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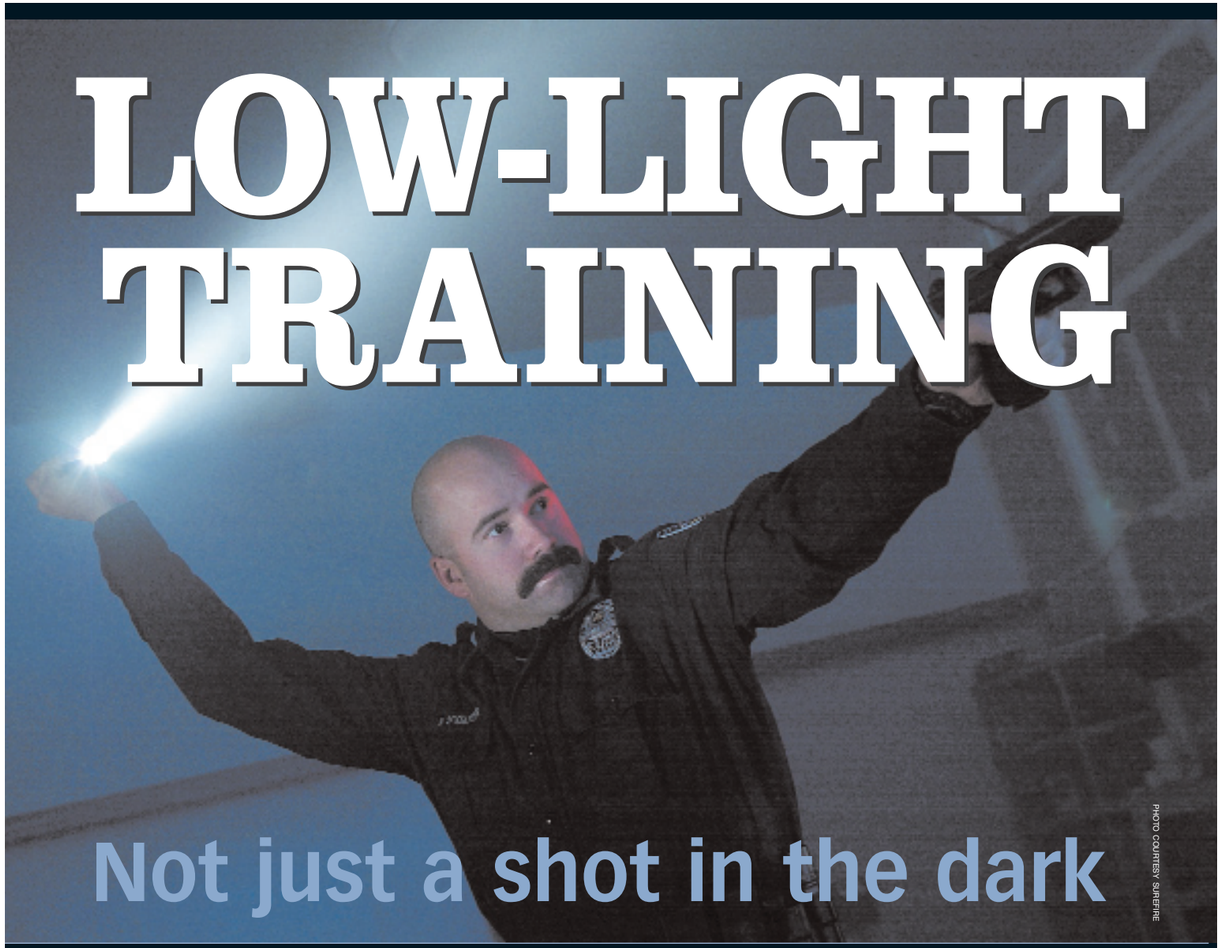

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Not just a shot in the dark

BY JOHN T. MEYER, JR.

During a recent meeting of Team One Network instructors, more than 20 of us spent time discussing low-light training, which we agreed is a critical but sometimes short-changed component of officer-survival courses. What follows summarizes what we discussed, our conclusions about how to enhance low-light training and current doctrine dealing with weapon-mounted lights.

Training Truths

We discovered many of us have been teaching low-light techniques for years. Most started with the FBI technique (shown above) and then progressed to the Harries (see photos, p. 48). These days, there are more than eight versions of flashlight techniques with many names, but we agreed that no matter how many techniques you try, you must find the one or two that work best for you and stick with them instead of introducing new techniques every time you train. While instructors must know all of the techniques in order to offer various options to their trainees, those officers must find what works best for them and then practice that technique or techniques until they are proficient. Just like shooting skills, consistency and reinforcement are positive and critical factors in officer-survival training. Officers who survive deadly encounters do so because they fight the way they've been trained.

