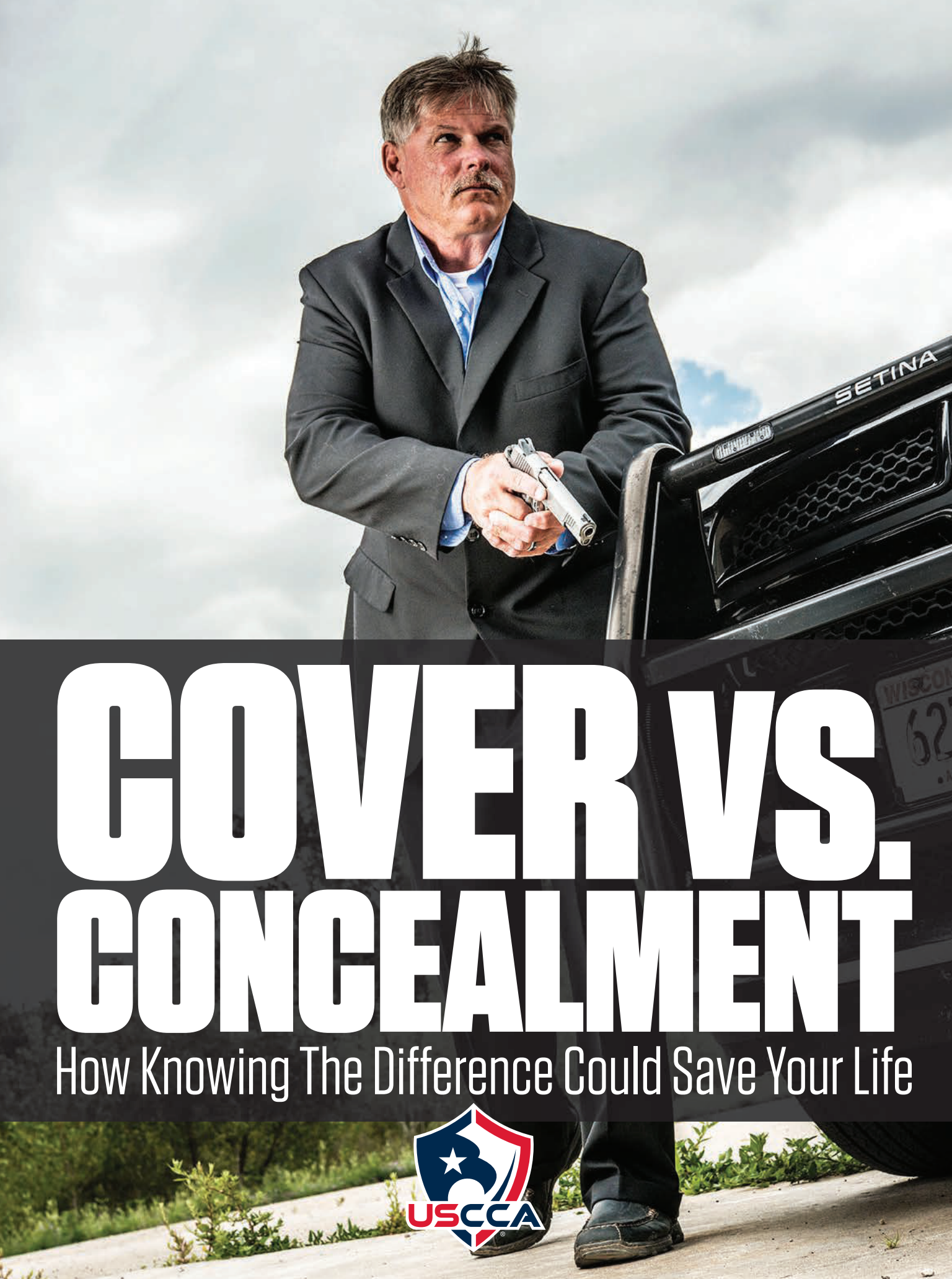




COVER VS. CONCEALMENT

How Knowing The Difference Could Save Your Life



COVER, CONCEALMENT AND THE ELEMENTS OF A GUNFIGHT

BY KEVIN MICHALOWSKI

Executive Editor, *Concealed Carry Magazine*

The first rule of winning a gunfight is to ensure that you don't get shot. Getting shot greatly reduces your chances of emerging victorious. Yes, you can and should — to the best of your ability — fight through any injury and continue attempting to defeat your attacker no matter what. But doing that with a bullet hole in you is all the more difficult. The best way to avoid incoming rounds is to place some sort of barrier between you and your attacker. You have two choices: cover or concealment.

