



A weapon stoppage at this range doesn't leave much time for clearing a malfunction or reloading.

THE ART OF THE TRANS

When Plan "A" Fails

◎ BY TIGER MCKEE

You knew there was going to be a fight so you armed yourself with a rifle. Breathing slowly to calm yourself you step through the door to begin searching.

Working around a corner you see a shadow coming from the opposite direction. No doubt about it now, the fight is here. You stop, mentally check your stance, and then there he is, eyes displaying murderous intent. "Drop the weapon!" you command. Ignoring you he points a pistol at you and advances. You bring the muzzle of your carbine up, slip off the safety, focus on the front sight, and press the trigger and—nothing. No bang. No recoil. Not even a click. It seems strange that you notice his lips form a smile as he starts running at you, closing the gap between you. What do you do? If you have your pistol—and there's no reason

you shouldn't—a transition is called for, and the quicker the better.

Compared to pistols, rifles kick ass. Battle rifles normally have high capacity magazines. They allow us to engage targets with accurate fire from touching distance out to hundreds of yards, and the velocity of rifle rounds increases the probability of stopping the threat. But when your rifle ceases to function, and you can't call in artillery, you better have the skills to transition to your pistol.

The Combative Triad, established by Jeff Cooper, consists of mindset, marksmanship and gun handling. Marksmanship is the ability to hit your target. Gun handling includes reloads and mal-

function clearances—which hopefully you practice until these tasks become subconscious processes. If the weapon runs empty or a malfunction occurs, the conscious mind acknowledges this and initiates the reloading or clearing process and then the trained subconscious takes over to complete the procedure. Our conscious mind also determines when clearing a malfunction or reloading are not options due to lack of time. I'm talking about those situations where if you don't send rounds down-range *immediately* you will die. When the long gun ceases to function under these conditions, regardless of the cause, the ability to transition to your second-



The simplest transition is to pull the rifle into the body with the support hand. As mentioned in the text, positioning the muzzle of the rifle up seems to work best.



A carry sling, if adjusted properly, can be looped over the neck allowing you to use both hands on the pistol. The disadvantage is that it takes slightly more time, which may not be available.



Clint Smith teaches a technique where the sling is looped over the support arm elbow. This is a quick and easy method that allows two hands on the pistol.

POSITION

any weapon is essential to survival.

Transitions are best when kept simple. Complicated actions, or a sequence of acts, consume additional time, contain more opportunities for you to make a mistake, and are difficult to practice and retain. However, to prepare for the realities of combat you will need several transition techniques. Transitions with a tactical sling are fairly simple, but there may be times when you won't have a chance to strap into the sling. Daylight transitions will be different from low-light actions. Maybe the only light you have is the one mounted on your rifle. Then there is no guarantee you'll even be fighting with your own rifle. If I'm armed with a pistol and during the fight have the chance to pick up a rifle, you better believe I'll grab it.

The point is we need to train without all the fancy tactical slings, neon sights, lasers and weapon-mounted lights—just in case.

So for right now let's forget that high dollar tactical sling and imagine you've got a four-dollar cotton military sling on your rifle. The easiest way to transition from rifle to pistol would be to just drop the rifle and use both hands to employ the pistol, but there are several reasons we might not want to ditch our rifle. Predicting exactly what it will take to stop the fight and how long it will last is impossible. Your engagement may have an opportunity to get the rifle back into action. During the fight you're moving, creating distance, going to cover or just trying to make yourself a more difficult target for the threat to engage. Drop your rifle and it's gone. If the opportunity to get the rifle back into the fight does come, you probably won't be anywhere near where you dropped it. There is also the possibility your opponents could retrieve the rifle, get it operating and employ it against you. Keep the rifle and perform the transition.

