

the ordinary guy

Column by Mark A. Walters
VOL.20

BECAUSE I NEEDED THE MONEY

Dear Readers,

Several months ago, Maria Harris, the Managing Editor of Concealed Carry Magazine, asked me to contact a fellow USCCA member who sent her an e-mail regarding a recent shooting in Jacksonville, Florida. Following her request, I called the sender of that correspondence, Mr. Erick Williams. Erick is a former law enforcement officer who was once shot in the line of duty and is now a highly respected CCW instructor in the Jacksonville area.

Mr. Williams informed me during our conversation that he had been contacted by a prospective student who, along with his wife, was interested in Erick's Florida CCW instruction course after seeing one of Erick's advertisements. Mr. Jorrick Landry and his wife, Vernalise, made arrangements that day to take the upcoming class from Erick on the following Saturday.

Subsequent to my conversation with Erick, he and I both placed a call to Mr. Landry. What Jorrick Landry proceeded to tell me is one of

the most devastating and frightening accounts of criminal terror that I have ever heard, the end result of which is absolutely incomprehensible. During my interviews with Mr. Landry, my heart sank to the pit of my stomach with each passing word. Listening to this brave young man describe what happened to his family brought tears to my eyes, and his words made me question my own inner strength. I am truly humbled to be the one to bring this story to you.

It is my sincerest hope that none of us have to endure the type of tragedy that you are about to read, but if we ever find ourselves face to face with evil, may we be emboldened with the courage of the Landry family. My heartfelt thanks go out to Mr. and Mrs. Landry and their children for allowing me to pass along this difficult story of utter terror, awful fear, impossible strength, and one family's courage to overcome the unimaginable. Following is the factual account of the Landry's fight for survival against a vicious criminal attack on one late and horribly fateful Florida night.

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Mark A. Walters
The Ordinary Guy

Jorrick Landry and his family can tell you first-hand how difficult the life of a US Navy sailor can be. It involves long hours working when the ship is in port and long strenuous weeks away from home while on sea duty...weeks that turn to months in the blink of an eye. Jorrick's plight is one that I have heard before. Wives keep busy through support groups and the tedious days alone, running the household and taking care of the family in the father's absence. This can put a tremendous stress on even the strongest of relationships.

Jorrick told me during the beginning of our discussion that the crime rate in his area was becoming a greater concern for him while he was at sea. Through much discussion with his wife, they agreed that the family would keep a firearm for self-defense during his absences, one of which was rapidly approaching in the coming days. They also agreed that they would attend a CCW class together so he could feel comfortable knowing that his wife had a means of defending the family while he was on deployment. After seeing one of Erick Williams' CCW instruction course advertisements, the Landrys signed up for class.

Jorrick and Vernalise attended Erick's CCW class on Saturday afternoon, April 30th, 2006, during which time they were taught the Florida statutes and basic firearm safety. Erick took them to the range, and both Jorrick and Vernalise passed the class together. Jorrick was not aware that it was legal in Florida to keep a loaded gun concealed in a vehicle without a Florida CCW until Erick informed him of that fact during their instruction. After passing the class together and sending in their CCW paperwork, the Landrys now kept the revolver in the console of the family SUV for their protection while waiting for their Florida licenses to arrive.

With the firearm instruction now out of the way and feeling somewhat safer, Jorrick and Vernalise now turned their attention to the family activities during his upcoming deployment. They saw an advertisement for a "day camp" for children at McGirts Park in Jacksonville and decided to sign up the children. This activity would certainly give Vernalise some much needed downtime while taking care of the family in Jorrick's absence. Vernalise called the recreation center and was told that the applications were on a first-come, first-served basis and that the camp filled up quickly, so it

was in their best interest to line up early on the day of sign-ups. The woman on the other end of the phone told them that it was not unusual for parents to begin lining up in their vehicles just after midnight on the night before to assure themselves one of the limited spots.

EARLY SATURDAY MORNING

At approximately midnight on May 6th, 2006, Vernalise set out for the park while Jorrick remained home with the 3 children. Shortly after her arrival and realizing that she was the only one at the park, Vernalise called Jorrick to inform him of the fact that she was not comfortable waiting alone. Not wanting to miss the camp sign-ups, and concerned with his wife's well being and safety, Jorrick asked her to come home to pick up him and the children so they could make a fun night of it together as a family. The children were awoken and loaded into the SUV, and the family set out for the park to assure their spots for the kids' camp.

It was 1:30 a.m. when they arrived back at the park together. Vernalise was in the driver's seat, Jorrick was in the front passenger seat, 7-year-old Zaccheaus was in the middle of the back seat, and 2-year-old Anaiyah hopped up into her mother's lap in front. Sitting alone in the far back of the SUV was 10-year-old Drevon who was keeping himself busy with his video game.

THE FACE OF EVIL

Jorrick and Vernalise were discussing the fact that they were still the only folks waiting for the camp sign-up when the face of evil appeared. While Vernalise was talking to her husband, she yelled to Jorrick in shock at what she saw through the passenger side window, just inches behind her husband. A young man in dark clothing had approached the passenger side window and pumped his shotgun, sending a live round into the chamber before screaming at Jorrick inside the vehicle to give him "everything that he had."

With a loaded shotgun now pointed directly at his face, Jorrick offered the man his wallet. Desperate and fearing for the lives of her children, Vernalise offered the crazed punk everything, including their SUV. "Shut up bitch!," was the response that came back from outside the vehicle. Vernalise begged the man to leave them alone, telling him that they had children in the car, and then, according to Jorrick,

"His eyes lit up like he hit the lottery." The man screamed back into the SUV through the slightly opened passenger window, "Kids? Let me see some mother-fucking kids." Eighteen-year-old Jabray Davias Jones then entered the Landry family's SUV, forcing his way into the rear passenger side door and pushing Zaccheaus across the back seat.

TIME TO ACT

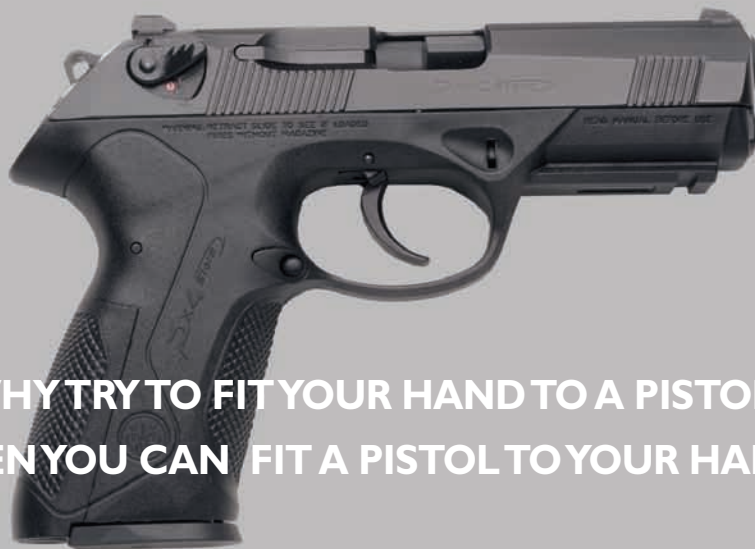
With a shotgun wielding maniac now inside his SUV, Jorrick had to react to save the lives of his family. He later told me how he thanked God that Erick Williams had set him straight on Florida law, which allowed him to have a loaded gun in his vehicle for protection, even without a CCW license. Looking behind and over his right shoulder in utter disbelief at the incredible and frightening events unfolding in front of him, Jorrick reached for the console and the handgun inside it, all the while trying not to let the maniac threatening his family see what he was doing. Watching her husband fumbling for the weapon in a fight for the lives of her children, Vernalise discreetly assisted Jorrick. Opening the console and breaking the thumb latch, Vernalise quickly and quietly handed the gun to Jorrick while dropping 2-year-old Anaiyah on the floor, at her feet, between the seat and the pedals. Jorrick, now armed with a handgun, swung around to his right, placing the gun between his seat and the door, and began firing at Jabray Davias Jones. Vernalise in a desperate and incredibly heroic attempt to save her family, reached for and grabbed the shotgun muzzle behind her and to the right, forcing it towards the floorboard in the back seat.

KABOOM! Jabray squeezed the trigger on the shotgun. The explosion ripped into the floorboards of the SUV. KABOOM! A second shot; the roaring blasts going unnoticed by Jorrick, who continued firing, emptying his handgun into the seriously wounded criminal who invaded and threatened the lives of his family.

Out of ammunition and during what seemed like an eternity, Jorrick watched as a wounded Jabray Jones tumbled outside of the SUV through the same door that he forced his way into just seconds earlier. He struck the pavement with a thud. Jorrick had succeeded in striking Jones multiple times in the groin area, leg, stomach and eye, with the shot to the eye lodging in his head, directly behind

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the ear. The shot to the leg penetrated through and traveled up Jones' arm, shattering and destroying his bicep muscle. During the incredible violence and with unparalleled bravery, Vernalise gained control of the shotgun and jumped out of the truck with Anaiyah. Zaccheaus jumped from the rear passenger door on the driver's side and joined his mother and young sister who were now safely outside of the vehicle. Drevon remained in the far rear of the SUV.

TAKING CONTROL

Jabray Davias Jones lay on the pavement gravely wounded and bleeding profusely. Vernalise, in control of the shotgun, threw it to Jorrick, who was now standing over the criminal bleeding out on the ground, at his feet. Jorrick dropped the empty revolver, racked another round into the chamber of the shotgun and held the wounded Jones on the ground with what seconds earlier had been the robber's weapon. Jabray Jones, with his own loaded shotgun pointed directly at him, began frantically fumbling inside his pants, near his back for what Jorrick thought might be another weapon. "Stop reaching behind you!" Jorrick screamed at the man, "Stop it, now!" Jorrick squeezed the trigger and opened up with one deafening blast, tearing into the kidnapper's lower back, near his waist, striking him near the kidney area at almost point-blank range.

Unbelievably, the young man was still alive when he uttered the words, "Please Mister, no more." Jorrick told me that he knew then that it was over when he saw Jones' body relax on the pavement. "I saw him give up," said Jorrick. As he held the shotgun over the mortally wounded man on the ground, he asked, "Why? Why did you do this to my family?" "Because I needed the money," was the sickening reply from the dying man laying on the ground at Jorrick's feet.

