

July brought high temperatures and even higher humidity to Minnesota.



John Farnam demonstrates close up self defense for his students.

It also brought John Farnam, President of Defense Training International, to the Monticello Gun Club for an Advanced Handgun class.

Thirteen students were registered and came together Friday night, July 15, for a “meet and greet” dinner with Mr. Farnam, his colleague Dr. Len Breure, Bob Jahn of REJ Firearms Training, and Jon Thompson of Riverside Sporting Gear. The latter two gentlemen were instrumental in bringing John Farnam to Minnesota. It was at the dinner that John told his students that he “wanted us to fail!” He wanted us to understand that if we did everything perfectly every time, we weren’t pushing ourselves hard enough. It put an interesting spin on things, and opened the door to good-natured jokes and humor through the course of the two-day class.

Dinner gave us an opportunity to meet everyone in the class. We had been told to be prepared to spend a minute or two talking about our background and what we were

looking for from the class. The class roster included competition shooters, CCW and NRA Instructors, a law enforcement instructor, and a holster manufacturer. John was also interested in what our primary and backup guns were, and whether we had brought a knife. He made a point of interacting with each person as we made our introductions.



Student Don Larson practices the Farnam technique for keeping strangers from getting too close.

Before we left that evening, we had an idea of what to expect from the class over the next two days. John explained, “This is a fighting course,” and added that he would “push us to the breaking point” so we could see our own capabilities.

Some techniques John teaches and expects students to use in his class differ somewhat from those of other well-known trainers. Isn't the reason we train under different instructors to learn new techniques? At some point, we can take all the techniques we've learned and incorporate them into something that works for each of us individually. No one person has the market on what's best for everyone.

Advanced Handgun is not just standing in front of a target making holes in it. Neither is it only about speed out of the holster. It's a combination of presentation and accuracy. As John says, “Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.”



Farnam teaches students to use Position Sul before reholstering.

After breakfast together Saturday morning, we headed to the range as a group. Day One started with a safety briefing. John and his assisting instructors explained that this was an advanced class, and the range would be “hot” for the entire class. Guns were expected to be loaded and stay in the holster unless on the firing line. During dry-fire exercise our back-up guns (BUGs) were expected to be loaded, so we were armed at all times.

We practiced handling single and multiple “stranger approaches” and deescalating those types of situations. John believes in “getting off of the X” and constant movement unless firing. What John stresses most is “keep moving,” and “stay in the fight.” If there were two recurring phrases throughout the weekend, they were: “Don’t just stand there like a potted palm!” and “Quit dithering!”

Once on the range, John checked our grip and stance, and offered suggestions for changes to both, also on thumb position and trigger finger placement. We practiced trigger reset with a partner until each student was comfortable and had mastered the technique. John likes the “close in” ready position so there’s less chance of someone being able to grab your gun, and the “Position Sul” before holstering. We were introduced to a press-check that works in both light and dark conditions.

Each shooting drill began in an “interview stance,” on the move, with the challenge, “Police. Don’t move. Drop your weapon.” After that, we followed commands that were given. We were instructed to shoot in four-round bursts, and then assess. Shoot, using the trigger reset, move, assess, and then shoot again.



Farnam fine-tunes student Terrie Williams’ grip. Farnam teaches students to keep their hands high on the gun for best control.

Targets used were IPSC cardboard silhouettes with no markings on them. We were told what proper shot placement should be, and after each shooting drill we were invited to tape our own targets, taping only the holes that we ourselves weren’t satisfied with.

John incorporates real life scenarios into his drills and uses role-playing among the students as a teaching method. We were not only told and shown what to do, but we practiced and interacted with each other to master the techniques. His Four Ds of Defensive Shooting are:

1. Deflect his (your assailant’s) focus
2. Disrupt his plan
3. Disable his body
4. Destroy his will to fight

Because of the weather, breaks for water in the shade were important. John used these times to explain his philosophies on training and self-defense using both lethal and less than lethal methods, avoiding confrontations, and dealing with law enforcement and attorneys (what to say and what not to say.) He and Len shared with us information on the equipment that they personally carry, and why.



Students practice responding to a hostage situation.

Bob Jahn was a student in John Farnam's Basic/Intermediate Handgun class in 2007 and writes: "It was an intense experience. John is not remotely interested in being politically correct nor does he like everyone's guns, knives or self-defense practices. If he likes something you know why; if he thinks it is junk, he calls it that and tells you why it is. If it is new, he has generally tried it and has an opinion as he is always training and testing guns and gear."

We learned and worked on the transition from primary gun to BUG, then to knife. We also practiced John's technique for switching the gun from one hand to the other—strong to support and back. John has an interesting drill that involves setting up targets across the width of the range at different distances with different scenarios. We started with our primary gun, transitioned to our backup, then to a knife. Both strong-hand and support-hand shooting techniques were required.



Guns set up with various malfunctions allowed students to practice solving problems and clearing trouble.

After dinner together that first day, we returned to the range for some low light drills. As dusk (and the swarms of mosquitoes) came, we worked with all of our equipment in the dark. This gave us an opportunity to practice the press-check John had taught earlier in the day and learned the advantages and disadvantages of the different flashlight techniques in use today.

Day Two again started with breakfast together, and once at the range, a review of the drills from the day before, then practice for the afternoon's test.

Two interesting exercises gave each of us an opportunity to shoot a variety of guns.

Tables were set out on the range and each participant placed their primary gun on the table with an extra full magazine. Each student fired two shots from each gun on the table.



Farnam works with a student during gun retention practice, allowing the student to deal with attacks from various angles.

When everyone had finished, John, Len and Jon set up three sets of three guns each. In each set of three, one had a dummy round somewhere in the magazine; one had a stovepipe; one was set up with a double-feed. In each group, the exercise was to pick up the gun, fire it or attempt to fire it, then fix whatever was wrong, and move on to the other two guns in the group. Although Glocks outnumbered other brands, each group offered a variety.

During one of the breaks from the sun, we learned disarming techniques, practicing with blue (dummy) guns. We learned techniques to disarm people known to us in a non-hostile situation, as well as strangers in a self-defense situation. We were paired up and ran some drills, with John setting up the scenarios.

Also included were one-handed drills, should one be injured and lose the use of one hand. We learned several methods of clearing malfunctions, reloading, and racking the slide with both strong hand and support hand. These skills were taught and practiced with unloaded guns, and then the drills were run live fire.



Farnam teaches students to use leverage-based principles to maintain control of their own handguns or to disarm hostile others.

The range part of the class ended with each student taking John's test; a timed shooting exercise that included movement, malfunctions, and reloads, all while getting acceptable (to John) hits. The test added some heat to an already hot day!

Throughout the days we spent with John, we heard much of his wit and wisdom. He managed to have words of wisdom intertwined in every drill. Before we headed for dinner, John told us his advice to all CCW licensees:

1) Be in bed by ten o'clock! Police regard those who are up and about late at night as less respectable, and more dangerous, than "normal" people, who sleep during the night and are active during daylight hours. A "nocturnal" lifestyle is fraught with peril and unhappiness!

2) Have a "normal" appearance. Police officers automatically focus on "unusual" things and circumstances. That's their job! Simply looking normal goes a long way toward putting police officers at ease. Who insist on covering themselves with tattoos, dyeing their hair purple, and having a "face-by-Ace-Hardware" will discover that they garner a great deal of attention, most of it unwanted.



Student Mary Albrecht practices transitioning from knife to handgun.

The class officially ended with dinner, much like it started. However, where we gathered on Friday as strangers, we dined Sunday night as friends.

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