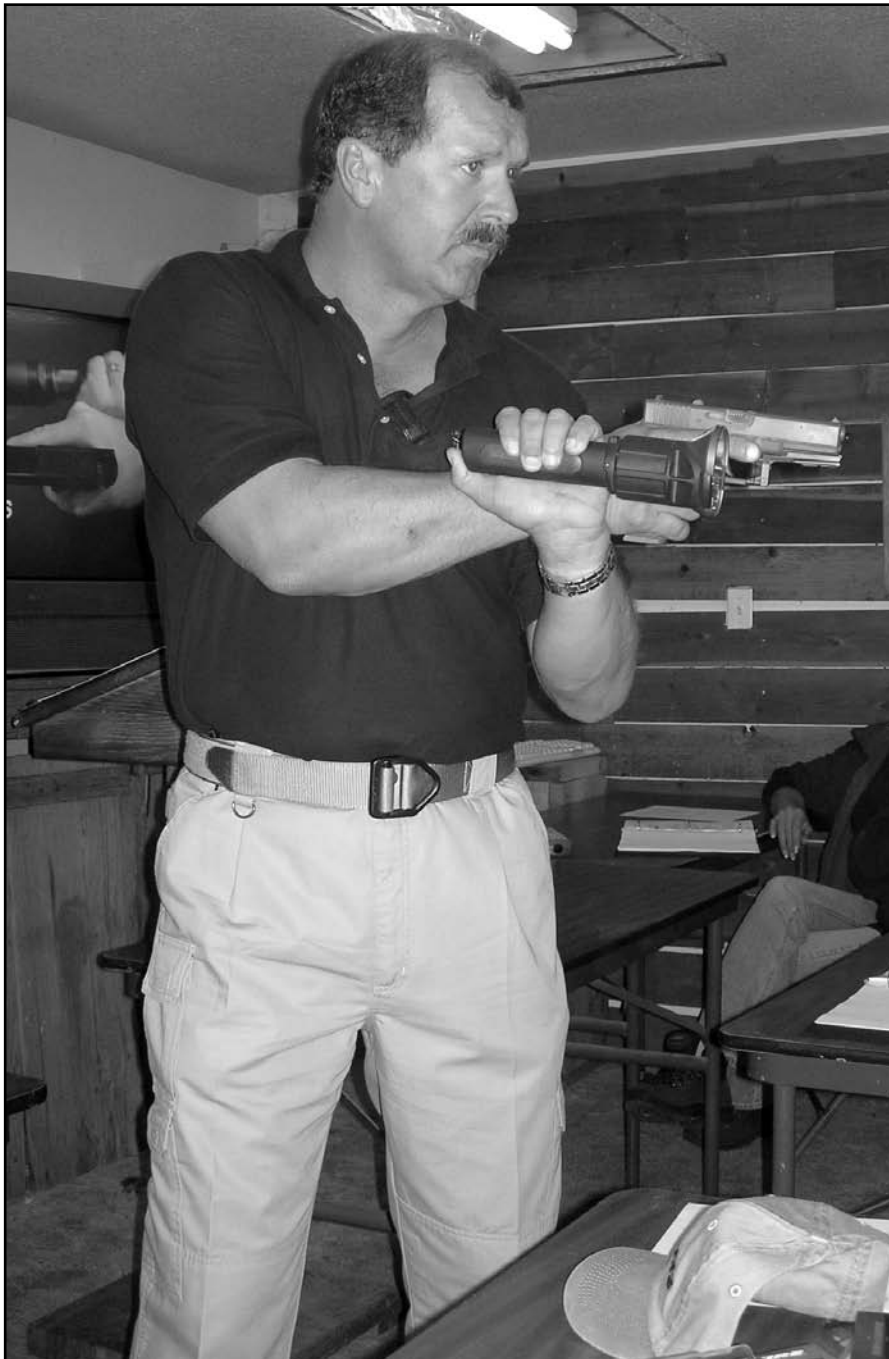




SUREFIRE'S Low Light Shooting



The students were exposed to several techniques for using a flashlight. Here the Harries technique with SureFire 10X Dominator rechargeable light.

