



UNITED STATES SHOOTING ACADEMY

Get street-wise shooting savvy that's key to survival!

By Matt Berger

When United States Shooting Academy (USSA) invited us to their one-of-a-kind shooting facility I was fortunate enough to draw the assignment. Encompassing 93 acres in Tulsa, Oklahoma, it comprises six action pistol ranges and a pneumatic shoot-off range, two 100-meter carbine and one 300-meter rifle ranges, 20 multi-purpose ranges, a reactive steel and police/military qualification range, tactical assault field, and an unprecedented 360-degree combat field. The finished grounds will have a large main lodge, maintenance building, ballistic shoot-house, armory, organizational building, and a defensive tactics building.

In 2005, the original concept for USSA was born from discussions and planning between President and CEO Tom Fee, Custom Shop Director/Gunsmith Kevin Toothman, and Steve Broom, brother of USSA's current IT Director, James Broom. The concept originally hashed out by the three was for a competition range.

Tom Fee, owner of Fee Oil and Gas and the primary financier, is also a competition shooter. It was through his competition that he met Mike Seeklander and Brian Hill, and the present vision for USSA emerged as a collaborative brainchild of all five men, with Fee, Seeklander and Hill the officers of the company. They ultimately decided that they wanted to provide not only a range for competition and advanced training of all shooting disciplines, both sport and defensive, but also for the most advanced training available to our military units and law enforcement alike.

Ground was broken in April of 2006. Training classes have commenced as of

March '07, though construction, which is planned in phases, is still ongoing. Later phases include the defensive tactics and armory buildings. A Boeing 737 has been purchased and will be brought to the Tactical Assault Field. The aircraft will serve to facilitate training to military units and law enforcement in emergency aircraft interventions.

The shoot-house provides live-fire training. It features numerous rooms and points of entry, and an infrared video system and real-time video feed to an onsite review

(Right) The author is reloading during a stage. (Below) Students practice firing from a squatting position.



Fire Training Range. This range may be entered via vehicle, and will support realistic training with multiple engagements and angles of shooting. The 125 yard-diameter "Colosseum," as the instructors have dubbed it, is unparalleled by anything anywhere in the world.

USSA has gone to great lengths to obtain world-class instructors: Mike Seeklander, director of training; Phil Strader, Director of Competition/Marketing; Brian Hill, Director of Operations; Brad Delauter, Division Chief heading up Military/Special Ops/Security Contracting; and Eric Lund, Senior Instructor. The real-life experience, backgrounds and instructor credentials of these seasoned teachers are far too extensive to detail here. I would refer the reader to USSA's website for further details.

What is important is that each of these men brings knowledge, real-world experience, and teaching abilities with them on an exceptional level. Additionally, the school employs about 33 other adjunct instructors who contribute as needed.

I wanted to experience USSA. I enrolled in the Practical Handgun 1 Course, and really chose the class for no other reason than it fit my schedule, and it was the very first class hosted.

The course is designed to address the fundamental techniques intrinsic to competition shooting, mainly practical shooting. I'm not an IPSC shooter, and the only competition I'd participated in prior to the school was IDPA. All of my practice is geared toward defense, but I figure one can always learn something valuable from instructors of this caliber.

Our class was small, with nine students, and we were joined by Director of

Sales Brendan Fitzgerald, and Division Chief Brad Delauter, who also shot the courses alongside us. This, of course, allowed for plenty of intense one-on-one instruction. Our primary instructor was Phil Strader, who was assisted by Mike Seeklander, and Rangemaster Kelly Raglin.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Beginning in the classroom, the first order of business was appropriately firearms safety, then arranging one's gear. The fundamentals of marksmanship were next, with an eye toward detail: Stance, Grip, Sight Management, and Trigger Finger Management. Instruction then progressed toward the competition draw, reloading, and so on.

Moving to the range, we resumed with live-fire: basic exercises building one-upon another, and progressing to higher levels of difficulty. Kneeling and squatting positions, moving-and-firing, as well as one-handed shooting were covered. We studied methods of target acquisition, transition and multiple levels of visual focus. We even delved into



Phil Strader conducts classroom instructions.

theories of basic stage breakdown.

Students were video recorded shooting a timed and scored course from the onset, then the same course at the end of the second day, for comparison. The recordings were subsequently reviewed and critiqued in the classroom, and discs copied to be sent to the students.

I'd brought my factory-stock Springfield Armory 1911 Champion, and 1000 rounds

of re-manufactured .45ACP provided by Black Hills. My gear included both a Braveheart IWB, and Point.5 kydex holster and magazine pouches from KyTac

I learned quite a bit, not only in my shooting but in terms of instructor development. Phil Strader is quite an effective teacher, and I gleaned a lot in terms of communicating training concepts to others. He also helped me to refine and improve my grip and stance. The curriculum-governing body in my state for law enforcement relegates us only to a modified Weaver "tactical" stance, so this was the first extensive formal training I'd had in isosceles shooting. I went home with quite a bit to practice!

Throughout the two days of shooting, the Champion ran perfectly and put my shots where I aimed them. The only malfunctions I experienced were through my own error. The Black Hills ammo performed flawlessly and ceaselessly. My KyTac gear functioned superbly, carrying my weapon and magazines securely and close to the body while facilitating a quick draw. There's much to be said for proper equipment and ammo.

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The author is shooting a stage.

At the conclusion of the course, we each were presented with wristbands bearing USSA's ethos, "Win the Fight." We were encouraged to acknowledge and accept it as a relentless refusal to accept failure or medi-

ocrity, commit to a professional code of ethical and moral behavior, and embark upon the endless pursuit of personal and professional excellence.

It was clear to see, even at this stage of construction, that USSA is, and will be, an unprecedented epicenter of shooting disciplines, having no rivals. As work continues, it can only get better. USSA's stated objective is to train and challenge the student, teach progressive principles, tactics and techniques that are effective not just in theory but in real-world applications. I think they have surely accomplished this, both in their level of instruction and in providing an amazing place to do it.

USSA is committed to training every shooter of every need and background, from the beginner, to the dedicated competitor, and to the protection professional, policeman, soldier, or Marine. If they don't have the course you're looking for, they'll create it and tailor it to specified needs.

Excited is the word that describes the feeling I had as I left the range, especially to see something as big as this emerging in my home state, and to have participated in its beginnings. ■■■■■

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COMBAT STRESS

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