

BENNIE COOLEY'S URBAN TACTICAL RIFLE COURSE (Zen and the Art of Gunfighting)

By Connie Bond

With a federal law enforcement background, Bennie Cooley, founder of Crisis Resolution Training Consultants (CRTC) gives personal instruction to law enforcement and military officers across the country in courses such as: Urban Tactical Rifle, Urban Tactical Patrol, Urban Tactical Rifle Instructor's Course, Advanced Firearms Training, Advanced SWAT, Tactical Sniper, and many others. Cooley is well known and respected in the shooting sports industry, where he holds such distinctions and titles as the 2005 World Sniper Championships Match Winner, 5-time USPSA 3-Gun National Championship, 3-time 3-Gun World Champion and many others, too numerous to mention. Suffice it to say, he is one of the country's top shooters.

This class was different than many I've attended due to its intensity! At the beginning of the class, students were asked exactly why they were there—especially considering a number of them were there on their personal time and some paid for the class out of their own pockets. Answers ranged from “to receive further training” and “being better able to operate the weapon systems,” to “we heard great reviews on the class at TTPOA.” Cooley was very clear and surprisingly simple when he stated that the specific reason anyone should be taking the class was to become a master of teaching themselves, and that this is not possible until you first “know where you are.”

He also explained that the class would be three days in length and the techniques introduced could not be mastered in that time frame, but it was critical that they be understood. He told the students it would take another two weeks of rehearsal to be able to start ingraining the lessons that they found valuable into daily activities, so that they became part of their normal response. Cooley also warned that the more time the students allowed to pass without practicing what they'd learned, the less information they would retain. Obviously, this article can't encompass everything presented in the class but, we'll touch on the main points.

“This course is different than other courses I've taken because most of them teach you how to shoot. This class teaches you how to fight with a gun, which is more applicable for what I do. Here I've experienced many different shooting platforms—some I've never dreamed of.”

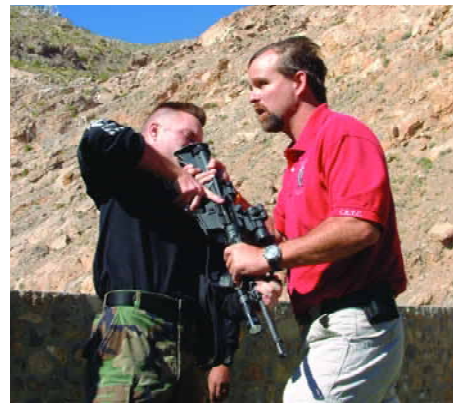
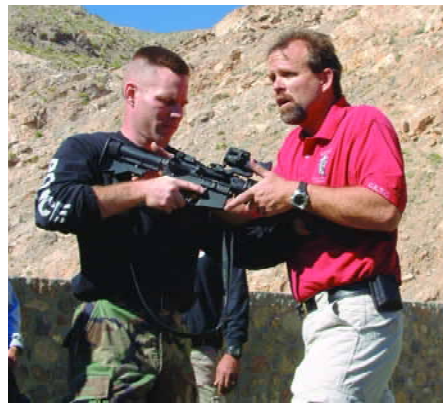
Johnny Martinez
El Paso PD SWAT

Held on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday in El Paso, Texas, Bennie Cooley's Urban Tactical Rifle class lived up to expectations and then some. The El Paso County Sheriffs Office, in conjunction with the El Paso Police Department hosted this class after an officer with the sheriff's office attended one of Cooley's classes at the Texas Tactical Police Officer's Association's Annual SWAT Conference. As Bobby Flores said, “I was very impressed and determined to get Cooley down here so our officers could learn his techniques firsthand.”

C.R.T.C., Inc.



Because Life Is Not a Rehearsal!



Simplicity is the key to effective disarming techniques.

RIFLE PRIORITIES

The most important accessories of a patrol rifle are:

1. Light – rifles must have a light source because we operate in the dark 90% of the time.
2. Optics – you must be able to see the target.
3. Sling system – you must be able to secure your rifle when you are transitioning or searching someone, and the sling must allow you to be able to transition the weapon from left or right side.

Seemingly simple, Cooley reminded everyone that shooting is 100% visual. Because of this, the light and optics are extremely



important. Ammunition choice was also discussed, and the students were reminded that it was their responsibility to enlighten administration on the kind of ammunition that would best suit their needs and the mission at hand. Another, often overlooked aspect was brought up—keeping track of how many rounds have been fired through the barrel. Especially if the weapon is departmentally owned, it is vital to know how old the barrel is because

“Level of instruction is the best I’ve attended.”

