

Massad Ayoob's Lethal Force Institute I and II Teaches the Skills, Responsibilities and Psychology of Armed Self-Defense

By Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D.

When is it right to kill another human? That is just one of the questions that are studied at the Lethal Force Institute (LFI). To my knowledge, LFI is the only defensive shooting school that spends as much time addressing the judicious use of lethal force (the legally armed citizen's responsibilities) as it does concentrating on combat shooting skills and tactics. When you carry a gun, you must subscribe to a higher standard of care in exercising your rights of self-defense. This is because with greater power, comes greater responsibility, and a person with a gun holds the power of life and death. I had the opportunity to attend LFI-I and LFI-II in Florida, taught by Master Trainer, Massad ("Mas") Ayoob, for nine consecutive days in December, 2005, and this is my review.



LFI instructor, Herman Gunter, supervising the line.

SAFETY FIRST!

Safety is emphasized first and foremost throughout any LFI training course. Having a gun is like having a pet rattle snake. You may love it, but it will never love you back. It's a lethal weapon. Each class begins with a safety lecture and video. The rules of gun handling on the range (which is a "cold range") and in the classroom were explained, and Ayoob and his instructors mean business. Supervision is excellent and no safety violations are tolerated. The consequence of one safety violation is that the violator must sit out the day without shooting. A second safety violation on any subsequent day results in expulsion from the class. It's no surprise that there were no safety violations in either of the classes I attended.

THE JUDICIOUS USE OF LETHAL FORCE

Lethal or deadly force is the degree of force that a reasonable and prudent person would consider capable of causing death or grave bodily harm. Depending on the



Mas coaching a student.

circumstance, a crippling injury can be considered grave bodily harm. For example, if an attacker causes you an injury that would render you incapable of defending yourself, so that they can continue their attack unhindered, that would justify the use of lethal/deadly force.

Deadly force is only warranted to protect innocent life from immediate and otherwise unavoidable death or grave bodily harm. You are not justified in pointing a gun at anyone unless the following three circumstances apply right then and there: (1) the person you are pointing a gun at possesses the ability (e.g., a gun, a knife, or is known at the time to have lethal killing skills), (2) immediate opportunity of causing your death or grave bodily harm, and (3) is acting in such a manner that a reasonable and prudent person would assume he was using those powers to place innocent life in jeopardy. Note that ability can also refer to a notable disparity of force in favor of the attacker (e.g., size, force of numbers, etc.).

The legal system will judge you on the basis of what it judges that a "reasonable and prudent person" would have done in the same situation, knowing what you (the defendant) knew at the time, taking the totality of the circumstances into account. If the prosecutor decides to prosecute, he has to show malicious intent on the part of the defendant (i.e., "Mens Rea," the guilty mind), or that the defendant acted with such gross negligence that the act of killing can be considered culpable negligence. Ayoob repeatedly emphasized that if right and truth are on your side, the truth will set you free; that is if you can articulate and authenticate that truth to the triers of fact.

LFI helps you understand and anticipate the patterns of criminal threats and attacks you are likely to encounter, and teaches you how to counter them. However, LFI does not teach threat management for dummies. The K.I.S.S. principle does not

apply in the management of violent threats because unfortunately, it's not simple, and if you graduate from LFI, you're not stupid.

POST SHOOTING TRAUMA

LFI-I not only teaches you how and when to defend yourself against a violent criminal attack, but also how to defend yourself legally and cope psychologically in its aftermath. After killing an attacker in self-defense, you will be flooded with conflicting emotions such as "survival euphoria" and guilt. You will suffer sleep disturbance and other symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Post Shooting Trauma (PST) is to be expected and it has to be dealt with. Moreover, after surviving a lethal force incident, you will encounter psychologically and financially draining legal trials and tribulations. In the end, your final examination will be on a witness stand and it, just like the lethal force incident, will be pass/fail.

LFI-I

LFI-I consisted of well over 50 hours of immersion training. The course thoroughly covered when a citizen can and cannot use a firearm in self defense, ways to avoid a lethal force incident, managing one that cannot be avoided, and coping with the aftermath. The following topics were covered:

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Mas shooting handgun under the watchful eye of LFI instructor, Herman Gunter.



Don Hume's "IWB Strike" was manufactured to meet the specifications of the Dept. of Homeland Security's Armed Flight Deck Officer program, which also selected the HK P2000 LEM as their duty pistol. The "IWB Strike" provides an all day comfortable, deeply concealed carry with excellent weapon retention, given its thumb break retention strap; Kydex belt clip; wet molded, hand boned, leather holster; and its ability to be tucked beneath the wearer's shirt to make the gun completely disappear.



The author shooting in a "cover crouch."



Author with one of his law enforcement training targets in LFI-II.



Author on the line, shooting 12 gauge, Mossberg, 590 pump shotgun.

tactics for home defense and gun fighting, interacting with a suspect at gunpoint and with witnesses, how to contact the police while holding a suspect at bay, interacting with responding officers and investigating officers, and how to contact and retain an attorney.

