



PISTOL RETENTION GONE WRONG

The safety circle isn't so safe.

At what point in the tactical continuum would you see a necessity to shoot yourself in the femur or have your pistol stripped from your hand after it catches on the steering wheel as you quickly disembark your vehicle? Or, even worse, you lose a struggle to maintain possession of your pistol simply because you were surprised? Hopefully, none of the above will occur.

My bread and butter is the tactical carbine and its employment, but I can't sit by and watch as techniques are used when there are better ways to skin the cat with the pistol.

Safety Circle—Not So Safe

A straight wrist is a strong wrist. When Viking Tactics (vikingtactics.com) teaches a combatives course, we always push to break the wrist in order to gain the advantage on the suspect, or bad guy, as we call him in the military. Yet certain techniques preach breaking the wrist. A perfect example of this is the safety circle. Once you have engaged the threat, break the wrist to point the pistol down, supposedly for safety reasons. What is safe about breaking your wrists and allowing the bad guy to have



The pistol may be safely pointed at the ground, but the soldier has given up all hopes for retention.

one of the necessary steps of most gun take-away techniques already completed for him? This technique is also taught for use in and around vehicles, so now you have a broken wrist that will allow quick ejection of the pistol from your hand if you happen to come in contact with a resistant object, such as a vehicle or door frame. It would be one thing if this were an “administrative position”

(not sure what that is), but certain instructors are teaching room domination, threat elimination, then transition to the safety circle while cover is needed. Oh, and by the way, nothing about a gunfight is “administrative.”

Position SUL

Position SUL was developed by Max Joseph and Alan Brosnan. Their intent

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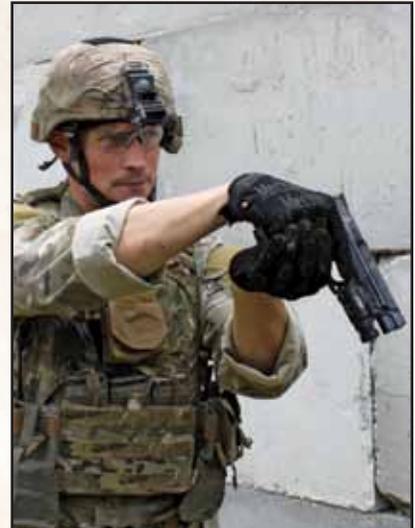
was to create a position that allowed the additional members of a tactical team to safely move in and around each other while maintaining muzzle awareness. Their intent was absolutely not to cause a shooter to cover himself with the muzzle of the firearm or present an invitation for some “tool-bag” to attempt to take his pistol. If you want to learn the proper use of this position, go see Max and Alan and get the real scoop.

Always Keep Your Firearm Pointed In a Safe Direction

How many times have you heard this safety mantra, then turned around to see someone cover himself or his mates with a firearm? I have been very alarmed to see how seasoned operators handle their firearms when they are transitioned from the flat range to a realistic scenario. Some of these realistic scenarios may only involve a basic move such as taking a kneeling position. Immediately, I see



Alternate position of retention. Keep your wrists straight and strong.



Not part of the draw stroke: Limp wrists await gun take-away.

the firearm pushed against the shooter’s chest, his wrist broken and the muzzle pointed directly at his own thigh. I’m

not a big fan of treating gunshots to the upper thigh or, as far as that goes, anywhere to the thigh. When you move into a kneeling position, you can easily keep the gun in what we call Position Three, or if you require your support hand to assist you in getting down, to stop movement or to brace yourself, then control the gun with one hand. It isn’t that hard, but you must practice if you have been trained to use other positions that cause you to cover yourself in obscure configurations.

