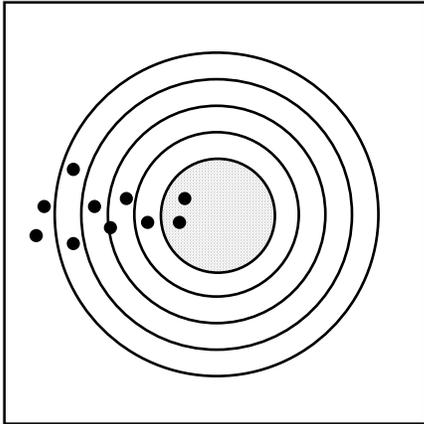


Section 14

Resources

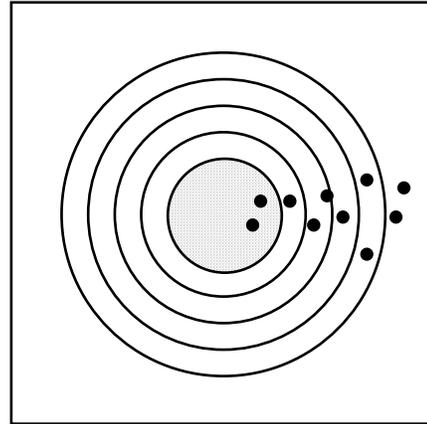
Target Analysis Examples

Examples shown are for right handed shooters – Use mirror image for left handed shooters



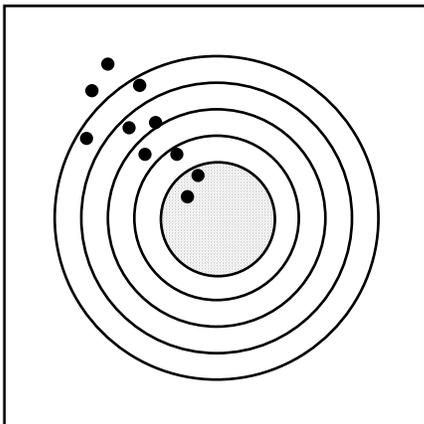
Left of Center

Possible Cause: placing trigger finger too far or too little through trigger guard. Improper finger placement increases the tendency to squeeze the trigger at an angle.



Right of Center

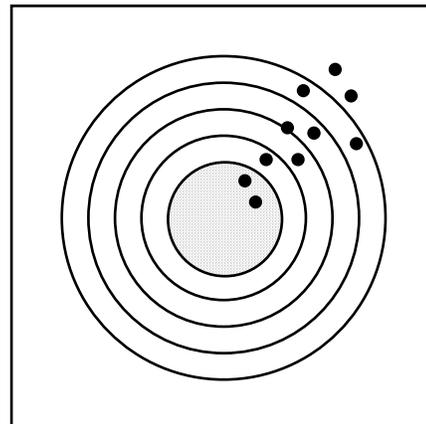
Possible Cause: pushing against the frame with the thumb as the shot is fired.



Upper Left

Possible Cause: anticipation of recoil and poor follow-through; the shooter enhances the recoil.

Possible cause: moving the trigger finger forward too quickly after the shot.



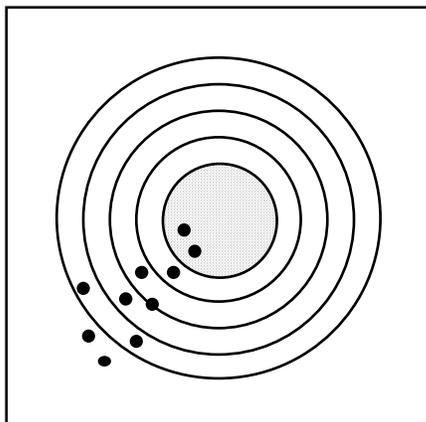
Upper Right

Possible Cause: anticipating recoil and pushing with the heel of the hand.

Target Analysis

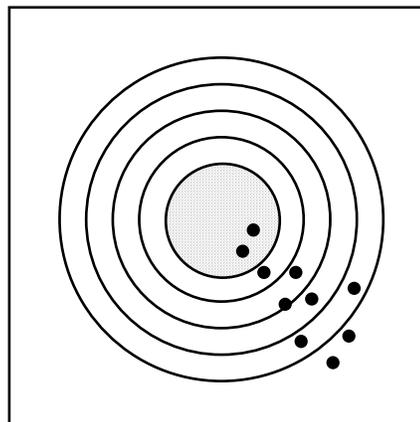
Examples

Examples shown are for right handed shooters – Use mirror image for left handed shooters



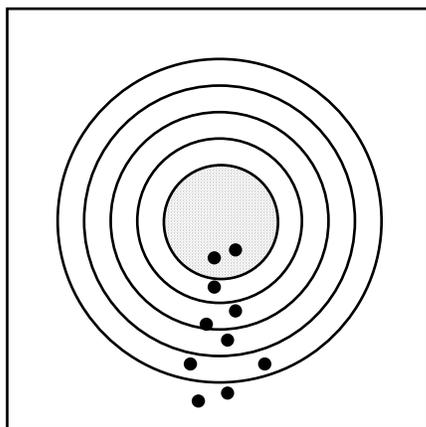
Lower Left

Possible Cause: jerking the trigger. The cure is to concentrate on trigger release.



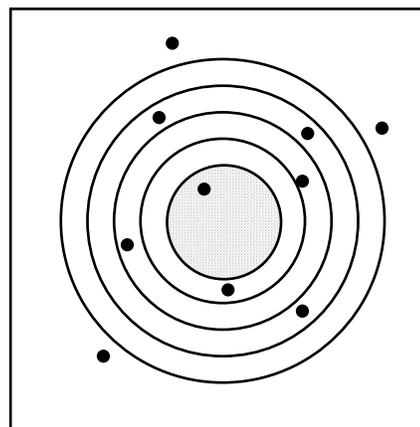
Lower Right

Possible Cause: squeezing or milking the grip as the shot is fired, allowing the barrel to drop low right.



Bottom

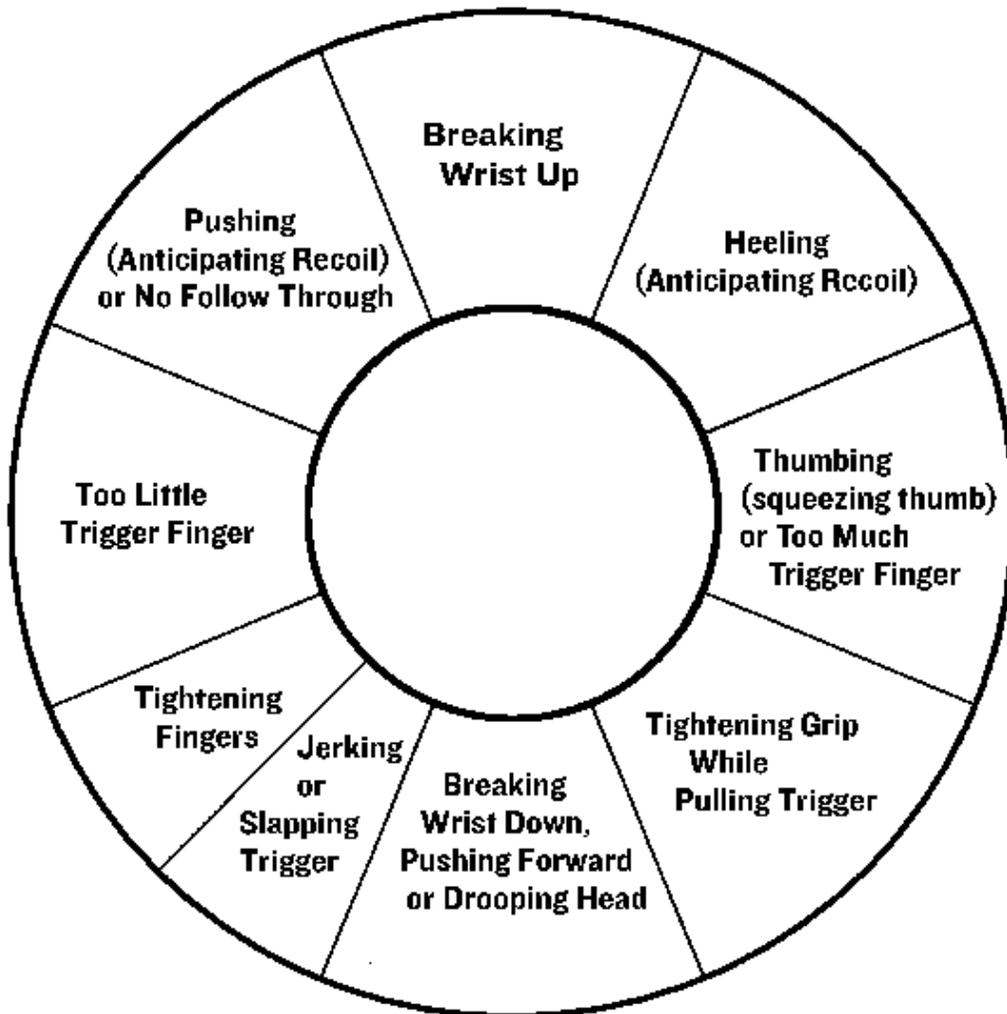
Possible Cause: breaking wrist in anticipation of recoil, or relaxing the grip as the weapon is fired.



