

The Hidden Strength Of The WEAK HAND

A neglected
shooting skill

By Andy Kemp



Author demonstrates weak-hand-only technique. Note the locked elbow and shoulder forward off hip. Gun side leg is forward.

The poor, often forgotten, weak hand. The bastard stepchild of our shooting technique. While it serves us well in support functions most of us never give our weak hand the attention it deserves. Rarely do we allow it to have the same fun the strong hand enjoys...actually shooting the gun.

During an advanced class last year, which included an above average amount of weak hand use both in the class and on the qualification, one student remarked that too much attention was devoted to the weak hand. He quoted statistics which

claimed that only a minuscule percentage of gunfights require shooting with the weak hand. My response was this; "If you are in only one gunfight in your life and you need to use your weak hand, then 100 percent of *your* gunfights required you to shoot with your weak hand."

The fact is, most of us, according to statistics and God willing, will never be in a gunfight. So why train at all? Why carry a gun where we are legal to do so if statistics indicate otherwise? It is because those of us who read the pages of this magazine do not buy into the statistics. We realize that regardless of how slim the

chances, we may, one day, need to use a gun, whether we like it or not. We are not content to play the odds where our lives, or those of our loved ones, are concerned. Why then, would we play the odds when it comes to training our weak hand in the performance of a task that could, someday, save our life?

Let us not forget that our strong hand/arm may be shot or otherwise incapacitated during the fight. I would submit that this is a bad time to start teaching the weak hand to shoot. During a struggle for the gun you may have to transfer from the dominant hand to the non-dominant hand in

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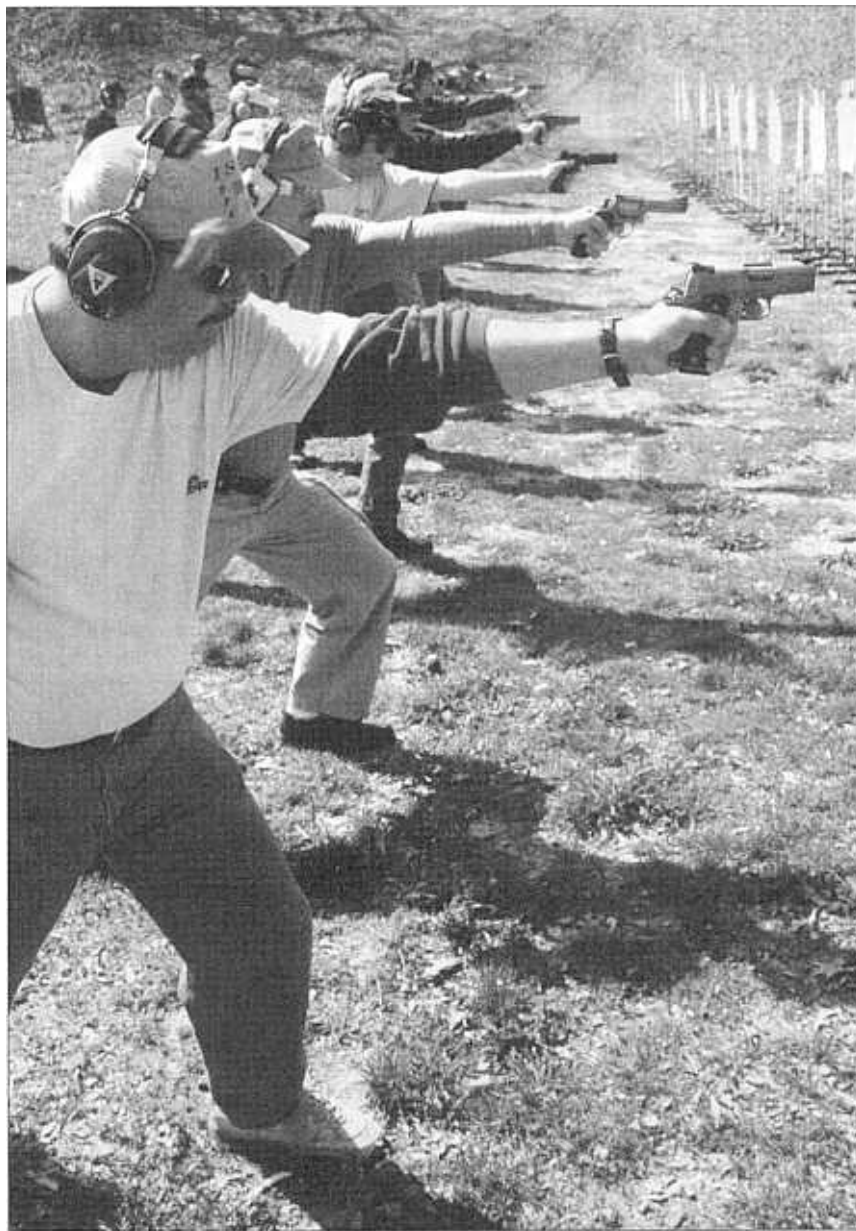
order to retain your gun. Again, you want your weak hand to already know what to do now that it is holding the gun. I doubt that anyone out there can state with absolute certainty that they will never break a bone in their dominant arm or hand, or suffer some other injury that would give you only the use of the weak side while the strong side recovered. When you do, likewise, this is not the ideal time to start your weak hand training. You should already be comfortable firing the gun and drawing from a weak side holster.

