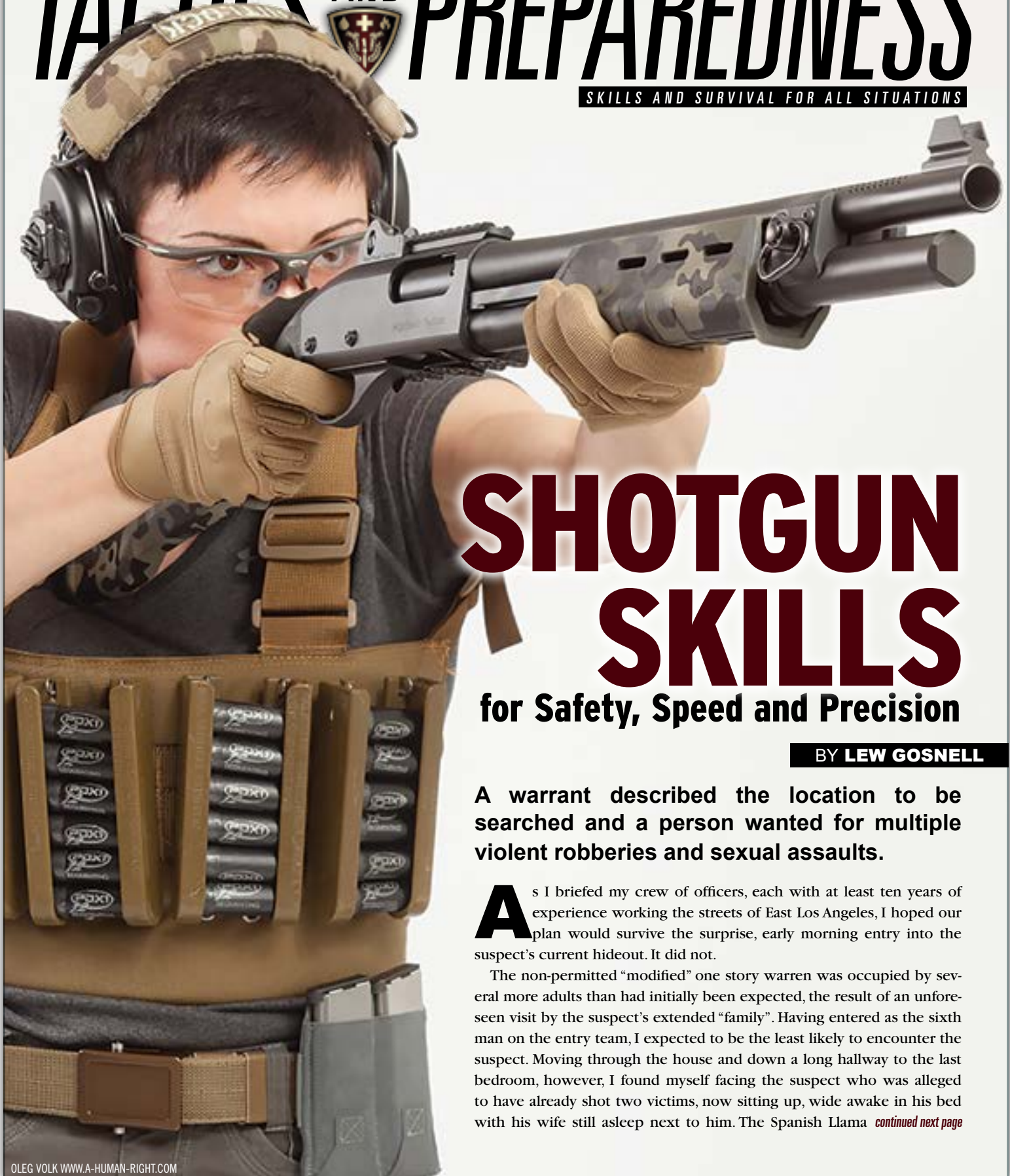


# TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS

SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS



## SHOTGUN SKILLS

for Safety, Speed and Precision

BY LEW GOSNELL

A warrant described the location to be searched and a person wanted for multiple violent robberies and sexual assaults.

**A**s I briefed my crew of officers, each with at least ten years of experience working the streets of East Los Angeles, I hoped our plan would survive the surprise, early morning entry into the suspect's current hideout. It did not.

