



◀ TDI instructor demonstrates transition to secondary.

▶ Live Fire House 1 is series of corners and doorways. Every turn can have hidden enemies, and many of them do.

With most agencies across the country, training budgets are being slashed and brutal choices have to be made.

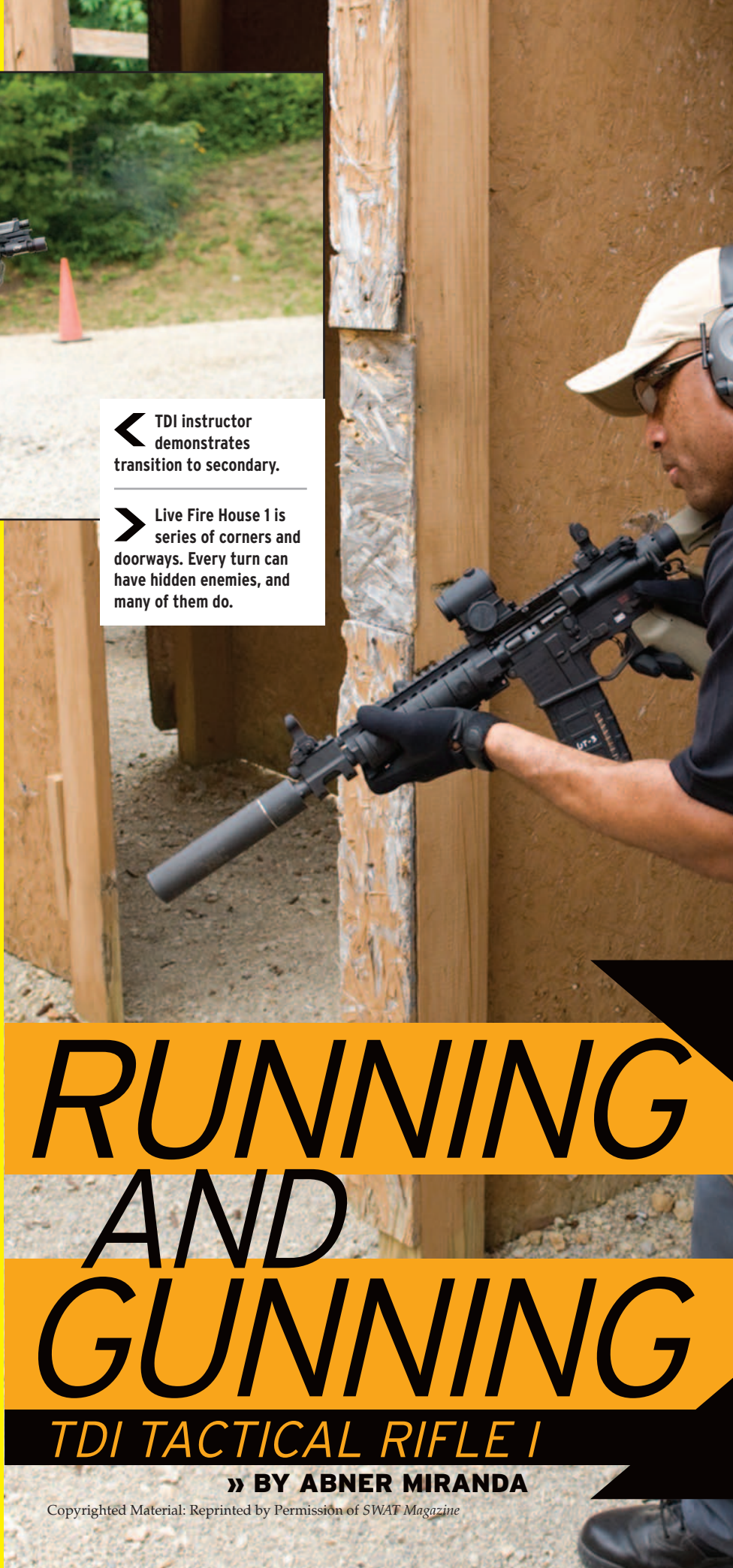
Through my agency, our officers received a good intro class on the basics of operating our rifles, however, I felt the need to seek out more in-depth training.

