



BY RICHARD KAY

ALTERNATE OPTIONS:

FIREARMS BEYOND QUALIFICATION TRAINING

PART 1

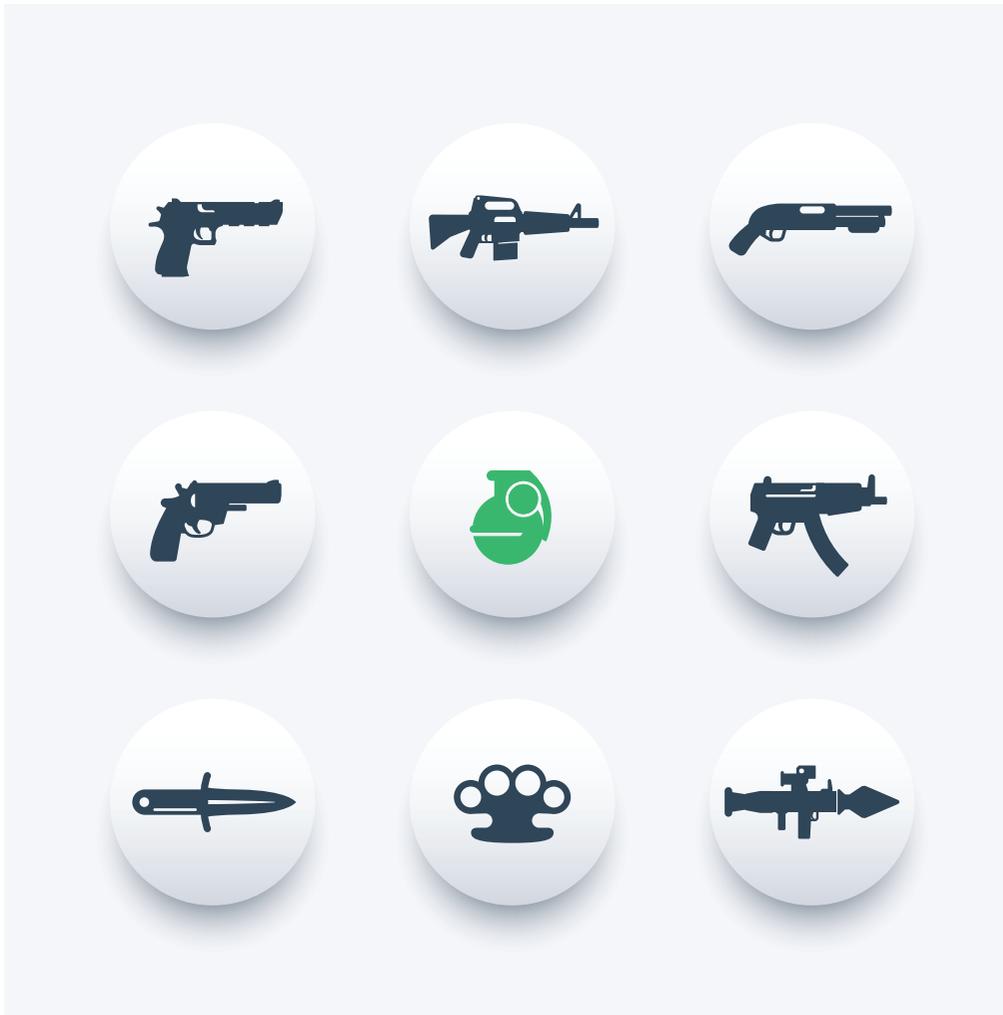
Officers who carry a lethal force option on the job must ensure they possess the requisite skills needed to survive a situation at that level of risk. In the public safety sector, budgets and liability considerations often override adequate training in the various options available to officers, with firearms being a prime example.

Most qualification training places emphasis on precision

shooting (clinical skills for a score) rather than combat shooting (stress skills to survive a life-threatening encounter). Regardless of the emphasis, the fundamentals of shooting remain the same. It is the relevance of certain fundamentals that differs between the two contexts and the end-result outcome.

A key difference between precision and combat shooting methodology is that precision

shooting is conducted in a very clinical context – static shooter and target, known drills and minimal stress. Combat shooting starts with these simple paradigms to teach shooting fundamentals, but then progresses to tactical firearm skills, with shooters moving, variable targets, unknown drills and high stress, and include options for carriage, movement, cover, backup and so on.



Gear Options

There are numerous options available that can assist officers in the operational use of firearms. The selection and use of these options depends on regulations, agency policy and officer ability, but where permissible, they can be a valuable aid.

Firearm sights are easily modified, replaced or substituted. There are various sighting configurations designed for intuitive sight acquisition and alignment. High visibility tritium sights offer easy sight acquisition, especially in low-light situations. Another alternative is the addition of an optic sight mounted on the frame for reflexive target acquisition.

Lasers provide another plausible option, especially for officers working at night. Options include laser units that attach to the accessory rail under the barrel, or to the rear of the receiver group, or even laser units that replace the recoil spring assembly in pistols. This latter option is convenient as the laser does not alter the external shape of the firearm and therefore officers can use the laser with existing duty gear without having to replace or modify.

Flashlights are an essential option for officers. Whilst flashlights are mostly reserved for use in the dark, officers working in daytime should carry a flashlight. Not only may officers find themselves in a low-light

situation during the day, but a quality flashlight with high lumens output is an excellent distraction to aggressive subjects. With regards to firearms, there are numerous options for flashlight units that attach to the accessory rail and can be activated without adjusting the shooting grip. Some units also include a flashlight/laser combination.

