

TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS

SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS

FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS

LOW LIGHT CARBINE COMPETITION

SHOOTER ENGAGING
TARGETS DURING
"WE OWN THE NIGHT"
COURSE OF FIRE.

BY **BRENDAN SOUDER** PHOTOS COURTESY **RPGI** (RPG-INTERNATIONAL.US)

Friday Night Lights is a low light themed carbine-only shooting match in the Florida Panhandle which was created and run by Special Forces Soldiers.

The match itself was created to test shooters of varied skills in no-light scenarios (night vision goggles and infrared laser), low light scenarios (requiring weapon mounted lights) and artificial/incandescent tower light scenarios over five different courses of fire. The match was held at Southern Tactical Range (southern-tacticalrange.com) in Holt, Florida. Southern Tactical Range features 180-degree firing, nighttime shooting and long-range en-

gagements out to 1000 yards and beyond.

Stage Zero, also known as the "Ghost Stage" was an optional night vision stage that required shooters to don a set of commercial night vision goggles (NVGs) and shoot a competition box fed shotgun with a commercial infrared (IR) laser at five knock over steel targets at distances of 10-15mm on the signal of a shot timer. This course of fire allowed shooters (many for the first time) to catch a glimpse into the

realm of night vision target acquisition and engagement. Accurately engaging targets at night can be an extremely difficult task with NVGs and IR lasers, many factors are at play and need to be considered.

The user needs to understand how to properly fit NVGs and adjust the objective focus, eye relief and more importantly turn the device on. The IR laser (depending on model) would need to be "zeroed" to the weapon platform on which *continued next page*

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RPGI STUDENT WORKING HORIZONTAL SLOT DURING ADVANCED RIFLE COURSE AT SOUTHERN TACTICAL RANGE.

it is attached. There are many ways to mount these lasers on a rifle. Most shooters mount the IR Laser on top of their rifle. Using the IR laser in conjunction with the NVGs allows the user to illuminate and engage targets while naked-eye individuals who lack NVGs cannot see the IR laser. This is the number one reason USSOF and militaries around the world strive to enhance this capability.

The “Ghost Stage” was extremely popular with shooters. During the competition the staff ran over 150 iterations of this course of fire through the DC Precision R12 Open Shotgun and expended over 850 shotgun rounds. The fastest time of the night was 3.5 seconds, which, given the conditions and number of targets, was blazing fast. It is challenging to train for this type of shooting outside of the U.S. Military or government agencies. The shooter must obtain NVGs, IR lasers and find a location to shoot at night. A modern dual tube set of NVGs cost upwards of \$6,000 (Night Vision Incorporated DTNMG are my favorite). Night Vision INC. allows customers to build their NVGs on the website and offers a payment plan. IR lasers (good ones) usually cost around \$600 from Holosun to start (Model LS221R). Shooters who wish to do this type of training should seek out a high quality course that offers Low Light/NVG training before spending \$7,000 on equipment.

Stage one, “We Own the Night” allowed shooters to utilize their weapon mounted lights (WML) and/or visible lasers. The targets ranged from 3 meters to 50m and contained paper and steel throughout the bay. This course of fire required shooters to start with their WML and/or visible lasers in the *off* position as they waited for the start signal. This procedure created the necessity for shooters to find their WML/Laser activation buttons in the dark while engaging targets throughout the bay. The other aspect was weapons handling while moving and shooting which can become more challenging due to the lack of visibility. There were many shooters who had never shot their weapon at night; numerous top-level shooters had to slow down.

During low light courses of fire, shooters’ knowledge of equipment and training experience goes a long way in enhancing performance. I’ve found that simple reflexive firing drills or “ready ups” are the best training and practice to commit to memory on where and how to operate those WML/Lasers and controls on the weapon. These types of drills can be done with dryfire if shooters don’t have the ability to shoot at night at their local range.

Stage two, “Plate Rack Paradise” was a stage in which shooters had tower lights over the bay allowing shooters to see the targets without using their WMLs or Lasers. During



"PARKING LOT SCUFFLE" AT RPGI FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS MATCH.

KYLE BEAN (RPGI SHOOTING TEAM MEMBER AND OWNER OF AUT BELLUM GROUP) MOVING TOWARD WINDOW POSITION ON STAGE THREE DURING RPGI NIGHT MATCH.

this course of fire shooters were required to shoot three separate plate racks at 50 meters and using three different positions on barriers (high wall, window and on top of a low wall). What we saw was shooters having a tough time hitting the plate racks due to smoke and heat rising in front of the weapons during the engagements. Additionally, we usually see a few shooters using the barriers poorly to stabilize. I teach barrier shooting and positioning quite a bit in my courses, but I have generally not seen the average shooter build a good position on a barrier during shooting competitions.

