

IOPS

FIGHTING SKILLS VS. SHOOTING SKILLS: KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

by Gary Kercher

What is amazing is how often we try to fool ourselves when it comes to marksmanship training for battle.

First comes the basics of weapon manipulation and marksmanship. Eventually, by doing enough repetitions, a reasonable amount of ability is attained. This is invariably followed by the "Gadget Junkie Syndrome," usually of the "what junk can I bolt on my gun to make up for poor performance" variety.

Then comes the "big secret," like the proverbial light bulb going off. You sell your Smith & Wesson and buy a Colt, so you can have a reverse barrel twist which will counteract the torque set up by the vicious recoil of a .45-caliber bullet. This naturally reduces your target group size from a 10-inch diameter to a one inch-until you find out you're wistfully looking downrange through rose-colored shooting glasses.

That's when the real never-ending learning experience begins. As Benjamin Disraeli said, **"To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step towards knowledge."** The intriguing question is what constitutes adequate fighting marksmanship?

Unless you have a 100-percent-safe backstop, or it is on the rare occasion where bystanders can be regarded as expendable, you are morally, ethically, legally -- and for reasons of self-preservation -- bound to stay within strict parameters of surgically projectile delivery for successful battle marksmanship (Now was that deep or what?). If you don't hit the target, you lose. And even if you do strike the designated target, there's no guarantee that the bullets will get the job done.

There may be fewer things more disturbing than placing those hits perfectly on a very large perp, who is all cranked up on meth or just a strong stubborn bull, than looking up to see him glare at you with his eyes glazed over as if to say "Is that all you've got?" Oops. Not a good time to find out that dedicated competition training doesn't always produce the required result.

My analytical approach and internal struggle with the difference between the Weaver or Isosceles standing position was just not as productive as I thought. Also the discovering of all those bad habits that I created in my muscle memory while playing the competition game may now be catching up with me. By this, I mean trading a quick time in exchange for some good solid defensive tactics and instilling solid defensive muscle memory.

Nothing should come as a surprise in battle. If you are attacked without prior warning, you're starting off behind the power curve with retaliatory reaction on a time clock -- by at least two-fifths of a second. You can't predict everything that will occur. But an absolute guarantee is that something will not go as planned -- assuming you have the luxury of preplanning. With this as a basic premise, the obvious next step after basic marksmanship and manipulation principles have been achieved is to coordinate range training to approximate street/battlefield reality as closely as possible.

To this author's mind there are some major differences in training for IDPA, ISPC, or any other shooting competition for that matter. There are aspects of each one of these competitions that would require different types of training, stances, as well as gaming strategy. Shooting techniques that are directed at gaming type shooting situations and scenarios **cannot** be related to a real world violent confrontation. In the real world you do not have the luxury of practicing that scenario.

I am not trying to sound controversial, but let's talk about the shooting stance for defense as opposed to competition. One of the most common responses to threat is general muscle tightening, which recruits the major muscle groups to flex in anticipation of combat. These are very powerful muscles that when recruited together present a very formidable argument for stances that are built off of recoil management. By this I mean the Modern Isosceles Stance. A combination of the feet in the fighting position spread shoulder width apart and the strong side foot a little in front of the weak foot. The arms would be locked, the wrists locked and the gun tight in the hands. This would lock the firearm in place. A solid and locked stance to the point that you are very steady but not so tight that you are shaking. The gun should be solid and firm in the hand.

In a violent confrontation, you will have a very quick and large dump of adrenaline into your system. Every muscle in your body will tighten, your tendons will flex, you may experience some tremors, every fiber in your body will be flexed and tight. Under the effects of body alarm reaction and fight or flight reflex, a loss of manual dexterity and fine motor skills are emanate. It is doubtful that you will be thinking about whether you are in a Weaver, Isosceles, or any other stance for that matter. This thinking is why some shooting schools have adopted the Modern Isosceles shooting stance, the default stance, if you will. It is the closest to a natural defense posture that has been found in real world confrontations. If you are all tightened up from the stress of the violent confrontation, then a rigid stance may then be the natural one. There have been studies conducted, and video tapes reviewed from cameras mounted in law enforcement vehicles. These studies have indicated that when confronted with a violent confrontation, there is a natural tendency to take what is close to the Modern Isosceles Stance (default stance) in using a firearm for self defense.

Some departments have been favoring the Modern Isosceles on the basis of presenting the most body armor to the threat and minimizing the chances of the bag guy's shot penetrating the armpit area or side seam of our protective vests. This was in response to a officer that was killed. A perpetrator, who while running away, launched a shot over his shoulder. The round went through the side seam of the officer's vest while in the Weaver Stance.

Static range drill under a time constraint is mandatory in order to perfect and maintain mechanical skills. Fighting skills are the decider when you're in a trash-strewn alley on a dark rain-soaked night and the heavens drop a load of dung on your cranium.

If you hurl a couple of thousand rounds downrange in a week at non-street-representative targets placed at the Olympus-ordained 3, 7, 10, 15, and 25 yard firing distances, you need 2,000 hits to have gained any semblance of fighting benefit. If you have 1,800 hits, forget it. All you've "achieved" is 200 misses. Quantity is nothing without quality. If your one-handed shooting -- left or right -- is not as strong as your two-handed pistol results, work on the problem. No predator will cut you slack when you're floundering on the battlefield -- that's when he redoubles his efforts and closes in for the kill.

Training for competition is one thing, but let's not fool ourselves into thinking that our competition training is a good substitute for training that creates solid defensive tactics and good muscle memory in preparation for a violent confrontation.