

TACTICAL SHOOTING, A FEW THOUGHTS

When looking for a tactical shooting system to adopt for your tactical team or agency, several important factors need to be considered. First, the system you choose should go from dry fire, to range fire, to Sims, to Live Fire Close Quarter Battle (CQB), to Combat (street or tactical encounter) with no changes and be accomplished in a safe manner.

Too many systems have limitations or problems when transitioning across the spectrum of shootings we encounter. Most systems will fit only a few scenarios creating glitches, if you will, to a streamlined system. Your dry fire and range fire procedures should complement your CQB tactics and then work in a street or tactical encounter. If they do not, you're making things too complicated. Remember, simple is best.

- **SELECT A SYSTEM THAT WILL GO FROM DRY FIRE, TO RANGE FIRE, TO SIMS, TO LIVE FIRE CQB, TO COMBAT OR A TACTICAL ENCOUNTER ON THE STREET WITH LITTLE OR NO CHANGES TO THE SYSTEM:**

If your shooting system will not consistently work in a low stress, flat range environment, it will not work in a fast moving street or tactical encounter. The system you select should work in duty gear, concealed carry (undercover) and in tactical gear. Again, if it does not, you will waste valuable time and energy changing components of your shooting system to fit your job description.

Your ready position with either a pistol or rifle should be safe and usable in any situation. A low ready position, with the shoulder weapons muzzle below your belt line will work and allow you the maximum visual angle for discrimination purposes. The question I routinely ask in class is, "Do you see first or do you shoot first?" The answer is always the same, you must see before you shoot. This practice will set the stage for proper discrimination, which I will discuss later in the article.

For the handgun, I promote one ready shooting position and that is the high ready position. The weapon is kept in tight for retention and will enhance your ability to scan. This position can be used in CQB and in tube targets such as buses or aircraft. You may carry your weapon at the low ready while in the stack, but when you're on point or ready to shoot, your pistol should be at a high ready.

- **HAVE AN EFFICIENT, REALISTIC AND MEASUREBLE STANDARD TO MEET OR EXCEED:**

Another question I ask is “How many people go into a gym and just throw steel around without a workout plan.” You’re right, not many do. The same rule should apply to shooting. When you head to the range, you should have a plan that you follow to ensure you’re getting the most for your time on the firing line.

I generally start out with dry-fire. Yes, even on a flat range. It costs you nothing and cultivates good range habits. I then shoot my standards, ten basic drills that cover the fundamentals of tactical shooting. The standards I shoot require 25 rounds of ammunition to complete. I use a shooting timer and a standard IPSC target to score the hits. Anything out of the “A” box is considered a miss. I use both a time standard coupled with an accuracy standard to pass the drill.

After shooting the standards, I note which drills I failed and those are the first drills that I work on during my subsequent practice. The use of time/accuracy standards will let you know your strong and weak points in short order. Besides pistol standards, I shoot 10 rifle standards, all starting from the low ready position.

Many of the standards I use came from John Shaw and Mid-South Institute. I took them, analyzed and modified them to fit what I consider tactical or combat shooting. Originally these standards were developed for the 1911 style pistol and reloads. You can modify them as you see fit to accommodate your equipment, such as magazine pouches and holsters.

They begin with 1 shot from the ready in one second and then move to one shot from the holster in 1.5 seconds. Two shots, six shots, multiple targets, reloads and several other core drills are also covered.

- **POINT SHOOTING OR SIGHTED FIRE, WHICH WORKS ALL THE TIME?**

I usually get cornered a couple of times a year by a current or former student who ask me at what distance I use my sights. I reply that I use them from 0-300 meters or as far as the target is away. Routinely they relay a shooting situation that they were involved in and talk about how many rounds were “lost” during the incident.

I won’t knock point shooting, but I will make a few points. First, I don’t believe you can consistently replicate the stress you will be under in a gunfight on a flat range. Your muscles will be different from the first shot to the last, before or after your workout. I learned a long time ago that all good shooting requires is being consistent and doing the same thing every time.