Cover is anything that will stop incoming rounds. Cover is dense, solid and impenetrable. Cover offers you the best chance to avoid the impact of bullets coming your way. But you need to use cover correctly in order to maximize its protective effects; more on that later.

Concealment simply hides you from your attacker. Concealment is better than nothing because it, at the very least, obscures your outline and does not give your attacker the opportunity to acquire a perfect sight picture. Concealment will not stop bullets, and in a perfect world, concealment is simply a brief stop on the way to cover.

A car door is concealment; an engine block is cover. An interior wall made of sheetrock and paint is concealment; a brick wall is cover. Bushes and shrub-

bery are concealment; a 12-inch tree trunk is cover.

Any cover is better than concealment, and there are some items and locations you might not think of as cover. A fire hydrant is cover. A curb can be cover if you are able to get down on the ground. In both of these cases, you will need to get as much of your body as possible behind the cover. Again, any cover is better than nothing. You must use what you have available. A simple steel file cabinet likely won't stop a bullet, but if that cabinet is filled with paper — depending on the angle of the bullet — you have something that will adequately protect you.

There is a saying I heard often while serving in the U.S. Navy: Do all you can with what you've got where you are. That's how I feel about the use of cover and concealment, except that we must understand we need to be looking for and moving to cover. You can't just stay in one spot. You need to move, and that movement needs to be getting you to cover.

A big part of proper situational awareness is to regularly make note of escape routes and areas of cover or concealment. Now that you are carrying a gun you should be looking at the world differently. You should be paying attention



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■ *Moving — specifically, moving properly — during a lethal force encounter is a skill that is best practiced before it's needed.*



to the elements of the world around you and thinking about what you might do should you suddenly find yourself in a very bad situation.

For instance, as you are walking down the street, you see a big, blue, metal mailbox and a smaller concrete planter filled with dirt and sporting a nice arrangement of colorful flowers. The mailbox is closer to you. If you hear a shot or suddenly find yourself in what we will call “a bad situation,” your first immediate move might be directly toward that big, blue mailbox to assess the situation. You should immediately be thinking, “I’m out of sight, but this box is really only two pieces of sheet metal. I need better cover.”

As you assess your ability to use the planter for cover, you’ll also have to be thinking about the size of the planter, how long it will take you to get there and whether or not you can get behind it effectively. Remember too that the flowers sprouting out the top of that thing are only concealment. The real cover is the concrete and the dirt. The planter is clearly the better choice for cover, but you need to consider all the elements of that piece of cover before you make your move.

There are a million combinations of situational factors and all are unique to the situation and your physical abilities. We could play “what if?” for hours and never answer every question. If you have bad knees and can’t kneel down behind that planter without pain, you might be hesitant to head in that direction. But consider this: If the bullets are coming your way, the pain of a gunshot wound will be far worse than knee pain as you try to crouch. I can’t answer every question about every scenario ... I’m just asking you to think about what you might do.

EFFECTIVELY USING COVER

There is no doubt about it: When bullets start flying, you will very likely be terrified. Don’t let that fear keep you from thinking clearly. That’s why we address these topics before we are terrified. You need to think about what you will do; you need to train for sever-

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■ *Train to limit how much of your body is exposed when “rolling” out from behind your cover.*

al alternatives before you are in a deadly situation. This is especially true when it comes to effectively using cover. When the adrenaline kicks in and you realize bullets are flying, you are very likely going to want to get as close to your piece of cover as possible. Don't do it. Good cover is good cover, and getting closer to it doesn't make it any better.

If you press your body tightly up against your cover, you limit your vision and your ability to move. You also run the risk of being injured by fragments of the cover that will be flying around when the cover stops the bullets.

The first rule of using cover effectively is to not crowd the cover. If you are using something like a vehicle, a wall, a tree or a pillar, you should be back from the cover about 3 to 6 feet. This allows you a good field of view and keeps you from being struck by flying debris. The goal is, of course, to keep as much of your body shielded as possible. To the extent that you can, conform to your cover. Any part of you that is sticking out could be struck by gunfire; refer to the first rule of winning a gunfight at the top of this piece.

