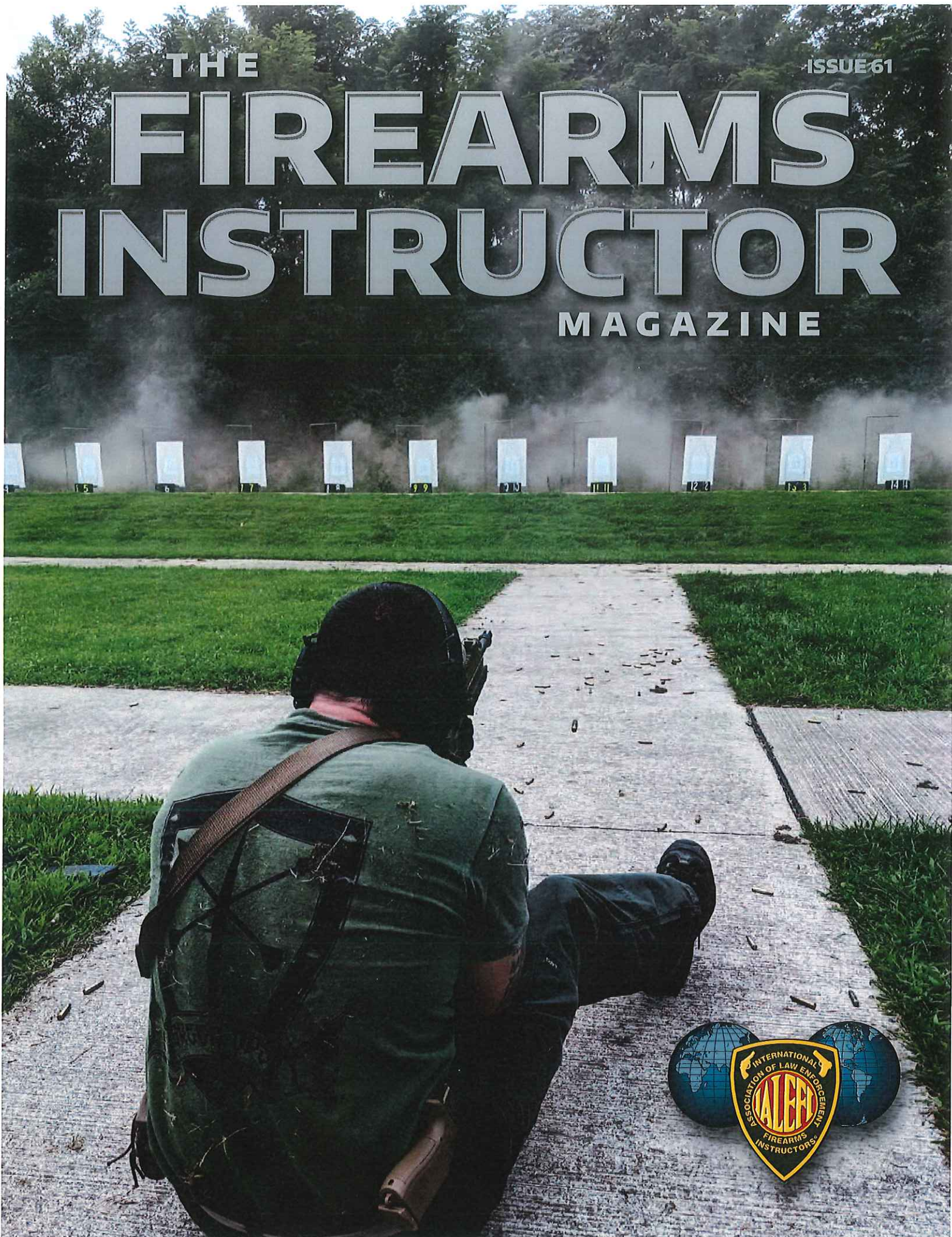


THE

ISSUE 61

# FIREARMS INSTRUCTOR

MAGAZINE





THE MAGAZINE **FOR** FIREARMS INSTRUCTORS **BY** FIREARMS INSTRUCTORS

# THE **FIREARMS** INSTRUCTOR

ISSUE 61

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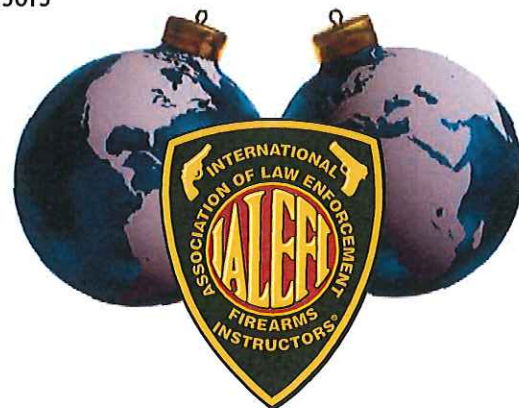
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Cover photo: Numa Landry

Rifle exercises at the Master Instructor Development Program in Monroeville, PA August 2018





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# THE FIREARMS INSTRUCTOR

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## NOTE FROM THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

*We encourage you to submit articles and photos for publication as well as letters and comments on articles which have appeared in previous issues. We can also use short "Training Tips" and "Safety Tips," cover photos, and news items of interest from a training perspective. Please refer to the Editorial Guidelines below for details on format for your submission. Take advantage of this opportunity to share information with other instructors and see your work in print!*

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Members are urged to provide us with input on the style and content of *THE FIREARMS INSTRUCTOR*. Submitted articles should conform to these rules:

1. Articles should be submitted in Microsoft Word. Please have your article free of spelling and grammatical errors. We encourage you to support your article with photos and/or illustrations, if applicable.
2. A photograph of the author, along with a brief biographical sketch, should be included.
3. Any photographs submitted should include captions. Photos will be returned on request. For optimal print quality, digital photos should be a minimum of 6 megapixels.
4. Submitted manuscripts will not be returned. The author should retain a copy of the manuscript.

