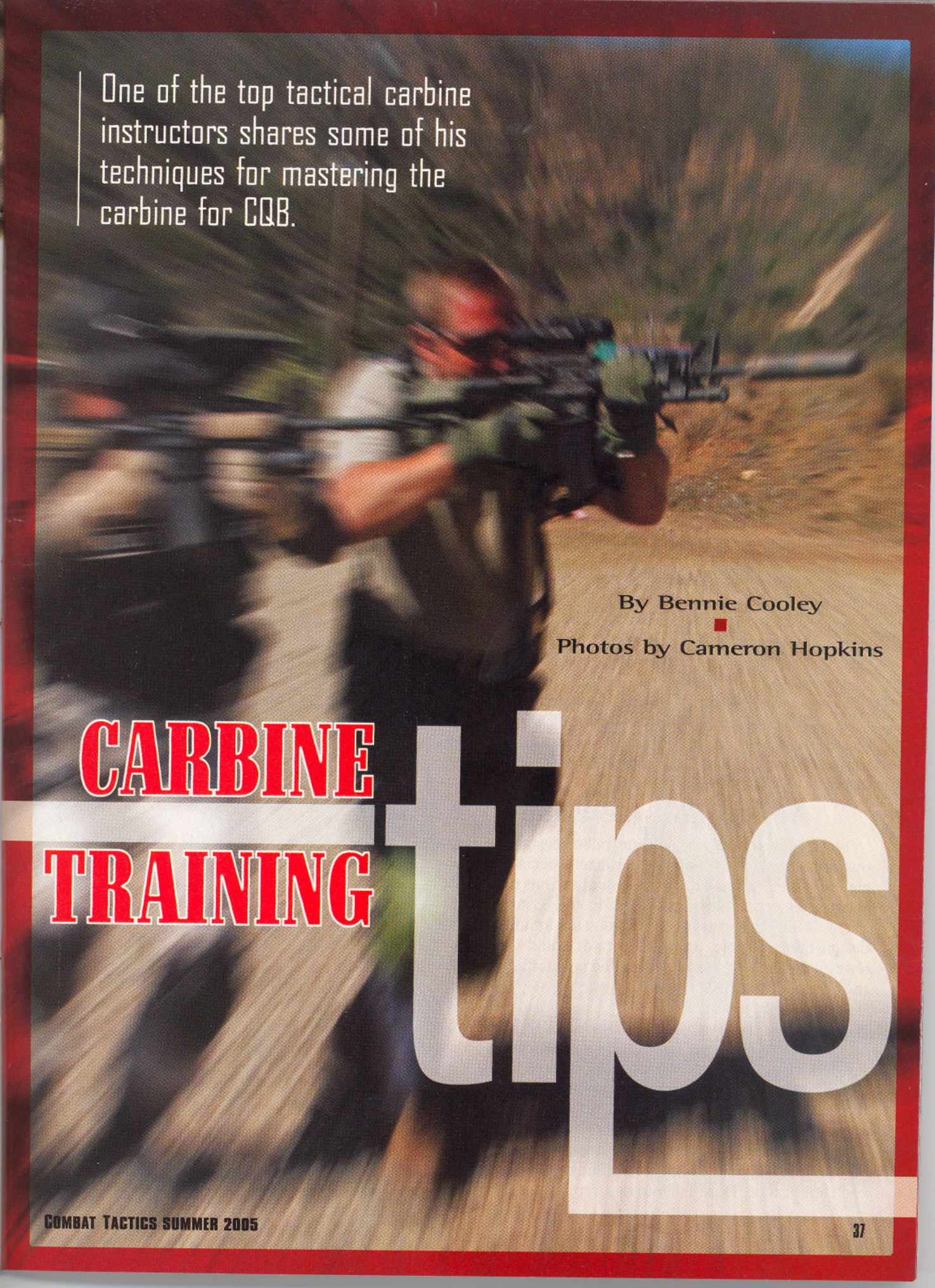




One of the top tactical carbine instructors shares some of his techniques for mastering the carbine for CQB.

