

TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS

SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS



GUNSITE BATTLE RIFLE COURSE

In 2008, after a number of Gunsite alumni asked about a class where they could shoot their M1 Garands, HK91s and M14s, we created the Battle Rifle course.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY GUNSITE BY **WALTER WILKINSON**

The first iteration clearly demonstrated that old eyes and iron sights just don't get along, but other than that it was a success and it has been on our schedule every year since then. The types of rifles preferred have changed over the years. For the first few years, we saw a lot of FN FALs, HK91s and M14s. Now we see AR10 clones and the FN SCAR 17S in favor.

The objective of today's Battle Rifle class is how to fight with a .308 Win/7.62x51 cal-

iber semi auto Battle Rifle. The Battle Rifle is defined as a rifle capable of being shot effectively in the standing position and carried extensively in a ready position. Keeping the total weight of the loaded rifle under 11lbs and having an optic mounted that is conducive with engaging targets at close and medium ranges is the goal.

Many students ask what equipment they need for the class as well as what the physical demands of the course will be. I recom-

mend the FN SCAR 17S for many uses. The optics recommendation for the course varies widely as matching the optic to the rifles mission after the course is most important. I recommend a variety of 1-4 to 1-8 power variable power scopes, with the 1X being very important. With these, I always weigh heavily toward external adjustable turrets in the Mil/Mil configuration. The close range engagements in the class don't go well for the students with *continued on next page*

CONTENTS

- 01** GUNSITE BATTLE RIFLE COURSE
BY WALTER WILKINSON
- 05** EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
UNDAUNTED COURAGE
WRITTEN BY STEPHEN AMBROSE
SUMMARY BY JOHN STEVENSON
- 08** EAT TROUT
BY ANDREW CURTISS
- 11** A RADIOACTIVE IED
IN MOSCOW
BY LINA KOLESNIKOVA
- 13** GEAR REVIEW:
AR-7
- 14** A LOOK AT THREE SHOOTINGS:
POLICE PISTOL MISHAPS
BY CHRIS GRAHAM
- 17** A DETECTIVE'S TIPS
FOR OBSERVATION
BY DAVE CADY
- 20** PROFILES OF COURAGE:
STEPHEN WILLEFORD

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In keeping the rifle's weight down, bipods are discouraged, but allowed with one caveat...

a 5-25X scope mounted on a heavy precision semi auto rifle. Students with good mounting skills normally do well with the different fixed power ACOGs with a red dot mounted above them. The drawback to this system is the height over bore that the red dot ends up having and the two different cheek welds that are required to operate the two sighting systems. Another combination that I run on my rifle, is the Aimpoint T2 on a Spuhr mount and a Leupold D-EVO. This system takes away the height over bore and cheek weld issues. The 45 degree offset red dots are discouraged as the number of rounds that are going to be fired in that altered stance and rifle position make life difficult.

In keeping the rifle's weight down, bipods are discouraged, but allowed with one caveat. The shooter must begin each engagement with the rifle in the carry configuration. That means that the power ring on the scope is dialed to its lowest setting, magnifiers are in the down position, and bipods are up and closed. There is no "pre-configuring" the rifle to meet the next exercise. The shooter is prepared to engage a threat at 10 yards. That is how the rifle is carried and configured before each drill.

The week of training begins with a few hours in the classroom to cover the history of Gunsite, safety policies, class objectives and schedule, different magazines, slings, weapon

accessories and the first look at the required weapon manipulations that will be covered again on the range. The classroom sessions end with a detailed explanation on the zeroing procedure that we use and the how and why of it; point blank zero considerations, initial intersection distances based on height over bore, converting inches into MOA at different ranges and discussing what the "click" value is for different optics in the class.

Once on the range, the loading, unloading and safety and range rules are covered again. Each student's rifle, equipment and gear is inspected and any change recommendations are given. The first firing done is to achieve a basic initial intersection zero which is established based on the students' optic type and height over bore. We see that most shooters have about five good five-round groups in them before they start to degrade and we meet the "law of diminishing returns". Once on our feet, we cover the stance, work space, ready positions, tactical and speed loads. We establish where on the body we want to see hits the rest of the week. The standard engagement is two rounds to the upper chest. Engagement techniques include the controlled pair, hammer, head shots, failure drill and the NSR (Non Standard Response). After each engagement the student practices the post engagement sequence, which is basi-

cally ending the first fight, searching for additional threats, ensuring the rifle is ready for the next fight, managing ammunition and setting "safe".

The first day ends with a classroom briefing on how to safely conduct, and what to cover in their dryfire practice sessions, and a weapon maintenance class. Many students do not know what to focus on in cleaning the rifle day to day and in some cases have no idea how to conduct detailed disassembly. Some want to learn how to disassemble the different rifles that other students have in the class.

