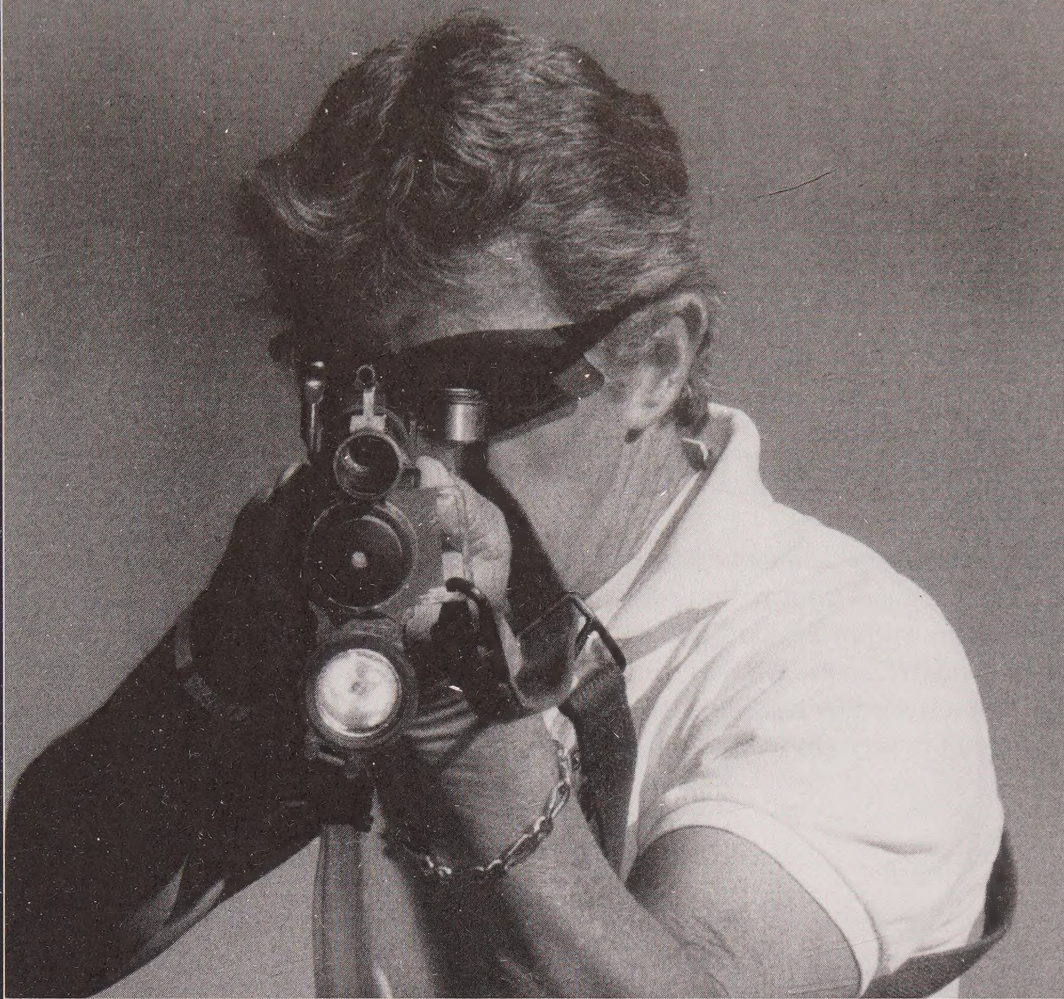




Why
There's
No Such
Thing
as an
"Advanced"
Gunfight

MORE TACTICAL REALITY

LOUIS AWERBUCK



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Warning

Firearms are potentially dangerous and must be handled responsibly by individual trainees and experienced shooters alike. The technical information presented here on firearms handling, training, and shooting inevitably reflects the author's beliefs and experience with particular firearms and training techniques under specific circumstances that the reader cannot duplicate exactly. Therefore, the information in this book is presented *for academic study only* and should be approached with great caution. This book is not intended to serve as a replacement for professional instruction under a qualified instructor.

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"For the forgotten soldiers of 1SSB . . . and for the renegades of N.A.A.F.I. Battalion."

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The Combat Shotgun: Concepts, Skills, and Tactics for Employing
the Shotgun in Personal Combat (video)

Only Hits Count: Practical Firearms Training for Personal Defense (video)

Safe at Home: A Thinking Man's Guide to Self-Defense (video)

Tactical Reality: An Uncommon Look at Common-Sense Firearms Training and Tactics

More Tactical Reality: Why There's No Such Thing as an "Advanced" Gunfight
by Louis Awerbuck

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Introduction



compilation of articles previously published in the "Training and Tactics" column of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*, this treatise follows in the footsteps of *Tactical Reality*, published by Paladin Press in 1999.

More in favor of turning Plowshares into Swords than vice versa, this author is of the personal opinion that dialogue is for two parties who have a common goal of peace, and bullets are the only response for people who initiate violence—and ne'er the twain shall meet. There's a time for talking and a time for fighting.

While physical violence should always be the last resort, it is sometimes necessary. To this end this scribe has attempted to provide a series of thought-provoking ideas for the reader's perusal, dealing with both the mental and physical aspects of self-preservation, be it withdrawal, containment, or execution.

More Tactical Reality is not a training manual, it's not a "gun-book"—and it is not for those who

would turn the other cheek. It purports merely to offer some ideas with which the reader may or may not agree. But when all is said and done, it might behoove us to remember that while the puppies are cute and popular, it's the old, forgotten Junkyard Dog that always gets the job done.

And last but not least, it is a tribute to the timeless warriors who gave their all. Their graves are a blight upon the land, so soon forgotten by those they protected.

Louis Awerbuck
Arizona 2004

EDITOR'S NOTE: The "Training and Tactics" column appears in every issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*. If you enjoy this book and would like to read more of the columns or know more about *S.W.A.T.*, see page 137 for contact information.

Using Shot Placement to Diagnose Shooting Problems

While

a proficient shooter can usually “call” where a bullet has impacted without referring to his target, an average marksman usually cannot.

If the latter is the case, much information can be gleaned from the hits on the target to aid the shooter in correcting his or her problem.

What follows is an analysis of common right-hander problems, with the target face envisioned as the dial of a clock and impact group positions placed on the various “hour” numerals.

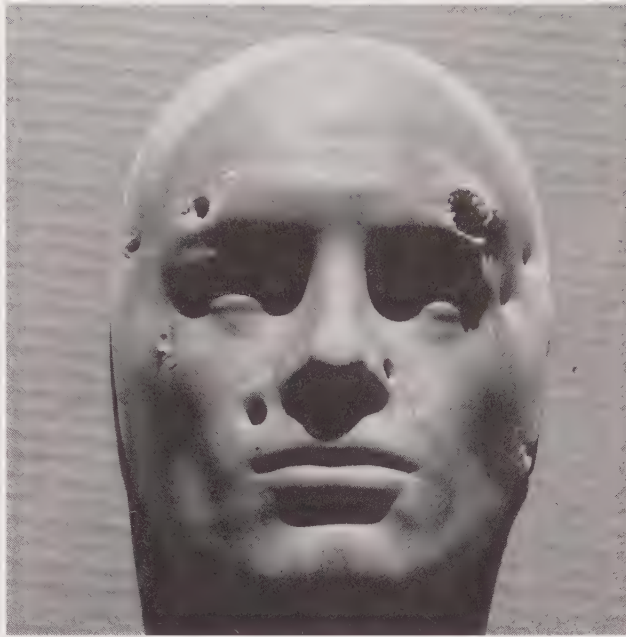
SIX O’CLOCK

One of the most common ailments: low hits. These can invariably be attributed to anticipation (trying to second-guess when the hammer will fall, with a resultant “jerk” on the trigger), or putting pressure with the bottom two fingers of the shooting hand with a pistol or pistol-gripped long gun.

One is programmed to close the entire hand as a unit for most everything but shooting. It is extremely difficult to dissociate the bottom three fingers from the trigger finger and thumb of the shooting hand, but they need to operate as independent units. No matter how good the trigger control, if the bottom fingers are gradually squeezed as the trigger is pressed, the muzzle of the gun will dip before ignition. This is relatively common on the Heckler & Koch (H&K) squeeze cocker, where the off hand should be used for cocking in the two-handed shooting mode.

A third cause of low hits with a handgun, especially on small targets (e.g., head shots), is the tendency to drop the muzzle of the gun to check the impact before the bullet has actually exited the barrel. The only way out is to follow through. Recover focus on the front sight plane ready for another round, ensuring that the focus was, indeed, on the front sight at the termination of the internal ballistics cycle.

With a rifle or shotgun, many shooters tend to lower the gun butt off their shoulder before the bullet leaves the muzzle, causing a high hit, for the same "mental" reason: looking for the impact prematurely. With heavy recoiling guns, the shooter often "flinches," pushing the gun away from its cheek weld. This again results in a low hit, but classically at "seven o'clock." Gradual trigger pressure and follow-through are the keys.



The result of concentrating on the front-sight focus, sight picture, trigger control, and follow-through. The target pictured was utilized on a moving, swiveling, bobbing target system. (Note the angle of entry of projectiles fired from rifles, pistols, and a shotgun.)

SEVEN O'CLOCK

Invariably from one cause: anticipation/trigger control. Usually results from losing patience with a long trigger pull, from a heavy trigger pull, or trying to "avoid" recoil.

A fourth factor is tactically induced—trying to rush the shot before the sight picture changes.

NINE O'CLOCK AND THREE O'CLOCK

These two impact areas can usually be lumped together because of the "different strokes for different folks" syndrome.

Because of differences in hand sizes, some marksmen with long fingers will "pull" the gun to the right during ignition. Others will bottom out with the trigger fingertip on the left side of the receiver before ignition, "pushing" the gun to the left.

The smaller handed individual tends to "pull" the gun several degrees to the right. This is obviously caused by a poor firing grip, forcing the shooter to "reach" for the trigger. Ideally, in theory, the muzzle, hammer, and forearm should be in a straight line, but this is easier said than done. Again, ideally, the first pad of the trigger finger should contact the trigger, except for double-action shooting. Here the finger is generally inserted up to the first knuckle for more leverage.

On occasion, rifle and shotgun shooters try to help the projectile downrange by pulling or pushing the fore-end left or right respectively.

This leads to the inevitable three or nine o'clock impact.

Keep the lead hand relaxed when shooting these guns. A final cause of the nine o'clock rifle or shotgun hit occurs with the shooter who "drops" his cheek down to the gunstock; this results in the muzzle canting to the left. Raise the long gun up to your head; don't drop the head to the gunstock!

TWELVE O'CLOCK

Primary causes are shooting too fast and poor light conditions. If the handgunner doesn't "lock up" prior to firing from a low ready position or the rifleman/shotgunner doesn't complete the cheek or stock weld when mounting from a high ready position, the hits are invariably high. In poor light, shooters tend to place the front sight higher than normal sight alignment to make sure they are seeing the front sight in focus, with the inevitable result.

Range estimation also contributes to high hits, especially with rifle shooters. Most of this breed would rather die before they'd admit they whacked Bambi at less than 6,000 yards. Overestimate the range, hold high to compensate for bullet trajectory, and you'll put holes in the sky.

ONE O'CLOCK

Common with handgunners. Usually not enough recoil control with the left hand, especially from the braced kneeling and prone positions, where the shooter tends to relax the basics of a solid two-handed firing grip/stance. The corollary of this is the one-handed shooter's eleven o'clock "heeling."

FOUR O'CLOCK

For the handgunner, this invariably results from a combination of "snatching" on the trigger and overmuscling with the left hand. For the rifleman, this usually occurs in prone, when the left elbow is not directly underneath the receiver. In prone, if you breathe in and out, the muzzle should move only vertically. Any deviation to the side, and that's probably your problem.

Two other common shot groups are holes strung vertically and a very large but concentric group. The former is caused either by inconsistent sight alignment or, in the case of a rifle, poor mechanical bedding of the barrel, leading to stringing as the barrel warms up.

A large but concentric group is caused by three factors:

- A. A shot-out or bad barrel
- B. Poor or incompatible ammunition
- C. And most likely, failure, on the part of the shooter, to focus on the sight. One of the biggest problems encountered in shooting is the urge to see the hits impacting.

A fourth and less common occurrence has the same end result, but is caused during dim-light shooting when a flashlight is focused with a dark patch in the center of the beam, forcing reverse tunnel vision on the shooter.

NOTE: All of the above reading applies to right-handed shooters only and, in the case of handguns, the two-handed hold only unless otherwise stipulated. Left-handers need only reverse the "clock."

(This column originally appeared in the August 1990 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

For Safety's Sake



he objective of small-arms training is presumably to save your own life or that of a third party.

While the firearm employed for this purpose is only the medium—and therefore secondary to the brainpower behind the gun—it is nevertheless essential to have the necessary manual skills required to operate the weapon. Obviously this requires practice, as only repetitive manipulation of the gun can improve one's ability to the stage where operation becomes totally reflexive.

If the manipulation of the weapon is not totally reflexive, you're doomed. You'll have enough problems diagnosing a tactical solution without the further stress of trying to think about the finer points of basic firearms operation.

All the above leads to one obvious solution: like knowing where the ignition switch is located on a race car, familiarity with the weapon used on the Day of Reckoning is the one overriding factor that will decide whether or not the bullet

does what it's supposed to do.

Overstating the obvious? Maybe not. If, for example, you own a Smith & Wesson (S&W) revolver, a Colt .45 semi-automatic pistol, and a Remington 870 shotgun, the plot thickens.

The golden rule of safety is that the trigger finger remains off the trigger unless the gun's sights are aligned with the "target." So far, so good. What, however, do you do about positioning the mechanical safety catch/button/lever of the weapon if you are merely covering down or searching for a "target"?

The obvious (and safest) solution is to leave it "on." In simple terms, the weapon, if mechanically sound, supposedly will not fire, even if the trigger is depressed.

While it doesn't take a neurosurgeon to work out that this may be a seemingly brilliant idea with the Colt pistol, it becomes irrelevant with the Smith revolver because it, for all intents and purposes, has no external mechanical safety button.

No big deal, you say. All you do in these situations is leave the trigger finger extended outside the trigger guard until such time as it is required for trigger operation. The safety on the Colt will merely be depressed at the same time as the pistol comes onto target, manipulated by the shooter's thumb.

Moving right along . . .

If you mandate your nonstressed Einstein brain to repeatedly perform this ritual during practice, what happens under stress? You will do exactly the same, that is, trigger finger extended and manual safety "on" if the sights



The thumb-operated safety about to be flipped "off" as an FN-FAL is mounted onto the target.

are not aligned with the "target" and finger on the trigger and safety "off" if you are pointed in at the "target."

Here comes the kicker.

Encountering the "Murderer of the Day," you pick up the weapon closest to hand, which happens to be your trusty Remington 870. You have one chance to save your life, which unfortunately entails firing on said gentleman.

Checking the chamber at "warp speed" . . . nothing. No click. No bang! *Nada*. Guess what? You left

the safety on. Why? Because the safety button is located behind the trigger guard, requiring an unfamiliar bent finger to depress it. And now, you're dead.

Of course if you had picked up a Hi-Standard or Mossberg shotgun, or an MP5 submachine gun, the story changes all over again. While it's easy to say that you should practice diligently with your weapons, the sorry truth is that if you have differently positioned mechanical safety latches that require both a bent and extended trigger finger to depress, dependent on which weapon you're using on a given day, an accident is waiting around the corner.

Sooner or later, under stress, you will either depress the safety disconnect unintentionally, or you will leave it on unintentionally and the trigger mechanism will fail to operate at the most crucial moment.

Why the long-winded diatribe about the obvious? Because most powers-that-be dictate the safety button must be left on at all times, except during the actual act of firing. This is a little strange, especially when one considers that

most revolvers have no external safety. The other end of the spectrum is the Glock pistol, which has a safety on the front of the trigger.

The bottom line is the shooter's golden rule: The trigger finger should be extended whenever the weapon is not aimed at a target, e.g., in a "ready" position, etc. The position of the mechanical safety is irrelevant.

It's asking a lot for a stressed, sphincter-shrunk brain under stress to operate from an extended finger "ready" position with one weapon, and a bent finger with a different gun.

So does this article suggest that you never apply a mechanical safety? Most decidedly not. It merely suggests three things for consideration by the reader:

- A. No mechanical safety mechanism can override stupidity.
- B. Asking a finger to perform two different functions on different guns under stress is going to lead to a problem sooner or later.
- C. It is of paramount importance that the

trigger finger never contact the trigger until such time as the shooter is deliberately delivering rounds to a target.

In other words, it may behoove the shooter, at certain times under certain tactical situations (such as reloading, for one), to intentionally leave the safety in the "off" position, rather than run the risk of confusing a stressed mind into delivering conflicting commands to the trigger finger, resulting in either an unintentional discharge or an inoperative trigger mechanism.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article was written only to promote tactical thinking. Neither *S.W.A.T. Magazine*, the author, nor Paladin Press condones—nor will any be held responsible for—actions resulting from removal, modification, or misuse of mechanical safety systems or the irresponsible or reckless handling of firearms.

(This column originally appeared in the April 1993 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Learning from the Masters



It was more than 30 years ago, and his name was John.

During my limited-success sojourn into the field of trap and skeet shooting he always beat me—by one bird. I shot a 16 score; John shot a 17. I shot a 20; he powdered 21. Several years later it finally sank in that I'd been duped—when Mister Klemp shot straight 25s at will with a 16-gauge side-by-side for a wager.

In my ignorance I hadn't realized he was just messing with my mind, or, to be more precise, had proceeded to amuse himself by watching me destroy my own pathetic grey cells! As the years have flown by I've noticed several things, to wit: you can't outfight yourself, there is absolutely no substitute for experience, and I have been blessed with generously passed-on knowledge by a lot of fighting men—a large percentage of whom have had the given name of John.

While it is not an uncommon English language name, the amount of Wise Ones and Warriors I've

been privileged to understudy have included so many “Johns” that it’s almost creepy. Colonel Cooper, Mr. Plähn, Satterwhite, Gannaway, and another well-known man who’s survived literally a dozen gunfights are but a few on the list. The good news is that I was born and raised in an era where men such as these were free and generous with their hard-earned knowledge and were/are true Masters in their respective fields of weaponcraft and tactics.

In the never-ending search for knowledge and improvement, to improve both my own performance and also that of trainee clientele, much has been derived from men such as these, as well as centuries-old tactics and target systems. (Recently I was informed that some Young Turk had “helped” me design a moving target system I’ve used in training for a decade. Apparently he’s not the sharpest needle in the sewing kit—I plagiarized the mechanism from a SEVENTEENTH-century Swiss system.)

Similarly, many of the new breed are teaching Clint Smith’s Urban Rifle program verbatim, without giving him the simple courtesy of accreditation for years of hard work and originating and developing the concept. Four decades of Mr. Cooper’s studies and experimentation in the development of pistol and rifle techniques and weapon design are bastardized and plagiarized on a daily basis—again, with no accreditation. Young puppies make a lot of noise, but they’re no match for a weathered veteran junkyard dog. Don’t snow the snowman!

But enough of the commentary on the inevitable dregs of society. The big question is how do you put personal knowledge, however minuscule—such as that of yours truly—to good use?

The big lesson I learned from Klemp—and for me it was gargantuan in its impact once it had finally permeated my thick skull—is that you can never ever beat yourself in a fight. So you’re cold, wet, hungry, and somebody’s

cranking off rounds in your direction. Get over it or die. If you’re going to concentrate on trying to find a warm, dry sleeping bag instead of making sure your weapons are clean, lubed, and loaded, you deserve to die.

John’s explanation of my clay pigeon embarrassment was, in essence, as old as the hills—psychology. I was hoping to hit the target—and didn’t. He assumed he would hit the bird—and invariably succeeded. When I later graduated to the dizzy height of being so presumptuous as to assume that I was qualified to train others in the field of firearms and tactics, I transferred John’s advice into a training environment where the trainee hopefully learns how not to self-destruct. There are very few proficient warriors who are beaten by a single opponent—and on the occasions when they lose, most of the time they beat themselves.

The first time I used negative targets several years ago, I was amazed to see how it bent proficient shooters’ brains. Competent marksmen who were capable of shooting quick three-inch groups on a solid-surfaced conventional target were shooting six-inch groups at a four-inch hole. Merely because the target now dictates where you have to hit it doesn’t mean you let the basics of marksmanship slide and start looking for a .45-caliber hole in a four-inch hole. Obviously you can’t see a small hole in a large hole—stay on the sights and follow through and the bullet will go where it’s supposed to.

Thanks, John—Long Life.

The knowledge amassed by the Coopers and Gannaways can be short-circuited to a certain extent, but you’re not going to have the wealth of expertise of men of their ilk by taking a five-day class and then assume you know what they do. As somebody once said: “I’ve taught you everything *you* know, not everything *I* know.” All you can do is beg, borrow, and steal by inserting a vacuum cleaner hose into a Master’s brain socket and flipping the “On” switch. That

WHY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "ADVANCED" GUNFIGHT

gives you a small running start. Then you begin the long, arduous hike down the learning trail.

If your answer is, "Well, if I had enough practice ammo I could also perform the Satterwhite shotgun circus tricks," you might want to reevaluate your opinion of your ability. If it were that easy, then dance companies would hire taller ballerinas to save vertically challenged damsels from hopping around on

their toes. John H. didn't win his gunfights by being incompetent, naïve, or stupid.

I'm grateful that I'm old enough to have been around to benefit from a lot of Masters named John; they are fast disappearing.

I guess you had to be there.

(This column originally appeared in the June 1999 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Battle-Zeroing the Carbine

S

ince two fruit loops cranked off 1,500 rounds at anything and everything in Los Angeles in 1997, a vast majority of both law enforcement departments and private citizens have decided that a high-capacity .223 carbine should be an essential component of their firearms arsenal.

There are several reasons for using a carbine in a gunfight. Inherent power and accuracy are but two aspects that supposedly make a carbine superior to a handgun, subgun, or shotgun in a medium- to long-distance confrontation.

Unfortunately, as is so often the case, the now ubiquitous M16/AR15 clones and descendants have come to be regarded by many as the be-all and end-all of solutions to any bullet ballet. A bullet bouncing off a hat bill when fired from five yards doesn't exactly fill my little spleen with confidence when it's supposed to penetrate some raving nut's body armor—but there are 17 or 27 more in the magazine to make up for this

problem should it occur (and plenty of alternate body areas to perforate until the job's done).

What has, however, become a major training and survival problem is the supposed accuracy of this genre of weapons. To put it in plain French, over the past 18 months upwards of 20 percent of these carbines encountered by this author on the firing range have failed to achieve the vaguest modicum of Battle Zero. There was a time (for 40 years) when one could zero these weapons at 25 yards and be Battle Zeroed point blank out to 250 metres. That, apparently, is now a thing of the past. Either there's been a design change at one of the major factories—intentional or unintentional—or these weapons are being slapped together at ten-to-five on a Friday afternoon. Whichever it is, almost overnight at least 20 percent of these weapons are, in effect for law enforcement or civilian use, about as useful as a frog without a waterproof posterior.

And it seems a strange coincidence that the problem started at the same time as the demand intensified for these carbines. This article is not a tirade aimed at the manufacturers, but a caution for the reader—caveat emptor. If your gun dealer will not allow you to live fire for zero at 25, 50, 75, and 100 yards, either find another supplier, buy one of the older models, or look to a different manufacturer.

Why shoot for zero check at four distances



A tastefully customized AR15, with all the goodies a shottist requires and no extraneous garbage.

inside 100 yards? After all, this weapon should be on for point blank aiming for several hundred yards if zeroed Point of Aim/Point of Impact at 25. Because here's how a typical first day of a carbine class runs, without exception, since the problem first arose.

Zero all shooters at 25 yards, with both iron sights and any other optics attached to the weapon. (This, incidentally, occurs after a rough check is done to make sure the barrels aren't loose—and there've been enough of those recently.) Shooters usually prefer to use the small aperture for precision, but then switch to the larger of the two for most fighting applications. This should not affect the point of bullet impact by much. For 25 years range drills would then commence, with a double-check on zero at distance on Day Two. This game plan has now changed to immediately

moving the entire firing line back to 50 yards—and here's where the exasperation begins.

Eighty percent of the carbines print virtually through the same hole as at 25, as it should be. But the remaining 20 percenters start having elevation problems, which must have Dr. Mann performing pinwheels in his grave. Some shoot a couple of inches high, some six inches, some as much as a foot high, with both iron and glass. Some, on rarer occasions, will print markedly low. Two that shot a foot high at 50 were *THREE* feet high at 100 yards.

The eventual common denominator solution was to rezero the "freak" carbines' Point of

Aim/Point of Impact at 50 yards. The net result of this puts the POI about two inches low at 25 and about three inches high at 100—on most of the “perverse” weapons, but *not all*. Then there are the other inexplicable problems: one AR15 printed six inches higher at 25 yards when the shooter put *ONE* click of elevation adjustment on the rear drum. Another printed eight inches higher at 25 when the trainee flipped from small to large aperture. Yet another impacted two inches lower at 30 yards than it did at 35.

The net result of this debacle is, apart from the fact that irrespective of the instructor’s ability the trainee will never gain full benefit from the training or have confidence in his weapon, a lot of people are going to get hurt from bullets flying every which way but loose—and not because of a lack of marksmanship ability. This is supposed to be a precision instrument. Any man worth his salt should be able to shut off somebody’s computer out to at least 50+ yards with this family of weapons. Planting a bullet into somebody’s face at this distance should be like taking candy from a baby. Having to use two different aiming points at 30 and 35 yards respectively is absurd—and dangerous.

As an instructor you feel like a whore, because no matter what you do to improvise you are not giving full trainee benefit. You can’t ask someone to use Tennessee elevation on a precision hostage shot in the street. As a shooter you reach a level of frustration where you feel like shooting the first person you see—if you thought you could hit him.

While everybody mocks weapons like the Kalashnikov “because it only shoots into a four-inch group at 100 yards,” I’d rather have a weapon that is adequate for battle than a roll-of-the-dice firestick. At least all you have to worry about is your own ability, and not bizarre mechanical inconsistencies.

This problem has been discussed with many armorers, instructors, and shooters. The response has been one of two. First, the respondent has stared at me like the filament in my porch light has finally fractured, along with verbal comments like, “Are you crazy? This is impossible, it can’t happen, I’ve never heard of it,” etc., etc. Others have run across the same problem, but have hit the same brick wall when it comes to a diagnosis.

To be fair, it is the minority of these carbines with which the problem occurs, but 20-plus percent is an atrociously large minority. Several models, such as Olympic Arms, have never exhibited the phenomena. And, no, it has nothing to do with rate of twist, bullet weight, or any of the “normal” causes of problems in this weapon’s system. Several hybrid “parts guns” have maintained standard trajectory and accuracy parameters.

One police officer who used a Ruger during a training course but whose department had recently been issued two brand-new M4s spent three days sweating, wondering what the Colts would do after witnessing the elevation debacle others had experienced. After striking camp, we zeroed the weapons at 25 yards, moved back to 50—and they both printed through the same hole. The bad news is they wouldn’t work worth a damn on full-auto two-round-burst application. You pay your money and you take your chances, but it would be nice if a functioning 40-year-old weapons system wasn’t bastardized to the stage where you can’t trust the gun at the end of the 20th century.

This article was written as a *Caveat Emptor* for interested S.W.A.T. readers. Perhaps “*Te Morituri Salutamus*” should be included.

(This column originally appeared in the September 1999 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The End of the World as We Know It

W

ord has it that the world's going to end on December 31—something to do with computers apparently.

If R2D2 or whatever it is does take effect, there are only two possible scenarios: a slight hitch in normal societal existence for a couple of days or absolute turmoil. This in turn raises two diametrically opposed game plans for the survivalist. If nothing of any consequence occurs, you'll be eating your stock of MREs until they're coming out of your ears. If, on the other hand, the media continues the fine job it's doing of stirring up the general populace into a frothing-at-the-mouth, panic-stricken riot squad, a cool head and certain materials will be required to prevail.

Once again, for the umpteenth time through history, Man has managed to display more of his Idiot characteristics than Savant. The so-called civilized world has known about the potential computer problem for years—and done nothing.

North America has long been touted as the world's technological leader. Well guess who will be the biggest loser if the technology doesn't work? Not the jungle dweller who can forage for food, find shelter, and make a fire without the crutch of electricity, that's for sure—he's been doing just that for centuries. It won't affect his life one whit if every computer and ohm of electricity on earth stop working.