For years I've had the notion that, because I always score very high in my weapons competencies, I am "capable" in tactical situations with a rifle. Then I took the three-day Tactical Rifle I course at Tactical Defense Institute (TDI) and learned otherwise. It was like that moment in my childhood when I realized Santa Claus wasn't real. *Say it ain't so, Santa!*

ALL SLINGS SUCK

On Day One of Tactical Rifle I, students are briefed on what constitutes a fighting AR and shown what can happen when you turn your AR into an accessories showcase. Yeah, that used to be me. One of the more crucial lessons learned is that, "All slings suck, some just suck less than others." It's something that students learn very quickly at TDI. Luckily I'd learned this fact a couple of years ago. It's inevitable when you're a left-handed shooter.

I recently got an MS2 sling from Magpul and found out what versatility really can be. Since I'm a lefty, I'm very judgmental regarding all things AR. What may be a well thought-out product for a righty




RUNNING AND GUNNING

TDI TACTICAL RIFLE I

» BY ABNER MIRANDA





Popping out from behind cover to engage multiple targets. 

Negotiating The Wall. 



pretty much sucks for us lefties, so I lean exclusively toward single-point slings.

The MS2 is a single-point sling that epitomizes the word ambidextrous. My reasoning behind this choice is simple. Couple the MS2 with the Magpul's ASAP plate and they make shoulder transitions lightning fast. If you're clearing malfunctions, the last thing you need is to fight with a length of sling running the full length of the weapon.

GRAB YOUR GEAR

For this class, I ran a direct impingement gun from Spike's Tactical Custom Shop. Spike's VP and head armorer Tom Miller personally took on this project for me. Tom machined a 1:7 chrome-lined, Med-Con barrel down from 16 inches to 10.3 inches and hand fitted the weapon together with a level of precision that paid off at TDI.

The weapon was tricked out with Magpul gear: CTR stock, MOE handguards, MIAD grip, MOE rear sight, ASAP Sling Point, and MS2 Sling. I finished it off with a rugged Procyon LED light from Insight

Tech Gear and a 416-SD suppressor from Advanced Armament Corporation.

The 416-SD Fast-Attach 5.56mm Silencer is not your normal suppressor. It was designed to run flawlessly on CQC weapons like this Spike's SBR (short barreled rifle). Almost any suppressor can run on a standard AR, but at the short end of the spectrum, you can have problems.

AAC's patent-pending Ratchet-Mount fast-attach mounting system provides reliable precision accuracy with minimal and repeatable zero-shift. The 416-SD's extreme durability is maximized by CNC automated fusion welding of every high-temperature aerospace alloy component used in its construction,

making 100% suppressed fire possible.

With that fact in mind, I ran the entire class with it on. I also ran a high round count drill without hearing protection, which should tell you something about the ability of this suppressor to attenuate the explosive forces of the 5.56mm cartridge.

Out of approximately 1,000 rounds, I had no malfunctions. That's saying something, especially considering that I was running cheap Serbian 5.56mm ammo through a suppressed SBR. The estimate is that when firing suppressed, for every one round you fire, the weapon fouls to the equivalent of ten rounds unsuppressed. I only cleaned it every 300 rounds, which

is actually about 200 rounds more than suggested. And yet I didn't have a single malfunction.

LONG-RANGE LESSONS

Training Day One was spent on the long range under the watchful eyes of the instructors as students precisely set their weapons' zeroes. John Benner, a veteran SWAT cop who's been there and done that, is the president and chief instructor for TDI. While a list of credentials like those possessed by John and his crew can certainly create a fair amount of arrogance, it was pleasantly absent at TDI. In the time that I spent getting to know John and his staff, I found them all to be genuine folks who like what they do. John is an astute businessman who surrounds himself with intelligent instructors from all walks of life.