Vehicle Contact

How likely is it that you will be involved in a shooting near vehicles? My guess is that the likelihood is huge, judging from the history of my mates and the other military and law enforcement officers with whom I have trained. Once again, movement inside

and around the vehicle must not cause you to cover your teammates, partner or yourself. Most shooters, pistol or rifle, want to sweep the gun across their thighs to quickly evacuate a vehicle. Not a good plan. The other calamity I have witnessed is the steering wheel taking away the shooter’s gun. The broken wrist allows the firearm to be easily stripped from the shooter’s hand, which is not only unsafe, but you lose all of your “cool-guy points” there, too. Using this unsafe technique does not make you faster, and it is unsafe, so why?

I prefer to use two different techniques to quickly get out of the vehicle, all the while driving home the point that we want to be prepared to shoot a threat and be safe at the same time.

Over the Steering Wheel

If the threat is anywhere near the front of the vehicle or the driver’s side and you are the driver, quickly grabbing the wheel and pulling yourself from the vehicle is a good plan. While this is happening, drive the gun over the steering wheel to eliminate the coverage of your own appendages with it. If the threat location is to the passenger side of the vehicle, it is best to continue using the support hand to pull yourself from the vehicle, with the only exception being that your firearm remains pointed in the direction of the threat. Left- or right-handed, it doesn’t matter.

Drive the pistol aggressively to the threat.



Muzzle Awareness In the Tactical Stack

I constantly receive questions about muzzle awareness when I point out poor technique. “What if I am surrounded by other officers?” If you are surrounded by others on all sides, you are more than likely in a mosh pit at a Marilyn Manson concert and need to shoot your way out.

There is generally a safe place to point your firearm. This may mean coming all the way to Position Two, the position where your muzzle has just cleared the holster, but these instances should be few and far between. You should be looking for a place to point your firearm. In these scenarios, we always tell team members to “look for work.” This means to find a place where we need your help.

If you happen to be standing in a position with your firearm toward a wall, maybe you should rotate in order to allow quick presentation to a surprise threat.



Good firearms retention, part of draw stroke and strong wrists—this shooter is ready for the fight.

Urban Legend: “Don’t Take Your Support Hand Off the Gun”

Holy schnikees, Batman! Can you believe I just said that? If you need to take your support hand off your gun, do so. This includes that good old rifle, too. There is generally a lot of resistance to this advice, but you must be ready to take hold of the man in front of you if you happen to be the No. 2 man or you need to open a door for the team or yourself.

Another Option

While training a group of American special operators overseas, I was exposed to a slightly different thought process and technique for gun retention. I had just blown my stack when a new shooter pointed his gun at his thigh

Always be aware of where your muzzle is pointed. The muzzle should never cover your body, no matter your position.

while getting out of a vehicle. After I explained the issues, which they all agreed with, one shooter demonstrated a slightly different technique that would allow the shooter to have strong wrists and not cover himself or his mates.

This position is simply rotating the strong and support hand so the support thumb goes over the top of the pistol. It gives strength and still allows quick movement into and out of the position. If you need to point the gun straight down, you will have to slightly lift your elbow, but this is very similar to the position we draw from in the first place, therefore it’s much easier to teach. The rotation of the wrist, while keeping it straight, allows the elbow to easily lift enough to point the firearm where need be.

Lamb’s Laws

Here are the basic principles I try to adhere to with regard to pistol muzzle awareness and retention.

1. Stay in your draw stroke. Always attempt to conduct movements that are somewhere in the draw stroke, as this will eliminate any “Starsky and Hutch” or “Charlie’s Angels” movements.
2. Don’t be afraid to take a hand off the gun if necessary—the support hand, that is.
3. Do not break your wrists. This is true of almost all techniques we teach for the rifle and pistol. At the moment, I can’t think of any, but I thought I would say “almost all” to cover any future craziness someone may come up with. Draws, reloads, malfunction clearances—we want to have strength at all times. Don’t fight with a limp wrist.
4. Find a hole and put a gun there. Always look for work in a tactical environment.

Next time you find yourself and your mates on the range or in a scenario, look where their guns are pointed. Are they covering their femurs or feet? Are their wrists in a compromised position for gun retention? Don’t train for failure, train to quickly get the gun into the fight and keep it there.

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