Conforming to cover is a perfect segue to the rules for shooting around your

cover. Clearly, you must emerge from cover to get a shot at your attacker. The goal is to limit your exposure to incoming fire while maximizing your ability to see and engage your target. We do this by “rolling” out.

Rolling out is likely not the most accurate descriptor for emerging from cover to take a shot, but it is the term commonly used in law enforcement training and I will explain that training here. Assuming you are a right-handed shooter and you are shooting around the right side of a tall vertical barricade, like the corner of a wall, you should be back 3 to 6 feet from the cover. Your feet should be a bit less than shoulder-width apart. Your right foot should be forward of your left foot and you should acquire your preferred two-handed grip on your firearm. Now “roll” forward with a slight lean to your right. Keep your feet, legs and hips behind the cover. All that should appear around the cover is your firearm and only as much of your head as is required for you to establish a good sight picture. Take the shot (or shots) and return to cover.

You can also do this from a kneeling position. Simply drop down on your left knee and roll forward to emerge from

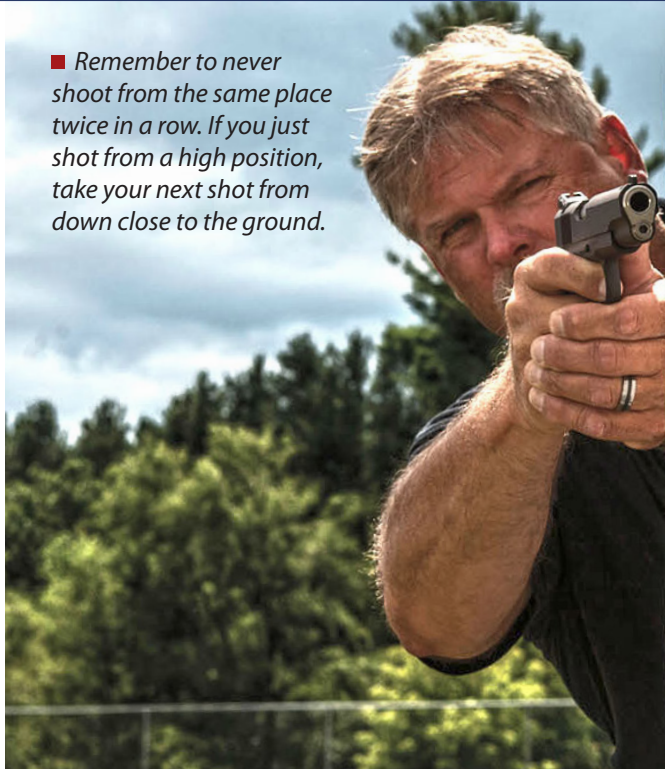
the cover and take the shot. This can be difficult for those with bad knees, so practice before you are forced to try it in battle. This system allows for you to maintain a stable shooting platform but still keep the majority of your body behind cover. Of course, you might have to reposition and change your angle to get a good shot.

To make it work for the other side of the barrier, you will need to reverse your foot position. If you can shoot with your non-dominant hand, you should try that. If you can't, you might end up being forced to expose a little more of your body in order to get a good sight picture. If you have to ... well, you have to. But remember: You should only expose the minimum. Anything you stick out there could be shot off.

Standard law enforcement training demands that you never, ever, emerge from cover in the same place twice in a row. That is, if you are standing and you roll out to take a shot, you should kneel for your next shot. And maybe go prone for your third shot. Then return to standing. The goal is to ensure that your attacker can't predict where you will pop out next. Now, this works effectively on a static range with perfect training

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■ Remember to never shoot from the same place twice in a row. If you just shot from a high position, take your next shot from down close to the ground.



barriers, but the real world might throw some other problems your way. Adapt. Try to come out in different locations if you can, but if you physically can't, you'll have to do the best you can with what you have where you are.

WHAT IF ... ?

The description above is a fine example of using cover if the cover is perfect, the footing is perfect and you are working on a training range that allows you to shoot around all sides of a barricade. Will everything be perfect in a gunfight? Almost never. You'll need to adapt to your surroundings. Apply the basic rules of staying back from the cover, using the angles to your advantage and only exposing the smallest amount of your body to your attacker as possible.