Tuesday finds the class broken into two relays on different ranges. There isn't any down time in the Battle Rifle class. One relay starts work on the intermediate positions, braced kneeling, squat and the different variations of sitting while the other relay works toward establishing a 200 yard zero. Halfway through the morning the relays rotate.

For many shooters this is their first exposure to the "other than prone and standing" shooting. We cover the step by step process for assuming each position as well as how to

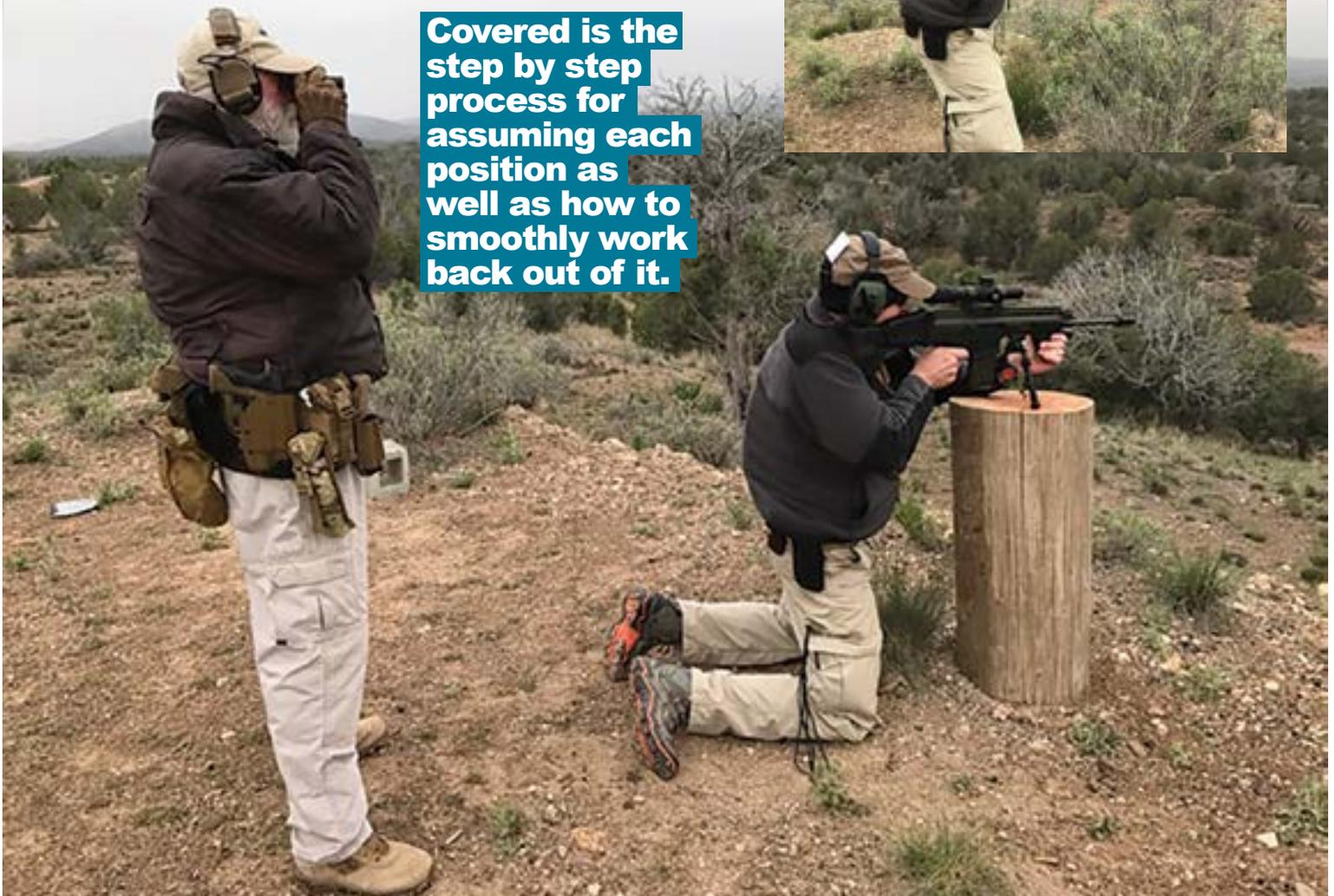
smoothly work their way back out of it. One of the first things shooters find out is what equipment modifications they are going to have to make. Moving the magazine pouch location to prevent being stabbed is one of the most common. The goal of these practice sessions is to understand the use of the different positions, how to smoothly move into them and immediately achieve a good natural point of aim on the target. Each day the students get better as their bodies begin to understand what muscles to relax and which to tighten, plus the huge importance of skeletal support. In pre-class preparation, flexibility exercises are clearly the most important things in the training regimen.

