

Col. Rex Applegate's Presentation To Police Firearms Trainers

On February 24, 1998 in Seattle, Washington

Prologue from the editor: Gentlemen, we haven't sufficient space to cover the entirety of Colonel Applegate's speech nor to include his additional demonstrations or attachments which easily prove his contentions. I wish I had that space. Thus, I can only excerpt in some areas, with the hope that you'll be able to easily follow his argument to its logical conclusion. With the saving of valuable lives in mind, we present the following excerpts from the Colonel's presentation.

“Gentlemen, I want to dispose of an unanswered question which is probably on your minds, the age of that old bastard now speaking on the platform. I will be 84 next June, and I assure you that I have no career or economic axe to grind. In my role as a contrarian, I realize that some of you may consider me to be a voice from the past, however, what I'm going to say to you, involves my evaluation of the handgun training which most of you are currently giving to your officers and recruits. Although I am addressing your group here in Washington State, what I have to say also applies to *all* handgun firearms trainers in the U.S. Military and Law Enforcement.

In case you are not aware of it, the national average of police hits in firefight situations with criminals is approximately 15%. This disgraceful level of proficiency has remained almost the same over the past few years. During this time, the Weaver, two handed sighted stance has dominated in training, even for close quarter combat, to the exclusion of better battle-tested techniques.

It is my opinion, that most of you have been 'brainwashed' into believing that the Weaver is the only way to shoot a handgun in combat. Actually, the Weaver was developed as a means to achieve greater expertise in the sport of combat competition shooting. Unfortunately, it 'breaks down' under stress and instinctive shooter reactions which take place in close quarter, life threatening combat situations. *Irrespective of this, you have continued to train with it, even though over 50% of all police shootings take place at distances of less than 30 feet, under conditions where there is no time, light or opportunity for the mandatory use of the sights, as required by the Weaver technique.* Now, you would think that any serious firearms trainer would be looking to improve training of police shooters at close quarters so as to increase their hit factor. Still, this has not been the case.

Before the world war I and during the world war II period, most police and military handgun training for actual combat involved shooting on the range, with one hand, at bullseye targets. At this time, most training consists of using two hands to do practically the same thing. You also use numerical scores, almost entirely based on sighted shots, to determine whether or not the officer is fully trained for actual close quarter combat. In reality, your men are only half trained. They certainly are not adequately trained for those situations where most of their actual combat encounters will take place.

The police and the military have been using handguns in mortal combat for several centuries, and there is a proven history of successful handgun use in combat.

Colonel Rex Applegate has enjoyed an extraordinary career as a world renowned leader on Close Combat techniques, as knife designer, and as the foremost expert on Riot Control. Applegate served in the U.S. Army Military Intelligence, and was a member of the OSS during World War II. His book "Kill or Get Killed" is the best selling book on unarmed and armed close combat in history. The U.S. Marine Corps has reprinted "Kill or Get Killed" as an official reference training manual, and Applegate's revolutionary knife fighting and Point Handgun Shooting Techniques are in wide use, earning the unparalleled respect of of virtually everyone in the police shooting and military communities. Applegate is also the winner of the Outstanding American Handgunner Award. His books include *Kill or Get Killed, Crowd & Riot Control, Point Shooting, Shooting For Keeps, Scouting and Patrolling - and more!*

Irrespective of this, the modern technique of the pistol published by Gunsite Press in 1991, is now declared by the 'experts and gurus' to be the basis from which almost all current police handgun training is derived.

Actually, the Weaver stance cannot be validated on the basis of actual combat experience. In fact, it is the 'new kid on the block.' Its merits are based almost solely, on the opinion of those gun writers and self-proclaimed, or 'media-made gurus' who have been promoting it over the years. **I consider this a disservice** to most police and military recruits who have been solely trained in this technique. Currently, this is an escalating though controversial issue of primary and vital importance to all of law enforcement.