Articles should be directed towards law enforcement firearms training, trainers, instructional methods, and officer survival. The specific techniques and practices proposed in the article may be original, unconventional, or controversial, but should reflect sound training and safety principles. IALEFI\* will publish product reviews and evaluations, provided they are directed to the interests of the professional firearms instructor and are not derogatory of other products or manufacturers. Articles on other subjects may mention and discuss the use of specific products including limited professional critique of the products, but the thrust of the article must be one of training methods, firearms techniques, and officer survival.

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# THE CENTER AXIS RELOCK (CAR) SYSTEM: THEORY AND PRACTICE (PART 1)

by Jeffrey B. Johnsgaard  
and Gregory M. Vecchi, Ph.D.

**D**eadly force situations involving firearms by law enforcement officers are usually sudden, violent, and at close range. According to the FBI, from 1994-2016, nearly 50 percent (48.9%) of trained law enforcement officers were feloniously killed by a firearm at a distance of less than five feet (CJIS, 2003; CJIS, 2004; CJIS, 2014; CJIS 2015; CJIS 2016). Moreover, nearly 70 percent (68.9%) of officers killed were less than ten feet away and over 80 percent (82.1%) were killed within 20 feet of the attacker (CJIS, 2003; CJIS, 2004; CJIS, 2014; CJIS 2015; CJIS 2016). Due to the extremely close distances, these situations afford the officer little or no time to effectively draw and aim. The situation is compounded by the involuntary activation of the sympathetic nervous system which triggers the fight or flight reaction, otherwise known as the Body Alarm Response. As such, when faced with imminent threats of death or serious bodily injury, time, space, and the body work against the officer who uses traditional firearms positions and tactics (Johnsgaard, 2016). To further complicate the matter, many law enforcement officers find themselves in their patrol vehicles unable to move, escape, or take cover when an ambush occurs (CJIS, 2003; CJIS, 2004; CJIS, 2014; CJIS 2015; CJIS 2016). Given the above statistics, there appears to be a gap regarding training programs addressing close quarter encounters where deadly force is required to survive.