Aside from that, you need to adapt to your cover. You also need to be constantly looking to see if better cover is available. If you are caught on the street and all you have for cover is a fire hydrant, I suggest you get small and use that hydrant as best you can while you look for something better. If all you have is a curb, prone out, return fire if you can and look for better cover.

If you are physically unable to go prone or squat down behind a hydrant, you need to immediately abandon those ideas and get moving. You need to understand your physical limitations and know that any training or any suggestions you get must be contextualized to your physical abilities. If you can bend, squat or lay down, well then, get out of the way. Movement is not as good as cover, but it is better than nothing. Don't wait to move; rather, move while you are assessing your options. A gunfight is a dynamic event; do all you can to make yourself a difficult target.

ONE LAST THING: KEEP THINKING!

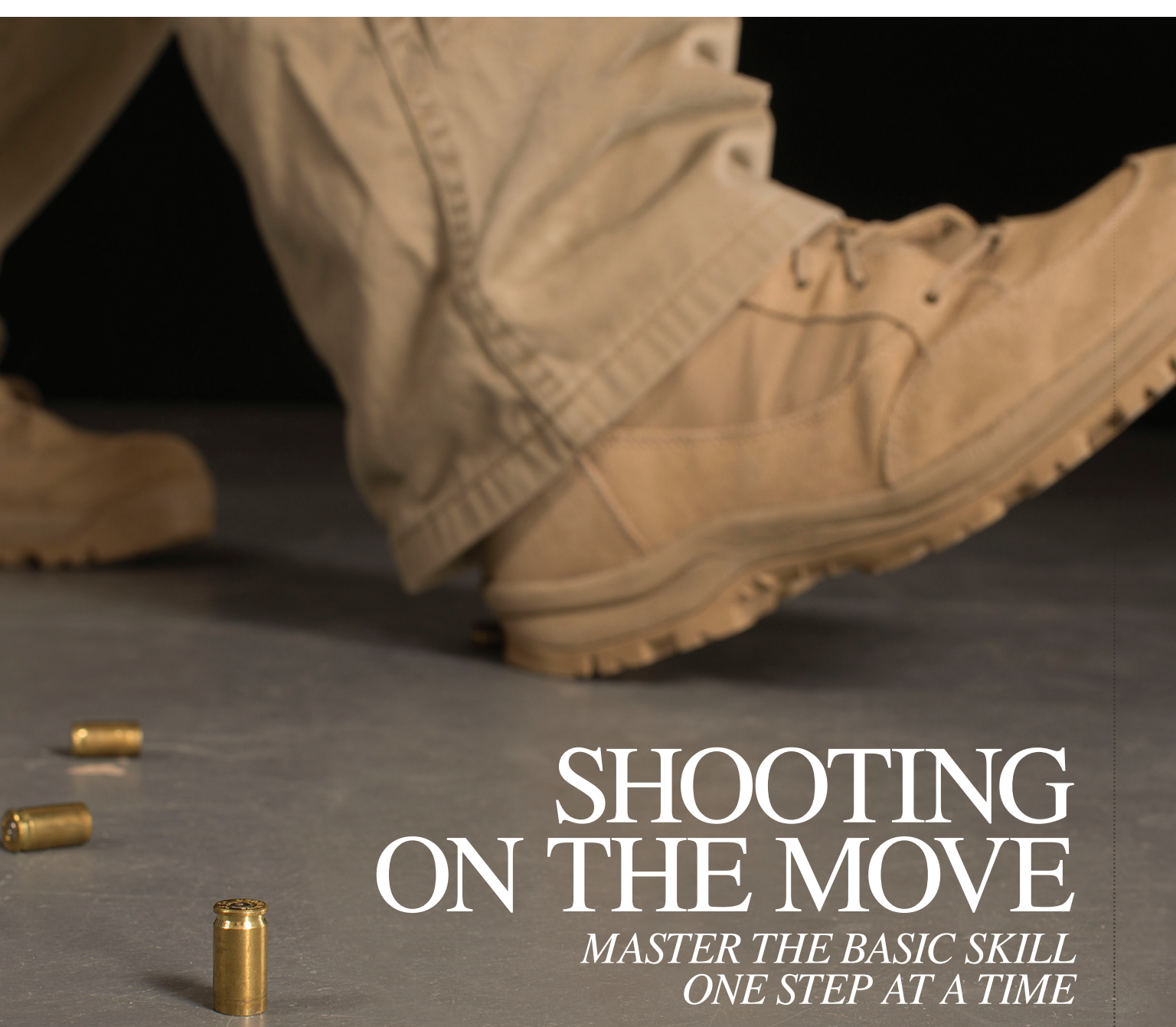
Self-defense is a thinking person's game. Yes, a deadly event will be terrifying, but you have a better chance of getting through it alive if you keep your head.