Tuesday afternoon, the relays rotate between rapid assumption of the intermediate positions and malfunctions. With all the weapon possibilities that can be present in the class, all the different malfunction clearance procedures have to be covered. Wherever possible, the students are taught

a procedure that will work with a majority of rifles. However, what is needed for an M1 Garand and what is required for an AR10 is going to be very different. The challenges of the AR10 charging handle design make clearing malfunctions for these rifles difficult. In addition to the normal type 1, 2 and 3 malfunction clearances we cover the specialty problems that the different rifle designs have. Namely the need to, and how to, safely conduct "mortaring" procedures and for clearing both "brass over bolt" and "bullet over bolt" malfunctions.

Wednesday has the relays split, working on the basic "step off the line of attack" (meaning single step 4-way directional movement), other prone positions and rapid assumption

Covered is the step by step process for assuming each position as well as how to smoothly work back out of it.



of prone. 300 yard prone is also introduced this morning as that will be the standard distance for prone from this point on. The other prone positions taught at Gunsite are Supine, Urban and SBU prone. The description for how and when these positions are used is covered in detail and the students practice firing from each when they and their equipment are capable of doing so.

In the other prone positions, the main consideration that one has to take into account is the fact that the optic is rotated 90 degrees off what it normally is. Simply put, on the optic, the elevation becomes windage and windage becomes elevation. This concept is explained to the students and then during the familiarization firing it is graphically demonstrated what effect it has on the impact of the rounds. The problem created by aggressive muzzle brakes and the issue with eye relief from magnified optics shows the students that these considerations have to be taken into account when designing a system to suit their mission.

That afternoon the basics of using an object for support are covered. The student learns when it is best to support the rifle on the object as opposed to supporting the body and methods and principles for each. The danger of having the rifle barrel touching the support is covered again, stressing that it will cause an impact shift of the round off target. This session is to prepare the students for their outdoor simulator run on the "Military Crest".

On the other range, the use of cover is discussed in the barricades class: Cover vs. concealment, how to use cover to one's best advantage and their introduction to "pieing" around cover to locate threats. The principles of minimizing one's exposure from around the cover while remaining in a balanced fighting position is practiced by every student. This prepares them for the indoor simulator run through "The House" the following day.

Next, the method of executing a 180 degree turn and engaging a threat from behind is covered. The concept is simple, move from one fighting stance to another while changing direction either by turning toward the shooting side or support side. In execution, it is very clearly demonstrated in many classes that the money that most of these guy's moms gave them for dancing lessons was spent on beer. The major difference between the two directions one can turn is the stance



FN FAL style rifles were popular in early iterations of the course.

the shooter ends up in. When turning toward the strong side, the feet will be reversed, but the same basic stance will be achieved. The rifle will not know the difference. There is a support leg and a drive leg to help mitigate recoil, it doesn't make any difference. This same reversed stance is used in "pieing" around cover toward the strong side.

The day ends with a detailed tactics briefing on both simulators. The students walk through a house with the instructor as he explains different methods and considerations for "solving the problem" presented to the students the following day. The House run is very difficult with the long barreled battle rifles and if this is the student's first exposure to The Houses at Gunsite it can be a very trying experience. The poor instructor who draws running The House gets to endure the noise and muzzle blast of a class full of .308 semi-autos! Naturally, extra points are given to "civilized" students who bring suppressors for this purpose.

The "Military Crest" is located as its name implies on the side of the ridgeline looking into the Vlei valley. The student is briefed that they are working in a simulated team, with one shooter moving while the other provides cover. While they are in position it is their job to scan for and engage all threats. When given the command to move, they are to move forward quickly to their next "overwatch" position. At each position, the instructor dictates what portion of the object they can use to support the rifle. The student then uses this portion to their best advantage to achieve hits on any detected threats. The other portion of

the training is for the students to effectively scan their sector of fire for any targets. The key here is not to look, but to see. The technique of scanning in overlapping rays is used to find threats by the use of target indicators. A few of these would be: shape, shine, shadow, spacing, color and movement. The student has 10 seconds to detect their first target and engage it, then an additional 10 seconds to find a second, if one is there. If they fail to detect or effectively engage the targets in the time standard they are told to move to the next position. After detecting the target, the student must estimate a basic distance to the threat and apply the necessary "hold off" or adjusted point of aim to achieve a hit. The importance of selecting the proper zero distance for the rifle/caliber combination to achieve the maximum point blank zero is demonstrated in this simulator. The student runs through 14 different and challenging firing points while on the Military Crest.

The Battle Rifle course is a great experience with students always coming away having either a sense of great accomplishment or a need for a stiff cocktail of painkillers ... or both. In the next issue of *Tactics and Preparedness* we will finish the story of the Gunsite Battle Rifle course. ✓

BIO

Walt Wilkinson served the US Army as a Special Forces Weapons Sergeant ultimately retiring as a Sergeant Major. He currently works as an independent contractor in the Middle East and has been an Instructor at Gunsite since 2007 (www.gunsite.com).