Assuming the glitch does take effect, to all intents and purposes for the brain-dead "civilized" urbanite the world stops—and the rats come out of the woodwork. If you aren't currently ensconced in your retreat (preferably rural), you're already running on one flat tire. As Charlton Heston says, civilization's veneer is wearing thinner all the time. It doesn't take much for people to panic and riot—witness the nine-hour Con-Ed power failure in New York in 1977 or the 1970s oil crisis zoo at gas stations, with people killing each other over two gallons of gas. If Y2K blows up, *nothing* will work. That means no electricity, no fuel, no food—and no help from any quarter, least of all law enforcement.

Let's face it, if police departments have already cancelled days off and the National Guard is on standby, Officer Friendly isn't going to respond to your smoke signals when half-a-dozen crackheads kick in your door and butcher your family. In fact, he'll probably be at his own residence protecting his own family, while the Guard will be shooting looters, firebombers, and other gene pool algae.

Here's what it boils down to: if the *Mad Max* scenario goes into effect, you need the basics—food, water, shelter, medical supplies, and weapons. And, last but not least, you need a base of operations, be it your current abode, a rural retreat, or a cave. Situations like these require a rock solid defense—only the lower life forms use offense under these circumstances.

Late December in the United States is winter—you aren't travelling anywhere, even if you do have fuel for your vehicle, unless you

want to be an ice-bound target for marauders who will kill you for your possessions, however meager they may be. The problem with this potential situation is that it's too ethereal for the average Joe Citizen to contemplate. Nobody *REALLY* believes that Y2K will actually occur. It's the "It can never happen to me" syndrome. The big question is are you prepared to place all your money on the table resting on one roll of the dice?

If nothing happens you'll feel like an unsuccessful kamikaze pilot. If you guess wrong, it's all over. For those of us who have no family and few friends it doesn't matter one way or the other. But for the huge majority it's a mammoth decision to make. The wealthier you are, the more you have to lose. If the coin toss comes down on the side of anarchy, preparation is the key.

As far as the basic material components go, food is the easiest—MREs, unless you already live in an area where you currently have homegrown crops and the like. Water is essential for both hydration and cleanliness—it doesn't help to have a full belly and die from dirt and infection.

Water is a much bigger problem than food—you can't survive without water—period. If you are situated close to clear, running water or have available snow to melt, lucky you. But if you have to store the liquid in large containers, it is both heavy and cumbersome.

Shelter doesn't require a neurosurgeon's diploma to fabricate. Stay dry and warm, and you're halfway there. For that matter, most people will merely batten down the hatches in their current city houses if the Pale Horse Rider does appear. A generator will be necessary for an urban resident to maintain warmth and other winter essentials. Although a more "primitive" lifestyle would be a prerequisite, one would probably be better off in a rural setting, where open-flame fires, cooking, and personal defense are actually easier.

It's a lot easier to protect oneself on a predetermined defensible battlefield than to attempt to shut down an out-of-control mob hell-bent on invading your fancy million-dollar urban house. And you don't have to worry about shooting anything that attacks you, two-legged or four-, because all the current ivory tower rhetoric, hypocrisy, and gun laws won't be worth a rodent's derriere under these circumstances. When someone cries havoc, everybody lets slip their dogs of war.

Then there are the inevitable idiots giggling into the nightly TV news cameras proudly displaying their two-year survival supplies and posing in front of their urban mansions, their address resplendent for all the world to see. There was a saying in World War II: "Loose lips sink ships." If you're that serious about the world's coming to an end, keep your stupid mouth shut and don't give every sewer rat a road map to your cache if things go to pot. They're for real, and they'll hurt you and your family worse than a pit bull on crack.

Inevitably, if nothing happens, many will look back on this article with mirth, wondering at the mental status of the author. But it might be as well to remember that six short years ago

most everybody in the Republic of America thought it was wonderful to pressure a thriving republic in Southern Africa into becoming a democracy. Now the citizens of that country are literally laying mines under their front lawns. As the Indian proverb goes, you become what you hate.

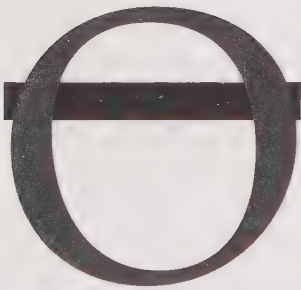
There's a reason law enforcement agencies are preparing to stand by. There's a reason the Red Cross is handing out literature on suggested prepacked emergency medical supplies. And, no, Mr. Bank Manager, I don't need any more leaflets accompanying my monthly financial statement assuring me you have the Y2K bug under control. I'd never considered that it was a problem until you started sending the incessant reassurances.

Maybe I was born at night, but it wasn't last night. The writing's on the wall, and if it's not this year, history will repeat itself sooner or later. Man is too stupid not to self-destruct.

Word has it that tickets to Hell are on special offer at half price. Order one on the Internet—while your computer's still working.

(This column originally appeared in the October 1999 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Mind Control 101



One of the primary differences that often occurs between practice and a real-life battle is that a trainee allows himself—or is allowed by an instructor—to “dictate” to a target on the range but then has to react to a previously unencountered situation in the street.

In other words, if you train on large, flat steel or paper targets, you had better hope your enemies are all large, flat, nonmoving, and immediately incapacitated by initial shots fired. Unfortunately, the criminal element either trains religiously or is filled with drugs, adrenaline, and delusions of immortality—and often covered in armadillo-like body armor. And (surprise, surprise) the incessant passing of more and more gun laws makes the crook’s job easier, not more difficult. It’s always wryly amusing that the politicians who invent grandiose, Utopian schemes never seem to go anywhere near the front line and/or apparently have never read a history book.

WHY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "ADVANCED" GUNFIGHT



A two-man team approaches the Yavapai Firearms Academy Mirage Slider target . . .



. . . until a clear shot on the center "bad guy" is finally available to both officers.

If you buy a survival kit that includes an empty gallon can of dehydrated water, there's the vaguest possibility that you're being scammed. If you can't see a problem with adding a liter of water every hour for four hours to "dehydrated water" so that you can end up with a U.S. gallon of water after four hours, you have a problem.

Similarly, don't be surprised if you can't hit a moving felon in a dark, trash-strewn alley if you've practiced only on IPSC-shaped targets on a smooth, level, clinical firing range. This automatically brings up the basic versus advanced training cliché. The plain and simple answer is that a fight is neither basic nor advanced. Because things went to hell doesn't mean that the initial basic fight became an advanced problem halfway through the proceedings. Things invariably go bad after the fight starts unless you're lucky—it's called Murphy's Law. But that doesn't mean you ever deviate from basics to get you through.

What turns a fight into a so-called advanced Armageddon is often self-induced. When the enemy isn't kind enough to dress up in a white tuxedo and remain static and full-frontal, we start tormenting ourselves by giving up control of all three body organs required to maintain the necessary basics: the brain, the adrenal glands, and the sphincter. While adrenal output is almost a given, that doesn't mean you have to additionally transpose your sphincter with your brain. Adrenaline is one thing—thought processes clouded in a brown mist are a whole different matter.

Case in point: Broad daylight; circular, eight-inch, steel impact plate placed at 60 yards; and all 12 trainees are hitting in 1 1/2 seconds in a man-on-man rifle training drill. Target is painted matte black; the backstop is green/brown. The next day, the target is left unpainted, and the lower third is covered by a horizontal barricade. A vertical reference pole is aligned with the left side of the

target. Immediate panic and misses.

There are two solutions to the problem. Even if you can't see the target clearly, and we all know that we can't shoot at what we can't identify, you have unequivocal verbal confirmation that the target is hostile. It was in the same place as it was positioned the day before and perfectly bracketed vertically and horizontally so you know exactly where it is. There is a vast difference between not shooting at someone you can't identify and being able to hit someone you can't see but whose location and hostile intent are absolutes. It's also not guesswork or laying down cover fire. It is still precision one-round, one-hit rifle shooting with a minor mental twist.

The second solution is to carry both a gun and a dictionary into a gunfight. You'll find the word "sympathy" between sh-- and syphilis.

Is this "advanced" training? Of course it isn't. It's a matter of staying with basics and not making a mountain out of a molehill.

Obviously, Basic/Level 1/Beginners firearms training has to start from ground zero with safety, weapon manipulation, and the base principles of marksmanship. But once you have these attributes under control, so-called advanced training is more a mental process than engaging in high-speed, low-drag practice antics on nonrepresentative targets. Always expect the unexpected, and never underestimate your enemy.

Yes, you'll still probably have your gallon of water, but did you really have to pay for the secret dehydrated component material? The truth is, there is no secret—if you can't control your mind, it doesn't matter how well you can control a firearm's trigger.

If you're traveling at the speed of light, does it really matter whether your car's headlights are working?

(This column originally appeared in the December 1999 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

“Any Bloody Fool Can Pull a Trigger”

F

irearms training should not consist only of slinging a bunch of projectiles downrange. Quantity is good when combined with quality, but quality is indispensable.

If on a given day you fire 100 practice rounds and have 90 hits, you don't have 90 percent success—you have a 10 percent failure rate. And once you're satisfied with 90, you'll be content with 89, then 88, and so on. So to subconsciously make up for a 10 percent lack of quality/ability, the next practice day you fire 200 rounds.

While 180 hits on a single target look more impressive than 90, because your ability is a constant, you miss 20 times. This still factors out to a 10 percent failure rate, whichever way you manipulate the math. The answer is not to fire more rounds—unless the quality is in evidence whether you shoot 10 or 1,000 rounds. On the other hand, the “perfect practice makes perfect” cliché is all well and good, but if you're hitting everything

every single time during defensive training, your training drills are probably not totally street realistic—or you're not pushing your personal envelope.

There's a happy medium between trying to make up for inefficiency by merely shooting more projectiles and firing drills that are way within your limitations, the latter giving you guaranteed success on any given training day. Neither of the above does anything towards improving your fighting ability—in fact both, apart from trigger time, are probably having a detrimental effect on your gunfighting capability once you've reached a specific platform of performance level.

Obviously, for combat training, tactical elements—such as target angles, discretionary shoot/no-shoot targets, movement of both shooter and target(s), dim-light live fire, and utilization of cover—are essential. But for the purposes of this article, the subject under discussion is solely that of hitting any street-realistic target incorporating the two basic essentials. These are speed and accuracy and getting a personal hairline-perfect balance of not sacrificing too much of one for the other. Shooting slowly with good hits is not the answer for a close-quarters gunfight, and neither is shooting too fast and missing.

Yes, as an instructor you can run a stopwatch and a start-and-stop signal for a full line of trainees, but the problem here is that, while it does improve student speed and accuracy, (a) somewhere you have to eventually incrementally establish a regulated recommended time frame, and (b) everybody on the firing line has to have a cloned target. A better system is to go with man-on-man drills, such as Colonel Cooper's "Flying M" combined with Janelle Cooper's "J Ladder." This combines the elements of speed, accuracy, and pressure, but there's one drawback.

If you are responsible to and for a dozen trainees, at any given time the 10 nonshooters are

either admiring their watch dials or surreptitiously examining their pinkie fingers, analyzing the dead brain cells freshly plucked from their nasal cavities. This is called downtime, an undesirable feature for range training.

Before going any further, let it be clearly understood by the reader of this article that in this author's opinion, Mr. Cooper was, and is, the doyen of modern firearms training—the rest of us "new breeders" have all plagiarized his training in one way or another. Similarly, let it be known that Colonel Cooper used and uses drills like the Flying M as a test of ability, not as a training regimen to incrementally improve ability.

The trick is to attempt to gradually improve the entire firing line's ability on street-representative targets as soon as the shooters have mastered the principles of marksmanship and firearms manipulation.

So it's on to the dinner table, and Lynnbo is engaged in her favorite occupation of launching an arrow so I can get the shaft. Bemoaning the aspects of trainee downtime on the range due to rotating relays, Lynnbo jokingly makes a comment about the old game of musical chairs, wherein there is one less chair than players, all chairs placed in a circle. The music starts, participants circle the chairs, and when the music stops, the idea is to seat oneself as fast as possible. Obviously, the person with the slowest reaction time loses and is out of the game.

The comment intrigues me because somewhere in the dark recesses of what's left of my mind, something tells me I can apply this scenario to a firing range to solve the downtime problem. Several dozen restaurant napkin "blueprints" later, it's resolved: 12 trainees on the firing line, but only six three-dimensional angled targets.

One target is allotted per two adjacent shooters. On the whistle, whichever of the pair fires one good hit first is in business—the slower shooter abstains from shooting unless the first

shooter fired inaccurately. Ostensibly, this should be a one-shot drill.

This drill gets a plethora of objectives accomplished, including the following:

- Because the targets are 3-D and angled, the two shooters have different impact-area access on a humanoid target, as in the street.
- You have to get a balance between speed and accuracy every time you deliver a projectile.
- Your "partner" has to immediately cover down on the target to ascertain whether or not he needs to "fix" a marksmanship error.
- Communications have to be incorporated in the event of one partner's weapon failure.

- The entire firing line is gaining the benefit of a man-on-man drill while the ability curve is progressing, with no downtime.

Trainee: "Hey, Buddy, I came here to shoot. We've been through this drill half a dozen times, and I haven't got off a shot."

Heartbroken instructor: "Hey, Ace, you came here to improve, not to donate more lead into the backstop. Pick up the speed, and hit the target before your partner—or die in the street."

Like the man said in *Enter the Dragon*—"Any bloody fool can pull a trigger."

(This column originally appeared in the January 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Altering Your Shooting Ego



o paraphrase a line from “Desiderata,” one should accept the things one cannot change. This does not, however, mean you don’t find a way to work around your marksmanship stagnation level or make an effort to improve.

Homeostasis is one thing—dying in a gunfight because of complacency or lack of effort is a whole different kettle of fish. Both basic target shooting and fighting are predominantly mental. If you think you might miss either a range target or assailant, you’ll probably miss. The bottom line is that there’s always room for improvement in one’s marksmanship ability—and there’s always a need for having an extra edge, however small, in a fight.

So the big question becomes if you can center-punch a target nine times out of ten, why is the loose round errant? It’s patently obvious that obstacles such as poor vision or other physical infirmities are huge handicaps to overcome, but the shooter’s mind-set—at the moment of and

immediately after cartridge primer ignition—is the biggie.

Absolute concentration on the task at hand at any given moment is the key—and this is not easy for humans to achieve. Let's face it, there's no reason why a world champion handgun shooter shouldn't win every competition he enters. Distance rifle shooters have variables such as wind and mirage with which to contend—50-yard pistoleros don't.

If the shooter can, indeed, already place the hypothetical nine out of ten rounds where he wants them, it's apparent that a physical infirmity didn't cause Number Ten to "fly." It's usually Mister Alter Ego perched atop the marksman's shoulder, whispering sweet nothings in the shooter's ear as the latter trips the trigger, who causes the problem. And the sorry joke is that the missed shot on a static firing range, under controlled conditions such as a clear, windless day and one-dimensional, nonmoving targets, is totally unnecessary.

Here's how it usually works: "Lord, please help me to center-punch this one shot, and I'll give up smoking, drinking, and chasing women." If the projectile hits its mark, the sworn oath usually ends up immediately afterwards in a bargaining session along the lines of "Appreciate the help, but can I maybe just cut back to one pack a day, two beers a week, and join the Salvation Army and merely drool at women instead of chasing them?"

If you miss, it's "Great. I'll show You. I'll smoke like a chimney and drink like a fish." Good move. You're not making a deal with the Almighty—you're making a pact with the devil. Have fun with your emphysema and no liver.

The only way to impact a target, whether it's a static range target or a human enemy is to immerse oneself in the proverbial bubble, stick with the basics of sighting, trigger control, and follow-through, and concentrate on the task at hand—to the exclusion of all else. Anything other than that will result, on a good day, in 90

percent hits—and 90 percent on a training range isn't good enough for the street, where misses don't count for a lot when you're shooting for blood.

It's time to Alter Mister Ego and to learn when to listen to him—and when not to. The time to listen to him is when he asks if you've noticed a slight overpopulation problem at Little Big Horn. The time not to pay him any attention is when your sights are aligned and superimposed on a target and you have no availability to unbuttock thineself from the field of conflict.

The crass, brutal stupidity of the situation—and we all do it—is that the shooter literally blows a shot by talking himself out of it. Who he's talking to nobody knows, because you can't talk to yourself—it's impossible. While you may indeed have an alter ego, if there were two of you you'd have two birth certificates. Yes, this does deteriorate from the sublime to the ridiculous—and, yes, we all do it. And the net result is most of the shots we blow are for sublime or ridiculous reasons—the primary of which is not concentrating on the job at hand.

Related to this is a physical aspect that ties in with the mental—that of trying to make a shot too perfect. The predominance of humans can't completely prevent a handgun from "shaking" or "wobbling" when firing from a standing position. So what do we do? We try harder to prevent the shake. This inevitably leads to attempting to make the gun fire at the exact time the sights are dead-centered on a target—which equally inevitably leads to trigger control and follow-through problems. And another round flies errant.

Experiment: Ask John Doe to shoot at a blank, two-foot-square sheet of cardboard. He shoots a two-inch group.

Ask the same man to shoot at a two-foot-square sheet of cardboard emblazoned with a one-inch bull's-eye—and he shoots a three-inch group. Subconsciously his brain informed him

that he had to shoot a one-inch group to hit the target. The worst he normally shoots is a two-inch group. So if he'd merely stuck with his original game plan and shot for center of mass of the entire piece of cardboard, his worst hit with a .45-caliber pistol would have been half an inch wide of its mark.

Trying to hit the absolute dead center of the bull's-eye, he drives himself nuts and ends up shooting a bigger group than normal. Mr. Thoreau's "quiet lives of desperation" quote seems appropriate.

You can cream a target in the 10-ring every time with a surprising amount of "shake"

coupled with good trigger operation. But you'll miss the X-ring by a country mile and end up with only eights and nines if you try to stop the shaking and "snap" the trigger. No matter how many times you shoot the same pistol, you'll learn to "outwit" the moment of ignition about two minutes after someone discovers how to seal the Grand Canyon with a tube of Preparation H.

If you carry a pistol, it's time to Alter your Ego before someone else does it with a bullet.

(This column originally appeared in the March 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Training and Fighting Smart



In the House of Tactics, there are only two levels worth considering—the Penthouse and the Outhouse. And only a moron would intentionally take up residence in the poo-poo suite.

Tactics are governed by many influences, such as debriefs of prior occurrences, eliciting information from those either genuinely or supposedly in the know, basic common sense, and the curse of the modern fighting world—the let’s-invent-something-new-just-for-the-sake-of-being-different breed.

There’s just one teensy little problem with using poor tactics: unless you’re blessed with undeserved good fortune, somebody dies. Like the winged termite of the Kalahari Desert, the unsuccessful gunfighter gets to fly only once. It’s bad enough that you need a gigantic portion of Lady Luck to make it through a confrontation no matter how much you train; you don’t have to

compound the problem by handing over your pate on a plate.

One of the ultimate man-on-man tactical geniuses was master swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, who never lost any of his five-dozen-plus recorded contests. But even during his lifetime—three centuries before football became popular—there were the inevitable Monday-morning quarterbacks. Their main “complaints” were that he almost never bathed, he shunned society, and he beat both the establishment and his opponents at their own game. In an age where *mano a mano* contests were supposed to be carried out on a “fair” basis, he used every so-called dirty trick in the book—and he won every time. This naturally caused his detractors to froth at the mouth all the more. Tough mammaries.

While there are undoubtedly good and bad strategies that will largely determine the outcome of a battle, tactics are as negotiable as a courtesan’s price. The trick is—if time permits—to attempt to predetermine which tactical applications will most likely load the odds in your favor before the excrement hits the whirly machine. If you guess right, you occupy the Penthouse Suite. If not, you wind up in the Dung Dormitory—there are no cozy apartments between the two.

Obviously you can’t have it all your own way. Like a SWAT team after negotiations have failed or a homeowner faced with an imminent life-or-death situation in his own house, Musashi had no choice but to enter his enemy’s battlefield—the last thing any sane person would choose to do.

What the swordsman did to balance the odds in his favor was to arrive hours late—or early—dress like a slob, and generally fly in the face of convention. This so infuriated many of his opponents that they lost their temper long before the physical battle began. Then, in addition, they had to fight a confident master wielding two swords. Anger can win a fight—losing your temper leads to downfall.

Muhammad Ali played the same game 300

years later in the boxing ring.

One of the Webster’s Dictionary definitions of the word “fight” is to “manage in an unnecessarily rough or awkward manner.” So you fight dirty—or you lose. The idea is not quite to float like a bee and sting like a butterfly, or you’ll be just another one-trick pony.

The aforementioned hypothetical entry team has a more difficult problem. They literally have to make ingress into the opposition’s battlefield after prior communication has fallen apart, so there’s essentially no psychological advantage over and above an explosive surprise element and a menacing physical appearance once physical proceedings begin.

While tactics have to change with technology, strategy is as old as dirt.

And there’s also the pitfall of overthinking the problem. Oftentimes we are our own worst enemy. A typical example of this is a corn farmer in Southern Arizona. For fun, and to provide entertainment to visitors, he plowed a maze into a subsection of his crop field. At various stages in the passages of the maze he placed written clues as to how to exit the maze. Interviewed by a Phoenix news reporter, he was asked the inevitable question: “Who progresses through the puzzle faster, men or women?”

His answer? Children. They rely on intuition instead of trying to “what if this, what if that” the problem until they’re literally walking around in circles like most of the adults.

Reverting to the Samurai theme, consider how Tsukahara Bokuden decided on which of this three sons would continue in his place at the end of his illustrious career.

Without informing any of the three of his game plan, he placed a wooden pillow above the door leading to his room, then summoned them to his side one at a time. The youngest son entered the room, drew his sword, and sliced through the pillow in midair as it fell from the top of the door.

The second oldest made his entrance and

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dodged the wooden block as it was about to whack him on the cranium.

The eldest son smelled a rat before he entered the swordsman's room, even though he, like his brothers, was unaware of the "test." Extending his hand before passing into the room, he caught the pillow and then entered the room.

Obviously the position was passed on to the oldest son.

Moral of the story? Bokuden's training discipline was called "Style which wins without a sword."

Don't train stupid and don't fight stupid, or you'd better hope that when the elevator jams it's not stuck on the Foo-Foo Floor.

(This column originally appeared in the April 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

One-Handed Doesn't Mean Unarmed

A large, stylized, black letter 'W' is positioned on the left side of the page. It is a decorative element that serves as the first letter of the word 'While' in the first paragraph of the main text.

While the mindless arguments over the pros and cons of the Weaver vs. Isosceles handgun shooting stances continue ad nauseam, the importance of one-handed pistol shooting is often overlooked.

Reasons necessitating single-handed operation vary from injury and transitioning from a primary to a secondary weapon to simply needing the use of the nonfiring hand to hold a phone, radio, or steering wheel. Whatever the case may be, a gunfighter needs to be adept in his ability to both manipulate and accurately fire his carry pistols.

And the operative word is "*ACCURATELY.*" There is no excuse for not having the same level of marksmanship left- or right-handed as one has when operating a pistol with a two-handed hold. The only obvious detraction would be a lessening of target visibility in poor light conditions if the handgun is not fitted with a dedicated flashlight.

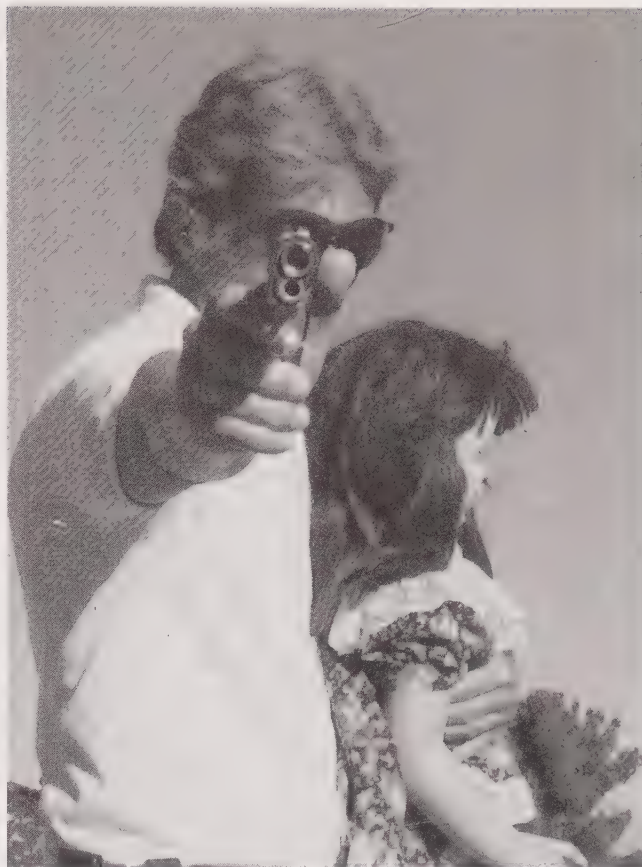
Invariably two of anything is better than one, unless it's IRS auditors, and such is the case with

one-handed pistol shooting. The trick is to utilize different muscles, tendons, and an overall shooting platform as those used when firing from a Weaver, Isosceles, or any of the other two-handed "revolutionary," new name-it-after-yourself stances.

Although the Weaver Stance was finally given a name by Colonel Cooper in the 1950s—named for Sheriff Jack Weaver—it has been used by boxers, martial artists, and archers since Moses was a corporal. It uses geometry—specifically a simultaneous horizontal and vertical triangle—combined with "push-pull"

isometric tension to, in essence, allow one's upper body to become akin to a tank turret; this enables the shooter to achieve fast target acquisition and control of both muzzle flip and recoil for follow-through and/or quick follow-up shots, if the latter are necessary. The Weaver also allows a wide arc of fire without having to shift one's foot position. In essence, it's a rifle shooting platform, with the shooting arm stiffened and the hand extended to meet the support hand. This simulates the same net result as is gained from a rifle stock, except for the cheek/stock weld.

The Isosceles stance is comprised of a single horizontal Isosceles triangle, which obviously necessitates both arms being straight, combined with "neutral" hand pressure. Favored by many,



Sometimes circumstances necessitate one-handed-only shooting.

it can cause problems when confronted by an assailant at a different elevation to the shooter or when trying to use cover to full advantage. Most people use a personal hybrid version of both techniques for gunfighting.

Once one is forced away from the Warm Weaver Womb or Idyllic Isosceles because of a fight having gone to hell in a handbasket, the panic sets in. Because you are no longer comfortably ensconced in a familiar, secure firing platform, the basics start breaking down. Obligated to shoot one-handed by circumstances beyond your control, anatomical principles are violated, leading to the

inevitable Alamo reenactment—and a firestorm of outgoing projectiles hitting everything except the intended target.

Adept one-handed shooting of the pistol in a gunfight is dependent on a locked wrist and, if distance allows, a locked elbow. Obviously within gun-grab distance, close-quarters techniques—such as clamping the firing wrist alongside the pectoral muscle—have to be employed.

At any further distance, however, the elbow *MUST* be locked. What most people do is squeeze the gun like they're trying to extract blood from a turnip. The problem is that while a firm firing grip is always preferable, the wrist and elbow are the stabilizing fulcrum points.

You can strangle a handgun until males give birth, but with an unlocked wrist and elbow, the

weapon will torque and twist off target after primer ignition but *before the bullet exits the barrel*. That's why some shooters experience malfunctions on a semi-auto even with a death grip on the weapon. And that's also why the term is "limp-wristing" and not "limp-gripping."

Similarly, an unlocked elbow will cause high projectile impact, though not necessarily weapon malfunction. Some shooters prefer stepping in with the strong foot, some prefer to leave their feet the same as for their two-handed shooting, but the criterion again is that the upper body needs to be in tank turret mode, as the target may not be facing straight on, belt-buckle to belt-buckle—and this applies whether you have to operate right- or left-handed. The bottom line is that misses are nonnegotiable.

You may have to move your head laterally to acquire the sights with the eye/eyes that you normally use. You may have to slightly cant the top of the pistol inboard to strengthen the wrist fulcrum and afford it rigidity. It's all a matter of personal trial and error until you achieve a balance of what works for you, *on demand*—Musashi's "striking without thought and without form." One system that won't work is the Hollywood/banger horizontally held pistol technique. Stemming from an Israeli draw-from-the-holster-and-fire system, it does not produce precision hits. Yes, an Olympic target shooter took the Gold Medal 60 years ago using this technique. No, it won't get you surgical hits in the street with a large-

bore defensive pistol in a for-real contact.

Another suggestion is not to use the "clenched-fist technique," whereby a shooter uses a fist support hand against his chest to facilitate added isometric tension to his shooting stance. It is usually accompanied by an exaggerated diagonal leaning in of the entire body towards the target. The question, of course, is if you have the use of your support arm and the muscular power to clench the fist, why would you be shooting one-handed anyway? You shoot one-handed because you have to, not because you choose to do so. On a target range maybe; in a do-or-die conflict that's tantamount to taking a pistol to a shotgun fight.