The high wall technique is a simple position to take up. We've always taught our shooters to use their support hand to make a "C" clamp around the rifle and brace that support hand at approximately shoulder level on the barrier, pulling the barrier towards them (not pushing into it). Also, and very importantly, we need to ensure good footwork. What I like to do and what I'm teaching is to land with your feet wider than shoulder width and in a position that makes it easy to depart towards the next position.

The window shooting position on this course of fire provided shooters two options



for rifle placement. Left 90 degrees or a right 90 degrees in the window for increased stability. As a left-handed shooter, I go for the left 90s if available in the situation. We saw a few shooters "go to war" with the middle plate rack at this shooting position and they also happened to post up in the center of the window (not in either of the 90-degree corners). To maximize the left/right 90 support theory shooters should use their support hand in building a good "C" clamp into the corner (pull the barrier to make a good stable position, don't push into it). Footwork doesn't go away in this position (wide stance is best used here).

Low walls and shooting on top of them can be fairly stable if done properly. For this situ-

ation the better shooters landed with good wide feet, used a modified "C" clamp (clamping rifle and holding the barrier like a pool stick). One of the things I like to show my shooters is how having a good barrier position built can be tested by removing the support hand and attempting the shot (except high wall with no perpendicular support). Generally speaking, shooters are able to repeat hits on target without the support hand if they have a good stable position built on the barrier.

Lastly, on this course of fire there were two types of trigger control to be used: slapping or "hammering" (paper targets) and prepping/squeezing (plate racks). The paper targets were extremely close for run and gun activity that fostered a point shoot theme. The plate

racks were deceptively hard, and shooters had to know their zero on their rifle while faced with steam and smoke coming off of their weapons.

Training this, we like to create drills that require shooters to “shift gears” when engaging close-in targets to targets at distance (sometimes smaller sized targets vs. larger targets). We like adding in shooting while moving, which is harder than it seems. In terms of barrier shooting, I like to start to the left/right or about 5 meters away from the barrier/shooting position and initiate movement with the signal of a shot timer on a respectable sized steel target for audible feedback.

Stage three, “Parking Lot Scuffle” was a great low light stage that forced our shooters to bail out of a vehicle to continue the course of fire. We had our shooters pointing their rifles out of the driver’s side window with their WML engaged and oriented towards the first two IPSC paper targets. This course of fire was conducted in a tight space which made the shooter devise a plan that would eliminate unnecessary movement to complete the scenario. Fighting out of, and around, vehicles is another skill that can be hard to train at local gun clubs or ranges.

I recommend taking a good vehicle course that has prop vehicles that are brought out to the training and are ok to take the occasional round when shooters forget their height over bore (HOB). One of the things we found of interest is that there were shooters who shot over the vehicle in stage three, but missed the target that they shot at (under 10 meters away). The HOB factor played a big role in this happening across multiple shooters. Through the optic the targets were easily identified over the car, but when the shooter pressed the trigger the muzzle of their weapon was pointed along the parallel axis of the car roof or in line with it. The next day we were able to see multiple holes and gouges on the prop vehicle. A great way to avoid this phenomenon is to train on a 9-hole

JD WILLIAMS FROM THE HK SHOOTING TEAM UTILIZING NVGS AND IR LASER ON RPGI FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS GHOST STAGE AT SOUTHERN TACTICAL RANGE.



type barrier (horizontal slot) and get good at shooting the rifle sideways then graduate back to a vehicle hood turning gun sideways while shooting (using rifle rated steel targets for good feedback).

Stage four, “Do You Even CQB, Bro?” was the majority favorite course of fire which incorporated the usage of tower lights and forced the use of a WML on the far steel targets and upon entering the shoot house. CQB or Close Quarters Battle is characterized generally by close-in fighting in urban environments, structures or other very short-range distances and is simply confrontational. There are three main principles of CQB that were introduced to me as a young Army Ranger and they are: Speed, Surprise and Violence of Action. This course of fire required strategy and knowing your equipment well enough to quickly engage the WML, maintain trigger discipline and find the sights while applying proper trigger press techniques across the spectrum of needs.

CQB is a great tactic to practice and is a perishable skill to professionals who require a “no fail” mission capability. Individuals who desire to learn this tactic for home defense and potential active shooter mitigation should seek out instruction from professional trainers with backgrounds in military special operations, SWAT or other government agencies that have training/mission requirements related to CQB. Training CQB with simuni-

tion rounds can also be a useful experience. Knowing how to move in and around tight spaces as a solo operator or the “one man clear” is critical to home defense. Additionally, learning CQB as a group or learning how to clear as a team is also an extremely valuable skill set.