By Bennie Cooley

Photos by Cameron Hopkins

CARBINE TRAINING

tips

CARBINE TRAINING TIPS

A large, stylized, red letter 'F' with a textured, slightly distressed appearance, set against a dark red background.

From lethal conflicts that our military faces abroad to ones encountered here in the U.S. by our law enforcement officers, the M4 weapons platform is leading the way as the primary weapon of choice by the professionals. The M4's versatility and ease-of-use play a key role in the carbines's attractiveness. I've been intricately involved

with AR15-style assault rifles for over 20 years both in tactical applications as well as in competition.

The AR platform has come a very long way in a very short time, and the high-speed modifications— from its ammunition to the accessories that grace its profile— are cutting edge to say the least.

Recently, SureFire invited me to travel to Camp Pendleton to conduct a two-day advanced M4 course. Every year SureFire sponsors a training class for the company's friends in local law enforcement and the nearby Marine base, so the class was filled with top operators from both state, federal and of course the hosting range, the U.S. Marines Special Operations Training Group (SOTG).

Not everyone can take my two-day M4 carbine operator's class, so with the aid of some good pictures, here are some of the key points that I teach. I'll cover them here in the same order I address them in class.

Ammo Considerations

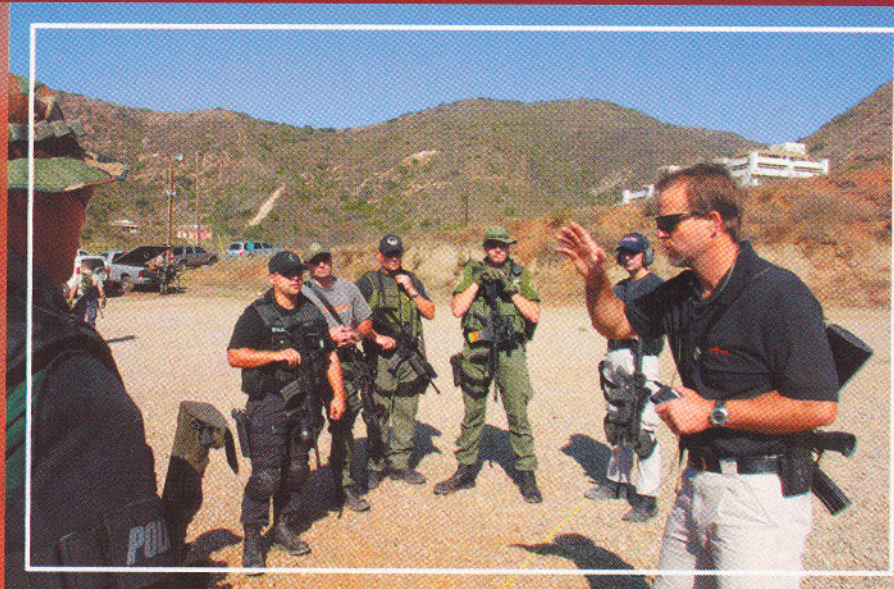
Most agencies only select one bullet design for their operations and I feel this is a big mistake, especially for specialized units. We need to broaden our horizons here. Most agencies select a midweight bullet in the 55 to 62 grain range. While this category is a good all-around weight design, there are times when an operator would want to use a very light bullet for extremely limited penetration, such as the Hornady 40 gr. TAP.

Additionally, a heavier bullet such as the Hornady TAP 75 gr. BTHP or the Sierra 77 gr. BTHP loaded by Black Hills would be more applicable if additional penetration was needed, such as against vehicle glass. I have found that the difference in zeroes from one round to the other, on the far extremes, will be less than 2 MOA at 50 yards with a good rifle.