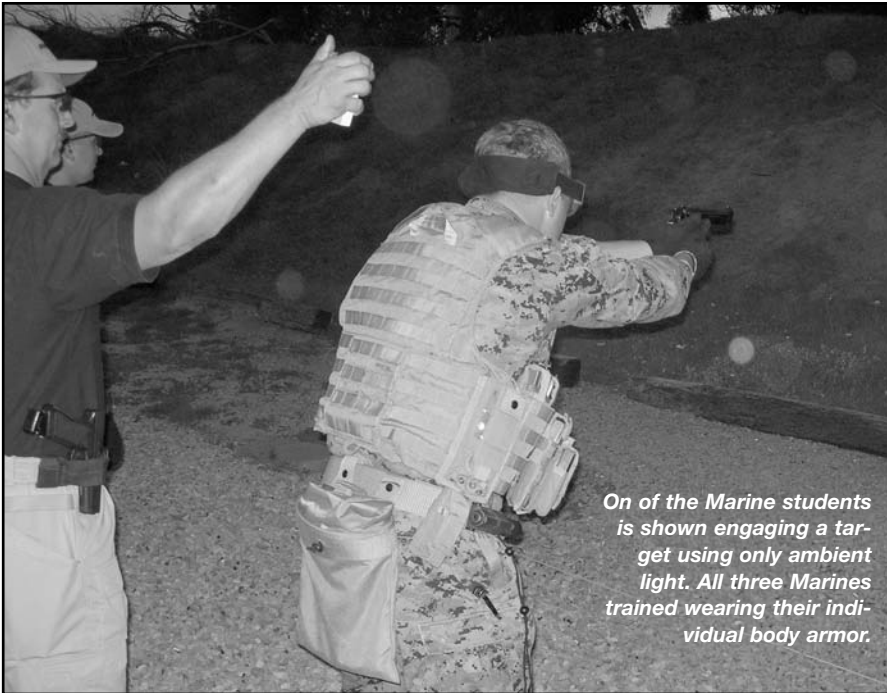
Long days and extensive drills—where tactics and light stand alone!

By Rob Garrett

“We are here to show you the safest tactics that we know. No tactics are safe!”

These were Bill Murphy's opening words on day one of SureFire's Low Light Operator/Trainer Course. Murphy should know. He has over 25 years of law enforcement experience, spending the last 19 years with the Huntington Beach Police Department. He is also an experienced firearms instructor and Rangemaster, holding certification #44 from API Gunsite. In addition, he has been affiliated with SureFire for the last nine years and is one of the original cadre of instructors for the SureFire Institute. Murphy is also an experienced SWAT operator who has been involved in several deadly force encounters.

I had an opportunity to meet Murphy and spend two full days learning from him when I attended the Low Light Operator/Instructor Course, Level 1. The course is a two-day course with approximately 20 hours of instruction. While designated Level 1, this is not a beginner's course or a "learn to train" course or a firearms instructor's course. Students should be certified and experienced instructors or rangemasters, and have advanced skill levels with their pistols. While some techniques such as tactical reloads are discussed, the class focuses on principles for addressing threats in a low light environment with, and without, a light. In other words, if the student can't run their pistol under time and stress, clear malfunctions, move and shoot or shoot and move, while learning new techniques and methods, they need to first



On of the Marine students is shown engaging a target using only ambient light. All three Marines trained wearing their individual body armor.



The range exercises started out with basic skill drills.

improve their basic skills before applying.

Doug Martin was the co-instructor and also has close to 20 years in law enforcement. Martin started his career with LAPD and worked with the LADP CRASH unit prior to moving to the Huntington Beach PD. Martin and Murphy are partners on the HBPD SWAT Team and are extensively involved with training HBPD officers in firearms and tactics. Interestingly, the SWAT Team trains all of the HBPD officers in basic tactics and entry techniques. This allows the patrol officers



Student engages steel targets using the Harries technique.

who are first responders to make entries with SWAT officers during an active shooting or crime-in-progress incident.

The class I attended was made up of three members of the United States Marine Corps, two prior special forces veterans, two full-time law enforcement officers, and one private security professional. Day one started with an orientation and explanation of the course objectives.

Students should understand the reasons for low-light training; the five primary flashlight techniques; the concept of light as a force option and the ten key principles of low-light tactics. Students should be able to identify various lighting conditions; be able to apply four handheld flashlight techniques; and develop decision-making ability in low-light conditions under stress.

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After entering the doorway, the students cover the entire room while remaining in contact with each other. Situational awareness is critical when operating in a low-light environment.

My first thought was that this is a lot to absorb in two days, even if they are long days. I was right. This course could easily be expanded into 40 hours. Murphy explained that the two-day course curriculum lessens the impact on agency budgets and staffing levels. Shorter courses are more affordable, will draw more students, and therefore increase the number of trained instructors in the field. While the days were long and the drills extensive, the format of the course provided maximum impact and learning.