Movement is extremely important when conducting CQB or competitive shooting. It is one of the hardest things to practice and execute properly during tactical scenarios and/or courses of fire. For tactical guys, when we add body armor, helmet and other equipment the task becomes slightly more complicated. During the Friday Night Lights Match we gave shooters the opportunity to wear body armor kits on a course of fire for “10 second bonuses”. This was a way to give our shooters the feel of what it’s like to shoot and move in tactical equipment. Keeping a lower center of gravity is key on movement and moving only as fast as you can actively engage is also critical. That being said, if there is movement between target engagement (competition) and cover (tactical combat) the shooter should move as quickly as possible accelerating/decelerating into and out of positions and movement speed required to accurately engage targets.

Most shooters don’t get to train live fire scenarios outside of the military or other government agencies. This is why I suggest attending shooting competitions and taking

the occasional shooting or tactical course. Having legitimate instructors with knowledge, experience and skills goes a long way. There are many folks teaching shooting and tactics and it's hard to tell what's good and bad in the industry. Do your research and pay attention to areas that are considered "hot spots" for talent. Places where special operations soldiers live and train are great locations. If a place has both a high content of SOF guys, a high concentration of shooting competitions, and legit competition shooters, you are in the right spot.

Where do we get our expertise at RPGi? Apart from the special operations courses and shooting schools that we've attended over the last two decades with the military we have been lucky enough to train with world champion shooters in the industry. The other big part of our knowledge comes from our interaction with the great shooters at shooting competitions. Each has their inputs on what makes a great shooter. Fundamentals are essentially the same from tactical to competition shooting. Sight pictures/alignments, trigger press (best for the need), stance, etc. If you have been in the military over the last 20-30 years you have probably heard or seen at least 127 fundamentals of marksmanship

taught by some high-speed NCO or instructor at a course. The best shooters I have seen narrow these fundamentals down to the basics that I previously mentioned and do them better than everyone else.

Each and every time I do training I borrow from KC Eusebio of Metagroup. The 20A drill provides a great warm-up and cool down with rifle or pistol. This drill helps shooters work on fundamentals through a five-round string of fire at varying distances from 5-15 yards for a total of 20 rounds. Each distance calls for a different type of sight picture/alignments and trigger press. Frank Garcia and Shannon Smith of Universal Shooting Academy have trained the guys and me, almost consecutively, every year since 2012. Frank and Shannon both harp on the three distinct trigger presses. Slapping/Hammering the trigger for close-in shots that don't require a high degree of accuracy, "motoring through" for targets that require a little more attention (maybe while moving or at a longer distance) and then the "prepping and squeezing" technique (small targets, targets at distance and engagements that require absolute trigger control).

Shooters need to ensure that they have good, reliable equipment. Quality gear is criti-

cal to success in both competition and tactical training. Don't simply buy the capability, train it, outgrow your equipment, then move up. Instead of spending money on the latest and greatest optic or gadget, I recommend spending your money on training and ammunition. You can never go wrong buying thousands of rounds. Shooters who are the most successful beat on their craft by combining dryfire drills and countless "perfect practice" live fire iterations on the range. Go out and compete, even if you don't consider yourself good enough. Failing forward is extremely important in the shooting world. Most of my important life lessons have been learned through failure, blood, sweat and tears. See you on the range. ✓

BIO

Brendan Souder is an active duty soldier, a competition shooter, and owner/operator of Range Project Group International (rpg-international.us) in the Panhandle of Florida. RPGi hosts shooting competitions and training courses that leverage the SOF background/competition hybrid model. The views expressed in this article are the opinions of Brendan Souder and do not reflect views of the U.S. Military.

GEARREVIEW



SILENT-SR ISB

Soldiers have used suppressed .22s to take out lighting, to silence barking dogs and to eliminate sentries. Citizens have used suppressed .22s to kill pests, hunt small game and have fun. This Ruger 10/22 suppressed variant was designed to reduce sound pressure levels of .22 LR to an average of 113.2 dB with standard velocity ammunition. The internal components seal together to keep the residue of combustion away from the tube. A single screw retains the baffles and cap within the sleeve and doubles as a removal tool. The included 5/32 inch hex key tool allows the integrally suppressed barrel to be completely disassembled for cleaning. The takedown design allows the rifle to be conveniently stored in two small components. See links to legal suppressor purchasing instructions on the Silent-SR ISB web page. www.ruger.com