Random

Possible Cause: inconsistency of grip, change of aim-point with each shot, and/or focus on the target instead of front sights.

Example of Reprintable Target for Right Handed Shooter

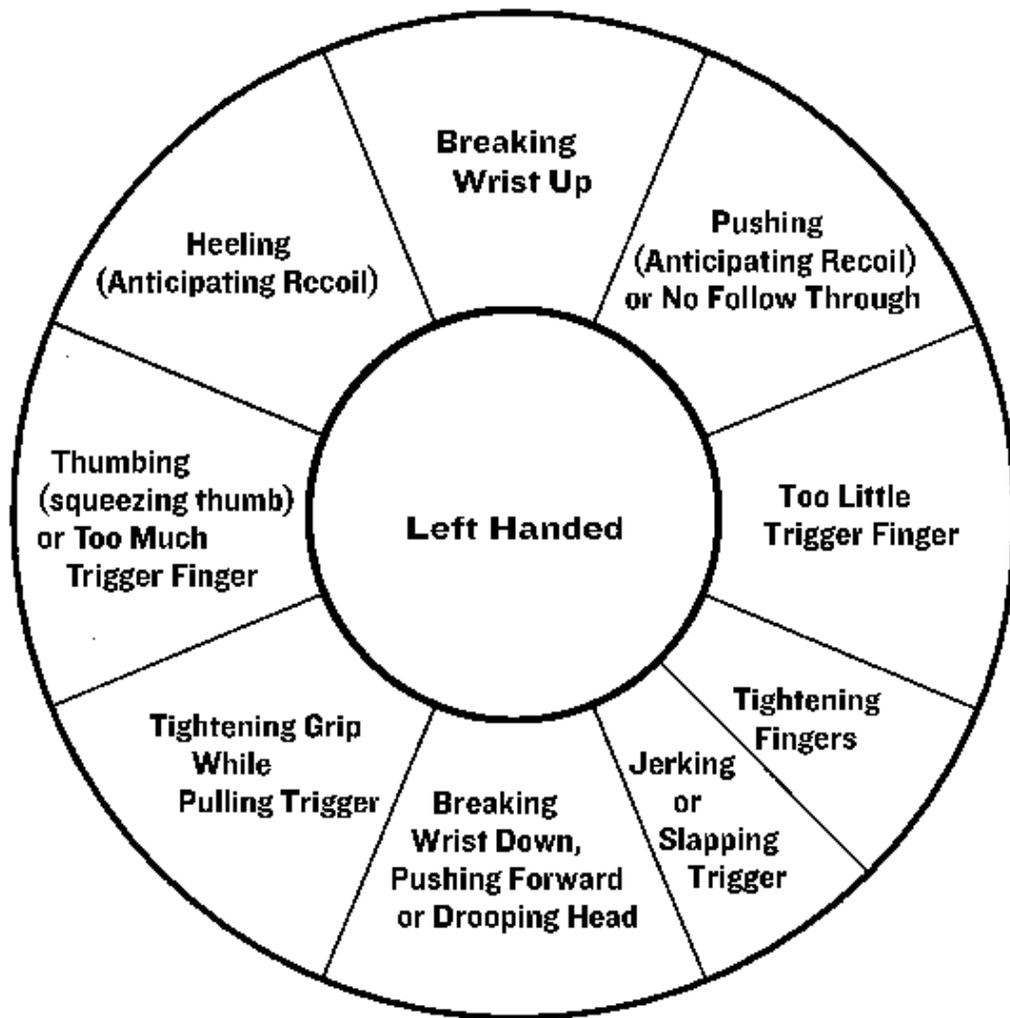


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Example of Reprintable Target for Left Handed Shooter

FOR LEFT HANDED SHOOTERS



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A TIME FOR INNOVATION

Police Handgun Marksmanship Training

by Gregory B. Morrison and Larry Mudgett
Photos courtesy Bettmann Archives

Editor's note: This is the first of a fascinating and important two-part article on police firearms training. In Part One the authors, who are eminently qualified, examine some common assumptions regarding contemporary handgun marksmanship instruction. They discuss the problem of police field marksmanship, the training environment, criteria for gauging proficiency, as well as "qualification." Following these introductory remarks, they begin a discussion of a new and quite innovative approach to imparting a thorough and easily applied understanding of sighting and trigger-control to recruits. Their opinions are based on considerable personal experience, but more recently are influenced by an in-house, unit-level review of the Los Angeles Police Department's Firearms Training Unit's program. Begun in the fall of 1990, the review is ongoing.

American police firearms training has been conducted for most of this century, but to widely varying degrees. The New York City Police Department's School of Pistol Practice was established in 1895 at Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt's direction. Most other major police departments trace their initial marksmanship instruction to the 1920s. Nevertheless, contemporary police field marksmanship — that demonstrated in police-involved shootings — remains low in terms of bullet hit rates. Interestingly, limited evidence suggests that 19th century New Orleans police officers' marksmanship might have been surprisingly similar to that seen today. This is in spite of their having used a now dated mixture of cap-and-ball and fixed ammunition "cartridge" revolvers, as well as there having been no firearms training. An historian found that police officers in post-Civil War New Orleans had a bullet hit rate somewhere around 15 percent, and more likely somewhat less.

Today's large municipal agencies report bullet hit rates that suggest an average of perhaps 20% of the shots fired hit their targets; Los Angeles is a notable exception at 38% and 39% for 1987 and 1988, respectively. Such rates include bullets which hit anywhere on suspects' bodies, so hit quality remains to be assessed. Qualification course requirements differ between agencies, and reviewing the literature reveals only one attempt to establish the degree of relationship between field marksmanship and "qualifying" scores. The finding was that there was none. While the relevancy of police firearms training to gunfighting necessarily must be left for future discussions, some basic matters can benefit from immediate attention.

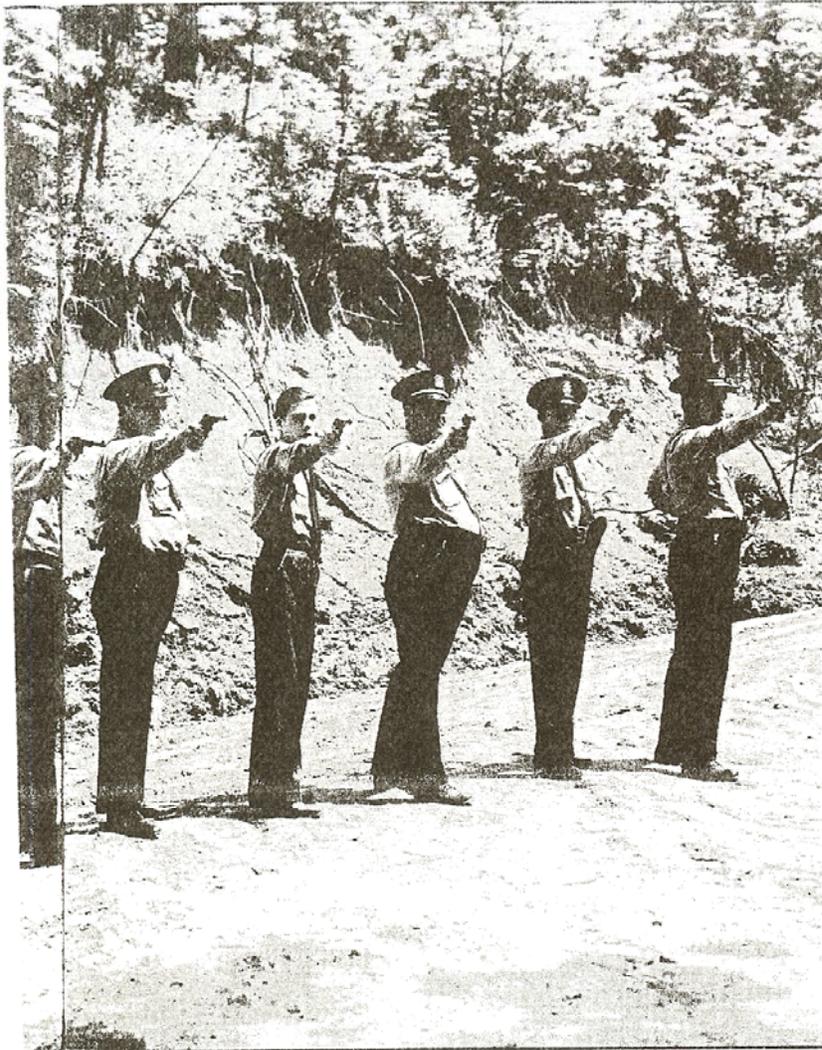
Reconsidering Marksmanship Fundamentals

The fundamental principles upon which practical marksmanship is grounded deserve reevaluation. We believe this also applies to gunhandling, but we restrict our present discussion to marksmanship. One of us has been actively involved in firearms instruction for a major municipal police agency for the past 17 years, but during the past three years has exclusively taught in the recruit marksmanship program. Experiences gained in a variety of settings suggest that most police officers do not possess fundamental marksmanship skills. They did not understand them during recruit instruction, nor during in-service instruction or qualification sessions. That may seem



preposterous, for how could such an assertion be true? Officers' grasps of marksmanship — principally sighting and trigger-control — can be fuzzy and yet still leave them appearing to be adequate marksmen, particularly in comparison to the untrained.