Realizing that he was in desperate need of medical attention and that his attempt to rob, kidnap and murder the Landry family had failed, Jabray Davias Jones asked Jorrick to reach into his pocket to retrieve his cell phone and call for help. Holding the shotgun over Jones, Jorrick retrieved the wounded man's phone while continuing to hold him at gunpoint. Not able to get service on Jones' phone, Jorrick yelled for Vernalise who was standing away from the vehicle with two of the children. She tossed her phone to Jorrick through the

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open car doors. Jorrick was able to call for assistance with the weapon trained on Jones.

ROLL CALL!

Confident and in total control of the situation, Jorrick Landry immediately yelled for a roll call of his family, one by one, when he realized that everyone answered except for Drevon. Alone in the back seat and sitting directly behind the incredible violence that unfolded seconds earlier inside the vehicle, Drevon was silent. While hearing emergency vehicles responding to the scene and still pointing a shotgun at the wounded gunman, Jorrick looked inside the rear of the SUV to see his oldest boy slumped forward and bleeding against the rear of the seat in front of him.

THE CRIME SCENE

A total of 10 to 12 minutes elapsed between the time that Jones began his terror against the family and the time that he lay bleeding, as police arrived. Using a Maglite to alert the approaching vehicles to his location while still on the phone with emergency operators, Jorrick Landry did as instructed when the officers arrived. He lay on the ground, face down while the officers gained immediate control of the crime scene. When responding medical personnel first arrived, they rushed to the aid of the fallen gunman while Jorrick frantically alerted them to his wounded son in the rear of the vehicle. Drevon was rushed to Shands Jacksonville hospital in

critical condition, wounded by a stray round that police later determined was the result of a ricochet from his father's own gun during his heroic efforts to save his family. Homicide detectives removed Jorrick from the scene and took him to the police station where he was intensely interrogated about the events of the evening. Vernalise was questioned on the scene and sent to the hospital to be with her son. Detectives were cognizant of the fact that Jorrick had moments earlier killed a violent criminal who was robbing his family. Jorrick, who was now distraught over his critically wounded son, was allowed to get regular updates from the hospital about Drevon's condition during the investigation. According to Jorrick, it was approximately 45 minutes later when he was informed that no charges would be filed against him and that detectives were considering his defensive use of force a justifiable homicide. He was quickly reunited with his family at Drevon's bedside.

Only hours after the incident and with his son in critical condition in the intensive care unit, Jorrick and Vernalise notified Erick Williams of what occurred. Rushing to the hospital, Erick arrived to find Vernalise still with blood covered jeans. Jorrick approached Erick and collapsed into his arms, giving him what was described as a "bear hug" and thanking him repeatedly for informing him that they could legally keep the gun in the car. Jorrick broke down in tears in Erick's arms.

THE CRIMINAL'S INTENT

Although no one will ever know the true intentions of Jabray Davias Jones that night, clues left behind by the dead robber make it clear that he was not inclined to leave any witnesses. Jones was carrying what Jorrick described as some sort of knapsack with him during the commission of his crimes against the family. Police later told Jorrick the next day that inside the knapsack was found some lighter fluid, tape, and dozens of shotgun shells. It was later found that the shotgun was stolen, and although no hard proof existed, detectives told Jorrick that the pattern used was similar to other known crimes. We can only speculate. EMS personnel on the scene described shotgun shells as "falling out" of the gunman's shirt as they cut it away at the crime scene. It was obvious that Jabray Davias Jones meant business.

THE ROBBER

18-year-old Jabray Davias Jones expired on the scene as a result of Vernalise and Jorrick Landry's heroism and bravery in the face of pure evil. He was later determined to be a student at Savannah State University and had no prior criminal record. Jorrick was told by

police that the violent nature of the crime, the weapon and the techniques used by Jones during the attempted kidnapping and robbery of his family suggest that Jones was no rookie to this type of behavior. It is probable that he had done this before and was never caught. Similarities to other unsolved crimes were apparent to police. One thing is certain; he will never again have the opportunity to harm anyone else. Predictably, those who knew him described him as a "good boy."

DREYON

Jorrick said that during the violence in the vehicle, Jones threw up his arm in an attempt to block the incoming fire and he remembers Jones' hand striking his own hand or arm as he was firing. It was this action that they believe sent the stray shot into Dreyon, striking him in the head at his left temple. Though there were encouraging signs during the next week, Dreyon passed away approximately one week after that horrifying, night having never awoken.

THE FAMILY

Through these horrific events and through the loss of their beloved son,

the Landry family has survived together by their strength and faith. The events of May 6th, 2006 have changed their lives forever and forged a deep bond with Mr. Erick Williams. Having been through defensive shootings and their aftermath, Erick has been a source of strength for Jorrick and his family, comforting them since that fateful night. I asked Jorrick how he was coping with what occurred. He told me that he is confident that his son knows that the outcome of the events of that night quite literally saved the rest of his family. The United States Navy gave Jorrick some time off and he is now back on active duty.

Mark is the director of Gun Safety Education and a NRA Certified Instructor in three disciplines. He is the owner of 45 Caliber Transfer, LLC and 45 Caliber Transportation, Inc as well as a Second Amendment activist in his home town. Mark is a member of the Professional Outdoor Media Association (POMA) and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). He encourages readers to contact him at:

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Width	0.93 in.
Overall Length	4.75 in.
Barrel Length	2.49 in.
Material	17-4 pH Stainless Steel
Weight - Empty	18.72 oz.
Operation	DAO
Magazine Capacity	6+1
M.S.R.P.	\$449.00 US

The basic Guardian is a handsome piece of stainless. It has good lines, a simple clean look, and it carries easily. A perfect foundation for some custom work.



The NAA Guardian has long been one of my favorite little pistols. I have no specific reason to validate that bias. There are pistols out there that are a bit smaller, some that are lighter, some that are more powerful. In a race for first place, the Guardian doesn't win any category firsts. Yet when you take in all the score averages, in my book it comes in with the most points.

Some guys might not like it because they think it might be too heavy, or the trigger pull too long and too weighty. The slide might be too hard to pull back. The sights might be too hard to see. You know what? They are right. However, the Guardian has a way of turning negatives into positives. Let me explain. The sights are just about useless. They are too small and narrow to be effective. But this does not matter because within the intended purpose of the weapon, they are not even going to be used. The slide is hard to cycle by hand because the gun uses a blow-back action. It isn't an elegant system, but it is very reliable. As long as the ammo works, the gun is going to work. The trigger is long because it is a

double action only design which gives the gun added safety and simplicity of use. It doesn't need a safety lever. It is as simple to run as a revolver.

Overall the Guardian is greater than the sum of its parts. Late at night, when you are walking from your office out to your car and the parking lot looks spooky, you can feel that reassuring weight in your pocket letting you know that you are prepared. As you walk, you casually slip your hands in your pockets and your right hand slides over and around the grips. In your mind the cool steel whispers in a comforting voice, "You will be okay." Should a goblin appear, the snag free profile draws quickly and easily from the pocket holster. You don't have to think about working the action or dropping the safety because the gun is always there for you, always ready. You might be scared and stressed. Maybe your finger is already on the trigger while you cover the potential assailant. Under such stress a lighter trigger might be pulled all the way resulting in a negligent discharge. This happens to members of law enforcement sometimes... it could happen to anyone.

With the Guardian's longer pull this isn't so much of a danger.

Should you have to fire, the .380 ACP cartridge is going to bark and snap and send out a 90 grain jacketed hollow point to deliver your cease and desist order. While a .380 isn't the most powerful round out there, the Guardian's 6+1 capacity will certainly make a convincing argument to the goblin that it picked the wrong victim. By this time the Goblin could be laying on the ground bleeding out and you could be using your other hand to call 911 on your cell phone. The Guardian's magazine release is in the standard American position on the side of the frame, behind the trigger. If you practice, you can reload the pistol quickly. Of course all the above is a worst case scenario. But that is what we are all about. We hope for the best, but plan for the worst. A concealed carry gun like the Guardian is such a simple thing, like a seatbelt or a parachute. It can only do its job if you strap it on before you take off.

My last gun review mentioned the shooting at Trolley Square in Salt Lake City. Since then we have had the

shooting at Virginia Tech. Unlike at Trolley Square, there was no one at the scene armed with a concealed weapon. Had there been, the outcome could have been different. The body count could have been a lot less. Here is the clincher, there were people who had concealed carry permits, but didn't have the weapons on them. That was because of the Virginia Tech no weapons policy. That is the thing that bothers me the most. Thirty victims died after the police were already on the campus. I'm not going to disrespect the police here, but I am going to say this: *Personal Security is a Personal Responsibility*. Remember that.

For that purpose you have to have your weapon on you at all times. You can't leave it at home. You can't leave it in your vehicle. You can't leave it in your purse back at your desk. You have to have it on your person, and where you can access it without drawing attention to yourself. This is where the Guardian comes into play. Carried in a pocket holster, the gun is invisible and you can look cool as a jewel as you stand there with your hands in your pockets, in about as non-threatening a pose as you can be, yet ready to instantly respond to a threat. In an inside-the-waistband holster tucked in behind your hip the Guardian is easily forgotten and unnoticeable, but it is always going to be there for you.

In the first part of this series on the Ultimate Concealed Carry Gun, I laid out some reasons for our selection of the Guardian as our gun of choice. Let's review: We wanted a gun that was small. We wanted a gun that was solid. We wanted at least a .380 caliber. We wanted the highest quality while avoiding high premiums. We wanted reliability. After filtering all the gun industry's products, the result was the North American Arms Guardian. Let's take a look at the internals. The Guardian doesn't break down in the usual way. There is a small take down button on one side. Hitting that button allows you to lift the rear of the slide up and off the frame and then slide it forward off the barrel. Here is the interesting thing about the Guardian; the frame and barrel are both one part. So you have the frame/barrel, the slide, and the recoil springs with that little weird spring plug. I took my example apart and was struck by the bigger hammer approach that NAA used in the design. Even in the small parts there is a large dose of *rugged* built in. This is a sturdy little fellow. If the Guardian was a

character from *Lord of the Rings*, it would be Gimli the dwarf. Small, tough, and full of attitude.

It was also a little rough. I used a new product called Ultra Blue by Microton. The color is like the blue milk that Luke Skywalker drank in episode 3. Strange or not, it's some really slick stuff. With a little bit of that blue stuff and some hand cycling, the Guardian smoothed out a lot.

During test firing, I ran through four boxes of shells with no problems. The reliability is there. As the saying goes, "accuracy is fine, but reliability is final." I would have no problem packing this gun as a daily carry item. Even if it isn't my main gun, it can always ride as a backup. In a pocket or on the ankle, the Guardian can always be there for me.