For those of you who do not know, I have long been an advocate of the single hand point shooting technique, a combat tested, historically proven, and authenticated method of using the handgun in close quarter, life threatening situations. It is diametrically opposed to most of the basic precepts of the Weaver technique. Also, believe me when I say that if there were any other proven way to improve police handgun performance in close combat, I would be for it, even if it involved standing on your head. I hope that now you can approach this subject with an 'open mind.' Remember, your main concern and primary objective should always be how to teach your officers and recruits to survive and successfully conclude handgun firefights - *which mostly occur at close quarters.*

I am of the opinion that in the case of the sighted shot, I would rely entirely on the isosceles stance. In my opinion, any future successful police handgun training program should be devoted to half isosceles and half point shooting. I would entirely eliminate the Weaver stance training for reasons which I will state later in the program. There is an urgent need of an attitude change in the minds of most trainers and in the law enforcement organizations of this vital, basic subject. At this time, a ground swell is taking place from the ranks to turn things around. I am also appalled at the reluctance of most police firearms

...Colonel Applegate continued

instructors to at least try, or test, the point shooting technique against the Weaver in their training programs. I consider this fact to be detrimental to all active police personnel and military personnel. Now, it is a fact that for the past two decades, most police and military firearm instructors *have blindly assumed* that the two handed Weaver is the only way to shoot a handgun in close quarter combat. The modern technique of the pistol has been accepted as the 'gospel' even though it breaks down in most police combat situations under 30 feet, and where conditions are unlike previous experience on the training range. I am afraid that you have been listening too long to many individuals *who are legends in their own minds* and whose constant mantra seems to be 'always get a flash sight or front sight picture' etc. etc. As far as I am concerned, this is pure B.S. ("Barbara Streisand.")

Now I fully realize that in the past, most policemen have never had to fire their guns in anger. But as the song title says, 'the times they are a changing.' The escalating use of firearms by criminal elements must be matched by not only giving our law enforcement officers the best hand gun training available, but also providing them the proper training mix so that they can *survive* the escalating violence now taking place in our streets and alleys. In fact, those trainers who have been entirely involved in teaching their trainees the two handed Weaver stance technique, remind me of lemmings who mass and go in one direction, oblivious to anything else - and die going over the cliff. There is a place in police handgun training programs for the sighted shot, *but not to the exclusion of other battle-tested techniques.*

Now gun writers and other 'media driven, self styled experts' have been bad-mouthing point shooting for years. Some, have either deliberately or through ignorance associated it with the Bill Jordan style of exhibition shooting which involves shooting an aspirin from gun on the hip. These same people continue to take strong stands against the point shooting technique because they cannot afford at this late date to change their position. Their egos, economic and other factors won't permit anything else. Incidentally, I am not impressed by those trainers who want to 'stroke their own egos' by demonstrating their superior expertise before classes of basic recruits. I am principally interested in what and how they train, not in the number of combat competition tournaments and medals they have won, etc.

Today's average police or military recruit has an *urban* background and no interest in handgun shooting for recreational purposes, etc. Your recruit base is comprised of both sexes from varying ethnic groups, with all types of physical statures, various sizes of hands, etc. Their attitude toward the use of firearms varies, based on what they either *assumed to be true*, prior to training - or what they are told by their instructors. Ninety-nine percent of them consider their handguns as just another tool hanging on the belt, like handcuffs. This is the raw material from which you must create a competent combat shooter, not only because of *their own survival*, but to better perform their professional

duties.

Your men and women recruits and officers deserve the best training you can provide, and they certainly have little or no interest in becoming a 'combat competition' shooter. I say *'wake up and smell the roses' before more dirt covers police caskets.* To some of you, these statements may come as a rude shock and I do not expect to be overwhelmed with applause at the end of this session. However, I do ask you to grant me the courtesy of your attention. In return, I'll try to keep you from going to sleep.

The Weaver Stance

We all know the story about how, in the 1950's, Jack Weaver introduced the Weaver stance into combat competition shooting, a recreational sport.

