In this issue, I’ll continue with the topic of shooting fundamentals, by discussing how that solid grip and full arm extension become the basis for a “natural and neutral” shooting platform. In the classroom or on the range, the term “shooting stance” usually implies a specific position for the arms, the head, the upper body, the legs, and the feet. When it comes to the “perfect” stance, instructors can argue for hours about the optimal angle of the shoulders to the target (if any), how far apart the feet should be, and whether the arms should be flexed a little, flexed a lot, or not flexed at all. While you might have the luxury of perfecting each of those body positions when standing on the firing line at your local range, under the extreme stress of a violent attack, you’re not going to have the time or the luxury. In fact, I’ll often mention in my classes that the only “perfect” shooting stance occurs at the range, and that during a dynamic critical incident, you’ll have to be prepared to shoot from whatever awkward position you find yourself in, which might include being seated, rapidly retreating, or lying flat on your back. In addition, there is now ample evidence from a decade of police dash cam videos that suggest that the “automated responses” that occur during violent attacks, will have more of an effect on our body position, than will dozens or even hundreds of hours spent on the range. While it’s often said, “we’ll fight the way we’ve trained,” those dash cam videos suggest that we should, “train the way we’ll fight.” So let’s talk about those automated responses, which if you’re interested, originate within an almond sized structure in the brain called the amygdala. The amygdala contains most of the brain’s alarm circuits designed to react to any imminent threat, which would include a violent attack. When its alarm circuits are tripped, the amygdala has a direct connection to the motor cortex (that is, it skips the reasoning and planning part of the brain) in order to take immediate action, such as: freezing our legs if we were about to step in front of a speeding bus; raising our hands to protect our head from a flying rock; or ducking into a crouch, orienting toward a threat, and pushing the arms out to full extension to defend against the threat. It’s that last automated response that has been recorded time and time again on dash cam videos during police shootings, and it’s the one that we’re going to focus on when it comes to discussing a “natural and neutral” shooting platform.
ISOSCELES STANCE

WHERE IT ALL STARTED: WEaver STANCE

Anyone who’s attended a shooting school in the past few decades has most likely heard of the Weaver stance, named after the late Jack Weaver. The Weaver stance was a staple for nearly four decades at police academies across the world, and takes up a “bladed” body position, with the strong side foot placed to the rear and the body bladed at approximately 45 degrees to the target. The arms create solid isometric pressure with the strong arm slightly flexed and pushing forward, and the support arm elbow down, and pulling back. The theory behind the Weaver stance was that the isometric pressure between the two arms helps to manage recoil, and the arm position places the firearm in a location which allows the shooter to easily focus on the front sight. If your shooting requirements were limited strictly to the range, those theories would be meaningful. The problem is, dozens of dash cam videos have proven that regardless of how often police officers had trained on the Weaver, the body’s and the mind’s natural reaction to face the attacker head on with the arms at full extension took over during dynamic critical incidents. That evidence was enough to cause most police academies (and most civilian schools) to gravitate toward the more natural and neutral Isosceles platform.

The Isosceles platform is more natural, and it matches the body’s and mind’s natural reaction to take up a low crouch, face the attacker head on, with the arms at full extension. The firearm is elevated high enough to allow the shooter to use the sights (when the brain allows it), or the shooter can look over the top of the sights when using unsighted fire, or when using a “flash sight picture.” In addition to taking up more of a natural body position, the Isosceles is almost direction neutral, in that the defender can place rounds in nearly a 180 degree arc, without moving the feet.

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WEAVER STANCE

THE WEAVER STANCE was developed by L.A. Deputy Sheriff Jack Weaver, in an effort to win Jeff Cooper's "Leatherslap" competition in Big Bear, California in 1959. At that time, the typical competitive shooter shot from the hip or one-handed from the shoulder, and according to Jack, "What started out as serious business soon produced gales of laughter from the spectators as most of the shooters blazed away..." and "with guns empty and all 12 rounds gone but the 18-inch balloons still standing, they had a problem: load one round and take aim or load six and blaze away again." By the time the 1959 Leatherslap rolled around, Jack had realized that, "A pretty quick hit was better than a lightning-fast miss," and decided to bring the pistol up by both hands and use the pistol's sights, rather than just shooting from the hip. Jeff Cooper commented, "Jack walloped us all, decisively. He was very quick and he did not miss."

While the Weaver stance looks pretty cool, a decade of dash cam videos has proven that during dynamic critical incidents, we'll be more likely to take up a stance that matches the body's and mind's natural reaction to face the attacker head on, with the arms at full extension. In addition to placing the body in an unnatural position, the Weaver is also not "neutral," in that it's designed to place rounds in just one direction. For example, trying to place rounds at a second attacker on the right side of the defender, would require the defender to literally rotate their body 90-degrees to the right.

ISOSCELES PLATFORM

The isosceles (which gets its name from the perfect triangle formed by the squared shoulders and straight arms) squares the body to the target, with both arms at full extension, pointed directly at the target. The stance is designed to match the body's and mind's natural reaction to face an attacker head on and to push the arms out defensively, which allows shooters to "train the way they'll fight." In addition, since both arms are at full extension, recoil and follow-through are easily managed—shooters will find the firearm dropping back on target immediately after the muzzle rise. Since the arms point at the target using the isosceles, it also provides a simple, repeatable method of using unsighted fire in a stress situation. You'll notice that I didn't refer to any specific position for the legs and feet—in a perfect situation, the feet would be firmly positioned under the body, but the "natural and neutral" nature of the isosceles doesn't require that, in fact, the only real focus on the isosceles is to face the target, and push the arms out to full extension (or as far as possible) which creates a natural, straight line from the shoulder to the fingertip. We've been born with the ability to point that straight line with a high degree of accuracy, especially when we're talking about the distances of most self-defense shootings, with nearly ninety percent falling between 9–15 feet. Considering most adults have at least a two-foot reach, that means that the distance between your gun and your attacker, will most likely fall between 7–13 feet. Stepping back to the original theory behind the Weaver stance, it was believed that the Weaver allowed the shooter to position the firearm for easier acquisition of the firearm's sights, leading to more accurate fire. That's a great argument if you're trying to make a silver dollar sized hole at 50 feet, but it's less meaningful if you're trying to hit an attacker a dozen feet away (or one who's already on top of you), when speed will typically be critical, and trying to align your front sight, rear sight, and the attacker will be the last thing on your mind. Don't blame me, blame your amygdala.

Next issue: Aligning our Barrel to the Target.

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