Another option is a handgun conversion kit that provides certain advantages, such as a shoulder stock, charging handle and extra weight to counter recoil, as well as accessory mounting options. These tactical platforms provide better grip and shooting stability that facilitate greater range, faster aiming and better accuracy. The setup is

simple, with no pistol disassembly required, and they come with picatinny rails for accessories such as optics, flashlights and lasers, plus spare magazine and sling attachment. The unit not only facilitates a more stable and accurate shooting platform, but provides an increased visual deterrent to potential subjects, and works well with officers wearing a tactical vest and thigh holster. A key aspect is that the handgun maintains its operating function of single shot capability. Whilst the unit may look like an assault platform, it is still a handgun. At present, there is ambiguity around its use, with regulators examining its operational plausibility.

Any option that assists in better operational shooting should be something officers look at. Obviously any gear options should be thoroughly tested and mastered in training prior to using in operations, and any gear accessories should conform to regulations and agency policy.

Carriage and Presentation

Officers should consider carriage options based on operational requirements, especially where concealment is concerned. Alternative carriage options include tactical (vest, thigh holster), concealed (shoulder holster, tactical bumbag or thigh bag, personal defense accessory [PDA] holster) and sling. When selecting and using alternative options, safety is a paramount consideration.

Officers should train with their gear and think of firearm security at all times. A body-holstered firearm, such as a duty, thigh or shoulder holster, is always with the officer. A remote-holstered firearm, such as a tactical bumbag or PDA holster can be put down and taken, misplaced or forgotten.

Presentation refers to the action of drawing the firearm from the holster. Specific circumstances may dictate which position to use, such as behind cover, crowded area, building search and so on. The firearm is presented into the ready position as a default, and consistency of this action should be drilled every time the firearm is taken out of the holster.

- **Ready position:** the firearm is held in at the body at chest level with the muzzle forward on target. This position equates to the 'working space' for officers to present their firearm into, assess a threat and manipulate the weapon. To engage, the arms are extended forward into the combat position.
- **Combat position:** the firearm is extended directly towards the threat at eye level, ready to engage. Officers should keep both eyes open, with the firearm held low enough to see the subject's hands. In the absence of a visible threat, this position allows officers to scan the threat area.
- **Close combat position:** the firearm is held close to the body with the dominant hand, muzzle on target, and the support hand is bent with the elbow facing forward. The firearm and support arm are kept parallel to each other. This position is used in close confines or close proximity to a subject. The bent elbow creates a buffer against an advancing subject and can be used to strike at their centre mass if they close in or sweep them away or down by unfolding the arm.
- **Low ready position:** the firearm is held with the arms relaxed and the muzzle pointed down at an angle with the finger off the trigger

(angle is dependent on the proximity of another person). This is useful for a line-of-fire situation, or when moving with firearm drawn.

Shooting Positions

Officers should be comfortable shooting from a variety of positions, as the situation may evolve rapidly and standing may not always be the most suitable shooting platform. Shooting positions are dictated by the situational environment, available cover, the number of threats and officer capability and vulnerability.

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Cover will stop a projectile, but may not hide an officer. It is anything officers can get behind that will not allow projectiles to penetrate. The value of cover is dependent on the firearm type and calibre. Examples include telephone poles, concrete walls and the engine block of a car. If perfect cover is not available, poor cover may not stop bullets, but may deflect them. Most wooden walls, nearly all interior walls and wooden or metal doors will not stop bullets. Concealment

hides from view, but may not stop a projectile. Concealment is not as good as cover, but if the subject cannot see officers then he may not be able to shoot them. Examples include shrubs, plasterboard walls, tall grass and hollow core wooden doors. Concealment will not protect, but it may prevent the subject from firing accurately. Officers need to make use of what is available, and practise moving to and from cover so it becomes instinctive.

Alternate shooting positions include standing, kneeling, (high, low, two knees), seated (unsupported, supported, chair), prone, supine and foetal. Officers should also train to shoot whilst transitioning between these positions, as well as with both or either hands. Officers should reinforce their ability to shoot in various positions and be able to move and fire from alternate positions smoothly and with balance. Whilst these alternate shooting positions provide stability and assist in reducing target profile, they may reduce mobility.

The use of cover is a fundamental aspect of any tactical plan. The ability to effectively use a firearm from cover is a necessary skill that should be practised consistently. Statistics show that officers who seek cover during a confrontation have a significantly higher rate of survival. Be aware of the environment and the potential cover offered to take advantage if attacked. Officers should train to take cover immediately if fired upon. It is important to remember that gunshot wounds are often not fatal and officers can continue to defend themselves even if they are injured. By using alternate positions, officers can still defend themselves even though they may be injured.

Single-Hand Shooting

Shooting single handed is an excellent way to master grip and trigger control, and is a skill officers should train, as situations may occur where two-handed shooting is not appropriate, including cover restrictions, one hand being occupied with another task, or officer injury. The ability to shoot, reload and return fire with one hand may save a life in a violent encounter.

If officers are going to practise one-handed shooting they should practise one-handed reloading also, as the two aspects go hand-in-hand with operational reality. Options for one-handed reloading include placing the firearm between or behind the knees, under the armpit, in the waistband and in the holster. Any protruding part of the firearm may be used to action the slide, such as ejector port, front sight, rear sight, safety and decocking lever, on a belt, between the knees, on furniture or the heel of a shoe.

In a violent confrontation, success is more important than form. If the need to reload with one hand should arise, any way that works is correct. Let the situation determine the action. Always maintain vigilance of the subject, then get to or remain behind cover.

Part 2 of this article in the next issue of *Security Solutions Magazine* will continue to look at the factors that should be considered in developing an officer's tactical firearm skills. ■

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