During a training seminar, I watched a video I wish I could find now. It was a gunfight caught on the dashboard camera of a police car. The officer and the criminal were on opposite sides of a 4-foot-tall chain link fence equipped with those plastic privacy slats. The criminal ducked behind the fence and quickly popped up, firing two shots. The officer moved to the rear of the vehicle, then tried to time his shots to catch the shooter as he popped up to fire. After about three attempts, the officer realized his target was hiding behind plastic slats. He then fired through the fence, hitting the assailant and ending the fight.

Did the officer violate one of the cardinal safety rules because he could not clearly see his target? Technically, yes, but the overriding safety concern allowed for his actions. More importantly, that officer knew the difference between cover and concealment and used that knowledge to his advantage.

There is no way to define all of the options you might face when it comes to employing cover and concealment. Learn the basics and adapt them to your situations. Play the "what if?" game. It could save your life.





SHOOTING ON THE MOVE

*MASTER THE BASIC SKILL
ONE STEP AT A TIME*

If you think a gunfight is going to be a static event with you standing 7 yards from the bad guy and putting round after round into a stationary target, you are likely going to die during a gunfight.

If there is one word to choose to describe a gunfight, that word is “dynamic.” People will be moving, so you had better be moving. You need to get to cover. You need to make yourself a more difficult target. In short, you need to move — and before you can move, you need to learn how to move effectively.

We will start by moving straight toward the target and straight back, be-

cause that is the easiest and we want to master the basic elements first. For those of you asking, “Why would I move toward the target?” think of it like this: You might have good cover in front of you. Get to that cover to stop the incoming rounds and win the fight.

WALK THE LINE

The typical shooting stance, if there is one, puts your feet about shoulder-width apart. If you try to walk that way, you will basically waddle — and the intense side-to-side motion will cause some serious accuracy problems. Your goal is to keep the front sight on or

as close to the target as possible. That’s right: You will experience some sight movement as you shoot on the move. This is inevitable. What you want to do is reduce that movement to the point that you can maintain combat-effective fire. We will get to that in a minute. First we must get the walking part correct.

Let’s assume we are first working on moving forward. Being a former military guy, I always start moving with my left foot. So, pick up that foot and put the heel down a comfortable length in front of your right foot. Try to imagine that you are walking on a balance beam. You don’t have to be perfect on

SHOOTING ON THE MOVE



this; just make sure you are not waddling. What is important is that you come down on your heel and roll your foot forward smoothly.

Before you even start training to shoot, bring your unloaded gun up on target and practice walking forward, on the line, setting your heel down first and rolling to your toe. Pay attention to the stride and to the front sight. Focus on taking smooth steps and maintaining the front sight on the center of the target. This is a great time to try some dry-fire practice to bring all the components together, but remember this: Live-fire will give you more accurate and immediate feedback about where and when you are dropping the hammer.

Now that you are walking forward slowly and smoothly and focusing on the front sight, it is time to introduce live ammo to this equation. Remember, slow for form.

Starting about 15 yards from the target, get your sight picture and start walking the line with your heel-toe rolling steps. Start shooting after your second step.

To fire accurately, take up your trigger slack and, as you see the front sight on the center of the target, finish your trigger press. You need to be able to take up and fire smoothly yet quickly. I'm not telling you to jerk the trigger; I'm suggesting you think about combat accuracy, not match-grade accuracy. We only need "minute of bad guy" groups. Just think about this: every time you see your front sight on the center of the target, finish your trigger press. At this range, you should be making good hits if you are going slowly and working on your form.

BACK IT UP

The best thing about shooting on the move as you go backward is that you will quickly notice that you can shoot better going backward than you can while you are going forward. This is a good thing, because you get the double benefit of getting farther away from danger while you are putting rounds on target. The downside is that you can't see where you are going. So, once again, I urge you to start slowly and only attempt to

■ *Rolling the foot from heel to toe is the smoothest way to advance while shooting, and rolling from toe to heel will take you in reverse with similar steadiness. Start slow for form.*

pick up speed once you have mastered the basics.