The CAR System has been misunderstood as a replacement for other shooting platforms such as the Isosceles and Weaver configurations. At longer distances where there

is time to obtain proper sight alignment and sight picture, the Isosceles and Weaver platforms can be effective; however, at close distances where movement and dual sight picture become prominent factors and there is no time to aim or adapt your stance, it is our position that the CAR System is superior both from the perspective of shooting and weapon retention. The CAR System was reverse engineered from absolute contact, outward to approximately 30 feet, and it works in harmony with other shooting platforms.

In addition, the CAR System has appeared in and out of the media and in Hollywood. For example, the CAR System has been featured in the Ubisoft video game *Splinter Cell: Conviction* by Keanu Reeves in his character role as John Wick (Reeves, 2015) and by Donnie Wahlberg in the television series *Blue Bloods*. Unfortunately, these depictions of the CAR System, as well as several YouTube videos, have not been accurate in their portrayal.

In Part 1 of this article, we provide a reintroduction and overview of the CAR System as it was originally conceived by its founder, Paul Castle, and its development over time under the leadership of its heir, Jeff Johnsgaard (Sabre Tactical, 2015). Moreover, we will attempt to dispel some of the common misconceptions of the CAR System and provide evidence of its efficiency and effectiveness in close quarter deadly force situations. It is important to understand that the CAR System is more than just techniques for shooting and retention; it is an entire system focused on training the ability to make criti-

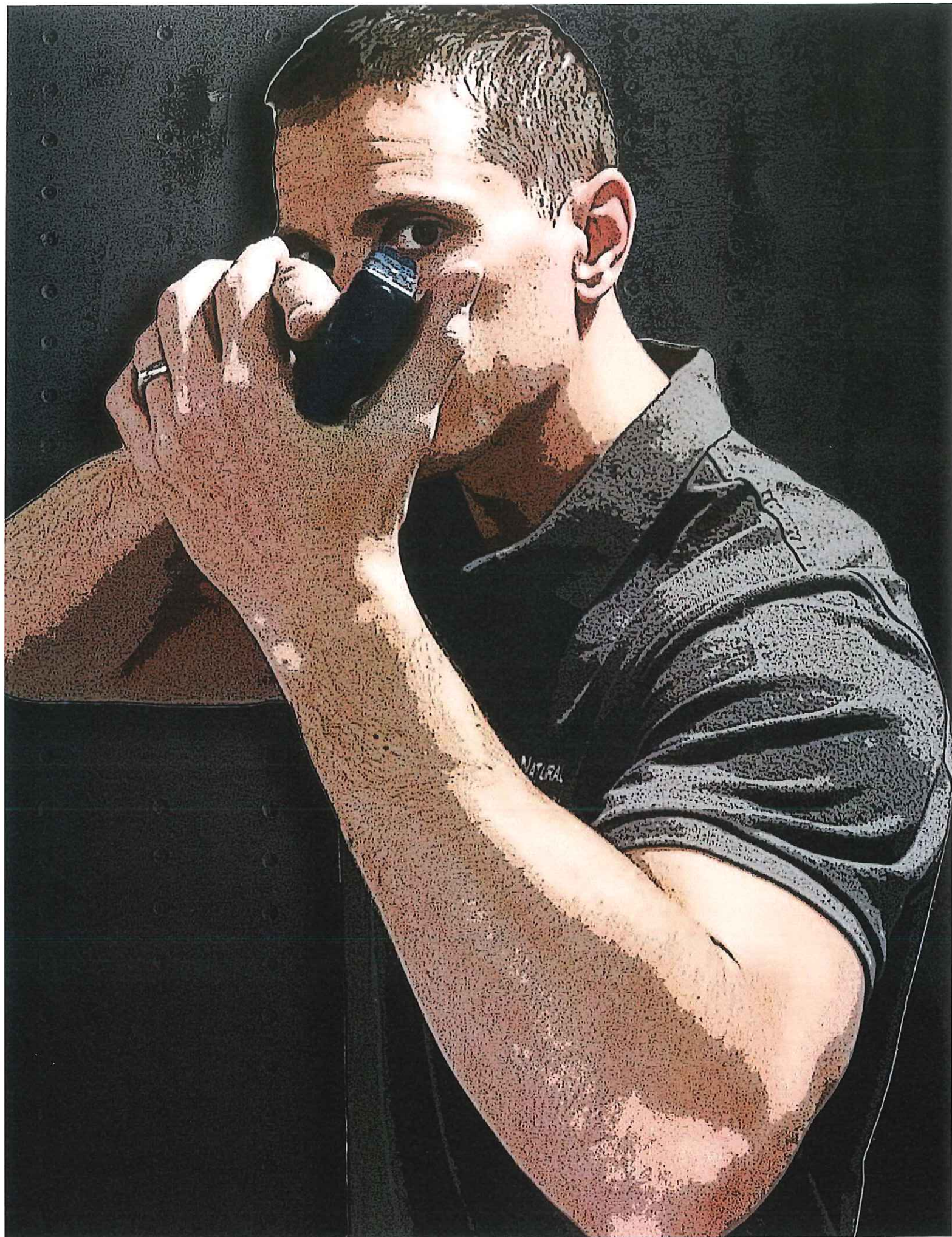
cal decisions under stress. Therefore, as an introductory article on the CAR System, we will only touch on its overall efficacy, history, human physiology, dual sight picture, and target acquisition. In Part 2 of this article, we will discuss the core components of the CAR System including the concepts of Reacting, Reducing, Reloading, Recovering, Returning, and Retention.

