



LOW LIGHT SHOOTING TACTICS

How To Stay On Target In The Dark





The intense, blinding beam of a powerful flashlight isn't just helpful during an emergency — it's also a less-lethal force option.

GOT A LIGHT?

THE TACTICAL TORCH

■ BY ED COMBS

WITH THE POSSIBLE exception of the jacketed hollow-point projectile, I don't believe there's a single defensive technology that has progressed as far in the last 30 years as the modern flashlight.

What even 20 years ago would have only been in the hands of extremely high-level federal employees is now available for less than \$50 delivered to your door. It's been a long road for those who might even remember the days of carbide lamps attached to the front of hats. Now it's to the point that we almost take modern flashlights for granted. A flashlight the size of a roll of quarters that's bright enough to temporarily blind an attacker is common today, but that wasn't always the case.

OLD SCHOOL

The D-cell Maglite reigned supreme in the law enforcement world for decades, and for good reasons. First and foremost, it's of very high quality and can withstand the knocking around that is the lot of a duty belt tool. Second, it's a dynamite impact weapon, especially if your department bends to political pressure and removes standard batons from your duty gear. I'm not kidding; as I once heard a law enforcement DAAT (defense and arrest tactics) instructor quip, "Flashlights used to be pretty normal, but then the city council took your batons away and what happened? The 4-cell Maglite, that's what happened."

This aside, the old reliable 4-cell is actually much better suited to unarmed (or "unarmed" with air-quotes after you're holding a Maglite) self-defense. Not only have many, many other options surpassed it in actual lighting utility, it's ... well ... it's a metal tube filled with D-cell batteries. It's heavy, it's bulky and, as I was reminded every winter while directing traffic, it gets downright frigid on a cold day. If you are absolutely barred from possessing a firearm, a 3- or 4-D-cell Maglite is a good impact weapon option. If you'll be carrying a concealed sidearm, you can do much better.

POCKET VERSUS PATROL

While many folks are quick to simply ask which flashlight law enforcement officers in their area use and then go buy one, there can be some difficulties in doing so. Though I too usually adhere to the attitude of "find someone who uses it for a living and ask which he prefers," you have to be certain you're asking for info on the right flashlight.

You see, most law enforcement officers carry at least two flashlights at all times: a belt-worn duty flashlight and a backup or backups. The light worn on the belt — the duty light — will be extremely powerful and anywhere from 10 to 16 inches long. Though that might seem odd in this day and age of tiny super-powered units, there's an explanation.

When issuing a citation, that officer needs all of the hands that he can get, and one of them has to be kept free in order to

draw a weapon if necessary. Hence, his duty flashlight has to be long enough for him to hold under his non-dominant arm, pinned between his elbow and torso so he can then hold the citation in the hand that's in front of the beam and keep his dexterous hand free in case of emergency. This is the type of flashlight that you can consider a "nightstand light" — a light that you won't have to worry about trying to carry around all day in your EDC but that would be an excellent flashlight to keep around the home (or in the vehicle) in case of a potential lethal-force encounter.

TAIL SWITCH

I consider a tail-cap activation switch basically essential for a primary defensive EDC flashlight. Even more importantly, the tail button should not only turn the light on and off but should allow for momentary activation, thus allowing the user to send extremely short flashes of light with very slight amounts of pressure and without having to worry about turning the light all the way on and off over and over again. The benefit of this is, of course, one-handed operation. If you need to use both hands to operate the light, it will only be of so much use to you when you have it in one hand and a pistol in the other.

LUMEN REQUIREMENTS

I'm not a huge believer in there being a strict lumen limit on EDC flashlights, but I will go on record that I believe brighter is better. The only time that dimmer is better is if you will be spending a decent amount of time reading off of white sheets of paper — ask any military vet or LEO what happens when you shine a 100-plus lumen light onto a packing manifest or ticket book and they'll laugh, squint their eyes and then feel around like they're blind. For such lighter-duty lighting duty, even the glow of a cell phone is preferable to a tactical light. Your night vision will be spared and you won't immediately broadcast your personal position like a lightning strike.

STROBE

I'd like to go on record as the man who brought the term "Crime Disco" to the tactical world. It came to me one night while patrolling a campground in search of an individual who was even more dangerous than he was intoxicated, and when I lit him up next to a tent that he was trying to start with his truck keys ... well ... it was one of those moments of inspiration in the field.

