



LASER SIGHTS— THEN & NOW

*Tactical lasers and their real world use
in low light lethal force encounters!*

By Gary Paul Johnston

Traditions are often difficult to break. Take sights. Before firearms were invented, there were no sights. Spears were thrown and arrows were sent at a target using only experience, “Kentucky windage and Tennessee elevation.”

Even with the first firearms, sights were non-existent or primitive at best. With increased accuracy sights began to be taken seriously. Still, however, many did not use them and still don’t. I recently saw World War II footage of a US Marine looking over his sights, as he fired his M1 at the enemy in the Pacific, and so it goes, from hip shooting to point-shoulder “aiming.”

Hollywood aside, for some, point shooting can be remarkably accurate.

Examples are Ed McGivern, Bill Jordan, Bill Munden and others. I once watched 12-year-old Thell Reed toss a tin can 15 feet downrange, then draw his 7.5-inch Colt SAA revolver and hit the can six times with .45 slugs. All of this was within 10 seconds, as the can continued to roll and bounce downrange, and Reed was shooting from the hip. Was he just having a good day? No.

Because of eye/hand coordination, a few people have an innate ability to hit targets without aiming in the conventional method of using sights. Practice certainly helps, but some can practice a great deal and not equal what a few can do on any Sunday.

While shooting without using sights can be fun and challenging, it isn’t for the real world if you want to hit your “tar-

get” before it hits you. Well, more or less.

First arriving on the scene back in the 1970s, laser sights were in their infancy. They were big, clumsy and misunderstood, and they were expensive. Things have changed.

Today’s laser sights are not only tiny in comparison to earlier models, but also just as powerful and they are now affordable. Offered both for shoulder arms and handguns, lasers can be extremely useful tools in virtually almost all light conditions except bright sunlight. In bright sunlight your open sights or optics should work fine, but when do most law enforcement encounters involving firearms occur? If you say in low light, you’re right. Even at high noon, dangerous incidents usually take place indoors in low light.



It is in low light that the laser truly excels, but its proper use must be understood. Bringing your laser-equipped firearm up to eye level, or in the case of shoulder arms, your eyes down to sight level, minimizes the advantage of the laser, because the sights tend to hide the bright red or green dot it projects. Far better is to bring a handgun up to a few inches below eye level where not only the laser can be seen, but also much more. Where the shoulder arm is concerned, I prefer to keep my head high to look over my sights to see the laser. A high tuck position can also be used with the buttstock up under the armpit, but recoil may make follow-up shots more difficult than keeping the weapon against the shoulder.

Keeping the laser high, but not too

high is the secret to achieving fast, accurate hits. While shooting from the hip and other awkward positions, it is not recommended unless necessary because of confinement or other reasons.

True, just the deployment of a laser can cause anxiety and can even induce a suspect to surrender, or flee from hiding when he or she sees the bright light beam on a wall or floor, or into a vehicle. However, lasers can also cause confusion when more than one are used, or when shined into a mirror or other glass, and lasers that don't meet FDA regulation can cause serious eye injury if directed into eyes.

As with all tools, if used correctly, lasers offer a great advantage to law enforcement officers in lethal force encounters.