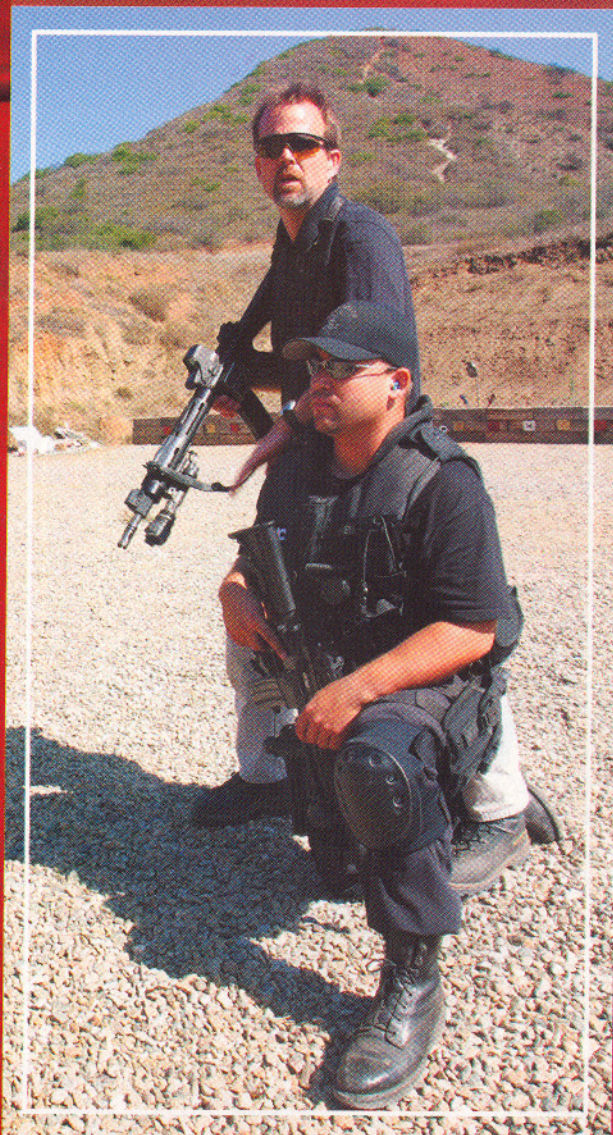
Unfortunately, we sometimes convince ourselves that we're not intelligent enough to keep the rounds straight for each application. Don't fall into this trap! You need to learn

A large, vertical, red-tinted photograph showing a person, identified as Bennie Cooley, in a dynamic pose, possibly demonstrating a carbine technique. The image is heavily blurred and has a strong red color cast.

Bennie Cooley makes an emphatic point in his carbine class. His understanding of the key points of shooting— physical and mental as well as practical equipment issues— is phenomenal.



Cooley addresses the students in a special two-day class hosted by SureFire for local law enforcement and trainers from the range we borrowed at the Special Operations Training Group, U.S. Marines, Camp Pendleton. Cooley's hands-on training (below) included just that— using your hands to signal a partner in drills such as the high-low stack.

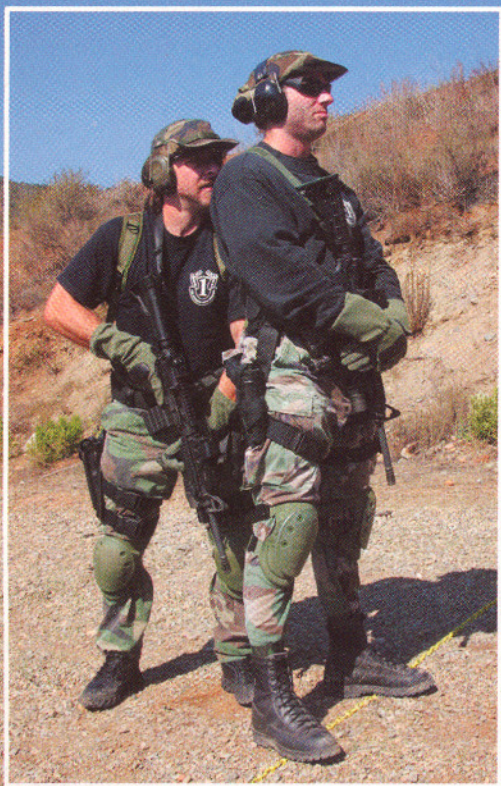




Cooley's class included night firing with both weapon-mounted lights and using a handheld with a carbine, in case something goes wrong as your WeaponLight goes down.