Intensive marksmanship training and combat shooting comprised approximately 40% of the course. The 60% majority consisted of lectures by Massad Ayoob, video presentations, group discussion and student interaction. The curriculum also included training in "shoot--don't shoot" judgment scenarios and equipment selection (i.e., defensive calibers, choice of handguns, types of ammunition, holsters and carry gear).

Marksmanship and combat shooting skills:

"Shooting straight with your .38 beats the bad guy's jive with his 45." We were thoroughly immersed in learning Ayoob's StressFire system of combat shooting with a handgun. This system utilizes our natural, physio-psychological reactions to violent threats; that is, the "body alarm reaction" (BAR) and the "fight or flight" response, to remain in control and accurately hit our target. The basic premise is that StressFire techniques hold up under body alarm stress when one's strength goes through the roof and fine motor skills are degraded. Through a combination of lectures, demonstrations, dry fire practice, live fire drills at half speed and then at full speed, the full repertoire of StressFire gun handling and shooting skills with the handgun were taught.

The basic StressFire marksmanship "pre-flight checklist" includes the power stance; high hand grasp; crush grip; front sight lock; and smooth, straight back roll of the trigger. As a foundation, we learned the proper way to shoot from the three "classic" shooting stances: Weaver, Chapman and Isosceles. Then, Mas taught the basic StressFire cover positions: (a) the "cover crouch" for when you need an immediate barricade (such as behind a car engine block) or when drawing from an ankle rig, (b) high kneeling, and (c) low kneeling.

We also learned Ayoob's "Stress Point Index," which is for close quarter combat and the middle ground between point and sighted shooting. We learned one-handed shooting, both weak and strong hand, switching shooting hands, keeping the gun running, administrative handling, speed reloads, stoppage reduction and malfunction clearances.

Reality drill:

We performed and documented each student's performance in the famous "Tueller Drill." This demonstrated first-hand that even the most physically challenged

members of our class could cover 21 feet in under two seconds! Never again think that a guy aggressively brandishing a knife or baseball bat 20 feet away is not a lethal threat!

LFI-I qualification:

In order to pass LFI-I, we had to pass the qualification course of fire at standard speed, and also a written examination. The timed qualification course of fire required 60 rounds fired at a standard IPSC target. The course included shooting at various distances: (1) with the weak hand; (2) with the strong hand; (3) with both hands; (4) drawing and shooting from the holster; (5) shooting to slide-lock; reloading and shooting to slide-lock; (6) shooting from the cover crouch, high kneeling and low kneeling positions; and (7) shooting from the Weaver, Chapman and Isosceles stances. I was pleased with my qualifier score of 298 out of 300.

LFI-II

Picking up where LFI-I left off, this intensive, 5 day, 50 hour course further developed and refined our combat shooting skills to increase our "survivability" in violent encounters. Approximately 70% of LFI-II was spent on the range or practicing hand-to-hand skills (weapon retention), and the remainder was spent in the classroom.

Instruction covered: review of firearm and range safety rules and LFI StressFire handgun basics; judicious use of lethal force at a more advanced level; weak hand (or "mirror image") shooting; and advanced handgun shooting and manipulation drills, such as return fire techniques when wounded, shooting while moving (both forward and laterally), shooting around barricades, and prone shooting positions.

We then addressed: mastering the combat shotgun; handgun retention and disarming (e.g., maintaining control of your weapon in a struggle for the gun); armed self-defense inside a motor vehicle; building search tactics; using cover and concealment; and much more (e.g., night shooting). Classroom lectures covered the physio-psychological aspects of violent encounters, and information on how an expert witness can assist an attorney in preparing an effective defense of a self-defense shooting.

Physio-psychological aspects of violent encounters:

During a violent encounter, the "survival reflex," or "Body Alarm Reaction" (BAR), is physiologically tripped. The resulting psychological manifestations include tunneling in on the threat visually and auditorily, as one's cerebral cortex screens out everything extraneous to survival. This

can lead to various cognitive distortions, such as the distortion of perceived time; threat magnification; and selective attention, perception, and memory.

After a deadly force encounter, such as a shooting, the horrendousness of it all can overwhelm, leading to an unconscious denial reaction as an involuntary, psychological defense mechanism. It is normal for the survivor's mind to jumble its recollection of the sequence of events (honing in on certain aspects and unconsciously blocking others). Therefore, the victim of a violent assault who used lethal force to terminate the lethal threat is advised not to make any specific statements about the details of the event in its immediate aftermath. In fact, the survivor should not make any statements before first conferring with his or her attorney.

Another very valuable aspect of the LFI-II training was Ayoob's clarification of many defensive handgun and shotgun myths.

Myth clarification:

Myth or truth? Don't draw your gun unless you intend to shoot.

Truth: Wrong. This is a myth! Don't draw your firearm unless you are prepared to shoot. Most felons are cowards and will run away, so you may not have to shoot. In thirteen out of fourteen cases, you won't have to shoot at gunpoint. So, if the preponderance of evidence tells you the aggressor is a danger to you here and now, you should draw, but you should not pull that trigger until the immediate threat to your life is beyond a reasonable doubt. The point is that you cannot wait to draw until you need to shoot, because you'll be behind the action-reaction curve.