Just when I thought long-range shooting couldn't get any more interesting, the instructors said, "OK, grab your gear and move back to the 300-yard line." I know we live in an age when people hear about sniper crews popping bad guys at 1,200 yards as a routine thing. But remember that this was a *tactical* not a *precision* rifle course. Not to mention that I was shooting a CQC weapon with a 10.3-inch barrel and a suppressor on the end. At 300 yards I was firing every shot using nothing but an EOTech 512.

I thought for sure when we *hiked* down to take a look at the targets that I'd have a shotgun pattern going. Not so: every shot was on target from 300.

DAY TWO

On Day Two, we went to the tactical rifle range, where the instructors worked very closely with us on fast shooting. This is where a good red dot optic was necessary. If you're not sure which optic to buy, just come out with a quality rifle and TDI's pro shop can set you up with an optic at a decent price.

Working with a rifle in a CQC environment is dramatically different than lying prone behind one and engaging a distant target. In CQC you're on your feet and moving around. To make matters worse, the TDI instructors made it a point to induce malfunctions in our guns.

When the instructors said that they were going to cover malfunction clearance

drills, I was expecting the old dummy round routine. It's a no brainer: when you pull the trigger and the gun goes "click" on a dummy round, all you do is tap-rack-bang! TDI induced malfunctions by holding an empty mag against my ejection port and saying "Fire." This instantly caused a failure to extract and a partial feed. Tap, rack, and ... crap! Now I had a "Charlie Foxtrot" on my hands.

That's where the fun began. The instructor verbally pushed me to "Quick, lock that bolt back, strip out that mag, tilt the gun to the right, and use your fingers to push out the stoppage!" If I didn't move fast enough, he screamed "Transition!" I then transitioned to my pistol and engaged the target. Needless to say, this drill really got me going and started to reveal the holes in my gear.

RUDE AWAKENING

Running through TDI's exercises is a good way to learn how shooter and gear either fit well or rub the wrong way. I learned that less is more when it comes to CQC. While my tactical vest looked *really cool* in the trunk of my patrol car, it turned out to be a major rubbing issue with my duty gear. These are invaluable lessons learned while at TDI.

TDI showed students in a nonjudgmental fashion where their techniques and gear will get them hung up. Then they showed students how to do things better. If any student still chose to do things his way, he was treated with respect and the subject was left alone.

Training in LE settings is seldom that flexible. TDI strives to include students in every aspect of the learning process and to make sure that the instructors teach the entire class and not just a select few. TDI teaches students to do a particular drill "their way," but each student is encouraged to do it to the best of *his* abilities and no further.

ONLY THE HOSTAGE SURVIVED

The live-fire houses at TDI are dynamic, to say the least. The rooms all have doors and furniture that have to be negotiated. I'd love to tell you that I went through this drill like Robocop poppin' snitches, but the truth is that everybody died.

Imagine pushing a door open and find-

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ing a gun-wielding thug in your sights. You drop him, then clear to the right and drop a thug holding a hostage. Then you clear the room further and find some chick, with a not-so-friendly look on her face, holding a beer in a threatening manner. That's right, I dropped her too. Guilty by association!

The live-fire house is meant to make students think and not just shoot. Clearly I was in shoot mode. They say alcohol is bad for you, but who stands in the corner drinking beer while her friends are in a gunfight? Exactly—she needed to die!

SAMMY SANTA RITA

On Training Day Two, TDI held a night shoot. The evening started with 100-yard precision shooting to burn off the rest of the daylight. Party balloons were affixed to a row of targets and everyone went prone. John walked down the line counting. When he reached ten, anyone who had not popped his balloon was out. We started off with about 20 students and ended up with a shoot-off between Sammy Santa Rita and myself.

