

AUTHOR INTERVIEW

LOU CHIODO

Author of *Winning a High-Speed, Close-Distance Gunfight*

Paladin Press: When did you first realize that the prevailing form of firearms training was inadequate for law enforcement officers?

Lou Chiodo: As I became involved in firearms training at the beginning of my law-enforcement career, I made a number of observations about what was being trained, how it was trained, and what was happening when that training was being applied in the field. I noted that agency to agency, much of what was being taught was very similar and based upon very precise ways of using the handgun. Much of this training involved the full use of sight alignment and acquiring a sight picture, and all in the environment of a conventional range, where many of the conditions present in live combat do not exist. Range officers could be heard saying, “Breath, relax, aim, slack, squeeze.” Also, the time limits being used in both training and qualifications were extremely generous.

While these principles of shooting are essential for precision shooting, the environment where that training would need to be applied for real was much different than the calm, orderly way ranges were run. The speed, shock, and violence of action in close-distance combat shootings caused officers to have difficulty applying their training. The physical, psychological, and environmental differences the officers were encountering during the duress of live combat were, in fact, negating their training. Since they were not exposed to and trained in alternative methods of combat shooting, they had difficulty putting bullets on target, as evidenced by low hit rates and unacceptable casualty rates suffered by officers, even though the distances to suspects were often very close.

PP: Tell us about your first contact with Colonel Rex Applegate. Did you hear of his work and seek him out?

LC: I was first introduced to the principles that Colonel Applegate developed in the early 1970s via articles that were written about his methods and from his own writings. Also, I had the opportunity to talk to a number of World War II and Korean War veterans who were members of my gun club who shared their experiences with me. The gist of those conversations supported the concepts that were professed by Colonel Applegate in his writings. Many years later, in the early 1990s, I was introduced to the Colonel while at a training conference and had conversations with him about his training principles and what I was doing at the time, which was an expansion of the methods he taught (and which were directly descendent from W.E. Fairbairn’s training programs). At the time, I was working diligently to make changes to the programs within my agency. He was absolutely thrilled at the prospect of a major state police agency incorporating methods appropriate for close-quarters shooting into their program. In April 1998, Colonel Applegate presented me with a copy of his famous book, *Kill or Get Killed*, in which he wrote the following message: “Congratulations on introducing the point shooting technique in your organization. Yours is the first major U.S. police department to initiate point shooting in its handgun training program since WWII. More will now surely follow.”

Colonel Applegate and I discussed the issue of terminology in reference to what we teach. I call the close-distance shooting I teach “target-focused shooting.” As I discussed with the Colonel, the term “point shooting” has been interpreted in many ways over the

years, and since the objective of the method is to focus on the target, I chose to call it target-focused shooting. Colonel Applegate didn't have a problem with that and expressed complete support of what I was doing. He was one of the most supportive persons I met during the time I was developing the programs I teach today. He was a wealth of knowledge and always offered keen insight and advice.

Later that year, Colonel Applegate came to San Diego to participate in a program sponsored by California Peace Officers Standards of Training (POST). I was also scheduled to present a segment in that program. Unfortunately, the night before the program began, Colonel Applegate had a stroke and was admitted into the hospital. I made frequent trips to the hospital during that time and unfortunately, he passed away about a week later. He was a true American patriot.

PP: Tell us about the challenges of instituting change in firearms training programs.

LC: Change can often be somewhat traumatic for both individuals and institutions. This is no different when we talk about change in firearms training programs. There are many reasons why this happens.

For individuals, it requires both physical and psychological work to learn new concepts and teach our bodies to develop the motor skills to successfully apply the new material we are learning. Many times, this process requires us to call into question many things we have been taught and believed in over a period of time. It is hard to face the fact that what we have been doing in training isn't as effective as we thought it would be when actually applied in the real world.

For institutions, change requires additional requirements. A change in training will require a commitment by all in the chain of command to support the change and allocate the resources needed to implement it. Sufficient funding will be needed to pay for the man hours, scheduling, ammunition, and any related equipment.

I have often been asked if I encountered resistance to the programs I have introduced in the many venues I have taught in over the years. The answer is very simple: of course I have met resistance. It is not easy to walk into a group of officers, military members, or civilian CCW holders and call into question many of the principles they have believed in over a period of time. This is something I welcome, however, because it is a natural occurrence in the learning cycle. It is my responsibility as a teacher to bring the student to a point where he or she understands what I am professing and hopefully sees its utility. The same holds true when I am trying to institute change at the organization level. I have to ensure that the program is understood and that I address the logistics of the change so the organization understands what is needed to support its implementation. This means I have to know what I am doing in regard to the material that will be taught and also know what level of support is going to be required to make the change successful. For individuals, how much resistance I meet often is determined by how I present the material. For organizations, I have to ensure that the decision makers understand how their organization will benefit from the change to their existing program. They also must understand that the time and money they invest will increase their officers' performance in the field, better protect the public, and address liability issues that affect the organization.