This system was picked up and very successfully promoted by the guru from Gunsite. Many other writers and 'experts' have since been responsible for its almost universal acceptance as the way to shoot a handgun in simulated combat. Movies, TV, The Gun Press, and many authors have 'spawned' numerous books, articles and videos on

"Point shooting is the employment of the handgun in close quarter combat without the need or use of the sights.

**Point Shooting,
(contrary to some of these self-appointed gurus)
is not some untested, untried theory!"**

Colonel Rex Applegate

this method of two handed, sighted, handgun shooting. Almost 100 civilian shooting schools also now exist promoting the two handed Weaver as the only way to shoot a handgun in actual combat. Entire industries are now devoted to satisfying the needs of combat competition shooters. Special sights, grips, and other accessories abound. Handgun manufacturers and gunsmiths have made a 'killing' catering to combat competition shooters. The Colt model 1911 and its many clones is touted as 'the weapon' for successful handgun use in IPSC shooting circles and also as an ideal civilian defensive handgun in the civilian shooting schools. Fortunately, most law enforcement has not bought into the recommendations of the gurus and shooting cults which have evolved around this antiquated, but still famous handgun.

Compared to the basic shooting stance, Isosceles and Point, the Weaver requires complex motor skills, requiring hand-eye coordination and a series of timed muscle movements working together to achieve sighted fire accuracy. The Weaver shooter must spend many hours on the range, expend a relatively great amount of more ammunition, and undergo constant training and retraining to build up what is known as 'muscle memory' which is supposed to replace natural instinctive responses in stress situations.

To assume the Weaver stance, the shooter stands upright, with his strong side at a 45 degree angle away from the target. The strong, or gun supporting hand, is slightly bent, and the supporting arm is bent sharply, elbow pointing toward the ground. Isometric tension is relied upon for stability. The gun hand pushes out, and the support hand pulls to firm up the sight picture. This stance also enables quick recoil recovery. Also involved are the use of the dominant eye, and separate trigger finger control. Generally, it is excellent in achieving high scores in IPSC type competition shooting. ***However, it does not meet the needs of the shooter in actual close quarter, high tension combat situations.***

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...Colonel Applegate continued

On the other hand, the two hand Isosceles stance is simple, compared to the Weaver. It has been battle tested. It takes advantage of more natural and instinctive shooter reactions when under combat stress. What is even more important, is the fact that most shooters, no matter how well trained in the Weaver, instinctively revert to the Isosceles when faced with life threatening situations. This is why I say 'throw out' the Weaver in police training programs. Recent police history and modern research support my conclusion. We used it in world war II because it worked for sighted handgun fire in combat, whereas the single hand-bullseye training in effect in the police and military programs at that time, did not.

Single hand, Point Shooting

When any individual is subjected to combat stress and a life threatening situation at close quarters, he instinctively faces the threat with both eyes open, focusing on the target, and assumes an instinctive natural forward crouch. In the case of the handgun shooter, the gun is gripped **convulsively**. These are the building blocks around which single hand point shooting is based. The Isosceles, two handed, sighted shooter reacts much the same in similar circumstances.

The point shooter locks his wrist and elbow, lifts, or raises his arm in a pump hand motion until the gun reaches eye level, and he fires. His eyes never leave the target. Gun sights and process of sighting are completely disregarded. Separate trigger finger function and recoil control are not important factors because he is gripping the gun convulsively and squeezes the whole hand when activating the trigger. Head hitting accuracy is possible at a range of up to 15 yards in all kinds of light and terrain conditions, from either a stationary or moving position. Combat competence in point shooting can be achieved regardless of shooter background and the weapon used. Trainers will find that combat expertise can be developed in a shorter training time with less ammunition expenditure and little need for constant retraining. The reason all this is possible, is because point shooting is based on how the mind, body and eyes - instinctively react under combat stress. Simply put, it's a natural instinctive process like raising your hand and pointing the gun barrel as you would your finger (etc.)

