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The Shooting Wire

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Training with the Master: Ken Hackathorn's Pistol and Carbine Course

Every field of endeavor has its legends. NASCAR has Richard Petty. The NFL has Joe Montana. In the realm of firearms training there are a handful of legends and Ken Hackathorn is one.

During a warm and sunny weekend in northeast Texas I was privileged to attend a three-day pistol and carbine course hosted by Bill Wilson of Wilson Combat fame. Bill and Ken have been friends for decades and when Bill asked me last fall if I'd be interested in coming to the course I couldn't say yes fast enough. The truth of the matter is that I've known Ken personally for better than ten years but I'd never taken one of his courses. This was my chance.

"Welcome to the Ken Hackathorn Combat Pot Luck Dinner," Mr. Hackathorn greeted the group of eighteen eager pupils. "You don't have to like everything I put out on the table but I'd like you to at least try a little bit of it all." Ken, naturally, was right on. I've attend numerous training courses throughout my life and found that some folks will show up with preconceived notions that hamper their ability to learn. The old axiom is "Leave your ego at the door."

After the initial safety briefing and explanation of the four universal safety rules we moved into the introductory lecture portion. Everyone wants to jump in and start shooting but you need to have a goal and establish the motivation for the training. You don't attend a Sporting Clay course hoping to learn long range marksmanship techniques.

"We're here because we want to learn to deal with what actually occurs in the real world." Ken explained. "In the real world the targets shoot back at you and there is no firing line. It's these two realities that we must keep in mind as we train." He continued by reminding us that there are two times when a firearm is used in the real world: Shootings and Gunfights.

Students perform a drill under Ken's watchful eye.

"They aren't the same," our mentor explained. "In a Shooting only one person fires a gun and the average round count is one to three shots. However, a Gunfight involves multiple parties all firing guns and the average number of shots fired is whatever happens to be in the gun." During genuine gunfights between good guys and bad guys those involved normally shoot their guns dry.

As the weekend progressed we focused on mastering the fundamentals of front sight focus and deliberate trigger press or manipulation. "Controlled trigger press is the number one most important factor in hitting your target with sight picture coming in a close second." Ken related. "It doesn't matter what kind of sights you have, if you snatch the trigger they don't mean a thing."

Training teaches you what and how to practice. During the class Ken explained and demonstrated numerous skill maintenance

drills that shooters could take home with them to gauge their level of proficiency and growth as a shooter. We moved though the program conducting shooting on the move drills, engaging targets near and far, shooting multiple targets both cardboard and steel all the time keeping our goal in mind; to succeed if ever forced to fight for our lives.

Mr. Hackathorn explains an effective method for shooting single-handed.

Generating empty brass with like-minded fellows is always a worthwhile endeavor and you can get that experience at many training schools. The greatest aspect of training with Ken Hackathorn is that the student will benefit from his decades of knowledge and experience. Ken has been in the firearms training arena since the late 1970's. That translates to myriad students and a mountain of brass at his feet.

Ken stresses a point during training.

While no one has truly seen and heard it all, Ken Hackathorn is one of a small group of professional firearms trainers that have heard and seen most of it. And, it's this fact that makes the time spent at one of Ken's training courses truly worthwhile. Now for the bad news, as Ken has four decades of teaching under his belt he's looking to spend more quality time with his lovely bride and a lot less with sweaty shooters. If you can find an opening in one of his courses this year, don't hesitate. Hackathorn-San, as he is referred to in some parts of the world, will soon be living a quieter life.

-- Paul Markel ©2012

A trainer, former law enforcement officer and self-professed student of the gun, Markel is host of the television show, appropriately enough entitled, Student of the Gun on Sportsman Channel.