Day One

After spending the first morning in the classroom, the students were ready to burn some powder. The initial range drills were designed to assess the skill level of each of the students. One and two-drills concentrated on a smooth and deliberate presentation from the holster and proper shot placement. Following the Gunsite training model, after a few warm-ups, each student was placed on a timer that gave them a performance benchmark. As the afternoon progressed, positions were adjusted and draw strokes were refined. As I've attended numerous firearms schools in 28 years of law enforcement, I can say that the techniques used by Murphy and Martin are first rate. While they are both veteran SWAT operators, they did not have the "we're SWAT and you're not" attitude. Their coaching techniques and manner of instruction made learning easy.

The afternoon continued with a review of modern flashlight techniques, including Harries, Rogers/SureFire, Modified FBI, and Neck Index. The Ayooob technique that requires a flash-



Students prepare to clear a threshold using the two different techniques. The student in the foreground is using the SureFire/Rogers technique while the second student uses a modified FBI technique.

light with a side switch was not utilized. Each student was given a SureFire G2Z flashlight and belt holster when they arrived. These lights took a real beating during the practical exercises without any problems. Practicing the flashlight techniques during daylight allowed the instructors to identify problems and offer suggestions. More importantly, it allowed the students to become familiar with the techniques in a safe manner. This was important since SureFire operates a "hot range" where the student is responsible for keeping his pistol in a ready condition at all times.

As the drills progressed, each student was again placed on the timer to gauge improvement as well as provide

a spirit of competition.

After a supper break, the class returned to the range for the low-light live fire. The initial drills were a repeat of those practiced during the afternoon. Again, the level of individual coaching enabled each student to make corrections and improve their skills in a short timeframe. Times were decreased and the difficulty of the drills increased. Initially students started with pistol and light in a ready position. However, before the night was out, students were drawing the light and pistol, assuming a proper position, and engaging the target with two rounds. Several students broke two seconds for this drill.

After working numerous individual



SureFire offers suppressors for the M4. (SureFire photo)



Here one of the Marines demonstrates the modified FBI technique while remaining in contact with his partner.

drills on single targets, the students participated in "Drill on Steel," where a pair of students engaged steel poppers at various ranges. The purpose of this drill was to teach coordination, communication and concentration. Many students have never engaged in a live-fire exercise where a second pistol is being discharged within two or three feet of their face. Muzzle flash, blast and expended brass all work to distract the shooter. Shooters were also expected to engage targets that were illuminated using a railroad flare. To simulate both front and back lighting, the flares were placed in front and behind the targets. Smoke added to the distraction and difficulty. It was in this exercise that the Marines found themselves at a disadvantage. While law enforcement is accustomed to having pistols with tritium night sights, very few military line units have this advantage. As a result, the Marines, with their M9 Berettas, had to work significantly harder to make solid hits.

The night fire ended with a familiarization course with a Remington 870 and M4 carbine, both equipped with SureFire lights. The highlight was firing the M4 with SureFire's suppressor. SureFire has made significant inroads in the suppressor market and their 5.56mm suppressor proved to be very effective.

Guns & Gear

One of the decisions I had to make was what pistol, holster and accessories to use. I decided to shoot a GLOCK 17 equipped with XS Express sights with the large white dot and tritium insert. For a holster, I chose BlackHawk's CQC SERPA carbon fiber holster in matte OD. While I had briefly tested the SERPA holster, I had not used it under time or stress environment. For those not familiar with the SERPA, it's an open top, carbon fiber holster with a retention lever that automatically engages the triggerguard when the pistol is placed in the holster. The release lever, located on the outside edge of the holster, is activated during the draw stroke by pressure from the trigger finger.

The night before range day, I spent about 15 minutes practicing with the holster. During the live range work on day one, I estimate that I completed between 200 and 250 presentations from the holster with the majority being at full speed and under a timer. I am happy to say that I fumbled only one draw stroke the entire day. Toward the end of the class I was managing to draw and fire two rounds with a flashlight in about 1.7 seconds. It was so natural that I forgot that the holster had an active retention device. This is a tribute to the intuitive design of the holster rather than my pistol skills. I also

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utilized two CQC open-top magazine pouches and a BlackHawk reinforced instructor's belt. All performed flawlessly and I never lost any equipment.

I also used the course to test the new Crimson Trace GLOCK laser. The LG-617 is a modular unit that fits over the upper portion of the back strap. A single activation button is located in the center of the unit's back strap. As with all Crimson Trace Lasergrips, the activation is intuitive and requires no additional actions other than obtaining a proper grip on the pistol. I also found that the unit improved the pointing characteristics of the GLOCK by lowering the muzzle. The one criticism I have is that the GLOCK unit does not have a master on/off switch. The ease of activation is a serious liability when conducting a covert search. In my opinion, this is an essential feature that should be addressed. Even so, the LG-617 is a welcome addition to the Lasergrip line and is proving to be very popular.