Basic familiarity with the sights and the trigger-mechanism, obtained by casual handling and exploration of operating features, provides some measure of increased marksmanship. Most recreational shooters never undertake any formal training, though they may well get some guidance from various firearms related publications. They nonetheless may be considered good shooters amongst their peers, and that will suffice for shooting at pa-



NYPD's School of Pistol Practice was established in 1895 at Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt's direction, 25 years before most other major police departments.

per targets or steel targets, cans, expended shotgun hulls, or other informal targets.

In the law enforcement arena, firearms competence for field encounters is the appropriate touchstone. Today, firearms training and qualification are obligatory law enforcement community activities, though programs vary in content and conduct. Nevertheless, minimum acceptable qualifying scores — which imply competence, since officers thereafter carry their handguns on duty, and often off duty too

— can be achieved without a solid grasp of marksmanship fundamentals. If you have instructed in that environment for any length of time, that has manifested itself to you. Some combination of the following factors can account for this: rotteness, "adapt and overcome" resourcefulness, as well as the generally limited challenge often presented by qualification courses — for example, an unproductive combination of target and scoring zone sizes, distances and time frames. We firmly believe that most departmental instruction has left its police officers ignorant of marksmanship fundamentals, yet they still qualify. Unfortunately, marksmanship largely remains a mystery to them, and that can have only nega-

tive consequences for field shooting performance which calls for competence under demanding circumstances.

Evaluation

Three years ago the LAPD Firearms Training Unit (FTU) initiated an evaluation of its marksmanship program. Its revelations lead us to question many popular beliefs about police marksmanship instruction, an official activity supposedly which has gunfighting at its core. First and foremost, one may infer from traditional firearms instructional practices that marksmanship can be learned, perhaps even mastered, principally through explanation, demonstration and coaching. Since visual images leave additional impressions, instructors typically demonstrate applicable techniques in an effort to enhance their verbal instructions. While this system can be effective, it seems woefully inadequate for protecting officer and public safety — as well as the public coffers.

While marksmanship sometimes is inappropriately confused with the broad matters associated with firearms use, not everything one does with a handgun actually has something to do with marksmanship. Gunhandling activities, for example, include loading, unloading, reloading, drawing, standing at a combat ready position, and clearing malfunctions. Range demonstrations can be extremely helpful in introducing such skills. Something like the firing stance, which utilizes the entire body, particularly benefits.



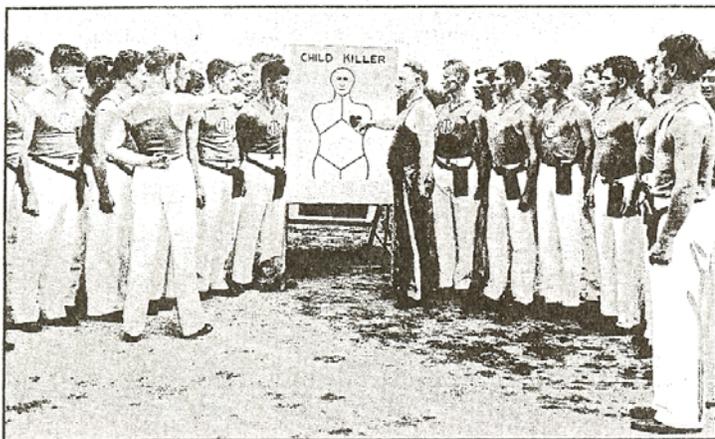
Vintage photo shows L.H. Hines, center, in charge of the Washington range, instructing two guards from the Bureau of Engraving.

This is not the case for all, or even many, marksmanship aspects.

Marksmanship connotes competence; the ability to deliver bullets on target. The "mark" of marksmanship being the thing aimed at, a marksman simply is one who can hit the mark. With regard to learning that skill, we find that descriptions and demonstrations of sight-picture and trigger-control, particularly the well-coordinated combination of the two, leave much to be desired. Besides, if we could tell recruits how to shoot, training obviously could be drastically shortened. Yet police marksmanship

This "system" unarguably has produced hundreds of thousands of firearms "qualified" recruit police officers, but are they competent? What remains open to debate, however, is whether current recruit curriculum and qualifying marksmanship examinations develop and assess practical marksmanship, or merely produce a limited set of skills through well-understood and perhaps much-practiced conditions. Contemporary approaches assume, without proper verification, that recruits grasp marksmanship fundamentals and, furthermore, that they apply them correctly. We have found

that field shootings over time, and that remains a relatively casual undertaking in the law enforcement community. What might happen to field shooting performance, for instance, if marksmanship training's goal changed from getting everyone qualified to instilling the highest possible levels of skill in practical pistolcraft? That precisely is the question that LAPD's FTU began answering in the Fall of 1990. The results have been dramatic as measured within the context of training, and the some popular beliefs about marksmanship proficiency have been challenged. Field shootings remain to be explored.



Sgt. Joseph Evans conducts a pistol marksmanship class for police rookies at Camp Mulrooney, City Island, New York in 1931.

training is predicated on recruits interpreting the visual and verbal information they receive from instructors and then converting this "show and tell" information into personal skills. We think that this description, though admittedly brief, provides the model presently so widely used.

It is easy to assume that recruits enjoy a steady upward learning curve, or even fine-tune some skills, during supervised target training sessions. Somewhat understandably, this improvement is thought to come from the feed-back provided by the placement of bullets on the target. Since we maintain that few people can be told how to shoot, the common combination of line-safety supervision and occasional correctives offers little hope for substantially improving the situation.

Furthermore — and somewhat more sobering — instructors who fervently endeavor to coach their students may premise their well-meaning advice on flawed performance analyses.

this not to be the case, however — not with all officers considered to be "good shots" by their peers, nor even with all of those at the upper bounds of what might be considered the "expert" class.

Validity

Historically, notions about police firearms proficiency have rested upon a combination of non-validated training practices and a variety of minimum acceptable qualification scores which vary with the course of fire as well as the agency which uses it. There can be little argument that virtually all prospective police officers can be "qualified" on some course of fire, even if this merely means that struggling officers fire the course until chance delivers a passing score. What seems misunderstood, or at least not pursued with diligence, is what difference does this training make when officers shoot in the defense of their lives, the lives of others, or to stop dangerous fleeing felons? Validated training requires systematic evalu-

Doctrine and procedure

LAPD's firearms training program addresses recruit marksmanship matters long before the FTU instructors meet their students or the recruits are issued their handguns. A common belief is that people shoot acceptably well using a variety of styles, and this necessarily implies that there are many paths to reaching acceptable performance levels. There is some truth to that, with a handy example being the wide variety of shooting stances used by top-level competitors in bull's-eye, police combat revolver, action and "practical" pistol competition. One must resist concluding, however, that such variability is necessary, much less even desirable, for the thousands of police recruits who receive basic training each year and the in-service officers who continue to train and test their skills. The apparent acceptability of heavily personalized styles also extends to the firing grip. One thing which has encouraged these practices is the availability of easily adjusted sights.

Pistols often incorporate screw-driver adjusted sights, but even the less amenable models that require drifting or substitution offer some adjustment, though sometimes it is limited to one plane. This suggests that sight settings vary enough between shooters to require re-zeroing, and the presence of easily adjusted sights further reinforces (and facilitates) that custom. The harm implicit in this, however, is compensating with mechanical sighting adjustments for what clearly are fundamental marksmanship problems. Attributing point-of-impact discrepancies to seemingly inoffensive stylistic differences in arm arrangement, grip, isometric tension, sighting, and trigger-control, thus presents problems. In spite of inadequate diagnostic ef-



New police marksmanship champion is chosen at a shooting range under an instructor's watchful eye in this vintage photo.

fort, actions such as liberal sight adjustments can lead to high percentages of passing qualification scores, and that further lulls trainers into leaving the actual problems uncorrected. Though understandable, it is misguided.