Shooting on the move to the rear is almost exactly like shooting on the move going forward except that as you step backward, put your toe on the ground first and roll to your heel. Continue to try to walk that line, dropping one foot a comfortable distance behind the other as you roll your toe-heel step. Start this drill about 5 yards from the target and shoot on the move until you are about 15 yards away.

If you really want to add some next-level ninja stuff to this, remember that as you move backward, don't shift your weight off the stationary foot until you are sure you have firm footing beneath your mobile foot. It is best to practice moving to the rear on a flat, smooth range at first. If you want to add in some obstacles to your movement, only do so during dry-fire practice. Consider that while backing up, things like curbs, parking lot barriers and other items could block your path. It pays to learn how to navigate these obstacles, but please use dry-fire practice to master the footwork. It is just safer.

THE WRAP-UP

This drill is done with a single target on a flat, open shooting range. When moving forward, start from about 15 yards and fire until you are as close as 5 yards. Then start moving backward. Once you feel comfortable putting rounds accurately on target, try shooting on the move — laterally.

Stay safe. Train hard.



A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a black tactical vest over a black shirt and tan cargo pants, is shown in a dynamic pose. He is wearing a green baseball cap with a patch that says "I'm not Dexter". He is holding a black handgun in his right hand, pointing it forward. His left hand is near his chest. A brown leather holster with a handgun is visible on his right hip. The background is black.

SHOOTING ON THE MOVE: LATERALLY!

*GET TO A POSITION OF
ADVANTAGE AND MAKE
YOURSELF A MORE
DIFFICULT TARGET*

In the last edition of "Drill of the Month," we covered shooting on the move while moving forward and to the rear. That is the foundation of shooting on the move. Using the elements presented in that column, you get a basic understanding of how accurately you can fire your pistol while you are moving.



■ *Shooting on the move becomes increasingly difficult when lateral movement is added to the equation. Not only does foot motion change, your grip on the sidearm should change as well. For right-handers, switch to a one-handed grip when moving to the left, and when moving to the right, maintain a two-handed grip. This keeps your shoulders from getting in each other's way.*

You should have realized pretty quickly that these movements have limited benefit. Whether you are going directly forward or straight to the rear, you are still in the line of fire. That's a bad thing. Ideally, you want to move laterally. Get off the X while you engage your attacker to make him think about something other than putting his rounds on target.

We taught forward and rearward movement as the foundation for shooting on the move. If you have not mastered those two elements, go back, review and train until you have them mastered. Once that is done, we can start to work on shooting while moving laterally.

First, let's review the twofold goal of shooting on the move: You are shooting on the move so you can get to a position of tactical advantage and to make yourself a more difficult target.

If you are ready, let's jump in.

The overriding concept guiding effective lateral movement is to never cross your feet. Crossing your feet in some sort of Broadway dance move is a recipe for falling down. If you have fallen down, you can't be moving toward your position of tactical advantage. You might be a more difficult target because you have "gone prone," but if you have gone prone unexpectedly, you run the risk of dropping your gun, hurting yourself or being involved in a negligent discharge — thus