The free hand is used to maintain balance when stationary or moving, while using a flashlight, opening a car door, avoiding body contact, etc. From a holstered position, the body bends forward in the instinctive crouch position, the handgun is drawn and lifted, or raised to the firing position.

This system of handgun shooting at close quarters has a long history of success in actual combat, dating back to prior world war I. It is well documented.

I have simplified these definitions of stances, but have covered the basics. At the present time, there are well illustrated books and videos also describing the point shooting technique and its combat background, history, etc. Numerous articles covering this subject have recently appeared in the Guns Press. Single hand, point shooting is *the best, most practical means* for the military man, policeman, or civilian to shoot at close quarters - in *actual*, ('not 'simulated') combat situations.

Pushing-Shoving The Handgun

Every day, there is a newspaper report describing how police and criminals engage in firefights at very close ranges **with many shots fired, and few hits scored**.

I am now going to cover one of the major reasons the police or soldier misses in handgun combat, even at very close ranges.

Basically, this is because the stressed shooter grips his weapon convulsively, and pushes, punches, or shoves his weapon at the target before firing. When this happens, the design of the handgun, as well as the delivery method prior to firing, greatly effects accuracy, and ultimately, lives. I am aware that many of you actively conduct 'drills' based on pushing or shoving the handgun at the targets. I am also aware that many 'gurus' advocate this method of shooting."

(Demonstration shown here, using a laser mounted model 1911 & Whitney handgun. Shows how almost all handguns, when gripped convulsively under shooter tension, will always end up pointing downward when pushed or shoved at the adversary, before firing.)

Col. Applegate's speech continues:

"Where does Jeff Cooper stand on close quarter handgun training? **In his 1961 book**, he states that 90% of combat pistol shooting is done with one hand, and that if you are trained to hit only if you can see the sights, *you are only 8% effective*. *At this time*, he has turned almost 100% around, and advocates the two handed Weaver sighted shot for almost all handgun combat situations. *'You can't have it both ways.'*"

Combat Handgun Shooting Stances And Techniques: Training To Survive. By Eugene Nielsen, SWAT Magazine, Feb. '98.

Studies show that in life-threatening, spontaneous shooting situations, shooters revert to a one-handed, crouching stance - no matter how they have been trained. Studies show that shooters revert to the Isosceles stance in life threatening spontaneous shooting situations at longer ranges. Although the overall level of firearms training given to police recruits has improved substantially over the years, the level of combat marksmanship has not. According to some statistics, on the average, less than one in six rounds fired by officers hits the assailant. *Clearly, something is still missing in the standard training process. Training needs to be reality based.* Although training in traditional marksmanship skills is important, more emphasis must be placed on developing truly effective fighting skills. Fairbairn and Sykes recognized this over 70 years ago. *Rex Applegate's comment: "This is a good example of a recent trend among more serious researchers and writers, who have come up with a more balanced viewpoint on the subject of handgun combat shooting."*

Colonel Applegate directs the attention of firearms instructors to the Scientific and Test Data Validating the Isosceles and Single Hand Point Shooting Techniques (by Bruce Siddle, Feb. 1998)

Colonel Applegate: "The paper by Bruce Siddle and the research by other of his associates is extremely important, because it forms a basic, independent research source as to why the Isosceles and Single Handed Point Shooting Systems perform best in combat. It will be invaluable for validation of these techniques from the legal and liability standpoints. In addition, this paper outlines, from a scientific basis, why the Point Shooting and Isosceles techniques were so successful in actual combat. Every serious firearms trainer should be aware of this paper and its contents, when developing a program of training for his department."

...Colonel Applegate continued

Siddle Quotes: "This research will show that sympathetic nervous system (SNS) activation causes pupil dilation, a decrease in blood flow to the periphery of the retina and the inability to use the dominant eye. The result is the loss of near vision and the ability to focus on the front sight, focusing on the threat and the collapse of the peripheral vision, and forced binocular vision. This latter SNS visual adaptation response causes the head and body to square on the threat, a foundation of the Isosceles stance. But when someone perceives that their life is in jeopardy, the sympathetic nervous system is automatically activated, and is virtually uncontrollable.

