

# LAW and ORDEF

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MANAGEMENT

Special Report

## LOW-LIGHT POLICING

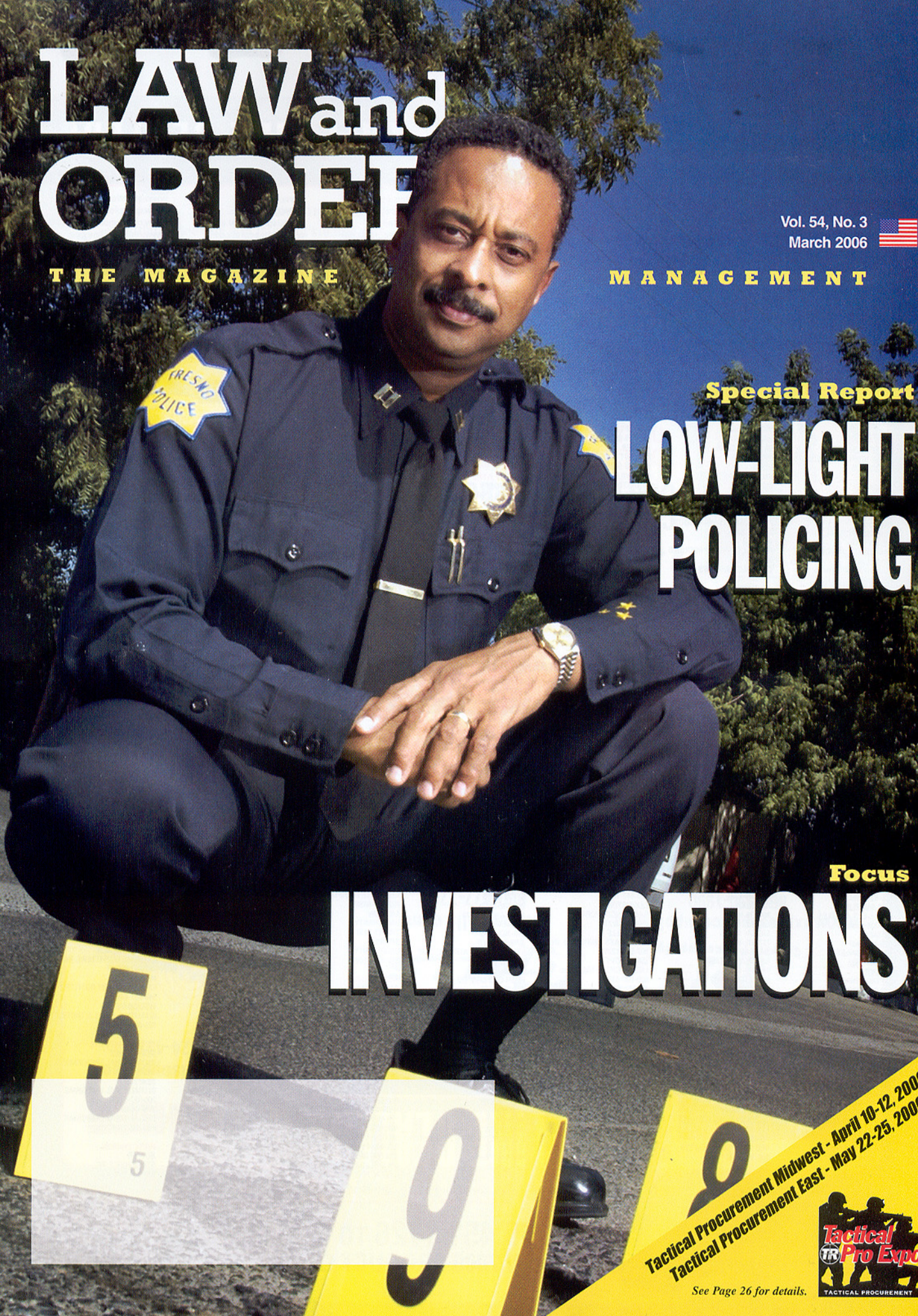
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SPECIAL REPORT: *LOW-LIGHT POLICING*

BY MICK WILLIAMS



# LOW-LIGHT ENGAGEMENTS

## INSTRUCTOR COURSE

*Powering with light on a traffic stop.*

**T**he subject of low light conditions and officer survival has been a concern of police trainers for a long time. However, for many departments, low light training has consisted of the yearly handgun qualification with the flashlight. Starting in the 1990s a group of instructors and trainers began to go beyond the “handgun and flashlight techniques” to develop a curriculum of low light tactics and skills through a test bed of force-on-force training and user feedback from the field.

