible on the backstrap of the pistol and it is rotated sideways to allow gravity to help you gain a grip.



Immediately gripping as high up in the backstrap. Then rotate the pistol to the left in this case to allow gravity to help the hand change.

PLACE – We use the word “place” for this step on purpose. The word place, unlike drop, typically brings a connotation of intention and purpose along with it. Place is the last step in gaining a FFG with the other hand. Hopefully, the word place has more precision and awareness behind it for the student and this point should be reinforced by the instructor.



Using an inert pistol, we typically teach this hand switch from the standing position first. We have the students face one direction and have them bend their arms so they are manipulating the pistol closer to their body and not with extended arms. This is because you have more ability to recover if you fumble the pistol away from you as you can easily extend your arms.

The next teaching progression is typically done seated (mimicking being in a vehicle) and still with an inert pistol. Switching hands when seated requires the use of a “high ready”, muzzle definitively up position for the safety of the student. The same technique is utilized, Rock – Grip – Place. [FIGURE 4]

We prefer this technique because it is the safest and works on all models (frames) of pistols. First, it allows for the most control in a high ready as the pistol is always supported in the webbing of your hand. Secondly, because you “rock” the pistol forward you can easily use pistols with high backstraps like the 1911 as you are coming in from under the backstrap where you created room to grab with the rocking motion. We have had people not be specific with the “Grip” portion as described who failed to grab properly and fail to disconnect the grip safety.

Also, we have had people grab pistols without a larger backstrap like a Glock Gen 3 for example and their hand or glove comes up over the receiver and interferes with the slide, impeding operation.

Lastly, you can use this technique while seated in any position in the vehicle, even a backseat, without allowing your muzzle to sweep people who may be seated in front of you.

FIGURE 4



Right hand grip



Rocking forward



Gripping



Left hand grip

Now, let us talk about a couple possible errors that we have seen when people try to apply the technique without live instruction present.

One common error we have seen and even done ourselves is to use the trigger finger to help push the pistol into the other hand when changing hands. This does not ensure the immediate placement of the webbing of the hand high up into the backstrap as mentioned previously. Also, seen with people whose fingers are long enough to go past the trigger guard, the trigger finger will either push the pistol or even drop down and

slightly hook the outside of the trigger guard [FIGURE 5]. This is especially common to do when changing hands in a muzzle down, low ready position. This is because you do not have the pistol held into the webbing of your hand by gravity as in the muzzle upward hand change.

We find this action of the pointer finger to be non-optimal for two reasons. The first is the increased possibility of a negligent discharge. Having the trigger finger do any work other than just to rest on the slide or to operate the trigger means an increased chance it will slip or be confused and hit the trigger

FIGURE 5



Note finger pressing on trigger guard to “aid” in controlling during hand switch. This is not optimal.

FIGURE 6



Person places finger onto trigger guard to switch hands when but cannot grip the pistol because weapon light is now in the way. Gravity acts on the pistol and person clutches to maintain hold. Unintended discharge is more likely.

FIGURE 7



Right hand hold



Thumb moved to other side to initiate hand switch, is not optimal

FIGURE 8



Here the person is switching the pistol from their right to left hand while rotating their torso in their seat to the left. They inadvertently hit the steering wheel with the pistol.

This momentary loss of control could trigger a grabbing reflex and raises the possibility of an unintended discharge.

when you do not want to.

Second, by pressing the finger to rotate the pistol and grabbing it with your other hand instead of the technique just described, you will not have the same amount of control if the pistol has a weapon-mounted light. [FIGURE 6] The trigger finger should only ever have one action, to operate the trigger or lay still on the slide/receiver.

One other technique we have seen for changing hands with the pistol is the “thumb switching technique”. This technique has the person take the thumb of the pistol holding hand and flip it over to the other side exposing the pistol grip to then be grabbed by the other hand. [FIGURE 7]

We feel this technique is less optimal for the following reasons. First, not everyone has large enough hands to be able to move their thumb around larger backstraps found on some pistols like a 1911 style for example. This is especially important to be able to do as you may need to re-grip in a FFG with that hand to fire.