We also agreed on another issue: As instructors, we must do more that just teach flashlight-shooting techniques. We must teach officers how to operate in low-light conditions, and how to use light and darkness, shadow, silhouette and even "shock and awe" to gain the tactical advantage. While knowing how to shoot a gun with a flashlight is certainly a necessary survival tool, the officer operates in low-light conditions far more than they shoot in low-light conditions.

LOW-LIGHT DRILLS

How do you teach those survival skills? Below, I've listed some low-light training non-shooting drills that will help your officers learn how to make light an ally through guided discovery. By giving students a scenario—putting them in the middle of a situation—the officers get practical experience while discovering on their own what works best for them. *The key:* Instruct the officers to observe the effects of light from numerous perspectives so they learn how to make effective use of light under real-world conditions.

LIGHTS ON-AND-OFF DEMO

Position one half of the students inside the classroom looking out a window, and the other half outside.

- ☐ Turn the lights on in classroom, with no lights outside;
- ☐ Turn the lights on in classroom, with lights on outside;
- ☐ Turn the lights off in classroom, with lights on outside; and
- ☐ Turn the lights off in classroom, with the lights off outside.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: If you are in a darker environment than your adversaries, it's harder for them to see you than vice versa.

PATROL CAR DEMO

Students should observe what the officer looks like in the car:

- ☐ With the interior light on (white);
- ☐ With the overhead light on (red);
- ☐ With a laptop computer or MDT on;
- ☐ Holding a lit cigarette lighter;
- ☐ Holding a live cell phone;
- ☐ With the headlights on and off;
- ☐ With the overheads on and off;
- ☐ Holding a live penlight or stylus light; and
- ☐ As the vehicle approaches using different lighting techniques to distract.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: It doesn't take much to light you up, but light shining in your adversary's eyes will make a huge difference in what they can see and how they react.

SEARCH DRILLS

Students take turns searching and observing inside a room. During the search, students should be able to identify guns and other items. Scenarios should include:

- ☐ Constant-on flashlight;
- ☐ Flashing and moving;
- ☐ Painting and moving;
- ☐ Door backlighting;
- ☐ Strobe lights;
- ☐ Offensive light use; and a
- ☐ Hall drill (moving behind an intense, high-powered light).

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: The students should learn how to observe, how to use light intermittently, how to move and how to search for cover, and they should learn the pros and cons of these different techniques.

We must teach officers how to... use light & darkness, shadow, silhouette & even "shock & awe" to gain the tactical advantage.

KIM'S GAMES

I learned these drills from sniper-instructor schools. Students must identify objects and colors under time and illumination pressures. They must identify objects held by the instructor from 15–20 yards by using a flash or paint technique from behind cover. We use the 15–20 yard range because it's the maximum effective range for most tactical flashlights. Team One Instructor John Zamrok says, "You can't outshoot your light," which means you must always be able to identify your target. Students should make IDs from the following positions:

- ☐ Straight on (using only the flashlight);
- ☐ With the suspect backlit;
- ☐ With the suspect side-lit at 90-degree angle; and
- ☐ With one student off-center with another student opposite of center (using only the flashlights).

They should try to identify the following items:

- ☐ A handgun, stainless;
- ☐ A blue or red handgun;
- ☐ A screwdriver or knife;
- ☐ A baseball bat;
- ☐ A long gun;
- ☐ A flashlight;
- ☐ A badge;
- ☐ A rubber hose;
- ☐ A wallet; and
- ☐ A spray can.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: The students should learn how difficult it is to identify objects and colors under stress without proper light, and how additional light sources and the use of angles make the situation easier.

Weapon-Mounted Lights

In a recent PoliceOne.com survey, nearly half of the more than 1,100 officers polled worked in agencies that allowed the use of weapon-mounted lights. Here's our take on these tools: The gun-mounted light enhances an officer's ability to identify and engage a target if the officer has justification/reason to draw their gun in the first place. A gun-mounted light is not an illumination tool; consider it an element of a law-enforcement weapons system.

With that in mind, we strongly recommend that officers who install lights designed to mount on a pistol purchase a holster to accommodate the pistol with the light attached. (The PoliceOne.com poll found that roughly 40 percent of the officers polled who used a weapons-mounted light carried a holster that allowed the light to remain on the handgun.) Many manufacturers make such duty holsters.

We don't contradict manufacturer's policies—always verify the weapon is →→

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Here's the Harries flashlight technique from two different angles.

PHOTOS COURTESY SUREFIRE

PHOTO JOHN MEYER

A gun-mounted light is not an illumination tool; consider it an element of a law-enforcement weapons system.

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