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Fighting with

LIGHT

BY DALE STOCKTON

Although there are countless manufacturers of products used by law enforcement personnel, only a handful of companies present any significant training. One of the most ambitious offerings comes from the SureFire Corporation, a manufacturer of high-end flashlights. SureFire has an entire division called the SureFire Institute that is committed to delivering high quality training to help officers tactically handle low-light situations. The training goes far beyond flashlight techniques and helps officers to develop an effective, practical tactical perspective for dealing with low-light confrontations.

About 80% of officer involved shootings take place in low-light conditions according to Ken Good, the director of the SureFire Institute. Proper techniques and mental preparation can make the difference. Environment is the best teacher and the institute utilizes the low-light experience to facilitate change.

Good described the relationship between the training and product divisions of SureFire as both synergistic and symbiotic. Offered as one, three or five day courses, the popularity of the SureFire classes has grown steadily and Good has begun placing emphasis on training officers to become instructors for their own departments or regions. There are now more than 200 certified instructors in departments across the country presenting the one-day course material. Participants of the

five-day instructor course receive updates of course material and ongoing support from the company. This mentoring of instructors allows more officers to learn techniques that could make the difference in critical situations.

The typical SureFire course participant is a patrol officer or team member of a specialized unit looking to enhance his abilities to survive low-light encounters. The one day and three day courses are about a 50/50 mix of patrol and special assignment officers. The five-day courses are typically instructor cadre and they are often involved in some type of specialized team. Student commentary on the courses has been filled with praise. In fact, one state certifying agency decided to audit the course because the course evaluations were so consistently high that there



was concern the evaluations might not be valid. The audit revealed that the courses were just as the evaluations had described: outstanding.

While justifiably proud of the training provided by the SureFire Institute, Good emphasized there is nothing magical about the techniques they employ. It is clear that simple repetition gives the brain a reference point that it can use in a real situation.

The SureFire courses are experiential in nature. While there is some lecture time, the emphasis is on letting officers go through situations and see for themselves what works and what doesn't. One of the keys to doing this effectively is the constant use of video feedback. Using specialized infrared cameras, situations are taped as they unfold. The commitment to video is great and for good reason. Participants can view their actions from the perspective of the opponent and quickly see what their vulnerable areas are.

Many officers find that the tapes are a dramatic wake-up call to the need for change. Many express surprise on seeing what their actions were during the heat of the moment. Others realize that they were inadvertently making their partner

into a target by silhouetting him for the opponent. The video also allows the instructors to effectively facilitate student development by helping participants realize what approach is most effective. This tends to minimize those lengthy discussions over what tactical approach is preferable.

The SureFire Institute does not try to advocate specific tactical approaches. While at first this may seem to be contradictory to the intent of the training, it is recognition of the reality of tactical situations. A broad arsenal is best to work with to be successful. Good gives the example of participating in a fight with a professional boxer and relying on training that developed the best right hook possible. No matter how good that one punch is, it will never be enough on its own.

Good wants officers to bring effective thinking to situations and to work through situations by using whatever will give them a tactical advantage. He feels they can best be taught to do this by going through situations with live adversaries.

The value of experiential training is that it results in a higher survival rate in

critical incidents. Studies done during World War II found that if a soldier survived his first five engagements, he had a 95% chance of surviving the war. The intent of the SureFire training is to provide officers with some of those initial experiences so that the mind and body learn how to process their way successfully through a potentially life threatening situation.

Many experienced trainers are familiar with the concept of the OODA loop, composed of four parts: Observe, Orient, Decide and Act. The OODA loop is a crucial component in the SureFire training and a key to its success. OODA is the perfect model of the mind battle space as it describes how human engagements are performed for consistent results. The concept, while comprehensive, is basic in nature and officers are taught to use the principles to process their tactical responses.

The SureFire courses emphasize the development of a mental process that allows an officer to continually evaluate his actions from the perspective of the opponent. Learn to see in reverse and look at actions from an opponent's perspective.

One of the most emphasized areas during the SureFire training is the need

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for stress control— an area that is critical to effective participation in a tactical situation. The training philosophy is to train the human operating system to function under duress. A key indicator of successfully doing this is the voice. Something seen over and over is an officer yelling or screaming during situations, an action referred to as fear based posturing.

Yelling sends the wrong message: the officer is not in control. The training helps officers learn to use their voices to communicate effectively through tactical communication, effectively sending a message and getting feedback.

Part of the SureFire training process involves having officers serve as aggressors against SureFire instructors. One of the consistent comments is that the calm approach is overwhelming: it effectively communicates who is in control.

Agencies should not overly rely on department shoots scheduled during nighttime hours. Departments may be shooting at night but may not really be teaching their officers how to operate at night. There is a significant difference.



Officers need to become accustomed to working in low-light conditions and to utilizing their lighting equipment to their advantage, not just to light up the target. A fundamental obligation of departments, and one that has been reinforced by the courts is to provide training that equips officers to perform in real life situations.