As an instructor at Jeff Cooper's American Pistol Institute for many years, one of us found that sight corrections to students' handguns rarely were needed unless the sights had been adjusted prior to training in an effort to compensate for errors in technique. In a class of 24 students, there might have been one or two weapons that truly needed zeroing. Students who previously had chosen to suffer with groups which eluded their intended points of impact, quickly found their pistols nicely "zeroed" simply through attention to proper marksmanship fundamentals. Some found this out with only a few shots. Having fired numerous students' guns to assess whether the problem was student or weapon based, virtually all the handguns (predominately Colt, Smith & Wesson, SIG-Sauer, and Beretta pistols) printed within an inch or so of their factory sight-settings at 10 yards.

To rule out factory-delivered sight-settings as a training issue at LAPD, a group of FTU instructors began pre-training zero checks of recruit pistols. A group of three top marksmen cross-verified the zeros the first time, and since then it is conducted on an as-needed basis. At 25 yards, service pistols using the same ammunition should not vary significantly in zero, i.e. no more than an inch or so between shooters. Significantly dispersed group centers point to mistakes

in marksmanship technique, not zeroing. Invariably, technical error is the culprit. Therefore, to remove the sight setting both as a real or imaginary problem, pistols' zeros are confirmed.

This sounds like a wise precaution, but a question comes to mind: How do the instructors know whether they properly applied sound marksmanship fundamentals during zeroing or simply happened to share the same problem and so achieved only the appearance of valid weapon zeros? The FTU uses a set of "trigger-drills" to confirm its instructors' own marksmanship skills and as an instructional and routine diagnostic tool for recruits and in-service police officers. Those diagnostic drills are detailed in Part Two of this article.

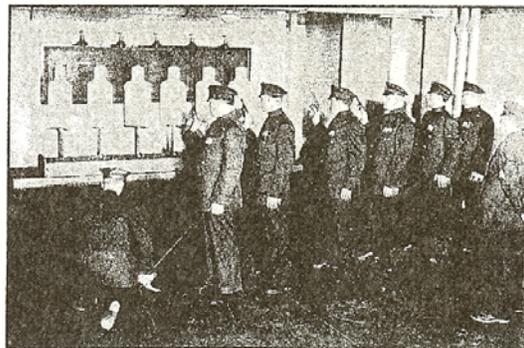
Ammunition

LAPD formerly utilized commercially reloaded ammunition to reduce training and qualification expenses. That proved somewhat disappointing, however, and inconsistently performing ammunition complicated the training process. For example, anomalies ("flyers") properly attributable to ammunition could not readily be distinguished from the shooter's errors. Ammunition that under the best of condi-

tions grouped only moderately well adversely affected the slow-fire precision shooting portion of the curricula. This portion of the training program is central to ingraining fundamental marksmanship principles upon which more advanced techniques can be overlaid. By improving the weapon's accuracy through the use of new factory ammunition, inaccuracies reliably were attributed to recruit errors. While we stop short of endorsing any brands, the ammunition currently used at LAPD for training and qualification must group 10 shots into 3 inches at twenty-five yards when fired from a Beretta 92F pistol mounted in a Ransom Rest.

This matter of being "a good shot"

Such deficiencies can be hard to detect, particularly in the case of off-setting habits, and supposedly trouble-free shooters who perform at the upper levels on rote courses still may have problems. Mistakes can be practiced to perfection and even many good shooters unintentionally or unconsciously compensate for marksmanship errors. Two sources at LAPD have pointed to this inescapable fact: in-service training sessions in which instructors discovered problems where targets and scores initially indicated that there were none, as well as from officers personally motivated



Police sgt. Joe Evans watches a group of police rookies fire at new revolving targets introduced around 1934.

to seek instructional assistance for various problems. It is perplexing that an incorrect sight picture can be offset with incorrect trigger and hand manipulations to produce center hits, and teasing out such problems can be frustrating.

A "high" front sight (more on this in Part Two) in relation to the rear

Continued on page 78

tion Orange. Remember that mirrored images will be reversed if you turn around!

Rule Number Two:

If you aren't prepared to get your hands dirty, don't jump into a cesspool. If you honestly can't bring yourself to gouge out a rapist's eyes, you can't blame the rest of the world for not coming to your aid. It's nothing to be ashamed of, but *you have to know your limitations*. Rambo may have looked good on the silver screen, but with all due respect to Mr. Stallone, he was never in a real war. Could the real-life Stallone gut out an adversary? If the answer is "no," he must accept that a tactical withdrawal is required and get out of the danger zone. Don't fight if you aren't prepared to go 10 rounds.

Most people expect a miracle to occur, or the cavalry to arrive from a black hole in space. It ain't going to happen! "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," observed Henry David Thoreau.

And last, but certainly not least, the subject of unrealistic training. Carry on punching bullet holes in a flat piece of paper imprinted with an 8-inch bull's-eye, and you'd better pray that if you're ever attacked it's going to be by a flat piece of paper imprinted with an 8-inch bull's-eye.

"The sword is more important than the shield and skill is more important than either. The final weapon is the brain. All else is supplemental." — John Steinbeck ■

MARKSMANSHIP

Continued from page 65

sight — incorrect sight-picture — when combined with a consistent bump on the trigger — the absence of a surprise-break — can produce what appears to be good marksmanship. Worse, that combination can be accomplished with some consistency. This particular combination appears to be not only one of the most common maladies, but generally one that is found among those whom most peers would describe as "good shots." Without attentive, perceptive monitoring, these recruits and in-service officers would pass as good marksmen. Viewed from this perspective, well-centered groups must not be thought to be synonymous with error free marksmanship until confirmed through diagnostic assessment such as that discussed in Part Two.

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Crucial to students of practical pistolcraft

LAPD relies heavily upon the doctrine and skills derived from modern pistolcraft, which in large measure can be traced to Jeff Cooper's past efforts at the American Pistol Institute and current teachings at other schools. Two elements of The Modern Technique, as it commonly is referred to, are the "flash" sight-picture and the "compressed" surprise-break. We will not detail them here for they can be found elsewhere (e.g., in *The Modern Technique of the Pistol*), but both represent methods for achieving accelerated sighting and trigger-control in the pursuit of a practical balance of speed and accuracy. Their accelerated nature makes them advanced techniques, though not in the sense of their being appropriate only for the very talented, but rather that they must follow more fundamental marksmanship proficiency. Firing quickly and accurately will forever remain out of reach if one cannot first fire slowly and accurately. An instructor cannot hope to teach the compressed surprise-break to students who have never achieved an open-ended surprise break that carries no time pressure. Likewise, you cannot teach the flash sight-picture when someone does not understand — or at least cannot apply — an unhurried sight picture.

In Part Two of this article, we explore an effective means of imparting the fundamental marksmanship skills through the use of trigger-drills as a basis upon which to develop advanced gunfighting skills. The authors: Gregory B. Morrison holds a doctorate from the Criminology, Law & Society department at the University of California, Irvine, and presently is a criminal justice professor at California State University, Bakersfield, California. Though his research interests generally revolve around the police use of deadly force, he currently is focused upon the history of police firearms training, contemporary training practices and program evaluation. In addition to his scholarly interests, Mr. Morrison serves as an LAPD special reserve officer and in that capacity consults to its Firearms Training Unit. He has been a police officer and firearms instructor and, until taking up doctoral studies, was operations manager and a senior rangemaster at Jeff Cooper's American Pistol Institute.

Larry Mudgett is a decorated senior police officer with the Los Angeles Police Department. He has

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PART II

**POLICE
HANDGUN
MARKSMANSHIP
TRAINING**



**Assumptions,
Instruction And
The Need For
Diagnostic Aids**

by Gregory B. Morrison
& Larry Mudgett

Photos by Gregory B. Morrison

64 FIGHTING FIREARMS

SUMMER 95



Trigger Drill 1 will look familiar to some readers since it commonly is used to demonstrate the surprise-break to shooters who are suffering due to its absence. Its greatest value is in *confirming* recruit comprehension of sighting principles through the use of diagnostic aids. Resulting groups attest to the recruit's *sighting* proficiency. This drill, along with the others, requires coaches to lightly brace recruits' shoulders to minimize the effect of having two people in contact with the pistol (Officer Mudgett's fingers are just visible over the top of his shoulder). The object simply is to counteract rearward force inadvertently exerted by instructor. This stability is particularly important for Trigger Drill 5 when the coach must exert sufficient force to cycle the Beretta 92's slide.