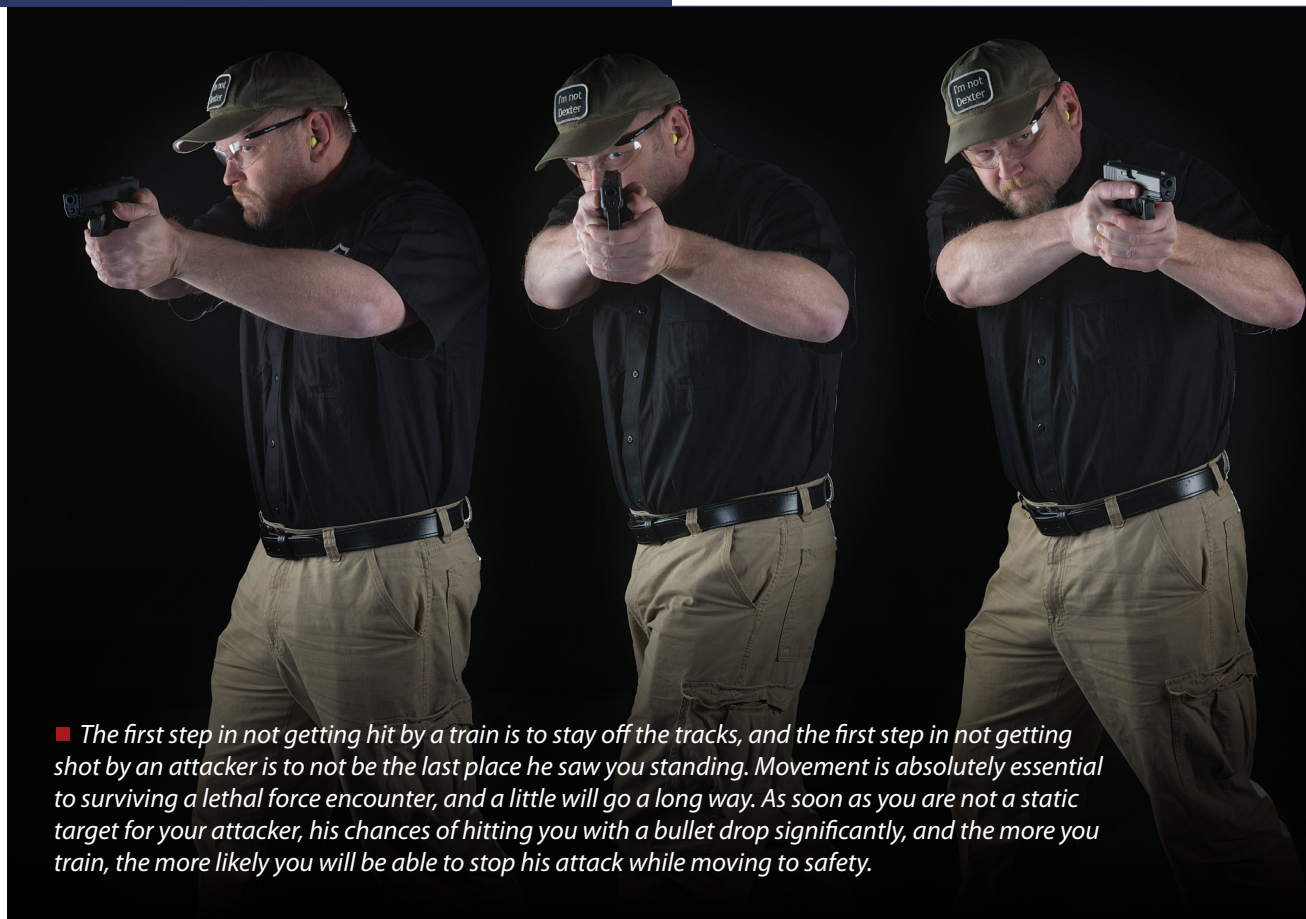
sending a round somewhere you did not intend for it to go. So, never cross your feet.

Instead, point your feet in the general direction you want to travel and walk just like you did when trained to move forward: heel-to-toe steps, moving smoothly. Walk in a fairly straight line and move your torso as though it was a tank turret.

How you grip your firearm is dependent on your direction of travel, yet this is where some trainers differ. Let us assume for the purposes of this drill the target is 10 yards away and directly in front of you and you are a right-handed shooter. If you are moving to your right, you can aim and fire with a standard two-handed pistol grip. To maintain your muzzle discipline (only pointing your gun at something you are willing to destroy), execute the following sequence:

1. Draw and acquire the standard two-handed grip.
2. Keeping your muzzle pointed downrange at your target, pivot on the balls of your feet so both feet are pointed 90 degrees to the right, relative to your target, and begin walking by moving your left foot first.
3. Press the trigger fully to the rear each time the front sight is on the target.

Some trainers have told me I should only fire between steps. Others have told me only to fire when both feet are on



the ground. I have found it does not matter. If the front sight is on the target, I will get suitable combat accuracy while moving.

Now, for the right-handed shooter moving to the left, we get into some differences of opinion. I have trained with instructors who demanded I keep both hands on the pistol, and I have trained with instructors who have told me to fire one-handed with my left hand tight against my body to keep it out of the way. I shoot and teach the one-handed technique for two reasons: The first reason is because that is how the Wisconsin Department of Justice Training and Standards Bureau teaches it for my LEO qualifications. The second reason is that I find it easier to stay on target.