Speaking of things going wrong (at right), Cooley holds up a student's bolt with a broken lug. How many times do you see a sheared lug on a Colt bolt? Never. Except when it happens. t

Training included muzzle awareness drills for working in a stack. If the point man fails to see a threat and you, the number two man, has to shoot, you need to step well clear before you bring your muzzle to bear. Yes, that was done with hot guns. And no that's not unsafe, as long as the students are seasoned shooters.





your gun's zero shift with the different types of bullets, and then find a way to segregate your mags for the different types.

Equipment Issues

I discussed in detail the equipment that I consider to be a priority for every operator to have on an M4. The number one equipment priority for all weapon systems is a white light source. This includes both the primary weapon and secondary weapon, your handgun. We are placing ourselves at an extreme disadvantage in the fight and taking on a liability that in the court we cannot win. A dedicated weapons mounted light source is a must!

My preference for CQB operations on the M4 is the new SureFire Scout Light with the upgradable M60 head. It is lightweight, compact, extremely versatile and very powerful. If more light is needed for certain operations, then SureFire's modular Millennium Universal System goes all the way up to 12 volt 350 lumen systems.

The next item that I find crucial is a good aiming system. Fighting with a gun is done 100 percent visually! The use of high quality red dots that allow the operator to co-witness his iron sights will drastically improve the operator's ability to engage targets effectively. I like the red dot sights such as the EoTech Holographic Sight, Aimpoint M3 or Trijicon's reflex sight.

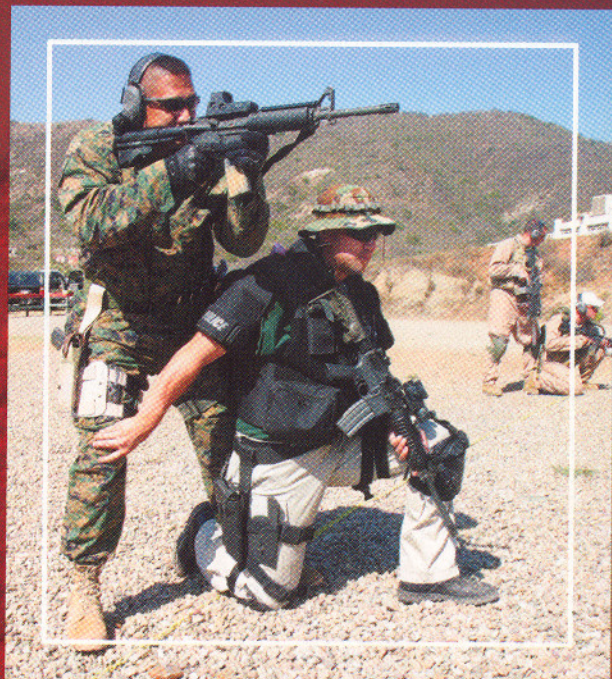
Where magnification is needed, I highly recommend that it be a variable scope such as the Horus Vision CQB H49 1-4x or the Leupold CQ/T in a 1-3x variable. These optics allow the operator the needed field of view for close in work. In short, the uses of optics whether it is a red dot scope or a scope with magnification is needed and should be sought after for all applications.

The next item that I feel is required is a good sling system. I have used just about everything out there and I have found the V-TAC sling made by Viking Tactics (www.vikingtactics.com) to be the best there is. It allows the operator to quickly adjust the sling- simple, easy to use and, above all, very practical.

Lastly, I firmly believe that having a suppressor for the M4 is the way of the future. There are distinct short and long term advantages for a suppressor's application with patrol and special operations uses. We know that in day to day work, a patrol officer will not be able to don hearing protection prior to going on an emergency call. He must be able to hear his radio.