Whichever system you settle on, make sure it works under battle conditions, before the fact. Undoubtedly quick, accurate sustained fire is more difficult one-handed as opposed to firing a handgun using two hands, but that's no excuse for not attaining proficiency.

It takes a lot of practice, but so does playing a violin or being a race-driver. The subtle difference is if you mess up on a violin the worst you can do is make a sound like a mating tomcat. If you screw up on the track, you can get a lot of other drivers hurt.

Don't put yourself out on a limb simply because you've lost the use of a limb. There are two definitions of the word "unarmed."

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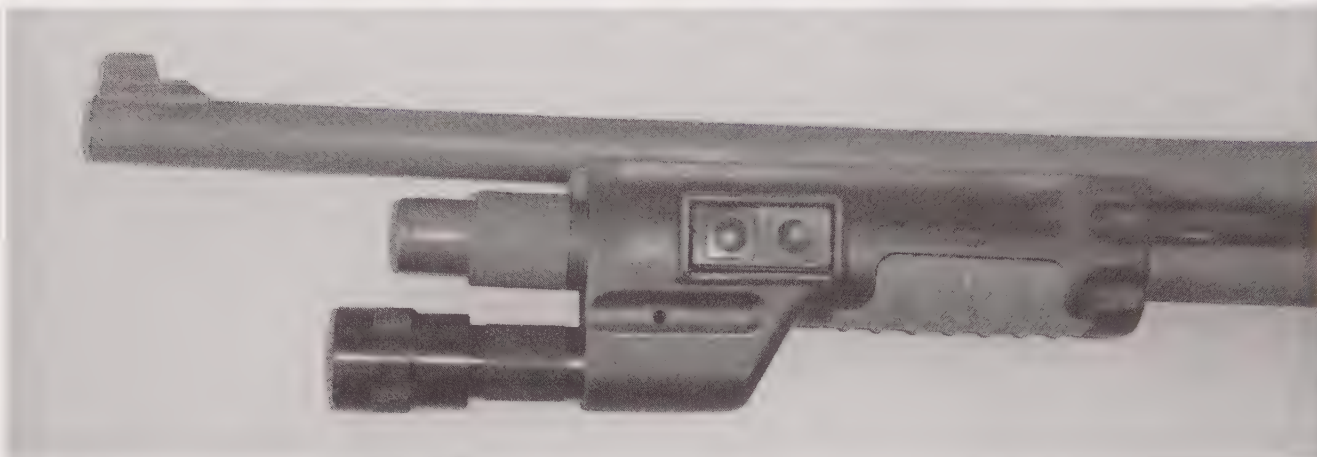
Blinded by the Light

M

an, for the most part, has always had an innate fear of the dark.

Even with the ability or fortitude to either permanently or temporarily conquer this fear, if you can't see, you can't see. And even though the human eye has the capability of seeing a single candle light in the pitch dark from a distance of 10 miles, that doesn't help when your excrement has liquefied and you're trying to identify a potential enemy in a dark alley at 10 feet.

Over 100 years ago the first pistol flashlight systems were devised, and especially during the past several decades companies like Surefire have refined these accessories to a fine art. But while dedicated and powerful handheld flashlights are essential for dim light employment of handguns, subguns, shotguns, and carbines, a percentage of training time undertaken must be conducted under poor ambient light conditions. If all training hours with these weapons are undertaken only during



A six-volt dedicated Remington 870 fore-end from Surefire, the world's leader in tactical flashlight equipment.

daylight hours, the negative aspects of the various gun-mounted systems and handheld flashlight techniques won't be discovered by the operator until it's too late—usually in a battle situation.

So if the flashlights and accoutrements have reached such a refined stage of development, what's the bad news? The problem manifests when you turn on the light: everything operates mechanically, but you still can't see clearly enough to identify, shoot, and/or contain your enemy. This is invariably caused by blockage of the beam output by a variety of solid material objects—often literally unseen until you're trading projectiles in some Godforsaken dark alley without backup.

A conventional rifle military-style sling is not compatible with a six o'clock-mounted flashlight fore-end, as the light beam will obviously "bounce" back towards the shooter, both illuminating him and canceling target illumination. This type of sling/carry strap must be side-mounted at the front end on the weapon to negate this problem.

While something this simple is patently self-evident, many other aspects are not. A positive On/Off fore-end switch, for example—as opposed to intermittent pressure operated only—is almost mandatory on a slide-action shotgun or rifle, or you're relegated to only one

round availability and no illumination if you're forced into operating the weapon one-handed. This can arise during a fight after sustaining an injury or even for something as innocuous as having to open a latched door.

But the above having been said, other less evident problems can arise from normally used flashlight operation when the chips are down in dim light conflict. A six o'clock-mounted flashlight on a shoulder-fired weapon, for example, may not be a problem until cover or concealment is used. Rolling out right or left side of a barricade will require more leaning out to acquire target illumination at night than it will during daylight situations, or the beam will reflect off the barricade, night-blinding the shooter. And while most people tend to crowd cover too closely, with the misguided thought that they are exposing less of themselves as a target—the opposite is true—you may not have a choice if you're taking incoming fire from more than one compass direction.

Unfortunately the answer is not to mount the light at two or ten o'clock because sooner or later you're still damned. A two o'clock light mount is fine for a rollout on a right-side barricade, but screws you on the left side—a ten o'clock-mounted system causes a vice versa problem. And any of these mounts will be exacerbated when you're operating a high

sight/low bore line weapon, such as an AR15, or a scope-attached firearm. There are already enough shooters blowing holes through plywood cover on ranges during daylight training hours—and you won't be the first person to blow a hole through your truck's cab while attempting to whack Bambi because the high-mounted scope offered an unobstructed view of the target. Unfortunately the muzzle of the barrel is pointed three inches lower than your fancy scope—often at the aforementioned cab of the truck.

That's why you see so many deer parked in front of bars with a perforated Chevy truck hood trophy strapped to their proboscises.

The flashlight quandary, however, is not confined only to shotguns, carbines, and subguns. Much-vaunted pistol techniques, such as the Harries and Rogers, can have similar undesirable consequences. Even though the techniques in and of themselves are reliable, battle-tested, and applicable for most situations, there's a time and a place where they may not be idyllic to use.

Scenario: You're set upon in a dimly lit public parking garage. Judiciously heading for a circular concrete support pillar to use as cover, you form a plan to use your pistol and flashlight right-handed in tandem to deal with the threat. Leaning out to the right around the pillar, you cunningly use a Rogers or Harries system to gain optical target acquisition—and are instantly blinded by the concrete-reflected beam. Oops. "Guess I need to lean out farther." With some modicum of regained vision, you roll out farther—and take an incoming ricochet in

the head. Damn. Forgot that projectiles refract off a hard surface within a 12-degree angle of the last object they impact, which in this case is a circular column.

Fortunately the round hit you in the head, so nothing vital was damaged. Time for plan B. Let's try a left-side rollout. Much better—now you can see. Trigger a couple of rounds, which immediately slam off the concrete and back into your face. This is going well—starting to feel like the beer-drinking deer's trophy again.

At about this time you're thinking one of three things: (a) you should have given up drinking when you promised God you would, (b) you should have gone to church more regularly, or (c) you should use an intelligent flashlight technique relevant to a specific tactical situation. In the above case, possibly the FBI technique, whereby you can illuminate the threat by lighting up your attackers with the flashlight around the left side of the usable cover and shooting right-handed-only around the right.

The bottom line is to ensure that your range-acquired ability with a firearm/flashlight combination will work under *ALL* circumstances, before the happy occasion occurs for real.

While it's true that in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is King, going down in history as the Braille Bomber with three bullet holes in your head isn't exactly going to get you on the Honor Roll in Valhalla either.

Light's a bitch, and then you die.

(This column originally appeared in the July 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Unnecessary Equipment Won't Make Up for Personal Inadequacies



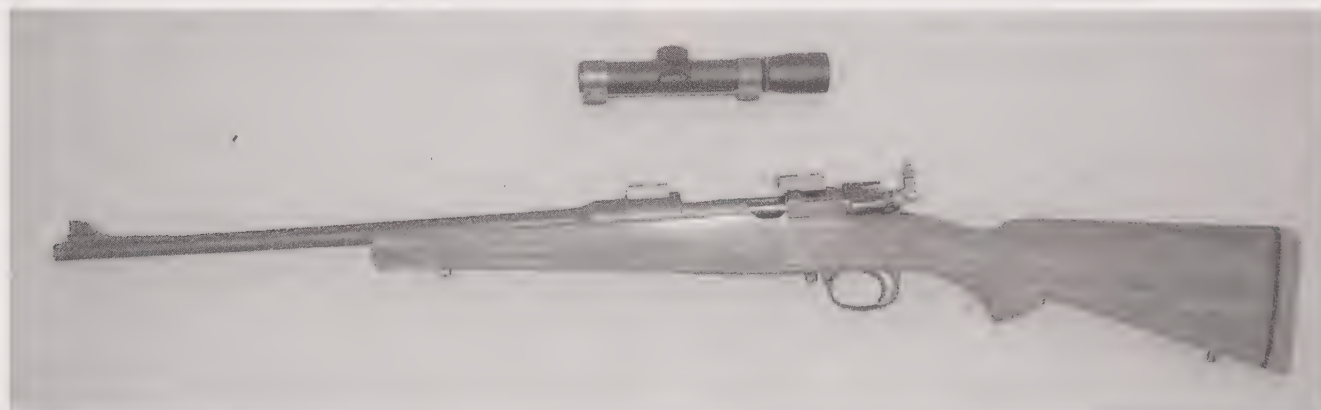
Firearms enthusiasts are a strange breed. Like the car and truck fanatic, many of these brethren are not satisfied with the product as produced by the manufacturer—and often rightly so. Many is the time when a factory production model has an inadequate trigger mechanism, sights, or the firing grip and stock length don't mate to the shooter's physique.

These drawbacks can be easily modified to meet the operator's requirements, much like altering the suspension on a street car to improve road handling. Modifications along these lines, though not essential, are often necessary to improve performance, be it for a race driver or marksman. The antithesis to this, however, is the procraptinator.

Procraptination, for the uninitiated, is the art of wasting time on useless feces. For the gun owner this invariably takes the form of unnecessary bolt-on garbage which the buyer fallaciously believes will improve his marksmanship ability. One of the



A .308 Mauser custom-built by master gunmaker Fred F. Wells. Note the quick-release Talbot scope mounts (which always allow a return to zero if the glass is removed) . . .



. . . and the 70-year-old flip-up reserve rear aperture sight.

accoutrements which rifle shooters seem to think is an absolute prerequisite for capable marksmanship is a telescopic sighting system.

And while a true rifleman will shoot well with a scope, if you can't hit your identifiable mark with iron sights, you won't do any better with a snooperscope. A scope is intended to be used for one primary reason: to *IDENTIFY* the target. It will not magically shrink target group size and will, in actuality, cause exactly the opposite effect if incorrectly used.

The sighting system under discussion is the "conventional" telescope, as opposed to the fast-acquisition "illuminated dot" systems, such as the ACOG Reflex setup.

There are various downsides to telescopic sights, such as overall fragility, reticle shifting, etc. If you don't have reserve iron sights on a serious battle weapon, you're probably rolling

dice. Because of the high percentage of breakage, just like with Mr. Gump's box of chocolates, you never know what you'll get from shot to shot. The only way to be sure that the internal workings haven't shifted from the last round fired is to shoot the weapon—a really comforting thought when everything's laid on the line with one surgical precision hit required.

Obviously if a marksman has optical problems, iron sights might not cut the mustard, and he'll have to resort to glass, either to improve target identification—especially in dim light situations—or to substitute crosshairs for his inability to focus on a steel front sight focal length. Most shooters, however, mount scopes on their rifles as a matter of course—and often, because of misuse, wind up shooting worse than they would have using an iron front and rear combination.

Mistakes are numerous, usually starting

with buying “too much” scope—a unit with unnecessary magnification power. Anything more than four-power magnification for the “generic” rifle shooter is about as useful as a lavalava at the North Pole. Apart from anything else, too much power often leads to one of the biggest mistakes performed by scoped rifle shooters—using the scope to “find” the target. Use binoculars to find the target; use the rifle to shoot him. Once you start using the telescopic sight as a spyglass, you’ll eventually hit the pitfall of shooting with one eye closed—detrimental on a moving target and definitely not beneficial on even a static target.

The mark of a rifleman is to use the “nonshooting” eye to track the target, while the eye looking through the glass concentrates on the crosshairs.

Common scenario: Million-magnification scope, right-handed shooter engaging camouflage target with left eye shut. While the marksman can identify every nook and cranny contained within his right-eyed field of view, because of the disproportionately reduced amount of binocular visibility, he doesn’t have a clue as to exactly where the rifle is aimed on the overall camouflage target. Works great on a two-inch black dot on a white paper target at known distance—doesn’t pan out too wonderfully when you’re taking incoming.

Of course you can always combine this with the inevitably too-far-to-the-rear mounted scope, so you can stamp the recoil induced crescent-shaped badge of stupidity into your forehead while you’re studiously engaged in missing the target. Or you could hold two inches high to allow for bullet drop when you’re shooting a 10-inch group.

While the Scout genre of forward-mounted scopes removes many of the potential downfalls of the rifle shooter, he will never be a Rifleman

unless he utilizes the glass as it was initially intended to be used.

The problem with using a telescope, as with iron sights, is that the human eye cannot focus on two different focal planes simultaneously. The upside of using glass is that it enables one to easily identify a target. The downside is that the crosshairs visually seem to be plastered against the target, at the same distance and on the same optical plane. This often causes a marksman to literally look for bullet impact on the target—a much easier trap to fall into than maintaining focus on an iron sight before, during, and after the projectile exits a barrel muzzle.

In other words, because of the much-improved clarity of vision on the target when using telescopic sights, the shooter violates the marksmanship basics of focal plane follow-through.

Yes, you can more easily identify a target via glass than with the naked eye, but for the most part your group sizes and fighting ability won’t improve unless you adhere to basics. Unless you have a vision problem, you’re probably better off with iron sights out to Common Man distances. Townsend Whelen’s opinion still holds true: if you can hit a man on demand in a fight at 300 yards, you’re way above the Average Joe.

And if you’re shooting at four-legged game at that distance, you should be regarded with contempt. If you wound a human enemy, who cares—but you owe a quadruped a one-shot clean kill.

Don’t mount unnecessary equipment on a firearm in a vain attempt to make up for personal ability inadequacies.

It’s not worth procrastinating over procrastination.

(This column originally appeared in the August 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Immediate Incapacitation Is Your Goal in a Gunfight

M

any people are scared by dogs because when they bite they don't miss. From a neurotic Chihuahua to a yellow-fanged Rottweiler, they don't miss.

Now that a section of the firearms world has started realizing the brilliant concepts that only hits count in a firefight and that projectile size—though important—has to take a backseat to training, we can hopefully finally return to the straight-thinking wisdom (and ability) of our forebears—at least until such time as self-guiding laser guns become the norm.

This all leads up to the question of shot distribution during training and, for that matter, in a fight. While this has been discussed in prior "Training and Tactics" articles, it does warrant another look. The main reason is that humans are creatures of habit, and because of this our firearms training tends to be executed by rote, almost to the extent of faddism. Somebody comes up with a resuscitated centuries-old idea, and for a period of time the Gun Rats of Hamlin follow suit like

lemmings because “it seems like a good idea.”

Bungee-jumping also seems like a good idea until you realize that more people are killed in this sport than the originators who use the technique to jump from trees attached to a jungle vine as a passage to manhood. There are too many variables in a gunfight to assume that you will always have the human-shaped target availability of your choice.

If the junkyard dog always went for an arm bite, learning a counter to a canine attack would be simple.

But he’s not as stupid as we. He doesn’t pay taxes, he gets free food and board—and anybody who can use his own tongue for toilet paper is a tactical genius in my book. And one other minor detail—he has the sense to go for repetitive chomps on the most readily available portions of his overall target.

Irrespective of tooth size, eventually you’re going to bleed. There’s only one way to shut down a mad dog—incapacitate him or stay out of his backyard. There’s only one way to shut down an enraged human—incapacitate him or don’t get into a gunfight.

While many advocate firing a pair of pistol bullets to the central chest area and/or follow up with a round to the head, that’s often not quite as simple—or available—as it might seem. If somebody’s cranking off rounds at you with a rifle, there’s not a lot of chest area offered as target material if the assailant is shooting from a conventional bladed shouldered rifle stance. Combine the reduced target size with a three-dimensional concave human-torso configuration, and you have about four or five lateral inches available for deep, damaging projectile insertion.

There’s no question that immediate incapacitation is required at this point, or you’re done. This does not necessarily mean that your attacker must receive an intentional killing blow at this stage, but he has to be stopped—right now. A round to the computer would do it, but

it might not be available. A flurry of bullets to the pelvic bone structure might not stop his trigger finger, but it could twist him enough to offer more target area for repeat shots.

The problem is the same as always—there are too many “ifs,” “buts,” and “maybes” to ever guarantee that a repetitive training regimen will be an exact replica of a future confrontation. Humans are not one-dimensional; they move—often at an alarming pace—and are equally as often not facing directly on to the shooter. If the classic Mozambique and/or Automatic Failure drills are good, they are good only if the enemy is facing straight on. If range drills like these were the perfect answer to every situation, there’d be a lot more documentation in the form of autopsy reports as confirmation.

In this author’s stupefied opinion, logic dictates that because of all the variables involved when one is under attack, the only way to have a chance of success is to rigorously train on different moving targets at different angles, under different light and weather conditions—and pray regularly and often. Because no matter how good you are, you’re still running on 90 percent luck. Nobody’s that good—period. Not when you’re on the defense—and reacting to a threat.

Anybody who thinks he can draw a pistol, dump a couple of bullets into somebody’s chest cavity, and follow this up with a round to the snotbox when *reacting* to an *unexpected* attack from a charging enraged lunatic is living in a dream world. You may get away with it once in a blue moon for real—and you may also hit a Royal Flush in Vegas. It will work on a stilted firing range drill, but bullets don’t immediately short-circuit the neurological synapses of an adrenal-pumped loony merely because they might penetrate his heart and/or lungs.

Try this trick: Ask a friend to position himself 25–30 feet in front of you. Using a toy pistol, ask him to charge you only when you begin your drawstroke. Simulate firing *one*

central chest hit and note the distance your training partner has covered.

Rerun the scenario, but this time both of you start on the "go" signal of a third party. Note the distance covered by your partner.

Repeat the drill a third time, except this time you begin your drawstroke only once your partner starts his forward charge.

The net result is that because of the three different reaction times, in the last case you'll be stranded after *one* simulated fired round only several feet from your buddy with your pistol almost within take-away reach of his sweaty little paws. This after only one body shot fired.

(At the risk of insulting the reader, it must be noted that only a *REPLICA PISTOL* should be used when trying this.)

The only way you'll get the job done in the third scenario is to use lateral footwork and tag him with repeated shots on his way past. This sets up not only a tremendous fast-changing safe backstop-reading problem, but also an extremely fast-changing target shape-and-movement situation. Bet you throw the staid range drills out the window and burn him half-a-dozen times in the biggest piece of meat and bone your front sight can find.

If you want a kick, try it for real when unexpectedly set upon in a dark alley. No time to pull your flashlight, and see how much your tritium sights help under these compressed

time/distance circumstances. Tripping over beer cans, no idea if the changing backstop is safe in the dim light once you side-step, and your heart is in your mouth. We are the spiders of society, and what a tangled web we weave.

Scenario: Several years ago a police officer fired 16 rounds from a duty Beretta pistol at a perp from a distance of six feet. Draining the pistol in panic? No. Excess force? No.

What happened was Mister Goofball was engaged in attempting to turn his girlfriend into a fruit salad by means of a butcher knife. This was on the bench seat of a pickup truck. The officer's only out was to slam repeated rounds through the open cab window at every piece of available human parts that weren't female. Problem solved.

A horrific situation, but it was really only an extension of any gunfight. If you can't initiate, you're in react mode. And that means you pick the easiest biggest target you can find that will incapacitate the enemy under the enforced constricted time frame.

Keep it plain, keep it simple, and stay with basics. The fancier you get, the sooner you die.

Remember the dog with the toilet paper trick? I think he learned it while trying to get the ugly taste of a recently bitten stupid gunfighter out of his mouth.

(This column originally appeared in the September 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Balancing Speed and Accuracy

S

hooting speed is relative—and like many of your other relatives, its presence is not required much of the time.

You have to be quick in a gunfight, but you don't have to be fast. The anomaly of the term *fast* is that in a contact, one's mental perception of the passage of time is way off the scale as compared to actual elapsed chronometric time frames. Sometimes it's faster, sometimes it's slower, but it's rarely dead on with a stopwatch—and it's different every time, governed by the attendant pucker-factor level. The greater the perceived threat, the more one feels that tempus is fugiting.

The bottom line with a firefight is that ammunition needs to be distributed the way most of us run our finances—outgoing needs to be released faster than incoming. The trick, of course, is like dying one day before you go broke—you have to time it almost to perfection, and you have to hit the target. You don't want to outlive your



The first stage of a four-count pistol drawstroke: firing grip in the holster, straight trigger finger, support hand flat against the abdomen.



The weapon is drawn from the holster and rotated to the "rock and lock" close-quarters weapon retention position.



The support hand meets the gun hand in a secure, consistent firing grip.



The pistol is extended onto the target, the shooter's focal plane shifts to the front sight, and the trigger finger is then—and only then—placed on the trigger, prior to firing.

financial reserves, and you don't want to run out of ammo.

It's commonly accepted that successful combat marksmanship is comprised of a trinity of Power, Accuracy, and Speed. The power is inherently built into, and emanates from, the firearm and ammunition, but the balance of accuracy and speed is subject to the shooter's ability. Obviously the necessary amount of alacrity and surgical precision of shot placement

will depend on the overall situation, but a balance has to be achieved between the two. A 100-yard sniper round which has to be placed into a hostage-taker's eyeball, for example, is obviously not the time to use a one-second snap-shot from a standing off-hand stance. The antithesis is equally as obviously not to attempt to insert a projectile up a charging lunatic's nostril after deliberating for two seconds, when he's initiated his attack from a distance of five yards.

Shot placement has to be accurate, but like so-called speed, it's relative. Two rounds pumped into somebody's chest from a frontal firing position, and split one inch apart, are good marksmanship as such. But they are no better than two projectiles fired at the same target in half the time, spread three inches apart. In fact, as far as defensive survival is concerned, the latter case is a better speed/accuracy balance.

On a numerically scored slow-fire paper qualification target, precision is more important than speed, as long as the shooter is within the usually lenient target-shooting time frames. In the street in a close quarters encounter, you're better off with three fast central torso hits spread in a three-inch group than with one perfect heart shot that takes all day. If the trio of projectiles doesn't shut down an attacker at close quarters, you may or may not have time to instill more damage. But if you mosey along taking all day to go for more precision than is needed on a central torso shot, and it doesn't do the job, you're probably out of time for follow-ups.

While single round torso shots often work, it's an equally common occurrence for body shots to have absolutely no effect—single or multiple. Just because somebody's aorta has been perforated doesn't necessarily mean he'll be out of the fight for a long, long time. So as usual, the percentage of affordable sacrificial accuracy must be counterbalanced with allowable time frames and target availability. Not a good idea to shoot a one-second four-inch group at a rapist's countenance when your wife's head is between your gun muzzle and two-thirds of his facial structure.

So how fast is fast?

Requisite speed is the shortest time in which you can bring a gun to bear on target, with precision hits, with no prior "walk-through" of the scenario. In other words, what can be achieved *ON DEMAND* by an individual operating solely on reflex and a fighting brain.

Actual speed of, for example, a pistol

drawstroke and single fired round on a *given* target from a *given* distance can be measured—to a certain extent. The reason it can be timed only to a certain extent is that the chronometric measurement is often based on a false premise.

If the shooter's drawstroke can be orchestrated to mechanically start an electric timer and his bullet impact stops said timer, the premise holds true. If, however, he has to react to an external source as a "start" signal, his overall time will be slower because of the additional lag time before his drawstroke begins. Again, this is if the bullet impact stops the timer.

On the other hand, if the external "start" stimulus is an audible whistle and the desired overall range drill time is indicated by a second closing whistle, the gunman will probably beat the clock every time, for several reasons: An oral whistle, by nature of its mechanical construction, emits a relatively long, drawn-out sound, and nobody can really tell if the fired round actually "beats" the whistle or not if the cartridge detonates while the whistle is blown. Also, one has to take into account both the shooter's and whistle operator's reaction times—the shooter's reaction time to the initial start whistle and the whistle blower's reaction to his own optical observation of a stopwatch. And the latter will invariably blow the whistle as his finger hits the stop button on the timer.

Throw in the added facet of one man shooting, a second blowing the whistle, and a third operating the stopwatch, and the zoo continues. You now have two people probably with different response time reflexes reacting to a third initiator.

So what the whole sorry mess boils down to is that stop/start audible signals on a training range are *suggested* time limits for a given scenario to measure one's *mechanical* ability. In the street you go as quick as you can without missing your mark, and unless you run out of luck that will probably suffice.

You probably won't be shooting as fast as

WHY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "ADVANCED" GUNFIGHT

you do on the range, because you have to constantly read target availability and backstop problems. In years of observing, I've yet to see one gunfighter who's survived multiple gunfights who *LOOKED* fast. They were all quick, and Quick & Sure beats Fast & Fail every time when the stakes are for real.

When you're young, everything takes second place to speed. As the saying goes, the young man knows the rules, the old man knows the exceptions.

(This column originally appeared in the November 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Fear: Deal with It!



he length of an individual's foot from heel to toe is the same as that person's forearm from wrist to elbow.

There are many inconsequential facts we assimilate over the years, and there are many valuable lessons to be learned. One of the vital lessons to be unlearned is that of Fear. In actuality fear isn't learned—it's an innate part of human makeup. But as life progresses from cradle to grave, on the rare occasion when you manage to momentarily forget about fear, there's always something or some kind soul to dredge it back into your consciousness.

Nobody on this side is presuming to suggest that while you're slipping in your own feces your aorta isn't working overtime, but if you can't learn to either control or override fear, you will not win a battle. There's a simple chemical formula to validate this: If the coprolite outweighs the adrenaline, you wind up with a midden. If you reverse the process, you'll probably be victorious.

Inherent from birth, any chance of a life of insouciance is quickly doused by parental kindness at an early age with the introduction of the dreaded bogeyman. So by the age of three or four you're peeing in your bed and whipping the sheets over your head at the slightest perceived threat, even though it may be imaginary. Welcome to the human race—you've now subconsciously taken a latent facet of human nature and turned it into a learning process.

Ten years later the school bully uses it against you, and you get a bloody nose. Five years after that you're on a battlefield, and you've learned your fear lessons so well that the blood is now leaking out of bullet holes instead of nostrils. But you get lucky, and you make it out of there—and then set out to perfect the art of being terrified of everything: fear of snakes and spiders, fear of flying, fear of career failure, fear of an IRS audit, fear of being mugged during an automatic teller machine (ATM) withdrawal, and on and on. Eventually you're scared of living and scared of dying.

While it's easy to take a President's quote and say there's nothing to fear but fear itself, tell that to somebody who's trapped in a dark alley and surrounded by half-a-dozen real armed bogeymen. It's a little late in the game to unlearn one of the few perfectly learned Life's Lessons—you've already managed to get phobophobia down to a fine art for decades. So now you revert to your bed-wetting stage, and instead of doing something to solve the problem with physical retaliation, you go back to Plan A and craftily crap in your Levi's.

Good thinking: "If I empty my bowels, then there won't be any crap left for the predator to beat out of me." The bad news is that the enemy can smell fear on you long before the odor of feces, and his big kick in life is a power trip. Primarily he wants to rule the jungle by fear; physical violence is secondary. If he smells the fear on you, you've lost before the bell rings for Round One.

It's interesting that people accept the truth about the Tooth Fairy with hardly a murmur but won't let go of their trepidation about the Cookie Monster. Taking poetic license, we preach the Power of Positive Thinking, but in actuality practice the Power of Positive Flinching. We live in a society where people won't—and don't have to—take responsibility for immoral and cowardly actions. This cause inexorably leads to the inevitable effect of expecting the rest of the planet to help you when it's Levi's-soiling time. Unfortunately, if you live the life of a coward, you'll die a lonely coward; and as the man said, "Fear is the Thief of Dreams."