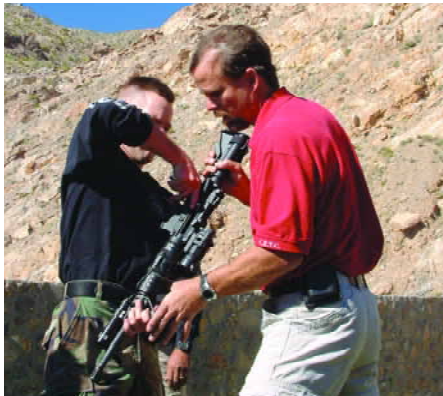
“This is my second time through this class. I learned more and refreshed what I knew. This helped me with getting the mental focus that I need.”
**Brett Lemmon
Federal Agent**

“Wonderful class that should be taught to all law enforcement personnel.”

the weapon will likely be passed on to other officers, and at some point, barrel degradation will occur if excessive rounds have been fired. This is an example of the manner in which instruction progressed from formal training on one exact element of operation into an aside on departmental liability issues. Never a dull moment, and no time wasted in the class.

EMOTIONS OF SHOOTING

As we’ve mentioned time and again in articles in this publication, when an officer gets into a shooting situation, stress is a major factor and the way the officer handles that stress heavily influences his chances of surviving the incident. Cooley discusses what he refers to as a *personal comfort zone*. This is



where your mind tries to appease the physical desires of the body. If you are unable to control your response to your personal comfort zone, it will inhibit your ability to deal with the crisis effectively. As human beings, we naturally flinch or go into defensive mechanisms for a moment when faced with a threat. However, we can train our minds to recognize this panic and immediately start to control this reaction, allowing us to



Cooley demonstrates an economy of motion while changing positions at the barricade.

use the tactics we've mastered. Cooley teaches officers to quickly get out of their personal comfort zone, to fight through it as "100ths of a second count in a gunfight." Because of this, officers are able to progress quickly and violently to their offensive tactics, allowing them to change the outcome of the situation.

Law enforcement officers are already behind because of the simple fact that they are reacting to an action by the subject. The ability to learn how to break through one's personal comfort zone is meant to give the officer, who is in the reactionary mode, more time. We're only talking about 10ths and 100ths of seconds within each step, but they add up to crucial seconds

if you can save time on all of the steps along the way. Every fraction of a second can be used to the officer's advantage to even the odds.

Cooley teaches aggression! In fact, this is stressed all during the course—don't just point the rifle at the target, *drive* it to the target. Don't waste precious time—*move!* Quickly get yourself into position to take the shot! The subject will dictate the amount of force you need to use, but you *must* be ready to respond with the appropriate level, including deadly force. Cooley stressed that you can always reduce your force level, according to the subject's actions, but it takes precious time to increase it—time that you do not have!

VISUAL PATIENCE

"The entire course was beneficial. I generally expect to walk away from courses having learned one or two things, I lost count of the things I learned from this course. I will continue to highly recommend your training courses to anyone who has a serious commitment to survival."

**Preston Browning
Federal Agent**

"Most instructors have the background, but they come down to the student's level. They teach basic tactics and work to proficiency. Bennie starts you at proficiency and pushes you to levels you've never achieved. He makes sure you master every principle. It's up to you to build on, but he doesn't tolerate less than your best. It's all about confidence. The confidence you gain from his instruction is outstanding."

**Bobby Flores
El Paso Sheriff's Office SWAT**

This is a particularly interesting aspect of Cooley's training. Visual patience involves the fact that during a crisis, your mind cannot perceive that you are doing things fast enough. In fact, it will literally be *screaming* at you to move faster. This can cause you to panic, setting you back into the defensive mode and causing your tactics to go out of the window. Students are taught that they must fight and control this panic to maintain the visual patience needed so that they can continue to fight the threat and call upon their knowledge base of tactics that they've been trained in. This aspect of the training is one of the most important and needs to be fully understood.

TRANSITIONING WITH THE RIFLE

Every one of the students in the class was right-handed. When asked how many ever shot left-handed, the reply was "no one." Well, that all changed, and quickly! After instruction, answering questions regarding the instruction and dry fire prac-



The class of right-handed students adapted very quickly to shooting with their left hands and transitioning from standing to kneeling and squatting.



Two-man team security movement drill.

tice, students were transitioning from right- to left-handed shooting as though it were second nature. As an observer, it was interesting to note how much more fluid and effortlessly the movements became as the students gained confidence in their abilities.

Not only did transitioning involve right and left-handed shooting, students also learned to transition from standing to kneeling and to squatting. In other words, they could shoot from just about any position they would find themselves in the real world. Instruction didn't stop here. Movement was

“Outstanding instruction. He answered questions I had never even thought of. By far the most impressive class I’ve ever attended.”

“Instructor is high speed—pushed each student to a higher level mentally and physically.”



The position Cooley teaches for shooting around a vehicle reduces the exposed body mass of the shooter.



It is critical to have the stability of bracing the front and rear of the weapon.

incorporated into the different positions and the more they practiced the positions, the better they became. Interestingly, the only time the prone position was used was in the beginning of the class when they were sighting in their rifles.