## WHY THE CAR SYSTEM?

Gunfights typically occur at ranges of less than 30 feet (CJIS, 2003; CJIS, 2004; CJIS, 2014; CJIS 2015; CJIS 2016). At gunfighting distances from zero to approximately 30 feet, the CAR System cannot be matched for efficiency and effectiveness. This does not diminish the utility of other traditional shooting platforms such as the Weaver and Isosceles stances, especially at longer distances or when the threat is identified sooner enabling more time and opportunity to adjust. It should be noted that officers often perform well at distance or when the attacker is scripted or moving unrealistically; however, when forced to perform at close range, the stance, reload techniques, and even the draw become less optimal and often unsafe (Johnsgaard, 2016).

The CAR System is a more effective platform when shooting from a vehicle or close quarter environment. It is designed to work with the body during the fight or flight response and it is adaptable throughout the use-of-force continuum from verbal de-escalation, to empty hand tactics, to improvised tools, and firearms. According to the FBI, a considerable number of deadly force encounters result in injuries due to the offender









taking the officers' firearm away and using it against the officer (CJIS, 2003; CJIS, 2004; CJIS, 2014; CJIS 2015; CJIS 2016), as well as using personal, edged, and impact weapons against the officer. Since over 50 percent of firearm deadly force encounters are within five feet of the attacker (CJIS, 2003; CJIS, 2004; CJIS, 2014; CJIS 2015; CJIS 2016), there is a critical need for weapon retention, which is another area where the CAR System excels. Simply put, being able to deliver multiple rounds on multiple targets at close distances while moving and reloading is the minimum competency needed to survive deadly force encounters.

### **HISTORY OF THE CAR SYSTEM**

The CAR System of gunfighting has been around since the 1990's (Castle, 2009). The original technique was developed by Paul Castle, a former police officer and firearms instructor originally from Wales (United Kingdom) (Boogaard, 2016; Sabre Tactical 2015). Castle developed the CAR System out of a need for lessening felt recoil, weapon handling, and manipulation as well as developing a close-in gun position and hold techniques due to his severe myopia (Castle, 2009).

In 1994, Castle met Kevin Sayle, a British Army soldier, who had specialized tactical training in close quarter protection.