In the first part of this article, the authors discussed their thoughts about some underlying assumptions of police recruit marksmanship training. Taking the position that most police officers are not competent marksmen in the sense of understanding and being able to demonstrate marksmanship fundamentals, they noted some of the changes made in the Los Angeles Police Department's training program over the past three years. The authors now discuss the six Diagnostic Trigger Drills currently used in LAPD recruit and in-service training. While some trainers already may be familiar with one or more of these aids, the authors offer fresh insights into more effective uses.

We previously encouraged police firearms instructors to reconsider contemporary approaches to teaching marksmanship fundamentals, as well as limited skills (i.e.,

the ability to sight and press the trigger in a virtually error free manner). The notion of "virtually error free" shooting varies with the challenge. In testing pure marksmanship, the argument can be made that time constraints properly play no role, for example, in time-honored "slow-fire" bull's-eye shooting. Any shot landing beyond a given handgun's inherent accuracy potential necessarily implies human error. The well-directed shot requires that correct sight-picture coincide with non-disturbing trigger-finger pressure that concludes with the firing mechanism being set in motion.

Most law enforcement agencies probably utilize bull's-eye targets, or targets very much like them, during the early stages of recruit training. This is a good practice. Bull's-eye targets for handgun shooting are graduated with rings 1 inch to 2 inches wide and offer decreasing point values as the rings grow in size and distance from the target's center. Whether in practice or competition,

bull's-eye targets are positioned to enhance results; formal rules address fixed distances, plumb setting and a sharp contrast between the black bull's-eye and the remainder of the target. These targets usually are very discriminating, particularly those devised for formal competition since they must separate master competitors at national and international events.

cannot "qualify," and in-service officers who fire scores below the minimum are at least temporarily "unqualified" and might experience changes in their official duty assignments. Such assessments are largely arbitrary, but have taken on unwarranted significance after being embellished with official sanction for so many decades.

We seriously doubt, however,



The left-side view of Trigger Drill 1 shows trigger-finger placement for the coach and student. The recruit's trigger-finger lies above the trigger guard and along the frame, though in this picture it has been lowered slightly so that there is no mistake about whose trigger-finger is on the trigger — the instructor's.

Once the "combat" portion of police firearms training begins, marksmanship properly is measured against humanoid targets and the balancing of accuracy with speed. The reason for this is quite simple: The potentially accurate shot delivered too late to affect the gunfight is useless and protects neither the police nor the public.

Competence

People perceived as competent at manual skills are expected to perform with very little error; conversely, someone's very inability to perform at similar levels suggests something less and which at some point reaches levels of incompetence. With police marksmanship, an officer's points on a course of fire are summed to attest to skill. While some officers may be interested in their relative rankings with one another, such as through classifications like marksman, sharpshooter and expert, an officer's primary objective is to produce a score which meets or exceeds the established minimum acceptable score.

Importantly, not accomplishing that objective implies incompetence. Indeed, some agency's recruits are released from employment if they

whether the qualification process clearly establishes competence. While attaching numbers to police marksmanship ability implies much, it may deliver precious little. For example, officers who fire the minimum acceptable score, let us say 75%, are qualified, yet those who scored merely one point less are unqualified. This system is tidy, but does it really mean that these officers possess significantly different degrees of skill? We think not and hope that you agree.

"Qualification" remains the predominant test for marksmanship and might well be masking inadequate practical handgunning skills. While standards certainly are warranted, the specifics deserve rigorous scrutiny. We will save that discussion for another time. Our purpose in raising this point is to suggest exchanging the "qualified" touchstone for something more important — competence. While these two terms may be synonymous in some fields or activities, we do not presently believe that this applies to police firearms training.

A New Approach To Teaching The Basics

Practical — or combat or defen-

sive if you prefer — pistolcraft requires shooting at increased speeds and thus by its very nature denies one the luxury of weighting accuracy disproportionately to speed. This exacts a balancing of speed and accuracy from serious students and makes effective handgunning uniquely challenging. One hardly can be expected, however, to accurately fire several shots within a matter of a few seconds while tenuously grasping marksmanship fundamentals.

LAPD has taken a new tack in improving recruit basic marksmanship skills and, in the effort to address competence, has begun de-emphasizing qualification as the most important measure of shooting skill. One principal component in that effort is the set of "Trigger Drills" used there for recruit and in-service training.

The Trigger Drills are training and diagnostic aids, and they are sequenced herein to best facilitate instruction. The goal is to combine instructors' active assistance with recruits who gradually are given increased responsibility for well-placed hits. The goal is reached when recruits perform all the functions central to accurate shooting. The Trigger Drills afford beginning shooters a controlled and intensely monitored opportunity to participate in accurate shooting from the very beginning of their instructional experiences, and thus well before they could be expected to manage it by themselves. At the same time, the drills allow instructors to assess sight-alignment and trigger-control techniques. The drills also provide recruits with correct techniques for a minimum of time, effort and money.

Lectures suffice for some students, but it is one matter to comprehend the presented material and quite another to transform that knowledge into demonstrable skill. Learning manual skills through the combination of spoken instructions and brief demonstrations has serious drawbacks and prompted one LAPD instructor to quip, "That is why there are only a few good shooters." Each Trigger Drill seeks to teach or assess a particular aspect of marksmanship. The instructor holds the handgun for one of the drills, though sight-picture and trigger-control responsibilities vary across the four primary Trigger Drills to give new shooters a full range of experiences.

Recruits' pistols are always used. An instructor's pistol might easily be imbued with "magic," and that devalues the training experience.

For instance, novices must be prevented from forming the belief that the instructors' pistols have better sights, lighter triggers or are more accurate. Using the recruit's pistol helps immensely in this regard. Furthermore, recruits need to see accurate shooting performed with the pistols they soon will depend upon to defend their life, their fellow officers and the public. Confidence in

of and, equally importantly, the finesse required for its delivery. The target must be far enough away to prevent rewarding significant error. Recruits who fire symmetrically grouped center hits may assert that they are performing relatively error-free, so that had better be the case. The target's most rewarding, and thus smallest scoring zone *must not* reward poor marksmanship.

variation. Once instructors have introduced recruits to a drill and tentatively assessed proficiency, recruits begin working with one another by alternating coach and student roles. Combined with the liberal use of "skip-loading," a procedure detailed later in this article, "student" recruits briefly comment upon dry-fire snaps. The recruits undertaking the coaching role remain silent unless they disagree with the students' assessments. Recruit-coaches never comment upon the actual shots. Why? The bullet's strike is all the statement that is needed regarding the shot's execution.



With Trigger Drill 2, the instructor holds and fires the pistol while the recruit monitors trigger-control. Trigger Drill 4 reverses these two roles and provides instructors with the final check upon recruits' techniques. Subtle misapplications of pressure which cannot always be seen by instructors often can be felt by them. Trigger Drill 4 goes far toward identifying residual problems.

one's personal weaponry and the training received in its use are crucial to achieving competence.

Since most officers carry the revolver or have switched to the double-action semiautomatic pistol, bear in mind that the drills we now discuss all require thumb- or slide-cocked firing capability. Attempting to perform these particular drills in the trigger-cocking or double-action mode is ill-advised and inappropriate.

Teaching With Trigger Drills

Some basic rules apply: First, recruits must demonstrate proficiency with one Trigger Drill before moving to the next. Firing vast quantities of ammunition is not the objective, but rather learning and instilling proper manipulation.

Redirecting goals and objectives in that direction seems the sensible path. Second, the Trigger Drills must establish in the recruits' minds what an accurate hit is comprised

of. Striving for a small group in the middle of a relatively large scoring center works against the instructor. The large target center can be shrunk by moving the shooter farther away. Conversely, a small one can be enlarged by moving closer. Be sure to arrange your situation accordingly.

The drills seem to work best at distances from about 12 to 25 yards. Firing closer than 12 yards can conceal errors by way of a large and insufficiently discriminating target; firing from greater distances provides little unneeded discrimination. Given typical wobble, and the LAPD's silhouette target's 10-point scoring zone, the Firearms Training Unit chose 15 yards for most trigger-drill exercises. This seems to be a convenient distance too, since it makes for a relatively short walk to the targets.

Third, the Trigger Drills depend heavily upon instructor-student in-

Trigger Drill 1

Dividing marksmanship into its two major components — sighting and trigger-control — is a crucial teaching technique. The result is a comprehensive understanding by recruits which provides short- and long-term benefits. Firing single shots in the absence of time pressure allows instructors to detect a variety of marksmanship problems.

As we pointed out above, the Trigger Drills are used with pistols fired from the cocked-hammer condition. What we call Trigger Drill 1 seems widely known, and many trainers will recognize its basic elements. It is most commonly used to demonstrate the surprise-break to shooters who habitually manipulate the trigger with sudden, sharp movements and thereby disturb the sights. It allows separating trigger-control problems from those associated with sight-picture.