With this in mind, an M4 fired without a suppressor will immediately impair the officer's ability to communicate, causing a distinct disadvantage to the officer. Hearing damage is immediate





Again using physical touch to signal a partner, the low man squeezes the leg of the high man in the stack to signal it's his shot.

This SOTG instructor was running an EoTech HoloSight, PEQ2 IR lases, SureFire M900 vertical grip and SureFire suppressors on his M4. Staff Sgt. Rodriguez (facing page) shows what a high-ready position is supposed to look like.





Beginning with individuals on a firing line, Cooley's training program progresses through a skill-building series of drills that culminates in a stack of men attacking downrange. First up as point man is SureFire's Barry Dueck, director of the Suppressor Division.





if you fire an M4 without ear pro, especially in an enclosed environment.

During the class at Camp Pendleton, a number of participants shot with SureFire suppressors. Their M4FA suppressor not only drastically reduces the noise level but also is the only suppressor that I've tested that allows the firearm to maintain its zero when installed or removed. This, of course, is critical. If your department hasn't been exposed to suppressors or their advantages, I highly recommend that a call be made to SureFire to arrange a demonstration at your location.

Range Drills

Allowing personnel to verify their zeros prior to training is extremely important as it allows the operator to make any immediate corrections as needed. The class quickly confirmed their zeros before any range drills were conducted and specific methods and ranges for zeroing were discussed. This prevents losing valuable training time later as it takes the equipment out of the equation when trying to identify a shooter's problem.

Once all operators had confirmed their zeros, the class moved into specific CQB drills. Each shooter went through a variety of drills that allowed him to identify what I call "pure reactionary time." This is the time it takes for an operator to physically deploy the weapon once a decision to fire has been reached.

The operators are given a specific drill that is outlined for them so the decision-making process is eliminated. With the use of an electronic timer such as a PACT Mark IV to accurately measure response time, the operator begins to understand how long it takes to physically deploy his weapon under ideal conditions, removing the decision-making aspect from the equation. This knowledge of how long it takes to fire one accurate round plays a critical role in providing the operator with a base line throughout his training. It also plays a very significant role in controlling his visual patience, a concept we will discuss later.

Once each student's pure reaction time was established, we then started to use this knowledge as we performed close-in drills under 25 yards. All drills were performed from a variety of ready positions with the M4. Some drills included multiple target engagements, attacking the targets from different angles while moving, and transition drills.

One of the gun handling tips I taught is used only in very specific situations and is called the "buttstock shoulder roll." The class was shown the weakness in deploying a fully mounted rifle in close quarters with the butt tucked into the shoulder pocket as is taught in conventional marksmanship training. The weakness, or should I say disadvantage, to a conventionally shouldered M4 is that it limits our ability to drive the weapon to the strong side without taking a small step, which is time consuming.

This step involves extra time that can sometimes be

eliminated with the buttstock shoulder roll. The technique is performed with the operator pushing the M4's buttstock over his shoulder and then rolling the weapon into the center of his body as he is turning. The technique's sweet spot comes readily evident when performing a buttonhook while entering a room and the target is within close range, normally less than 10 yards. By mastering this technique, the operator is normally able to engage a target between .40 and .75 seconds faster than with a normal mount. A tenth of a second in a gunfight is huge... seven-tenths is invaluable.

Transition Drills

We then looked at the techniques and the thought process involved with transition drills—accessing the secondary weapon—we covered everything from slung M4s to rifles without slings and methods for using the white light on your M4 in the event that the handgun does not have a dedicated weapons mounted light.

Just as important as the techniques was the thought process behind them. Operators were cautioned when to transition to a backup weapon and when transitioning was possibly not the best solution. As a general rule of thumb, transitions should be made only when the operator is not close enough to perform a strike with his M4. Alternatively, a transition to the handgun should only be performed if the operator is within the capability range of his backup. Otherwise, it might be better to remedy whatever problem caused the primary to go down.

Operators were also cautioned to be aware of developing bad habits on the range. Sometimes we get caught up in the moment and forget important items such as conducting secondary searches after a target engagement, trying to find additional targets while looking through the sights or closing on a target within arms reach without a reason or purpose.