There are some things about the Guardian that I would change. Oh sure, the gun is fine as it is, but I want it to be better. I want NAA to deck it out as the

"Vee Dub" commercials say "Pimp zee Auto." I want it to be slicker. I want the edges to be melted a bit. And as always I want tritium in the front sight post. I would also like something a bit more in the looks department. Dress it up a bit for me. Nice wood grips maybe. Those don't contribute anything but pure cosmetics, but it would still be nice.

Even if it is a concealed carry gun, I want it to look cool. I don't care if no one ever sees it. Like a tattoo under your clothes... you know it's there.

The Guardian is a great starting platform for The Ultimate Concealed Carry Pistol. Let's see what we can do with it and how it turns out.



George Hill is an NRA Certified Pistol and Personal Protection instructor and the writer and publisher of MadOgre.com. Visit his website for more information on Mad Ogre. www.madogre.com Photography by George.



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Begin your shooting at close ranges so you can develop the necessary skills and identify any problems. The goal is to have all shots touching at 10 feet then move back as needed.

The Basics of Marksmanship

Getting hits on a target is easy to do once you know how to do it. Like any other control and dexterity dependent skill, there is a proven and correct way to shoot a pistol. I am not talking about bull's-eye shooting, although some of the skill involved in that discipline also corresponds to tactical shooting. We are primarily interested in self-defense shooting. This means that we want the ability to place solid hits on an adversary from a condition of unreadiness and under urgent time limits.

Before you can expect to hit anything, there are some "hardware" issues that must be seen to. The ammunition must be capable of an acceptable level of accuracy. This is not as much of a concern when using quality defensive ammunition, but it may be if using more economical "training ammunition." Primarily, you must make certain that the pistol is zeroed correctly. This simply means that the sights must be arranged in a way that they will coincide (visually) with the physical impact of the bullet strike on target. There are hundreds of different types of sights, and to explain how to zero every particular weapon would take

a volume. For zeroing procedures, please refer to your weapons training manual or owner's manual. Don't dismiss this part of the equation. Doing so will only lead to frustration.

There are several fundamentals to marksmanship. They include: sight alignment, sight picture, trigger control, pistol grip, shooting stance, breath control and follow-through. *Of these seven, four are most important.* It is these four which must be focused on by the tactical shooter. They are: *sight alignment, sight picture, trigger control, and follow through.*

Sight alignment is the relation between the front sight, the rear sight, and the shooter's eye. It is established by placing your visual focus on the front sight and aligning it with the rear sight (irrespective of any target). The top of the front sight must be seen as level with the top of the rear sight. Additionally, you must see equal amounts of light visible on both sides of the front sight as viewed through the rear sight notch. This describes perfect vertical and horizontal alignment of the sights.

This is the sight alignment that we would always like to have. Sometimes we

will settle for less if the target is close enough. Generally, the closer the target is, the bigger it appears and the less perfect your sight alignment must be. Conversely, the more distant target is or the smaller the target is at close range, the greater the requirement for precision will be in the alignment of the sights. *In practice, however, we must always strive for perfect alignment.*

Sight picture is the existing sight alignment as it is seen superimposed on the target's center of mass. Center of mass describes the central portion of the visible target. Now let me ask you something. How many things can the human eye focus on at any one time? *The human eye is similar to a camera; it can only focus on one thing at a time.* With regard to the sight picture, there are three things that we want to keep in alignment: the target, the front sight, and the rear sight. Now imagine looking at these three points through a camera. If you focus the lens on the front sight, you can still see the target well enough, although it appears somewhat out of focus in comparison to the front sight. Additionally, you can still see the rear sight well enough, although it also appears slightly out of focus in comparison to the front sight. By focusing in on the front sight, you can see both the target and the rear sight well enough in the peripheral vision (although not as clear and focused as the front sight), so you are able to keep all three points in alignment. That is the "secret" of sight picture. The more difficult the shot is (i.e., a distant target or small target), then the more precise that sight picture must be.

One of the most common training mistakes is attempting any advanced training without having a full and complete understanding of the fundamentals of making the hits. Everyone considers themselves a master shootist, and few want to spend the time on basic skills.



The visual and mental focus must always remain on the front sight.

Another very important aspect of the sight picture is whether you should close the non-dominant eye or keep both eyes open. The simple fact of the matter is that most students that I've seen cannot focus on the front sight as well if both eyes are kept open. If it's not an issue for you, then don't worry about it. If you find it difficult to focus on the front sight with both eyes, then you must close one eye. But which one? We all have one eye that is more "dominant" than the other. That eye is the one that you want to use for sighting. For most shooters, their dominant eye is on the same side as their dominant hand. In other words, a right-handed shooter will most likely have his dominant eye on his right side, and so on. Some shooters are cross eye dominant, i.e., right-handed and left eye dominant, or vice versa.

Here is how you find out which eye is dominant: Make a small "OK" signal with your primary hand, and look at a target through the opening with both eyes open. Now close the eye that is opposite of your primary hand. If the target disappeared from view, your support side eye is dominant. If it did not disappear from view, your primary side eye is dominant.

If your primary side eye is dominant, you simply close the support side eye when focusing on the front sight. If your dominant eye is on the support side, you have two options: Either close the eye that is opposite of your primary side and learn to sight with the non-dominant eye, or close that non-dominant eye and modify the shooting position slightly by angling the head slightly to allow the support side eye access to the sights.

Some of you who may have been schooled to keep both eyes open, take notice. The non-dominant eye is only shut off for fractions of seconds while the shots are fired. Therefore, you are not missing anything in your immediate surroundings. Secondly, the reason given for not closing one eye is that you may need it to see things around you. This is hardly a combat reality. If a hostile man is standing in front of you and intent on killing you, then to survive and win, you must do him before he does you. In such instances, do you really think you will be looking around with your non-dominant eye for other adversaries? Of course not! *You will be too busy with the problem at hand to worry about other potential problems out there somewhere.*

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Here is the sequence of events: Your eyes are initially focused on the target, specifically on the center of mass. The pistol is raised up into the line of sight between the eye and the target. The non-dominant eye is closed to allow the dominant eye to focus better on the front sight. The sight alignment is verified by bringing the visual focus to the front sight, as seen through the rear sight notch, and as the two points of reference are aligned on the target's center of mass. As the eye focuses clearly on the front sight, the rear sight and the target will be visible in the foreground and background, but they will be slightly out of focus. You must see the front sight with crystal clarity and sharp enough focus to be able to count the serrations on it. Moreover, you must concentrate your mental focus on that front sight to the exclusion of all else around you. (More on this later, grasshopper!) This keeps the pistol on target.

Trigger control is the third fundamental, and probably the most important. Proper trigger control allows the shooter to fire a shot without disturbing the sight picture. The trigger must be pressed smoothly to the rear, without any disturbance of the sight picture until

the pressure suffices and the pistol discharges. Two key elements to this are the *finger placement* and the *surprise break*.

Correct finger placement on the trigger is dependent upon the type of trigger you are operating. The placement should allow you to press straight to the rear without any lateral divergence in pressure. Placing too much of the finger, or conversely, not placing enough of the finger on the trigger will cause your shots to string laterally on the target. Such extremes in placement will cause you to exert pressure to the side as well as the rear, with poor results on target.

Naturally, some triggers are easier to operate than others, but all can be managed with enough training. With Colt/Browning single-action triggers, the area of the first pad of the finger seems to work best. When using a Glock pistol, the area between the pad and the first joint will allow you the best control. Finally, if you are using a double-action pistol, you must place much more finger on the trigger in order to provide the leverage necessary to operate the heavier trigger. For these shooters, the area just above the first joint will work the best.

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Classic marksmanship skills must be fully understood. Only then can more advanced methods of shooting be developed.

Before we discuss the actual operation of the trigger, I want to discuss our physiology. We are still hard-wired like our caveman ancestors. They were fairly good at caving heads in with stones and such, and our brains don't work any different today. The result is that it is unnatural for us to experience a small explosion out there at the end of our hand. That is precisely what happens when we shoot, right? Invariably, our subconscious minds want us to flinch, close our eyes, and do all manner of silly things in anticipation of the forthcoming BIG BANG. This creates all manner of problems with marksmanship. Not to worry, however; we can easily get around this by allowing the shot to *surprise* us.

When operating the trigger, the shooter applies smooth and constant pressure to the trigger until eventually and almost unintentionally the pressure is sufficient to *break* the trigger. This is called a *surprise break*. Pressing the trigger in this manner may be likened to using an eye-dropper. Think of the process involved. You *align* the dropper above your eye, you get the proper *sight picture* by focusing on the end of the eye-dropper; and finally, you gradually begin increasing pressure until one drop forms and falls into the eye by surprise. If you force the drop out by mashing the eye-

dropper, you will flinch, close the eye, and get the eye-drops everywhere except in your eye. The same process applies to operating the trigger on a pistol. First, align the sights with the target and establish an appropriate sight picture. Next, focus visually on the front sight while building constant, smooth pressure on the trigger until the pistol eventually fires by surprise.

Of paramount importance is that the break of the trigger is not specifically expected by the shooter. He knows that it is going to go, and he is continuing the constant pressure on the trigger, but he does not know the exact instant when it will break. The trigger must break almost unintentionally. If the shooter anticipates the break or forces it to occur, he will invariably bear down reflexively on the weapon and flinch at the final moment. This will cause the shot to go errant.

Remember when I said that the human eye could only focus on one specific thing at a time? Well, when under stress, the human mind is much the same way. ***If you focus your mental and visual attention on the top edge of the front sight while you operate the trigger, that is where will your thoughts will be when that trigger pressure is enough to cause the gun to fire. Your attention will be on the front sight, and not on the small explosion that happens.*** That is how you experience a surprise break, but most people do not understand this.

In a combative situation, you will not have an open-ended time interval in which to press the trigger so very carefully. However, this does not invalidate or change the process. Go back to the eye-dropper analogy. Those of you who put drops in your eyes on a daily basis know that it becomes quite easy as you get used to the procedure. As you become accomplished at using the eye-dropper, you do not require the lengthy time interval to align, focus and press. On the contrary, it happens very quickly due to practice. Operating the trigger on a pistol is the same. Through perfect practice and programming, you will operate the trigger in the same fashion as with the surprise break, but you will do it in less time. This is called the *compressed surprise break*.