So what kind of program should you incorporate into your training

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schedule to work your weak hand? Shooting a few rounds weak hand only at each range session will get you on the right path. Regularity is more important than launching boxes of ammo downrange in one session. Train up close at first and work out to about 10 yards. Drawing from both a weak side holster and strong side holster with the weak-hand-only should also be a part of weak hand practice.

Shooting weak-hand-only requires some conscious adjustments initially. It is, after all, your weak hand, and you want to shoot with strength. The recoil



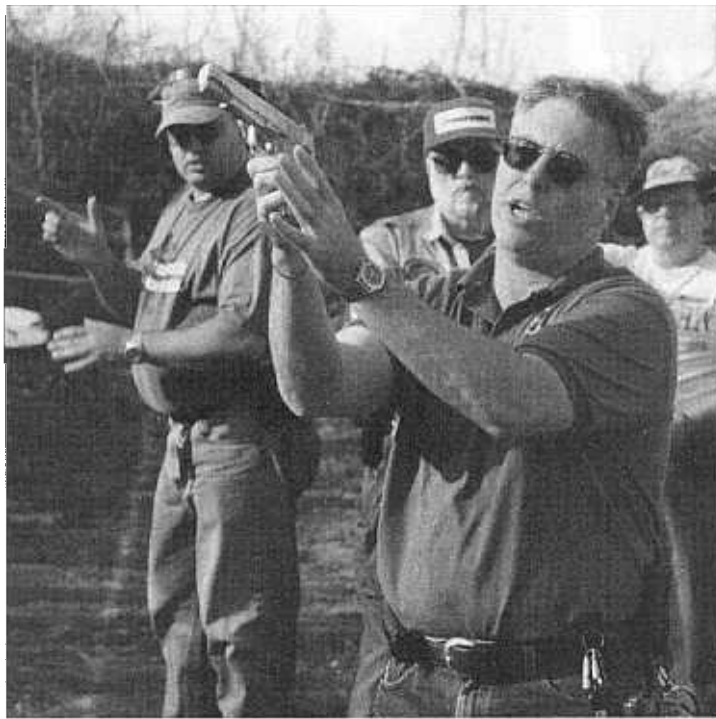
Lethal Force students in action practicing left hand shooting drills.



will find the weakest link in your technique. Even if you normally shoot with your thumbs up or along the frame, curl the thumb down and crush the grip in a fist. This is a stronger hold and will prevent you from limp-wristing. The dominant hand is in a tight fist, palm up, tight against the chest. Ideally, the gun side leg should be forward with your shoulder forward off your hip, putting more of your body weight into the recoil. Lock the elbow! Use of the skeletal structure rather than the musculature will allow even the smallest of body types to control the recoil. Unless you are cross-eye dominant, the sights will not be aligned with your eye. Either bring the chin to the shoulder or slightly cant the gun to correct this. Both techniques will align the dominant eye with the sights.

One of the great secrets of weak hand training is "mirror image" shooting. It is just what it sounds like...reverse the roles of your strong and weak sides and your stance and hold will look like a mirror image of your normal shooting stance. Righties shoot like lefties and vice versa. Your draw, reloads, everything, is done with the opposite hand. This is great stuff and holds many benefits.

My first experience with mirror



Author demonstrates transitioning from strong hand to weak. A strong high grip is required. The high position of the gun is for instructional purposes only so that class can see the technique.

image shooting was during an LFI-1 class with Massad Ayoob (Lethal Force Institute Director, one of the Country's top firearms instructors and a leader in the area of the legal applications and implications of deadly force). I had been in a serious slump for quite some time. I shot mirror image for four days. When it came time for the staff to shoot the qualification in front of the students I thought I would go back to my right hand. Massad suggested shooting the qualification mirror image...great role modeling for the class and all that. Hmmm, let's see, great role mod-