Weaver falls into the complex motor skill category and will generally degrade once the heart rate peaks to 145 beats per minute. This is important since a deadly force threat will drive the heart rate well above 200 beats per minute. Canon (1915) found that SNS excitement triggers pupil dilation, leading to the loss of near vision. The SNS also disrupts the ability to focus, which is a function controlled by the tension on the ciliary muscle. This muscle maintains the convex shape of the lens, which is necessary for clarity and focus. But when the SNS is activated, the ciliary muscle relaxes, and the contour of the lens changes from a convex to a flattened state. This results in a loss of depth perception, and the ability to focus on close objects. Therefore, the ability to focus on the front sight of a handgun is not possible when the SNS is activated. Officers will not use their front sights if the SNS is activated. Studies found that when an officer is confronted with a spontaneous threat, or startled, the body will uncontrollably square on the threat and assume a point shoulder position. The most interesting aspect of this study, is that it is consistent with the Fairbairn/Sykes and Applegate research, which was based on the observation of men's natural positioning in actual combat.

Understanding the implications of the SNS in combat is fundamental to selecting a combat firearms system. *The research clearly substantiates Point Shooting Principles and the system long advocated by Col. Applegate.*"

Colonel Applegate: "For the past two years, the Law Enforcement Training Program at Hocking College in Nelsonville, Ohio has been conducting a single handed Point Shooting Program. This college is accredited in the state of Ohio and trains new law enforcement recruits, retrains officers on duty, and generally conducts its shooting program so as to meet the Ohio state standards for training of law enforcement officers. The program has an outstanding success! It was fully described in the September 1997 issue of Law & Order magazine. It is ongoing, and escalating in scope. I think it is extremely important that any serious trainer attend one of their special firearms instructor courses if possible. Although the techniques of the Isosceles and Point Shooting are relatively simple and easy to teach, the training methods developed at Hocking should be made available to law enforcement handgun trainers in order to accelerate programs in their own departments. My suggestion is that you telephone Steve Barron at 740-753-3591, extension 2220. The address of the training facility is: Hocking College, Washington Hall, 450 W. Washington Street, Nelsonville, Ohio USA 45764. Their fax number is 740-573-3031.

(To our readers, the Siddle Report which is titled "Scientific and Test Data Validating the Isosceles and

Single-Hand Point Shooting Techniques" can be obtained by contacting: PPCT Management Systems, Inc., 500 South Illinois, Suite #3, Millstadt, Illinois, 62260. Their phone number is 618-476-3535. Their fax number is: 618-476-3323. Bruce Siddle is a 19 year law enforcement veteran, and the Executive Director of PPCT Management, one of the largest research based use-of-force training organizations in the world. Mr. Siddle has been an active consultant for hundreds of criminal justice agencies, including special operations/warfare units for the U.S. Dept. of Navy, U.S. Dept. of Army, U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Dept. of defense, the FBI's Hostage Rescue Unit, the U.S. Secret Service, etc. etc.)

For Your Information:

√ During the years 1972-92, there were 1,722 police officers killed in armed encounters. The following is a breakdown of the distances in which these officers were fatally shot:

- √ **0-5 ft** - 928 officers fatally shot (percentage is 53.89)
- √ **6-10 ft** - 342 officers fatally shot (percentage is 19.68)
- √ **11-20 ft** - 237 officers fatally shot (percentage is 13.77)
- √ **21-50** - 118 officers fatally shot (percentage is 6.85)
- √ **50 ft plus** - 97 officers fatally shot (percentage is 5.63)

Colonel Applegate: "Proper training in combat point shooting achieves quicker expertise, does not necessitate so much retraining to maintain proficiency, saves more police lives, and takes more criminals off the streets. There has been too much concentration on what is erroneously called the "new modern technique" promoted by self-appointed gurus instead of what is, and has been proven in combat!"

