

“Beyond the Basics”
Defensive Training Concepts
Patrol Rifle/Carbine Course
By John Howard, NRA National Instructor Trainer

My phone rang and a friendly voice said, “Hey John, this is Randy.” After the usual exchange of pleasantries, Randy said, “Have you ever thought about a Patrol Rifle course?” Having the desire to increase my skills with a carbine, and thinking of possible future projects, this certainly sparked my interest. I’ve wanted to attend one of our LEO restricted Law Enforcement Patrol Rifle instructor courses for some time, and not having the requisite law enforcement background, this is nearly impossible, even for a guy in the NRA Training Department. I explained to Randy that I certainly own an AR platform carbine, but my focus has always been with pistols. My son carried an M4 during his tour as a Combat Medic in Iraq so I had a good friend build me a Rock River Carbine I could legally own. This was my way of feeling close to him during his deployment.

Randy Smith is the President of [Defensive Training Concepts, Inc.](#), located in Staunton, Virginia. He is also one of our most prolific Senior Training Counselors and holds all of our civilian certifications, NRA’s Law Enforcement Instructor credentials, and a myriad of others. As a matter of fact, he is the epitome of a personal protection trainer. When we needed someone to play the role of the “instructor” during our Personal Protection Outside The Home DVD development, he was the first one we thought of. Not only is he close, he is always eager to lend a hand.



Stopping the threat!

“You know, I qualified several times with an M14 in the Navy, gone squirrel hunting with a .22, and earned Distinguished Expert in Light Rifle” I explained. Randy replied, “Okay, that’s the type of student I’m looking for.” I continued “A friend built my rifle and I put an Aimpoint M3 on it, which I sighted in and put away.” By this time, I suspect he was sensing a little bit of excitement in my voice. I have never attended any “tactical” type training with a carbine, but the thought was certainly an exciting one. I made some notes and asked if it was the NRA Law Enforcement course. Randy stated that though the same material would be covered, this course was his own version – geared toward training folks like me, without a law enforcement background, but a solid background in firearms safety training, and that he’d like my perspective. “Well now, that sounds like something I can do for you,” was my response!

He guided me to his website so I could take a look at the course syllabus, equipment requirements, registration and tuition. I determined it was something I certainly had the desire to attend, and once I found a fit for it in my budget, I registered for the course. I realized I needed to inventory my gear and get “prepared” for the course. I mentioned the course to my tacti-cool friend Graham on the staff and he insisted that I ditch my single point sling (among other things) in favor of a 3-point sling. “You’ll want to replace that receiver end plate as well,” Graham continued. “You’ll tear up your knuckles for sure!” Graham also recommended I ditch my

current Aimpoint mount and replace it with a LaRue LT 129, which I was glad to do! He didn't have to say much more, and after offering to do the work for me, gave me a small shopping list.

I drove down to Charlottesville the night before the course and checked into the "Bates Motel." Not literally, but you get the picture! The course was conducted at the phenomenal Rivanna Rifle and Pistol Club in Charlottesville, Virginia. I was the first to arrive Friday morning and gave Randy a hand setting up for the course. When everyone else showed up, we settled in and began our introductions. It was quickly apparent that the participants in the course were everyday folks that shared the same interests as I. Joe drove down from Pennsylvania to join his brother Mike they are insurance agents. Bill "makes soda pop" for a living and made sure I knew he wore his NRA hat for me. Pete, who ended up being my shooting partner works for a major tobacco company and Tom, is an IDPA competitor with the desire to continue out-shooting his soldier sons! We were all there for the same reason, to become better equipped to use our carbines in a life-threatening situation.



Instructor Randy Smith demonstrating the "Safety Circle" position.

As in any course, Randy began by covering the fundamentals of "patrol rifle" marksmanship, handling and so on. He covered immediate action and feedway clearance, use of the sling (all types), loading and unloading, the "safety circle" and his expectations on the range, among other things. We spent the first few hours in the classroom, but you all know what we were there to do! Shoot.

Once we all felt mentally and physically prepared we decided to head over and set-up before breaking for lunch. We took care of all the formalities, range safety briefing and sat down for a very informal picnic type lunch. We all visited and learned more about each other before actually getting the okay to load up and begin the part of the course we had been anticipating.

"Imagine yourself standing on a trashcan lid, you will maintain constant awareness of your muzzle and control it at all times" Randy stated as he took his position in front of us and demonstrated an

appropriate "Safety Circle" position, in which you held the gun tight against your body, muzzle down within the diameter of the trashcan lid. He instructed us to maintain control with our grasp, and not to rely on the sling. He made it clear that we would be moving constantly throughout the course with a "hot" rifle and that the two most important "safety checks" were to keep the muzzle in a safe direction and finger off the trigger.

We took our places on the firing line for the first familiarization firing. These positions remained "ours" throughout the course. We always assumed the same position, no matter what the exercise. We're all creatures of habit, just like parking a car, always hoping for the same spot. We did all the drills in the same order as well. As the course progressed, I noted that many of us had long established habits that are hard to break. One thing I figured out quickly, with the benefit of having tacti-cool friends, is to shoot the carbine much like a pistol, squared to the threat, elbows tucked tight. "No Chicken Wings!" I heard Randy state a time or two.

At one point, during the moving target drill, I caught myself performing an emergency reload by standing above my “cover” to retrieve my spare magazine... I know better, but in the heat of the moment, that is what I did. When I pointed this out to Randy (as if he hadn’t already noticed) he nodded and told me, “that’s because it’s the way you’ve always done it. At least you are catching it yourself.” “Right...” I noted hesitantly, but that didn’t make me feel any better. With that one exercise, I know I will never expose myself when reloading or performing immediate action drills again, whether in training, or for real! After all, that’s what it’s all about. We all learn from our mistakes! That particular exercise was caught on video, so I’ll have a constant reminder, and for that I am quite thankful.

By the end of the 2-day, 22-hour course, we were all exhausted, and sore. I have the blisters to prove it! The sun had long been down by the time we completed our exams, received our certificates and were saying our goodbyes. No one was anxious for the end of the course, or complained about the long days. We all had a blast and learned skills that we will carry with us for a lifetime. I compare the course to our Personal Protection Outside The Home course, and well beyond. Instead of pistols, we used carbines, and shot a LOT more ammunition.



Setting the 50 yard zero

My carbine and Aimpoint optic performed flawlessly. The constant use of “dummy” ammunition mixed in every magazine made immediate action become “second nature!” The “Patrol Rifle Skills Assessment” course that started at the 50-yard line, and ultimately ended at the 7 gave us the confidence needed to prevail in a life-threatening situation. We all left with the knowledge that our optics (and back-up iron sights) were zeroed at 50 yards. We could shoot and move, shoot on the move, deal with moving and multiple threats, transition and shoot from our support side, perform tactical and emergency reloads, and much more!

At the end of the day, I noted that I never witnessed any safety violations; we learned things above and beyond the “norm” and simply had a great time. I thank Randy for the invitation and look forward to attending future courses. His course is thoughtfully put together and is designed to meet the needs of a fast growing audience. If you are ready to move beyond the basics and enhance your skills using your carbine, DTC’s “Patrol Rifle/Carbine” course would be a great start.

Defensive Training Concepts, Inc., provides all levels of firearms and less lethal training to law enforcement, military, private security, and civilian personnel. More information on this and other available training courses can be found on their web site at <http://www.dt-concepts.com>.