The non-permitted "modified" one story warren was occupied by several more adults than had initially been expected, the result of an unforeseen visit by the suspect's extended "family". Having entered as the sixth man on the entry team, I expected to be the least likely to encounter the suspect. Moving through the house and down a long hallway to the last bedroom, however, I found myself facing the suspect who was alleged to have already shot two victims, now sitting up, wide awake in his bed with his wife still asleep next to him. The Spanish Llama *continued next page*

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"Old School" Shotguns. (top to bottom) Harrinton & Richardson "Topper" Single-shot 12 gauge, 18.15" bbl. and 5-round stock carrier. Ithaca Model 37, Police surplus "Deerslayer", pump action 12 gauge. Remington 1100 Semi-automatic, with Speedfeed magazine gate, 21" bbl. fitted for RemChokes. Remington 870 "Wingmaster", factory 26" bbl. w/interchangeable chokes, +5-round magazine tube, X/S barrel band front sight, and VangComp rear sight.



"New School" FNH Self Loading Police, 12 Gauge. 20" bbl, interchangeable choke. 3-Gun Nation, forend ammo carrier and receiver carrier. VangComp 1913 Barrel mounted rail, and Aimpoint T-1. VangComp front and rear sights. This gun works for either Patrol and Defense or Competition.

380 pistol he held in his hand, was pointed at the floor, and stayed pointed at the floor until it fell from his hand. His attention was clearly focused at the muzzle of the Remington 870, short barreled shotgun, loaded with Winchester LE "Low Recoil" 9-Pellet 00-Buck-shot, I had aimed at his nose two feet away.

As my team joined me and took our fellow into custody, I reflected on the good judgement suddenly embraced by the suspect, courtesy of the mightiest of close-range handheld weapons systems, the twelve-gauge shotgun. Whether for sporting purposes, hunting game, target shooting (trap and skeet), self-defense or a tool of law enforcement and the military, no other firearm has the versatility of the shotgun, or raw short-range destructive power.

Whether for home defense or LE application, some homework regarding how specific types of ammunition perform in your gun, will remove the mystery and guess work

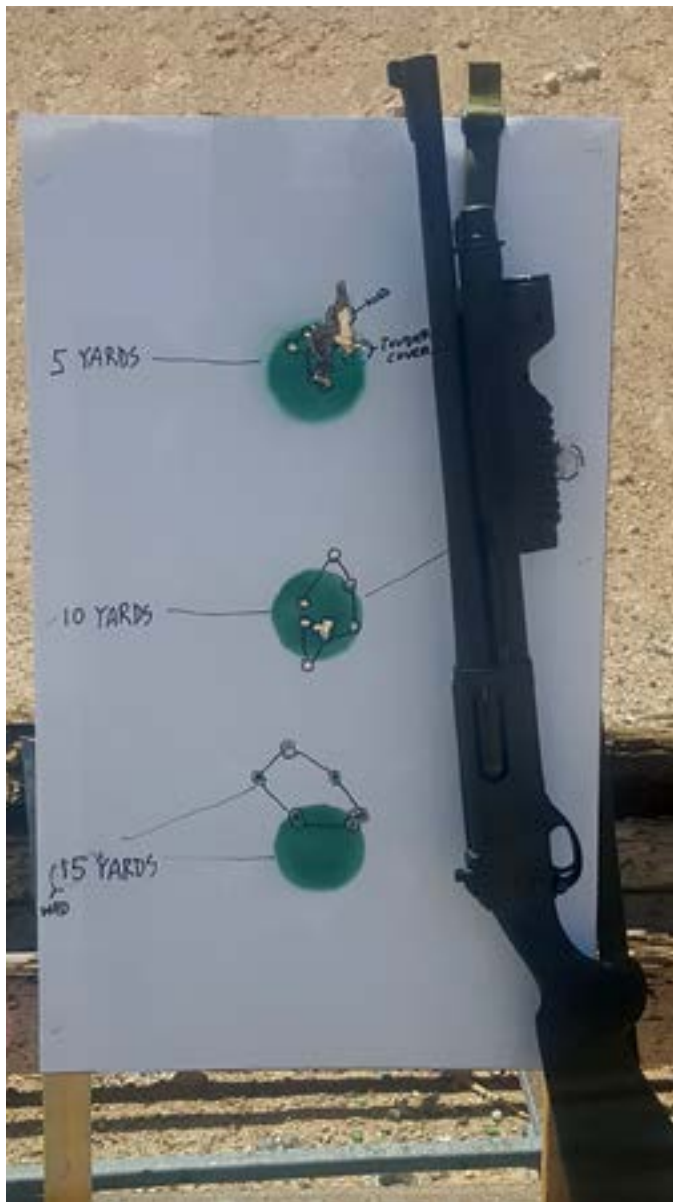
of what can be expected from a gun and ammunition.

### POWER

The twelve-gauge shotgun cartridge can deliver anywhere from 7/8<sup>th</sup> ounce of lead shot, to two ounces of Magnum single-projectile slug, and at velocities exceeding 1,700 feet per second, depending on loadings. With that power, the tradeoff is recoil, sometimes, very punishing recoil. We have all seen "hilarious" videos of new shooters firing a shotgun and suffering from the recoil, sometimes being knocked off their feet or dropping the gun. To be sure, there is nothing funny about such events, as the shooter is then often fearful of that gun forever.