Next, if you practice point shooting and also practice using your sights, you’re using two systems. Remember what I said about using one system that will do everything or handle all situations? It applies here. I believe that point shooting requires less mental discipline than does using your sights every time. So, when it comes to a high stress situation, which system will your mind revert to, the easy way or the

disciplined way? Unfortunately, being human, I believe you will revert to the easy method, which is point shooting. I don't think your mind will say, it is under 10 yards, it is time to point shoot or it is over 10 yards and it is time to use my sights. You will simply revert to one of two systems and generally that will be point shooting.

Many of the tactical team shootings I have read in the last year show a 20% hit ratio for tactical team engagements. This is poor at best. This means that we are losing 80% of our rounds downrange into the community or into other officers. Further, I don't know how someone can go into court and say, my position felt good, but I don't know why my rounds missed.

While working as a special ops instructor, we had a junk admin shelf with old handouts and miscellaneous copies. Rummaging through the piles of paper, I found what I consider to be the best set of shooting rules that apply to tactical shooting.

PLAXCO'S SHOOTING PRINCIPLES

- 1. ACCURACY TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER SPEED.**
- 2. SPEED IS ECONOMY OF MOTION.**
- 3. SPEED WILL COME WITH PRACTICE (IF YOU PRACTICE TO BE FAST).**
- 4. LET THE SIGHTS DICTATE THE CADENCE OF FIRE.**
- 5. YOU MUST LEARN WHAT IS AN ACCEPTABLE SIGHT PICTURE AND TRIGGER CONTROL FOR THE SHOT REQUIRED.**
- 6. SHOOT ONE SHOT AT A TIME.**
- 7. WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, ALIGN THE SIGHTS... SQUEEZE THE TRIGGER.**

- WHY LOOK AT SYSTEM'S SAFETY PRACTICES?**

Those who have worked with me know I preach the use of the mechanical safety if your weapon has one. I got an informative after action comment from an officer in a recent hostage rescue class. He informed me that during one of the scenarios, he made the attempt to shoot a hostage (unarmed of course), but because I had made him employ the mechanical safety, it did not allow the weapon to discharge. Routinely during my course, I put officers in high stress scenarios and them make them think and discriminate. On average, I get 2-3 scenarios where unarmed hostages take fire out of the 8 scenarios they run. Not a good ratio.

While I always hear the complaint that “if I had the safety on, I would not be alive today,” it does not wash with me. I can cite a great deal of accidental shootings where officers and special ops guys shot themselves, their partners, their injured partners and innocent folks because they failed to use the mechanical safety. If you train with it on the range, it will work in a high stress scenario. As teams evolve and begin doing advanced multiple breach point operations, it is crucial that the mechanical safety be used.

- **DOES YOUR SHOOTING INSTRUCTOR OR SYSTEM HAVE A DISCRIMINATION PROCESS OR USE ANY DRILLS TO DEVELOP THESE SKILLS?**

Through intense training, we have been taught and conditioned to shoot faster than we can think. This is dangerous practice. We must bring up our discrimination skills to the same level as our shooting skills. When looking at new instructor or shooting system, ask them what discrimination process they use or what drills they use to help the officers develop their discrimination process. If they do not have anything in this area, be cautious of the information they put out. Discrimination is a critical safety valve for speed shooting.

I can recall several instances where officers looked for the gun first, saw it and then went to center mass, pulled the trigger, all while their mind is saying “what is wrong with this picture.” They generally get one round off, their brain catches up and they realize they are engaging a friendly officer. Some commanders will attribute this as an inherent danger of multi-breach point or window “Break and Rake” operations. Nothing could be further from the truth. The problem is a weak or non-existent discrimination process.

I changed my discrimination process years ago from what I was originally taught in special operations. There they taught us to look at the hands first. This caused problems down the road when operators were shooting faster than they could think. They would look at a gun, go to center mass and launch rounds only to find the target was a good guy. Their mind was not moving fast enough to process the information, that the weapon their target was carrying was the same as theirs. They simply responded to how they were taught and this generally cost them their job. Now, my first step is to look at the whole person and then I collapse to the hands.