Mental courage and the biggest fighting asset Man can utilize in a fight—that of anger—are more important than guns and knives. Losing your temper will cost you the fight—being able to draw on anger is a whole different ball game. Definitions of courage are variable, but the one emotion that is *GUARANTEED* to overrule fear is anger. It doesn't cloud your thinking processes as does losing your temper, and while it won't make you invincible, it tends to give you the mental drive and spirit of a madman—and nobody with half a brain cell wants to mess with a madman.

He knows he can be hurt, but doesn't feel it if wounded. And he knows he can be killed in a fight, but is prepared to sacrifice that in lieu of crawling on his knees for the rest of a miserable life. And finally, here's a largely unknown fact—we're all going to die sometime. Sorry, rich people; sorry, film stars; sorry, cowards—but that's the way it is.

And so, dear reader, after having pored through these ravings of a madman, remember one thing: I'm not the one who twisted himself into a pretzel in your sitting room five minutes ago, comparing his foot size to his forearm length.

Who's running the asylum now?

(This column originally appeared in the December 2000 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Choosing the Right Tool for the Job

S

o you've finally got the defensive weapon of your dreams. An inordinate amount of time, thought, and money have gone into the project, and now you're ready for any potential deadly force conflict. Or are you?

If, for example, you've selected a shotgun for home defense, you've probably gone the route of shortening the factory stock and fitting an extension magazine tube (assuming you haven't selected a gun of double-barrel or single-shot configuration). The next trick is usually a flashlight system, adjustable sights, and a sling. This is invariably followed by an ammunition carry system, such as a SideSaddle or butt-cuff, which gives you a total potential payload of plus/minus a dozen 12-gauge rounds contained on and in the gun.

The latest, greatest choking technique has been applied to the barrel bore and, of course, the obligatory trigger job. As a final essential touch, you elect to fit an oversize safety button the size of

WHY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "ADVANCED" GUNFIGHT



Is the high-speed, low-drag AR15 (top) a serious home-defense weapon, or is the Winchester 97, manufactured in 1900, a more sensible choice? Gentlemen, choose your weapons. . . .

an elephant's rear end (for those cold days when you're wearing gloves and your igloo is invaded by a herd of drug-dealing yaks on the top of Mount Everest).

With pride and a sense of satisfaction you admire your Black Beauty (it has been finished completely in black because that automatically makes the weapon more accurate, reliable, and "user friendly").

Basking in the euphoria of a job well done and gazing upon your deadly work of art, you experience the first little nagging doubts gnawing at the intentionally forgotten dark recesses of your mind.

Is B.B. really set up for what you actually need for home defense? And the more you think, the more despondent you become. After drawing up a list of pros and cons, you finally come to the earth-shattering conclusion that your ideal home defense gun is actually more user applicable for an Alaskan police officer than for your initial intended blueprint.

Will it perform the requisite task if needed? Of course it will. The problem is that you've used up a poo-poo load of money that would probably have been better spent on two

complete guns sans much of the extraneous garbage, both firearms capable of performing the requisite task. You also ran some terminological inexactitudes past your trusting spouse about why so much of little Johnny's college funds had to be expended on "that thing"—and you know it's going to cost you even more when madame cottons on to it somewhere down the pike and you have to buy your way back into her good graces. Hell hath no fury like a woman who finds the invoice for a gun.

Absolute Rule Number One for a gunfight and a peaceful marriage: Never write a check with your mouth that your ass can't cover.

Assuming that you're filthy rich and have an understanding (or naive) spouse, you've built a weapon which has a capability totally irrelevant to its intended application. This firearms Fabergé was supposed to be a down-and-dirty close quarters home defense shotgun. It *does* need a short enough stock, a front sight, flashlight, and sling. It does *not* need 100-yard accuracy adjustable sights, oversize safety button, and a baker's dozen of ammunition.

If you need 100-yard accuracy in your

kitchen, your name had better be Charles and your residential address Buckingham Palace. If you need an oversize safety button in your house, you'd be better served spending the money on central heating. And last but not least, how many times can you reload single rounds after the initial half-dozen have been fired in a close quarters contact at 15 feet?

You're not a member of a multiple-officer police contact; you're not engaged on a military battlefield. You're on your own, attempting to deal with one or two cretins in your domicile, at close quarters, in a fight of several seconds' duration.

A \$100 choking job doesn't mean a damn at 10 feet with buckshot; and if pattern diameter even at this distance does bother you, load the puppy with something like the Choke single-projectile buckshot round, which is basically a Glaser round on steroids, with as minimal an overpenetration as humanly possible at this stage of technology.

So you decide hell with it, "I'll cut my losses and buy one of those AR15 A-Salt-type suckers." Good idea. Now you're wandering around a confined space with a 28-round magazine and a bore-line sight-line problem which will put the bullet impact 2 1/2 inches below where you aim. Coincidentally, this point of impact is about where the top of your spouse's head will be while Mr. Home Invader

is using her for a face shield, and you get the brilliant idea of sticking the front sight between his eyes.

Can the shot be made? Yes. Do you want this type of sighting problem in a home defense situation? Knock yourself out—it's not my wife.

The gist of this article is not to annoy the reader with this author's possibly perceived pomposity and/or sarcasm. It is to promote serious thought. And, admittedly, I do possess a couple of toys of the ilk described above—boys will be boys—but not for one-man use in a close quarters home environment situation. The primary objective of this article is to suggest that you use the right tool for the job.

An old carpenter once taught me to use 19–20 hammer strokes per minute to pound a nail into wood. If you use the correct weight hammer, everything runs smoothly. If the hammer is too light, using 40 strokes a minute results in a bunch of misses, and the nail still doesn't penetrate. Use too heavy a hammer at 10 strokes per minute, and you'll mar the wood and probably smack your thumb.

Thanks, George. When you helped a young kid flailing away with a hammer, you may very well vicariously have saved somebody's life in a gunfight.

(This column originally appeared in the January 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

A Solution in Sight

W

hile many people quote Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, when *Ars Belium* becomes *Arse Bellum* in midfight, you need essentially four things to win: mental control, prior training, luck, and reliable equipment.

Needless to say, if you can't keep your feces coagulated when under pressure you'll probably be the proud owner of a second-place tombstone trophy. Training, combined with luck, certainly doesn't hurt the cause, but last, and certainly not least, you have to have a gun to participate in a gunfight.

And while there's no question that firearms, along with all other technological advances, will eventually be made up of the laser-launching Buck Rogers/Star Wars ilk, we are currently making do with primarily Plain Jane equipment similar to that which has worked for over a century. All of which leads up to the subject of sights and sighting systems.

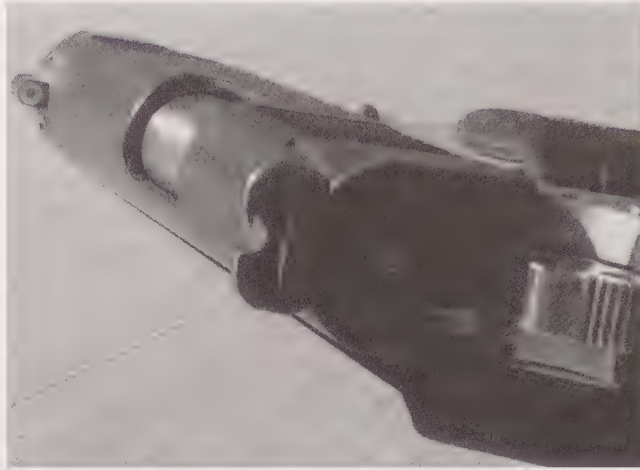
Apart from glass, such as the Steyr Aug or the ACOG Reflex and a few other scopes which have

the retail price of a small yacht, many of the telescopes and attendant gadgets and battery-operated seek-and-destroy/I-can't-tell-you-what-it-is-or-I'll-have-to-kill-you gizmos seem neither sturdy nor reliable enough to be trustworthy for serious battle. And you usually need a pachyderm to hump the spare batteries, wires, bulbs, and a team of NASA engineers to keep the sucker running.

So it's down to rudimentary iron sights for reliable operation when it comes to the "generic" mano a mano defensive conflict. But there are problems with these sights as well, and one needs to be aware of the strange and sometimes almost bizarre side effects of using these sights.

Assuming that the marksman is competent in the execution of sighting, trigger control, and follow-through, oversize concentric-shaped, laterally offset and/or high-impact groups, and shot placement can often be attributed to quirks of optical/mental misperception of sight picture and alignment. This can occur with handguns, rifles, shotguns, and subguns, dependent on the current ambient light conditions and actual physical construction, dimensions, and shape of the sights themselves. It can baffle both shooter and instructor alike and often leads to a misdiagnosis by the coach.

With the arrival of the rear aperture sight in the 19th Century came the "many shooters impact high" in dim light conditions syndrome. The interesting aspect is that this phenomenon seems to become more and more of a problem as the decades go by. Now it's becoming common in bright sunlight. So it's back to the diagnostic



An X-S Systems front sight mated to a rear sight customized by Gunsite—simple, rugged, and accurate.

drawing board to find the whys and wherefores.

A bead-sighted shotgun is easy, especially if the bead is silver- or gold-colored. Once the overhead sun hits the top of the bead, the shooter's eye often can't discern where the exact top of the shiny sight is, and he automatically mentally starts "looking for more front sight." This can

net almost a six-inch gain in elevation impact with slugs at plus/minus 50 yards. Similar problems can be caused on windage impact from side light, but the group drift usually isn't as severe as from overhead light.

The now ubiquitous AR15 rifle and its clones are a double whammy. Ambient light can cause problems from both the front and rear standard iron sights. Unless the shooter "crawls" the stock and blots out rear-emanating sun or moonlight from refracting off the bottom of the rear aperture, hits will be high. Instead of a perfect circle, one's brain interprets the now essentially out-of-round aperture as a circle. Since the sighting system is based on a ghosted rear ring requirement as opposed to a fine peep sight, wherein the human brain-eye coordination automatically self-centers a front sight in a circle, the brain now receives a false message. The operator unwittingly places the top of the front sight above the center horizontal axis of the rear "ring," and the projectiles head off into the ozone.

Similarly, incoming front light can have the same effect, and side light can cause similar problems with windage, much like the "shadow effect" of a telescopic glass sight system.

And if you've never encountered this

problem, either you're training on jumbo-sized targets or your practice range doesn't facilitate 360 degree firing. While this may sound like it's making a mountain out of a molehill, (a) if you fire an AR in four opposing compass directions, you *will* encounter a problem with light bouncing off the *front* sight on a bright sunlit day, and (b) the crux of the problem is that everybody talks the talk about shooting sub-MOA groups, but trying to find one in a hundred who can walk the walk is like looking for enough rocking horse droppings to manufacture alternate fuel.

An Ashley front sight will solve this problem, and so will some forms of glass sighting systems, but the gist of the matter is that the problem is a very real issue, and not only with the Colt and its clones. The Heckler & Koch and FN-FAL, to name but two, will have the same net result sooner or later.

So what's the big deal?

The rifles are now being used by law enforcement and civilians alike for two reasons: supposedly for penetrating armored-type protection but also for distance precision. And precision means if you can't place your rounds *on demand*, cold, dirty, hungry, and squirming in your own urine, you're going to get somebody killed or you'll wind up with a no-win lawsuit. Banging away at huge flat targets is fun and does improve mechanical manipulation and base marksmanship, but if precision is one of your rifle training objectives, quality has to replace quantity. A two-to-three-inch bullet windage drift at 50 yards caused by sunlight hitting the eleven or one o'clock section of a rifle's front sight can fast put an end to your career.

Perforating somebody's carcass with a fusillade to facilitate self-preservation or slamming in rounds on a military battlefield so half-a-dozen bullet magnets have to retrieve

their riddled buddy is one thing. But taking one snooper-type shot and not knowing that your brain is misreading the sight picture because of light conditions is a whole different ball game.

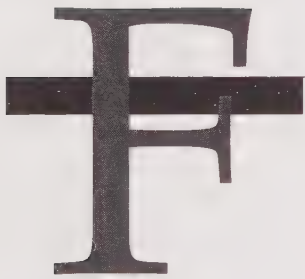
Handguns are also not immune to this problem, especially since the advent of tritium inserts, and the plethora of dots, stripes, bars, and various interesting combinations of shapes and colors. While a long ramped front sight resplendent with a triple coating of chrome is obviously not conducive to accurate shooting, cutting it back to a square post so it can tear holes in your foundation garments while attempting to rapidly draw the concealed weapon from the inner sanctum of your nether regions isn't too bright either.

Once you're aware that there's a problem, a solution isn't too difficult to find. Bury those tritium dots deep in the sights. If you don't, either your peepers won't be able to find the dot in daylight, or, as is all too common, the dots are inserted so close to the top of the front sight that there's only a hairline between the top of the dot and the sight itself—and with the short sight radius of a pistol it's enough to pop a head shot by three or four inches at seven to ten yards when overhead sunlight "washes out" the top of the sight. Make a decision as to whether you want to focus on the front dot or the sight itself and stay with *one system only*. Logic dictates that in dim light you'll run off the tritium anyway, but too many aftermarket sights don't align on top when the inserted dots are aligned, and vice versa. In fact two pistol models that have triple-dot white painted systems are misaligned fresh from the respective factories. *Caveat emptor!*

May the Sun of Tzu shine kindly upon your sights.

(This column originally appeared in the March 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Malfunctions— What to Do About Them



Firearms instructors say that when you encounter a weapon malfunction it's not the time to panic.

Hell with that—it's the perfect time to panic.

After observing literally thousands of trainees assiduously practicing malfunction clearance range drills until they're inculcated with robot-like ability, only to watch their brains turn to mush when a hitch occurs unexpectedly, the only conclusion at which one can arrive is that it's probably not going to get fixed in a hurry for real. At least not without a lot of movement, cover, and luck.

This is by no means meant to imply that malfunction clearances shouldn't be studied, practiced, and perfected, but the chances of instant fixes—and, coincidentally, supportive documentation from the battlefield—are minimal. Thirty-four years ago we were instructed on how to fieldstrip and reassemble our service rifles—in record time, in the dark. This was obviously intended to totally

familiarize us with the rifle and "build up our confidence."

"Yes, Sir, Sergeant Einstein, Sir, a real confidence booster, trying to find a firing pin spring in the mud at midnight while taking incoming in some Godforsaken country nobody could find in an atlas. Thank you, Sir, for allowing me to be a proud member of the cannon-fodder brigade, Sir. And thank you so much for not giving us the sanction to carry pistols."

This author, for one, would like to see how the ledger columns balance between the servicemen, police officers, and citizens who died while attempting to reload or clear malfunctions and those who actually survived a fight after managing to fix the problem. That's why you carry two guns before you become senescent or canescent—or you may not live to see either.

While one malfunction—that of an empty chamber experienced with a semi or fully automatic firearm—can usually be corrected relatively quickly, it's invariably because it has occurred with the operator several times in prior training. Primarily caused by pilot error, often because the operator failed to check the contents of the chamber or neglected to fully seat a magazine, the solution is to "Tap, Rack, Bang" (seat the magazine, run the bolt, fire).

As with everything else, the terminology has changed for this clearance from the original to "Tap, Jack, Bang"; "Tap, Rack, Assess"—and my all-time favorite, the incredible Barbie Bomber's



A "smokestack" malfunction in the process of being cleared by means of a rearward sweep with the support hand. Carry two guns!

"Smack, Jack, Whack." Bottom line: If you don't check and double check the condition of your weapon, don't expect it to function—which means no amount of Smacking, Jacking, and Whacking will correct the problem if you've forgotten to put a magazine in your pistol.

The Type Two malfunction—a "smokestack"—if vertical, can usually also be expeditiously cleared with a firm rearward sweep of the support hand. Many schools are now

teaching a variation of the "Tap, Rack, Bang," combined with a simultaneous inversion of the semi-auto pistol. Of course, if the extractor hasn't already grabbed the rim of the cartridge case in the chamber (and there usually is one in the chamber when a pistol "smokestacks"), you're now blessed with a Double Feed. This latter is your worst nightmare unless you're running a Glock, Para-Ordnance, or H&K USP, which can be easily cleared from double-fed status.

A simple rearward sweep should clear a smokestack/stovepipe. And if it doesn't, your worst-case scenario is an empty chamber—any day of the week a safer gamble than potentially setting up a double feed. And, yes, the sweep will reset a Glock's now-dead trigger.

The reason given for attempting to clear different malfunctions with one technique is simple—uniformity. But while uniformity is the logical ideal to cut out as much opto-rectimitis as possible during a fight, you don't try to fix a

steering problem on a race track by turning on your windshield wipers.

Try losing a magazine base plate immediately after a speed-load in a competition and see if you think you can keep your feces coagulated in a gunfight. Your brain freezes for a chronometric eternity—and that's the entire problem with malfunctions. If there were only one type of mechanical function, you could always quick-fix it. But there are several, and they vary in complexity both in occurrence and clearance operations—too much, in this author's cerebrally challenged opinion, to correct on a consistent, fast, reliable basis.

And nothing, not even a second gun, is fast enough to deal with an oncoming insane mass of humanity from five yards. Your gunfight is now a fistfight.

There's always a subtle hint to inform a shooter that he's experiencing a weapon malfunction—he's trying to shoot somebody. That's what's known in detective circles as a Clue. Which means you'll already absolutely experience some form of reaction time lag before it sinks into your dung-immersed synapses that your firearm has now temporarily become a perfect facsimile of a gun. Perfect in every respect except those of making loud noises and slinging bee-bees downrange.

So you then exclaim the obligatory first two words, closely followed by an agonizing—and time-consuming—analysis of which specific malady your wacko-whacker is suffering. Flawlessly and effortlessly you then whistle through the clearance and proceed with perfect fight-stopping marksmanship. All this is completed within the confines of a pig's eye. Your opponent, of course, is now deceased.

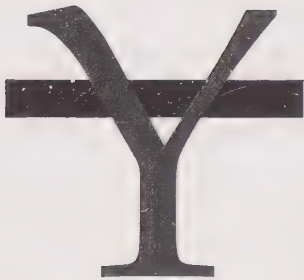
Lucky you. He died from a punctured lung—caused by the cracked rib he sustained from laughing too hard.

Yes, you practice malfunctions on a firing range—but you know in advance they're going to occur. Yes, you practice shooting and moving, use of cover, and speed-loading on a range—but it's all predetermined. If you carry a second gun and can acquire it fast, you've got a head start, but you need a brain to fight—you may not have an operational gun available.

It is said that God doesn't build junk. But He didn't build in a backup system for a panic-stricken brain either—and a dime gets you a dollar that He knows a helluva lot more than your firearms instructor ever will.

(This column originally appeared in the April 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Don't Try This at Home



ou have to envision the scene to get the full effect.

It's two A.M., and as is my wont, I'm engaged in one of my nocturnal mad scientist routines in the garage. The rest of the world is asleep, and I'm sartorially resplendent in a denim shirt, a Fruit of the Loom foundation garment, and a pair of tactical boots.

As if this isn't enough of a vision from hell, and even though the ever-handy 12 Gauge is standing by for old time's sake, I've craftily added a folding boot knife to the ensemble, presumably in case of an attack by a demented cockroach. At this stage, there's nothing abnormal in my life—it's just one of a thousand similar nights doing some tests and evaluations and engaging in therapeutical activity until the sun finally comes up and I can go to sleep.

But here's where the downhill slide begins, and Lady Luck assembles my habits and idiosyncrasies into a comedic, horrific, and ridiculous scenario which Shakespeare couldn't have dreamed up in a

drunken stupor. Part of the ensuing problem stemmed from the fact that I can't—and never have been able to—relax. This results in endless fidgeting and pacing up and down. This was compounded by the fact that for 40 years the only footwear I don is boots—and only boots which have side zippers. This dress idiosyncrasy has what I feel is a reasonable basis.

After having had an expensive pair of boots unnecessarily cut off in hospital after a motorcycle wreck, and after being conditioned in the Army to run bootlaces horizontally through the eyelets to allow single razor-slash emergency medical removal of footwear, I carried the same mind-set into later life.

At this stage, you're no doubt wondering what any of this has to do with "Training and Tactics," and why *S.W.A.T.* hasn't already fired my sorry rear end.

Stick around, it's worth waiting for: (a) it does have relevance, (b) you will undoubtedly derive some amusement at my expense, and (c) my sorry rear end is a lot sorrier than you can possibly imagine at this stage of this article.

So here we go, and it's back to the Past Present.

I'm wandering around the garage in Jekyll and Hyde mode, vacillating between meddling with a vintage Alfa Romeo and designing and constructing target systems. This entails a lot of pacing, bending over, crouching—and more pacing. After a couple of hours of this activity, I squat down to rest. By the way, did I mention that I hadn't pulled up the zippers on the boots? By the way, did I mention that the liner-lock boot knife wasn't exactly the quality of a Reeve Sebenza? And by the way, did I mention that I'd counterbored the ball-bearing detent that locks the blade in the closed position? (I'd done this to facilitate easier opening, because the thumb button on the blade was not well placed ergonomically and had led to prior frustration when attempting one-handed deployment.)

The rest break over, I go back to my chores—

and immediately notice droplets of blood on the garage floor, amazingly following the exact path that my footsteps are tracing. Now I'm no dummy. Years of training have fine-honed my observation skills to immediately realize that the blood isn't emanating from a wounded buffalo. And with omniscience gathered over a lifetime of studying tactics, I cunningly came to the conclusion that the blood has to be leaking from my own chassis.

Obviously the first check is my hands—nothing. Then the wrists, forearms, elbows—still nothing. Mustering all of my superhuman mental powers, I cast my eyes downward—nothing, nada, zip.

So I start tactilely checking areas that I can't see. This entails twisting and turning my upper body—which also torques open the unzipped boots. Coincidentally, this also exposes to my eagle-like vision a familiar-looking boot knife—with the blade in a fully extended and locked position, and pointed straight toward the heavens.

Obviously what had happened is that, with repeated friction caused by a lot of foot and ankle motion, combined with the plethora of free space provided by unrestrained footwear, the knife had worked itself into the opened condition.

You guessed it. While squatted down taking a break, I'd surreptitiously stabbed myself in the left buttock. But I told you I'm no dummy. Even though I was in a subconscious state of mind when I was viciously attacked, with lightning-like reflexes I'd cunningly intersticed my right calf between the blade and my above-mentioned rear end to cushion the blow. So, yes, I'd slashed my right calf as well.

So what are the tactical ramifications of the above debacle?

1. Don't modify equipment which doesn't need modification. (It is better to affix a One Arm Bandit to a knife blade than

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- countersink a detent if you absolutely have to have easier opening capability.)
2. Don't ever use cheap equipment. Sooner or later you'll pay, one way or the other.
 3. If you do modify equipment or use out-of-the-ordinary gear, use it as it was intended to be used. None of this would have happened if the boots had been zippered, if the knife hadn't been

modified, or if it had been a quality knife. Any one of these three root causes would have negated the problem.

As you get older, you suffer fools less gladly. I have met the enemy—and he is I.

(This column originally appeared in the June 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The Problem with Winning the Rat Race Is That You Are Still a Rat



he problem with winning the rat race is that you're still a rat.

Someone once asked me what it takes to be a firearms and tactics instructor. The answer is simple: you open your big fat mouth and tell the world you know everything about firearms and tactics.

The sorry joke is that people are gullible, and they figure—and rightly so—that if they pay money for a service they will automatically receive that service for which they've paid. Unfortunately, defensive weaponcraft has become a cottage industry in the last half-dozen years, spawning a breed of algae who put financial return as a primary and their clients' survival secondary.

Unless one has received a "doctorate" from years of performing the task in law enforcement and military circles, there is no university degree in weaponcraft. If you fork over the green stuff to somebody whose résumé consists solely of having

attended other schools' classes, there's a clue. All he's doing is teaching a course from someone else's lesson plan, and if it weren't such a serious subject it would be laughable.

The problem is obvious. Once Mr. Pseudo-Sensei runs out of ideas and/or loses information in secondhand translation, you don't get the full benefit of the originator's intent and ideas, let alone his ability. A classic case of this is the many bastardized versions of Clint Smith's Urban Rifle program which this author has seen in the past few years. While Clint—who served in battle and in law enforcement—had the foresight over a decade ago to see the potential for close-range rifle/carbine operation, it took two shoot-'em-up idiots in Los Angeles in 1997 to bring the carpetbagger rats out of the woodwork.

And even though there are probably many fine Urban Rifle programs out there, Mr. Smith's was the first and consequently the most copied.

And while imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we now have a herd of watered-down give-me-your-money courses utilizing Mr. Smith's techniques, barricade designs, and pathetic imitations of his expertise—without anybody having the common courtesy and etiquette to at least give him and others vicarious credit.

There are so many other similar situations. Let's face it, like it or not, most late 20th/early 21st Century pistolcraft stemmed from the Old Masters like Cooper, Applegate, etc., but one hears less and less accreditation or even the basest form of reference to the origin of their techniques, studies, and lifelong work.

What set off this article's tirade? This author personally feels that you shouldn't have the gall to lie to people to cover up a lack of knowledge—especially when it could lead to somebody's death or injury—simply to save face, stroke one's ego, and boost one's coffers. It's called Blood Money—and it's someone else's blood involved.

Having recently been dragged kicking and screaming halfway into the wonderful world of the computer, it didn't take long for even this brain-dead writer to understand the maxim of "garbage in, garbage out." First out of the gate was a question from an obvious beginner on how to clear a specific malfunction on a specific pistol. The instructor who replied gave him completely false information which will unequivocally lead to the former's demise in a gunfight if he is ever unfortunate enough to be caught in the envisioned situation. And while humor is relative (I, for example, think a terrorist who is accidentally blown up by his own bomb is funny), things like the above Computer Crook disgust yours truly. And there was more, based on his omniscience concerning the shotgun, before I gave up on humanity in about another five minutes.

The only eventual justice is, to quote President Eisenhower, "Fake reputations, habits of glib and clever speech, and glittering surface performance will be discovered." You can't fake it in this game and get away with it forever. The bad news is how many people will be killed, wounded, or raped before Jungle Justice is exercised from above? If we don't have the intestinal fortitude to admit that most of us don't know a tenth of what we thought we knew 20 years ago, at least get into something honest like prostitution.

Let it also be clearly understood by the reader that any perceived pomposity on this author's part is nonexistent. After 30 years in this field I admittedly have maybe 1 percent of the knowledge I'd like to have. But I also wouldn't sell my soul at any price—and certainly wouldn't risk somebody's safety merely for the sake of saving face. It's called practicing morality.

The late, great Bruce Lee once said that there is no such word as "maturity," but that it should rather be "maturing." He taught—and lived—on the basis that "when there is a way, therein

lies the limitation. When there is a circumference, it traps. If it traps, it rottens, and if it rottens, it is lifeless." He was the eternal student, never thought he knew everything—and he was the Best of the Best.

If he was so hungry for knowledge, how can it be that wet-behind-the-ears weapons and tactics instructors know everything after three or four short years?

Remember the rat race? We all know who abandons a sinking ship first. While you're suckering people, make sure the Pied Piper isn't lying in wait.

You're next.

(This column originally appeared in the July 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The Real Overpenetration Problem



In the early days of building his own race cars, Enzo Ferrari was asked why the brakes were so atrocious relative to the car's horsepower output. His answer? "I build cars to go fast, not to stop."

Although this may seem somewhat disconcerting at first glance, we're doing the same things with firearms today. First came the apparent necessity for everybody to have a .223 carbine as the sole requisite weapon to solve every conceivable tactical situation; now comes the perceived attendant problem of projectile overpenetration.

Can a .223 round pass through a human adversary and hit an innocent party? Yes, it can. But so can a 9mm pistol bullet—or pretty much any other projectile launched from a gun muzzle, for that matter. The questions that come to mind are (a) who in his infinite wisdom decided that the carbine is all of a sudden the only gun that will solve every conceivable problem, and (b) why now

the panic of supposed overpenetration without considering the same possibility occurring with other cartridges which have been around since the Dead Sea was only ill?

It's not as if the 5.56mm cartridge is the sole round in the world of true armor-piercing capability. Those rounds are issued to SpecOps units only, for mission specific uses only, as are shotgun and pistol hot-knife-through-butter rounds. The "normal" bullet issued or procured for every-day generic use is the same as any other. There may or may not be infinitesimal vagaries in end results by varying bullet shapes, components, designs, barrel lengths, etc., but when all is said and done, *nobody* can guarantee what any individual bullet will do once it impacts a human.

While there are expert authorities like Doctors Fackler and Roberts, the list of names of men of their knowledge and expertise can be counted on one hand. The rest of us are Armchair Ballisticians.