Trigger Drill 1's real contribution is in teaching and assessing sight-picture. The recruit holds the pistol in a two-handed hold — LAPD exclusively uses the Weaver stance for dampening muzzle-flip — and is responsible for sighting; the instructor, however, presses the trigger. Instructors stand on the shooter's strong-side and face parallel to the firing line. The instructor places the heel of the up-range hand on the recruit's shoulder blade to counter any trigger press effort that might otherwise turn into a rearward push, the down-range hand forms a grip over the student's hands and the index finger is placed on the trigger. This combination of bracing and grip largely eliminates trigger-control as a factor in bullet strike, thereby allowing the hits to

speak to student sighting proficiency.

After the instructors have assisted recruits in firing approximately six to eight Trigger Drill 1 shots, the entire class assembles at the left-most target on the range to critique every target. This impresses upon recruits the importance of target reading and that each bullet and grouping is informative. Cognizance of common marksmanship errors helps to bring individual recruit's concerns into perspective. Target reading in a group setting has the added benefit of reducing future excuse-making about one's hits, since the entire class is being familiarized with a broad range of problems, not simply one's individual difficulties. Besides, reducing the realm of possibilities for what errant hits might otherwise be attributed also is important. Ignorance about what is happening as a result of one's efforts quickly leads to frustration and then to complacency. That must be avoided.

ing base down on the rear sight. The officer saw part of his front-sight was "missing" when he reacquired his sight-picture. That would not have happened if the front sight had been properly located within the rear sight's window. As such, the front sight had been properly superimposed on the target; the problem was the rear sight being low.

Lowering the rear of the pistol to see more of the front sight is probably due to several factors. First, there is the constant emphasis upon focusing on the front sight. Second, superimposing sight-alignment on the target to achieve sight-picture can result in a loss of attention to the rear sight's orientation. In many cases, the front sight is centered on the target when high hits are being produced, so imagine the frustration that novices face when an instructor informs a student with this problem that "the front sight is too high." The front sight was not low in relation to the target — but actually centered — rather the rear sight

effect upon initial training is reduced by blackening the white rings which surround the tritium inserts with a black felt marker — a temporary alteration which later can be removed. LAPD expects to be receiving Trijicon sights with black rings around the tritium insert in the near future.

After the instructors are satisfied with recruit performances, the recruits are paired up to take on their coach/student roles and continue supervised practicing of Trigger Drill 1. Trigger Drill 1's objective is to provide both confidence in one's present skill as well as spur one's motivation toward a full embrace of marksmanship fundamentals. As a part of that motivation, Officer Mudgett poses the following question to his classes: "If I can teach you to press the trigger like I did for you, does it stand to reason that you can shoot just as well as you did on Trigger Drill 1?" The answer is yes, as they soon discover. Once the recruits' groupings coincide with the instructors' expectations as to size and location, they progress to the next trigger drill.

Trigger Drill Responsibilities

	HOLD/SIGHTS	APPLIES	MONITORS THE PISTOL
Trigger Drill 1	recruit	instructor	N/A
Trigger Drill 2	instructor	instructor	recruit
Trigger Drill 3	recruit	instructor	recruit
Trigger Drill 4	recruit	recruit	instructor

When recruits are told to align their sights with the target, instructors mean for them to superimpose sight-alignment upon a target — this is sight-picture. What comes first, of course, is sight-alignment which involves placing one's visual focus upon the front sight and aligning it with the rear sight irrespective of any particular target. Unfortunately, the rear sight becomes too easily forgotten in the process. For example, instructors can identify high impacts attributable to "looking for too much front sight," but we think that what actually happens is that the rear of the gun is lowered. Even though the eye, front sight and target appear aligned, the lowered rear sight misdirects the barrel and thus the bullet.

A case in point: An officer experiencing high hits on target sought out FTU assistance. At the range with Officer Mudgett, he sighted in on a target with his unloaded pistol. As soon as he settled down on target, Officer Mudgett "capped" the rear sight by placing a cartridge cas-

was low in relation to the target, front sight and eye.

LAPD's present method for detecting and correcting the low rear sight malady is to "wire" the rear sight with a piece of clear scotch tape. The sight should be degreased or at least wiped off. Then, cut a 3/4-inch wide piece of tape into a 1/8-inch long piece and place this across the top of the rear sight. The 3/4-inch width allows the instructor to wrap the tape down the sides of the rear sight to better secure it. The tape appears as a faint line at the top of the rear sight which the front sight in turn should touch, but not bypass. This technique is effective and inexpensive.

Another reason for high hits is a "busy" front sight. Dots, bars, crosses or coloration also seem associated with high bullet impact or the general loss of front-sight focus, particularly when associated with the front sight. Their contribution to marksmanship remains questionable. LAPD's Beretta 92s now are issued with Trijicon self-luminous tritium sights, but their negative

Trigger Drill 2

Trigger Drill 2 is the only drill which places the pistol in the instructor's hands. With this drill, instructors both sight and press the trigger; the recruits monitor the trigger-press by feel and observe the hits. The recruit stands on the instructor's support-side and slightly forward of the instructor's foot position. Recruits place their left index fingers on the triggers — in cases where the instructors fire right-handed — but do not apply any pressure. Instructors then place their trigger fingers atop the recruits' index fingers.

The objective is to have recruits monitor the gradually increasing pressure as their fingers are compressed between the instructors' finger and the resisting trigger. In this way, recruits experience the instructor gradually building pressure toward the surprise-break and accurate hits.

As instructors, we often have seen novice shooters jolted by true surprise breaks. Possibly your query about their surprised responses evoked comments something like "I wasn't ready for that" or "I didn't know it was going to go off." This is precisely what we are looking for, but is something many recruits fail to grasp. The recruits feel the instructors get surprise-breaks by applying gradual pressure. With Trigger Drill 2 then, instructors can introduce the surprise-break under

well-controlled circumstances and thereby quickly come to find surprise to be desirable. Officer Mudgett has used the analogy that Trigger Drill 2 is much like "dual control" flight instruction where student pilots place their hands on the control wheel, but only to monitor how the instructor actually flies the plane. In this way they experience the effect of various control surface inputs on the aircraft's attitude in flight.

Trigger Drills 1 and 2 provide two separate learning experiences: student sighting responsibility for the shots which are actually triggered by instructors (TD1) and then monitoring trigger-press control

proves insufficient to warrant complete responsibility for a shot, the instructors take charge of trigger-control during Trigger Drill 3. The instructor presses the student's finger against the trigger, and the recruits must be careful not to apply any pressure. The objective is to continue enforcing recruit responsibility for holding and sighting the pistol, but only monitor the instructor trigger-control. This brings the recruits one step closer to full responsibility for their shots by constantly reinforcing the proper execution of fundamentals.

Trigger Drill 4

Trigger Drill 4 brings recruits



Here the student — a role played by Sgt. Glen Hees — demonstrates basic body positioning for Trigger Drill 2 in relation to the instructor who is holding the pistol. It also provides some detail about the monitoring grip.

while instructors both sight and trigger the shots (TD2). Recruits thus have seen sighting principles demonstrated and have practiced them. They also have developed a "feel" for proper trigger-control gained through the instructors' surprise-breaks. After just a few hours of training, recruits already are cognizant of what accurate shooting requires and that it can be achieved through the keen observation of fundamentals. More importantly, they know it can be achieved. The next Trigger Drill builds upon this foundation.

Trigger Drill 3

Here the pistols return to the recruits' hands, and thus the responsibility for controlling and sighting the handgun. Since recruits' admittedly limited trigger-control still

very close to firing their handguns unassisted and finally requires their manipulation of the trigger. They control, sight and fire the handguns and we think that the preceding controlled experience has prepared them. The confidence they have gained contributes to particularly high proficiency levels which we consider the truer test of skill, not merely qualification. Even here, however, their efforts still are actively monitored by the instructors, who place an index finger between the recruit's trigger-finger and the trigger's surface. This is a reversal of roles found in Trigger Drill 3. Without continued monitoring of the recruits' trigger-control, one gambles that center hits indeed are being achieved through proper technique.

The most effective use of Trigger Drill 4 comes by encouraging re-

cruits to gradually increase trigger pressure. For example, the instructor might say: "Give me one pound of pressure, but don't let the pistol fire. Now, add one pound at a time — *but*, don't let the pistol fire." Asking for increased pressure, but not so much as to fire the pistol, produces a lengthy press on the trigger by making purposely contradictory demands. Recruits do not know what one pound of trigger pressure feels like, but the relatively small number sends the message to add pressure in small increments.