Sayle worked for the British Army's Close Protection Unit where he had extensive training and experience with shooting out of and around vehicles as well as dealing with ambushes and crowds. Sayle was intrigued by how accurately Castle could shoot using the CAR positions and how well it could be adapted to close protection situations (Castle, 2009). Castle and Sayle teamed up and further developed the CAR System by incorporating the use of CAR in close quarter situations, specifically executive protection and vehicle anti-ambush techniques. Sayle also introduced Castle to a World Kung Fu Champion from Europe (Castle, 2009). This is where they learned that many of the principles CAR was founded on share similarities to Kung Fu, specifically the concept of centerline and the generation of power through short range movements.

Castle and Sayle founded Claymore LLC then later Sabre Tactical LLC which they used as the base for their research, development, and training of the CAR System. It was during this time that the CAR System spread from the UK to the United States.

In 2004, Jeff Johnsgaard, a Canadian police officer and martial artist, was introduced to the CAR System. From 2004 - 2011, Johnsgaard trained, added, and improved upon the retention aspects of the CAR

System drawing attention to how it could be used across the entire use of force spectrum. For example, incorporating aspects of the Worden Defense System to seamlessly flow in and out of fistfighting, stickfighting, knife-fighting, and gunfighting situations (Worden, 2013). This "tool for your toolbox" approach worked well in bringing together these seemingly divergent areas and changing the mindsets of officers by marrying martial arts and firearms for lethal close quarter survival situations (Johnsgaard, 2016).

In 2009, Castle openly declared Johnsgaard as the heir to the CAR System. In September 2011, Castle died at the age of 52 from a lengthy battle with cancer (Johnsgaard, 2016). Johnsgaard further developed the CAR System by incorporating Reality Based Training (RBT) methods as the basis of the CAR System training method. This method of instruction, based around The Seven Survivals, encompasses several evolutions of specially designed live fire sessions, visualization training, and RBT role-playing scenarios (Murray, 2006; Murray, 2017). Crisis communication, behavioral analysis, and threat assessment techniques were also incorporated into the CAR System (Ireland & Vecchi, 2009; Vecchi, 2009a, & Vecchi, 2009b).

### **HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY AND THE CAR SYSTEM**

To gain an appreciation of the efficacy of the CAR System, one must understand human physiology as it relates to stress. Stress is a normal and natural part of life and it is perceived as either eustress or distress. Eustress has a beneficial effect on health, motivation, performance, and emotional well-being whereas distress has the opposite effect (Mills, Reiss, & Dombeck, 2008). The importance of stress is to understand it is a matter of perception. When one perceives a situation as a threat to their physical or mental well-being, unstoppable physical changes take place first in the body's sympathetic nervous system and then in the parasympathetic nervous system that immediately and involuntarily places the person into the fight or flight response (the Body Alarm Response or BAR) (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008; McKinney, 2012).

Deadly force situations are acute stress situations that trigger the BAR which greatly diminishes the ability to perform (McKinney, 2012). The BAR occurs in three phases: Alarm, Plateau, and Refractory (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008). The Alarm Phase occurs when the officer perceives a situation as urgent and dangerous and questions his or her ability to cope with it. This results in anxiety and a temporary mind freeze caus-



ing the body to enter a state of fight, flight, or freeze (Berger, 2007; Berger & Kain, 2007; Kain, 2007). When this occurs, the body experiences several unstoppable physiological changes such as vasoconstriction, audio exclusion, tunnel vision, perceptual distortions, and an influx of adrenaline (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008; McKinney, 2012). The Plateau Phase immediately follows resulting in decreased performance levels with respect to cognitive recall and psychomotor skills; however, it is in this phase where proper training can further assist. In order to mitigate the mind-freeze phenomena during the Alarm Phase and to competently perform during the Plateau Phase, the officer must be trained to recognize the situation and employ practiced movements to efficiently and effectively deal with the situation (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008). In other words, there must be an “Orienting Response” (situational awareness) followed by a “Behavioral Chain” (techniques, tactics, and procedures) (Berger, 2007; Berger & Kain, 2007; Kain, 2007). This equates to training at the level of “unconscious competence” where decision making, movement, shooting, and reloading happen without thinking about it. The Refractory Stage is the last stage of the BAR when an officer has “stood down” believing that the incident is over (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008). During this stage, the body goes through a strong parasympathetic nervous system backlash as it returns to officer’s baseline (McKinney, 2012). This phase is powerful and physically renders the person less able to respond to the high degree they were able to previously. This phase can also make the officer psychologically vulnerable by prematurely relaxing and becoming inattentive, thus rendering the officer less able to effectively respond to further threats as needed mentally as well (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008). The problem of the Refractory Stage can be mitigated by mental engagement techniques or, when the officer is ready to stand down, by performing the Benson Breathing Technique, a purposeful breathing focused on inhaling deeply through the nose and exhaling forcefully through the mouth (Bell & Saltikov, 2000; Benson & Klipper, 2000). If done correctly, the Benson Technique results in a massive decline in stress, tension, and anxiety allowing the officer to effectively return to a normal state. This is important because, for optimal performance, the body must return to homeostasis; that is, from the sympathetic “fight or flight” condition to the parasympathetic “rest and digest” condition (NIH, n.d.).