And even with their invaluable input, it's still a crap shoot if the round you fire doesn't do what it's supposed to—and these men will be the first to tell you this. While we all "know" that any sub-.36-caliber pistol round is ineffectual, this is small consolation to my brother—dead in his grave for 20 years from a one-shot kill via a .32 S&W bullet. I've also had the dubious pleasure of seeing a soldier return to light duty two weeks after removal of an undetonated mortar lodged in his torso.

Does this mean that a .32 is this author's first-choice carry caliber? Obviously not. But I wouldn't sneer at incoming mortar shells either. The above two examples are admittedly isolated incidents, but the corollary is that there are no guarantees.

Picture, if you will, a police sniper sticking a .300 Win Mag bullet through a hostage-taker's head. Is there anybody out there who seriously thinks that that projectile isn't trucking on through? While we're taking pictures, how

about Mr. Homeowner, who's elected to load his defensive shotgun with birdshot, supposedly to avoid overpenetration?

He hooks a tight corner, misses the perp, and stuffs a load of birdshot through a Sheetrock wall four feet from the gun's muzzle. The round will fragment and run out of steam faster than buckshot, but it'll still blow a hole through the wall like a slug—and butcher one of his kids in the adjacent bedroom.

There's a relatively simple answer to both of the above hypothetical examples—be aware of the background relative to the target position. Rule Number One when handling firearms is to maintain a safe muzzle direction *AT ALL TIMES*. This includes general gun-handling, during reloading, not "sweeping" fellow team members and non-hostiles (or oneself for that matter), as well as the potential ever-present overpenetration problem when stitching the enemy.

The reason the solution is "relatively" simple is that it's sometimes easier said than done. People have a nasty habit of moving when you shoot at them, and often in the 150-plus heartbeat excitement one tends to lose vision, hearing—and clear thought processes, such as losing track of the backstop. Kneeling positions can open another Pandora's Box in a gunfight, as any projectiles fired at close quarters from kneeling invariably follow an extremely acute angle towards the heavens.

The onus falls fully on the shooter's shoulders as regards the terminal resting place of rounds fired, be it because of target movement, bullet overpenetration, and/or angles of fire. And it doesn't take a space shuttle commander to work out that a projectile that meets penetration requirements can also fly through a human throat, abdomen, head, or even torso.

As usual, we've become a victim of our own circumstances. Most bullet designers don't end up in a war zone, and every two-day sergeant is a Monday-morning quarterback.

WHY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "ADVANCED" GUNFIGHT

You can't replace the human brain with technology without somebody paying the ultimate price sooner or later.

Yes, Signor Ferrari's brakes sucked, but he monopolized the world's race tracks because he hired superlative race drivers. They didn't

wreck cars because of inefficient brakes—and bullets don't hit innocents merely because of overpenetration.

(This column originally appeared in the October 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The Purloined Target: Hidden in Plain Sight



Can you plant a bullet in a target that you can't see?

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the answer is often the affirmative. And while on initial contemplation this may seem as ridiculous as a rapist stalking a mermaid, it can indeed be accomplished more often than one might think.

Obviously, under these circumstances, "can't see" is *not* synonymous with "can't identify." If you can't identify someone as hostile you don't shoot—period. If, however, he has already been identified as the enemy, he can on occasion be hit, even when not visible.

Based on reversing the principles of good tactics, *The Purloined Letter*, or such maxims as "what you don't know can't hurt you," one can often turn the tables in one's favor when an adversary becomes "nonvisible."

There are only a specific number of reasons why a shooter can fail to place a bullet into a human adversary. Whether or not the projectile achieves the

desired effect upon impact is neither here nor there as far as this article goes. The problem under discussion is to hit the target, specifically under out-of-the-norm circumstances. Obviously poor marksmanship techniques, a lack of knowledge of subjects like bullet trajectory path, or inability to judge distance and/or wind speed, etc., can cause misses.

But assuming that a competent marksman is armed with good equipment, there are some shoot situations that can "throw" the shootist's thought processes to the extent that he either blows the shot—or sometimes doesn't even attempt to shoot, not realizing that the target problem is actually easier than it might initially seem.

Target angles, shapes, and movement are criteria, but these problems have been discussed for literally a decade in this column. What about the miscreant you've already identified but whom you can no longer physically see once the decision to ballistically neutralize him has been made?

Here's where the "reverse thinking" mentioned above comes into play. If Gy./Sgt. Hathcock could shoot at a mirrored reflection of a scope lens and put a bullet through the telescope into the shooter's eye socket, so can anyone else, assuming he had Mister Hathcock's remarkable marksmanship talents. The difference between a great hunter like Hathcock and the average Johnny is that once he [Hathcock] saw the refracted light flash, he knew the enemy's eye had to be directly behind the image. He immediately deduced that someone was "scoping him" and shot at the flash, as opposed to actually being able to see a human form behind the reflection.

What most of us lesser mortals would have done is hung around trying to visually identify who, or what, was causing the sun-mirrored reflection—a slightly difficult task when your brains are decorating the surrounding foliage after your enemy's bullet has passed through your snotbox. Too little, too late.

There are, of course, easier marksmanship targets than the above episode, but the base problem of a nonvisible target remains the same. In fact, more often than not, you *do* have access to a target—both visual and ballistic—when taking incoming. If the enemy is so completely secreted behind hard cover that not one iota of him, his possessions, or his armament is visible, for that moment in time he isn't a threat as such, unless he's lobbing grenades over a parapet or some similar activity.

Here comes the reverse thinking again. If you use cover for 100 percent protection, you can't return fire, at least not accurate fire from a firearm, anyway. Ergo, to get a balance of using cover and retaining the ability to visually control a downrange situation, you will *HAVE* to sacrifice a certain percentage of safety, however small. So no matter what level of tactical brilliance you've achieved in your life, there will be a certain amount of physical vulnerability from exposure if you're trading bullets—period.

Concealment and misguided thinking, however, have probably won and lost more battles from the times of the Trojan Horse through *The Purloined Letter* syndrome because, while you are often physically visible, your enemy doesn't *SEE* what he's looking at. Yes, concealment ostensibly hides you visually from prying eyes, but camouflage is almost concealment in everything but name only—and anybody dressed up like a Ghillie *CAN* be seen, if only so-called civilized man used his eyes to their full capability. Vision is, to a great extent, a brain function more than a photographic process.

If you were "fortunate" enough to encounter a camouflage-attired enemy who hopped around like a bunny wabbit and then froze into immobility behind a foot-wide bush, is he immediately magically invisible? Only if he's very, very good. And, no, he's not "invisible"; you just don't have the personal powers of observation to make out his outline. But you *can*

drill him anyway. You know *EXACTLY* where he is: he may as well be an eight-inch black bull's-eye on a foot-wide white paper backing on a practice range.

Similarly, if a hostile opponent disappears behind typical urban concealment, such as a Sheetrock wall or wooden door, he is no longer visible—but he is a sitting duck for any small-arms fire, as long as you can audibly or somehow geometrically pinpoint his location. Skip-fire is another useful tool whereby somebody can be dumped. Always deflecting off an impacted surface within a 12-degree angle, bullets will retain a shallow ricochet angle, for example, when using searching fire underneath a vehicle or using a wall to deflect rounds into or at a small target. Nobody can fight effectively with shards of glass, concrete, and/or bullet fragments in his eyes or ankles. Secondary or tertiary projectiles caused by bullet impact can blind a man as easily as a bullet.

Naturally the above-mentioned 12 degrees is based on the presumption of a flat surface. Obviously if bullets are bounced off curved objects, such as a cobblestone street, the compass direction of the ricochet would be wild guesswork, even though the maximum ricochet angle would still be based on a 12-degree deflection. Equally as obvious is the fact that any technique that you can use can be used just as effectively against you. And without

overstating the obvious, you are absolutely, as always, responsible for ensuring that the backstop and terminal resting place of fired projectiles are safe.

Manually operated lights and the corollary—causing shadows by physical movement—are another tactical field which can be either advantageous or a death trap, depending on whether you're the shootist or the shootee. Most of the handheld flashlight techniques currently taught—or dedicated weapons-mounted lights, for that matter—while they can be extremely effective if used to temporarily blind or disorient a suspect, usually position the light source directly in front of the shooter. This is what's colloquially known as a bullet-magnet.

On the other hand, back-lighting yourself before craftily peeking through that nifty spyhole in your front door is offering somebody a perfect eye socket/brain shot. No, he can't see you, but when the translucent glass in the spyhole darkens with your facial proximity, your rear end is grass—and he owns the lawnmower.

Yes, you can hit a target that you can't see—but so can your enemy. Learn from others' mistakes—you'll never live long enough to make them all yourself.

(This column originally appeared in the November 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Pray, Prey, or Spray?



or many who study the modern technique of the defensive use of the pistol, the litany of “front sight focus” has become almost a mantra, presumably religiously repeated every night with their bedside prayers.

There’s no question that at extended distances—or when finite shot placement is required, irrespective of target distance—maintaining one’s focal plane on the protuberance at the front end of the pistol is beneficial. But at the risk of sounding like a heretic, there are many occasions when circumstances preclude this technique.

There are degrees of front sight focus at the moment of triggering a round. There is a perfect sight picture, wherein the rear sight and target are blurred, while the front sight is so finely optically detailed that it stands out like the Pope in a synagogue. Then there’s Colonel Cooper’s “Flash” Sight Picture, which is utilized when compressed time, distance, and a relatively large target area

combine to afford only a quick glance to ensure the “muzzle reference detector” is aligned with the desired impact area before the projectiles are sent on their happy path of destruction.

But here’s where the inevitable “what if” monster rears its ugly head. Cold-cocked at contact distance (if you’re lucky enough to be able to get your pistol into action, which is highly unlikely), you’re not going to have the time to acquire *any* facsimile of a sight picture. You’re three

feet from your assailant, and you’re looking at unsighted close quarters firing techniques—if it’s not a fistfight, which is more likely.

Or you’re set upon by a group of thugs in a dark alley, city park, or blacked-out building. Yes, you should have a flashlight. Yes, you should have a tritium insert in at least your front sight, if not in the rear as well. Then again, you should also be blessed with perfect health and live to be 150, but that never seems to work out in the Good Lord’s plans either.

One more “what if.” What if you awaken in a dimly lit bedroom to find a dark human form looming over your bed? Under these circumstances, any concept of a front sight is going to be cast to the winds before your anal orifice has time to slam shut. In this horror situation you WILL point shoot, instinct shoot, or whatever this year’s new terminology is for lining up the gun with the intruder before slinging rounds into his carcass.

This article is not intended to propose



If time and distance allow, the stance and use of front sight focus exhibited by Officer Elizabeth Thomas will net center-punch hits every time you run the trigger.

unsighted fire as a rule, and this author, for one, is definitely a proponent of sighted fire—when the situation allows it. And, as mentioned above, there are—for want of a more “polite” term—“half-measures,” such as the Flash Sight Picture or Jim Cirillo’s technique. Mr. Cirillo’s technique entails aligning the entire handgun with the target when time is of the essence and the devil’s about to stick his hairy fingers up your nostrils. (If you can see part of one side of a semi-auto slide or if your

revolver’s cylinder looks elliptical instead of cylindrical, the gun isn’t aligned with the target.)

The bad news with both the Cirillo and Cooper Flash Sight systems is that you have to bring the pistol to eye level—and consequently extend your arm(s)—to execute the techniques. This can result in having the weapon removed from your possession in a close quarters conflict and subsequently inserted where the monkey put his peanuts.

Over the years, this author has had the privilege of meeting and knowing the Greats like Cooper and Cirillo, and even stood in awe watching Thell Reed hip-shoot a 10-inch steel plate three times out of five from 50 yards! But when it came to shooting for blood, these greats—and the Bill Jordans of the fighting world—used their sights. And while this writer is fast becoming an admitted curmudgeon—and almost dotard—and has to admit that he’s fallen off stepladders and motorcycles, I’ve yet to fall off a turnip truck.

Let it also be said before the reader assumes any ideas of bombast on this end that they are unfounded. This article is an analysis and diagnosis of shooting techniques—and whether current training isn't slightly tilted solely in one direction or the other, without thinking the problem through in its entirety.

There is at least one major law enforcement department which is currently teaching hip-shooting out to seven yards from the target. And even though you could probably teach an organ grinder's monkey to hit a massive flat piece of cardboard with this technique, it's not exactly going to be a roaring success in the street when innocent bystanders are dropping like tenpins from stray bullets. This isn't training for a gunfight; it's an exercise in futility on a huge paper target on a firing range.

On the other hand, this half-witted author is totally confused by the myriad of instructors yelling out the "front sight" litany hour upon hour until twilight. The trainees are then required to drill the target using "muscle memory" because there is now not enough ambient light to see their sights.

Here are the problems:

1. If this is such a good idea, why don't you just do this all the time, including daylight hours?

2. It's invariably executed on the same practice range, on the *same target*, the shooter has engaged all day long, with a safe backstop and a controlled firing line. Try this trick while your family is in the potential line of fire; moving, yelling, and fast regretting the day they ever became involved with you.

Somewhere there has to be a balance. There's a time and a place for sighted fire, unsighted fire, tritium sight inserts, and flashlights. Thirty years ago there was more leeway, both from a legal and time/distance aspect, to light up somebody who deserved it. Today one has to operate almost under French law principles, which often forces the Good to give the Bad and the Ugly an automatic time and distance advantage in an urban fight. Of course now that "crime is on the decrease," I assume everybody's rushing out to buy a turnip truck.

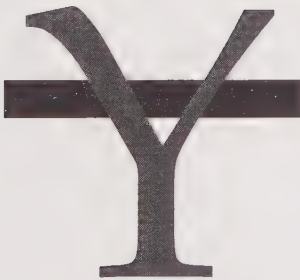
Litany or mantra, whatever you want to call it, you have three choices:

Let us pray, let us prey, or let us spray.

There's nothing like a gunfight to find out if your training techniques really work.

(This column originally appeared in the December 2001 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Quick versus Fast in a Gunfight



es, we've all heard it before. Focus on the front sight, press the trigger, and follow through.

So how come we continually miss cardboard and steel targets?

And oops—almost forgot—keep on having our hindquarters perforated in gunfights? Admittedly, any idiot or hardened veteran who's been the proud recipient of incoming projectiles will say that there's not much analogous between range training and a gunfight, but a substantial foundation vis-à-vis marksmanship and tactics can, indeed, be acquired on a range.

Let's face it, anything is better than being thrown into battle when you're still wet behind the ears—not a good place to start a learning-on-the-job career. Though many have succeeded, probably more have paid the ultimate price—it's called cannon fodder.

Shooting at inanimate, static, flat steel and paper targets should be easy, but it isn't. If it were, you're

not pushing your personal envelope. But the underlying concept is that if you can hit nine out of ten, you can also make it ten for ten—once you have the fundamentals of marksmanship, the rest is mental. Once you lose the mental aspect, the physical inconsistencies which cause misses go out the window straight afterwards.

Bruce Lee phrased this by saying that if you fill a cup with water, it becomes the cup. The average person can't—or won't—accept this visualization and usually winds up with both a broken cup and a water-drenched tablecloth. While he is widely acknowledged for his physical martial arts prowess, Lee's secret was his mental genius. He knew his full potential, and he also knew his personal limitations, and he never exceeded either. That's why people like Lee and Miyamoto Musashi were never beaten.

The specific firearms hit potential possibilities break down once the mind loses concentration and manifest themselves in a variety of ways. While, for example, most shooters know that yanking on a trigger will cause inaccurate hits, nowhere near as many realize that more shots are lost *after* the striker whacks the primer than before. This occurs primarily because immediately after the powder is ignited, the shooter relaxes *before the bullet exits the gun barrel*.

This, accompanied by the insatiable human desire for instant gratification—in this case, not refocusing on a metallic front sight—leads to the shootist looking for bullet impact before the weapon's firing cycle is completed.

This obviously results in an undesirable point of bullet impact or, with multiple rounds fired, an oversize group on the target—and misses in the street.

The only way out of this problem is to practice, with a handgun, the most difficult of all range drills—the single perfect shot, 25 yards, from the holster, 2 1/2-second total time frame. If you can put 25 consecutive rounds into a five-inch group, the water has become the cup.

The reason that this is such a demanding exercise is that everything has to be near perfect.

Any brainless ox can repeat drills which he knows he can perform, and while said drills will help maintain manipulation and dexterity skills, they do absolutely nothing to improve one's ability. All this does is maintain your current skill level and swell your ammunition expenditure allowance.

So it's back to the physics of the Art of Missing. And one of the most frequent psychological causes is that of trying too hard to make the too-perfect shot. The inevitable disaster runs something along the following lines.

Now you know you're on a specific time limit, the first thing on the Marksmanship Failure List is to either blow the drawstroke or, more commonly, to acquire a misaligned firing grip in the holster. "What the hell, just this once I'll get lucky and hit the target, even though I'm gripping the pistol like a baboon." That one's going to work about two seconds after Diogenes finds an honest man.

After that comes the vain attempt to hold the pistol in a rock-steady position, without the slightest evidence of a tremor, and then trying to time the trigger operation, sight alignment, and follow-through to the perfect moment in time when the bullet will leave the barrel when you want it to. The only problem with this is you're trying to outwit physics, and the gun always has one IQ digit more than the shooter.

Let the thing shake. As long as both sights shake together within the desired impact area on the target, who cares? The projectile will hit where it's supposed to.

Then come the inevitable trigger control problems, also caused by attempting to beat a self-imposed time frame. "Maybe if I slam the you-know-what out of the trigger, the bullet will travel downrange faster." Yup. Probably about three feet behind the herd of pigs that just flew overhead.

Last comes the big nemesis—follow-through.

The trigger has to be reset at the same speed it was retracted, the sights have to be realigned on the target's desired point of impact, and last but not least you have to lie to yourself that you will always be firing one more round—and you have to literally believe your own lies. Considering that most people these days seem to be adept at the art of deceiving others with terminological inexactitudes, it shouldn't be too much of a chore to believe one's own bovine excrement.

What this latter thought process does is to leave the wrist and elbow locked and achieve a myriad of required physical operations by the simple expedient of mental control.

Recently, this author conducted what was, to me at least, an interesting psychological experiment. Six shootists, one each in front of a remotely operated target. Distance, 15 feet. The targets turned to face the shooters, then turned away after 1 1/2 seconds. The initial target turn was the participants' cue to drag old Betsy out of the holster and fire a pair of projectiles into the respective cardboard targets' "x-ring."

Result? *Nobody* made an accurate second shot.

The second stage was to repeat the drill, but the shooters weren't told what the time limit was. This time they *all* made good hits on

NONTURNING targets. Slowest time—1.3 seconds. Now even though I have the IQ of a seagull, the biggest moron can deduce three things from the above experiment:

1. Reaction time will never beat action.
2. If you cannot hit accurately in 1.3 seconds working off a different start "stimulus" (in this case an audible beeper), you have an IQ less than a seagull's.
3. Visual perception is one of the most important human assets. (Once you've identified the desired impact area of a target you can hit it more quickly than if you have to acquire a visual impact point only after the drawstroke commences.)

The underlying message of this entire monologue is that you don't have to be fast in a gunfight, but you do need to be quick—and you might want to actually hit the target as an added bonus.

The water needs to become the cup. Once you understand Lee's genius, the trick is not to forget there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip.

(This column originally appeared in the February 2002 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Center of Mass— Sometimes It Isn't



In the vineyard of Life's battlefield, you can choose to be the vine, the raisin, or the grape press.

In a gunfight, you have to be the press—or sooner or later, like the well-preserved fine wine or the lowly raisin, you will be consumed. Which all leads to the matter of shot placement on a human adversary. One can argue ballistics until somebody opens a ski resort in Hell, but unless the enemy is hit by a projectile or projectiles, a ballistic confrontation is not likely to end with a satisfactory conclusion. You miss, you lose—it's that simple.

Before befuddled readers get the idea that their intelligence is being insulted, there actually is some deeper—and hopefully thought-provoking—content involved. And that subject revolves around the core matter of where and how to insert the bullet(s) at the required angle of incidence on a human target.

If you have a large target, there's good news and bad news. The good news is that he's so close

you don't have to worry about refinement of angles of entry to ensure deep, angular projectile penetration. All you need to be aware of is the background in the event of bullet overpenetration. Of course the bad news is if he's that large and close, and if the weapon's ballistics don't shut him down, you're up to your nasal cavities in midden.

So, excepting the above-mentioned "easy pickings" or the snooper-type shot where you can pick and choose the day and hour when Mr. Bullet Magnet is going to cheerfully place himself in front of the bullet path, the problem becomes one of quick thinking and geometry.

Obviously if you're "lucky" enough to be involved in a classic Hollywood-style *mano a mano* gunfight, where the two main participants march toward each other at high noon firing revolvers from the hip, you have a relatively large frontal-facing chest-abdominal target area. If that is the case for real, check your mailbox—somebody's probably already sent you some free tickets for the aforementioned ski resort.

What's under discussion in this specific article is the problem of surgically inserting rounds into some cretin who's sending incoming at you when he's proned out and you're not, or vice versa. Or he's angled—as in firing a rifle from offhand—and



Although this target may look easy, for deep bullet penetration and immediate incapacitation, projectiles would need to be inserted either into the top of the "bad guy's" head or between his head and his right shoulder.

he or you (or both) are moving. Or you have an unsafe backstop and have to lower or elevate your overall height to both neutralize the enemy and take background or foreground bystanders or barricades into consideration.

One can "what if" the scenarios ad nauseam, but the bottom line is that you have to put the bullets in deep to do corporal damage, and you have to hit one of the brain hemispheres if you need to shut down your target's computer. And while many people can envision the requisite angles of entry on nonhostile quadrupeds, bipeds and frontal-attacking quadrupeds seem to cancel out Man's ability to think.

That's why a novice hunter in Africa is in so much trouble with wounded dangerous game—and is very likely one of the root causes of why people often miss their intended target, even at close quarters, in the urban jungle.

Obviously you're pretty much slipping in your own feces under these circumstances, but assuming you can maintain mental control and have the rudiments of firearms manipulation and marksmanship, the rest becomes a matter of punching in the bullets where they'll do the damage and hoping the ballistics do what they're supposed to.

So it all comes down to geometry. If you can shoot into an eight-inch circle at 50 yards with a

pistol or hit a Pepper Popper at 300 yards with a rifle, that's all well and good. But all it really demonstrates is that you have marksmanship under control, assuming of course that the steel targets have been struck in the intended area. While Doctor Pepper's targets, in this author's brain-damaged opinion, are terrific training aids, all the rifleman has to do, in essence, is worry about windage. He'll still be accorded a "hit" even if he shoots a three-foot vertical group. Similarly, even though an eight-inch 50-yard pistol steel plate with peripheral hits scores points on a firing range, it may or may not mean that that specific marksman is capable of hitting a human at 10 feet, if the latter is not in the "conventional" belt-buckle-to-belt-buckle format.

While movement and action-reaction time are biggies in gunfights, most people under reactive duress will shoot for "center of mass." The problem is that Jeff Cooper's "center of mass"—like so many other things in recent years—has been bastardized and plagiarized to the extent that it has now been misconstrued as meaning center of mass of the upper torso—and this is not what he initially intended. The idea is to shoot center of mass of the part or portion of the target that you wish to strike—and this isn't always center of the upper torso.

Try shooting the center of mass of an incoming wounded lion, which is covering 25 feet every leap and bound (that's 100 yards covered in a dozen leaps, for the mathematically challenged), and you're probably Simba Steaks, unless you've either been there before or you are very, very good—or lucky.

A similar geometric problem would be, for example, if you were forced to shoot at somebody staged at the top of a steep flight of stairs. A head shot placed between his eyes, in this situation, might kill him but would probably not incapacitate him immediately, as the bullet would exit too far forward of the frontal lobes at the acute angle of insertion. Far better bullet placement, in this case, would be

underneath the chin to ensure brain penetration.

Another example would be somebody lying on a bed, reaching sideways for a weapon as you enter through the bedroom doorway. This might require initial projectile insertion through the lower abdomen if his head and feet were in line with the doorway, or low in the chest if he was side-on to your entrance. (Obviously, in the latter case, any high hits on a convex-shaped horizontal human would either be too shallow or ricochet off rib and chest bone structure, neither resulting in satisfactorily deep penetration.)

Of course all of this can be double-compounded at close quarters if you're using the now increasingly popular genre of high sight/low boreline carbines.

What can make precision shooting difficult with these weapons is if you're restricted to a specific small-target area, such as that offered by a partially tilted head. Within boreline/sightline distances you will be forced to hold high, which in itself is no big deal. What is a big deal, however, is if the subject has his head canted.

If only a bullet planted between his eyes will suffice, and if his head is leaned over to the shooter's left, Triggerman now has to instantly shift his point of aim to one o'clock high to puncture the shooter's snoutbox. Failure to remember this at contact distance with these weapons will result in the bullet's slicing through the target's right cheek (the shooter's left-side view)—definitely not a stopper.

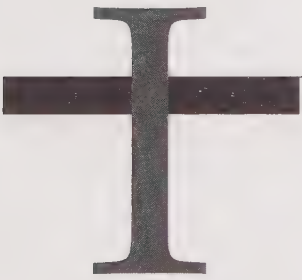
Sometimes you have to be a quick-thinking geometry genius to ventilate somebody's carcass . . . and then some days it requires no thought at all, and it's like taking candy from a baby. Either way, you don't want to end up as the wine or the raisin.

"To the Vintner Goes the Spoils."

—Alexander the Grape

(This column originally appeared in the March 2002 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The Southpaw's Tactical Advantage



It could only happen to me.

The restaurant is reasonably crowded, so I wind up with a booth adjacent to the kitchen. This is never a good location for me, as I always seem to be treated to a front-row performance of staff members physically reaffirming their amorous intentions towards each other or, more commonly, I get the privilege of seeing the cook who's preparing my food inspecting the contents of his sinuses.

But this time it's going well. Occasional glimpses through the bat's-wing doors reveal a clean kitchen, staff busily engaged in their chores, and the waitress is a princess. In fact, everything's too good to be true. Since I slithered out of bed 10 hours ago, nothing's gone wrong in my life. Everybody shot well, moved well, and executed admirable solutions to difficult tactical problems.

The old Sisyphean feeling of expectancy starts to rear its ugly head. And one more time I'm not disappointed. The Good Lord decides to honor me

once again with His sense of humor.

As the first sips of coffee help to unwind the mental strain from the day's activities, this neanderthal wanders out of the kitchen with a weed-whacker in his left hand. Now maybe it's just me, but this struck me as being a little out of the ordinary.

So I quickly go over everything in my mind, trying to find the piece which didn't fit in the jigsaw puzzle. Let's see: clean kitchen, pleasant staff, hot coffee, good training day, guy in restaurant with weed-whacker. Then it struck me. I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen someone emerging from a restaurant kitchen with a four-foot weed-whacker.

Obviously there could be only one of three reasons for the scene appearing before my eyes: either the restaurant had a problem with its salad shredder, one of the staff members was transferring a garden tool from the kitchen to his car, or last, but definitely not least—I was in for a Texas Weed-Whacker Massacre from hell. The fighting decision wasn't all that difficult to work out: if I heard a two-stroke engine fire up, a baker's dozen of .45s were going downrange. I wasn't about to even consider attempting the infamous "how to disarm a left-handed weed-whacker-wielding maniac" technique.

You don't have to play kissy-face with a southpaw's boxing glove for too long before you realize that a left-hander has certain tactical advantages.

And even though the modern world caters primarily to the right-handed person, Lefty is



There's a reason why one needs to have ambidextrous prowess with a handgun. . . .

often better off with firearms—or weed-whackers—designed supposedly for right-handed manipulation, most of the time. Guns designed with centrally located appendages—such as the manual safeties on Mossberg shotguns and Garand-style rifles, or, for example, the magazine release mechanisms on the FN-FAL or H&K levers—are “equal opportunity” systems.

Where the Pandora's Box comes into effect, however, is during the day-to-day operation of “common” carry weapons like the ubiquitous semi-auto pistol. While the “normal” port-side magazine release button—and the European heel-clip release system, for that matter—is no biggie to manipulate, the off-beat levers such as fitted to the H&K P7 family of handguns can be awkward to operate. Additionally, there's the anomaly of such pistols as the Sig-Sauer, which offer a reversible magazine catch but also turn a left-hand-only double-feed clearance into a nightmare—unless you know the trick—because of the unconventional location of the slide lock lever.

So the question becomes, who cares about left-handers anyway? After all, they're in the minority, and we all know that the majority rules. And the answer is you'll be the one who cares when you're in a real gunfight with a rifle or shotgun and you've taken rounds in your right arm, or when your specially designed contact lens or eyeglasses are buried in a foot of mud on some Godforsaken battlefield 2,000 miles from home.