This is a feature on the lamp itself that allows for a strobe, or extremely fast-flashing, phase of the light. This becomes exceptionally useful when confronting a threat in the dark, as the strobe light is extremely disorienting and can even lead to loss of balance or seizure.

Similarly, some models feature "Beacon" modes, which facilitate long-term distress signaling by turning the head or tail cap. Doing so causes the flashlight to blink either a steady pulse or actual S.O.S. Morse code signal for hours on end without requiring the user to sit there getting a finger cramp.

MAKE AN IMPACT

Since the flashlight is operated in the non-weapon-hand, manufacturers began to get field reports about what actu-

ally happened when users of their products were involved in violent encounters. One experience was almost universal: The flashlights were being pressed into service as impromptu impact weapons. Picture yourself standing facing a potential threat with a tactical flashlight in your off-hand and nothing in your dexterous one. If the individual before you begins to charge, what are you going to do? Well, you'll likely start to move in some direction (preferably laterally), either go for your primary weapon or at least get your dexterous hand up to defend yourself and strike your attacker with the chunk of steel or aircraft aluminum that you're already holding in your off-hand.

After this reality became common knowledge, light makers began engineering pointed scalloping into the faces of their products — sarcastically called "DNA Collectors" in some circles — that are specifically designed to open a cut over an attacker's eye during a self-defense incident. Similarly, other manufacturers began outfitting their units with carbide glass-breaking points as an added safety measure, especially for those who operate in environments with canals or other large bodies of water into which automobiles often find their way.

BATTERY OF QUESTIONS

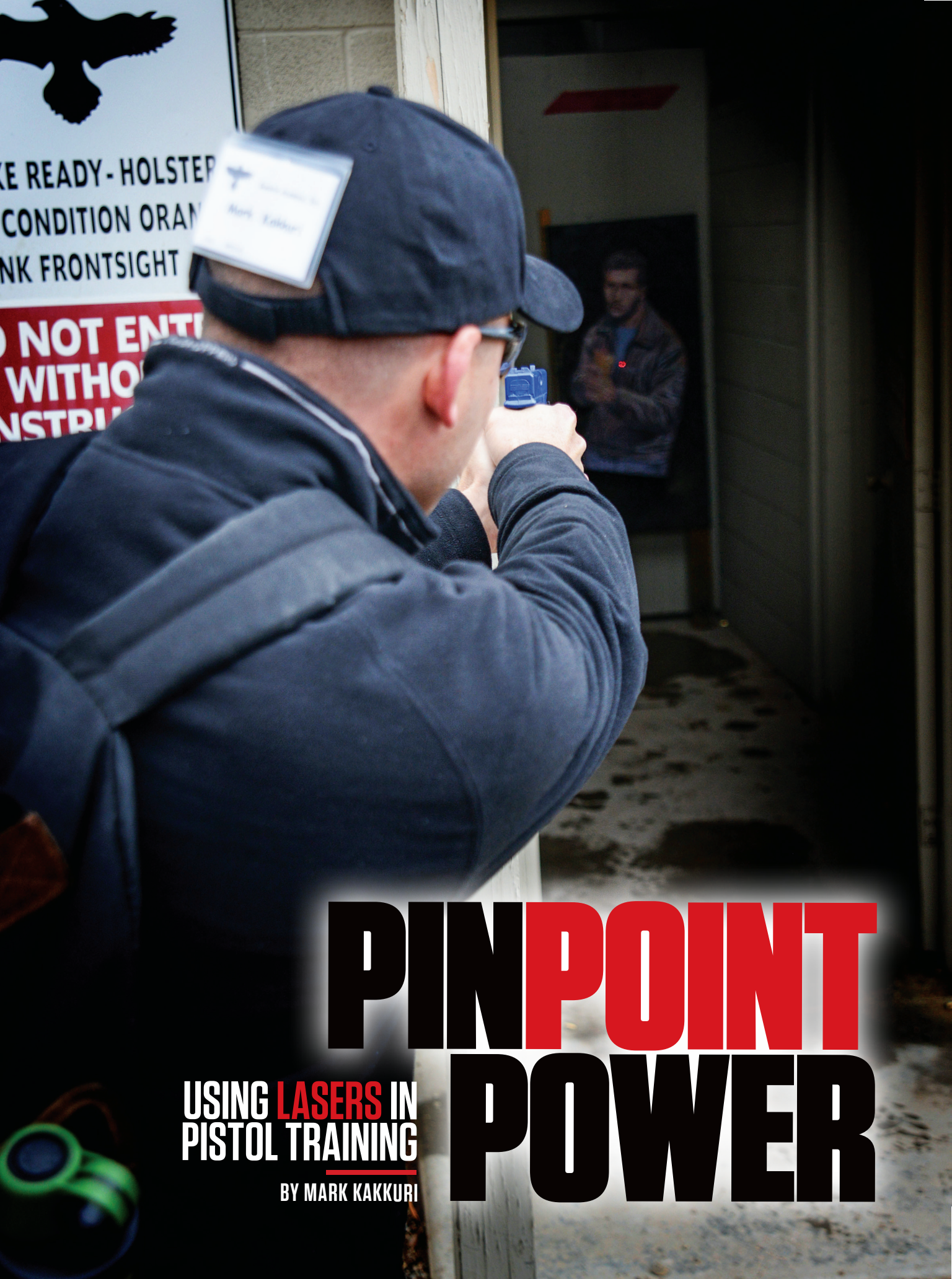
It's impossible to discuss tactical flashlights without discussing batteries, and it's a sore subject with some. On one side, there are those who believe nothing but 123As will do in a tactical light — you know, those odd little camera batteries that look like you took an AA, squished it into a squatter shape and sold it for \$4. Others are a little more forgiving.

