



By Mike Conti

Refocusing on the Front Sight Concept, Part III

While the basic concept of point shooting can be described as “aiming the weapon without using the sights to verify alignment with the target,” the individual stances and methods used to do this vary significantly.

In this installment we’ll take a look at the basic technique as taught by the late Col. Rex Applegate. I won’t go into the development and history of it, save to say that it has been bastardized, misunderstood, and—in some cases—vilified.

And let me add that I do not believe that the exclusive use of the Point Shooting technique as opposed to the Weaver-based “Modern Technique” is the cure-all for what ails us in the police industry.

As I’ve stated in earlier installments, my intent is to relate what I’ve discovered over the past eight years in order to generate a fresh look at the subject and shed some light on systemic training problems that have been identified.

One of the things I discovered during my research was that most of the techniques that have been “invented” were actually being practiced for years before becoming popularized by one or two individuals.

And, no, I have not synthesized the Modern technique and the Point Shooting technique into a hybrid—say, “the Combat Oriented Naturally Tactical Integrated System” (or C.O.N.T.I. System for short). These types of indulgences create their own sets of problems, not the least of which is an “apostle-like” atmosphere that discourages people from exploring other ways to accomplish the mission.

General George S. Patton, Jr., was obviously referring to the danger of this



Firing position: The pistol is raised along the shooter’s centerline to eye level, keeping the elbow and wrist locked. This simple movement is likened to the action of raising a pump-handle on a well. When the pistol is between the shooter’s eyes and the target, the hand is convulsed and the weapon is discharged. The shooter’s focus remains on the threat throughout the movement and firing. (Al Pereira photo)

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

mindset when he said "No one is thinking if everyone is thinking alike."

Firearms training must prepare officers to deal with deadly threats as they will encounter them in the real world. While there are specific threats which require specialized training and equipment, the vast majority of police-involved pistol fights share common characteristics: Low light, close range, a fast time frame, fear, anger, surprise, terror and, yes, an adrenaline rush...

Since this is the profile of the common deadly force encounter, then these elements must be incorporated into our training. If they are not, then we are preparing to compete in the Indy 500 by practicing parallel parking!

Fairbairn and Sykes knew this, as did Applegate and his staff at the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, back in 1942. That is why they designed a training course to simulate experiences their students would most likely encounter in the field. Dubbed the "House of Horrors," the program consisted of an instructor directing one student at a time through a low-light, danger-fraught environment. The student would be armed with the basic tools of the trade—a firearm and a knife. As the student walked through darkened rooms and along hallways littered with debris, uneven surfaces—and in some cases bodies—he would be confronted with various enemy and/or friendly figures in front of him.

The enemy—either a dummy or live role-player—would be dressed and equipped like the real thing. Often, blank-firing weapons were used to add to the sensory input. Friendlies would be dressed like Allied soldiers or civilians. If the student reacted appropriately to each scenario, either by shooting, knifing, or holding his fire, then the instructor would praise him with a simple and immediate, "Good boy. That's right, *Good job!*" If the wrong choice was made, the student would experience a great deal of the emotional trauma such a mistake in an actual situation would generate.

Applegate told me that people put through this type of training would experience the type of excitement, adrenalin rush, and stress-induced

effects experienced by men in actual combat. The idea was to let them experience these effects for the first time in a controlled environment, so they could learn from their mistakes and develop confidence in their ability to deal with crisis situations.

And here is where, in my opinion, the entire debate regarding Point Shooting and the Modern Technique was settled.

Average human beings placed into a "House of Horrors" situation as described above will react in startlingly similar ways. They will tend to crouch. They will tend to focus on the threat. They will tend to hold the pistol in a one-hand grip. Sykes and Fairbairn observed the same thing in numerous gunfights in Shanghai throughout the early 1900s.

Applegate observed it in training and during operations. And I have observed it firsthand in the field throughout the 1980 and 1990s. I have also seen it while taking approximately 900 police and military personnel (to date)

through the new House of Horrors training program we've built at the Massachusetts State Police Academy.

Applegate's question was, "Why not use these natural

reactions in a shooting technique that is easy to learn and easy to retain?"

So what happened? How come we abandoned what Applegate and his associates found out so long ago? The best answer that I've been able to come up with is that about 50 years ago we got mixed up. We put the cart before the horse. For when we took the dynamic environment and job-specific fear out of the training equation, we stopped preparing our police officers for what they actually needed to do with the pistol, and started preparing them to be proficient on a static target range under controlled conditions. And the Modern Technique and its derivatives grew in that environment, eventually taking over.

In the next installment, we'll look at the psychological conditioning methodologies present in the new House of Horrors.

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