

THE SIGARMS ACADEMY EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

This is a review of the Concealed Carry Pistol and Advanced Concealed Carry Pistol courses offered to civilians at the SIGARMS Academy.

It is titled "The SIGARMS Academy Experience" because the authors (Roger and Nicky) came away from the course with a lot more than becoming more proficient in the tactics and skills associated with CCW. We, along with Dave and Mark have become good friends since meeting each other at the Academy, and three of us teamed up to attend the 5 day Advanced Defensive Pistol course the following year (Mark had to cancel at last moment).



Dave, Roger & Nicky

*At entrance to Academy during
Advance Defensive Pistol training*

THE ACADEMY

The SIGARMS Academy is staffed by a team of dedicated professionals (with a spectrum of military and agency backgrounds) that instantly submerge students in an immensely rich learning environment. Instructors have their own unique experience, styles and pace that do not ever allow for training to become routine or bland.

The facilities located in Epping, New Hampshire, are extensive, covering an array of training opportunities for handguns and long firearms including, moving targets, diminished light, house clearing, shooting on the move and from cover, simunitions, sniping and rifle shooting to name a few. We hear there are plans to expand and move part of the pistol training programs to new and renewed facilities within the SIGARMS Factory site.

The SIGARMS Academy provides students with most of the equipment necessary to attend the courses. They offer a wide selection of SIGARMS pistols in different calibers, holsters, eyes and ears protection, etc. This affords visitors the opportunity to experiment with different options and find out what works best for each individual. This is also extremely practical for people coming from abroad, those not wanting to travel with a weapon or who just simply do not own a gun. They also supply all the pistol ammunition which is non-toxic/lead free.

COURSE REVIEWS

Concealed Carry Pistol [3 Day]

Prerequisites: None

Recommendations: Prior attendance on a one day course

Day 1

A dozen men gathered in a long classroom at the Academy at 9^{AM} ready and anxious to begin. Ages ranged from the early twenties to the mid and battered sixties, backgrounds also covered a wide spectrum of professions, most of them non firearms related. Students were all basically gun aficionados with some experience.

We were welcomed to the Academy by Bank Miller (Director) and George Harris (Assistant Director of Training), our instructors. Personal introductions were followed by a PowerPoint presentation of the program. A thick booklet covering in detail every theoretical and practical aspect of the seminar, providing more information on a myriad of related topics, and a SIGARMS hat were also part of our welcome kit.

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The first morning was spent entirely in the classroom. Particular attention was given to thorough understanding of gun safety rules, good health requirements for active participation on the class, range rules and other basic procedures.

All the right magical words were there. SIGARMS Academy teaches *a way*, not *the way*. They'll actually teach you several ways and as more variants of these than you can shake a stick at. It then becomes the student's responsibility to access the options and adopt those that personally work best.

As lunchtime approached we were showed directions for the most convenient places nearby. These spots are used to cater to the always-in-a-hurry crowd that goes to the Academy so they welcome students with a smile. Good chow too!



Shooting at static targets whilst on the move

Afternoon was our first visit to the ranges. Once again, the group reviewed the basic safety rules and it was made sure everyone was crystal clear regarding the range rules and etiquette. We started with a cold range and were slowly walked through the basics which covered gun manipulation, stances, grip, sights, trigger, etc. Dry drills then followed.

Afterwards, the Ready and Cover Positions were extensively practiced; these and the drawing and re-holstering drills would constitute the basics of all other exercises practiced on the days to follow. Everything was repeated until the whole class could master the techniques and operate as one entity.

Loading, reloading and stoppage techniques were examined and dry practiced before we moved to live fire exercises. Still working on a cold range, the group split in two, engaged by turns on a live practice of all the things viewed during the day plus some extra stuff.

The day ended with a pistol cleaning session and a very interesting winding down session in the classroom, where all the students analyzed, one by one, the day's achievements. This practice not only made each one realize how much ground had been covered but also made for very cunning observations. Most people had to agree that the classes were best enjoyed if you had buddy along with you.