Ken Good and Dave Maynard did much of this at Combative Concepts. Later Ken Good developed and further codified these concepts at the SureFire Institute, which was later restructured. Good and a group of instructors formed Strategos International to continue propagating and developing tactical skills in the

low light environment.

The current program is “Strategies of Low-Light Engagements Instructor Course” and it is a 40-plus hour instructor program. The particular course reviewed was conducted at the federally funded Regional Training Center in Sioux City, IA.

The primary instructor for the course was Mark Warren, director of training for Strategos International. Warren is a 23-year veteran cop who currently works full time for Strategos and is still a reserve officer. Assisting Mark was Rod Schaeffer, Nick Kokot and Jim King (the primary instructor for the Physical Conflict Resolutions program). All of the Strategos instructors have a background in police and/or military special operations.

#### Flashlight Techniques

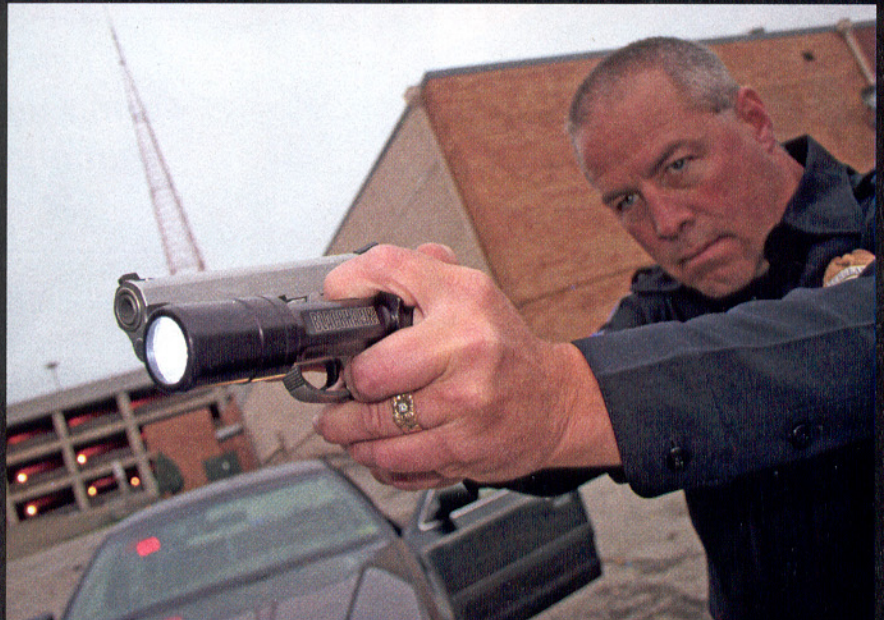
From the beginning, Warren made it clear that this was going to be an intense five days and not to expect to just put in your eight hours and go hit the bars. How can someone spend 40 hours and five days on handgun and flashlight techniques? The simple

answer is that Strategos doesn't. The benefits of the Harries Technique versus the Rogers/SureFire technique versus the Neck Index technique are covered only briefly in the course. These are only a very small part of the equation that makes up a low-light gunfight.

The focus of the course is fighting and winning in the lowlight environment. The course focuses on light use and management, movement, team communication, and effective control of subjects with all the tools available. When viewed from that perspective,

operator powers the threat up with light. The key, according to the Strategos doctrine, is to fluidly recognize and apply the needed principle.