Follow-through is the fourth fundamental, which is often ignored. Follow Through is controlling the pistol and the trigger after the trigger breaks (and fires the shot) in order to avoid disturbing the alignment of the pistol.

When the trigger breaks, maintain your focus on the front sight, and keep finger contact on the trigger as you hold it to the rear. When actually firing a shot, you will visually lose the front sight momentarily on recoil. Regain front sight focus immediately, as soon as the recoils dissipates. Additionally, do not release the trigger until the recoil cycle is complete. Maintain finger contact on the trigger and hold it to the rear as the shot is fired. Release it only after you have refocused on the front sight. Even then, only release the trigger far enough to reset it. After the trigger release begins, you will eventually notice a slight click. This is the disconnecter resetting the trigger. This is as far as you need to go in order to fire a second shot. Allowing the trigger to move any further forward increases the recovery time between shots.

The ability to fire an additional controlled shot is extremely important in a tactical situation. Except for special circumstances, such as single, precise head shots, you will usually fire twice. The reasons for this are to enhance the damage on the target, as well as to insure at least one hit in stressful situations that may cause missed shots.

The way to fire that second shot quickly is to release the trigger only far enough to reset it via the disconnecter device in each pistol. The trigger will be reset when you hear the audible (and feel the tactile) click as you begin to release. At this point, refocus on the front sight as you did for the first shot. Simply begin the pressure build-up with the trigger finger again. You must experience a second surprise break for the second shot. This is called a *controlled pair*. Each of the two shots is a controlled, individual shot. Each of the two shots requires a separate sight picture and a separate surprise break, even if executed very quickly.

These are the Secrets of Marksmanship. Study them well as they are the keys to hitting. In the end, they are the keys to your survival.

Gabriel Suarez is an internationally recognized trainer and lecturer in the field of civilian personal defense. He has written over a dozen books and taught courses in several countries.

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WHAT WE NEED TO SEE FOR A SUCCESSFUL SHOT

Much has been written about precision shooting in the world of combat skill development and pistol shooting in general. Perspectives and definitions of how and why we hit the intended target vary so greatly that two people involved in a heated discussion regarding precision shooting may be very parallel in their thinking, but not recognize it. In this column, we will talk about how and why our views concerning this subject work. Ultimately, the goal is to bring us all a little closer in defining this controversial subject and understanding what we need to see in order to deliver a successful shot.

All of our training at The Sigarms Academy stems from the SIG principle of firearms training. SIG stands for, "Simple Is Good." We like to cut through all of the fluff, and present concepts that make sense and are easily reproducible by the average shooter. We subscribe to the age-old premise that most likely originated with the invention of firearms in that the objective of shooting is hitting your target.

Let's start by discussing the two absolutes of hitting a target. They are muzzle management and trigger finger discipline. Since the bullet exits the muzzle on the way to the target, it seems likely that from zero to fifty yards (plus or minus), if the muzzle is pointed at the target when the bullet exits, then we will have ourselves a hit where we want it. Trigger finger discipline refers to how we release the bullet toward the target. If you stabilize the muzzle of the pistol on the target and operate the trigger without disturbing that stability, you will experience success. Make sense? Our students think so!

Precision shooting is a total mystery to some simply because they are confused about what they must see to consistently hit the target. Sight alignment and sight picture are two regularly used terms in the precision shooting world, but they aren't always fully understood. Sight alignment is nothing more than the front and rear sight as viewed by the eye. Perfect sight alignment is the front sight vertically and horizontally centered in the rear sight notch. Sight picture is the

target, front sight and rear sight as viewed by the eye. Perfect sight picture is the front sight centered vertically and horizontally in the rear sight notch superimposed on the desired point of impact of the target.

In studying human vision, we find that the eye can clearly focus on a single plane, plus or minus an inch or two. Everything else ranges from a little to a lot out of focus. Relate this to a camera lens. The camera has clarity at its primary point of interest and everything closer or further away is less than perfectly clear. A little known fact is that the eye can pick the center of any object, regardless of its shape. It can do this without having total visual clarity of the object and can be accurate down to one minute of angle (a half inch circle at fifty yards).

Now, let's take a closer look at how and why precision shooting works. The muzzle of the pistol must be square with the target to hit the target. Think perpendicular with a very slight upward angle to account for the effects of gravity on the bullet, and horizontally centered. We use our sights as a guide to position the muzzle on the target. The more precisely we align our sights, the closer the muzzle is to square with the face of the target, and the more likely we will hit our desired point of impact, assuming that the pistol is already zeroed. The clear focus on the front sight as viewed through the slightly out of focus rear sight allows us the best chance to position the muzzle square to the target. The target should be out of focus, but its shape should be apparent.

As stated above, the eye will automatically find the center of any object.

What this boils down to is that precision sight alignment will square the muzzle (where the bullet exits the gun) on the center of the target, which our eye automatically finds, for a hit in the desired location.

Bull's-eye shooters that shoot the blank side of their target and shoot better groups than when they are shooting the target side prove the concept that the eye will naturally find the center of an object consistently. By keeping the eye focus on the sights through the release of the shot, the muzzle remains square with the target, and a consistent impact point is hit again and again.

A simple and extremely effective sight picture that we developed for the aged-eye shooters (those in bi-focals and tri-focals) has become the standard sight picture of the SIGARMS Academy for all shooters who aren't happy with their present method of hitting the target where they want to. We recommend a dot on the front sight and the widest notch available for the type of rear sight to be used. This allows us to use the eye's natural ability to center round objects in square openings with incredible precision. We zero the pistol for the strike of the round to hit whatever we put the front sight dot on, just as we would a red dot sight system. The regimen is to center the dot in the rear sight notch and float the dot on the target. With a smooth trigger press to release the shot, the thrill of a center hit is felt again and again. Simple Is Good!

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RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

Anyone who would want to shoot somebody is either extremely naïve or insane. Once the trigger is pulled, the consequences are grave and irrevocable. Bullets cannot be taken back. Using a gun as a social problem-solving tool in a non-war environment is a very last resort for the gravest of extremes. Therefore, because the potential for petty conflict in today's society is high, carrying a firearm for self-defense requires that you adhere to a higher standard of care than if you were to go unarmed.

As an armed citizen, you must exercise good judgment and behave in a responsible manner at all times. *Judgment* refers to decision making ability; being able to find and evaluate the essential facts in a situation and come to a conclusion about what to do that is adaptive, smart, and healthy. Being *responsible* refers to being willing and able to take charge and be accountable for your actions.

Anything that clouds or dampens your judgment does not mix with firearms. This is why alcohol does not mix with operating motor vehicles or carrying a firearm. In fact, anything that is associated with excessive exuberance,

the potential for erratic behavior, or unnecessary attention directed at you, does not mix with carrying a gun.

The rule of thumb is to *minimize your exposure*. That means don't go to stupid places that are magnets for rowdy people and where people get excited, confrontational, or belligerent (e.g., sleazy bars, rock concerts, political rallies). Don't hang out with stupid and impulsive people, and don't do stupid things. Any confrontation you have when you are carrying is a gunfight. This is because there is at least one gun present—yours!

Carrying a gun should not be what gives you courage. As an armed citizen, you have *less* not *more* latitude to behave in a reckless or brash manner. Holstered courage is for fools only, and fools should not be carrying firearms.

If you carry a concealed firearm, you must certainly be prepared to use lethal force if that is your only viable option in an extreme social situation. The fact that you are carrying unfortunately does not impart to you any sort of magical repellent power. If your handgun is concealed, as it should be, it is your ace in the hole should your back be up against a wall.

On the other hand, if you are known to be carrying, you give up the valuable element of surprise.

Being prepared to employ lethal force if necessary, does not give you a license to be a cowboy or cowgirl, whichever the case may be. In order to justify the use of lethal force, and in order to be able to establish an affirmative defense of self-defense, you must follow certain rules of engagement.

I recently came across a short little booklet on this topic authored by firearms expert, Chuck Klein, entitled, *Klein's C.C.W. Handbook: The Requisite for those who Carry Concealed Weapons*. In my opinion, this excellent guidebook should be in the library of everyone who carries. Klein even recommends carrying it with you when you carry. At minimum, I recommend that you commit Klein's *Rules of Engagement* to memory. Klein states:

"In order to justify the use of lethal force, i.e., establishing the defense of self-defense, the discharge of a firearm at another person shall be instituted only when ALL of the following apply:"

1. "You were not at fault or did not create the situation that gave rise to the taking of another's life."

2. "You believe you were in danger of imminent death or great bodily harm."

3. "You must not have violated any opportunity to retreat or avoid the danger."

4. "You have exhausted all other means to avoid the use of deadly force."

5. "The use of deadly force presents no substantial risk of injury to innocent persons."

Rule #1: You were not at fault.

"You can't start the fight or egg someone on so that when they attack you, you then bring out the hardware." You have to stay cool at all times! You must know how to back off and back down if necessary. "Because you're carrying the ace-in-the-hole you must never be the aggressor." Anything you do to escalate the confrontation adds to your responsibility for what ultimately happens.

For example, another driver with road rage thinks I cut him off. He pulls up beside me at the next stop sign and aggressively demands to know why I cut him off. I capitulate by telling him, "I am sorry. I thought I had enough distance. I didn't mean to cut you off. I am really sorry." He drives away. If I didn't capitulate, and the situation turned really bad, I could be deemed the aggressor in the eyes of the law. On the other hand, if he did not accept my apology, and he got out of his car, I could drive away.

Rule #2: You believe you were in danger of imminent death or great bodily harm. The key is what you *believe* to be the case at the time. Do you have reasonable grounds to believe the threat is real?

Firstly, does the attacker appear to have the *ability* to cause you irrevocable harm? Here we are talking about disparity of force. *Ability* can refer to: (a) force of numbers, i.e., more of them than you; (b) able bodied against the disabled; (c) male against female, i.e., men are typically stronger and more aggressive than women; (d) young against old; (e) bigger and stronger against smaller and weaker; (f) trained vs. untrained, i.e., if your opponent is known to you to be a boxer, special forces, black belt, etc. prior to your using your firearm. *Note: You cannot use this criterion if you did not know your opponent's training prior to killing him!*

Secondly, does the attacker have the immediate *opportunity* to cause you irrevocable harm? Is he capable of immediately employing his power to seriously hurt you?

Thirdly, is your opponent acting in such a manner (by words and by deeds) that a reasonable and prudent person would conclude that he harbors intent to kill or cripple you? In other words, are his actions placing you in imminent *jeopardy*?