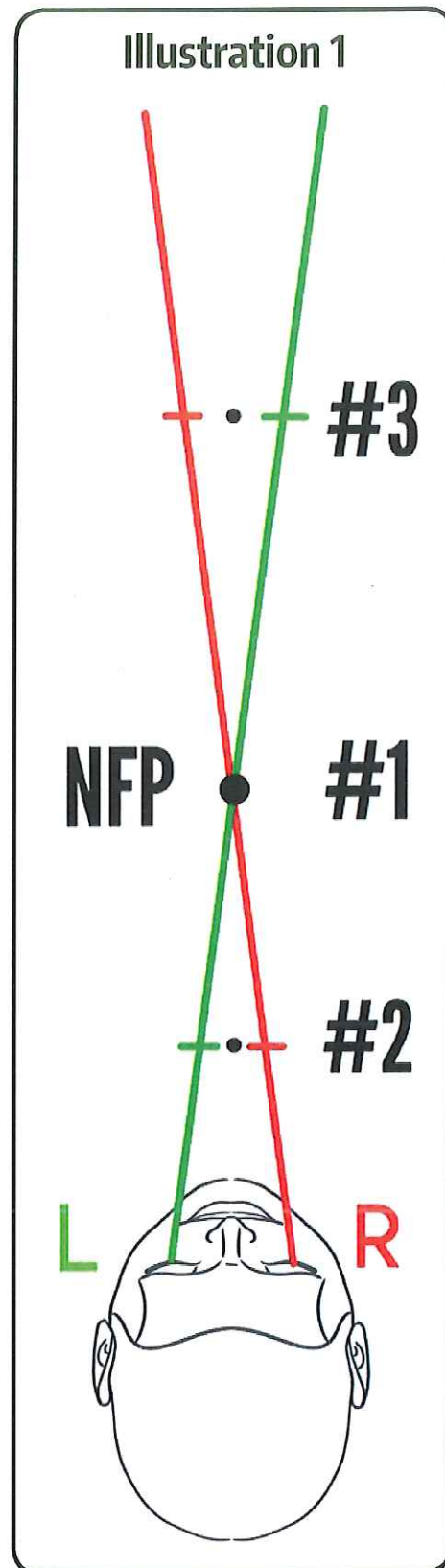
## ELIMINATING DUAL SIGHT PICTURE AND ENHANCING TARGET ACQUISITION

As part of this Behavioral Chain or set of practiced movements (techniques, tactics, and procedures), the CAR System takes into consideration the fact that, while in the BAR, the officer must reduce the amount of time it takes to properly sight in the target to optimize performance (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008). As such, the CAR System accomplishes this by placing the front sight at a distance where the eyes can naturally focus. It also eliminates dual site picture while keeping both eyes open (Johnsgaard & Castle, 2008).