The cure for recoil is training and proper instruction, a properly fitting stock, modern material recoil absorbing butt-pad and technique to counter recoil force with *isometric* tension. *Push-pull* is the effort to attempt to





above: Hostage Rescue Target, the final target for the Gunsite "Urban Scrambler" Course. Target is 12 yards from the firing point.

right: Nylon 5-round belt ammo carrier (unknown maker, 30+ years old), and the excellent Safariland 2-round belt pack.



left: Pattern board, with results of 00-Buckshot loads at 5, 10 and 15 yards, from VangComp modified barrel on author's Remington 870.

pull the gun apart by pushing forward on the forend as you pull back on the pistol grip (as if stretching the gun in the middle) and creating a spring-like tension with your arms and keeping the butt in your shoulder pocket and your cheek on top of the stock. This tension greatly mitigates recoil effect or "kick", acting as muscle shock-absorbers.

It is a relatively short-range weapon. Depending on the type of ammunition loading, shotguns, even with slugs, are considered safer for use in built up areas, as the range of the projectile is measured in yards, not miles like a center-fire rifle. Even with slugs, the effective range of a shotgun is usually under two-hundred yards.

## VERSATILITY

Various sizes of birdshot cover the spectrum from squirrels and rabbits to doves and quail, up to the largest migratory fowl like ducks, geese and turkeys. With buckshot or slugs,

any big-game in North America can be taken, from feral pigs to deer and bear. Against two-legged predators, and depending on the mission profile, buckshot or slugs will effectively do the same. Some advocate for the use of birdshot loadings as "home defense" ammunition. I do not agree. Penetration from birdshot is usually insufficient on a clothed human torso to insure reaching vital organs or penetrating the human skull. The police and military use buckshot and slugs for a reason. So should you for personal defense.

Safety rule #4, "Be sure of your target (and what lies beyond)", is vital when forced to use a gun in your home or anywhere else.

Each shotgun barrel that comes from the factory is much like a violin from a musical craftsman. Each has its own unique characteristics. The barrel should be tested at known distances with the ammunition you will be using. Ammunition should be selected that patterns consistently and predictably in *your* gun. Occasionally, if the gun is to be used with slugs and shot, it is important to know whether the slug ammunition will group to the center of your shot pellet pattern. While

this is usually the case, it is not always the case. Four to six inches may not be a deal killer when hunting doves in September, but two or three inches are a big deal if you need to pull off a hostage rescue shot inside an office setting. Knowing your load and pattern size at known distances allows you options.

As a Marine Primary Marksmanship Instructor in 1979, Police Rangemaster since 1994, and Gunsite Instructor since 2008, I have had the benefit of seeing thousands of capable shooters, from those with zero experience with firearms, to highly trained military and law enforcement professionals using semi-auto and pump-action shotguns, firing thousands of rounds of ammunition through them. Single bead front sights, rifle style barrel mounted sights, "Ghost" ring aperture sights and electronic red-dot or holographic sights are all capable of good and often astounding accuracy with slugs. Knowing where a gun will shoot with a specific load is not a mystery, you just have to learn your gun and do the homework. If all you have is a simple bead at the end of the barrel, do not despair, as it is a matter of practice and study to learn where that gun will shoot.

In my collection of work, competition and training guns, I have several "tactical"

shotguns, including four customized by Vang Comp Systems (in Chino Valley, AZ). The owner, Hans Vang, is a delightful character and dedicated to the perfection of the shotgun. The Vang Comp barrel modification is famous for reducing pattern size with buckshot and birdshot, and his barrel venting is highly effective in reducing recoil and offering the secondary benefit of greatly reducing muzzle-flash. At typical inside the house distances, these patterns practically guarantee all pellets would strike a human torso with a well-aimed, center shot. This consistent and repeatable performance stretches the useful distance buckshot can be employed from the near universally accepted zero to 25 yards, to sometimes 40 to 50 yards, before needing to switch to a "rifled" slug, for longer distance engagements.

Additional modifications to a shotgun can include improved sights, either iron or electronic (or both), and extended magazine tubes for more onboard ammunition. Weapon-mounted light systems and lasers are options, but the more gear you tack on, the heavier the gun becomes. Nothing is free. The modifications done by a custom shop like Vang Comp are not the only way to improve buckshot performance. The ammunition itself can make a big difference in pattern size from gun to gun. Specific loadings from major ammunition manufacturers, designed to decrease pattern spread are available. Federal "Flite Control" technology and similar offerings from Remington and Hornady, use a shot cup to contain, and buffering material to protect the integrity and shape of the pellets themselves during firing and passage through the barrel, in turn, helping to maintain their better aerodynamic shape (still round) and decrease the spread of the pattern.