Within the last five years, more and more lights stoked on AA batteries have entered the market at very reasonable prices that are more than bright enough for EDC use. The difference is usually in intensity of beam. For an ultra-bright yellow beam that is so bright the unit itself gets hot enough to set your pants on fire, it's hard to beat the 123As. However, for economy — if you can put up with a slightly bluer light at an intensity that isn't guaranteed to scald the hair off a hog carcass — the AA units are often more than enough. Like with your sidearm, it's going to be a matter of personal preference.

SEE THE LIGHT

Selecting an EDC light can be a daunting, confusing proposition. The main guideline I'd strongly recommend you follow is to neither spend \$10 nor \$1,000 on an EDC light; those ends of the spectrum will just not be worth the money you're spending. Depending on your tastes and desire to spend money, something between \$40 and \$400 will almost certainly accomplish what you need done (and, as always, if you ever have any questions, please feel free to contact us here at editor@usconcealedcarry.com).

The modern tactical flashlight is the single most important piece of emergency lifesaving equipment that literally anyone can walk into a store and buy. Predators prefer darkness; deny them of it.



PINPOINT POWER

USING **LASERS** IN
PISTOL TRAINING

BY MARK KAKKURI

Lasers don't just provide shooters a physical sighting point—they also identify training scars in need of correction.

LASER SIGHTS can significantly improve a shooter's ability to put rounds on a target. As lasers continue to grow in popularity, their usefulness in training can also provide significant insights into how a shooter is doing with basic gun handling.

Paulden, Arizona-based Gunsite Academy recently added a laser-training element to its 250 Defensive Pistol class. It covers the "tactical applications, benefits, and limitations of visible lasers" where, "along with learning Gunsite doctrine in the use of your pistol sights, you will also learn when, where, and how to use the laser in a variety of conditions and environments." The Academy's instruction in use of a laser includes two evenings of low-light shooting to allow the best conditions for laser use. So, while shooters may initially think only in terms of increased accuracy, Gunsite Training Director Dave Starin found that instructing students with laser-equipped firearms provided other benefits—namely, improved trigger control, muzzle awareness, draw stroke, and the engagement of multiple targets.

TRIGGER CONTROL

Much has been written about the benefits of dry-firing a firearm to strengthen the key muscles to ensure that the trigger can break at precisely the right time: when the sights are perfectly aligned with the target. Clever techniques abound to improve trigger control, such as putting a small square of tape on a wall and continuously going through the exercise of raising, aiming, and squeezing the trigger of an unloaded (very important!) firearm with as little movement as possible when the trigger actually breaks. Without an activated laser pointing at the wall, a shooter may notice little variation in aim and a trainer may notice slightly more. Add an activated laser to this exercise and you'll quickly learn whether your trigger squeeze is helping or hindering your ability to aim.

"The laser's dot allows the shooter—or even better, a coach—to see exactly what is happening when the trigger is pressed," says Starin. "If the dot moves, the shooter



is pulling the trigger too hard or flinching.”

With a laser, Starin says, trigger control exercises can be accomplished during both dry practice and live fire.

