

## Four Days of Training

I had not been in my office on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington for long that day when I read some disturbing news on the internet. With that, the phone rang.

“Hello,” I answered.

“Ken? Mas Ayoob.”

“Hi Mas.”

“Is everything set for tomorrow?” The date of something that I and other VCDL members had worked so hard to arrange was near. Massad Ayoob, one of America’s premier self defense instructors and authorities was coming to Virginia to train our members and others in essential skills.

“Yes, everything is under control. I’ll be picking you up at BWI airport tomorrow morning, and we can head on down to Richmond.”

“Great. Did you hear a plane hit the World Trade Center?”

“Yeah, and one hit the Pentagon as well,” I responded. “In fact, I had been at the Pentagon less than an hour ago.”

I had known Massad Ayoob for over five years. I first learned of him and his Lethal Force Institute through his writings, which I first read in 1994. In 1996 I met him in person, when I took his famous course, LFI-I, in Pittsburgh, PA. Later that same year I traveled to Chehalis, WA to take LFI-II. In 1997 I took LFI-III in New Hampshire, and returned the following year to take his most advanced course, LFI-IV. In both of these latter courses Massad told us that we were black belts, and we had an obligation to share what he had taught us with other “good guys.”

I got my opportunity to do so when the board of the VCDL asked me to bring Mas here to Virginia to offer his course. I contacted LFI, and we decided on the dates of September 13-14 for Stressfire, the shooting portion of LFI-I, and September 15-16 for Judicious Use of Deadly Force, the “lecture” portion of LFI-I. Finding a range proved to be a major headache, and our efforts to find a suitable location came to naught until Richmond area VCDL member Travis Fox volunteered the use of his home and private range for Stressfire. We decided to hold the JUDF portion of the course at a hotel in Fredericksburg.

However, throughout the morning of September 11, the enormity of what had just happened became clearer. America was under attack. Mas called me back to tell me that the entire U.S. commercial aviation fleet was grounded until further

notice. He asked me to fax him driving directions from his home in New Hampshire to Virginia.

I had taken that drive myself less than two weeks earlier. I had spent the last week of August in New Hampshire attending the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary LFI Reunion. The event was in commemoration of the founding of the Lethal Force Institute in 1981. LFI graduates from Germany, from California, from Idaho, and yes, from Virginia (VCDL member Mike Miller and I, both of us wearing our VCDL shirts), came together to share our knowledge of handgun shooting, the use of the folding knife as a defensive tool, unarmed combat, the use to the TASER, pepper spray, emergency tactical first aid, how to teach, and many other topics. We ended each day with two stages of a ten stage shooting competition. I had seen old friends, and made new ones.

On Labor Day I drove back to Virginia. On my journey I crossed the George Washington Bridge, and headed south on the New Jersey Turnpike. Along the way I could see the skyline of New York, the city of my birth. On that September 11 morning, that skyline was changed forever, along with other things.

Mid-morning of September 11 orders came down to leave the building. I took the Metro to Braddock Road, passing under my usual stop, the Pentagon. By the time I had arrived home, I learned that Massad had abandoned his plans to drive. His wife and eldest daughter were stranded in Las Vegas, and departing New Hampshire would mean that he would be leaving his youngest daughter, Justine, all alone. In addition, other students who would be flying from other parts of the country to take the course would face travel difficulties, and police officers who had registered for the course would be called to duty.

That night I talked to Travis Fox. I told him how it was such a shame that we would have to postpone the course. The events of that day meant that what Massad had been prepared to teach were now more important than ever. He told me that he was thinking the exact same thing. I told him how I had gotten out my copy of Jeff Cooper's *To Ride, Shoot Straight, and Speak the Truth* and re-read Mr. Cooper's opening essay on plane hijacking, written at the time of the TWA hijacking in Lebanon. Travis told me that he had done the exact same thing. I said that it needed to be printed in every paper in America, and read by every American.

That September's monthly membership meeting of the VCDL in Annandale I brought along a TV and videocassette player, and played my copy of *LFI Handgun Safety*. I told the members present that though we could not have Ayoob live that month, I could give them the next best thing, Ayoob on tape.

Now one of the things that Mas warned us about in the instructor level courses was a phenomenon that he called "unfold the arms." Teaching police recruits, who are eager to learn, is one thing, but teaching in-service police personnel,

who lean back with their arms folded across their chests, and give you the look that says, “yeah, sure, try and teach me something new!” is a challenge. When I first put the tape in I sensed that attitude among some in the audience (“hey, I’ve been shooting for over 30 years; what are **you** gonna teach **me**?”). However, as the tape played, and they got to see what a marvelous instructor Mas is, attitudes quickly changed. There were audible sounds from the audience when he showed the dangers of catching a cartridge in your hand while clearing a semi-auto. After that night a lot of Glock owners are going to clear their guns differently.

The knowledge that Ayoob imparts, his wry sense of humor, and the very dramatic stories combine to make watching the tape a memorable experience. People came up to ask where they could buy their own copy. One attendee who had registered for the course asked, “is he really like that in class?” “Sure,” I responded. “Oh boy!” he said.

We rescheduled the course for November. On Wednesday, November 7, I picked Mas up at the Richmond airport (following September 11 airfares became a whole lot more affordable), and the following morning we went to the Fox home for Stressfire. We were soon followed there by Steve Denney, an LFI-IV graduate and fellow student at the LFI Reunion, who had traveled from Pennsylvania to join me in assisting Mas to put on the course, and then by the thirty students.

Naturally, a good chunk of the students were from Virginia, with others from Maryland, North Carolina, and Ohio. However, one was a police chief from Washington State, and another was an airline pilot from Phoenix, AZ.