Rule #3: You have not violated any opportunity to retreat or avoid the danger if you can in the first place. Firearms trainer and author, John Farnam, teaches that you must do what you can to disengage safely at the earliest point in a confrontation or potential confrontation. The best sort of disengagement is to not be there in the first place! Avoid confrontations by making your exit at the first hint of trouble.

Farnam teaches that *avoidance* has several layers. The first layer is to not be where the confrontation is in the first place. The second layer is to leave before a potentially bad situation turns worse and goes in the toilet. The third layer is *functional invisibility*. This means you should try not to turn heads. Live a "stealth existence" below the radar. Finally, the fourth layer is to

act in a decisive, deliberate, confident, and assertive manner so that you are consistently *de-selected* for victimization.

Identify the exits every time you enter a place. Look around the room and notice who is noticing you. Never turn down eye contact. Look decisive, alert and strong. Keep your head up. Also, immediately before and after you get in and out of a motor vehicle, look around. Parking lots and driveways are places where victims are often selected. That is where people unwittingly tend to get distracted as their focus is divided and they are not paying attention—so their level of awareness goes down.

If you are in a restaurant or movie theater, leave at the first sign of trouble. Don't just look around—**see!** Study everything carefully.

The other day, I was eating in a diner with my wife and daughter when a man at the next table began to get loud and belligerent with his companions. I told my wife and daughter "let's get out of here" and we got up and left. Should that problem have escalated, I wanted us to be far away before the situation went into the toilet. In fact, we have an agreement

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that if we are any place where there is any indication of developing excitement, we are out of there! The kind of witness we want to be, if ever questioned by the police, is the type who left at least five minutes before the thing happened!

This advice is especially important for the elderly, women and children—as these groups are typically selected by predators for victimization.

Rule #4: You have exhausted all other means to avoid the use of deadly force. You are not justified in shooting a knife-wielding aggressor if you can drive away. If you cannot, that is another story. But, you must avail yourself of other options if you safely can before you resort to using deadly force.

So, let us say you are selected for victimization. You want to disengage at the first opportunity if possible before the situation escalates. Most predators want easy prey. Don't make it easy for predators!

John Farnam teaches that if you are walking down the street and you are approached by a stranger, keep moving. Walk right on through. Do not stop in the spot that the potential predator has chosen. You are probably being set up. Politely dismiss him with pre-rehearsed verbal tape loops. And do not answer his questions.

These tape loops should be practiced so that they can be reeled off whenever the need may arise. For example, you are asked for spare change. Your response should be something like: "I'm sorry sir. I can't help you." Or, let us say you are approached for directions. Your response should be something like: "I'm sorry sir. I can't help you." The point is that whatever the request is, your response should be the same. And you should keep moving as you respond verbally and make brief eye contact. Be firm but polite, and radiate strength. Remember that prey behavior excites predators. So act assertively and confident. Right action—right mind.

Failing that? Farnam wisely points out that you want to divide the potential predator's focus and disrupt his plan. So, you can point down at the ground just behind the person, with your support hand and away from your gun side as you verbalize with excitement something to the effect of "Oh—oh! Look out!" Then move around him.

Failing that? Escalate the ante. Verbalize something like "Get away from me! Leave me alone!" Then break contact and disengage.

Failing that? Some intermediate, non-lethal form of persuasion may be called for, such as a blast of pepper spray in the predator's face. If you carry a gun, you should carry pepper spray.

Remember that your goal is to keep from getting hurt. You work your way up the force continuum if that is safe and possible. If you have no other option than to resort to deadly force, you still want to find a way out of the gravest extreme safely if possible. If you have time and can draw your firearm and not use it, this is infinitely better than the grave alternative. Just because you draw your gun does not mean you have to shoot. It means you must be prepared to shoot if you must (i.e., you have no other viable choice). If there's time, and it's still safe to do so, drawing on the threat and shouting a challenge such as "Please! Don't move! Drop your weapon!" and then evaluating your situation is infinitely better than letting it rip. Announce your orders with a loud, aggressive, self-assured voice. Be convincing!

Rule #5: The use of deadly force presents no substantial risk of injury to innocent persons. What if deadly force is your only option? You still must consider where you are and who is around you. But keep in mind that you, the lawfully armed and trained citizen with a moral conscience, present a much safer bet of protecting innocent bystanders if the situation goes in the toilet than does the amoral criminal predator.


Words of Wisdom

John Farnam in a recent e-mail communication wisely states:

"Only victims are victimized. People with patterns of loser behavior, such as whining, sniveling, self-pity, blame-shifting, rationalizing, excuse making, and never taking personal responsibility for their own actions encourage victimizers to select them for victimization. Conversely, winners always look and act as if they are walking on sunshine, even when they are inwardly troubled. Victimizers customarily pass them by.

Think, don't feel. Ask yourself, 'How can I use this information to improve my situation?' Never ask yourself, 'How does this information make me feel?' Those who are enslaved by their emotions and 'feelings' are perpetual losers. They are universally regarded as weaklings, and are thus consistently selected for victimization. They only care about

'feeling good,' and they are deathly afraid of 'feeling bad.' They therefore predictably act exclusively according to that interest.

At every turn of a card, you have a choice. You can deal with the new information rationally and use it logically to plan your next move, or you can 'feel' your way to calamity. You have a choice: You can use the information to improve your play, or you can use it to alter your mood. You can think your way to victory, or you can wallow in fantasy-land, where everything that makes you feel bad is displayed on an imaginary scoreboard, labeled 'How I feel right now!'" 

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Bruce is also the co-author of the "Essential Guide to Handguns: Firearm Instruction for Personal Defense and Protection."



Photograph courtesy of Ken Lunde: <http://lundestudio.com/firearms.html>

Salt Lake City, Utah has a nice, quiet, little boutique mall over on the east side called Trolley Square. When I lived in the Sugar House area of SLC on 700 East, my family and I used to go there on an almost regular basis. We lived just down the street. My boys liked it because of the arcade upstairs, and I liked it because of the Brazilian grill. There used to be a neat little Celtic shop there with music, art and jewelry. My wife loved that store; it was one of her favorites.

I was planning on going out there to buy my wife some of that jewelry for a special occasion. I was gassed up and ready to head out when I learned that the little shop was no longer there. Well, crap! So much for that. It was time for a plan B. I got my wife something else.

About 3 hours later, the news reported something dreadful...a shooting right there at Trolley Square. Three hours is about the amount of time that it would have taken me to get there, driving a tick above the speed limit like I do. Had I gone, I would have been there right when the peace and calmness of Trolley Square was blasted apart by a maniac with a shotgun. I would have been in the thick of it. I always park in the corner parking lot where he fired at people. He entered the mall at the entrance where my destination used to be and where I would have entered. Had I gone, I'd have very likely come face to face with this monster, and it would not have ended well. The gun hidden on my hip was a compact 9mm. The maniac wielded a pump-action 12 gauge. Those are not odds that I would want to roll the dice on. I am glad that I made the last minute decision not to go.

An off-duty police officer from Ogden, about an hour's drive north of Salt Lake, did go. He packed his trusty .45 and went on his way, not expecting an ugly event, but he was prepared for it, not just with hardware, but with mental conditioning. When the shooting started, this man, this hero, kept his head. He identified himself to responding uniform police, he coordinated with them, and when they made the move, he had the

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George Hill's sister-in-law, McKenna Wheeler. She enjoys shooting and hunting.

self-confidence and self-control to focus on what had to be done to save the lives of hundred of people.

The exact details of what the off-duty police officer did have not been publicly disclosed. All we know is that he used his concealed carry weapon to engage and neutralize the shooter. Though there were 5 deaths from the rampage, if it wasn't for this man with a concealed carry handgun, the body count would have been enormous. The shooter had hundreds of people trapped in small shops just waiting to be executed.

It boggles my mind to think of the possible outcomes of going to Trolley Square that day. It shook me up a bit and taught me a good, hard lesson. Don't think that your part of the world is immune to ugliness and violence. Don't say to yourself, "It can't happen here." At the same time, we can't live in fear. We are not a paranoid people that expect goblins to spring upon us at any given second. But we have to be prepared for violence, just in case. This is why we carry concealed weapons. This is why you are reading this magazine. This is why we try to learn and improve the skills that could save our lives and the lives of our loved ones. My 13-year-old son would have been with me. He would have been in the line of fire just like I would have been. The thought that I might have let him down haunts me to the core. What if I was taken by surprise, my reaction was too slow, my aim was off, or my shot ineffective? I kid you not. I wasn't able to sleep for weeks. I've made an oath to myself: I will strive harder to better prepare myself for such dark hours. I will train harder and practice harder.

And should the time come that I am tested again, I will hit harder. I'm even trying to get myself back into fighting shape. I'm at 50 push-ups on the Army PT test. I used to be able to do 75. I'm working on getting that back. I've been out for a long time now, but at least I'm doing something. What are you doing?

I am not the only person to have such thoughts. Since the Trolley Square shooting, I've been selling a lot of compact handguns. A good portion of those have been concealable .45s. Most of those have been made by Kimber, the rumored brand of our Ogden hero. (I don't use that word lightly.) People want guns that can disappear in polite company, while being capable of delivering as much firepower as possible if the need should arise. Big boom taking up little room.

This is where the Detonics Combat Master comes in...the king of the

compact .45 pistols, which is imitated, but never duplicated. I've reviewed the Detonics Combat Master before. Long time readers might recall my review of the Combat Master from the old Detonics Company. Remember the one with the wood grips that split in my hand when firing test shots? Good times. Detonics, as a company, is not a Cinderella story. It's more like the mythological story of the Phoenix. It lives for a time, burns up and dies, and then rises again from the ashes. I will not go into the history of the company. If you want to read that, go to *BiggerHammer.net* and read it there.

I've always believed that Detonics was ahead of the game, ahead of its time. Look at everything Detonics developed for the 1911 type pistol that is now the norm. Bushingless barrels, captive recoil springs, multiple recoil springs together, lowered ejection ports, 3 dot sights... This is just the short list, pretty much all of the best things we enjoy in our 1911s. Heck, Detonics was even able to fix the problem of galling in stainless steel guns. Jerry "I liked it so much I bought the company" Ahern is not a guy to let things coast along. The guy is an idea man, a writer. He's made his living coming up with new things. I'm looking forward to seeing what is coming next from such mad scientists.

Even though the gun is so small, it shoots very well. The sight radius is short and even more abbreviated, thanks to the DCM's unique profile. This makes accurate shooting more of a challenge to the under-practiced. If you apply yourself, you can make good hits with it. With a smidgen of dedication, making hits becomes instinctive.