The simplest technique is to use the primary hand to lower the rifle's stock while the secondary hand, grasping the handguards, pulls the rifle tight against the center of your chest with the barrel pointing up. As soon as the secondary hand has control of the rifle the primary hand presents the pistol. Pulling the rifle tight against the body makes it easier to control since your arm isn't extended away from your body, and it's also a plus in the retention department. We point the muzzle up so the majority of the rifle's weight is lower than the point where we are holding onto it. Pointing the muzzle down requires either twisting the support hand into an uncomfortable position (and having the mass of the rifle above our holding point) or repositioning the support hand on the weapon, adding a step into the sequence. Remember, simple is best.

Maintaining the support hand's original grip on the rifle also reduces the ac-

THE ART OF THE TRANSITION



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right: With a handheld flashlight, the rifle can be pinned against the chest with the support arm. The support hand is free to operate the light.

below: If the only light you have is mounted on the rifle you must use the support hand to hold the rifle and manipulate the light, freeing the primary hand to present the pistol.



tactical sling you simply lower the rifle down with the support hand while the primary hand presents the pistol.

Clint Smith, originator of the Urban Rifle doctrine, teaches a technique where the support arm slides through the sling and you lower the rifle down so that it hangs from the crook of the support arm elbow. His reasoning is that if you sling it over the support shoulder, in the muzzle down or African carry position, as you move around the sling will slip off the shoulder and fall down to the elbow anyway. This technique is simple, quick and allows you to use both hands on the pistol.

Low-light transitions using a handheld light are basically the same only with slight modifications. For example, the first technique described (where the rifle is pulled into the body with the support hand) works if we trap the rifle's handguard in the elbow of the support arm and clamp it against our body. The support hand operates the light and the primary hand is freed up to present the pistol. As mentioned previously, this technique works best with the rifle's muzzle pointing up. The sling techniques described above can also be employed, only instead of having both hands on the pistol the support hand holds the flashlight.

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The rifle can also be positioned under the support hand and clamped against the body. This is a good stable position that could be maintained for extended periods of time.

functions." Then you need to practice more than anyone, because when it does happen it will be a real surprise. To practice transitions take every precaution possible to ensure safety. I have my students unload their rifles and start out slow and by the numbers, walking through the process prior to live fire drills.

Normally our training segregates rifle from pistol. What we should be doing is combining both into a seamless package. You should practice transitioning from the rifle to pistol, from pistol to rifle—and even from pistol to knife. Ideally you want to flow smoothly

from one weapon system to another without any gaps.

To achieve this level of proficiency you must unify mind and body. Not only do we segregate our weapon training but for far too long we have separated the mental from the physical. The

mind must be trained to make quick assessments and decisions and the body trained to perform the actual physical techniques without delay or hesitation. It is essential we have the ability to flow from one weapon to another, and even more important that our mind and body function as one unit.

"When in a fight to the death," Musashi states in his *Book Of Five Rings*, "one wants to employ all one's weapons to the utmost." He continues by saying that "to die with one's sword still sheathed is most regrettable." Although Musashi, a samurai in feudal Japan, fought with swords, the same is true today of fighting with firearms. Training for success in combat means becoming proficient with every weapon at our disposal.

(Author's note: Although the primary focus of this article is on the rifle the same techniques can be applied to any long gun.) ©

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conjunction with the sidearm we need techniques that will keep the light of the rifle indexed on the threat. One option is to leave the rifle stock in your shoulder, controlling it with the support hand. The primary hand presents the pistol while the support hand operates the weapon-mounted light, assuming your weapon is configured where the support hand manipulates the light. This is the simplest technique, and therefore quickest, but the downside is that it takes a good bit of pressure from the support hand to ensure the rifle doesn't slip out of your shoulder as you move. When you are looped into a tactical sling this may be your only option.

If you are using a simple sling you could shift the rifle to the support side of the body, sliding the stock of the rifle between the support arm and your side, and use the support arm to trap the rifle against your side. The support hand maintains its original grip on the handguards, indexing and operating the light, and the primary hand presents the pistol. Although this technique does take slightly more time to shift the rifle from your shoulder to your support side, it provides a good stable hold on the rifle that can be maintained for extended periods of time.

Right about now I can hear some of you saying, "But my rifle never mal-

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