After the class was dismissed for the day the whole reviewing/reenacting process began. Thoughts were actively shared and excitement was highly contagious.

Day 2

As the day at the Academy started, the class reviewed the previous day's information; (dry) practiced the drills and got ready to hit the range.

The first day had obviously served the students to get acquainted with the range etiquette, the verbal commands and to learn how to function as a homogeneous group. It had also allowed the instructors to take a measure of the men in order to set the pace of things to come.

Starting with basic live fire exercises and drawing from a concealed gun, the class progressed to close proximity shooting, single hand firing and precision vs. point shooting techniques. Each new technique was first dry practiced before conducting live fire drills.

One of the first things done at the range that day was to time each student shooting a certain live fire drill using steel and pop up targets. All targets had to be hit in order to finish the exercise.

As the day progressed so did the pace of the course and the group was showing their appreciation. Anyone not concentrating on shooting at any given time was sporting a delighted grin.

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Nicky practicing shooting lying down

The afternoon saw the class learning the principles of tactical movement followed by dry and live fire practices. By the time we progressed to engaging multiple targets while on the move some remarked with proud pleasure that their trigger fingers and dominant hands were already sore.

The day ended by a more detailed and supervised maintenance session where a function check of a semi-auto handgun was explained/demonstrated before we once again got together to cool down and review our day's accomplishments.

At this point, we were shown a large collection of holsters and other modes of carry. Each type and model was discussed, handled and analyzed. IWB, OWB, SOB, Ankle holsters, Shoulder Holsters, deep cover, pocket, off body modes (purses, etc) you name

it. They were all there, shown to us and explained in detail so we could understand the pros and cons of each mode of carry and differences between makes and models. Same as with defensive handguns, quality is paramount.

Although loaner guns are obviously SIG, the Academy welcomes (and encourages) students to bring their own firearms/gear to the courses so that everybody may train and become proficient with their personal choice of weapon for CCW. The guns present at the class were the usual assortment. Glock was there, a few custom 1911's, a Beretta or two, Sigs of course (Mark used a .357Sig loaner and Dave brought his own .Sig 229 in 40S&W with him). HK's presence was assured by Roger who originally came armed with a Tactical and then realizing it was a bad choice for CCW wisely changed out to his wife's USP40C, and Nicky was sporting a new USP40F courtesy of Roger.

Day 3

The last day started like the previous one with a quick review of days 1 and 2. The range was to remain hot from now on, which represented the manner in which one would normally carry in CCW mode.

The program covered single hand shooting techniques both using the dominant and the non-dominant hand. These were later applied to shooting from the holster with concealment, always following the dry practice first, live fire next system. We were demonstrated methods used for seated engagements and the first part of the day finished by an extensive practical class on the use of cover.

Once again, we shot the same drill we had timed at the beginning of the previous day. We were all doing incredibly faster than just 24 hours before. The Class was impressed.



Mark, shooting from cover

So far, we had alternated using the indoors and the outdoors range depending on the type of exercise to be conducted. The group moved indoors to learn how to shoot in diminished light conditions. The remainder of the day we spent engaging in live fire exercises before cleaning the weapons for the last time.

Our final classroom session served to gather and comment our impressions of the past days, to have extensive Q and A time and to receive some recommendations of the next steps to follow regarding our personal development as shooters or CCW permit holders.

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The Legal aspects of being a firearms owner, user and/or carrier were considered during every step of our SIGARMS Academy education and the Instructors insisted time after time that we, as responsible citizens, be aware of our rights and obligations. They advised the students to find the elements of proper education on these important matters and also provided some interesting pointers.

We all made our written review of the Program and Instructors and submitted them and that was it. Our Academy kit was upgraded with a nice Certificate of Achievement.

Advanced Concealed Carry Pistol [2 Day]

Prerequisites: Concealed Carry Pistol or similar 24 hr CCW training course.

Day 1

We were 10 students in this course, 5 of us had decided to stay after the 3 days Concealed Carry Pistol class and attend both courses back to back. By pure chance, the remaining ones were very comfortable working with each other and we were already a group within the original group by the end of the first 3 days. The new guys caught up and were up to speed by late morning without sacrificing safety or any other vital steps.