The message here, in case it's been lost in

the translation, is that you had better be able to operate *ALL* of your firearms ambidextrously. And ambidextrous doesn't mean drawing your pistol right-handed, transferring it to your left paw, and then shooting a range drill left-handed. That may demonstrate "weak-hand" shooting prowess, but the chances in a fight of your taking a hit as you're transferring the handgun from hand to hand are the same numerical likelihood as this author falling pregnant.

And by the way, why were you transferring the pistol in the first place if you weren't disabled? It's called playing games on a firing range. Apart from marksmanship, this has absolutely no correlation to weak-handed gunfighting.

Yes, it's a pain in the rear end to manipulate some firearms left-handed, but it's not as much of a big deal as people make out. Nobody wrote in stone, for example, that you have to use your left hand to cycle the action on a bolt rifle when shooting southpaw. In fact, it's faster to manipulate a right-handed bolt action with your right mitt when firing from the left shoulder—and you don't have to break your firing grip, either to run the bolt or to load.

The "joke" of all the left-hand jokes is that a southpaw is usually more difficult to fight than a "conventional" opponent. He's learned to

work around a right-handed-thinking world since he was a pup, unlike the easy path others had to tread. Consequently, Necessity became the Mother of Invention, and he usually learned to perform operations both left- *AND* right-handed, again unlike his counterpart.

He fought right-handers at grade school, in the boxing ring, and on the battlefield; and not only has he practiced gun and knife take-aways against right-handers, he thinks and maneuvers with the left brain. And if you think all of the preceding is drivel, that is, of course, the reader's prerogative. But before you dismiss all of the above, try throwing a baseball left-handed and see if you don't feel like a three-year-old klutz. There's a reason the great Musashi started fighting with a sword in each hand. If you can't think *AND PERFORM* like a southpaw, you will be beaten by a southpaw.

While you're at it, you might want to practice some east- and westpaw fighting as well, in the event that you aren't lucky enough to come up against a fellow northpaw.

What happened to our horticulturist friend? He strolled through the restaurant and on out to the parking lot. The scariest part of the whole deal is none of the patrons even noticed him.

(This column originally appeared in the May 2002 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The Difference Between a High IQ and Battle Smarts



here are times when you can be too intelligent for your own good.

One of the times this anomaly occurs is during the process of discharging a firearm. While in general, there are only a few specific mechanical operations that have to be executed to accurately deliver a projectile to a target, we all seem to miss on occasion for no apparent reason.

On a recent sojourn I met up with some old acquaintances who are a band of the very few modern-day gunfighters who've really been and done. They've never started a fight, they've never lost a fight, and they don't run their mouths—professionals to a man. Unlike the new Young Turks who talk the talk, these men have walked the walk—and they don't miss.

Like the lone sniper, they have the psychological makeup to be marksmen, as opposed to accurate shooters. The not-so-subtle difference between somebody who can shoot

accurately and a marksman is that the latter can hit his chosen target, under battle conditions—*ON DEMAND*. While the marksman can place precision rounds on a paper target, the reverse is rarely the case with the firing range fundi—especially during multiple for-real encounters.

And even though the true sniper needs precision equipment, his marksmanship is more dependent on his knowledge and experience of come-ups and doping than any thousand-dollar snooperscope. Without this knowledge, and an emotionless, single-minded psychological approach to his art, the ability to transform an enemy's head into grapefruit at 200 yards comes to naught.

So it comes full circle back to intelligence and the difference between a high IQ and wisdom—otherwise known as battle smarts. Being an invited member of Mensa is admirable in its own right, but the graveyard is filled with geniuses killed in battle. The difference between the highly intelligent noncombatant and the battle-worn vet is that the former will attempt to bury the hatchet with dialogue—the soldier will bury the hatchet in his enemy's skull.

When it comes to practicing marksmanship on a firing range, the highly intelligent man usually becomes his own nemesis. Conditioned to analyzing everything down to the nth degree, once Einstein lines up gunsights on a target the rot sets in. Firstly, the fact that he can't hold a pistol on target without the vestige of a trace of movement bothers him. So he attempts to stabilize the weapon on a tiny point of reference until blood pumps through his carotid and his eyeballs explode.

At this stage the secondary problem rears its ugly head. Just prior to eyeball disintegration, the decision to fire the shot is made. This naturally leads to the cardinal sin of trying to "time" the shot, to try to "tell" the striker when to impact the cartridge primer. Unfortunately the pistol is always that teeny little bit more intelligent than the operator.

This in turn leads to a Pandora's Box of disaster. Trigger control goes by the board, the shooter's focal plane dances from front sight to target to rear sight and all stations in between; and if by some freak of fate the front sight is in focus at the moment of percussion, it won't be when the bullet leaves the barrel because the prime cause of lost shots—poor follow-through—will undoubtedly be next. Lack of follow-through after ignition will cause more wild shot placement than all other root causes combined.

So all you've got for overthinking a simple problem is a blown shot. And if you try to fix it by trying harder the next time, you'll find out that the harder you try, the worse it gets.

Experiment: Take what may initially seem like a relatively large target, such as, for example, a quart water bottle. Place it halfway up a safe, soft sand perpendicular backstop. Invite a dozen pistol shooters who have received only the rudimentary basics of handgun shooting to fire one *quick* round at the plastic bottle from 25–30 yards' distance, emphasizing only the terms "quick," "trigger control," and "follow-through."

Net result: Several direct hits, several rounds missing by the margin of a frog's hair, and several missing by a slightly wider margin. The object of the exercise is to illustrate that very little is required to hit a relatively small target as long as one sticks to basics and doesn't overthink the problem. Request the same shooters to concentrate on sight alignment, sight picture, stance, firing grip, and trigger control, and ask them to hit the bottle with a single, slow, precise round—and most will miss by a country mile. Mind games.

And the big joke of the experiment is the fact that the water bottle is half the width of the required impact area on an average humanoid paper training target—missed by many polished shooters from half the above distance.

Or if they can hit the stationary paper target on demand, the latter will often miss a like-sized

reactionary steel target. So much for so-called advanced marksmanship training. If you don't have mental control, you may as well waste your widow's legacy on one of the ubiquitous "accurized" pistol barrels which shoot into an inch at 50 yards—so you can shoot a 10-inch group at 15 feet in a gunfight.

No, my *Unforgiven* acquaintances aren't geniuses. But they aren't stupid either—and they haven't missed yet. And, yes, I'd sooner be

a blissfully ignorant bumblebee that can fly than crash and burn after an intellectual physicist enlightens me to the fact that the laws of physics supposedly don't apply to a yellow and black insect.

There's only one gunfighter you will never, ever beat—yourself.

(This column originally appeared in the June 2002 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Train Like You'd Like to Think You'd Fight



things that come to those who wait may have been left there by those who got there first.

All the axioms like “Train like you fight; fight like you train,” and “Under duress you will revert back to your training” are all well and good—up to a point. But the successful outcome of battle is more dependent on common sense than genius.

And common sense dictates that no matter how much you train and how many scenarios you practice, you can bet your bottom dollar that the one situation you had not envisioned during training is the one in which you’ll become embroiled when the poo-poo flies. This stems from the paradoxical guarantee that a battle plan will always go to hell immediately after hostilities begin—which means that you have to be able to react to an unexpected situation, irrespective of whether or not initial action was proactive on your part.

Part of the problem is we tend to fight like we train, and if you train unrealistically, your hopes of

success in battle could well be dashed. While this may be overstating the obvious, some of the current commonly accepted range training may not be as realistic as it might seem at first glance.

One of the unfortunate aspects of training with firearms is that you can't fully emulate a gunfight without having somebody returning fire, or without sacrificing a certain element of range safety—and safety is absolutely nonnegotiable. So targets have to be placed in specific positions relative to backstops, body positions and fields of fire have to be adopted relevant to the elevation of berms, and range drills have to be conducted on the basis of safety to all personnel present.

This automatically starts you off X percent behind the power curve, but it is unavoidable. What is avoidable, however—as has been preached (possibly presumptuously) in this column for more than a decade—is the use of one-dimensional and nonmoving targets, lack of cognizance of action/reaction times, and assumptions that your enemy will invariably be standing on his hind paws and facing straight on and perfectly perpendicular. Obviously this bears no relation to a fight in a crowded restaurant when you are blindsided by a pair of goons while you're surreptitiously trying to gnaw through the last string of dangling spaghetti without your newly introduced in-laws noticing—and your pistol drawstroke is hampered by a napkin draped over your nether regions.

Another notion—in this author's opinion—is the one in which it's assumed that a very good shottist will automatically be a good fighter. This isn't necessarily the case—and often isn't. While all and sundry are enamored of quotes like those of Steinbeck's King Arthur "the final weapon is the brain" ilk, most don't really and truly practice the theme, relying more on shooting expertise than situational analysis, movement, attacking and defending from nonconventional body positions, etc.

And if you choose quotations as your

fighting guideline, remember a Hemingway quote: "Certainly there is no hunting like the hunting of a man, and those who have hunted armed men long enough . . . never really care for anything else thereafter."

Any idiot can knock Bambi on his butt from 100 yards with a rifle—it's a whole different ball game when you stare into somebody's eyes from four feet away and then realize that either you gouge out those eyeballs or you're going to die, because you can't get to your cunningly concealed pistol in time. Unless you're very, very lucky, you probably won't be able to access a weapon if Simian charges you from twenty feet, let alone four.

So you practice what you preach, right? Hopefully, but so often the best-laid plans of mice and men. . . .

I'm sitting in a traffic jam minding my own business, and I notice this large, almost-human-like critter bail out of a pickup truck about four or five vehicles ahead of me and start heading at a rapid pace between the two lanes of gridlocked vehicles—and he's wielding a lug wrench. Assuming that the driver immediately behind him had somewhat irritated him, I waited for the ringside entertainment—but he bypassed that car and the next and the next.

At this stage of the proceedings, I realize two things: (a) I'm next in line, and (b) he's glaring at my truck, obviously hell-bent on destruction. Slowly—in retrospect, too slowly—I finally slipped from Orange to Red. The net result, if it wasn't such a sphincter-shrinker, was the almost comical look on his countenance when he realized his lug wrench was going to take second place to my 12 gauge. He departed a lot faster than he arrived, and I can only assume that he mistook my truck for someone else's with whom he'd had a prior encounter.

The point is not to impress the reader with egotistical war stories, but to revert to the "train like you fight" syndrome, which, since that incident, I've revised for my own personal defense

to “train like you’d like to think you’d fight.”

And this is the reason: as the fad of carjacking had become popular almost simultaneously with concealed carry in my home state—and never having felt that anything but a cross-draw holster would be quick enough for me for anti-carjacking purposes—I’d had the brilliant idea of secreting a fast-accessible pistol in the truck for just such an occasion. And, yes, I had put in enough practice with the system for four years to have it down by rote. When it came to working off reflexes, however, I’d never even subconsciously thought of reaching for the Hi-Power, but had instead grabbed a shotgun that happened to be to hand—a weapon with which I’d never trained to use under the above-mentioned circumstances.

So much for preplanning—I was just plain damn lucky. Of course the cardinal mistake I’d made is that I’d trained for a carjacking, and my 1 1/2 brain cells didn’t read the “unusual” situation—and required response—quickly enough simply because the physics of the scenario had changed 1 percent. One more embarrassing hemorrhoid on the rear end of my life.

Patience may be a virtue, and maybe all good things come to those who wait, but it must be balanced with action and alacrity when your life’s at stake. If you don’t have a brain, it doesn’t matter how well you shoot.

(This column originally appeared in the July 2002 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Question Authority



Light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.

At the initial stage of any learning curve—whatever the subject—anybody who has been involved in that field for half a second longer than the novice initially appears to be a genius. Anything the experienced person states is accepted as if it was the Eleventh Commandment.

As the beginner's ability improves, he's delighted when his expertise reaches an "acceptable" or "expected" level, relative to whatever his peers feel it should be at that stage. Then comes the beginning of the final stage of learning: when you realize that you have hardly scratched the surface of knowledge in your chosen field, that you don't know half of what you thought you knew 20 years earlier—and that you should have asked questions of your pedagogues instead of accepting everything on blind faith.

If, for example, a computer wizard is currently



Trainees operating from an “ambushed” vehicle. For dynamic training drills like this, one safety officer per shooter is mandatory.

regarded as being so intelligent, how come only one man has ever worked out how the Egyptian pyramids were constructed—50 years before modern computers were on the drawing board? Pushing the correct buttons by rote on a machine may allow you to arrive at specific answers to specific questions, but that doesn't denote intelligence: that's akin to saying monkeys launched into space 40 years ago were astronauts.

Similarly, the novice firearms trainee can attain an average level of marksmanship ability relatively quickly, but if he doesn't understand *WHY* he's performing certain physical manipulations, and consequently analyze and question various techniques, he'll never be a marksman. And a marksman, by definition, is one who can hit his mark *ON DEMAND*, not merely somebody who launches projectiles or impact weapons downrange.

While the accomplished warrior can truly learn his trade only at the school of hard knocks, some of the fighter's requisite assets can be attained before having to experience actual combat. And one of the facets essential to the gunfighter is obviously that of having the

comprehension and capability to achieve marksmanship when under duress. Even though the ability to shoot accurately is important, it's not that big a percentage of the warrior's makeup—the gun is, after all, only a mechanical implement. But it would be a bonus to your longevity if you actually hit your enemy with bullets instead of merely making loud noises and hosing innocent third parties with lead when you trip the trigger.

The base differences between shooting range targets and drilling people are mental attitude and staying with basic firearms manipulation fundamentals, no matter how ugly or bizarre the circumstances become in a rencounter. If you don't have the mind-set and if you don't stay with basic marksmanship principles, the only other way you'll win a bullet bash is if you have more luck than anyone deserves—or if you're a theologian.

One of the problems with firing range training is that one can be lulled into a false sense of security—albeit unintentionally—by possible misconceptions about one's perceived shooting prowess. Perforating a piece of flat

cardboard with an eight-to-ten-inch group may look good in theory, but conversely, it's not necessarily a true reflection of adequate field marksmanship. Five-inch groups in the torso area are more realistic, even though larger diameter shot groups may suffice in a fight.

Some common misconceptions encountered during training are that "good enough is good enough," that "slight accuracy problems are acceptable," and such others like "if I miss him with the first couple I'll tag him with the remaining contents of the magazine." Unfortunately, "if," "but," and "maybe" are not very comforting when it comes down to rolling the Tombstone Dice. You have to impact the target with surgical accuracy to be in with half a chance of winning. The rest is up to ballistics and the recipient's state of mind when the projectiles strike.

So it comes full circle back to the initial foundation laid down during basic training—because there is no such thing as an advanced gunfight. Question your teacher, instructor, coach, or anybody else whom you regard as a luminary

on the subject until you find out why you have a consistent two-inch lateral bullet drift on your target, or why you can't cut split times to a satisfactory pace. There are many nuances to the art of shooting, even though it's easy to explain basic principles to somebody. The problem is that everybody is, to a greater or lesser extent, different—mentally and anatomically—and the trick is to be able to analyze and correct the individual's root problem.

If this is not done at the formative stage, one can spend literally years and thousands of rounds of ammo perfecting garbage. Knowledge of anatomy and amateur psychology are almost mandatory to become a true marksman—and going into battle with anything less is relying on pure dumb luck.

If somebody appears to be bright, by all means Walk Toward the Light. But you may want to pack a pair of sunglasses and a toilet roll in your range bag, just in case.

(This column originally appeared in the September 2002 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Shotgun Chokes and Patterns

N

ow that we have the answer, what exactly was the question?

So many countless hours of discussion, arguments, dialogues, monologues, and diatribes, and gallons of printers' ink have been expended on the subject of shotgun chokes and patterns that it probably warrants another look—not from the theoretical perspective, but from that of the gunfighter.

The actual mechanical choking of a fighting scattergun barrel—unlike that of a skeet or wing-shooting tube—is almost irrelevant. While a full choke barrel will give you somewhere around 70 percent of shot pattern *density*, it will not necessarily result in that amount of *overall* pellet pattern impacting inside a 30-inch circle at 40 yards. And that is the gist of the problem because that's how a shotgun choke is measured.

If the above is taken into contention, it's obvious that it matters not one whit whether you



From top to bottom: Remington 870, Winchester 97, Remington 11-87, and Rhodesian A5 Browning. Because of the vagaries of buckshot patterns, their dad prefers to feed these children a steady diet of slugs only.

buy a full choke or cylinder bore barrel, because the gunfighter's dilemma is that of delivering as much lead poisoning downrange as necessary to stop the enemy—without tagging innocents with errant pellets. And your name doesn't have to be Einstein to realize that this is more dependent on knowledge of one's overall pattern circumference than the inconsequentials of only a certain portion of the entire payload's pattern density. A cylinder bore, or "riot" gun, for example, will often measure less edge to edge on a pattern sheet than some improved cylinder or full chokes.

While custom barrel chocking (and chokes, for that matter) are available, for various reasons nobody can guarantee shot pattern diameter at relative distances. Every barrel throws a different diameter payload downrange, every change of ammunition brand will alter said diameter, and even extremes in weather temperature will affect performance. At the time of this writing, for what it's worth, the two tightest patterning buckshot loads in most

guns are manufactured by Estate and Hornady—but it cannot be overemphasized that the operative word is "most," and it's a toss-up as to how any individual barrel will perform until it's physically fired on paper.

Couple the above information to the fact that most law enforcement agencies and military units are obligated to use issue ammo, and in addition often have to share one gun among several officers, and the entire discussion of chokes and pattern sizes becomes a Pandora's Box of semantics. Let's face it, if your high-dollar choke alteration punches nine 00 pellets into an eight-inch circle at 25 yards, is another three- or four-inch spread any worse—at a target distance of 900 inches? The answer is probably no.

Would anybody be content with a rifle that shot an eight-inch group at 25 yards? Obviously not. If one considers that a single buckshot pellet can cause a fatality at 70 to 80 meters, the discussion becomes almost ludicrous. So the whole situation for the fighting man boils down

to the same old solution—if the Almighty hadn't wanted Man to exercise intelligence, He would have used a block of wood to separate our ears instead of inserting a brain.

If you want tight patterns to emanate from the front end of your shotgun, either use Billings' Choke single-projectile buckshot or go to nice, fat chunks of lead—they're called slugs. Either way, in 12 gauge you'll have a .70-caliber single projectile until the payload makes Mister Enemy's acquaintance (assuming you're not using caliber-reducing sabots). Should somebody decide to argue with the business end of a shotgun at close quarters, it won't make any difference if you use 00, #1, 000, #4 buckshot, or slugs—nothing out to eight or nine feet is going to make larger than a one-to-two-inch entrance hole unless you have a rifled barrel.

Obviously, if you make contact at further distances and you utilize conventional shot pellet loads, pattern spread will be inversely proportionate to distance. The shooter's problem remains the same whether he is firing a shotgun, rifle, or crossbow—accuracy, coupled with situational awareness of (and responsibility for) innocents who may be located in front of, behind, or beside the shootee(s).

This is easy meat when you're playing static training range games but not so easy when

you're pushed by coaches who've kicked the proverbial elephant in the rear end, know how the game really works, and resultantly "force" the trainee to hop around like an Easter bunny at different distances while delivering multi-projectile shotgun rounds at moving targets. Because that's what you have to do in a real fight if you don't have cover—unless you want to "stand up like a man" and be a bullet magnet.

That's when all the neat little theories go to hell in a hand basket, and reading the surroundings and training become a lot more important than the inconsequentials of whether one shotgun's pattern size is three inches bigger or smaller than the next at conventional gunfight distances. You don't have a convenient geometry calculator bolted to your front sight when you're doing a Jesse Owens bullet bash.

And if you want to "hold off" so you don't hit Snookums in the beak while you attempt to send half a buckshot load into her hostage-taker's countenance, knock yourself out—it's not my wife. Of course they're both going to be moving and yelling like there's no tomorrow—and for one of them there won't be.

So many buckshot pellets, so few wives. . . .

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Don't Outsmart Yourself

S

o there's this character with a gasoline-powered engine strapped to his back.

It's a long time ago, he's standing in the middle of his front lawn, and I'm figuring he's mistaken Jules Verne's literary work for an aeronautics textbook and is about to attempt a self-propelled launch into the stratosphere.

There's a cacophony of sound, a long vacuum-cleaner-like hose emanates from the front of his carcass, and all of a sudden leaves are expelled from the neighbor's presence like the parting of the Red Sea. To my amazement, somebody in his infinite wisdom had invented a machine to replace the humble garden rake.

At first glance the leaf-blower may seem to be a great piece of equipment. But as you examine the problem from a different angle, you realize that it doesn't really achieve any more than many of the current rash of garbage items available for firearms that will supposedly "guarantee an increase in

accuracy/reduce recoil/provide a more secure firing grip/improve reliability," etc., etc. Unfortunately many apparent Smart Bombs have turned out to be Stupid Bombs in recent conflicts around the world, and very few firearms aren't inherently more accurate than the operator—box stock from the factory.

Whether it's a bomb, a gun, or a baseball, its terminal effect is only as good as the performer using the equipment. It's a sorry reflection on the firearms competition world when eyebrows are raised at the success of a shottist when he actually uses a stock gun. The number of people on this entire planet who need a \$150 "accurized" barrel in a pistol can comfortably fit in a gnat's eye with room to spare. When you're shooting at an 18-inch-wide target and receiving 40 percent accreditation for "nicking" the edge of the target at seven yards, maybe you don't really need a barrel that supposedly will put perfectly handloaded bullets into one inch at 50 yards.

John Wesley Hardin had somewhere between a confirmed 27 and 50 body count before he was finally assassinated in El Paso—and he achieved this by mental control, rigorous practice, physical ability, and a habit of always carrying two guns. The more things change, the more they stay the same. . . .

Where the leaf-blower and many modern firearms training and competition curricula fall under the same umbrella is that they don't actually achieve what they set out to do—however unintentional that may be. While the leaf-blower may or may not make your lawn look presentable until the next gust of wind occurs, all you're actually doing is making noise and selfishly redistributing leaves from your own property onto that of your neighbor.

And when he buys a blower, guess where his dead leaves end up? It's a Ferris-wheel stop-gap, not a cure. Neither of the two blowers is destroying leaves. All they're doing is giving a false illusion that the leaves are disappearing.

Similarly, if somebody is going to be given a percentage accreditation for peripheral hits or told that "at least 50 percent" of your chassis must be concealed behind a barricade during a competition, don't say that the competition is simulating street practicality. If half of your rear end is exposed to enemy fire, you are probably going to take half of his rounds in the butt.

The other end of the spectrum is trying to shoot "too accurately." Perverse as this may sound, as explained in prior "Training and Tactics" articles, this mental overload is often the cause of worse results on the target than if you'd stayed with the initial Golden Rule game plan of shooting for center of mass of an overall area. Obviously some targets are smaller than others—often because of distance, but equally as often because of the amount of human target area available at the moment the shot has to be taken.

A common problem on a practice range is a group size disproportionately larger than the shottist's ability at a given distance. If, for example, Shooter A is asked to fire several rounds at the upper torso of a classic one-dimensional vertical IPSC-shaped cardboard target, he'll shoot a respectably sized group. Ask the same shooter to fire head shots on the same piece of cardboard, and the group size often expands dramatically.

Even if you have the IQ of a drain plug, it's apparent that the shooter in question doesn't have a mechanical/physical marksmanship problem—he has a mind control problem. Instead of merely aiming center of mass of a six-inch-square piece of cardboard, he'll insist on trying to add a third nostril to the absolute dead center of the head—and resultantly overthinks the problem to the extent that he'll violate every marksmanship principle known to Man. Peripheral hits, misses, and even rounds ending up in the neck and shoulder area abound. Obviously if you can shoot a two-inch rapid-fire group on an 18-inch wide target from seven

yards, you can shoot a two-inch rapid-fire group on a six-inch square piece of cardboard from seven yards. The only difference is whether or not you choose to let the target dictate to you or vice versa.

In ancient times there was an instrument called a garden rake. You dragged the tines across the grass, picked up the pile of dead leaves, and got rid of them forever by burning them with one match. Now you have gas-and-electricity-guzzling machines that cunningly redistribute the leaves into your neighbor's swimming pool.

The former required a little more physical exertion but got the job done every time. The latter looks good at face value but in reality is about as effective as strapping an extra pair of wings on an ostrich—that chicken just isn't going to fly.

Do it right or don't do it at all. It makes no difference if you looked good in a real gunfight. If you lose, you're still just as dead as an ugly dinosaur.

(This column originally appeared in the November 2002 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The Overlooked Aspect of Fighting



ld Man, how is it that you see all these things?”

Vision, or more precisely visual perception, constitutes a huge percentage of the marksman/tactician’s faculties—and, resultantly, his ability to perform in a firefight. And though this may seem like overstating the obvious, therein lies the rub.

So much emphasis is placed on the gun during firearms training that it is prioritized almost to the exclusion of everything else. And while a gun is a relatively important piece of equipment for a gunfight, you can run and fight without a gun—but you can’t run and gun if you don’t have any fight in you. Fighting is older than guns, and the ability to be a top-notch fighter is based on the primary requisite of being able to utilize one’s senses to the utmost.

Proactive and reactive movement is essential during a sustained attack, and apart from prior knowledge of terrain, tactics and movement are

primarily reliant on information relayed to the brain by one's eyes. The bad news is that Modern Man—primarily the urbanite—has lost the ability to use his vision correctly, either because of reliance on replacement computerized technology or through lack of use. (For "lack of use" read "doesn't need to use.")

In other words, in today's society most of the time you don't have to use your eyes as they were intended to be used because most of the time objects and situations are repetitive, and it doesn't require conscious thought to make it through the day. Then it comes to Fight Night, and all of a sudden you have to use your vision to facilitate movement and counterattack, and you haven't used your eyes to their potential since you were an adolescent—and now it's too little too late to relearn the technique in a 10-second crash course.

Eyes work like a camera—they send a billion pieces of information to the brain per minute. The problem is that the brain has to assimilate and process all this data and then transmit a few select commands that it requires the body extremities to perform. If you train with your eyes as rigorously as you train, for example, to attain a quick, consistent pistol drawstroke—or if you don't let the old China Blues become lazy and complacent over the years—you'll be way ahead of the game when you need your God-given senses.

Most people accept Tunnel Vision as an absolute—but then most people will answer the phone when a Village calls, looking for its missing Idiot. Yes, you'll get tunnel vision and auditory exclusion if your pulse rate hits 140-plus, but there are ways of training to slow down your pulse so tunnel vision isn't mandatory; it's a function of the Pavlov's Dog syndrome. The louder the bell rings, the faster the dog runs; the bigger the knife, the more you soil your foundation garments.

Several centuries ago, martial artists trained to counter a three-pronged attack, which meant

that they had to maintain as wide a field of vision as possible, even when under duress. Today, the urban dweller buys a wide-screen TV. This is what is euphemistically referred to as progress. The trick is not to have an enlarged or split-screen television set—the trick is to be able to watch three different programs on three adjacent TV screens and to be able to assimilate the treble information simultaneously.

Several years ago someone decided to regurgitate the principle of visually checking a full 360 degrees as best as possible after downing an adversary. A couple of years later it became "fashionable" as a training technique, and as is so often the case, some of the initial concept became lost in the translation. The trickle-down effect has resulted in legions of people now dumping a couple of rounds into a single cardboard target, then immediately swiveling their heads around like something from *The Exorcist*.

With your head rotating at this speed, all you'll be able to see is a six-ton elephant 10 feet behind you. A human adversary probably won't even be seen because the brain is being overcrowded with input when the eyes are working at this pace—the lens and shutter are working, but there's no film in the camera.

For example, if you've lived in a two-story house for 10 years and don't know how many vertical struts support the staircase banister rail, you're not using your eyes. Let's face it, you've looked at the same scene for a decade, your eyes have photographed the scene, but the brain has cast out the information as inconsequential. While there's nothing wrong with that in itself, soon everything becomes inconsequential, and you wind up not seeing objects at which you're looking.

Looking doesn't necessarily mean *SEEING*, and to have a full fighting toolbox, one has to be able to *SEE* and *DIAGNOSE* to be a winner, even under stress. There's a reason most people turn to optical correction on their 40th birthday.

At that age many urbanites' lives have become a humdrum rat race, there is no desire to open up one's eyes to new worlds and to learn, and we don't exercise and/or utilize our eyes beyond the daily level of complacency. The eye muscles become lazy, and the primary organ of vision—the brain—is not used to potential.

A rural dweller or a warrior will use his eyes—and consequently his brain—to the best of his ability, and *AUTOMATICALLY*, because his very existence depends on it.