Trigger Drill 4's value goes beyond that offered by conventional ball-and-dummy, for it uncovers subtle trigger-control problems. For instance, a shooter experiencing unacceptable wobble during precision firing typically is advised to "hold" the trigger pressure achieved when too much handgun movement is experienced. When the sights "settle down," trigger pressure is supposed to be resumed. This iterative procedure continues until firing pressure is achieved in accordance with good sight-picture. The use of Trigger Drill 4 at LAPD has revealed that at least a quarter of the recruits release much, if not all of the pressure on the trigger when the sights wander, thus necessitating that the trigger press begin anew. Previously, that had not been so apparent.

Value Of Basic Trigger Drills

The goal driving Trigger Drills 2-4 is teaching the recruits how to press the trigger in such a way as to produce the same results obtained with Trigger Drill 1, where the recruit sighted the handgun and the instructor pressed the trigger. The program's effect on scores over the past two years has been dramatic. Once the recruits have successfully worked their way through these drills, they truly have been taught and have experienced the marksmanship fundamentals associated with sighting and trigger-control.

All instructors have encouraged novice shooters "to imprint that feel" when we believe that good hits were the result of proper trigger-control. We want students to repeat good performances, and thus repeating the feel which produced a particular hit is central to that objective. During individualized coaching, we all have seen shooters slap the trigger or otherwise move the pistol during discharge and nonetheless get a center hit. Less attentive trainers might be persuaded by that hit to exclaim, "Yeah, see, there is a center hit, so remember how that felt and duplicate that feel." This is

a highly questionable practice. Well-centered hits imply that the shots were properly delivered, and one may choose to draw such an inference, but this relies too heavily upon faith for our taste. This innocent and certainly well-meaning advice is detrimental without some other confirmation of sound technique.

You might already have felt like pointing out to us that the long-

watch the sights and offering admonitions about jerking the trigger are long-standing, familiar components of marksmanship training. Standing alone, however, they do not provide the experiences that we think are crucial to competence. Too much reliance has been placed on verbal instructions coupled with limited demonstrations, and not enough on verifying recruits' understand-

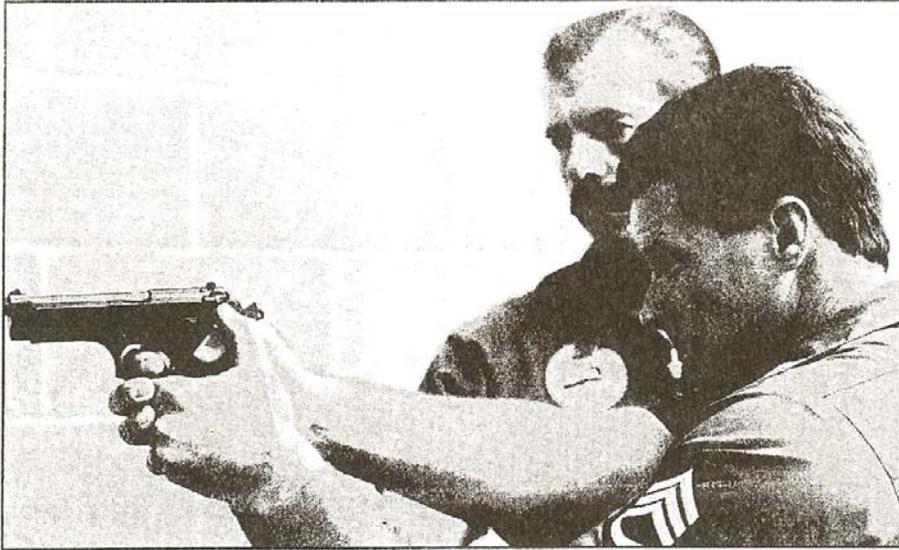
tered 3-inch or smaller groups from the 15-yard line at the end of their first day's training. Rapid-fire drills are of course another matter, but, as we previously noted, one cannot hope to deliver fast and accurate hits if one first cannot fire slowly and accurately. These officers now possess a clear understanding of marksmanship fundamentals, and this forms a new foundation for every-

thing else they will be taught and strive to achieve regarding firearms proficiency.

The four basic Trigger Drills reside at the core of marksmanship instruction at LAPD, but there are two other drills. We include them here because they represent logical extensions.

Trigger Drill 5

An observation that contributed to this drill's development was the awkwardness of dry-firing double-action semiautomatic pistols. The double-action revolver can be trigger-cocked for every shot if



Trigger Drill 3 has the student monitor the coach's trigger-press. Set-up virtually is identical to Trigger Drill 1, however, the student's finger has been inserted into the trigger to rest lightly upon the trigger. The coach supplies the necessary pressure for setting the firing mechanism in motion. Experiencing the gradually building pressure goes far toward instilling in recruits the need for smooth, consistent trigger-control so crucial to more advanced techniques, for example, the compressed surprise-break.

standing "ball-and-dummy" drill adequately identifies gross trigger-control problems and that our suggesting other drills is disingenuous. Ball-and-dummy exercises do have their uses, for example the previously mentioned muzzle-dip that occurs when shooters anticipate recoil and move the pistol groundward. In extreme cases, this recoil-avoiding pivot emanates from the shoulders and easily is observed during firing exercises. The garden variety "trigger slap," however, merely nudges the muzzle downward. These shots usually make it to the target at the closer distances, and often even at the intermediate ones, but the resulting groups are low. Many recruits and veteran officers deeply program this error, a situation which is laborious to rectify.

Showing depiction of proper sight-alignment and picture, giving commands and encouragement to

ing through methods other than passing or failing various qualification courses.

Retraining in-service officers who suffer with chronic marksmanship problems affords another useful application of these Trigger Drills. One recent LAPD "transition" course for officers switching from revolvers to semiautomatic pistols provided an opportunity to test these drills. Quite a few class members were known to have trouble with bi-monthly qualification, and some of them were in one instructor's words nearly "untrainable" (which loosely equates to instructor frustration reaching unbearable limits prior to the student's having caught on).

These particular officers managed to remain qualified based more upon their familiarity with the qualification course's rote challenge than on being competent marksmen. By way of the Trigger Drills, all these officers were slow-firing cen-

one so wishes, and this is the predominant firing mode used in practical shooting. Thumb-cocking the hammer in the "single-action" tradition is quite useful for teaching initial fundamentals, but trigger-cocking must take precedence. The police community's move away from revolvers to double-action semiautomatic pistols began in earnest in the mid-1980s.

Dry-firing these new pistols, however, presented a different manipulative challenge. Not only did these pistols' mechanisms feel different from revolvers, but they also obviously operated differently. Virtually all practical revolver shooting during the past few decades had been of the trigger-cocking variety and, practically speaking, remaining proficient at trigger-cocking sufficed for most revolver shooters. That is not the case, however, with double-action semiautomatic pistols. Here, shooters must be competent with

both firing mechanisms.

Assuming that the double-action pistol is not thumb-cocked prior to firing, its normal operation involves firing the first shot by trigger-cocking and then subsequent shots from the slide-cocked condition. Therefore, trigger-cocking the first dry-fire "shot" is fine, but after that, the second firing mechanism should be used. Unfortunately, the slide has not cycled due to dry-firing, and the hammer therefore remains in its down or forward position.

Dry-practicing one way, but live-firing and gunfighting in other ways, represents a poorly contrived learning experience and one which does not support practical handgunning. Shooters are faced with two dry-firing options: thumb-cock the pistol in a highly unnatural way or simply trigger-cock all shots. The latter seems to have been the most popular solution, but it leads to most dry-practice being of the trigger-cocking variety and thus contradictory to practical doctrine. This predicament has in some cases led to an overemphasis upon using trigger-cocking to develop trigger-finger strength, and this in turn has interfered with developing trigger-finger follow-through.

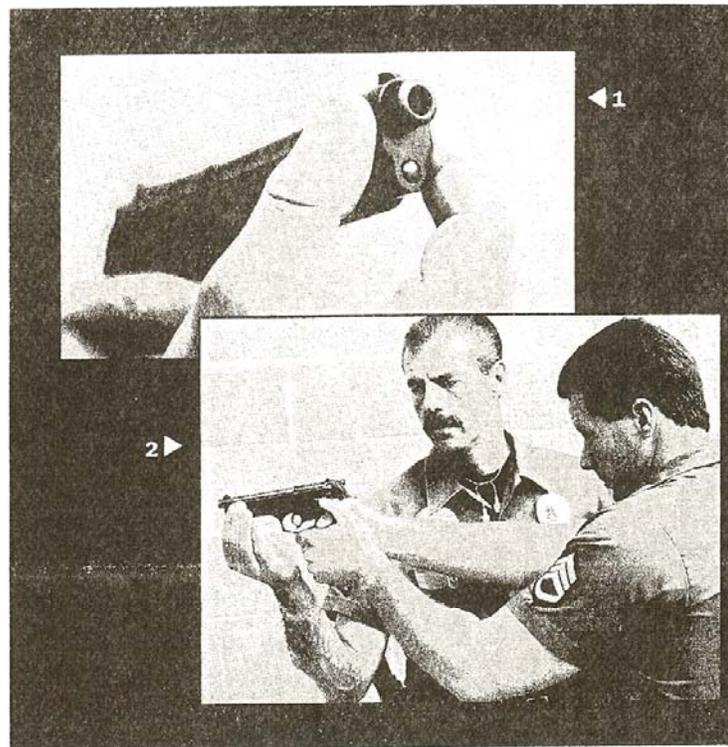
The trigger-finger must end up in a different place for trigger-cocked and slide-cocked shots. After the initial trigger-cocking shot, the trigger finger need move only slightly forward to allow the mechanism to fully reset itself for the slide-cocked shots. With slide-cocked (or thumb-cocked) shots, the trigger remains farther to the rear. Sear disengagement with this action also requires less than half the effort presented by the preceding trigger-cocking shot. Excessive forward movement of the trigger-finger during the firing of slide-cocked shots wastes valuable time and increases the likelihood of slapping the trigger. A better solution has been found in the development of a trigger drill.