After course and individuals introductions, we headed for the range for a step by step practice/review of range procedures and commands and some diagnostic live fire exercises. The group was ready soon enough and the actual program started.



Roger engaging a moving target whilst on the move

The new drills included a lot of single handed and two handed firing. Single hand shooting would be equally practiced with the dominant and non-dominant hand. The grounds covered included principles of speed draw, speed shooting and reactive shooting.

Alternate and Disadvantaged shooting positions was a very interesting proposition that had us all rolling, crawling and twisting like worms in search of a stable shooting platform.

Reloading techniques were also part of the instruction and at the speed we were consuming ammo at this point any good tip was more than welcomed. Shooting was non-stop and there was a time while shooting at moving targets that one buddy reloading magazines for us was not enough and a second one was necessary. We were all carrying spare ammo for ourselves in one pocket and for our buddies in another pocket (if different caliber).

The class made extensive use of the moving targets while practicing engagements on the move. Running towards and away from the assailants, in combinations of flanking, charging and lateral movements, two handed and single handed, dominant and non dominant with tactical and emergency reloads thrown in for good measure it was all extremely exciting and demanding.

Exposure was the name of the game; the instructors wanted us to be aware of all our possibilities and explore them at the range in a controlled environment (where our mistakes could be analyzed and corrected), they wanted to show us alternate modes of fighting and familiarize us with them prior to any confrontation where it might be too late to start trying "new" things.

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The first day ended with the now usual mix of maintenance session and day's review. It is hard to evaluate how it was for the new students that had joined us, for us veterans of the 3 day CCW course the pace had been a constant crescendo and this first day of Adv. CCW was no different. And the best was yet to come.

Day 2

The last day began with the regular warm up and an introduction to diminished light techniques. The background to these included a special topic on the nature of vision and the workings of the human eye, the proper techniques (off-center vision, scanning, preservation of night vision, etc) and the selection of proper equipment. Several light sources were presented and their pro/cons described and analyzed.

We were taught how to navigate in the dark and how to operate using a handgun in combination with a flashlight: Tactics were dry practiced before we started with actual live fire exercises. These included a combination of static and moving drills.



Dave, engaging multiple targets

The next item in our agenda was house-clearing. Individually, we would have to enter "our house" and engage all found threats and hopefully make positive target identification before shooting. The "house" is a small all angles/corridors maze where you can use live frangible ammo. Here we could put to good use all the techniques and tactics we had learned the past days such as cutting the pie, one hand (not necessarily the dominant one) gun handling, tactical reloads, etc, under the supervision of a following instructor. One half of the exercise was to clear the way in and the other half was to clear the way out, once the threats and no shoot targets were relocated. This was a very adrenaline pumping drill that we performed under a scalding sun.

Then, our unsuspecting souls were entrusted for the last part of the day, to Benjamin "Ben" Kurata and Michael "Mike" de Bethencourt, (Instructors) for the climax of our SIGARMS journey, the role-playing and Simunitions training.

Simunitions is a serious matter and special care and precautions had to be taken care prior to engaging in its use. The SIGARMS staff made sure all the students were well aware of this and had perfected a series of safety measures to minimize risks. All live ammo and guns were to be stored off premises before we began. We were then engaged in a series of role playing scenarios where there was a potential use of force on force if things went south. Of course they did!

The situations we were presented all demanded our skills either to avoid confrontation, to be smart enough to flee and not get involved, or to know when enough was enough. What we learned was mind blowing. Without giving away any secrets, lets say that SIGARMS Academy does NOT promote the use of force. After so many days of engaging endless numbers of targets, it finally dawned on us that the battle avoided is the battle won as it is written in Tsun Su's Art of War.

Our SIGARMS Academy kit this time not only included a hat, a manual and a Certificate of Achievement but also immeasurable wisdom and the final realization that carrying a concealed weapon is a heavy responsibility. As a couple of priceless extra bonuses, we were blessed with new found friendship and the urge to come back for more the following year.