Adjustable choke systems, as offered by nearly all shotgun makers, also allow for the tuning of pattern size, though care must be taken that the constriction is not so great as to cause problems should slugs or steel shot be used in the choked gun.

At the other end of the (not so) "tactical" spectrum, I have a Harrington & Richardson break-open single shot, shotgun, which I bought several years ago for \$85. The barrel had been kitchen modified to a (fortunately) still legal 18.15 inches, but no front-sight bead reinstalled. The gun shop kindly offered to install a new bead sight for free, as part of the deal of getting the ugly duckling off their gunrack. I shortened the buttstock and added

a soft rubber Pachmayr recoil pad, and a five round shell carrier to the right-hand side of the stock. This very handy package will group low-recoil 1 oz. slugs into three inches at 25 yards, directly on top of the bead. However, patterns with Walmart 7 1/2 birdshot are Eldorado'esque, and effectively limit small game to inside 20 yards. At only five pounds, it is a handful, but a reassuring one. It is no feat to fire a well-aimed shot every four seconds with this "single-shot" shotgun. Mount, aim, fire, eject, reload, mount, aim, fire, repeat until the additional five rounds on the stock are gone. I'm confident a miscreant or game animal will be either gone or in the bag before that occurs.

A "tactical" defensive shotgun should possess a decent sling. I leave the type to the end user, as I have no preference. A good sling, either from quality leather or nylon manufacture, is like a holster for your pistol. It gives you a place to put the gun when you don't need it, but can't secure it otherwise.

**SAFETY**  
**All guns are always loaded.**  
**Never let the muzzle cover anything you are not willing to destroy.**  
**Keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on the target.**  
**Be sure of your target.**

Finally, there is the carrying of extra ammunition. Mission and task can determine how much or little you may want to have with you at any given time. In my police service over 25 years, my agency hasn't needed more than what was in the gun to end the problem, but that is just one lifetime experience and I certainly recommend you have more than that with you. On patrol, I carried a belt pouch that held five spare rounds of 12-gauge slugs. I never needed it, but I felt better having it there.

For the field, I often carry a belt pouch made by Wilderness Products (thewilderness.com). Their gear is first rate, and the bag can easily carry two boxes of shells, handy for dove season. If competition is your game, just Google 3-Gun shotgun gear, and you can find every type of reloading accessory ever dreamed of to feed the shotgun.

Word is that shotguns in American law enforcement service are on their way out. Too much recoil, not enough ammunition on board, difficult manual-of-arms to master, blah, blah, blah, but I don't think so. Shotguns

may become more specialized, for the true dedicated professional, but they are not going away.

Confidence is acquired by putting in the time to train and practice, learning how your gun performs with your ammunition and making those modifications (if needed) to make the gun fit and work for you.

Here are a couple of drills I use at Gunsite:

**LOAD WHAT YOU SHOOT DRILL**

Do not engage steel targets closer than 12 yards due to ricochet danger. Wear eye and ear protection when shooting. Start with four rounds of birdshot in your gun, with six rounds available to reload. There is a total ten rounds for this drill. I conduct this on steel-target targets. Shoot one, reload. Shoot two, reload. Shoot three, reload. Shoot four to empty. This drill builds the habit of keeping the gun loaded as you go, then shoots the gun to empty to conclude.

**SLUG SELECT DRILL**

Start with four rounds buckshot or birdshot in your gun with slug ammunition available for a reload. At start, engage a steel target at 12 yards with one shot. Transition to a 25-yard target. Load slug in the magazine tube, (press the action bar release if necessary) run the action, ejecting live buckshot round and bringing the slug into the chamber. Engage the 25-yard target. Time limit 5 seconds (work up to the time limit as a goal).

In 2018, a San Diego Sheriff's Deputy saved a female hostage from an armed killer using his patrol shotgun. He fired from less than ten yards away hitting the suspect in the face. The hostage, just inches away, was unharmed by the buckshot projectiles. The Deputy knew how his gun patterned, and was confident in his ability, due to good training and practice. How proficient are you with *your* shotgun? ✓

**BIO**

*Lew Gosnell is a former Marine and police officer. He served in Los Angeles as a Patrolman, Detective, Patrol Supervisor, Gang Unit Supervisor, SERT and Department Rangemaster. He has won the Soldier of Fortune 3-Gun Championship, SASS "End of Trail" Cowboy Shooting Championship and Steel Challenge Shotgun Speed Shooting Championship. He competes in USPSA, IDPA and GSSF, and is a Gunsite Academy (www.Gunsite.com) Staff Instructor and Rangemaster.*