To understand how this is accomplished, it is important to understand the characteristics of the eye and how best to adjust stance and positioning as failure to accurately identify, aim, and shoot a target is the reason for the alarmingly high rate of misses for trained officers engaged in deadly force encounters at close distances (CJIS, 2003; CJIS 2004; CJIS, 2014; CJIS, 2015; CJIS, 2016; Boogaard, 2016). The first consideration is using the Natural Focal Point (NFP) of the eyes where the officer places the front sight 12-14 inches from the eye. This is also known as normal convergence which is the simultaneous movement of both eyes towards each other to maintain single binocular vision when optimally viewing an object (Hubel, 1995). This is the natural distance from which a person with normal vision reads and writes. (Illustration 1)

The eyes can only focus on one point at a time which is why, when you focus on the front sight, there appears to be two targets and, when you then focus on the target, there appears to be two front sights (Hubel, 1995; Johnsgaard, 2016). To eliminate this problem, many officers are taught to close one eye providing “one sight-one target” acquisition. The problem with this approach is, when an officer becomes involved in a sudden, deadly force situation, the BAR eliminates the ability to perform fine motor skills such as shutting one eye. If you could close one eye, there would be a total loss of depth perception due to the elimination of convergence (binocular vision) (Hubel, 1995; Johnsgaard, 2016). Finally, closing one eye eliminates in excess of 50 percent of vision (50 percent loss of vision from the closed eye plus the loss of vision from the blind spot of the open eye) (Einwiller, 2016; Johnsgaard, 2016).

To optimize the functionality of the NFP and eliminate dual sight picture, the CAR System uses the High Shooting Position when shooting at targets that are typically five to 30 feet away which allows faster



acquisition of the target while moving (Sabre Tactical, 2015). This position is established by blading the body towards the target and holding the pistol about 30 degrees canted toward the body with the shooting hand and support hand at right angles providing natural arm position and isometric stabilization.



(Photo 1) The pistol is then brought up to the eyes where the opposite eye of the shooting hand is used to aim (i.e., left eye used for aiming when right hand is shooting, right eye used when left hand is shooting). Both eyes remain open and the bladed body and head position adjusted so the nose blocks the non-aiming eye, which eliminates the dual sight picture by creating monopic vision with both eyes open (Johnsgaard, 2016; Sabre Tactical, 2015). (Photo 2) When you keep both eyes open, you maintain depth perception and full peripheral vision as well as keep your pupils correctly dilated allowing you to clearly see the rear sight, front sight, and target. (Illustration 2) When you use the NFP, your eye can focus on the front sight faster than when using traditional extended arm stances.

Another advantage of the CAR System platform is the elimination of the need to be concerned about the dominant versus non-dominant eye. This issue is created by standard firearms platforms and is irrelevant when using the CAR System. Simply eliminating the dual sight picture described above

eliminates the concern over eye dominance because the left eye is used to aim for right hand shooting and the right eye is used to aim for left hand shooting. The bladed body position and nose block allows both eyes to remain open while shooting without loss of depth perception or needing to deal with the dual sight picture (Johnsgaard, 2016).

The CAR System platform also eliminates the concern of being right or left handed or having a “good” or “bad” side. The body is divided into two sides separated vertically down the centerline. The dominant side is called the “Weapon Side” and the non-dominant side is called the “Reaction Side.” The platform is ambidextrous from the standpoint that each shooting side mirrors the other, so if you need to shoot with your non-dominant hand, simply transfer the pistol to that hand. This approach also changes the mindset of the officer in a positive manner; no longer is there a “strong side” and “weak side” with regards to what hand is shooting (Johnsgaard, 2016; Sabre Tactical, 2015). **TFI**

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Gregory M. Vecchi, Ph.D., is a retired FBI Supervisory Special Agent with over 29 years of combined service in the military and as a federal agent. During his career, Dr. Vecchi investigated Russian organized crime, international drug trafficking, international and