Medium Range Drills

When conducting rifle training at medium range between 50 and 100 yards, I try to only use rifle-grade steel targets. The most effective target systems out there that I have used for this is the ones produced by Mike Gibson from MGM Targets (www.mgmtargets.com).

There are several targets that make up the mainstay of my practice. These are the MGM Lollipoppers with the BC-C Zone target and the MGM Flash targets, which allow the operator to see hits out to over 400 yards with the naked eye. The use of high quality steel targets are a must as they provide immediate feedback to the shooter and will more than double the amount of trigger time each operator gets versus paper targets.

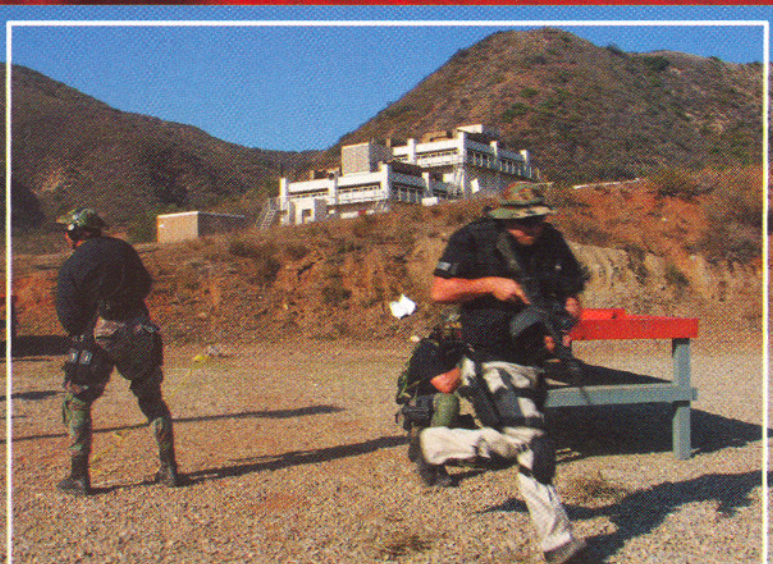
Shooting from the off-hand position was covered for both the strong-side and support-side applications. While shooting from off-hand, the operators were shown the advantages and disadvantages of proper hand positioning for supporting the weapon. While

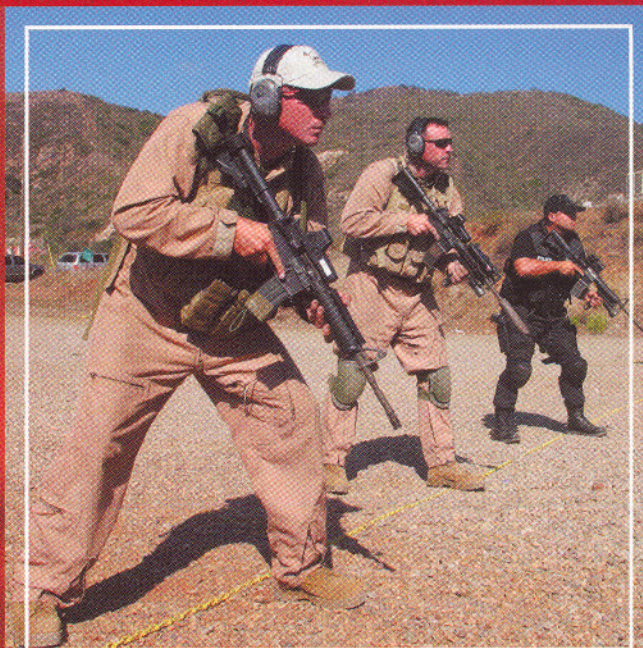


Pivoting around your partner, shoulder to shoulder, teaches a two-man team how to quickly take a rear security position. Muzzles were kept safe at all times, even with hot guns.