Photograph courtesy of Ken Lunde: <http://lundestudio.com/firearms.html>

Recoil is perfectly manageable, thanks to the well engineered recoil springs. It recoils less than a Kimber Ultra Carry. The only gun of this type that has less recoil is the Springfield V-10, which sports 5 compensating ports on each side of the top of the barrel, but it is longer by half of an inch.

My pinky swings freely under the magazine floor plate. This used to be annoying to me and is probably annoying to most shooters. After examining and shooting small handguns on a regular basis, I've grown used to this. It's not that I am going to start holding up my pinky while sipping tea or anything, but when I fire a handgun that has the room for a full-hand grip, it feels like I'm driving a luxury car, like a new Cadillac STS. Still, with only a two-fingered grip, and firing full-power .45 loads such as the Winchester SXT round, the DCM remains fully controllable and confidence-inspiring.

When I showed the DCM to a group of shooters, I was asked how much the DCM retails for. I answered, "Twelve hundred." You would have thought I said, "The keys to your house," by the reactions. Really, twelve is not that bad when you

consider what you are getting, which is a solid stainless, custom featured, compact 1911 with no metal injection molded (MIM) parts. MIM means that the parts are made by squirting liquid metal into a mold the same way plastic parts are made. The upshot to this is that the parts can be made cheaper and faster. The downside is that they can contain voids internally that you don't know about until the parts break. MIM parts are also a touch more prone to shearing and breaking than other metal parts. I know that thousands of MIM parts are in thousands of guns that get shot every day and are just fine. Yet, I've seen several MIM parts that look like they just cracked and crumbled. You should be just fine, but I'd rather not have MIM parts in my handguns. My youngest son's toy gun? Fine. My gun that I might one day have to use to defend my boy's life with? No thank you. I've had gunsmiths replace the MIM parts in my other 1911s. It is nice to not to have to do that on this one. I don't mind paying a premium for this. I feel like I am getting a better gun for my money.

The DCM really has only one peer at this level in the game, and that is the

Kimber CDP. The Detonics brings to the game a long, historically interesting pedigree, while the CDP brings with it a snappy, two-tone finish and night sights. Really, the only advantage the CDP has is those night sights. Luckily, tritium is not reserved for Kimber alone. Both pistols have a similar MSRP. The CDP is \$1255, while the DCM is a straight-up \$1200. The CDP is also longer gripped and therefore much more difficult to conceal.

Yes, these are more than many production 1911 type guns, but so what? Are you going to cheap-out on your parachute, or are you going to buy the one most likely to keep you from getting splattered? To me, in something like this, price is not a consideration. Firearms are those things that justify the expression, "You get what you pay for." Save your money by buying cheap things like mayonnaise and ketchup, but get a good defensive firearm. Many gun shops have a layaway program. Save your spare change, or start a swear jar; but please, don't be cheap when it comes to your personal defensive weapon.

While I don't mind paying extra for a nice gun, I do feel that the Combat

Continued on page 44

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Small, Powerful, Reliable... and Accurate. The Combat Master is worthy of the name. Kudos to Jerry Ahern and his crew for keeping this gun alive and better than ever.

Master could use some upgrades. Back in the 80s, no one had night sights. This is now a new century, and a gun with this purpose needs night sights. It could also use a carry bevel or have a melt job done to it to slick up all of the edges. That has become a common trait of higher-end CCW guns, and it should be standard here. The Combat Master started all this. It should be the final word; one should want for nothing with this pistol. Yet without these things, the gun remains fantastic. Another thing that might work out very well on the DCM is an LDA type trigger, such as Para's Light Double Action. I know several shooters who love the DCM, but would never buy one or


carry one because it is a single-action-only that doesn't have a grip safety. Yes, I remind them of the Browning High Power, but they are not convinced. They remain turned off by the lack of a grip safety or the fact that you carry this with the hammer down on a hot chamber. That is too "old school" for them. Maybe the DCM isn't for everyone. That's fine. There is no accounting for taste. But Detonics as a company might want to look at addressing these issues to bring in new customers who do not remember the 80s. More customers couldn't hurt.

I've not mentioned the grips yet. For such small pieces of lumber, these grips are gorgeous. The photos do not do it justice. The deep red tones and flawless checkering...man. The clean lines of the stainless steel with these red wood grips... sexy. Forgive me for sounding crass, but this is like a hot blonde in a little red dress. It makes the Combat Master look like it was named wrong. This is like Scarlett Johanson winning an Ultimate Fighter Championship. It is a shame that such a good looking handgun has to be worn concealed. I wish society was still like the 1800s, and we could walk around town with open holsters to show off guns like this.

In shooting the gun, I am reminded of just how good such a small gun can be. It is perfectly reliable with all ammunition fired and easy on the hands. Jerry warned me that the new DCM is not fully reliable with the old DCM magazines. I heeded his warning for only a little while and of course, ended up using an old one too. It still didn't jam on me. I fired what I thought was a nice shot group. In my previous review, I said, "These new Detonics guns should be just as good if not better than the old, and if that is the case, I would recommend getting one at the first opportunity." Guys, there is no question about this any more. The new ones are every bit as good, if not better than the older ones. Better yet, Detonics also makes a bunch of other 1911 type guns, in case the Combat Master is just not your thing. The line forms to the right.


For more information:
BiggerHammer.net, DetonicsUSA.com—
706-693-2220, and MadOgre.com.

George Hill is an NRA Certified Pistol and Personal Protection instructor and the writer and publisher of MadOgre.com. Visit his website for more information on Mad Ogre. www.madogre.com Photography by George.




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BOB MERNICKLE'S HOLSTERS:

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Preparing to draw from PS6 holster for Officers' Model 1911. Note erect posture and comfortable position. Reholstering is easy too.



Preparing to draw from PS6 holster for full-size Government Model 1911. Note the contorted, uncomfortable position. Reholstering is even more difficult.

A while ago, I ordered holsters for my Colt Officers' Model and full-size Government Model pistols, and a belt on which to carry them, from Bob Mernickle. Although Bob said that he was swamped with work, the time from our phone conversation to their arrival was only a month.

Mernickle's PS6 "Extreme Series" holsters are uniquely designed to ride higher on the belt than do other rigs, so you can wear more-normal-looking, shorter-tailed clothing over them. The concept really works, as I have been proving daily, going about in hip-length jackets and vests, armed for bear, in the small and nosey community in which I live.

I squat while repainting our community theater's sandwich boards, which sit out on our rural island's street corners, so these holsters get a complete, real world test. Bend or kneel as I will, nobody stops to comment on how pretty Bob's leatherwork or the pistol's blue-job are.

The PS6 succeeds because of the special leather paddle that augments its conventional belt slots. Your belt goes through the slots as usual, but the paddle slips inside your pants and is trapped snugly between your trousers' waistband and your body. It prevents the top-heavy grip of your fully loaded pistol from rotating outward and away from your torso. Thus, Bob can make a scabbard that cantilevers your weapon quite high, placing the muzzle of your pistol just 1¼ inches below the bottom edge of your belt!

Bob's holsters are made of high quality vegetable tanned cowhide, and are fully lined. They are sewn with strong, waxed, black thread. They are neatly dyed and glazed to a nice luster; and all their edges are nicely rounded, blackened, and slickly burnished. They all have molded-in front sight channels.

The PS6 holster is thin for easy concealment. Its pouch is two layers of three ounce (1⅛ inch thick) stock, which is glued and sewn. This is stitched to a 7/32 inch thick backing made of nine

ounce leather and lined with three ounce leather. Both pouch and back are wet-molded to fit the pistol and dried to wood-like stiffness.

Bob's PB2 tooled belt fits exactly the waist size that I specified. It's made of one layer of 12 ounce saddle skirting or back leather lined with three ounce stock, and it's about ¼ inch thick! It's stamped with a simple lengthwise pattern, and it's dyed to match my holsters. My only quibble is that the buckle and keeper supplied with it are cheap looking (but strong) chrome plated formed wire, but they're attached with snaps, and they are easily changed.

The Officers' Model holster and belt combination is very comfortable to wear all day long. Since the gun rides high, its muzzle never pokes me when I sit, lie, or bend; and its handle snuggles neatly just below my ribs. Reaching back and grabbing this pistol requires no undue contortion. However, if I'm wearing a shirt over it, I have to lift its tail higher than I would for other, lower slung holsters.

Bob's cutaway front design lets my pistol clear leather exactly at the top of my belt. Thus, my draw is quick, and my one-handed reholster is accomplished free of contortion and without looking. The pouch grips the weapon securely, and it does not fall out when I move vigorously. Bob's paddle innovation works well, and the gun never feels floppy.

One small complaint comes to mind. The PS6 has cut-through belt slots instead of tunnel loops, and the rearmost slot seems to be quite close to the aft edge of the holster. I fear that it could someday tear through after extensive, hard use or under the pressure of an attempted takeaway. I would move that rear belt slot ⅛ inch further forward, leaving more structural "meat." There is sufficient room for this, and since this is custom work, Bob will do it if you ask.

Bob's PS6 is not as compatible with a full-size pistol as it is with my stubby little shortie. With the full-size weapon's muzzle the same 1¼ inch below my belt, its slide and grip are raised much too

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Bob Mernickle's PS6 holster for Officers' Model 1911, and his PB2 belt. Note how high the pistol rides, related to the belt.

high, and they dig uncomfortably into my lower ribs when I sit down and lean back. It feels the worst when I'm driving a car. To draw my big Colt, I have to lift my hand and forearm so high and bend my elbow at such an awkward angle that a firm shooting grip is impossible to achieve when standing normally. The only way to get it out of this holster is to hunch sharply forward and 45 degrees to the left at the waist, and even then it can't be done in complete comfort. Bending over does help get covering clothing out of the way though.

Because of the holster's low-cut front, presentation is quick. Once your grip is established, you move the pistol only 3½ inches upward, and its muzzle is free to swing forward toward the foe. Reholstering the bigger gun, however, requires another weird geometric contortion like the one that got the weapon out in the first place. Twisted around like that, starting the pistol's muzzle into the holster is anything but intuitive and smooth. I've tried to "look it in," but in my old age I can no longer wind around enough to see the right side of my lower back while I'm bent forward and to the left.

Bob Mernickle's "Extreme Series" PS6 holsters are well made and reasonably priced; perfect for comfortable and unobtrusive all-day concealment of small, short carry pistols. They are not well suited for big guns. If you've got a "shortie," get this rig and you'll be very well pleased.