### Illustration 2

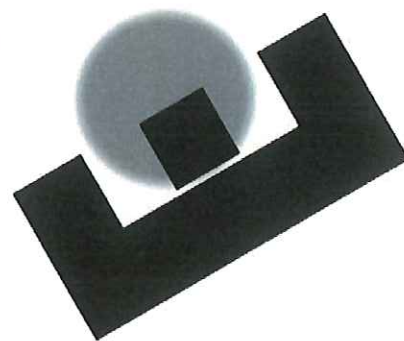


Photo 1

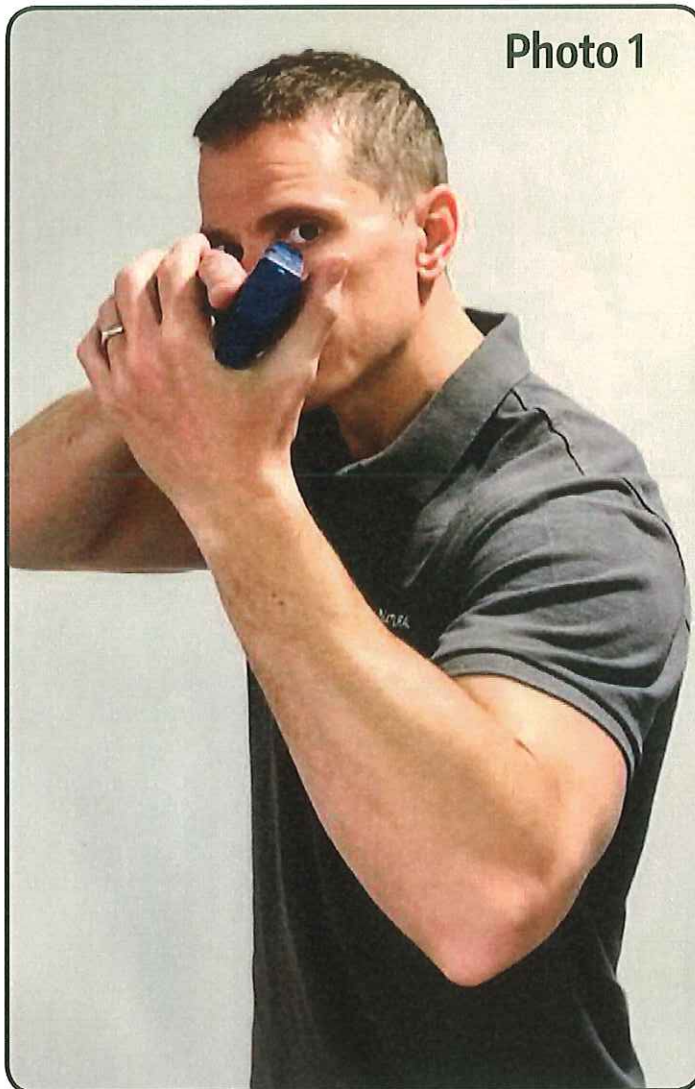


Photo 2





domestic terrorism, and violent crime. Dr. Vecchi was formerly Chief of the FBI's legendary Behavioral Science Unit and an FBI crisis negotiator.

Dr. Vecchi is currently a Reserve Deputy Sheriff with the Buchanan and Clinton County (Missouri) Sheriff's Department, an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Missouri Western State University (MWSU), and a police instructor at the MWSU Law Enforcement Academy where he teaches de-escalation, firearms, and judgment shooting. Dr. Vecchi is a certified Center Axis Relock (CAR) System instructor, NRA Law Enforcement Handgun Instructor, NRA Defensive Pistol Instructor, NRA Chief Range Safety Officer, NRA Training Counselor, and proud member of the International Association of Law Enforcement Firearms Instructors.

Jeff Johnsgaard is a Canadian police officer entering his 16th year and currently a Detective Sergeant. Jeff is a Firearms Instructor, Special Teams member, Specialty Munitions Instructor, Use of Force Instructor, and the lead Scenario Training Instructor for his agency.

Jeff has completed numerous other firearms tactics and instructor courses outside of his agency including several NRA LE schools and other US agency firearms programs. Jeff is the official heir to the CAR System and its official certifying authority. Jeff continues to further CAR itself both in tactics and instructional method.

Jeff works on contractual bases for several other companies and agencies in the USA and Canada through his company, Natural Tactical.

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