



After charging through a drill in 100-degree heat and with his chest heaving, Bill cautions Mike to slow down some and hug cover for a relatively long shot.

ONE-ON-ONE

Okay, you've decided to spend some time and money on professional firearms training.



Being the only student allows some extra time to develop an individual's unique strengths. Not many men are flexible enough to sit cross-legged with their elbows touching the ground (aka California Prone), but since Mike is an exception, some time was devoted to it.

Good for you. Even if you are already an accomplished shooter you probably need it. The smart guys, the ones at the very top of the food chain in pretty much any discipline, recognize the need for regular coaching not only to develop new skills, but also to prevent and correct problems in existing ones that crop up from time to time. Tiger Woods does it, the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies do it, so does Delta Force and so should you.

Whether a master marksman or rank beginner, when it comes time to spend valuable resources on training, are you better served by a private instructor in a one-on-one environment or by participating in a class with maybe a dozen or so fellow students?

I have had the great good fortune to train at most of the big name schools and some of the small ones over the years, but always as a member of a class. I have never been privately tutored and thus



Here is one of many jungle runs on the second day with Davison closely monitoring Mike. Individual training probably demands more of the student and instructor in some ways.

PRIVATE TRAINING VERSUS GROUP CLASSES © BY WILL COX

didn't have much of an opinion about it one way or another. It seems though, that this type of instruction may be becoming more popular of late. All, or nearly all, of the schools mention it in their catalogs or on their websites. Thunder Ranch now advertises a good portion of their training time in "tutorial blocks" and a couple of friends have taken private training in the past year.

AUDITING A PRIVATE PROGRAM

Recently I had the opportunity to observe a customized one-on-one program and began to get an idea of how it compares to a class environment. My friend Mike was home on a two-week leave from Iraq where he is currently serving with the National Guard. During this time Mike spent two days with Bill Davison who owns and operates Tac Pro Shooting Center west of the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, working on handgun

and carbine skills. Both were gracious enough to let me hang out and watch.

Mike reports that the training provided by the military leaves much to be desired (a sad state of affairs and possibly the subject of a separate article some day) and thus felt a need for some of the high speed stuff offered by Davison due to the very real danger he faces in theater. *S.W.A.T.* is the undisputed leader in the industry when it comes to covering gun schools and training issues, so I felt that its pages would be the perfect venue to hopefully provide some food for thought on private versus multi-student classes. Based on what I observed, there are pros and cons to both and each have their place in the overall picture.

In a private setting the student naturally gets more individual attention and probably can do more learning in less time, but at a cost perhaps of a lot more effort. Stated bluntly, Bill worked Mike's butt off. His youth and high level of

physical fitness were valuable assets as he spent two days in the 100-degree Texas heat running and gunning almost nonstop. Davison drilled him relentlessly, especially in areas where problems existed, until a genuine level of improvement was evident. Though taxed physically, Mike was not hampered by less proficient students who couldn't keep up nor did he feel pressured not to slow others down by asking questions or repeating techniques until getting them down pat. These are two dynamics that I have personally witnessed negatively impact students in a large class.

He also simply got to shoot more than he would have been able to as a member of a group, which was valuable as there is apparently no time devoted to practice while deployed. Of course a high round count per se, is not necessarily an indicator of a quality learning experience, but for Mike it was a positive, firing about a thousand rounds each of hand-



Drill after drill after drill, Bill devotes all his attention to Mike until he is satisfied with his performance. Here Mike is backing away from a target while engaging it with his handgun.

gun and carbine ammo in two days.

He had one other formal training experience to compare to the private lesson with Davison, which was a handgun class with Andy Stanford of Options for Personal Security. Mike's comment was that he felt like the amount learned was somewhat accelerated in the one-on-one setting, especially in the more subjective area of tactics. Having a student execute and then having an instructor critique a house clearing or jungle walk is time consuming compared to square range drills. Typically a student in a class with others will only get to experience relatively few such exercises. Bill had Mike performing jungle walks (though in Davison's case "jungle runs" might be a more accurate term) nonstop for half a day. Through the numerous repetitions I could observe him experimenting with a technique, perhaps in only a rudimentary fashion at first, and then fine tuning it in subsequent drills.