Second, there is an increased chance the pistol could become dislodged. With all four fingers and the thumb on one side of the pistol and while rotating in a confined space like the driver’s seat it is possible to hit the steering wheel with the pistol for example. You do not have as positive a grip on the pistol, and it may pry out of your hand. [FIGURE 8]

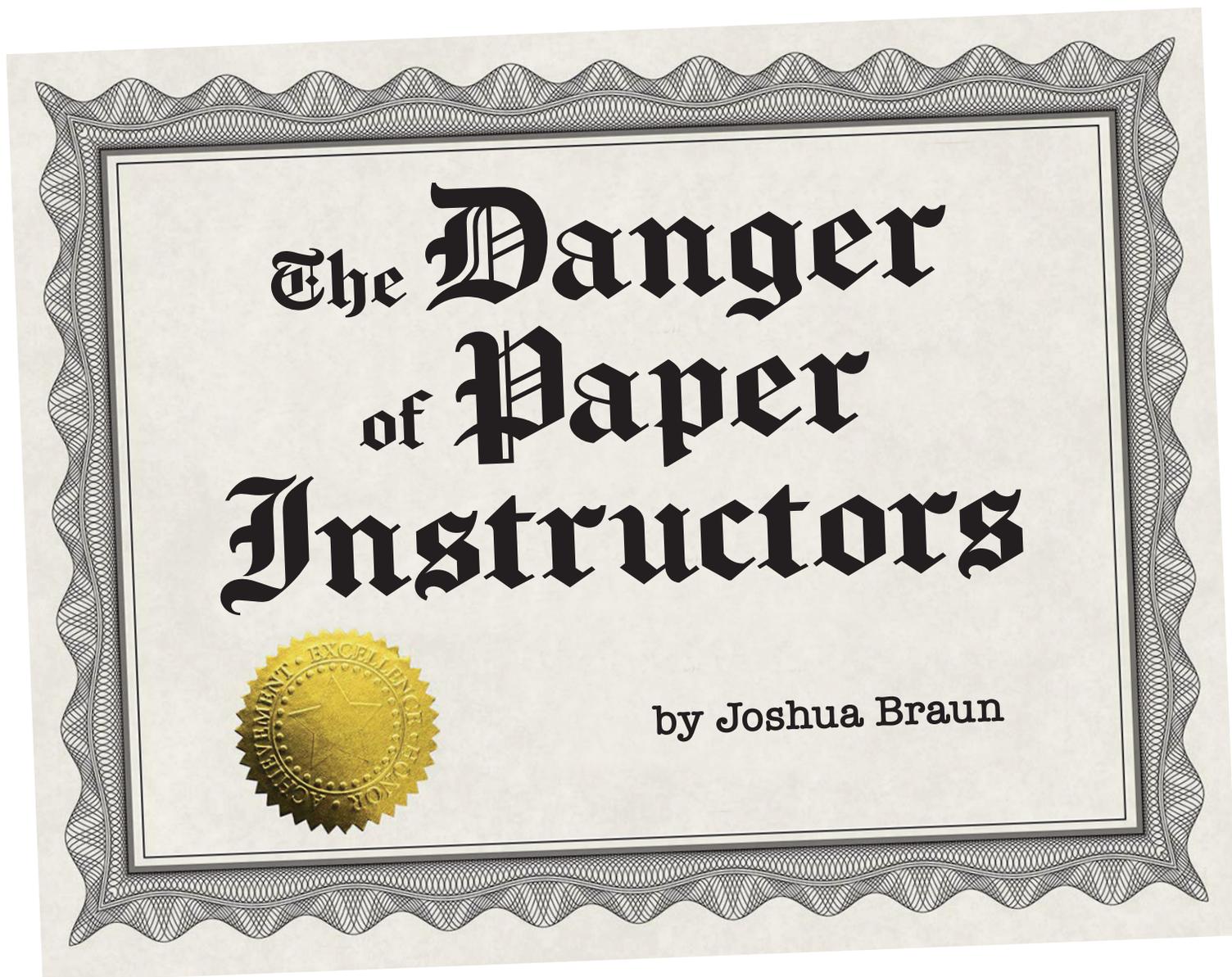
We hope this article has helped to clarify some of the details of the 360° Close Quarter Defense system for vehicle defense. Please refer to IALEFI® Firearms Journals #61 & #62, the IALEFI® 1st Annual Virtual Conference teaching block, or personally contact us with any questions or concerns. **TFI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff Johnsgaard is a Canadian police officer of over 20 years and currently a Detective Sergeant. He is a trainer for his agency and the police college, a Nationally Certified Instructor under IADLEST, and certified by Force Science Research® as an Advanced Analyst. He trains decision-making and use of force internationally with his company Natural Tactical (www.NaturalTactical.com) and consults with several others. Please feel free to contact him with questions or comments at Jeff@NaturalTactical.com

Does your title match your skill?

Does your skill match your title?



