



By Barrett Tillman

Larry Mudgett is the trigger master. Spend a day with him learning his four drills and you'll be convinced of his methods.

Larry's experience is, in words of one syllable, vast. A combat rifleman in the Air Cav in Vietnam, he joined the Los Angeles Police Department in 1969 and spent three fourths of his 35-year LEO career as a SWAT and department firearms instructor. He's a regular at Gunsite and has a long relationship with the Department of Energy. Along the way he learned a few things. Well, OK, he learned *a lot* of things, but he'll be the first to tell you that he's still learning ("Sometimes an instructor, always a student.") And he's still sharing what he knows.

In May 2010 Larry came to Phoenix for a session with police firearms instructors from half a dozen Valley agencies. After about three minutes the audience learned that he is passionate about teaching and about survival. The decibel level alone is convincing, but the penetrating *tone* of his voice speaks as eloquently as his words. Larry supports his evangelical tenor with some punch-in-the-nose facts.

During Larry's tenure, LAPD's 9,000 cops were involved in 150 shootings each year. Usually they win by a large margin but it hasn't always been that way. In one stretch during Larry's career the department buried 13 officers who were killed after missing the criminals they shot at. Larry takes it personally: two of his academy classmates were KIA.

Larry insists that marksmanship is defined by group size, which of course demonstrates competence and consistency. "But how many PDs care about group size?" he asks, not rhetorically. Most qualification targets allow generous scoring zones, and an acceptable pistol or carbine target can resemble a shotgun pattern. Larry believes that most officers in street shootouts lose half of their range accuracy, which explains repeated instances of multiple rounds fired with no/few hits inside 20 feet, regardless of weapon.

After instructing untold thousands of students, Larry Mudgett has an enormous database to draw upon. Analyzing shooters' problems over 40 years or more, he sees two prime problems: poor trigger control and improper sight alignment.

"A low rear sight is the most common aiming error," he insists. In many cases the instructor's emphasis upon front-sight focus leads students to neglect the rear sight.

That does not alone result in high shots because most shooters who drop their rear sight also anticipate, pushing the gun during firing. That's why the target does not tell the instructor that the shooter has a low rear sight: the two mistakes tend to cancel each other. "I've actually seen officers who taught themselves to flinch enough rounds into the K zone to qualify," Larry says. "No wonder they miss on the street."

What to do? Call Dr. Larry. He's a diagnostician with a couple of excellent remedies.

Apart from the ordinary assessments involving heeling, palming and breaking the wrist, Larry has found a surprisingly fast cure for what ails most problem shooters. It determines whether the difficulty lies in sight alignment, trigger control, or both. His regimen involves four trigger drills.

Trigger Drills

Trigger Drill One determines whether a student can maintain a proper sight alignment. It's accomplished with the shooter holding the pistol while the instructor manipulates the trigger. With his trigger finger along the frame, the student cannot possibly know when the round will fire; every shot is a surprise break. If the target shows a well-centered group at 12 to 15 yards, the problem likely is trigger control. Thus, the common error of rear sight low only shows high shots on or over the target when the instructor is pressing the trigger.

In Trigger Drill Two the instructor holds the firearm and the student stands alongside, placing his finger on the trigger. The instructor's finger is placed over the student's, permitting the student to experience a proper release. The exercise usually is done at seven yards.

Back at 12 to 15 yards, Trigger Drill Three returns the pistol to the student with the instructor again providing pressure on the student's trigger finger. If that's satisfactory – no excessive muzzle motion – proceed to Drill Four.

In the fourth drill the student again holds and fires the pistol, now pressing the instructor's finger against the trigger. As Jeff Cooper used to say, when results are satisfactory, "Print that!"

Larry has practical advice beyond the conceptual aspects of his trigger drills. For instance,