MUZZLE AWARENESS

“Never let the muzzle of a gun cover anything you’re not willing to destroy.”

This well-known firearm safety rule may be the one most commonly broken. From beginners to more experienced shooters, making sure the muzzle is always pointed in a safe direction can be difficult to track all of the time. A good range officer or shooting coach knows to keep his or her eyes on a shooter’s firearm before, during, and after any rounds are discharged. And no one is above the firm correction that points out a violation and thus helps a shooter keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.

Adding a laser to a firearm simply to track where the muzzle is pointed can prove to be an enlightening experience, and, according to Starin, helps reinforce keeping the weapon pointed in a safe direction. “A laser-equipped firearm gives the shooter and coach instant feedback as to where the muzzle is in relation to self and surroundings during scanning, moving, and manipulations.”

DRAW STROKE

Related to muzzle awareness is how to safely practice the draw stroke, a tactical drill that is critical to effective shooting. Just as important as loading, aiming, shooting, and rendering a firearm safe is the action of drawing when presenting to a target, and it demands equal—if not more—practice to conduct properly.

Without a laser, a shooter can practice alone, perhaps using a mirror or video camera to spot and improve any deficiencies. Even better, a shooting coach can watch and provide instant, professional feedback to affirm proper technique or to correct poor technique. Adding a laser, however, provides helpful input, as the laser’s dot obviously tracks wherever the muzzle is pointed. As such, a laser can show a shooter if his or her draw stroke violates the trajectory of a safe but effective path to the target. “With a laser, you can see exactly where the muzzle is during presentation to target,” says Starin. “Not only does this aid in shooting technique, it also develops proper muscle memory.

MULTIPLE TARGET ENGAGEMENTS

Similar to careful muzzle control and excellent draw stroke technique, shooters should train for how they might engage multiple targets. Starin says a laser-equipped firearm allows the shooter or coach to see exactly how the weapon is moved between targets. You might be tempted to think that aiming and firing at target A and then switching to target B is about as simple an operation a shooter could master, but there is plenty of room for error. “Seeing the laser helps in eliminating over-swing and other wasted movements,” he says.

All of these training scenarios can be conducted with virtually any firearm laser. While some firearm lasers offer instant activation when the gun is grasped, some require the shooter to push an additional button to activate. If you don’t have a laser-equipped firearm, you can purchase a device that actually fits into the chamber of the firearm and emits a laser beam straight out the barrel of the gun.

SIGHTS VS. LASERS

Some shooting purists may decry the addition of sensitive electronics, wiring, batteries, and such to a defensive weapon that, by its very nature, is an extreme-use tool. What if the laser fails? While current laser technology is very durable, effective, and reliable, they’ve got a point. A laser could fail. So, any shooter should do his or her homework and get the proper training on how and when to use standard sights in conjunction with a laser.

Lasers are here to stay and the technology will only improve. That means a greater need to train accordingly, preferably with a professional organization such as the Gunsite Academy. For now, if you have a laser on your firearm, realize the potential it brings not only for better accuracy but also the ability to train for better trigger control, muzzle awareness, draw stroke, and even the improved engagement of multiple targets.

Resource: Dave Starin

Training Director, Gunsite Academy Inc.

928-636-4565 ext.10 • dave@gunsite.com

Few things are more important in training than muzzle control, and few training aids will more demonstrably (and unforgivingly) track your muzzle like a laser sight.





As with all self-defense tactics, you're going to want to practice shooting in the dark before you're forced to do it "for real."

LIGHTS OUT

10 THINGS I'VE LEARNED ABOUT SHOOTING IN THE DARK

■ BY TOM McHALE

I'VE HAD SOME INTERESTING opportunities to shoot in the dark: during midnight 3-gun competitions, where your objective is to find and engage multiple targets in the fastest possible time while on the move; during dark shoothouse scenarios, where you move cautiously from room to room while searching for "good" and "bad" targets (ability to discern and identify targets is paramount here); and, in the category of "most fun shooting thing ever," at the shooting cave at Rockcastle Shooting Center in Park City, Kentucky, where you have the opportunity to navigate a pitch-dark underground cavern while engaging hidden targets with rifle, pistol or both.

Like many topics we debate, shooting in the dark — with or without lights and lasers — is one of those activities you really need to try before creating plans and strategies of your own. Some of the "facts" that get passed around aren't quite what they seem, while other hearsay gems are downright false. Fortunately, using safe dry-fire practices or a blue gun, you can learn quite a bit by bumbling around your own home in the dark.

