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TRIPOD SHOOTING FOR LE SNIPERS

Observations from a recent LE Advanced Sniper Workshop

We had 11 trained students in this course. All but two had several years of experience as operational police snipers to my understanding. They attended from Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Some served in gigantic organizations and others worked in small municipalities or SO's. The tempo in this course is purposefully slow and deliberate to entice class communication and the sharing of skills and experience, unlike the tempo of the basic schools all had attended. All came to learn, and that we did. The vibe is laid back and respectful as everyone interacts to help each other to solve problems and ultimately get better.

As a "workshop" there is no testing or qualification COF. It's about sharing with each other as our staff guides the two-day course. Our staff's focus is to conduct COF's that many LE snipers don't get a lot of time to do during their in-service training. However, our main objective is really to get these LE snipers to learn what their real capabilities and limitations are.

EXAMPLE: at the opening of the class, we asked the snipers to tell us what the maximum range would be that they could confidently make a hostage rescue shot off a tripod from the standing position, under otherwise perfect environmental conditions? The scenario is that the bad guy is holding a handgun to the hostage's head with his finger on the trigger. Therefore, **IF** the sniper chooses to shoot the bad guy, anything but a cranial vault hit could result in the bad guy shooting the hostage.

- In this particular class, the combined average range was **93 yards**. So, we went out and they shot off their tripods in a full standing position at an 8"x11" piece of static paper that had a hostage and a hostage taker illustration. Only hits that were within the hostage takers cranial vault were considered good hits.

RESULTS: Everyone shot the COF. Nobody got on their rifle and decided that they could not make the shot. No hostages were hit. There were 3 misses (below the cranial vault). The class success rate (good hits) was: **72%**

The next day the snipers reported to Center Mass (indoor range) and go through a series of live fire scenarios using our CAPS simulator that allows the student to engage using their gun, ammo, accuracy and most of all, judgement. Each of the 11 LE snipers had the opportunity to shoot the same hostage rescue scenario in the video shown in this post using their tripod in a full standing position. The range is only **15 yards**, which is not super uncommon for LE snipers, especially those working in urban and sub-urban areas.

RESULTS: Everyone shot the COF. Nobody got on their rifle and decided that they could not make the shot. No hostages were hit. There was one complete miss and four non-cranial vault hits which likely ended very badly for the hostage in real life (missed low in either the jaw or neck of the bad guy). **The class hit rate (good hits) was: 55%**

The good thing is that these mistakes are made in the training environment, thank God. Invaluable learning occurs that can only help make these students better in their decision making and accuracy.

Although I have not recorded this sort of data in the past, my best recollection is that we've experienced about the same results on the same scenario, from the same position in past advanced or instructor level LE sniper classes. That said, at the behest of my good friend Brian Sain, I'm going to track this data more closely and periodically share it for everyone's consideration. I'm gonna do this as I believe many LE snipers don't really know what their limitations are, or that it's ok not to take a shot, as we simply cannot miss fast enough as an LE sniper.

OBSERVATION: The LE sniper **MUST** be able to cover the entirety of their assigned field of fire and be able to track, in a split second, the unpredictable movement of the human opponent.

This ability can become hampered in some cases, especially at closer ranges, when rifles are locked so tightly into rifle rests that are mounted on a tripod and its head, and often times further tightened down by the rifles sling being wrapped around the tripods legs or otherwise, that it makes it difficult to do the basic premise of the job, which is to observe your assigned field of fire and report intelligence, let alone begin tracking a moving human opponent at a moment's notice.

I believe that this is due in large part to the LE snipers' competitive nature and in some cases, techniques that may not be applicable, or best suited for the realities of LE sniping. Snipers by nature want to outshoot their peers in training, which is good, otherwise they should pack their bags and find another job. However, sometimes what we do in training, as well intended as it may be, like locking a rifle in so tight that it can't be easily moved in a split second, just so we can shoot nice tight little groups, does not always translate well to the reality of the LE sniper's job, especially at closer distance (avg. LE sniper engagement of 56 yards). One might conclude that this is apparent based on 72% hit rate at 93 yards on a static hostage rescue target as compared with the 55% hit rate at 15 yards on a life size moving hostage taker.

In other words, what may work well at 100 yards and further, or for pure marksmanship drills on the static flat range, may not be best suited for the reality of the LE sniper sitting 30 yards away from a two-story house with an assigned field of fire covering the entire front of the house (corner to corner) and both stories.

Choose wisely snipers on when to wrap your sling around the legs of your tripod if it inhibits your ability to cover your entire field of fire (L, R, up, down) or makes it impossible to quickly detach your rifle from the tripod for self-defense. You will generally be in close proximity to the bad guy (s). Plan for it and be ready, please. Don't forget about the times that you've likely already experienced where the bad guy(s) flee on foot from wherever you have them cornered. Equally, don't forget about the cases where that bad guy has exited a building, sometimes even surreptitiously, to come hunt you, the LE sniper.

If your sling is wrapped up in your tripod so tightly that you can't get it out quick enough, you'll be fighting this one with your pistol... Oh, your observer will take care of the problem with his M-4 you say? You're right, but only if you have an observer? In my experience, having an observer was a luxury that happened intermittently at best. Good luck with that...

I hope that I haven't wasted your time in reading this post and that maybe there is something of value in it for you.

Respectfully,

Jeff Felts
Center Mass, Inc.