Following the paperwork, we played the Handgun Safety tape, and then played the tape *Stressfire Series Part One – Handgun*. From there it was outside, to begin shooting.

The weather turned out to be spectacular: sunny, moderate temperatures, no wind. Two glorious days to spend outdoors, shooting. It just does not get any better.

Students shot in three relays of ten each. Students in relays that were not on the line backed up those who were, offering coaching and helping by reloading magazines.

Stressfire is Massad Ayoob’s own system of shooting. It is based on scientific research of how the body reacts under stress, when adrenaline, the most powerful hormone in the human body, is dumped into the bloodstream. The system is designed to use the stress of a life and death struggle to make you a better shooter, and win a gunfight.

Students learned three different two-handed shooting positions: the Classic Weaver, the Chapman (AKA the Modified Weaver), and the Isosceles. There are many schools out there that insist that “the \_\_\_ position is the **only** proper one.” Massad Ayoob teaches that depending on the individual, any one of the three might be superior. Also, for any individual, any one of the three might be superior given the angle from which he has to shoot. Students were taught two different methods of one-handed shooting, and were free to choose the one that worked best for them. Various kneeling positions, to take advantage of different cover, were also taught.

At the end of the second day, a shooting qualification was held. The five stage, sixty round course is based upon police shooting qualification courses. To demonstrate the course, Massad, Steve Denney, and I shot the course, with VCDL’s Mack Elliot serving as range officer. Well, let’s just say that one of the three of us shot a perfect score.

Next, it was the turn of the students. The course began with one-handed shooting at four yards, and continued to longer distances. As the first relay was about to shoot Stage V, I looked with pride from 15 yards at their targets: on my side of the range, they were all perfect targets, 42 of 42 rounds in the A zone of the IPSC targets.

The best student score that day was that of VCDL member Andy Wallace, who like Mas Ayoob shot a perfect score. For this he received the pool, which consisted of one dollar from each student, and a dollar bill signed by Mas to state that on that date Andy had matched him in a shooting competition. Andy donated his winnings to the Virginia Citizens Defense League.

The most improved student was clearly Captain Sally Stewart, the Phoenix based pilot for American Airlines. Before the class she had only shot a handgun once before. On the qualification, she shot at 89%. We have to tell the Congress and the Administration that people like Captain Stewart need the ability to be able to protect their aircraft and their passengers from this country’s enemies.

Before we lost the sunlight that Friday afternoon, Travis Fox showed us all what .50 BMG round will do to a plastic water jug.

Saturday morning most of the Stressfire class continued on to Fredericksburg, where we were joined by new attendees. For the next two days we learned from Massad a wide variety of information essential to anyone who would keep a firearm for self protection.

Students learned the truth about the American legal system, and how “good guys” who had been forced by criminals to use firearms to protect their own lives were then prosecuted/persecuted for their actions. The class learned how they should react when faced by attack, how to protect innocent third parties, how to

interact with responding police officers, and how to deal with the criminal justice system. Bill Jordan titled his classic book on gunfighting *No Second Place Winner*. The students learned the grim truth that there are no first place winners, either.

On this topic, Mr. Ayoob talks with considerable authority. Not only is he the author of the premier book on the subject, *In the Gravest Extreme*, which served as the text for the course, but he has a long history of working as an expert witness to ensure that those who have been victimized by criminals are not further victimized by the criminal and civil justice systems. Not only are there people who are alive today because of what Massad Ayoob taught them, but there are people who are free who might otherwise not be because of him.

Mr. Ayoob has a policy that he will work for free in the defense of any of his students who do what he has taught them but then face criminal prosecution because of it. However, his teaching is so good and the preparation of his students for such an event so complete that in the 20 year history of LFI he has only had to do so on one occasion.

On Sunday afternoon VCDL member Mike Miller, an LFI-IV alumnus and a practicing attorney in Virginia, gave the class information on firearms laws and the law of self defense specific to Virginia. Also on Sunday afternoon we played two classic police training films, *Shoot/Don't Shoot* and its sequel. Both films had a variety of scenarios, where a police officer would be forced to decide whether or not to use his gun in self defense. Each student had the opportunity to step up before the class with an empty revolver equipped with a laser sight, and interact with the characters in the film in at least one of the scenarios.

Sunday concluded with a written examination, followed by the grading and discussion of the exam.

Because of this class a group of people, both private citizens and police officers, are now far better equipped to face whatever dangers might come their way, whether from attack by domestic criminals, or from foreign terrorists. I considered my four days to have been well spent.

What did the students think? Well, at the start of this year, I took a survey of the class to see who would be willing to return if Mas would teach LFI-II, or for those students who only took the Judicious Use of Deadly Force part of the course, whether they would return to take Stressfire. Here is the response I got:

"Best firearms safety attitude and practice I've ever seen. Bravo!"

"If you sponsor an LFI - II class sign me up and tell me where to send the money. LFI-I was worth every penny paid."

“I would be VERY interested in taking LFI-II. Where do I sign?! . . . In a nutshell...YES for LFI-II...YES for the Stressfire portion to complete LFI-I.”

“I would definitely take the LFI-II class this year if it were offered in Virginia.”

“I am all for an LFI-II course here in Virginia.”

“I would definitely be interested in LFI -I or LFI – II this year. Please count me in and keep me posted.”

“I regularly shoot IDPA and other action events and Ayoob's coaching took my one handed shooting (both strong and support side) up a full level.”

The two LFI courses were held through the efforts of a number of people. Jim Schroff arranged hotel accommodations in Fredericksburg. As mentioned, Steve Denney and Mike Miller helped in teaching the classes. However, the most essential people were Travis and Tina Fox, who so graciously offered the use of their home to make this world a better place, and to help VCDL do its part to make it one. Travis made modifications to his range, and built target stands for the course.