Mernickle's design philosophy seems to be "less is more." A friend who tried my PS6 and liked it quite a lot said, "It's as if he left off everything that isn't a holster." All Bob's leatherwork is neat, spare, and economical of material and labor, which keeps its price down. You don't have to be rich to own a Mernickle rig, although he can do some very fancy stamping and inlay work if you're willing to pay for it.



Here you can see the PS6's supporting paddle, that tucks inside the wearer's waistband. It keeps the holster erect, secure, and tight to the body.

The least expensive PS6 "Extreme Series" holster for any pistol costs \$69.95. The equivalent double-thick belt, the plain PB1, costs \$59.95. This is a good value because you're buying well designed, effective, made-to-order leatherwork. Some factory produced concealment equipment sells for lots more.

Write to Bob Mernickle, 1875 View Court, Fernley, Nevada 89408.

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Bob's complete, well illustrated catalog is on the web at:

www.mernickleholsters.com

Steve Henigson is a long-time defensive pistol shooter. He was a student of the late Michael Harries, beginning in the mid-1970s, and participated in IPSC and Southwest Pistol League (SWPL) competition with modest success. In 1981, as IPSC shooting was becoming less and less realistic, the club to which Steve belonged seceded from IPSC and SWPL to form the truly practical, experimental shooting discipline known as the Southern California Tactical Combat program (SCTC). Steve edited and published COMBAT!, the SCTC monthly journal, until he retired in 2004. Photos by Jean Henigson.

How to Prepare Yourself to Get the Most out of Your Training School Trip

Up until thirty years ago, if you wanted serious training in the use of firearms for self-defense, you had only one choice, which was to join the police force and go to the police academy! Such training simply wasn't otherwise available to civilians in any way, shape, or form. In fact, in those days, civilians weren't even allowed to shoot at human silhouette targets in NRA sanctioned matches!

That all changed in 1977. Ray Chapman, who became the first IPSC World Pistol Champion in 1975, opened the Chapman Academy in Columbia, MO. Its purpose was to teach serious defensive pistol techniques to any good guy, be he military, law enforcement, or civilian. A year later, in 1978, Col. Jeff Cooper opened what is now probably

the most famous and influential such school in the country, the American Pistol Institute at Gunsite Ranch in Paulden, AZ.

Today there are numerous schools and instructors all over the country. Some teach pure marksmanship and gun handling and some teach tactics, the combat mindset, and/or self-defense law as well. Most offer courses in defensive shotgun and defensive rifle or carbine, as well as pistol. Basic, intermediate and advanced level courses are common, and some schools offer some very advanced courses. Precision Long Range Rifle and Close Quarter's Battle (CQB) are a couple of examples.

It's now possible for a dedicated shooter who's willing to invest the time and money in training and practice

to reach a level of proficiency to rival that of a SWAT cop. In fact, SWAT cops and military personnel spend their own money to attend some of these schools! But you don't need to have an interest in taking things that far to justify attending one of these schools. Anyone who carries a pistol or keeps a gun to defend his home should give serious thought to taking one or two of the basic courses. As Col. Cooper once famously observed, "Owning a gun doesn't make one a gunfighter any more than owning a Stradivarius violin makes one a concert violinist."

WHAT YOU NEED

First of all, you need to pick a school and course. These days, they all have websites that describe their course offerings and schedules. You also have the option to write to them and get their latest catalogs through the mail. The sole criterion for attending one of these schools is that you are a certifiable good guy, and all you will need to prove that is a CCW. If you're one of the unfortunates that live in a state that won't issue a

Continued on page 48


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CCW, there are ways around that as well. Ayoob's Lethal Force Institute (to use one example) will also accept a letter of reference from a local official: police chief, sheriff, district attorney, judge, etc. or a letter from a practicing attorney stating that you have no police record or history of institutionalization for mental health care.

Most schools expect you to have some minimal familiarity with your gun. The NRA's excellent basic safety courses take care of that nicely. Some schools will take you even if you've never touched a gun before. My personal opinion is that paying a big name instructor to teach you the basic stuff, such as how to load and unload your gun, is not the most cost effective way to acquire such fundamental skills, but alas, sometimes your local conditions make this necessary. Take the local NRA courses first if at all possible. If not, then discuss this with the school that you are interested in before you sign up. Be sure that you know how to break down, clean, reassemble, and lube your gun. You will almost certainly need to do so every night during your course, so you will need a cleaning kit.

MINIMIZING THE COST

You will need to pay for tuition, and you will need to bring or buy ammunition, which will be anywhere from several hundred to a couple of thousand rounds, depending on the course. You will also have to pay for transportation to and from the school, and probably for meals and some place to sleep.

Obviously, your choice of school will affect the overall cost of attending.

If you have to fly half way across the country, stay in a motel, rent a car and eat in restaurants, you can expect to add hundreds or even thousands of dollars on to the basic costs of tuition and ammo. On the other hand, if you can find (or organize) a course close to home, you can reduce those travel expenses down to just the cost of the gas needed to drive back and forth to the range.

Many of the best known instructors: Massad Ayoob, Chuck Taylor, John Farnam, Louis Awerbuck, Ken Hackathorn, etc., travel around the country teaching. If you can't find any courses scheduled close to your home, perhaps you can arrange for one. If you belong to a gun club, or otherwise can arrange access to a suitable range in your area, and can talk a dozen or so of your friends into signing up for the class with you, many of these instructors will be happy to schedule a class there.

If you must travel and you have access to a camper (or a tent and camping gear), you can save significantly over staying in a motel and eating in restaurants. Some schools will let you park right on their grounds. (There will be information about this at their websites or in their catalogs.) You will certainly have no trouble finding a commercial campground close by to most schools, and the savings over a motel (and restaurants) can be significant. If you have a family, the campground option can make for a great family vacation. Take the whole family along, and while you're in class all day, they can be enjoying the recreational activities and playing tourist in the surrounding area. Personally speaking, on various occasions, I've spent

several weeks in a very pleasant New Hampshire campground while taking courses at Ayoob's Lethal Force Institute. The campground was full of families with kids. There were swimming, boating, several ball fields and other recreation areas. The surrounding area was full of antique shops, old bookstores, and ample tourist information about all of the nearby local attractions.

Okay, so you've picked a course and a date. Now you need to start planning what you need to bring, checking over what you

have and deciding what you need to beg, borrow, or buy. I will discuss this in general terms, but keep in mind that you will also receive a specific list of items from your instructor that he believes are necessary, which you should pay careful attention to.

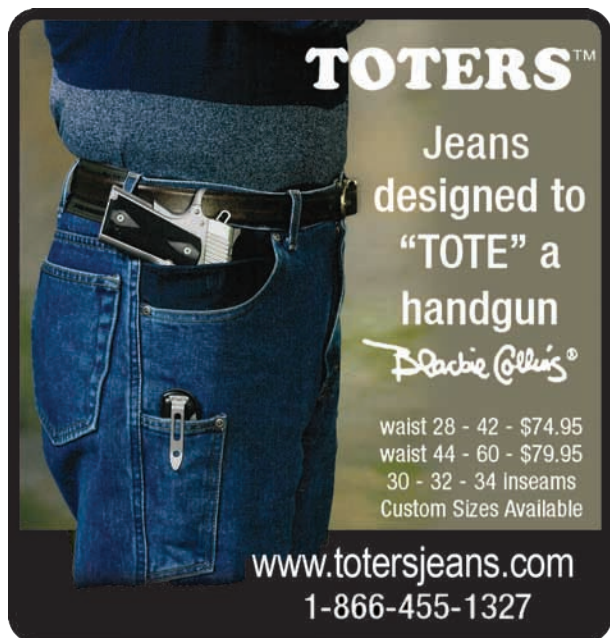
WHICH GUN SHOULD YOU TAKE?

You're going to gun school, so naturally, you need to bring a gun, right? Well, not necessarily. For example, Sigarms Academy advertises that if you sign up for one of their courses, you can borrow any model Sig pistol that you'd like to use in the course, and they will also provide necessary holsters and such. And I've seen at least one instance of a student from Boston who made arrangements to borrow a snub .38 from the instructor. But in general, you will probably be bringing your own gun. And this is a good thing. If at all possible, you want to take the course with the actual gun and holster that you will actually be carrying. If your hunting shotgun sits near your bed and doubles as your house defense gun, then that is the shotgun that you want to take to your combat shotgun course. Of course, if you've been looking for an excuse to buy a nicely tricked-out, new defensive shotgun or tactical carbine, taking a course that needs such a gun can be a dandy justification!

As you study the various schools and their course offerings, you will note that many have a minimum caliber requirement, perhaps .38 Special, .380 ACP or 9mm. A few schools will let you bring anything you want, even the little calibers. This may be a factor in choosing a school. The gun should fit your hand. The safety and other controls should be easy for you to manipulate. The sights should be easy for your eyes to see. Obvious, right? Well, I once witnessed a woman struggle through an entire course with a Browning Hi-Power that was way too big for her hands. The gun had great sentimental value. It had belonged to her deceased father, and she was determined to master it. Sadly, she didn't. I hope that she learned from the experience and retired it to a place of honor and moved on to another gun.