Each organization will present a unique situation based on many factors, including the size of the organization, budget concerns, and the flexibility of the training staff. When I started to initiate changes in the programs I ran within my department, it initially started at the lowest level possible, which was at my assigned area office. I was able to establish a viable program that was tested on the range and on the street. Once that was accomplished, I was given complete support at my division level, which allowed me to bring the program to over 1,000 officers. Once again, results on the range as well as in live combat shootings opened the door to bring a program forward at the department level. This takes time, perseverance, and support for it to happen. Any resistance that comes up must be handled in a positive way that ensures that the dynamics of the program are fully understood by the organization as well as the individuals being trained in the program of instruction.

As to the methodology being taught in the program, I firmly believe that the only way to fully understand the program is to participate in it. The participant must see for him or herself how the methods work by physically training in the methods. In my humble experience, when the curriculum is taught properly and the participant has the chance to personally attend the training, resistance is held to the absolute minimum.

PP: Is it difficult to get a student who's been schooled in front-sight shooting to adapt to target-focused shooting?

LC: This is an outstanding question, because there is a tremendous amount of misinformation about this issue. My comments on this issue are based on the experience of training thousands of people in target-focused shooting methods. This has included those with absolutely no firearms experience, seasoned law enforcement officers, and experienced military members. In short, I have taught people along the full spectrum of experience.

Up front, I want to make this point *perfectly* clear. This is *not* about whether sighted shooting is better than target-focused shooting, or vice-versa. These arguments have no merit in the real world, and it must be understood that each method of shooting is needed *and* required in any viable training program. What *is* the issue is that the operator must be well versed in both so that whatever the scenario demands, the operator can perform at maximum capability.

I have found that when target-focused shooting is taught properly and in the context of being applied in close-quarters environments, students *rapidly* increase their proficiency. In fact, students thrive on target-focused shooting. I completely disagree with many statements I have read over the years that say it is difficult for students to learn and apply the principles of target-focused shooting. This is simply not what I have seen. In fact, I structure my programs so that close-quarters, target-focused shooting is taught first and sighted shooting is introduced at an appropriate time later in training. I have found this to work exceptionally well. It doesn't matter if I have a student who has been schooled in front-sight shooting or a new shooter with little or no experience—the results have been the same. They have little difficulty learning target-focused shooting methods. Each method of shooting, sighted or target-focused, has its own unique way of working. My goal is to get a student to be competent in both and understand why they need both to be prepared to deal with real-world scenarios.

PP: You advocate scenario training using Simunitions and airsoft products as well as human role players to introduce stress into the training equation. What do you think about video-based training systems that present shoot/don't shoot situations to the trainee?

LC: First, I have to emphasize that I am heavily engaged in using airsoft products in my training programs. Simunitions, when available, is also a great training tool. There is nothing like being in a three-dimensional environment with another person(s) while having a safe means to apply the mechanical skills learned in conventional range training.

Here's an analogy I use to point out the critical importance of this concept. What would happen in our combative arts training if all we ever did was learn a movement and hit a heavy bag without ever attempting to get in a ring with another person and see how we can apply that movement in an environment similar to a real fight? The answer is very simple: you won't really know. Likewise, if we learn "movements" with our firearms and only shoot at pieces of paper, cardboard, and steel without ever attempting to use those "movements" against another person in an interactive environment, what will happen? Again, the answer is simple: you really don't know.

An essential element of firearms training is to be placed in an environment that can replicate conditions present in live combat. This allows the student to learn how to apply the skills developed on the range, discover the limitations of those skills, and determine what additional training is needed to increase capabilities. This process is greatly enhanced by the proper (and I really mean "proper") use of airsoft technology and Simunitions. Like any training tool, it must be used appropriately in order to be effective. Technology in this area is getting better, and additional products are coming on-line that can be used equally well. The key point is that unless you integrate this training into the program, the student's true potential will not be reached.

The true measure of the effectiveness of any training process is the results obtained in live combat. In debriefing students who have gone through my program and later been involved in a gunfight, the basic comment I receive is that the best thing they did that helped them achieve success in their gunfight was the integrated airsoft training. This is why I believe in this methodology so much. When proper range training in combat shooting methods is integrated with interactive airsoft and scenario-based training, the student is getting the best chance of having usable skills in the arena of live combat.

I believe video-based training systems are another tool that can be used to help the student achieve greater skill in applying their training. While video-based systems do not have the same "feel" as being engaged by a live human being in close proximity to you, they have their place in the training regimen if the funding is available to purchase the equipment. For many people and organizations, this is not an option due to the expense of purchasing and maintaining the equipment. If the equipment is available, the key point is to maximize its training value while understanding that it is only one tool that should be integrated within a spectrum of other training endeavors that have one common goal: giving the student the best chance of winning a live confrontation.