

NEW STUDY ON SHOOTING ACCURACY

Force Science News # 378 contains information on a new study on shooting accuracy. Dr. Christopher Donner and Nicole Popovich of the CJ department at Loyola U. in Chicago headed up the study. The following provides some study details, findings, and practical take-aways. Also included are my comments with supporting data.

This study of police shooting accuracy in deadly force encounters reflects the experience of just one municipal department. But to whatever extent the findings can be generalized, the picture is indeed a disturbing one. Researchers analyzed 149 real-life OISs recorded over a 15-year period by Dallas (TX) PD. In nearly half of these encounters, officers firing at a single suspect delivered "complete inaccuracy." That is, they missed the target entirely.

In 15 incidents, the total number of rounds fired could not be determined. But in the 134 cases where researchers could establish that figure, they calculated the hit rate, "incredibly," at merely 35%. In other words, more than six out of 10 rounds fired were misses.

"Unfortunately," the study says, "the data do not provide a clear picture of what happened with these [errant] rounds, but, at worst, they struck other officers or innocent bystanders."

The research team noted that "although the amount and quality of firearms training received by officers over the last century has increased considerably, there appears to have been little improvement in shooting accuracy." For example... the "Annual hit-rate averages in large departments such as New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Las Vegas, for example, have typically ranged from 22% to 52% over the decades."

The authors hope that reassessing police shooting accuracy, and studying officer, subject and situational factors, would lead to more effective policy and training.

The NYPD's old but still relevant SOP9 study of over 6000 police combat cases during the 1970's, addresses many more combat shooting factors than those in the Force Science News article.

Of significant note is that in the SOPO 9 study, an attempt was made to relate an Officer's ability to strike a target in a combat situation, to his range qualification scores. And after making over 200 such comparisons, no firm conclusion was reached.

The authors argue that a portion of firearms training should replicate a realistic environment. And that employing shoot houses or similar constructs will improve training by adding realism to it.

Now, while that is true, the conclusion misses the long standing elephant in the room which is the ad hoc use of point shooting that is used in most armed encounters. Traditionally, officers are only trained in sighted marksmanship shooting. And it, is not or can not be used in real life or death combat situations.

If one is going to be shot and or killed, there is an 80 percent chance that it will happen at less than 20 feet, and in less than perfect conditions.

There won't be time to align the sights, breathe properly, and squeeze the trigger until a shot breaks. Also, our Fight or Flight response kicks in immediately in real life threat situations, and it

can affect our near vision, and cause the loss of fine motor skills, both of which are needed for sight shooting. And moving of the X while attempting to sight shoot, will most certainly result in misses.

Rex Applegate, in his book: Kill or Get Killed 1943, said this about target shooting versus gun fighting.

"Visualize the first-class target shot in the following combat situation: It is dark, he is in an alley, a poorly lighted street, or a room in a building. He can hardly see his gun at arm's length, to say nothing of the sights. His muscles are tense, his nerves keyed up to a fighting pitch.

"Suddenly the enemy starts shooting at him from an unexpected quarter.

"Even if he could see the sights, would he take the time to line them up and fire at the enemy's gun flash? Does he take up the trigger slack and squeeze off the shot as he has been taught to do in target shooting?

"Will he make sure that his feet are properly positioned and that he is breathing correctly? He certainly will not! He will grip his gun convulsively, raise it, point or shove it in the general direction of the enemy, and pull (not squeeze) the trigger.

"...In daylight he will do exactly the same thing....

Those who say that you must use the sights or you will miss the target, apparently are unaware that using the sights in a gunfight is folly as proven by the accepted hit range of around 20%. In most cases some natural form of point shooting is defaulted to and with the same result.

So, which is the culprit, sighted shooting or some untrained form of point shooting that is defaulted to on an ad hoc basis. That question is not addressed or answered to date.

Point shooting works, and it is much simpler than sighted shooting. It also can be accurate as proven by targets with holes in them. And point shooting can be learned and maintained with minimal training.

I favor the simplest method of point shooting for use at close quarters. It provides both automatic and correct sight alignment, and an automatic and correct sight picture. And it also can easily transition to sight shooting if the sights can be used.

Basically, you grab your gun, point your index finger at a target, and pull the trigger with your middle finger. I call it AIMED Point Shooting or P&S.

For more info on P&S and other point shooting methods, visit: www.pointshooting.com.