How do we fix these issues? Continued exposure to advanced scenarios and the use of video. Video will not lie and is probably the most significant teaching tool I use. During the high-stress scenarios I put the officers through, many get the typical adrenaline dump and their mind can only absorb so much information. In effect, they can’t remember the finer details of what happened. Video will help them do this in a non-confrontational manner.

- **TRAINING AND THE SILVER BULLET OF REALITY**

I generally like to run a shooting course no longer than three days in length. Besides the students diminishing attention span and standing on a flat range for 40 plus hours, the officer can only retain so much information at one sitting. The reality of the situation is that the individual officer must dry fire/practice these drills on a daily basis. I have heard the 2,000-3,000 mark kicked around as to the repetitions it takes to develop muscle memory. You can jam them up day after day with forced repetitions, but when it is all said and done, if the officer wants to improve, they must do it on their own.

Dry fire practice should be a 70% to 30% ratio. This means that officers should dry fire 70% of the time to 30% live fire. This can be accomplished in their homes with the use of a shooting timer 2-3 times a week. It make take several months or even years to develop the finer points, but after these skills are acquired, it takes very little maintenance time to keep these skills honed.

Follow through and cover is a core training point that should be emphasized. After firing a shot, the weapons sights should be re-aligned on the target and trigger contacted and slightly pressed. This is follow-through and it will build in a good habit for combat shooting. When an officer gets used to doing this, they will instinctively do it during a real shooting situation. This will ensure that the weapon is up, ready to fire after every shot will no loss of momentum, should the threat still be present.

The next step is to “cover” left and right after the suspect has fallen from your sights. This can also be done on the flat range after each shot with a straight trigger finger. This gets the officer out of the hard focus they have on the target they neutralized and reminds them to scan for other potential threats. During range fire practice, you will continually hear me say, ”follow-through and cover.” It should become automatic.

Finally, keep your positions and techniques simple. For example, as an instructor I teach three different kneeling positions, Hollywood, Supported and Un-supported. Only one, un-supported works for me stripped, in duty gear, concealed carry and tactical gear. In keeping my personal system simple, this is the only technique I practice. Instead of wasting my time on three different positions, I practice one that will work in all uniforms/situations.

- **WHAT EQUIPMENT DOES THE INSTRUCTOR DEMONSTRATE WITH?**

The instructor’s standards should be shot with a common weapon and all the tactical gear worn. Why? Another reality check is that most officers use the standard issue weapon with the above average trigger pull and that is what they have to work with. If an instructor is demonstrating his shooting and drills with a

\$2,000 plus gun and skeleton shooting gear that would not last 10 seconds in a physical altercation, you lose credibility and fail to validate your system. Put your instructor in full tactical gear, to include gloves, helmet and goggles and have them demonstrate what they preach.

Next, officers should be encouraged to find a weapon that best fits their hand in a caliber supported by the department. Too many times officers are required to shoot ill-fitting weapons that tear down their confidence with each shot. Manufacturers have too many models out there, generally a compact, standard and extended slide model to choose from. A good fit will help an officer build confidence in their shooting ability with every shot.

Equally important is to pick a handgun with one trigger pull. Our long guns have one trigger pull, why shouldn't our pistols? Administrations are doing officers a disservice when they issue a weapon with two distinct trigger pulls. Find a weapon (Glock and the Springfield XD series) that has one trigger pull to learn and you will make life a whole lot easier on the student/officer and the range personnel who have to instruct.

Compensators work, but do a sanity check first. Get some duty ammo and shoot it in low light conditions to find out how much longer it takes to find your sights. Generally your duty ammo is a bit hotter than your practice and when the compensated guns vent, they do it in your visual plane, causing momentary blindness. Weigh the advantages of rapid follow on shots, but also, not being able to see your sights. I keep reading that most shootings happen in low light. You be the judge.

- **CONCLUSION**

I was fortunate to train with many great shooters over the years, both tactical and speed shooters. Coupled with a few tactical experiences, I was able to sort out what worked and did not and develop a solid tactical shooting program. Hopefully this article will prompt you to ask the right questions the next time your department looks to invest their money in an instructor or shooting program.

BIO:

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