What do I mean when I say “paper instructor?” How is this dangerous you ask? Well, this is something that I believe has been an ongoing issue in the shooting community, from the civilian side all the way to law enforcement and beyond. It all started when I began competition shooting and heard the term “paper master.”

It was explained to me that a “paper master” was a shooter with a master classification on paper, yet their current shooting skill was not at a master level. The more

I began instructing, the more I saw what I would consider “paper instructors” people who either possessed a certificate saying they were an instructor or possessed whatever they believed qualified them as instructors, yet their knowledge and skill set did not match. My lead firearms instructor, Sergeant T. Berry, mentioned this phrase to our instructor group all the time on the range, “does your title match your skill, does your skill match your title?” It was a phrase that still sticks with me to this day, and unfortunately was something that only a couple of

us took seriously.

While attending training courses, whether civilian or law enforcement led, I’ve had my fair share of good and bad instructors. I believe, as an instructor, you are always a student first, or at least you should have that mentality. Also, as an instructor, you should be an active participant in the growth of your own knowledge and skills prior to passing anything on to future students. There are too many instructors out there that are satisfied with the bare minimum they need to become an instructor. They know what it takes from

that one class or whatever prior knowledge they have, and there is no need for them to learn more. This is not where the instructional journey should stop.

I understand there is not much proprietary information when it comes to learning how to shoot, when to shoot, where to shoot, etc. We can thank Jeff Cooper and the other pioneers who brought us from revolvers to semi-automatics and introduced the modern techniques of pistol shooting. There are many great instructors out there from all backgrounds, who have built on those fundamentals and really broken them down to a science. Each one has their own views on the importance of certain fundamentals, from grip pressure to trigger control and everything in-between. Truly passionate instructors, have the knowledge as to why they teach what they teach. They can answer those questions and explain fundamentals so their students can truly understand and apply them.

I have heard instructors regurgitate things they have heard other instructors say but are challenged to explain in depth due to their lack of knowledge. One statement that makes me cringe is “the gun should surprise you when it goes off.” No, it should not... ever! Shooters need to learn and understand what trigger slack is, or the dead space in the trigger, whatever verbiage you use. Shooters should know where that wall of resistance or trigger wall is and how many pounds of pressure it takes to break through that wall. Shooters need to know when they are going to fire the shot, every time. There are many drills that help shooters with the problems of anticipation. Instead of learning and teaching these, that phrase “the gun should surprise you when it goes off” becomes the substitute for knowledge.

I have also seen instructors demonstrate poor firearm handling and manipulation. There are many aspects to this, one being muzzle discipline. That instructor opens their class with the four universal safety rules including, “don’t point your firearm at anything you don’t intend to shoot.” Yet, when it comes to racking the slide, they muzzle their hand or leg. I have learned that students will not only take what you say, but also mimic what they see you do. So, when that instructor is teaching a class and holstering their firearm with their shirt in their holster every time, what are they really teaching/demonstrating? This is what the student is seeing, and in most cases, this is what they are paying for.

Maybe that student is there to become a better competition shooter, or maybe that student is there so they will be able to proper-



ly defend their life one day if need be. Maybe it is a student whose had a horrible first experience with firearms, yet they are making the conscious choice to set their fears aside and learn with an open mind. Maybe it is a law enforcement officer, learning from a department firearms instructor who uses their title to get away from the job at times. No matter what, this is the seriousness that these “paper instructors” do not see, and it is what can get someone killed. Firearm handling and proficiency goes beyond that one range session. If being an instructor is a convenience thing, or something you do not take seriously, then do everyone a favor and please stop. With the media and all the terrible events happening, the last thing uneducated people need to see and hear about is incompetently trained people carrying firearms.

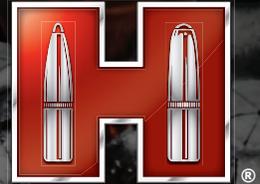
As an instructor, try to do as much training as possible, with as many different instructors as possible. Do research into the instructor’s

background who you are trying to learn from. As I said earlier, every instructor has their own take on the fundamentals and how to execute them. There is nothing wrong with hearing multiple points of view on the same topic, as you can get something from everyone. Try to recognize what you do not know so that you know where to become more educated, for yourself and anyone else who you may teach one day. It is about the student, always. Never stop learning, never stop growing. **TFI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joshua Braun is a Correctional Officer, firearms instructor and CCW instructor in Las Vegas, Nevada. He is passionate furthering his education as an instructor and his proficiency as a shooter. Joshua has been employed with the Nevada Department of Corrections for 11 years now.

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