(In 1996, Colonel Applegate produced a video for Paladin called "Shooting For Keeps." It covers in detail, point shooting techniques. Additional information may be found on the blue sheet enclosed with your "Informed Source" Intelligence Newsletter.)

EPILOGUE

"During recent months, three national major state police agencies have adopted Point Shooting. The largest of these agencies is the California Highway Patrol (5,500 men). They have just finished the training process and adopted the single handed point shooting technique for employment in the majority of police-criminal firefight situations. In addition, one major Federal police agency and numerous small civil law enforcement agencies have also adopted the technique. The U.S. Military is currently undergoing testing procedures so as to, once again, possibly adopt the technique which was abandoned shortly after WWII."

Col Applegate

Learn this and don't forget it:

"The best preparation for tomorrow - is to train superbly well today!"

Tribute: Colonel Applegate

"We were saddened to announce to you that Colonel Applegate passed away in mid July. He may be gone from our immediate presence, but there is no death, only a mustering out to a permanent duty station. What he's given to us all these years, stays with us, and for that, we are all grateful, determined to further his efforts. I'll miss him...the special friend, the man, the colleague, the leader....."

*FC Miller, Editor
"Informed Source" Intelligence Newsletter*

"It's seldom that you get to be friends with a man who is a legend. The Colonel was just such a man; a hero, a thinker, a pioneer, colorful, honorable, a leader of men, outrageously funny once he got to know you, and a fine gentleman of "the old school." It's a true pleasure to have been his friend, and to have learned from him. I believe that if I were to accomplish just half as much as he has, I would probably have to start my life all over again, work three times as hard, and live to be 150.

*As always, I salute you!"
Michael Miller,
CEO Pro•files Threat CounterMeasures Group*

"Colonel Rex Applegate would have become a legend no matter which century fate chose for him. Thankfully, he became a legend in our time and we are all the wiser and safer because of his untiring efforts to instruct and encourage. However, greater than all of his knowledge and skill, was the twinkle in his eye. He knew that life was to be challenged, not just lived. In his memory, let the contest begin!"

*Ed Dugan, President
Halliday International*

"Colonel Applegate was a special person, one of those folks whom once having come into your life, you'd never be quite the same again. He will be missed dearly by those of us who came to love him. The Conferences will have something missing, and we all hope our paths will again cross. God bless you Colonel, and all that you stood for - you were a great American."

Col. James Fraser (ret), SoftRisk Technologies

"Colonel Rex Applegate was the pioneer in skill areas of defensive tactics for the soldier, the law officer, and the protective agent. He knew more about unarmed measures of defense, knives and handguns than an encyclopedia. He was the creator, the author, the teacher and the resource. His humor, tolerance, wisdom and creativity will never again be duplicated by one single individual. Those of us who were privileged to know him feel very disturbed at his passing, but honored to have been his friend."

*Dr. Richard W. Kobetz
Director, The Executive Protection Institute*



L to R Col. Rex Applegate "hanging out" with two of his buddies, Michael C. Miller (CEO Pro•Files Threat CounterMeasures Group) and Col. Jim Fraser (ret) Softrisk Technologies, at an IACP Conference/Trade Show.

Colonel Applegate with one of the numerous awards he earned over his distinguished career, the 1996 Outstanding American Handgunners Award.



"Very few people have enlightened the world with expertises as well as proven knowledge such as Col. Applegate has done. I have learned many things from his articles, lectures and training, but the truest being that good training comes from seasoned people, and I am honored that part of my training came from his proven expertise. The world will miss him, but anyone who had the pleasure of knowing and learning from him, will pass on their knowledge and keep him alive in our professions for eternity. To you Colonel Applegate I give you a final salute and say with all due respect 'Sir, thank you for what you have done for your country, but mostly for what you have done for your personnel. God Bless!'"

Thomas J Patire, Military Instructor