The trigger should be light enough to be easy to shoot, yet not so light (or hair-trigger) that the gun fires before you intend it to, which is known as an unintentional discharge, an accidental discharge or a negligent discharge. In

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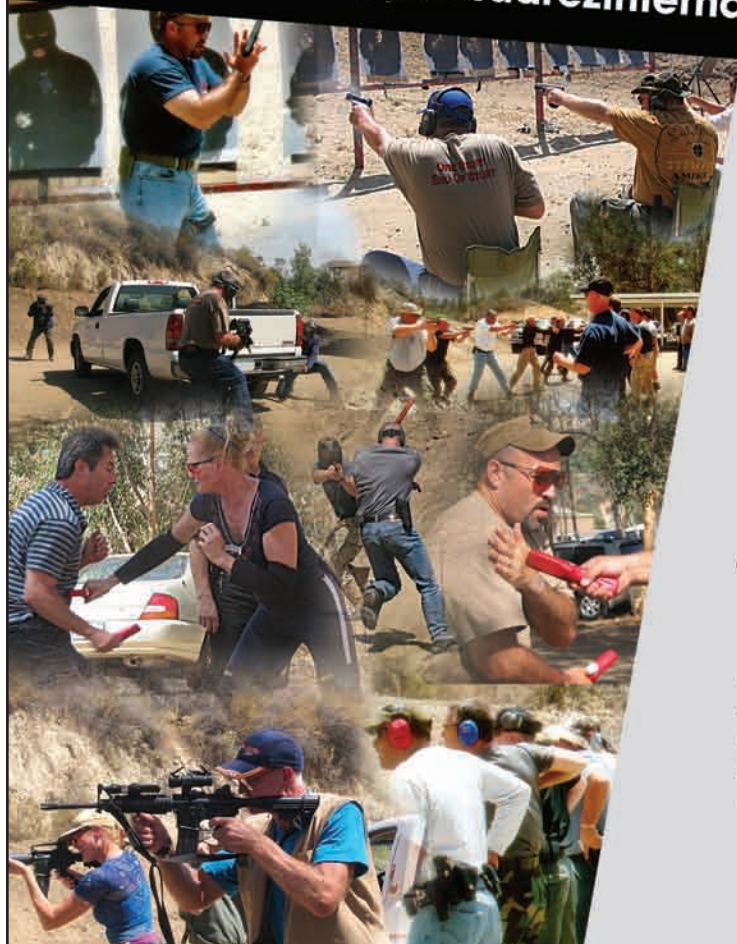


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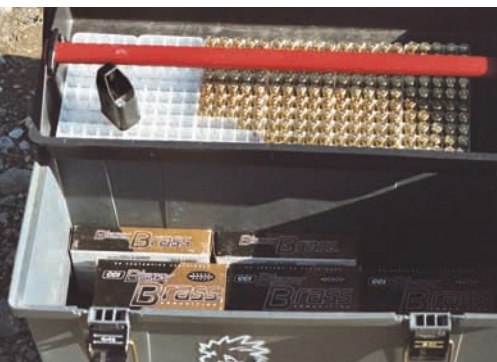
short, whatever gun you bring needs to be mechanically safe.

It also needs to be mechanically reliable. Many classes call for 500 rounds in two or three days, and some of the advanced classes can call for 2,000 or more. Round counts like these quickly separate the good guns from the junk! I've seen a number of guns fail while taking courses. Most schools expect problems like this. Usually, the instructor or one of his assistants is a qualified armorer, and minor problems like sights that have shot loose can be corrected in short order and with minimal disruption to the rest of the class. Major problems may not be correctable.

If at all possible, consider bringing a second, spare gun. Otherwise, if your one and only gun fails and can't be corrected or fixed, you may be forced to withdraw from the course. It will simplify your life considerably if it is the same caliber as your primary gun. Otherwise, you will also have to bring a separate ammo supply for it, as well as a spare holster, magazines, etc. Obviously, this would be a lot easier to do if you drive than if you fly!

AMMUNITION CHOICES

Ammunition is heavy, and if you are flying, it will be impossible to legally take as many rounds with you as you will need. In some instances, you can arrange



A tool box can be a handy way to deal with a case or more of ammunition.

to ship your ammo directly to the school via UPS, and they will hold it for you until you arrive for the course.

Buy quality ammo for the course, which is available from a good company like CCI, Federal, Remington or Winchester. It need not be their premium, expensive stuff. They all have economy lines as well, which are perfect for training. I've used Federal's American Eagle, Winchester's White Box and CCI's Blazer Brass at different times, and they've all worked well for me. I would urge you to stay away from the cheap, imported brands. Some of the imported ammo is loaded with very "dirty" powder that can foul your gun and cause malfunctions. Some is loaded in steel cases. Steel case ammo has been known to damage extractors on some guns. Quality control is not always up to what I would consider acceptable standards.

If you reload, you should know that while some schools have no problem with you bringing reloads, some will strongly try to discourage you. This is usually because they have had a number of bad experiences with students using reloads in the past.

At some schools, it is possible to arrange to buy the necessary ammo directly from them. However, the Smith & Wesson Academy warns that Massachusetts law makes it illegal to sell any ammunition to non-Massachusetts residents. So you will not only be prohibited from buying it from the Academy, you will also be prohibited from buying it from a local K-mart. I've run into a similar situation in Illinois. No IL Firearms Owners Identification Card (FOID), no ammo sale.

On the other hand, Sigarms Academy requires lead free ammo and provides all needed ammo, with its price included in the tuition. However, they only have 9mm, 40 S&W, and 45 ACP, so your gun needs to be one of those three calibers to take a course there.

CARRY GEAR

You will be expected to provide spare magazines or speedloaders, their corresponding pouches, a holster, a belt, etc. Many basic level courses will discuss and demonstrate such equipment choices, so it might be wise to hold off on buying new leather until after taking such a course, provided that you have or can borrow something that will get you through your first course.

Ideally, your holster and your gun should be the ones that you carry on

the street every day. However, that's not always possible. If you favor a cross draw or shoulder holster, drawing from it may allow your muzzle to cross another student standing in line next to you. Neither your instructor nor the student standing next to you are going to be happy about that! If you are the only one with such a rig, it may be possible to accommodate you by putting you on the end of the line. You might want to discuss it with the school before you sign up if it is important to you.

To be on the safe side, you should have a strong side belt holster. You also need a good, heavy gun belt and it should be matched to your holster. If your holster has slots for an inch and three quarter belt, you shouldn't be wearing an inch and a half belt. You will also need a magazine or speedloader pouch, and if the course requires a flashlight for low light shooting, you should have a carrier for that.

EYES AND EARS

Eye and ear protection are mandatory at all good schools. A separate article could probably be devoted to the fine points of choosing these. Here's a short and sweet summary instead: If you wear regular prescription eyeglasses, they will suffice. Otherwise, you will need one or more pairs of either shooting glasses or safety glasses. If your prescription is for distance, you may need bifocals in order to also see the sights clearly. If you wear contact lenses, be sure you bring your spare eyeglasses with you, and I mean in your range bag and not in your suitcase back at your motel. Many ranges are dusty, and if it gets windy, you may find yourself needing to switch to the prescription glasses. I always take two pairs with me, one pair with dark gray sunglass lenses for use in bright sun, and one pair with clear lenses for use in dim light and for night shooting classes. I've tried the yellow shooting glasses and I just can't get used to the unreal look they give to the whole world. They do, however, make dandy driving glasses for use in the fog. Speaking of fog, I always carry a spray bottle of anti-fog liquid with me, and treat my glasses every day that I am shooting. How long have I done this? Ever since my glasses fogged badly on a hot, muggy August day during my final exam qualification shoot at LFI!

Hearing protection breaks down into plugs that are put into your ears (which I hate) and muffs that are worn over your ears. Simple muffs are fine for



Necessary Safety Gear. Clear and dark glasses, range hat, active hearing protection.

just shooting, but for going to school, I strongly urge you to spend the money for "active" muffs. These contain speakers, microphones, batteries and electronic circuits. The microphones pick up all outside sounds and relay them via the electronic circuits to the speakers inside of your muffs. The electronic circuits amplify quiet sounds, but attenuate any loud noises like gunshots. They permit you to hear everything that is said around you, which can be an important safety feature when you are surrounded by a crowd of people with guns, and more importantly, they permit you to hear everything that your instructor says, which you are paying hundreds of dollars for the privilege of hearing in the first place. I bought my pair from Dillon Precision, but you can find them from a number of manufacturers and sources, including both Cabela's and Gander Mountain.

CLOTHING CHOICES

Clothing should be comfortable, and suitable for the temperatures that you expect. Days that start out cold but get hot require a layered outfit, which is shed bit by bit as the day warms up.

Shorts are not usually a good idea, even if it's very hot. They offer no protection from insects or sunburn. They also offer no protection for your knees if the course includes shooting while kneeling. Some tactical style pants have knee pockets to hold pads, and some experienced students have the same external knee and elbow pads that the SWAT guys wear. They're not really all that expensive and are a nice touch if the course will include a lot of shooting from the ground. Finally, pants need belt loops to hold your gun belt and holster in their proper place, so sweat pants and the like are also out.

Shirts should be fairly close fitting around the neck to minimize the possibility of someone else's freshly ejected, very hot cartridge case (hot brass) from going

down your neck and getting trapped against your skin. And trust me; once you are standing on a firing line with a dozen other people, you are going to be hit with hot brass sooner or later. If it hits outside of your clothing, it will bounce off. If it gets trapped between your skin and your clothing, it's going to burn! How do I know this? Trust me, I know this!

For the same reason, a cap with a visor is a virtual necessity. Otherwise, there is a real possibility that hot brass may slip between the top of your shooting glasses and your face and get trapped between your glasses and your eye(s).

Shoes need to be comfortable enough to stand around in all day, and suitable for use off of pavement. Some (particularly police and military) wear combat boots or derivatives thereof. Personally, I wear a pair of New Balance running shoes.

Into each life some rain is going to fall, and most schools are going to shoot through the rain. Rain gear is a necessity. Experience has taught me that a Gore-Tex rain suit is the way to go if you are going to be standing around in a heavy rain all day. This is supplemented by a pair of Tote's type rubbers pulled over the running shoes.

COMFORT ITEMS

The rain suit will keep water off of your outside, but the one thing that you desperately need to do on a hot day is to keep pouring water into your inside! Dehydration is no joke, and I consider a personal cooler full of some suitable, non-alcoholic beverage an absolute necessity at the range. Likewise, a folding chair will give you a comfortable place to rest your weary body during breaks in what can otherwise be a very long day.

Your range bag should include the following comfort items:

1. A good sunscreen with a high SPF rating. It's either this or a good sunburn cream to treat the painful sunburn that you will get if you don't use a sunscreen.
2. A good insect repellent. The stronger, the better.
3. Bandages for dealing with the inevitable cuts and nicks that a lot of gun handling and magazine loading are going to cause to your hands. I've tried a lot of them over the years, and I've finally settled on Johnson & Johnson's® Active-Flex. It's a clear one that sticks amazingly well in spite of all of the gun handling, it's waterproof, and it's even thin enough to use on your trigger finger if needed.

4. Over-the-counter pain relievers and rubs for aching muscles. You don't need to be in super-good physical shape to take a course like one of these. I would rate it as equivalent to a long day spent doing yard work. But if you mostly sit at a desk all year, you are probably going to find yourself with sore, tired muscles towards the end of the day. But trust me, the great feeling of accomplishment you get from finishing a course like one of these more than compensates for a few muscle aches!



The well stocked range bag will include spares and comfort items.

John Perz lives in upstate New York. He's had a CCW since 1972 and has completed a number of training courses over the years with Massad Ayoob, John Farnam, Tom Givens and others.



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