One concept brought up early, and often, throughout the course, was the importance of breathing and posture. The use of the force-on-force would develop these in the students. While it is easy to sit in a class and say, “breathing and posture are important in a gunfight,” it is very different to do it in a dark house with Sim rounds going off. Much of the strategy for low-light engagements is based on the



*The Night-Ops Gladius in Action.*

one sees that handgun/flashlight techniques are only a part of the picture. While the above techniques are discussed and used, and there is a lot of gun handling in the class, the focus is not static range skills.

Warren began the class with a morning of lecture in which he outlined the guiding principles that would be developed in the hands-on training. Strategos has several principles that are used in the low-light environment. All of the concepts are applied at various points in an encounter. Sometimes an operator uses intermittent light, other times an

ability to move and to create chaos on the threat through that movement. This can only be done if you are balanced with good posture and breathing.

Next was the philosophy of the OODA loop developed by Col. John Boyd. The Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act (OODA) cycle is the mental process people go through in a high-risk situation. By codifying the cycle, Col. Boyd was able to increase reaction time in fighter pilots. Others in other tactical venues have seen the value of the OODA loop. Strategos

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*The high-low stack. A pair of officers will start working on a threat area from this position sometimes.*

focuses a great deal on the OODA loop and how they can use it against a threat.

Warren pointed out to use the OODA loop training by going back over a simulated engagement mentally after it occurs and view it through the OODA loop. This will help a student see where he can shorten his own loop and lengthen the threat's loop. Instead of viewing the Sims engagements in terms of seconds, he wanted the student to think in terms of tenth of seconds.

### **Physical Conflict Resolution**

The Low-Light Engagement course has six to 10 hours of Strategos' Physical Conflict Resolutions (PCR) curriculum as part of the overall course. The integration of flashlight use, weapons skills, and physical tactics is a unique aspect of this low light course. The PCR curriculum is based on the Russian System developed by the Russian military.

The Russian System focuses on dynamically affecting the spine of the opponent to, in effect, gain mechanical compliance. Again, proper posture and the use of the hips are emphasized in the PCR course, mirroring what students would see on the range and in the Sims House.

The PCR curriculum is not a "if A then B" methodology. It is a more principle-based model of teaching. Throughout the week the integration of movement, control techniques, flashlight use and handgun use would be taught in the mat room. The first day would focus on breathing and movement between the kneeling, standing and modified prone shooting postures.

Jim King then took the students into the use of the head tilt, a core technique of the PCR program. The use of the head tilt in conjunction with use of the strobing of flashlight was then practiced. The course went into other techniques for taking the suspect down.

While half of the class was with King finding new levels of pain, the other half was in the Sims House trying to figure out how not to get smoked with Simunitions®. This was not a teaching segment. It was more of a "pretest" segment, an opportunity for students to test their notions of low light tactics in force on force. It also lets the training staff see what skills the students brought into the class.

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## *When was the last time your agency did physical control tactics training in low-light conditions with a flashlight?*

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### **Communication**

As students cleared the Sims House at the RTC in pairs, the importance of communication and full understanding of angles became readily apparent. It was not the newest flashlight and handgun technique that won the engagement. All of the engagements were videotaped and would be reviewed the next day. This was another key point to the course. The use of video review was key to many students' improvement.

The next three days started at noon, so that the class could work late into the night. The days were divided between video review, the mat room, Sims House, the barricade field, firing range and dry technical work at an aircraft hanger. The schedule for each day would vary and while the instructors tried to stay to the schedule, they also had to be flexible. The weather required that times for some of the barricade field and the live fire on the range be adjusted to work around the Iowa flat land winds.

In the mat room, students would continue work on their breathing and posture with some very good mindset drills. Also as the week progressed students would work in lower and lower light conditions. This was really where the program focused the attention of the students.

Realistically, when was the last time your agency did physical control tactics training in low-light conditions with a flashlight? The arm bar takedown done with two hands is a little more difficult with a flashlight in one hand and in low light. The PCR program focuses on control skills that require only one hand, such as the head tilt and the rear cut down. These skills are useful in any environment from low light to weapons retention.



Mark demonstrating cornering with Modified FBI position.

### Barricade Field

The barricade field is an interesting facet to the Strategos program. The barricade field training is done in both the day-light and night. The use of the barricade field as a teaching tool is to expose students to multiple angle problems against threats. The barricade field immediately shows students that angle problems have to be solved through communication and coordinated movement of partners. The field became a quick way for the instructors to impart these drills on the barricade field, giving students practice at communication on the move.