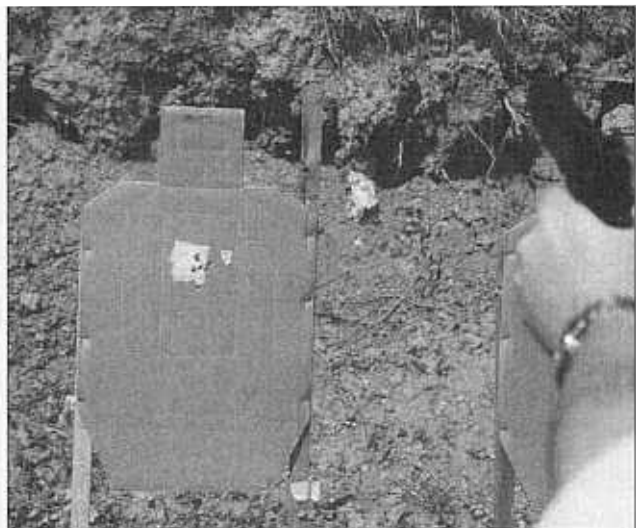
eling on one hand, good score on the other. Well, despite my reservations I did it. Much to my surprise I shot one of the best groups on that qualification that I had ever shot. When I went back to shooting with my right hand I was shooting better than ever, even though I had not been practicing at all with that hand. I was completely out of my slump.

Why is it that training one hand makes the other stronger at the same task? Well, first, there is the whole right brain, left brain, neuromuscular pathway thing. I don't fully understand it, nor can I document it, but the crux of it is that training one side of the brain assists in the other performing the same

task, or something like that. I once engaged Chicago-area chiropractor, friend and advanced firearms student, Larry Pyzik, in conversation on this subject. He told me of physical therapists who are performing therapy on opposite limbs when they cannot do it on the limb that needs it. For example, if the left leg is in a cast they work on the right leg. This supposedly prevents the disabled leg muscles from "forgetting." Dr. Pyzik explains:

"The frontal lobe creates the "thought." This goes to the cerebral cortex (gross motor skills) and then the message goes out along the

Good accuracy can be achieved when shooting weak-hand-only.



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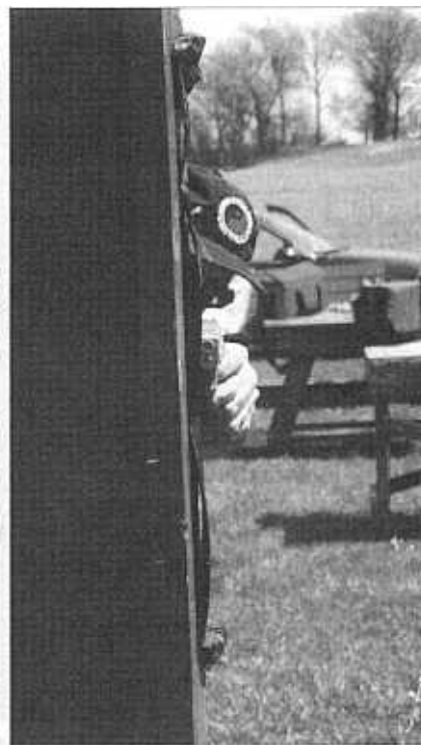
nerves to cause the muscles to move. The message is received back in the brain to complete the circuit. During this time the message is sent to the cerebellum (fine motor skills) where the movement is 'learned'. This stored 'learning' can be accessed from either side of the brain and applied to left or right side muscular movement."

Again, I have no first hand knowledge of this but the human body is capable of amazing things. I wouldn't discount it too quickly. If any of this is true then it should work in reverse,

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right? Your weak hand should already know what to do—sort of. I have seen advanced students shoot exceptionally well on weak hand drills with very little practice. Maybe there is something to it. Imagine what regular training would do.

I do know this, from my experience. When shooting mirror image I *had* to focus. Working the trigger, reloading, drawing from a holster, my stance, my grip, all this was foreign to me. Every detail of how to shoot had come to the front of my mind. It was a classic case



When shooting from the weak side of cover it is easy to expose too much of oneself. Using the weak hand and aiming with the weak-side eye can avoid this.

of "back to basics". This heightened-awareness stayed with me when I returned to right-handed shooting.

There are added benefits for instructors. First, your patience with students increases immeasurably. Shooting mirror image is very humbling. You realize just what a new shooter is going through while you are instructing them. Secondly, you can better instruct students who are your dominant opposites. Being right-handed, I would have no idea of some of the unique problems of a left-

handed shooter had I not experienced them.

There are also tactical advantages to mirror image training. While shooting around a corner on your weak side, you will be far less exposed to return fire, especially if you can train your weak side eye to use the sights. Shooting prone around weak side cover can be especially tricky. Go mirror image; problem solved.

To summarize, advantages of weak hand training: numerous. Disadvantages: zip. ■

Shooting prone with left hand from cover exposes less of the body.