Day Two

The second morning started out with a demonstration of various techniques for clearing a room, crossing thresholds and advancing on danger areas. A series of portable buildings served as an effective shoot-house. After walking through the techniques with both two and three-person teams, it was time to get down to business. Force-on-force training is the most effective tool in teaching new techniques and reinforcing mistakes. Pain dissuades one from making the same mistake twice.

After a detailed safety briefing, students were searched for any live rounds or weapons. Only then were we issued pistols modified for Simunitions. Prior to going force-on-force, each team cleared the building while neutralizing shoot or no-shoot targets. Students were then paired into teams and scenarios were set up by the instructors. A key element in training is to have a clear and specific objective. All too often, "sims training" becomes a big paintball game where the only lesson learned is how quickly one can get shot. This was not the case in this class. It was important that the student participate in both the suspect and officer role. As the suspect, students were able to observe the mistakes made by those attempting to clear the building. These mistakes included not reading the light, not recognizing when the student was backlit, and not utilizing the flashlight to distract or dominate the environment.

The photos from the "sims training"



What the well dressed GLOCK wears in 2006, XS Express Sights, SureFire X200 light with tape switch, and new Crimson Trace Laser unit. The author utilized Remington 124gr FMJ ammo exclusively.



The SureFire X200 utilizes a specially designed lens to focus the LED beam. The lens is recessed for better protection.



The tape switch was developed in conjunction with the US military. It is very low profile and allows the operator to activate the light with normal pressure from the middle finger.

were staged after the training was completed. The instructor cleared the weapons and safety rules were enforced. This is the reason that the students are not wearing eye protection or other protective equipment.

Much of SureFire's training curriculum can be utilized with a variety of flashlights. However, the instructors point out the advantages of SureFire products over the competition. According to the literature, a tactical light must have three features. The first is a high-output beam that is free from distortion, dark rings and shadows. The second, and perhaps the most important, is a momentary switch located in



The author used a CQC SERPA holster from BlackHawk. Despite having limited experience with this design, sub-second presentations became routine.

the tailcap. Third is a reliable power source that is provided by either lithium or quality rechargeable batteries. The issue of battery cost was addressed several years ago when SureFire started offering their own line of SF123 lithium batteries.

By the end of the second day, every student came away with a greater appreciation for techniques that SureFire has refined over the years. Each student was also provided with an instructor's manual and two CDs that contain training presentations and videos. I should mention that the skills that were taught cannot be mastered in a two-day course. However, the training experience, when combined with the reference material, will enable the student to hone his or her skills, and be able to impart these skills to others.

Summing Up

The SureFire Institute consists of a small staff of dedicated trainers who have many years of law enforcement and military experience. The question may be asked, why is low-light training needed? Consider the following statistics, taken from SureFire material:

- More than two out of three fatal officer shootings occur during the hours of darkness, or in locations where the light is very dim.
- Most officer-involved shootings occur within two minutes of the officer arriving on the scene, before the officer's vision has a chance to become dark-adapted.
- Day shift officers regularly operate in low-light conditions—inside buildings, closets, tunnels, etc.
- Every officer has a flashlight, but are they properly trained in the use?
- Most officer-involved shootings in

occur in diminished lighting conditions, yet most training occurs during normal lighting conditions.

It is equally important for our warriors who are fighting the global war on terrorism. Take a look at many of the soldiers in Iraq and other places. They are conducting nighttime raids, searching tunnels, huts and any dark hole where the enemy might hide. Weapon-mounted lights are now essential equipment for not only special operations units but for line infantry units as well. Whatever the enemy, and wherever the threat, it cannot be successfully engaged until the threat is identified. In most cases, that identification is made using white light. That is where the tactics and lights of SureFire stand alone.

I have been a full-time law enforcement officer for the past 28 years and have attended numerous firearms and tactics classes. The SureFire Course rates as one of the best courses I have attended. The quality of instruction and the qualifications of the instructors could not have been better. While these tactics are not considered classified, I do consider them sensitive and therefore have omitted specific details from the article. I remember Bill Murphy on the first day saying that no tactic is safe. The safest option is not to go through the door. However, many of us do not have that option. Given that, I believe that the tactics that SureFire teaches are sound and as safe as possible. If experience is the best teacher, then the three whelps I have from being hit by Simunitions will serve me well. ■

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