If memory serves, Sammy and I stayed neck and neck for a couple of rounds. John then had us stand and said, "The first

person to pop a balloon wins." I squared up on my target and John said, "Shooters ready?" I brought my carbine up and sighted on my balloon. John said "One," I heard "Boom!" and the entire class gasped in shock.

I wish I could've seen the look on my face. In just over a second, Sammy had engaged his balloon from a standing, unsupported position at 100 yards. I think I'd had just enough time to flip my safety off before I heard the report of his rifle. I then flipped my safety back on and went over to shake his hand. Over the raucous applause of the class, I said, "Good game,

young man. How old are you?" Standing by his dad and younger brother, he said with a big smile, "I'm 14." That's right, folks. Sammy is 14 and he whipped me. The hard work that his father is investing in him is clearly paying off. Good job, Sammy!

THE JUNGLE LANE

Tactical Rifle I is designed to be a showcase of all the different ranges that TDI has to offer, so on Day Three, the class was split up and sent out to the various ranges. One of the more interesting is The Jungle Lane.



◀ Top Gun Sammy Santa Rita with Miranda.

▼ Double taps on the move. Heat has evaporated paint on AAC 416-SD, but it's still going strong.



The Jungle Lane is an exercise in observation and threat perception. Students are led into a densely forested area and told that there are multiple enemies in the area. The mission is to find and kill them. I stood there for a moment and thought, "I don't see squat!"

As I began to move, my eyes started scanning the shadows for human shapes. Suddenly I saw a figure peeking out from behind a tree. I engaged him, then I saw another, and another, and.... Get the picture? It gave me great respect for our armed forces.

When all was said and done, I got a walk through to find out how many times I'd died due to inattention. I got greased twice out of a possible 12 or so enemy.

THE WALL

This drill really needs its own soundtrack, I'm thinking Hendrix. Imagine everything you've ever wanted to do with that rifle of yours and The Wall will deliver it in three very intense minutes.

The Wall is a huge expanse of plywood with triangles, squares and rectangles cut into it. Students were given one shape to shoot through. In my case I had the squares to contend with. I had to work my way up a walkway, then down the other side while moving and shooting through my given shape, while using cover. Then I moved around the edge of The Wall and fought my way downrange, using cover the whole way. Students who had malfunctions had to deal with them on the move or transition to their secondary. And no matter what, everyone had to keep moving!

By the end of the drill, students were seriously winded and dirty from leaning out behind cover and shooting up dirt. The lucky ones learned a few more things about their gear, but at the very least everyone had a blast. We all came out of that drill with smiles on our faces and a greater appreciation for our capabilities.

FINAL THOUGHTS

John Benner knew that I was coming out to do an article on TDI and allowed me to have some time to share feedback with him and his staff. Many of you understand what it's like to have instructors who "don't give a rip." This breeds a negative environment, where the student

slogs through the course just to get his certificate and not much else. I went to TDI with an open mind but a bit of trepidation because I didn't know what to expect.

What I found was a group of people who like what they do and actually want to be there. TDI feels more like a ranch than a training facility. The prices are amazingly low considering just how much instruction you get for your dollar.

As we sat talking with John, my friend Sean Utley compared TDI to another rifle school he'd been to in the past. He said that the other school "costs a whole lot of money to shoot on a static range all week-



➤ Dry firing while trying out different positions.

end." At TDI students do very little static range shooting. Most drills involve movement and dealing with reloads and malfunctions as they arise.

At TDI it doesn't matter who you are or what your day job is. Students come here to learn and are treated with respect. They come out of that three-day class excited and ready for more ... and more is what I'll be experiencing in a few weeks, with Tactical Rifle II.

Many thanks to John and his staff for all their time and attention. I learned a great deal and had a good time. Thanks also to the folks at Spike's Tactical Custom Shop for the outstanding carbine, Magpul for providing the gear, and Advanced Armament Corporation for the rugged 416-SD suppressor.

And to Sammy: look out, young man, I've been practicing—and I want a rematch. ●

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