Standing tall with one of the kill houses in the background, Staff Sgt. Rodriguez is an instructor at the Special Operations Training Group. At left, a team trains in holding rear and front security while one member advances to a new position.





Most of the Marines in the SureFire-sponsored class had served in Iraq or Afghanistan and they all had nothing but good things to say about the real-world relevancy of Cooley's training. Also in the class (at left) were local SWAT cops from Orange County Sheriff, Long Beach PD, Los Angeles County Sheriff and Riverside County Sheriff.

most instruction has the front hand placed directly under the forearm, it does not always benefit the shooter in doing so. I am a strong believer that you must modify how you employ the rifle, which includes mounting it. Not doing so will limit your ability and more importantly your effectiveness with the rifle.

With that in mind, each operator was shown how to change his hand position for different circumstances, enhancing the ability in driving the weapon from one target to the next.

The class was then shown specific drills for improving their ability to work their eyes in a more effective manner which in turn provided faster target identification and faster engagements.

Operators were also instructed in the mental aspects for engaging targets effectively, with one of the most important aspects being what I call "visual patience." In simple terms, visual patience is being able to control the panic created by the mind when it perceives that the body is going too slowly. This

only happens when your mind perceives a threat or anytime you're competing against the clock.

Understanding the effects of visual patience on your performance and how to control it plays a vital role in allowing the operator to control his actions under stress. Each of the operators was given specific techniques for learning how to recognize it and more importantly how to control it to a manageable level.

Shooting Positions

Some of the other shooting techniques that we covered were squatting and the stretched kneeling position. The stretched kneeling position is just a modification of a standard kneeling position and allows the operator to go from a moving position to a very quick, stable and relatively low shooting static position.

Team drills were also worked while conducting live fire. All of the drills

focused on how to perform safely while on the range or during live operations. Two-man teams were used to



Your basic everyday carbine with your basic everyday essential accessories— red dot sight, in this case an Aimpoint, and a white light, in this case a SureFire M900 vertical grip.

conduct live fire movement drills initially and then the drills progressed to the entire class performing “tactical bounding” during live fire. The teams learned to safely advance downrange, attacking their targets from different positions and angles.

Throughout all phases of training the shooting drills were constantly modified to prevent complacency. I believe that all too often we shoot drills repetitively enough that no thought is required— this can be a dangerous!

Once we have mastered the basic techniques for shooting, we must incorporate range drills that require a thought process from the operator. With that in mind, all drills and techniques were designed to constantly keep the shooter thinking about what he must accomplish next. Shooting is relatively easy; shooting and thinking at the same time is difficult.

Operators were also cautioned on one of the main illusions of training with a rifle. All too often, a shooter lacks the urgency for driving his weapon to the target because the target is not in their personal space. This is a huge mistake and each operator was cautioned to watch for this.

We must remember that the threat in a gunfight isn't 200 yards away— it's within arms reach. A bullet can traverse this distance in a fraction of a second with deadly accuracy. Therefore, our response in weapon presentation— mount-ing, turning, moving— must always show urgency.

This does not mean that the shot is fired quickly, but we have streamlined our response to the threat without taking away from our ability to make a precision shot.

There was a lot of ground covered that cannot be mentioned here. The class hit its apex with multiple live fire team drills that incorporated all the skills taught in a way that the operators could use to build confidence and lasting relationships.

All operators at the course were a pleasure to teach. They all brought a broad knowledge of specialized operations with them, making it a great time and a big learning experience for all involved, including the instructor. A big thanks goes to SureFire for organizing this event and providing the training to each individual free of charge. It shows the dedication that SureFire has in standing behind our military and law enforcement professionals as they continue to fight for our freedoms.



Bennie Cooley has over 20 years experience in counter-terrorism and SWAT training. He has received two World Class Quality Improvement Awards for his leadership and training of personnel and is recognized for his outstanding ability to instruct and develop individuals in combat shooting and hostage rescue operations. Bennie is also a five time USPSA 3-Gun Limited National Champion and a three time SOF 3-Gun World Champion. Bennie can be reached at www.benniecooley.com