It shouldn't take a sniper training session before an adult has to be taught observation techniques. If you don't keep your senses honed, you may as well exist in Condition White and never see trouble coming; realize that

you'll be unnecessarily punched, kicked, stabbed, or shot in a fight; or hit from behind when switching traffic lanes because you can't expect your vision to work and set up mental reaction under duress when it hasn't been refined and exercised to work under low-stress, everyday, mundane conditions.

It's nice to have a gun for a gunfight, but it's even better to literally see the trouble coming and avoid the encounter if at all possible.

"Old Man, how is it that you see all these things?"

"Young Man, how is it that you do not?"

(This column originally appeared in the January 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Fighting Is a Thinking Man's Game



here are times when one is reduced to the circumstance that so enraged Patrick Henry—that of not being legally allowed to carry a weapon for self-defense purposes.

While laws of the land have to be in existence—and obeyed—for purposes of maintaining public safety, honest, hard-working citizens often have to pay the dues. Which means that while the crook is laughing up his sleeve, the law-abiding members of society often cannot carry the Number One choice—a pistol—for defending themselves against a deadly force attack.

All is not lost, however, because of the simple fact that people managed with other grab-and-go alternate weapons long before firearms were invented. Unless you are taking incoming projectiles from a distance, you're in with a chance. Because most urban, day-to-day conflicts occur within arm's length—and as long as you have a fighting spirit and the will to win—even firearms

and blades in an assailant's hands can be defeated most of the time. An explosive, instantaneous counterattack to turn the action/reaction tables is mandatory, but what is often overlooked is the fact that if you're cold-cocked, you probably won't be able to draw your pistol from a holster anyway, unless you have the luxury of foot movement. If you read the recent contributions to *S.W.A.T. Magazine* from Jeff Gonzales and Pat Rogers on response time and mental conditioning, read them again—and again and again.

In recent years the gun has often taken precedence over the brain in firearms training, which, in this scribe's personal opinion, is the exact antithesis of what is required in a close quarters fight. If you can't gain access to your pistol fast, or even if you don't have one on your person—or instantly available—it doesn't mean you automatically lose.

FIGHTING IS A



Anything that can be held in a human hand can be used as an improvised weapon. Welcome to the Club. . . .

THINKING MAN'S GAME.

Almost anything within the immediate surroundings of the average urbanite lends itself to being used as a weapon at any given time. The trick is to recognize the value of everyday mundane objects as a potential defensive weapon. You don't have to be a martial arts sensei to survive a confrontation, even though proficiency in Karate, Jeet Kune Do, Savate, etc., would obviously be a major asset.

Typical locations of personal attack are so consistent that they can almost be written down on a checklist: gas stations, car washes, shopping mall parking lots, inside one's house, etc. So here's the crux: what do you have *INSTANTLY* available to hand at, for example, a gas station? Well, golly gee whiz, let me think about this. How would you like a faceful of gasoline squirted up your proboscis, in your eyes, and then have the muzzle of the pump jammed down your throat? The weapon is

already to hand, and it's a function of the same old game—action/reaction and immediate response to a threat.

How did you know the problem was approaching? Stay in Condition Yellow, keep your eyes and ears open, and if you absolutely have to turn your back to the world at large while you're pumping gas, use the reflective surface of the car windows to check your Six. Is this paranoia? Maybe, but there's no harm in being careful and observant, as opposed to skulking around looking for a bandit behind every bush—or living in Condition White.

Left the pump in automatic mode inserted into the gas tank while you were cleaning the windshield? Belt him with the squeegee or douse him with windshield cleaning fluid. Better yet, carry your own squeeze bottle of washer fluid and a squeegee. Now you have weapons in both hands—one impact weapon and another one that can be used to squirt a jet of ammonia/petroleum distillate into the Texaco Terrorist's eyes.

Ever been smacked with a steering wheel Club or squirted with the contents of a Fix-a-Flat® aerosol can? Then of course there's the old favorite—the wheel nut lug wrench. Or a fire extinguisher, or a simple broken compact disc for those *Dr. No* slashing "Oddjobs," a hot oil dipstick. The list is endless.

Does this author suggest that you carry a baseball bat in your car for defense? No. Apart

from the fact that it's illegal in some areas, the entire point is that (a) there are plenty of weapons available in and in close proximity to any vehicle, and (b) a gas station is not the most brilliant location to engage in a gunfight, for obvious reasons—even if you could access your pistol in time.

Car washes are another popular place for assaults. So the next question for Mister Badboy is does he want to be high-pressure washed, rinsed, waxed, and then tied up like a chicken with the hose, which is much thinner than a gas pump hose—or does he simply want an internal oral enema from the high-pressure wand?

A man's home is his castle—and like a castle has so many defensive weapons available that it doesn't even warrant running on and on, boring the reader to tears.

The gist of this article is to point out that if you're not prepared to fight, you don't deserve to live. Yes, when it comes to firearms and knife carry laws, sometimes politicians tend to come up with a legal cocktail composed of oral diarrhea and mental constipation. That doesn't mean you have to curl up into a fetal ball and die.

In the firearms training field we tend to lose sight of the fact that not every fight is a gunfight. Use whatever means are at hand to get the job done. Fighting fair—or unprepared—is for fools.

(This column originally appeared in the February 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

No Battle Plan Ever Runs Perfectly



he only thing you can guarantee when the chips are down is that the buffalo's stomach is empty.

Short of that, anything else in a fight is based on percentages. Whatever you practice on a firing range, you can bet that Mr. Murphy will modify a fight situation enough that you'll have to deviate from your initial brilliant game plan. Whether it's by 5 percent or 90 percent, no battle plan ever runs perfectly.

Training-perfected body positions, tactics, communications with a partner, vision, auditory senses, and fine motor dexterity all tend to go out the window when it comes down to do or die time. If, on the other hand, you keep things down to a bare minimum of mental and physical simplicity, there is less that can go wrong. Obviously, if you have eleventy-seven different game plans that require a team of monks to tabulate on an abacus, you'll soon discover that the humble sphincter will override even an Einstein brain most of the time—

and you'll bog down in a morass of "which technique do I use now" decisions.

Unfortunately one of the fields where you have to have more than one simple base technique is that of white light flashlight use. And while the pistol flashlight techniques, such as the late Mike Harries' invention, are excellent and battle proven in their own right, they are not always applicable or viable in certain situations, such as when using a barricade for cover—or crowd scenes.

Reflecting a beam off a barricade into your own eyes is not conducive to visual acuity, and this is what may occur if you're conditioned to using only one of the Harries, Rogers, Chapman, Ayoob, or "I Named It After Myself" techniques. Even dedicated weapons-mounted lights can negate their intended purpose on occasion.

Range training is invariably run under conditions where all the shooter has to do is find and identify a designated target, silhouette his sights against the illuminated "adversary," and then proceed to perforate said target. The shooter receives a congratulatory pat on the shoulder from the instructor and goes home happy, the deceased paper target is sent off to Valhalla in a bonfire funeral pyre, and all is well.

Or is it?

Here's where the Devil's Advocate steps in. Any one of the above-named techniques, including a dedicated light, may not be the answer in a crowd scene where there are one or two hostiles and a gaggle of moving, panic-



The receiving end of a six-volt, weapon-mounted flashlight, photographed indoors at midmorning.

stricken bystanders fore and aft of the crooks.

Where could this ever befall the average citizen or lone police officer? In a dark parking lot, bank, post office, or at the hated Christmas dinner where half-a-dozen unwanted relatives have invited themselves over for free food and booze. Even though they probably deserve to eat lead pills instead of turkey breasts, the law—and your remaining in-laws—tend to frown on indiscriminate gunfire.

The physical/visual problem with this type of scenarios is that once you illuminate a person who is in front of the bad guy, the latter is cast into black shadow, and you can't find the critter to blow him up. An obvious caveat is, even if you can illuminate the crook, the background is cast into shadow. (For "background" read "despised aforementioned relatives.")

The supposition is that you have to shoot to prevent carnage or the immediate potential thereof. Your handy-dandy tritium sights are now useless; the dedicated weapon-mounted light will possibly have to be held in some ridiculous Bin Laden overhead position, where the only way you'll know whether the gun is aligned with the target is if you have a laser dot which actually prints on the enemy's clothing (it's Christmas dinner, remember—a red laser dot isn't going to reflect off a red woolen Santa Claus outfit).

Setting posers is easy. The trick is to prepare beforehand for potential nightmare situations, such as the above scenario. A

possible solution, and/or maybe merely food for thought for *S.W.A.T.* readers, is a variation of the much-maligned FBI flashlight technique. Often ridiculed because the technique tends to illuminate the operator with a lateral light beam aura and because the one-handed hold on the flashlight causes problems with quick target identification and symbiotic one-handed gun/target alignment using one-handed pistol shooting, the technique may be the only option left. The Surefire Institute variation, whereby the flashlight is placed alongside the jawbone, simplifies and probably improves the technique because whenever you swivel your head, the light beam automatically centers on where you're looking but may not be as effective for the specific Santa Slaughter problem.

And just before you think about how stupid it may seem to put a flashlight next to your face, think about where the flashlight is positioned relative to your body with any of the myriad techniques out there.

The bottom line in the Christmas dinner fiasco is that you may have to elevate the flashlight or lower it underneath somebody—or something—in the foreground or even hang it

out around the side of an obstacle to get clear target ID. And having a partner with a high-intensity light may either help or impede your job, dependent on how many innocents are in the fore- and background, their movement, and the crook's movement.

Nobody said fighting is easy, but it could possibly be worth pondering the fact that a single-flashlight technique—no matter how well it may work on a mano a mano, belt-buckle-to-belt-buckle cardboard target—may not work in a complex caper as posed above. You may have to shoot from a technically ludicrous position, using a technically ludicrous-looking flashlight technique to get the job done.

It's the same old song—be prepared and think it out in advance. You can't "what if" every potential situation, but that doesn't mean that you don't latch onto every technique that you feel may be a possible winner and store it somewhere for a future insurance policy.

There's no point in trying to shoot a buffalo once he's already jumped off the cliff. You're still knee-deep in buffalo chips. . . .

(This column originally appeared in the April 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Shooting Isn't Always Fighting

L

ike the jumbo shrimp, things aren't always what they seem to be.

Fighting is fighting and shooting is shooting—and even though the two are symbiotic in a gunfight, a proficient shootist doesn't necessarily constitute a heavy-duty fighter. In fact, when all is said and done, the opposite is often the case.

Most of this phenomenon is due to a lack of mental control during a conflict, but there is also a fair percentage of battle loss sustained due to unrealistic and/or nonviable preparatory training. This often leads to either poor mechanical and dexterity ability or the common outlook of "This can't be happening to me—I hope I survive."

Surviving, though better than losing, sucks. As Pat Rogers says, survival is merely the by-product of winning. You have to go in with the will to win, or die trying. Fighting a mental rearguard action is just a loss waiting to happen. So much for the mental approach.

Where the quandary comes into effect is when you have half-a-dozen different “surefire” solutions provided before the battle, then have the pleasure of six noncombatant “experts” urinating on your coffin after the firefight goes bad.

If you haven’t been smashed in the mouth by a defensive lineman on Sunday afternoon, don’t couch-potato critique a quarterback on Monday morning. The problem with a perfectly drawn-up pass play is that you practice it to perfection with your own teammates. When you have to execute it in a football game, the opposition is also on the field—and the play often goes to hell in a hand basket.

Similarly, if you accept on blind faith that your battle instructor is always right, you may be in for an ugly—and deadly—surprise. It’s not that he’s intentionally trying to con you (hopefully) for egotistical reasons, it’s simply that many new technologies are not battle proven, and until they are they cannot be regarded as viable. Until the other team is on the field you don’t *KNOW* if you’ll win or lose—you can only surmise and pray.

As a corollary, many older and automatically assumed individual techniques are accepted as the Eleventh Commandment, and this often isn’t the case. On a training range, any operation can be backtracked to lend validity to a basic premise, but the bad news is if the premise is false, the solution also has to be false. You can put four wheels on a pile of scrap in a junkyard, but that doesn’t automatically make it a Ferrari merely because a Ferrari sits atop four wheels.

One of the first bones of contention which arises with pistol training is the old standby of two body shots. This “absolute” was questioned a dozen years ago in this column in *S.W.A.T. Magazine* for two reasons: (1) obviously on an enraged, doped-up, fanatically religious human enemy, two pistol bullets are nowhere near a guarantee; and (2) after studying reams of debriefs, autopsy sheets, and some after-action

battlefield reports, it was found that very few two-shot stops had actually occurred. On top of the fact that the pistol is a notoriously poor fight-stopper on an enraged enemy, there doesn’t seem to be much sense using a technique which *SHOULD* work in the future, when in actuality in the past most documentation shows that the enemy was invariably shut down by either a single or numerous projectiles.

Let’s face it, if he’s still behind your sights after initial projectile contact, he needs another dose of lead poisoning, whether it means one, two, or fifteen more rounds. Currently called a Standard Response, the only time this seems to be non-Standard is in a real fight—and any time you encounter an oxymoron, there’ll always be at least one ox and one moron.

Another contentious subject is that of shooting stances. The Good Lord saw fit to give us only two hind paws upon which to stand, and the bottom line is (a) if you don’t have a stance which promotes body balance, you will fall over; and (b) much of the time you will have to fire from some half-buttocked shooting position in battle, especially when it’s cold, wet, you’re bleeding and taking incoming. If weather and underfoot conditions become inclement and treacherous on a practice range, the rangemaster will call time-out for a lunch break for safety reasons—and, rightly so. Unfortunately, *THERE ARE NO LUNCH BREAKS IN A FIREFIGHT*. You had better be able to deliver meat-and-bone-impacting projectiles when you’re crouching, slipping, or lying on your back as surely as you can from a “ready on the left, ready on the right” static summer’s day firing line.

All the other “have to’s”—like you have to shoot with your master eye, you will encounter tunnel vision, you will encounter auditory exclusion, etc.—are not “have to’s”; they are choices. Here comes the Ferrari with a lawnmower engine again. Like the man said, once you discover your personal weaknesses,

that's what you train to improve—your strengths are already there. If you don't train both mind and body, you will never be a champion—and very few people through fighting history have, if at all, ever reached that zenith—at least not to the real champions' satisfaction. They were all eternal students until their death.

The good news is that all it takes is hard work and common sense, and hard work should be a normal human goal. The bad news is that "common sense"—isn't.

(This column originally appeared in the May 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Reducing Debilitating Effects with Training

M

ention the word “bogeyman” to a child, and he defecates in his foundation garments. An adult is merely amused at the mention of the word.

If, however, you take the same adult to a quiet, blacked-out Vlad castle in Transylvania, after 10 minutes he too will begin to experience diarrhetic problems. About the only differences between the two are age and experience—the perception is the same: fear of the unknown.

Fear is not an instinct; it is learned. And if it is learned, it can be unlearned and conquered. It is rooted in society and cultural beliefs, and plays hell with mental control, which is an essential component of the warrior’s makeup. As stated earlier, many fighters train religiously with their weapons, but it’s the repeatedly successful combatants who train their minds and bodies as well.

“Well thanks for the huge revelation,” you say. “Obviously I know I have to be physically fit to do

all the neat superadvanced stuff like hop over a fence and hang upside down from a tree before I shoot the clock-stopping steel target." And the answer is nobody is trying to insult the reader's intelligence, but merely to point out how the "bogyman"—usually self-induced—affects one's composure, and how this effect can be blunted with training. If you miss a steel plate in a competition, nobody cares anyway. If you don't dump whomever is trying to take you out, maybe somebody will weep over your carcass for five minutes.

The two primary senses used on a battlefield are auditory and visual. Conversely, under stress, they are also the first two that tend to go south, the sense of hearing being the first. Over the years, most people (as mentioned previously) accept "tunnel vision" and "auditory exclusion" as givens under stressful circumstances, but their debilitating effects can be reduced with judicious training techniques.

Hearing, vision, and fine motor skills degrade inversely proportionately to heart rate—it's as plain and simple as that. A 140–150 pulse is about the break point at which the degradation starts to take a heavy toll, so it's no wonder that fighting abilities are almost nullified when people pump higher—some have been measured at 300! And the longer you have to wait and envision impending doom, the more you will hyperventilate the bellows and resultantly escalate the blood rate. Combined with what's known as the "chemical cocktail," "adrenaline dump," or what is more colloquially termed "pucker factor," the blood subsequently rushes to everywhere except where you need it: in the extremities of your hands, resulting in fine motor skills akin to those of a drunk juggling mime.

So the big question is how to reduce the problem because it's not going to be totally negated. One answer is to repeat Mr. President's quote: "There's nothing to fear but fear itself." After reciting it 10 times and realizing that you

still have a phobia about being a bullet receptacle, bleeding, and dying, it becomes apparent that that one's not going to fly.

Plan B—and this one does work—is to practice breathing exercises in advance to permanently lower your pulse rate under all conditions. Breathe in three or four seconds; hold your breath three or four seconds; breathe out three or four seconds. Repeat half-a-dozen times. This will alleviate your first sensory failure—hearing. There's a reason for the expression "Communications are the first thing to fail in a fight." The reason is that it's true.

All those neat verbal sweet nothings you whisper in your buddy's ear on the practice range come to naught in a contact, even when he's yelling like a banshee from six feet away. Half of the time you don't even hear the report of your own gun's muzzle blast. Man reacts faster to an audible stimulus than a visual one. That's why people reflexively "duck" almost instantaneously after a bomb blast or a car's backfire—and also why most competitions are started with an audible high-pitched beeper. That way your reaction time seems faster than that of a drag racer working off a visual "Christmas tree" light post. Apparently the bigger the lie, the more the people will believe it.

Unlike hearing, vision doesn't shut down completely, but tends to lock down in periphery to a central threat, commonly known as "tunnel vision." The more volatile the threat, the less peripheral vision is used to its capability. This phenomenon—and it is a phenomenon—is usually governed by distance from the threat, such as a close quarters encounter with an edged weapon or firearm.

If the God-given optical rods and cones aren't used as they were intended during normal use, obviously the problem will be inversely proportional when your sphincter is imitating a pair of castanets. All the horse-patooties about shooting your pistol with both eyes open so your peripheral vision will enable

you to be aware of your buddies' location during a gunfight just isn't going to happen unless you train with your eyes more than you train with your handgun. You shoot a scoped weapon with both eyes open so you can see where you are on a single enlarged field of view on a target when you press the trigger—the rest is extraneous.

Rigorous and regular exercising of the eyes will not only help in a fight—it will also help to retain or improve their current ability so that you can avoid daily embarrassments like tramping in doggie doo-doo.

The sorry truth of the matter is that peripheral vision under stress is now called "a

lost art." And that is sad because it wasn't even considered an art 200 years ago. It's amazing to see how staring at computer pixels placed three feet in front of one's proboscis has destroyed one of Man's primary natural senses in one generation.

It's no big deal. Your optician is doing a roaring trade prescribing a heavier prescription every year for your glasses. And enduring a long air flight in soiled knickers isn't all that bad—assuming you survived the Transylvanian Tryst and aren't being transported home in a box.

(This column originally appeared in the 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Can You Overestimate Your Enemy?

B

ruce was a quiet man. Unassuming by nature, he was highly skilled in martial arts, but always avoided confrontation. Thus it came as somewhat of a shock when all and sundry learned that he'd been beaten within an inch of his life by a lone drunk farmer at a midnight gas station encounter.

While all the local yokels had a field day mocking him, I knew there had to be more to the situation than what appeared at face value—and there was. During a one-on-one conversation in the hospital, I asked him what had transpired. His answer, modestly delivered, was simple: the farmer had been “too stupid” to make the “right” countermoves.

In other words, if the farmer had responded with the correct, familiar, full-contact Karate dojo moves, Bruce would have taken him out. While we all know to never, never underestimate your enemy, it's apparent from the foregoing that you

can wind up in as much trouble *overestimating* your enemy's ability. Oxymoronic as this may sound, it is pertinent to much of today's weapons training.

Although tactics have been around since Moses was a corporal, and battle-efficient firearms for several hundred years, in the last quarter of the 20th Century firearms training began to stagnate almost to the extent of fast target shooting. Unrealistic extended distances relative to conventional battle distances; one-dimensional, nonmoving targets; and dedicated "by rote" time frames nonrelevant to action/reaction human response capabilities all led to naïve expectations from the trainee.

This situation was salvaged by the regurgitation of age-old techniques, target systems, and restudying the effects of adrenaline dump, blood supply to extremities, blood pressure, and psychological makeup relevant to battle conditions. So far, so good. By the year 2000, we were getting back on an even keel.

But of course we couldn't leave well enough alone. The growing cottage industry of firearms training had to insert more and more "advanced" classes into the circus, and even though there is always room for improvement, change merely for the sake of change is counterproductive.

Mastering flashy so-called advanced techniques is immensely gratifying, until you come to the sobering realization that there are no advanced gunfights. This in turn means that either you become a master of basics or you're just fooling yourself—and probably wasting a plethora of ammunition in the process.

The sorry truth is that *ALL FIREARMS TRAINING IS ARTIFICIAL* for one simple reason: unless you're involved in one of the ever-increasing horrendous training accidents, you *KNOW* you're not going to get hurt. And even to the extent of activities like Simunitions training, you don't react and/or perform the same as in a full-blooded fight. While it's still all

a beneficial learning experience, it's just not the same as a real fight.

And the more "advanced" your training has been, the more "advanced" will be your line of thought—until eventually you subconsciously overthink the problem and end up having your eardrum burst by an open-palm smack from a drunk farmer. Then your balance is gone, and he goes to town on you with his boots.

There are some simple basic facts to fighting. While everybody on the planet seems to regard the three-, seven-, ten-, fifteen-, and twenty-five-yard firing lines as the Gospel, fights are not going to occur at those exact distances. And if you persist in using those precise measurements, you will automatically come up with some arbitrary time frame to deliver projectiles into a known target.

Whatever you use for a measuring tool, three yards is nine feet. Unless you're Bob Munden, you're not getting a holstered pistol into action if you're reacting to a frontal charge from nine feet. So, yes, you train in the nuances of stepping off your enemy's line of attack. And of course you invariably have the luxury of room to move on a training range as opposed to a real fight, where you either get lucky, fall off a cliff, or step into the path of 40 tons of passing Budweiser truck.

The fact is if somebody is rushing you, he either has an impact weapon, open hands, or a blade—but he's probably not firing a gun. So either learn some basic knife/club take-aways or defensive punching or kicking techniques, or take a chance that there's no passing traffic on the interstate when you backpedal while scabbling for your handgun or folding blade. And even though the latter solution has worked on numerous occasions, it's the "advanced" solution to a simple fistfight.

Certainly there are some people out there with an immense IQ who can remember where every teensy obstruction and piece of cover are located behind them under these circumstances,

WHY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "ADVANCED" GUNFIGHT

but the rest of us mere mortals are possibly better off going forwards offensively in this specific situation.

You have to train to win, but simplicity in close-quarters fighting will always be the key

factor to success. Bruce would have been better off if he'd never been inside a dojo.

(This column originally appeared in the August 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

There Are Two Sides to Every Story



here are always two sides to every story.

The orchestra conductor thinks he's indispensable, while the percussionist figures the leader is just another lousy drummer missing a stick.

Similar antithetical viewpoints are espoused when the subject under discussion is tactics. Irrespective of which weapon—if any—is being used, the arguments invariably end with a distinct “my way is the correct way” attitude, especially when discussing tactical movement.

Let's face it, even though the geometric intricacies of building clearing can be complex, once the rudiments of basic tactical movement have been integrated in one's brain, how many different ways can a human ingress a portal? You can check doorknobs and hinges 'til they're selling ice cream in hell, but sooner or later it boils down to making entry from the left or right side, and that's pretty much your only option (except, obviously, in the case of something like a fire

escape door at the head or foot of a hallway).

Again, one must have basic observation and movement skills, and there's no such thing as too much training; but are we possibly, in some instances, wasting training time on extraneous tactics nonrelative to any potential situation we might encounter?

For example, thorough schooling in tactical team movement—both stealth and dynamic—is essential for a multiple-member team but isn't going to be of any use when you're on your own, being mugged at an ATM. Similarly, if you're invading a country you probably don't want to send in a one-man military force armed with a snubnie revolver. Either of these situations makes about as much sense as fingers on a rooster unless, in the latter case, you're a downed pilot stranded behind enemy lines.

So why are we so often participating in training scenarios, techniques, and tactics which are not relative to our respective personal future needs?

The ubiquitous gully, arroyo, or wash filled with a dozen "enemy" Pepper Poppers is a classic example of a no-win one-man situation. If it were for real it would either take you three weeks to traverse the terrain or you would have to haul through the area like a herd of turtles, hoping you don't take a fatal incoming hit in the



Two partners tag-teaming to cover their respective areas of responsibility. Notice that there are safe fields of fire and no crossfire potential, and all danger areas are under visual control.

process. So primarily the sole justification for, and benefit derived from, the scenario is target identification and marksmanship.

If intelligent negotiation of the terrain is the objective, it becomes almost a non sequitur at even a slow-moving walking pace because every pace you take opens up too big a vista for one pair of eyes and one brain to assimilate. Good for military and law enforcement team movement, where you have backup operators to perform dead-checks on the downed enemy Poppers, it compounds the individual's problem of dead-checks. If you're utilizing slow

movement, you can't keep your eyes on a dropped opponent and scan the rest of the plane at the same time. This in turn means that you'll invariably have to take a route different than what you would primarily choose through that specific terrain, which will inevitably lead to fatal incoming rounds for real, and you can't leave unverified enemies behind you.

So is this scenario beneficial for the lone trainee? To a certain extent, yes. What you learn is to never enter a similar area if you can possibly avoid it. And while the expression "never say never" is a truism, one exercise is enough to get the point across.

After that, in this author's admittedly inconsequential opinion, the lone trainee would

gain far more benefit from such an exercise by limiting the total number of targets to two or three, enforcing tactical movement basics, dead-checks, and target identification and marksmanship if the targets are hostile. If one of the two or three targets is designated nonhostile, the trainee's problem is actually exacerbated, as he now has to decide how to physically contain the situation.

But the bottom line is that while it may be fun to blithely march through an area knocking over pieces of steel-like tenpins—and ignoring them as you pass by—this doesn't fully replicate real-life fighting.

This is tantamount to watching a Simunitions drill where somebody performs the inevitable "quick peek" around a corner in a house-clearing exercise. After cunningly inserting his face into three of his waiting enemy's Simunition projectiles, he momentarily withdraws—then tries another quick peek. So now he takes another half-dozen rounds because the bad-guy "player"

had changed location. This is going well.

In fact it's going so well why don't you try the same technique a third time—and a surprising number of people do just that—because *YOU KNOW YOU WON'T BE KILLED*. That's the beauty of training—you get to commit suicide over and over. The truth of the matter is that circumstances always dictate tactics, and if you win you used the right tactics. If you lose you die, and every Monday-morning quarterback urinates on your grave.

The object of training is to learn from your mistakes and simulate reality—not to yuk it up and take chances you wouldn't take for real merely because you're in an artificial environment and know you're not going to get hurt.

Maybe the instructor/conductor is omniscient and needs only one stick, but without the drummer the music stops.

(This column originally appeared in the September 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

The Head Shot



Inserting bullets into someone's sinus cavity probably isn't most people's primary choice for Friday night entertainment at the Palace.

Unfortunately head shots, however distasteful the subject may be, are an essential component of ballistic enemy shutdown. There are three reasons for slamming projectiles into somebody's head: either it's the only available target, immediate cessation of neurological and muscular activities is paramount, or bullets stuffed into other body parts are not putting an end to an enemy's hostile action.

While shooting people is a last resort—whether it's for personal home or street defense, or because you've been sent in as a frontline spearhead on a battlefield—once the firestorm starts, you don't stop until the threat has been neutralized.

Dependent on the circumstances, this may entail pouring lead into every piece of meat and bone that appears in front of your sights, or it may require the surgical placement of one or two

rounds into someone's snotbox.

If several rounds into his blood pump and bellows don't shut down the boiler room, the logical next step is to trip his main switch by introducing an immediate lead virus into Mister Immortal's computer—otherwise known as a head shot.

And even though immediate incapacitation, as opposed to killing, is the main objective, death and its attendant legal, moral, and ethical problems need to be taken into account before engaging in battle—because death is almost invariably the result of high-powered bullet insertion into somebody's brainbox.

While this may be overstating the obvious, many people who are capable of draining a rifle magazine into an "inanimate" enemy soldier 100 yards away hit mental meltdown when they have to look into a targeted human's eyes from a six-foot distance. This is not the greatest time to let emotions overrun your fighting drivetrain, because he's still operating and to date your dose of corporal lead poisoning hasn't fazed him in the least. If you suffer an emotional freeze under these circumstances, you will die—because he isn't about to quit until you've been dispatched.