I have done simulator runs in classes, but by the time I finally got comfortable enough with a new skill to really put it to use it was time to quit. Mike got enough time to learn and then apply.

WHAT'S THE DOWNSIDE?

So if it's obvious that intensive one-on-one lessons with a real pro like Davison are a great way to learn combative skills then what are the downsides? There are a few actually. One obviously is cost. Tuition for a class at a place like Gunsite,



The classroom seems a bit large with only one student and one instructor.

Thunder Ranch or Tac Pro Shooting Center—combined with the associated travel expenses—make professional training very expensive for most of us to begin with and private lessons are even more. Figure on at least \$250 per day just for instructor fees. Ouch.

Another consideration is not being able to interact with fellow students, which can be a valuable way to learn also. Watching the same guy (the one who slowed the class down so much that everyone was deprived of an extra run through the shoot house) fail yet again to use cover when it was clearly available may demonstrate to you how *not* to make the same mistake. Also, perhaps the guy or gal who keeps smoking you on the man-on-man steel plate con-

test and making you look bad in front of the instructor and the rest of the class will provide the motivation to "Cowboy up," quit making excuses, and do what it takes to win.

Also, as mentioned earlier, private training is probably more fatiguing than being in a class. You get all the attention but you also get to do all the work. There is no opportunity to catch your breath while waiting on slower students.

WHICH IS BEST?

So which is for you, a class or private setting? Like most things in the tactical world, there is no pat answer.

After watching Bill and Mike work together for two days my conclusion is that the two types complement each



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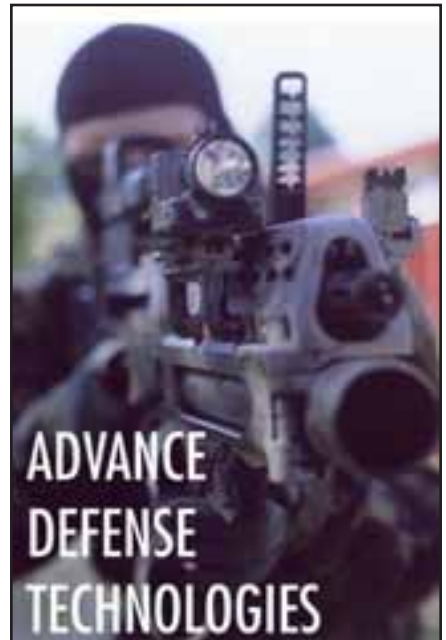
other and those who are serious about improving and maintaining their skills should do both. Davison makes the observation that an absolutely raw beginner, one who doesn't even know the basic functions of his gun, needs to have some private time before enrolling in a class to learn these fundamentals or he will simply slow things down too much to be fair to other students. Sounds like good advice. He also states that a day or two of one-on-one time immediately following a class can be an effective way of fixing problems and/or permanently ingraining newly learned skills. Again, good advice.

I was impressed enough by the experience that I will be adding some individual time with Bill to my own training log. I'm an okay shot (and only okay) but I don't get enough "tactics time." When going through simulators, for example, I push too much for speed thereby losing awareness and, as a result, I have shot what turned out to be non-threat targets. This is unacceptable and something I hope to correct by working one-on-one with Bill. But I will continue to participate in classes as well. I have a lot of fun taking them and always seem to make new friends.

If it sounds like I'm equivocating a bit, fine. Deadly force training and related matters are subjective and sometimes difficult to articulate. But what I can say for sure is this: Mike went back to Iraq a better warrior due to his time at Tac Pro Shooting Center. When I took him to the airport he was still talking about all the things he learned. On the way home I considered the commitment level of someone who is willing to spend two entire days out of a short two-week leave—not to mention the monetary expense—on improving his skill level so that he might return to Iraq and be better able to do a very hard job. I'm just thankful we've got guys like him on our side. ☺


SOURCE:

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