Let's take a look at some of the things I've learned, or at least have developed opinions on, after some time spent shooting in the dark.

1. NO, A LASER ISN'T GOING TO GIVE AWAY YOUR POSITION.

My favorite response to this immortal myth came from a gun blogger I know:

"You know what will give away my position?" he asked. "Me yelling 'Get the [expletive] out of my house!'"

In the majority of home-defense scenarios, I agree with him. If you're out and about, you're almost always better off trying to get the heck away rather than sneaking around trying to find bad guys. Playing ninja games in the dark with a horde of silent attackers just isn't a very realistic or wise scenario. That scene sure was thrilling in *Silence of the Lambs*, but the odds of you implementing it at home are about the same as politically disappointed celebrities actually moving out of the country.

Oh, one more thing: Unless your environment is full of airborne dust and smoke, most lasers won't cast a visible beam anyway — just a dot on the target. Red lasers are invisible in clean air and green are nearly so. The bottom line? Stop stressing about giving away your position and use tools like lasers to help you get shots on target faster.

2. YOU CAN CHANGE BATTERIES BEFORE THEY RUN OUT!

Even still in this miraculous technological era of smartphones and Flex Seal, the biggest objection I hear to putting a laser on a self-defense handgun is this: "Yeah, but what are you gonna do when the batteries run out?"

It's a great point, because look at the chaos that ensues when our cars run out of gas, we forget to pay the electric bill or the pantry runs low on Pop-Tarts. But, seriously, I've learned an important concept: You can change batteries proactively. You know, like before they run out.

The way I see it, if a light or laser device has the capability to dramatically improve my advantage in a self-defense situation, I figure I can take responsibility as a big boy and change my batteries on a periodic basis so that I never get surprised by them failing at the worst possible time. It's no different than stopping at the gas station before your engine sputters out on I-95.

3. A RIFLE MAKES A GREAT LOW-LIGHT WEAPON.

Yes, I know this is *Concealed Carry Magazine*. I also know that AR-15s are tough to conceal, especially during sundress season. But if we can stretch the concealed carry topic just a tad to include home defense, you might think about using a modern sporting rifle. Handguns are built for handiness and maneuverability, but when it comes to getting fast hits on target, a rifle is hard to beat, especially in low light.

Having two hands supporting the weapon and that extra long sight radius makes it very difficult to miss close indoor targets. Add a light and laser, and you can easily shoot from unconventional positions. While it might seem a little strange at first, try some rapid-fire, close-range shooting (like room or hallway distance) with an AR or similar rifle and you'll see what I mean.

4. THE PERFECT LIGHT STRATEGY REMAINS ELUSIVE.

Here's an example of learning that something has no clear answer. Conceptually, I think we can all agree that having a separate flashlight on hand is a great idea. Gun-mounted lights are con-

venient and are no doubt the best solution for actually shooting with a light, but you don't want to use that for search and identification because, by definition, you'll be pointing your gun at whatever you illuminate. Before you make a conscious decision to shoot, that's a bad idea.

If you've got a light in one hand and a light on your gun, what do you do if it comes time to shoot? If you use one of the classic techniques like Harries or Chapman, the light is "anchored" to the direction of your muzzle, so you're really not accomplishing anything different than having a light mounted on your gun. If you use a freehand technique like the FBI, you're faced with one-hand shooting unless you quickly assume a braced position.

I think much of the confusion arises from the fact that most light techniques were developed before the advent of small, reliable and inexpensive weapon-mounted lights. So what to do? Take the extra time to experiment on your own.

5. IF YOU SEARCH WITH A WEAPON LIGHT, YOU'RE GOING TO POINT YOUR GUN AT SOMEONE.

It's relatively easy to train yourself to search with the gun indexed down toward the floor, and you'll certainly light up the room indirectly with this technique. However, when you see a shadowy figure start to emerge, the first thing your brain will instruct your hands to do is raise the light, which is attached to the gun, in order to identify whatever you've just found. Now you're right back to pointing your gun at what might be a home invader or perhaps a family member.

6. IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO PRACTICE THINGS LIKE MAGAZINE CHANGES IN LOW-LIGHT SCENARIOS.

Want to look like a drunk attempting needlepoint while wearing mittens? Try changing magazines while using a hand-held flashlight. Cruising through a dark environment with a flashlight in one hand and a gun in the other is not exceedingly difficult with any of the common techniques. Even getting shots on target is fairly intuitive. When your magazine runs dry, though, things can get really awkward really fast. Do you move the light to your weapon hand? Try to retrieve and seat a new magazine while juggling the flashlight in the same hand? Stuff the light in a pocket? Drop it? You'll have to develop your own right answer based on your light technique, so the learning here is to try it sometime and work out the kinks *before* your life depends on it.

7. LASERS MIGHT NOT BE FAST DURING THE DAY, BUT THEY'RE SCREAMIN' FAST AT NIGHT.

In daylight conditions, using a laser sight is a game of "find the dim dot" even when using a brighter green unit. That's OK though, as their real reason for existence is to facilitate shooting in lower-light conditions. It doesn't have to be dark — just less light than midday sunshine.

What I've found is that the darker it is, the more a laser adds to your speed. Your eyes are going to fixate on the threat anyway, so that dot on or near your target will leap into view. You won't

"PLAYING NINJA GAMES IN THE DARK WITH A HORDE OF SILENT ATTACKERS JUST ISN'T A VERY REALISTIC OR WISE SCENARIO."

be slowed down by any transition back and forth between your target and your sights. Your ability to shoot when the gun is not in a conventional sight picture position will also increase dramatically. If your gun is in some low-ready vicinity, you can shoot just as accurately if you need to.

8. YOU CAN SEE REGULAR IRON SIGHTS IN THE DARK.

I'm a big advocate for using Tritium night sights that glow brightly in the dark, mainly because I'm happy to take every possible advantage. There's no downside except one: cost. Night sights will add a C-note to the price of your handgun.

The big advantage to night sights is that you can see your sights without any ambient light. However, if it's that dark, you won't be able to see and confirm your target either. Just something to ponder.

If you don't have the budget for night sights and are concerned with positive target identification, a weapon-mounted light will work just dandy with regular, non-illuminated iron sights. This is one of those nifty tricks to try: Using an unloaded gun, go into a dark closet and hold a flashlight in the approximate location of a gun-mounted light. You'll be surprised at how clearly you can see your sights even though the light's lens is forward of the front sight.

9. MUZZLE FLASH ISN'T THAT BIG OF A DEAL.

If you get the opportunity to shoot in the dark — indoors or outdoors — by all means, do it. I suspect you'll find what I did: Muzzle flash isn't all that big of a deal in a self-defense shooting situation.

The internet forums will tell you that the muzzle blast from a .357 Magnum or other "hot" caliber will permanently blind you by melting your corneas into a puddle of goo. You'll hear the same thing about using handguns with ported barrels. I think this myth persists because there's a little bit of truth to it. There is muzzle flash. There's more with boomier cartridges. Ported-barrel guns will create an exceptionally cool V-shaped flame pattern. The myth part is that it'll kill your vision and spoil your view of the target.

I've shot lots and lots of pistols in 9mm, .40 S&W, .45 ACP, .357 SIG and more in the dark (along with AR-15s and shotguns). In no case did the muzzle flash from any of them impair my ability to

make the next shot. In fact, I never saw the flash unless I consciously looked for it.

I think this one also persists because it sounds logical in theory. Think about it: If you're in the pitch dark for a while, your eyes will begin to adjust. If you suddenly shine a flashlight into your eyeballs, you'll see weird blotchy stuff for a few seconds. However, are you really going to fire a shot in near total darkness where you have no ability to confirm your target?

10. USE ALL THE LIGHT YOU WANT.

On a related topic, plenty argue about having too little or too much light. You might hear that using a 300-lumen light indoors will blind you in addition to any attackers. The theory is that light reflecting off things like white walls and such will impair your ability to see because of too much glare coming back your way.

Fortunately, this is an easy one to test on your own. If you don't have a big, flame-throwing flashlight, borrow one from a friend. Then wander around your home with the lights out and try it. I suspect you'll find what I did: It's pretty dang hard to have too many lumens. If the paint starts peeling off your walls, then you might want to consider backing down, but other than that, get a light that offers the power you want. Besides, assuming it's portable, you can use it for concealed carry too.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Handling guns and lights in the dark is not a pre-wired biological instinct like winning Facebook arguments. It can seem unnatural, and you're going to have to work at it. If your plan is to do "X" in a low-light situation, then you'd better practice that a lot in advance. Fortunately, most scenarios are fairly easy to try out right at home. Just be safe about it.



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**"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.

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