So much for the self-analysis as to whether or not you're prepared to convert somebody's head into a grapefruit.

The actual mechanical delivery of rounds into somebody's head is both easy and difficult. The easy part is understanding that



Although this is not a difficult marksmanship challenge, self-induced pressure, combined with the reticence of most Westerners to shoot Ashleigh in the face, could well get you—and her hostage—killed. He who hesitates under these circumstances is indeed lost.

the target—unless partially obscured, such as in a "classic" hostage-taker's scenario—is a constant overall size. This measures out at about six inches by six inches, whether you're shooting full-on, from above, or from sideways on to the target. Where many people get their bowels in an uproar is knowing that the desired impact area—such as eye sockets/bridge of the nose for a frontal shot or ear canal from the

side—is only a couple of inches in diameter. The trick, as always, is to not overthink the problem. All you have to do is shoot center of mass of a six-inch sphere, and the bullets will magically print a one- or two-inch group in the dead center of the target—right where you need them.

If you try to shoot a one-inch group on a one-inch target, you will invariably shoot a three-inch group. On the other hand, if you shoot for center of mass of a six-inch area, you will shoot a one-inch group—it's as simple as that. It's called mental control under pressure. Make the overall target as large as possible and you will inversely proportionately reduce the amount of self-induced pressure, which resultantly reduces trigger control and sight picture follow-through problems.

Once you *KNOW* that you can hit a target, self-confidence doubts disappear, and performance automatically improves. In a one-on-one confrontation you invariably have a full-frontal head shot available because your

enemy—irrespective of his torso and limb movements and angles—is usually looking directly at you to keep track of your actions. And even if he isn't, the head doesn't "shrink" in size, as does the torso of a turning, twisting human.

The largest vital area on a big man's upper chest, facing full on, is only about eight by ten inches overall—and it can be reduced in a flash to about four inches in width if he turns side-on. This is not much bigger than the overall dimensions of someone's head and can, in fact, often be narrower.

Repeated rapid bullet insertion into peripheral body parts may cause fast blood loss and traumatize somebody—but it may not.

You know he's supposed to collapse, your bullets know he's supposed to collapse, but all too often the only person who doesn't know he's supposed to collapse is Mister Lead Magnet. And not having attended the Bumblebee Aeronautical College, he doesn't understand he's not supposed to be capable of flying—so he flies. And you're now saddled with the slight problem of being killed by what should be a dead man. Time to trip the main switch.

The difficult aspect of surgical shot placement into somebody's computer-box is

twofold. One is based on the physical construction of the head—a lot of bone area to penetrate, much of which is angled and sloped in geometric shape, and which will often deflect bullets much like a curved military helmet. The other potential difficulty is rapid motion of the head independent of the body. This, however, is hardly ever as much as it seems when viewed through battle sights.

The key points to remember are (a) the human neck doesn't elongate, so the cranial motion is more "bobbing" in nature than actual lateral and vertical distance traveled; and (b) the head doesn't "reduce" in size like other body parts unless it's partially obscured by something or someone in the foreground.

Impacting an opponent's light socket isn't as difficult a shot as most people think it is. The target is bigger than it might seem, and it may be the only last-ditch solution available for self-preservation. If you need darkness to befall your enemy, closing your eyes doesn't help—you have to turn off the power supply.

Goodnight, Sweet Prince—lights out at the Palace.

(This column originally appeared in the October 2003 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

Strategy, Tactics— and Luck



he mere act of carrying a pistol doesn't make you a gunfighter any more than owning a car makes you a race driver.

And even though many people have successfully resolved a deadly force confrontation by pure dumb luck, regular realistic training is almost a prerequisite to having the confidence and mechanical ability to be a warrior.

While this statement doesn't exactly rate in the annals of history with the splitting of the atom, the prime factor to consider is that one's training has to be relevant to a perceived preconceived threat situation. There's no sense in putting in months of practice to avoid being carjacked when you ride a motorcycle, or religiously undergoing the rigors of house-clearing exercises with a shotgun when you're marooned on a desert island armed with a dead fish and a coconut.

If your primary concern is being one of the statistics in the latest "fashion"—that of being

squashed by an irate wife piloting the family Buick—you don't need a Glock; you need a pair of Nikes. However, irrespective of whether you're of the "train for the likely event" or of the "what if this, what if that" brigade, the underlying concepts remain the key—strategy and tactics.

Since the words "tactics" and "tactical" became fashionable to the extent of being almost passé, perhaps an explanation is in order. In boxing terminology, the "corner" men—the trainer, cut-man, and "seconds" in general—map out the strategy. The boxer applies this strategy by means of tactics to outwit, outmaneuver, and outpunch his opponent.

Ergo, irrespective of weaponry, strategy is vital, relevant to specific situations. If it's somebody trying to carve you with a blade at an ATM, draw your pistol and shoot—if you can get to the pistol. If Mommy's doing her NASCAR lap dance with the SUV—run, Forrest, run. She won't catch up to you—nothing runs like a Dear.

Where the problem becomes complex, when in reality it should be simple, is that many people who carry a pistol will often attempt to use the pistol when they don't have a snowball's hope in hell of extricating it from its holster. You have to have a brain to fight, and you have to have an alternate means of force that will work when you don't have the time to get your gun into play.

The system has to be simple, reliable, and it would be nice if it actually worked when needed for real—on demand, and reactively. Most fights are won by explosive, instantaneous reaction, even if it begins with preemptive action, such as roaming through your house searching for whoever or whatever caused "the noise downstairs."

In the past five years there has been such a dazzling array of "new and improved" techniques flooding the firearms and tactics training scene that one wonders how anybody

ever won a gunfight prior to the turn of the century. If the technique is complicated, takes half an hour to explain, and works only once the rangemaster has "prepped" the trainee on a firing range, don't hold your breath that it will work when you need it. Either there's a plethora of Samurai who've en masse decided to reveal their genius to the world or some résumés need to be checked. If you're male, you have no moral right to explain to a female virgin what it's like to be raped. You've never been there and never will be—lucky you. Unfortunately your client may be, and you're being paid to perform a service, not dazzle people with your own imagined expertise.

While many people preach the Marine Corps/Cooper Color Code, the honest truth is that *NOBODY* can, or does, live in Condition Yellow *ALL THE TIME*. Sooner or later everyone lets down their guard, and that's when you're vulnerable. Stuck in a traffic jam, during sex, or engaged in the bathroom, it's going to happen. And that's when your quarter-second practice-range drawstroke takes a full second, or that flashy move you've demonstrated with your new Kill a Commie for Mommy state-of-the-art "combat knife" produces nothing but a self-inflicted gash in your thigh.

As stated above, many conflicts will be—and have been—resolved by quick reactions and an instantaneous read on the enemy's intent, both physical and mental. This was Bruce Lee's Way of the Intercepting Fist, or what's commonly seen as the boxer's counterpunch. The trick is to be able to virtually *SMELL* your opponent's intent, almost let him initiate, and then counter with your strengths to the maximum, which may very well entail not even trying to get to your pistol. You have to be quick on your feet, you have to have balance, and you have to be capable of delivering power, ballistic or not.

If you're lucky enough to win the fight—and you will always need a helping of luck—you

can enjoy your celebratory dinner of chicken fingers and buffalo wings. And if you've ever seen a chicken pick boogers out of his beak with his fingers or seen a buffalo use his wings to fly,

then you wasted your time reading this article.

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Engage Your Brain



here are essentially only two mechanical or physical factors that cause firearms accidents.

These are the placement of a digit on the trigger when it should be elsewhere and muzzle direction of a firearm when the weapon discharges. While there are other potential contributory circumstances, such as dropping a \$2 pistol with worn-out sears, the aforementioned are inevitably one or both of the base causes of the negligence.

And even though this occurs over and over ad nauseam—usually with handguns—the big question is how do you prevent it from happening?

The answer is easy—don't place your finger anywhere near the trigger until the gun is aligned with the target and don't allow the muzzle to cover anything you aren't willing to destroy. Unfortunately it isn't that simple to adhere to these two of Jeff Cooper's four firearms safety rules—especially the latter—when you're in the middle of a firefight from hell on a dark, stormy night,

surrounded by friend and foe, and slipping and sliding in four inches of mud in foreign terrain.

The straight trigger finger is easier to ingrain in someone's mind, but the man hasn't been born who will keep his trigger finger alongside the frame of a pistol when he's sliding down a muddy cliff face, trying to grab for something—anything—to impede his fall into black oblivion. Under *EXTREME* circumstances like this, the so-called "sympathetic squeeze" will occur—and there's a reason. From the womb it is instinctual for a human to close the entire hand into a fist when reaching for an object, especially under stress during a nonpreconceived situation.

A straight trigger finger when holding a firearm is a learned process, and no matter how often and how long you practice, instinct will override a learned habit every time—from cradle to grave. Nobody picks up a wrench, table fork, or ballpoint pen with a straight index finger, so nobody is going to have a straight index/trigger finger (or safe muzzle direction) when he's lost his footing in the dark and is plunging down the above-mentioned bottomless cliff face.

The latter case, however, is an extremely rare and impending doom situation—and it is no excuse for accidental firearms discharges, either



An accident waiting to happen. If you can't keep your finger away from the trigger until the sights are on target, stay away from guns.

on the training range or during a fight. Or, for that matter, any time one is handling a gun, be it while going to the bathroom, practicing "dry-fire" practice, or merely fieldstripping the weapon for cleaning purposes.

Even though some inherent gun designs, such as Glock pistols or M1 rifles, seem to "invite" disaster, when all is said and done, the nut behind the wheel is invariably the prime cause of the negligent detonation. If you're not going to ensure that a Glock is unloaded prior to retracting the trigger for the fieldstripping process, or if you insist on placing your grubby little trigger finger on an M1 trigger before

pushing off the manual safety, don't blame the designer/manufacturer for the fact that *your* gene pool is low on water.

Whether you habitually wander around with your brain in Neutral or it's a momentary lapse in concentration, either way you've lost power to the drive line. If you're lucky, the car coasts to a halt with a blown motor. If you're unlucky, you crash—because in both cases you still have your mental foot on the gas pedal. The net result is that a bullet exits the barrel and has to find a terminal place to rest somewhere.

Several years ago when I was giving Einstein a run for his money and still knew everything about everything, I managed to fire a perfect dry-fire round into a wall. The downside

is that the "nonexistent" round made a loud noise—and a .45-caliber hole in the wall. The only saving grace was that the muzzle was pointed in a people-safe direction. Blown engine, no wreck.

How did it happen? A nanosecond lapse in concentration, that's how. After removing the magazine, yours truly had checked the chamber prior to dry-fire practice. And after carefully double-checking to make sure that the chamber was loaded, I cheerfully proceeded to Hydra—"shock" the wall—and myself. So used to rigorously checking for a round in the chamber every time I picked up a semiauto pistol, what I euphemistically refer to as a brain had slipped a gear when checking for an *EMPTY* chamber. *Mea culpa.*

Recently I witnessed an idiot on a firing range crease his calf muscle with a 9-millimeter bullet. About 10 seconds after it happened, it occurred to me that he wasn't a half-wit, was competent in the field of gun-handling and marksmanship, and had merely had a momentary concentration lapse like the

millions—yes, millions—before him.

While most readers of this column will no doubt derive great mirth and enjoy finger-pointing exercises at my stupidity, see if I care. Let he who is without sin cast the first bullet. The bottom line message is that whenever you pick up a gun, *EACH AND EVERY TIME*, the trigger finger has to be located in a safe position—and you have to maintain *MENTAL* concentration.

While many liken the earlier mentioned cliff-falling incident to a gunfight, they are not the same. The cliff scenario is instant stress. Hearing that your wife is pregnant with quintuplets is stress. A gunfight is not stress—it's just another hemorrhoid on the rear end of your life and definitely doesn't warrant twitching and curling of fingers.

And if you can't control this, whether you're at home in the bathroom or in the middle of a gunfight, don't carry a gun. That's like trusting a drunk barber with a straight razor.

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It's Only a Gunfight



rying to put a square peg into a round hole usually doesn't work, unless the peg is much smaller than the hole.

And shooting round bullets at square targets isn't all that beneficial either. In both cases the "recipient" has to be much larger in proportion than the penetrator.

After recently becoming entangled in a strip of flypaper at a firing range, it's obvious that this scribe truly doesn't have the brains of a fly; but if you'll bear with my sorry ramblings I'll explain where the square peg-round hole train of thought is headed. If you have the rudiments of basic marksmanship, can control your emotions while facing death, and have trained under realistic conditions using realistic targets, in theory it's impossible to miss your enemy in a fight.

Thus, if you take the above Big Three in sequence:

1. The delivery of a projectile from a gun with adequate battle marksmanship can always be taught/learned. Let's face it, there are only a few things requisite for a shottist to make a gun into an accurate power-delivery system: sight alignment, sight picture, trigger control, follow-through, etc.
2. If you can't control your emotions on a battlefield, you probably can't control them under any other emergency situation, and you'll die worrying about an ulcer long before the enemy's bullet finds its mark. It's only a stinking gunfight, not something serious like a flat tire on a rush-hour freeway.
3. So it all comes down to Number Three—realistic conditions and realistic targets. The former is easy to emulate—stand stark naked in the snow in subzero temperatures with a gun in your hand and let a buddy pitch a bucket of ice water over your carcass. Voilà—five minutes later you're an Icelandic Gunfighter from Hell if you're hitting the target.

Target systems require a little more forethought and psychological understanding. One has only to observe the generic man-on-man shoot-off competitions to realize that self-induced pressure will cause most people to lose mental control, violate the basics of shooting, and feed the win to their opponents time after time. Like golf, the idea is to forget about the other players—get the damn ball in the hole. Let's face it, most range targets are neither difficult nor battle representative.

Ergo, if you can mechanically shoot accurately and have read Rudyard Kipling's poetry, all that remains is target shape and motion. A one-dimensional square or rectangular steel or cardboard target teaches one how to aim center of mass of a perfect symmetrically shaped square or rectangle—no more, no less. And while the average width of a generic target is 18 inches, and you can shoot

neat, rinky-dink little groups in the middle of the target by the mere process of holding center of mass of this elephant, real-life enemy-dropping rounds often have to be placed into about an eight-inch-high chestbox area from the front and about a twelve-by-eight-inch box from the side. (Gut and pelvic strikes usually aren't worth much from full-frontal, but kidneys, spleen, and adrenals from side-on often offer longer north-south target availability and are notoriously great fight-stoppers.)

A dime will get you a dollar that a shooter will hit a square eight-inch plate more often than he will hit a circular eight-inch plate. The reason for this is obvious: if he's slightly "off" on windage and elevation, he can still clip the corners and score points on a practice range. If, however, he's "off" on elevation and windage on a circular or irregularly shaped steel plate, the plate is NO LONGER eight inches in diameter at that stage. If, for example, his sights are aligned a couple of inches left or right when the bullet leaves the muzzle, the target is now six inches or less in diameter; and there ain't no square-shaped people walking around where I live. They were the easy targets, and they're all dead.

Yes, if he's facing straight on, you aim for the center of an enemy's two-foot-wide girth, and you'll hit him amidships. But this 24-inch-wide periphery includes arms and clothes, and doesn't take into account that he can turn side-on and "shrink" into a target less than half the size he was fractions of a second earlier. Add in the convex shape of the torso and you're down to a six-plus-inch vital impact area in the upper torso, much like shooting for a spherically shaped, erratically moving football. The trick is to identify where the "football" is and to hit it—possibly repeatedly—until it is no longer a deadly force threat.

He may be facing-straight-on easy meat; he may be moving; he may be bent over reaching for a weapon or half-protected by hard cover. You have to immediately discern what's going

to be the easiest meat-and-bone area that will get the job done the quickest—and then you have to hit where you're aiming.

People shoot for the body because it's bigger than the head, but in actuality the head is about six inches in diameter—not much smaller an area than where all the good stuff is located in the upper torso.

The computer-box is a more difficult shot to make only because usually your mind starts playing games and you have less apparent overall visual area of which to hold center of mass.

While you can undoubtedly hit a bunch of meat in the body faster than you can surgically insert some lead into someone's beady little eyeball, he has to be stopped *RIGHT NOW*, and unless he is psychologically incapacitated, most of the time peripheral meat wounds aren't going to cause *IMMEDIATE* incapacitation. You don't

get more time in the street merely because your choice of target is smaller.

If you need a giggle—and a touch of humility—try an El Presidente range drill with different-sized balloons attached to a crossbar, varying lengths of thread, all gently swaying in a five mile per hour (mph) breeze. Either you have to take more time or your miss rate goes up.

If ever you're attacked by 10 square, motionless people and have a long time to dispatch them, count yourself lucky. Usually you need 90 percent luck in every fight and a 10-pound mallet to smash a square peg into a round hole.

And it hurts like hell when you miss with the hammer and smash your thumb. . . .

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Manhunting Tactics and Pitfalls

E

ngaging in one-man tactics is like walking a tightrope without a safety net: if you make it to the other side without mishap, you win—but if you don't make it, you lose everything.

Contrary to popular opinion, no matter how much you train and no matter how adept you may be at your trade, you need a huge preponderance of luck when you're playing a game with such heavily stacked odds. Yes, people win jackpots in gambling casinos, but the payout is covered by the losses of thousands of bankrupt suckers. Nothing comes out of the house coffers because the odds are so weighted on the side of the casino. The losers pay for all the jackpot winnings—and more.

And so it is when one vies in a gunfight against almost insurmountable odds. One would think nobody but a half-wit would become unnecessarily embroiled in a deadly force conflict, but Las Vegas isn't exactly patronized by brain surgeons either.

The only hope you have before you walk onto

someone else's battlefield is to hedge your bets, train like there's no tomorrow, and avoid unnecessary pitfalls. So many of these self-imposed pitfalls can be curtailed to the extent that you can reduce the odds stacked against you to maybe—and the operative word is “maybe”—allow you to have a running chance of success.

Fighting is a mental game, and even though it helps to have a gun when engaged in a gunfight, a firearm is merely a mechanical power-delivery system. Many a big-game hunter has left Africa in a shoebox because he thought a large-bore rifle plus a small-bore IQ equates mathematically to a small-bore pussycat with a large-bore attitude. Here's a closely guarded secret: it doesn't.

And if that isn't enough of a clue, work this one out: no hunter has ever been killed by a rifle-toting leopard. The leopard's skill at paws beats your skill at arms every time if you don't pack your brains along with the rest of your safari luggage.

So what are some of the most common avoidable manhunting pitfalls?

Number one is to pour your bottle of testosterone pills down the drain. If you don't understand the message of “discretion is the better part of valor,” go ahead and get yourself killed in a lethal confrontation escalated by an ego-driven single-cell brain—believe it or not, nobody really cares whether you live or die.

If you're forced into a rencounter, think *ON* your feet, not *WITH* your feet. Defined, this means that many people will start forward physical progress while simultaneously trying to formulate a game plan when it is far better, if possible, to preplan any further physical advance before leaving the warm womb of cover. While you have to be able to think on your feet because the situation invariably changes as soon as hostilities commence, the problem is that you have to think—literally and figuratively—not one but *TWO* steps ahead.

The problem when you are Man Alone is

that unlike the ubiquitous fly, humans don't have 360-degree vision. And even if you were a house fly, you still have only an 18-inch focal plane, which means if you run into a bad-guy chameleon with a fast 19-inch tongue, he'll French kiss you to hell.

If you start advancing unnecessarily into an area without preplanning, you'll undoubtedly lock your beady little China Blues on one area and automatically attract lead pills from a secondary area which you've overrun. In other words, before you start spinning your tires, preplan along the lines of “If I move to Position B, am I going to run into a potential problem from Position C?” Then, and only then, should you move from Position A.

Unless completely unavoidable, tap the brake pedal. Most people realize the “Position C” problem only after they've already started forward physical progress—too little too late. Yes, sometimes dynamic movement is a prerequisite because of the situation at hand, but most of the time stealthy, steady advance—or retreat—is more sensible. Don't overrun your headlights if you don't have to!

Another common faux pas is giving up distance advantage, which often leads to being blindsided, “telegraphing” of a gun muzzle around corners or open portals, or overcrowding of thought processes because you're forced to make too many—or incorrect—decisions. Distance creates time, and time creates distance.

If you can react at 100 mph in a 35-mph speed zone as effectively as you can react at 35 mph, then by all means hit the gas pedal. Otherwise, slow down or you'll be wearing two nuns and a schoolkid for a hood ornament. The reaction time is a constant—it's the stopping distance that counts. The more sedate your pace, the more time you have to think to take effective reactionary measures.

Another tactical “argument” that will continue for longer than it'll take this author to

acquire a pleasant disposition is the "quick peek." While this technique may initially seem like a brilliant idea, what you optically obtain from a "quick peek" is a microsecond of information of what *WAS* there when you looked, not necessarily what *WILL* be there when you cunningly stick out unimportant body parts (like your head) the second time around. If you see an armed assailant on your first look, you may as well "hold" him optically and deal with him—you own him. You could, of course, let your head protrude at a different elevation second time around—naturally he'll *never* work that out. Just because he's a crook doesn't mean he's stupid—he does this for a living, remember?

On the other hand, don't worry about it—you'll probably die from multiple bullet wounds after he stitches eleventy-seven rounds through

the Sheetrock wall while you're ruminating over your newfound problem. Or he'll advance from his initial position while you're performing your turtleneck act, and when you stick your beak around the corner second time around, he'll fill your snot-locker with lead from two feet away.

Yes, tactics are like rear ends—everybody's got one. But for the gamblers in *S.W.A.T.* readership, which Royal Flush do you want to bet on—the one that nets a \$1,000 jackpot or the one that ends with the King drowning ignominiously by having his head inserted upside down in a toilet bowl?

Or last, but not least, cut the power-hungry ego and abdicate your throne, don't go into casinos—and stay alive.

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Tactical Commandments



ime stands still for no man—and in a fight, neither should you.

Unless you have an overwhelming desire to convert your carcass into a bullet, blade, or fist receptacle, the MAD principle (movement, alacrity, and distance) should be employed. And obviously hard cover, when required, would also be an added bonus.

Sometimes, however, some or all of the above are neither available nor necessary, depending on the circumstances. If, for example, a situation has been contained to the stage where you have someone restrained and under control at gunpoint, and you are merely awaiting the clippety-clop of rescue cavalry hooves, speed and movement are probably unimportant. (Distance and cover, needless to say, should be maintained whenever possible, irrespective of whether or not you have delivered deadly force to the restrained subject.)

Assuming hostilities resume—or have the



It's not the size of the dog in the fight that counts. Using only a 10 1/2-inch length of pull, Elizabeth's rock-steady upper-body stance allows her to hit on demand with her duty 12-gauge standing, moving, kneeling, or from the prone position.

potential thereof—and you don't have the luxury of available cover, movement and distance while engaging the enemy are essential. This requires the three mandatory elements of a stable shooting platform: balance, balance, and balance. Which in turn raises the inevitable discussion about shooting stances.

As regards handgun shooting, the ad nauseam Weaver versus Isosceles arguments have been discussed so incessantly as to almost cause one to barf into one's holster. And while the viabilities of either don't need to be dragged through the mire yet one more time, and despite

the fact that yours truly is firmly biased in favor of the Weaver (because it's been successfully used by boxers, martial artists, and archers for 2,000 years—and also because nobody shoots a rifle, carbine, or shotgun from an upper-body Isosceles stance), there is more to this subject than initially meets the eye.

If you don't continue to study, you stagnate. So you can accept things on blind faith and possibly not see the forest at all—or you can try to emulate the wise owl and attempt to have more brains than the single tree on which you've perched. Which, in terms of this article,

means you can assume that you will always be shooting from your nifty preordained stance at static, standing-height targets—or you can realize that often one has to neutralize enemies from a moving automobile, or one-handed, or with a handheld flashlight from some field expedient position or . . .

And the list goes on and on. Yes, you can “what if” the subject matter to death, and being paranoid doesn’t help the cause—but that doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with being singlenoid.

The misconception of the One-and-Only Eleventh Commandment shooting stance is based on several false premises. One is that your enemy will always be located in a full-frontal compass position—hence the “I’ll shoot Isosceles so I won’t take acute lateral hits in the upper torso.” While there is some method to this madness, you’re still going to get lit up in the lungs, kidneys, liver, and spleen if there are two or more of them relatively close and split wide from each other. If you want to stick with Biblical Commandments, try the “Do Unto Others” trick—but do it first and do them before they do unto you.

Another oft-quoted premise is that you will “instinctively” fire from a specific shooting stance. The hell you will. One is born with instincts, such as allaying the pangs of hunger and thirst or answering the call of Nature. Unless a mini-derringer fetus somehow Siamesed itself to your human fetus in the womb, the stork didn’t drop you off on your folks’ doorstep with a .45 glued to your newborn little paw—so shooting isn’t instinctive; it’s a learned habit. Yes, you will do certain things instinctively, such as “ducking” at the sound of a bomb blast—but you’ll do that whether you’re holding a gun in your sweaty mitts or not.

As somebody once said, under pressure you will regress to whatever training technique(s) you’ve studied—hopefully. If your training

covered the potential situations you are most likely to encounter and you maintain your level of mechanical proficiency, you should be in with a good chance. Unfortunately, neither the Weaver nor Isosceles stance is going to contribute one iota towards your longevity if you have to shoot one-handed—but basic above-the-waist mechanical fundamentals and a *BALANCED* shooting platform will.

Let’s face it, most real situations are reactive, whether preplanned or not. All the neat “ready on the left, ready on the right” preconceived, prepared-for range drills are primarily a test of mechanical ability, not of reactive fighting. Excavating a pair of holes on somebody’s seven-yard target line using your feet for a backhoe isn’t exactly replicating being unexpectedly assaulted in a back-street alley littered with broken beer bottles and half-consumed hamburger remains.

Along with this goes the antithesis—expecting your overladen brain to think of not standing side-on to your attackers “so you won’t take a hit in both lungs or kidneys instead of only one.” That’s like telling the driver of an SUV that one flat tire is better than two. What brilliant advice do you have for a motorcyclist? You’re trying to protect your wife and infant rugrat with one hand and return fire with another. And most of us weren’t issued three hands at birth.

What you need is physical balance so you can keep your upper body stable to allow accurate return fire—a perfect range stance just isn’t going to happen under these circumstances.

It’s interesting to observe how much emphasis was—and to a lesser extent currently still is—placed on mind-set and footwork in the martial arts before a student finally got to the level of being entrusted with a weapon in his hands. Now we gleefully hand over a gun, go through the “basics” in a couple of hours, and then proceed to launch missiles into paper.

WHY THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AN "ADVANCED" GUNFIGHT

Then, and only then, do we cover the mind-set and footwork elements. That's what happens through the ages when you replace the human brain with a "long-range" mechanical power delivery system—which is most commonly used at blade-fighting distances. Time stands still for

no man, but you can always justify an illusion. Break your watch—that way it will still show the correct time twice a day.

(This column originally appeared in the May 2004 issue of *S.W.A.T. Magazine*.)

About the Author



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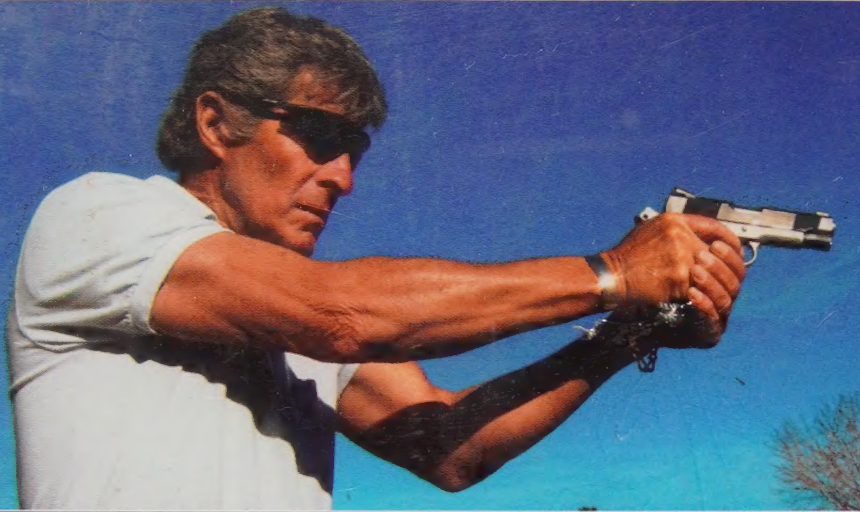
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