One of the biggest mistakes made early in the week on the field was crowding the barricade for cover, being so close to the barrier that it obscures the person's

vision and movement. Like the Sims House, the barricade field was videotaped to show students exactly why they received the sting of paintballs on the field.

Throughout the week the instructors emphasized the use of light to control and disorient the threat or suspect. Strategos' philosophy is that especially if the threat's location is unknown, the use of constant-on lighting can be a deterrent to the user. The use of intermittent light, that is a light rapidly strobed varying in height, position and frequency, can create a disorienting view for the threat.

Not being attached to having the light on or off to navigate was reinforced in students' throw drills. These demonstrated that they could "paint a path with light" and use their memory to guide them if

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they go lights out. While the use of intermittent light was important, the flip side of the coin “powering a threat up with light” was just as important.

Once a threat was located or engaged the use of light to control their movement and disorient their vision was very important. As an example, if a gunman pops out a doorway and shoots a couple of shots at a search team and goes back in the doorway, immediately powering up the doorway with light as team members move will force the suspect to reconsider moving into the light. This will allow team members to move into position or hold and bring other tools to bear on the suspect.

The use of constant on lighting is also used to mitigate the effects of backlighting as you pass it, if you have a powerful enough illumination tool. There is no one tool or technique to use, and there is no free lunch with any of them, and one has to look at developing a whole tactical skill set.

### Live Fire

The live fire range was only a short block of instruction in the entire program, but an important one. It let students see how they could do with the skills that had been taught with their weapons and gear. The range drills emphasized coordinating the light with movement and weapons handling. There was a lot of moving laterally after lighting, engaging the threat, and then vertically displacing (moving from standing to kneeling, to modified prone).

Movement balanced with the partner while engaging threats was taught as well.

Interestingly, the use of weapon lights mounted on the handgun was not emphasized on the live range, or much at all during the course. The obvious advantage of being able to acquire a two-hand firing grip on the gun can be outweighed by the fact that the gun, and thus the light, are centered on you. From the threat’s perspective, who will likely shoot at the light if they see nothing else, the target area will be centered on you. The weapon light also makes intermittent use of light more difficult to do efficiently.

Also, the live range demonstrated to the students that they could get good hits with the various lighting techniques at the distances most room engagements take place. That isn’t to say that the teaching staff totally dismissed the use of weapon lights; they emphasized that like all tools they have their time and place. When transitioning from a long gun to the pistol or when the threat has been located and “powered up” are a couple of examples.

### Force On Force

The class ended late Thursday night with a practical test at an abandoned aircraft. Students worked in teams of six in two Force-On-Force exercises. The quality of the exercise design and the quality of the role players made this a real test of the skills learned through the week. Video review the next day really showed how much students had progressed through the week, though we still had some lumps.

The facility and staff at Sioux City Police Department’s Regional Training Center are outstanding. The staff made sure students had the gear, facilities, housing, and food through some hard work and dedication. The courses at RTC are federally funded. Students do not pay for tuition, housing or meals. Breakfast and lunches are provided and a check is given for the dinner Per Diem at the end of the week.

In this class students did not have to provide Simunition® ammunition, a huge saving for agencies. All of this is available to any agency in the United States who wants to come to Sioux City because of the federal funding. Funding is dependant on votes from your local Congressional Representative, which means every year this valuable resource is endangered.

The Strategies of Low-Light Engagements Instructor course is well worth an agency to send its instructor staff to, especially if presented at the Regional Training Center. While it takes work to develop and ingrain the skills taught in the class, these are life saving skills. Through a mix of skills training, force-on-force and live fire training, Strategos presents a formula for teaching true officer survival skills in Low-Light. As they say, “Win the light fight and you will win the gun fight.”

*Myrick Williams is a patrol officer, SWAT team member and defensive tactics instructor with the Bloomington, IN, Police. He can be reached at [williamm@city.bloomington.in.us](mailto:williamm@city.bloomington.in.us).*

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