If the first rule of a gunfight is to not get shot, the second rule is to put rounds on target to end the fight quickly. So I suggest that you do what works for you in that area.

So my sequence for moving to the left is as follows:

1. Draw and acquire the standard one-handed grip. Cant the gun about 15 degrees to the left. Put your left hand on your chest.

2. Keeping your muzzle pointed downrange at your target, pivot on the balls of your feet so both feet are pointed 90 degrees to the left, relative to your target, and begin walking by moving your right foot first.

3. Press the trigger fully to the rear each time the front sight is on the target.

When training to shoot on the move, it is of utmost impor-

tance that you start slowly and establish good form. This is true for your body position and your focus on the front sight. Once you have mastered this drill moving slowly, you can begin to pick up speed. But you have a decision to make.

THE BIG DECISION

Should you fire while on the move? As we said before, shooting on the move does two things: It allows you to get to a position of tactical advantage and it makes you a more difficult target.

Notice that I didn't say anything about improving your accuracy. Shooting on the move does not improve your accuracy. You are still liable for every round you put downrange. It might be better for you to simply move quickly to cover and start shooting from there.

You might need to shoot on the move, and if you decide that you need to shoot on the move, pay extra attention to your surroundings and what is behind your target. Every decision in a fight is your responsibility. A deadly force incident is dynamic by nature, and this skill should be mastered before it is employed. If you need to use such a skill to save your life, don't hesitate. But if there is a greater danger to bystanders, move and then shoot.



USING YOUR VEHICLE AS COVER

The United States is a nation built around the automobile. We love our cars and trucks and really feel helpless without them. But that couple tons of metal, glass and rubber is not exactly perfect cover when bullets start flying. If you are going to use your car for cover, you need to do so correctly.

The first thing you need to know is that much of your car is concealment — at best. No matter what you have seen in the movies, car doors, vehicle glass and even interior fixtures like seats will not stop bullets.

If you are using your car for cover, you will need to keep the heaviest parts of the vehicle between you and the bad guy. The engine compartment and, to a lesser extent, the wheel hubs and tires are the best options when you need cover.

Bullets will sometimes whistle right through car doors. There are some interior components that might stop an incoming round, but they are small and narrow. Worse yet, they are not located in the same position on every car door. Don't count on using the doors for anything other than a means of concealment as you move to cover. Windows certainly will not protect you and, worse yet, they allow the bad guy to see you. The best you can hope for is that the laminated glass of a windshield will deflect a bullet off course enough to keep it from putting a hole in you. Don't ever rely on hope to stop bullets.

Using a car for cover is very similar to using any other form of cover: Conform to it. Use only the areas that will certainly stop incoming rounds and, most importantly, stay back from any vehicle you are using for cover. Because of the light sheet metal, plastic, fiberglass and tempered auto glass, vehicles provide a very high risk of sending flying debris right toward your face if bullets impact near you. The farther back you are from your cover, the less chance you have of being injured by flying debris.

Also, pay attention to where you stop and stand when fighting near a vehicle. Keep those wheels and tires between you and the bad guy. It's pretty easy for a round to skip off the pavement and into the foot or lower leg of someone standing beside a car. Several gunfights have been won by quick-thinking police officers who have dropped to the ground and fired rounds into the lower extremities of their attackers.

I have produced a related video segment for Episode 68 of my *Into the Fray* video blog. Here is the link: usconcealedcarry.com/using-car-cover.

Never assume that just because a car is big it offers good cover.



A close-up portrait of David Jackson, a Black man with short hair, a goatee, and glasses. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. The background is blurred, showing warm, bokeh lights.

**"I said, please,
my kids are
here ... please
don't shoot!"**

Forced to Pull the Trigger
to Defend His Children...

David Jackson, USCCA Member

David jumped into action and saved his children and innocent bystanders from two armed robbers. Without the self-defense education, training and legal protection of USCCA Membership, David's story could have ended very differently.

When the smoke cleared, David's gun was confiscated, and he was taken to the police station for questioning. With his USCCA Membership, David was able to get connected with an experienced criminal defense attorney AND get the funds he needed to replace his permanently confiscated gun. After all, ***doing the right thing shouldn't cost you everything...***



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