The SureFire courses are not a sales pitch for SureFire products. Training participants are encouraged to use what they use on duty. Although they may

purchase SureFire products, the emphasis is on making the best use of the equipment they have. One of the facts of the training though, is the realization that large flashlights present challenges when trying to work through a tactical situation and small, efficient lights have distinct advantages. It is in this area where SureFire products shine.

The SureFire classes continue to grow in popularity and for good reason: they provide training that is reality based and applicable to the street. With



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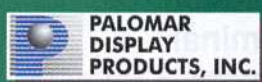
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ever increasing expectations for police to utilize less lethal alternatives, there has been a proliferation of devices designed to incapacitate a suspect without utilizing deadly force. The SureFire Institute provides officers with training that couples effective mental process with a truly non-lethal tool—the flashlight—to dramatically lessen the potential for a deadly encounter.

Administrators should welcome this type of training because it provides their officers with a higher level of functionality and confidence. This results in greater control and less panic when involved in a crisis situation. SureFire is working on a packet of information for administrators that will effectively outline training issues in this vital area.

The SureFire Institute (714) 545-9007

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Equipment

Always carry a light. Even officers assigned to a day watch are likely to encounter situations, such as a dimly lit building, where a light is needed. Be prepared.

When choosing your lighting equipment, look for a device that will:

Be small enough to keep on hand at all times.

Have a switch designed to get the tool on and off immediately, even under duress.

Have the highest intensity possible for threats, stopping short of permanent eye damage.

Have a low intensity mode for administrative functions, navigation and vehicle searches.

Be dependable and durable under a variety of environments.

Recognize that effective lighting can reduce the incidence of bad shootings. An officer who can properly see and evaluate his target has a tremendous advantage.

Technique

Finding the threat is the highest priority.

Learn to see in reverse. Knowing an

opponent's view is a tremendous advantage.

Intermittent use of a powerful light is advised. Learn to effectively light an area, evaluate, and move or react as necessary.

Light should be used as a tool and considered part of the force continuum. Light can be used to temporarily blind and overwhelm a threatening individual. Intense light will take away the threat's ability to gather useful information and disrupt his ability to make good decisions.

Don't be lulled into a false sense of security because a threat isn't obvious. This is particularly a concern when an officer is not dark-adapted in a new environment; the threat may already be dark-adapted. Perfect vision may drop to the level of 20/400 or even 20/600 while an adversary is functioning at 20/20.

Utilize light. A mistake made by many officers is putting the hot spot of the flashlight on the mid-torso area of the suspect because they are taught that they must watch the suspect's hands. The same can be accomplished by shining the light in the suspect's eyes, with the added advantage of disorienting the opponent.

The eyes gather most information and maintaining the ability to observe in low-light conditions is absolutely critical. Shutting down an opponent's ability to observe is equally important. Strive to disorient the opponent and use this disorientation to your advantage.

Be very mindful of danger caused to partners when they are silhouetted with light.

Training

Develop and participate in training that is more a reflection of the real world situations that officers face.

Recognize that the training environment is the place to make mistakes and improve.

Train with operational tools in place. To do otherwise risks failure when the techniques practiced in training are put to the test.

Optimum training means creating the necessary level of stress and adrenaline to challenge motor skills and the decision making process.

Put officers in the dark more often for training. It is inconvenient but it is more effective.

Do not overly rely on simulator

training. Current simulators cannot adequately respond to actions by the student. Tactics that might be effective in a real situation may actually result in negative feedback because of the training perspective of simulator operators and the limitations of simulators.

SureFire Institute Courses

SureFire offers the following courses in southern California and bring training on-site for departments. Contact the company for further information.

One Day

Officer Survival in Low-Light Conditions, \$150

Low-light concepts and conditions are addressed in a dynamic, hands-on course designed specifically for the patrol officer. Force on force drills are utilized with live adversaries. Topics include searching techniques, correct use of lighting tools, equipment selection, functioning under duress, decision-making, use of force and effective use of partners.

Three Day

Officer Survival in Low-Light Conditions Operators Course, \$450

An expanded non-basic version of the one-day course designed for students who are extremely familiar with their weapons and proper handling principles. Students bring 500 handgun duty rounds and 200 shotgun rounds for use in this course.

Five Day

Officer Survival in Low Light Conditions Instructor's Course, \$695

An intensive course that provides comprehensive hands on instruction along with an opportunity to run low-light drills. Covers tactical concepts, arrest and control techniques while using the flashlight, and extensive solo and pair drilling using live fire and force on force techniques. Upon completion, the participant should be able to effectively deliver progressive low-light training. Once certified, an instructor may use the SureFire curriculum package and will receive a support video package as well as an instructor handbook with no cost updates.



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The Police Marksman, July/August 1995

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