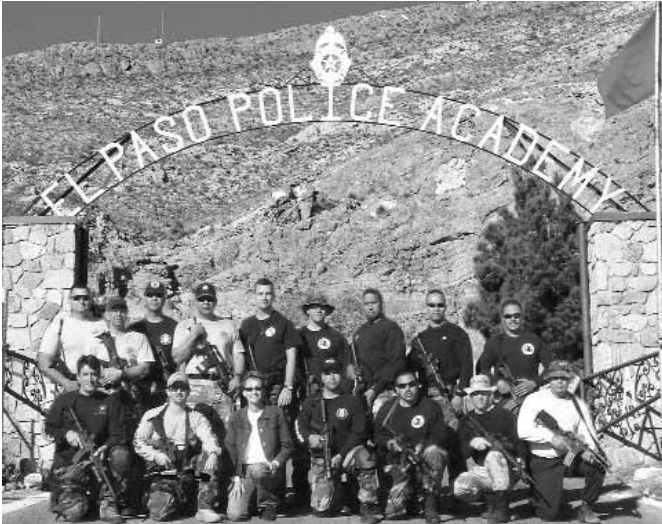
SPEED

Cooley stressed over and over again the importance of moving. He also taught the aspect of leaning ahead on your thought process. Ultimately, you want your body to keep up with your mind, not the reverse or you're floundering. The only way to do this is by practice. Technically correct practice will instill confidence in your abilities, giving you more time to explode out of panic

“Excellent, a must for every team member of a tactical team.”

“In the short time that Bennie was here, I learned so much. I loved his philosophy that he incorporated with his training and the passion he demonstrated when applying each technique.”

Gabriel Peralta
El Paso Police Department



and gain composure to make the shot happen. He also told the students not to judge a technique by their inability to perform it in the class. He reminded them that it was their responsibility to practice it and master it on their own. As he said, “If you understand a technique and can physically do it, there are only two reasons you won’t master it to your level of learning: 1) it is not important to you, 2) you are lazy.”

Strong points and not too lightly taken. As was stressed over and over again, this is serious stuff—it had better be important; there is no room for anything in between. We have to be honest with ourselves at all times!

RIFLE DISARMING

As a realistic reminder of how important it is *not* to allow anyone too close to your rifle, a section of the class was devoted to rifle disarming. Safety was paramount in this portion of the instruction, with relevant reminders that officers are killed every year in training incidents. After making sure that the rifles used were completely disabled from firing, and the training area was free of all live ammunition and firearms of any kind, Cooley proceeded to demonstrate an impressively simple and proven rifle disarming tactic. After a few awkward moments, when it was apparent the students were uncomfortable with showing submission during the first phase of the disarming, they settled into learning and did a great job!

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

Clearly, Bennie Cooley knows shooting. However, as important as knowing the subject matter, he also knows how to teach. He helps students understand (like all good teachers) by using things they can relate to in making his points. Example: he used the emotions and physical actions of a fist fight to help explain the emotions and physical limitations that will be experienced in a gunfight. He also made a crystal clear point when he asked “how long is a 1/2 of a second?” His answer - he fired off two rounds! When put into this context, 1/2 of a second is a heck of a long time—even I understood that!

It is apparent that Cooley has literally taken gunfighting to a higher level. He has obviously painstakingly dissected weaponry and more importantly gunfighting skills into all of its parts—some more evident than others. There doesn’t seem to

be an element overlooked or slighted in his instruction. He goes from the basics of the rifle itself into the dynamics of how the mind perceives threats and how it reacts under this stress, to the physical aspects of how you can move and shoot more accurately. Words like “urgency,” “warrior,” “aggression,” “critical,” “drive,” and “move” were repeated throughout the three-day class.

Cooley believes that knowledge not shared is ignorance and he made it clear that law enforcement officers and military are a family. As he said, “it’s the heart that makes us different. Everyday we go out and strap on our weapons and protect people we don’t even know. It’s because we believe in something bigger than us. The only difference between the Samurai of ancient days and the warrior of today is the equipment, if not, we’d be using swords.”

I highly recommend this class and any others Cooley teaches. Even if you have to pay for the instruction yourself and take personal time, like many of these students did, his vast knowledge and incredible attention to detail will be well worth the time and money spent.

**For more information, contact:
Bennie Cooley**

www.benniecooley.com



BENNIE COOLEY’S EQUIPMENT

JP Rifles - www.jp Rifles.com

Surefire Scout Tactical Weapon Light - www.surefire.com

Horus Vision Scopes -
www.horusvision.com

Hornady TAP Ammunition -
www.hornady.com

MGM Targets - www.mgmtargets.com

Viking Tactics Sling System -
www.vikingtactics.com

Texas Tactical Police Officers
Association sponsored/endorsed the class - www.ttpoa.org

Editor’s Note: I would like to thank Bobby Flores, Bridgett and everyone at the El Paso Police Academy for the hospitality and the tamales! You guys are great!