Trigger Drill 5 builds upon the basic four Trigger Drills and takes shooters further in their pursuit of competence by enabling multiple trigger manipulations. Utilizing paired recruits in their alternating coach/student roles, LAPD takes advantage of the Beretta 92 slide's contours. (A system also exists for some other pistols; contact Officer Larry Mudgett at LAPD for details.) There have been various attempts to cycle pistol slides without firing full-bore cartridges, for example, Colt's .22 conversion kit for the 1911 pistol. Compressed air also has been tried. Neither approach is handy,

and both can initially be expensive. The Beretta happens to lend itself to a manipulation that reduces ammunition consumption and yet provides sight recovery, trigger-control and magazine change practice.

Student-recruits sight in on a tar-

get as the coach-recruits take a position perpendicular to the line of fire and on the students' strong sides. The coach's uprange hand, principally the heel, rests on the student's strong-side shoulder blade, and the downrange hand is placed under the pistol's frame and slide that project in front of the trigger guard. The hand is positioned palm up, thumb to the near side and the fingers to the far side. The students trigger-cock their pistols for the first dry-fire snap of a series and the coaches await hammer drop, whereupon they pinch the slide just behind the muzzle and sharply move it to the rear while exerting equal forward pressure with the up-range hand. This prevents the force being used to cycle the slide also from pushing the recruit rearward.



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The 9mm cartridge in a pistol as heavy as the Beretta recoils very little, but the sights still are disturbed by discharge. Therefore, a

little movement is fine during Trigger Drill 5. It is perhaps more pronounced than a discharge but it seems to work well. This also confirms that the recruit's arms are locked due to isometric tension, for if they are not, the arms will slightly collapse upon attempting

the drill. Coach-recruits await the student-recruits' assessments of each dry-fire snap. They both analyze each dry-practice snap, though the coach-recruit remains silent unless the assessment differs from the recruit doing the firing. This keeps recruits focused on what they are doing. Concentration easily can be lost with a manual skill that seemingly is endlessly repeated, and this helps maintain a positive atmosphere that encourages continued learning while at the same time saddling recruits with more responsibility. The coach-recruit's constant observation is coupled with a "stand and wait for a response" predisposition. During skip-loading drills (discussed next) coaches must refrain from analyzing shots. Besides, if the majority of Trigger Drill practice is composed of dry-firing, occasional discharges and their resulting hits confirm the recruits' progress to anyone who wishes to look.

Trigger Drill 6

This drill, called "skip-loading," is not really a specific drill, at least not in the sense of those previously mentioned. Rather, Trigger Drill 6 is a general principle underlying the other drills. It is rooted in the well-known ball-and-dummy routine,

to use snap-caps for most of the cartridges in a magazine.

Skip-loading traditionally has been used to confirm that trigger-control problems existed. Using it to teach marksmanship fundamentals and correct problems presents a far more effective application.

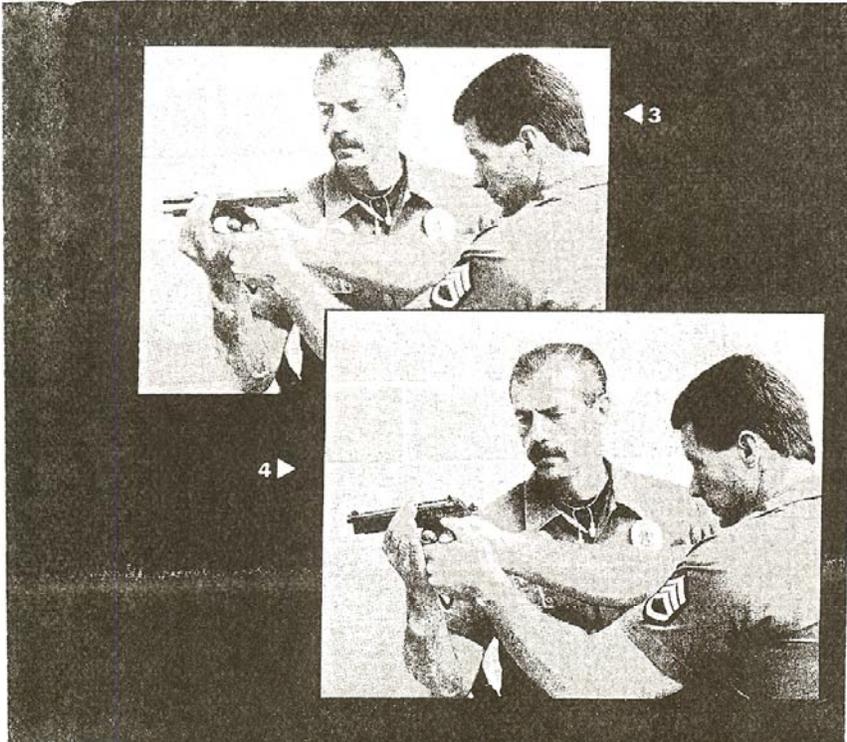
gatory "flinch" when the hammer falls to a "click" instead of a report. This has its uses, but occasionally reminding shooters that they indeed are flinching and should "stop that" has limited utility. We instead advocate about a four-to-one ratio of snap caps to cartridges. This allows for continued practice of correctives primarily in the dry-fire mode. When the firing pin does strike a primer, bullet placement says much about overall technique. Trigger Drill 6 has greater potential preventing or fixing the problem than the ball-and-dummy approach, which of course is the real objective.

The latter approach pervades LAPD's marksmanship training; at least one dry-snap can be found lurking in every magazine's worth of ammunition up until about a week before recruits qualify. Increased skip-loading, which has the added benefit of reducing ammunition costs, is associated with recruits performing at higher levels. Remember, however, that this is one among many that are central to the present instructional program. In isolation it might not make much of a difference.

To date, about 400 recruits have been trained using this system of Trigger Drills, and perhaps as many as 2,000 in-service officers. It is a good system, and one best used in its present reliable form. While improvements are possible, this system has survived considerable scrutiny within the FTU's cadre. Casually discarding portions erodes the system's potential, so we highly recommend using this system extensively before giving into temptations to make improvements. For example, significant cartridge/snap-cap ratio changes during skip-loading could easily undermine the program's full potential for the officers you train.

In the not too distant future, police departments may train, analyze and confirm recruits' grasp of marksmanship fundamentals using computers, lasers and sensor-packed pistols. In-service officers could have their problems diagnosed similarly. Until such technology becomes the norm, however, LAPD's Trigger Drills offer a progressive, successful system for imparting handgun marksmanship fundamentals.

The success at LAPD is well documented and demonstrable upon demand. Advanced gunfighting skills like those of the Modern Pistol Technique are at their best when they can be laid upon such a firm foundation. ■



Trigger Drill 5 partly resulted from LAPD's particular choice of service pistol, the Beretta 92F pistol, and the availability of "snapcaps" for dry-firing. (Note: This drill is used only for dry-fire exercises, and there must be no live ammunition available to recruits when being used.) (1) The front of the Beretta's slide has heavy radii on both sides which form a handy pinching area for thumb (on the near side) and index finger (on the far side). The other fingers may lie along the slide, but its firm capture depends upon the thumb and index-finger's proper positioning and grip. Using the shoulder-bracing already described, instructors cycle the slides immediately after the hammer falls; hammer drop (2), compression cycle (3) and then release (4). Each cycle is followed by a re-gripping of the slide by the instructor or student-coach. This simulates recoil and keeps the recruits manipulating their double-action pistols as they would if live-firing — only the first shot dry-fire string of snaps should be fired in the trigger-cocking mode. Thereafter, the slide's rearward travel would cock the hammer if live-firing.

though the LAPD's FTU cadre refer to its version as skip-loading. The essence of the "skip" is to substi-

For instance, with revolvers, one might have left a chamber or two empty in order to check for antici-