

# **Familiarization Training with a New Weapon and Night Sights**

**Danny D. Smith<sup>1</sup>**, *North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission,  
512 North Salisbury Street, Raleigh, NC 27604-1188*

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*Abstract:* The difference between surviving or not surviving a shoot-out will depend on many factors. Who are you up against, how many are you up against, how efficient are they, and then, how efficient are you? This could be the most important question you could ever ask yourself in a life or death situation. Nothing could be more important when confronted with a violent situation than training and equipment. Proper training and equipment are a must for a professional law enforcement officer, anything less is only flirting with danger. With liability cases on the increase, agencies who fail to provide the most up-to-date training and equipment are also flirting with danger. For these reasons, training and equipment must be put on the front burner and monitored continuously. The best defense to liability cases against officers and their respective agencies is, without question, competent training and competent equipment.

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Changing already established habits can be a challenge, especially when it has taken as many as 25 years to develop and refine automatic body and mind reactions. First you must start by brainwashing old habits out and engraving in new procedures. This can be accomplished only by practicing the new procedure many times. This duplication of the same movement, over and over again, will soon override the old habit and the new movement will become automatic and instantaneous. The transition by my agency from .357 magnum revolvers to 9mm semi-automatic pistols was very smooth, and very few problems were encountered. The major contributing factor to this success was that the officers in the field were open minded and looked forward to their new service weapons. For months and months they were told they were coming and finally they had their hands on them.

## **Transitional Training**

Our transition training was scheduled for 2 consecutive days and 1 night. The training was conducted by our own training officers who had received certification

<sup>1</sup> Present address: 1611 Summerhouse Street, Elizabethtown, NC 28337.

from the North Carolina Justice Department. To conduct this training each instructor had to be certified as a general instructor and as a specialized instructor in firearms. Along with these instructors were certified armorers, and again, these were our officers who had attended the Beretta School in Maryland.

The first segment of training began in the classroom with 6 hours of videos, classroom instruction, and hands on operation. Here we discussed the need for the semi-automatic, with the high capacity magazine and ease of re-loading being the main topics. The nomenclature and the importance of each special feature possessed by the Beretta was studied. Soon we were actually taking the weapons apart for cleaning purposes and practice and then reassembling them. As soon as everyone was proficient with this exercise, each was required to perform a safety function check. It was emphasized that this could be the one step, if not followed correctly, that could cost them or a fellow officer their life. With the classroom section complete, everyone was required to pass a written exam concerning all the material that was covered during the classroom portion.

The second portion of training was conducted on the firing range without ammunition. Here we spent about 2 hours properly drawing, dry firing, and re-holstering the weapon. This seemed to be very elementary to many of the officers; however, it was necessary. In the past, with the revolvers, our officers never had to be concerned with a safety/de-cocking lever, and this was a primary concern of all the instructors. While still on the range, and without live ammunition, other topics were covered. These included sight alignment, trigger control, aiming area, breath control, stance, and grip.

The next step was to become thoroughly familiar with loading, unloading, and immediate action steps. The immediate action step included training in how to successfully clear a malfunctioned weapon or faulty ammunition malfunction. This step included firing live ammunition mixed with empty casings and dummy rounds purposely causing a malfunction. Not only is this step important to an officer if he should have to use his weapon in the line of duty, but it also will be necessary during mandated qualification courses: if a weapon malfunctions during a qualification course, the clock will not stop and no alibis are allowed. With this type of restriction included in our policy manual, it really keeps the officers familiar with the immediate action step.

The next block of instruction involved becoming proficient with the weapon. Here we started by drawing and firing 1-, 2-, and 3-shot drills with no time limit. The primary purpose was to become familiar and accurate with the new weapon. As time and the number of rounds increased, we began increasing the number of rounds fired from each position. As the number of rounds fired increased, we slowly began to add time limitations and different shooting positions. As the accuracy level increased and time was not a factor to the shooters, we were ready to start with the timed day qualification courses.

With day qualification complete, we began night training. Night training was conducted for the first time without lights. Our new night sights, which will be discussed later, proved to be worth their cost and then some. With all the day training

complete, the officers were very familiar with their new weapons and had no or very few problems at night.

With the first 2 days and night of transitional training complete, each officer had fired approximately 600 rounds. At this point all officers had qualified and began carrying their new 9mm, 92F Beretta as the official sidearm of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

## Night Sights

A high percentage of a wildlife enforcement officer's hours are spent on night patrol and it is evident that night sights would only improve an officer's chances of survival. It is important to remember that not all confrontations will be during daylight hours, or, if at night, in a well lighted area. In other types of law enforcement, there are street lights, headlights from other vehicles, or business lights. For the wildlife enforcement officer, at best he has only a flashlight and/or headlights. For this reason, night sights were installed on all authorized service duty handguns.

Night firing classes were scheduled and conducted during the transitional training period. While carrying handguns without night sights, night training was conducted with varying amounts of lights. Lighting conditions varied from range lights, headlights, and all available lights from the 25-yardline to no light from the 3-yardline. With the new duty weapons with night sights installed, the entire course of fire should be conducted without any lights. There was some variance from this on totally dark nights: when night training was conducted on nights without any moonlight at all, blue lights were activated to help produce a faint image of the B-27 target.

The first exercise that was conducted with the new night sights proved that the use of night sights tremendously increases accuracy and chances of survival in a low light shoot-out. This exercise included firing 6 rounds from our revolvers, without night sights from the 25-yardline with no lights. The targets were then scored, and 6 rounds were fired using the new service weapons with night sights. The results were amazing. There were 14 shooters on the firing line, using the service weapons without night sights and only 14 rounds were in the black out of 84 rounds fired. With the new night sights, all 84 rounds were inside the black, with several officers having a 8- to 10-inch group. Once this exercise was complete, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that night sights are a must for wildlife law enforcement.

The 3-dot sight system was chosen for use on the 92F Beretta. This system included a single lighted dot installed in the front sight and 2 single lighted dots on each side of the rear sight. This system provided for fast sight alignment and increased accuracy in low light situations. The sights are only visible from the rear of the weapon, giving the shooter a clear and distinct advantage. With no light being emitted to the front of the weapon, the shooter is not giving away his location. Quite possibly, an officer could have his weapon outside the holster and the suspect would never know it. The mere knowledge of knowing that you are equipped to handle low light confrontations is very rewarding and self assuring.

Exactly how much accuracy was gained in points using night sights versus the weapons without night sights is not available. After changing over to night sights, we began shooting a totally different and more difficult course of fire. No one has failed to qualify using the night sights. Officers who in the past had difficulty qualifying without night sights on the standard Basic Law Enforcement Training Course now have no problem with qualifying on the more difficult course. Many officers now have a higher qualification score at night than their daylight score.

Physical ability has a direct impact on all areas of law enforcement, and this is especially true with firearms training. Officers who are required to wear glasses find that the use of night sights dramatically increased their level of accuracy at night. They found that the sights were easy to focus on and did not display a reflection inside their glasses.

Night sights were an added cost on the initial investment, but what will they save in the future? A life, the life of a wildlife enforcement officer, the life of an innocent bystander, no one knows. Would the game law violator be less aggressive at night if he knew the game warden was equipped with night sights? No one knows, but I can surely tell you that the officer would be better equipped to handle the situation with night sights.