Myth or truth? You will be looked at as a gun nut, or worse, a killer, if you spend extra money to make your defensive firearm more accurate.

Truth: This is a falsehood. If a guy pays extra to retrofit a passenger side airbag in his car, he is not reckless, but extraordinarily responsible! Similarly, if a guy pays extra to make his gun more accurate, he is doing so in order to make sure it works more efficiently as a tool to accomplish its purpose. For example, night sights will help you acquire an accurate sight picture in low light, so you can shoot with precision. If you have to shoot, the consequences of missing are unthinkable.

Myth or truth? Precognition of danger (intuition) is real.

Truth: Absolutely! The more you know, the more your intuition (your hunches, your sixth sense) should be trusted. To a trained defensive shooter, the subconscious will say without the words, "that person has a gun!" You are trained to recognize the clues.

Myth or truth? If somebody is trying to get your gun, you may have to shoot them off.

Truth: Correct! If you cannot get an attacker off of your gun, you are likely to have to shoot him off! The point is that when a gun is taken out of your hand by an offender, you can expect to be shot with your own gun. His going for your gun is like him going for his. So, you'd better do something ASAP. If you have to shoot, that may be the only thing you are able to do to save yourself from being fatally shot. Thus, shooting the gun grabber would be justifiable. It may be your only chance to stop him from stopping you permanently! It takes virtually no time at all to be disarmed. Mas showed us how a 220 pound, 34-year-old man was disarmed in 1.92 seconds by Mas' 15-year-old daughter.

Anyone crazy enough to grab for your gun is really desperate and dangerous. If an individual grabs for your gun in the first place, that constitutes a deadly threat because he has either some kind of special training, or he's crazy! If you perform a retention technique, and he goes after the gun again, it had better tell you that he's a really bad threat. He didn't learn a lesson, which is to leave it alone! Now you will probably have to shoot him in order to survive!

With these premises, Mas and his co-instructors introduced the Lindell system of weapon retention. Techniques for different situations were explained, demonstrated and practiced man-on-man, using dummy guns and work gloves to protect our hands and wrists. The weapon retention situations studied broke down into: (a) protecting against and countering various grabs at one's drawn gun, (b) protecting against and countering various grabs at one's holstered gun, and (c) disarming an attacker.

Myth or truth? The shotgun is the best first line of home defense firearm.

Truth: It's not! It is a special purpose, last line of armed defense (the "artillery"), for when you are barricaded and under attack. The handgun is your primary "infantry" defensive weapon because it allows you mobility and better weapon retention.

Pump shotguns were made available to those who needed them. Some who brought their own shotgun had auto-loaders. Others had pumps. I was issued a Mossberg 590 pump shotgun with ghost ring sights, which worked fine.

Combat shotgun drills included: safe administrative shotgun handling; loading, unloading and reloading; speed loading; weapon clearing; weapon retention; various ready positions; upright and low shooting positions; pain-free, StressFire combat

shotgun shooting stances (e.g., front snap technique, arm tuck, shoulder pocket, pectoral anchor using StressPoint Index while wearing body armor); shooting around and over barricades, alternate side shooting, and rapid fire.

Most of us shot approximately 90 rounds of rifled slugs and 10 rounds of 00 buckshot. Shotgun work was mostly done rapid-fire. The different grip and mounting techniques we learned made it possible to shoot heavy shotgun loads quickly and accurately because felt recoil was minimized and there was no recoil related bruising!

LFI-II qualification:

The LFI-II Qualification was the same, 60-round, handgun course of fire as was shot in LFI-I, but at twice the speed! I shot 294 out of 300.

Conclusion:

Studying with a world-class master is a rare and valuable opportunity to begin your training and/or further advance your knowledge, skills and experience. Pistolcraft is a martial art. I had nine days to study with Mas Ayoob in the martial art of combat shooting. For this, I am grateful.

Essential Massad Ayoob Readings:

Massad F. Ayoob (1980). In the Gravest Extreme: The Role of the Firearm in Personal Protection. Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf. www.ayoob.com 800-624-9049.

Massad F. Ayoob (1983). The Truth About Self Protection. New York: Bantam Books.

Massad F. Ayoob (1984). Stressfire: Volume I of Gunfighting for Police: Advanced Tactics and Techniques. Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf.

Massad F. Ayoob (1992). Stressfire II: Advanced Combat Shotgun. Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf.

Massad F. Ayoob (1995). The Ayoob Files: The Book. Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf.

Massad Ayoob (2002). The Gun Digest Book of Combat Handgunnery (5th Ed.). Iola, WI: Krause Publications.

Sources:

Don Hume Leathergoods. Miami, OK. www.DonHume.com 800-331-2686.

Heckler and Koch Firearms. Trussville, AL. www.HecklerKoch-usa.com 205-655-8299.

Lethal Force Institute. Concord, NH: www.Ayoob.com 603-224-6814 or 800-624-9049.

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