

MCS 176: Chris Sajnog – Open Eye Shooting

Jeff: You're standing in line in the convenience store, when without warning the man in front of you pulls out a gun and demands that the clerk empty the register. Before you can think, he turns to you and levels his gun. You can see it in his face. He's going to pull the trigger. Maybe he doesn't want witnesses. Maybe there's something about you that he just doesn't like. Whatever the reason, you have fractions of a second to act.

Do you draw your own gun? If you did would you be confident that you could get off an accurate shot, put him down and not hit the cashier or other shoppers? Has your training taught you how to deal with these life or death realities, or is it just theory that will get you or others killed?

Sad as it is to say, much of the firearm skills being taught today, and widely practiced at local gun ranges all across the country, may not hold up when it's a life or death battle in tight quarters, a dark parking lot or under the florescent lights of a gas station at 1:00 in the morning. Just one of those common skills is the single-eyed shooting that 99 percent of all shooters practice.

This is something you really have to think about. Are you a hundred percent competent that you'll be able to carefully align your sights on your attacker as he's ready to pull the trigger on his own weapon, or doing the 40-yard dash in your direction with a knife in his hand?

One expert trainer says no and advises you to rethink your sighting options to use both eyes for acquiring and firing on your target. But it's not just some trainer. Today he's here to help me convert as many of our listeners as possible to what he refers to as *The New Rules of Marksmanship*.

Hello, everyone. This is Jeff Anderson, Editor for *Modern Combat and Survival Magazine* and Executive Director of the *New World Patriot Alliance*, with another podcast to help you better prepare for any threat you may face in your role as a protector and a patriot.

For our very frank discussion on the dynamics of real gun fights and an alternative perspective on open-eyed shooting is a new member of our network, Chris Sajnog. Chris, welcome to the program man.

Chris: Hey, Jeff. Thanks for having me on.

Jeff: Good to have you here in our maiden voyage here on the podcast. I'm really excited about getting this out there, because this is an area that I preach a lot and I'm really looking forward to people getting another point of view on this.

Listen, everybody. Chris is the bestselling author of the books *How to Shoot like a Navy SEAL* and *Navy SEAL Shooting*. He's a family man who after retiring from the navy created his company Center Mass Group that provides elite level weapons and tactics training to military, paramilitary, law enforcement and civilian personnel. He's coached and mentored thousands of young men as a Navy SEAL instructor, has led security teams across the globe, and quite literally wrote the book on *Navy SEAL Sniper Training* when the Navy Special Warfare Command selected Chris to develop the curriculum for the current US Navy SEAL snipers. For more information on Chris and his training, make sure that you visit him online at www.navysealshootingtactics.com.

All right, Chris. Let's go ahead and get started.

Chris: Let's do it.

Jeff: One-eyed shooting, or just the real life dynamics of a gunfight, is something that we've been trying to preach for a long time. That there's a big difference in the reality of what people are going to experience when there's bullets flying around, versus what maybe they're even taught in so-called tactical classes or that they're practicing down at the range. There's a lot of those different dynamics here.

But when it comes to real gunfights, what would you say are the biggest misconceptions people have about acquiring and shooting a target when they're under threat, basically when the adrenaline's pumping, their heart's in their throat and it's do or die time. What are the biggest misconceptions that you think people have with reality versus what they're currently traditionally planning for or training for?

Chris: One of the biggest misconceptions with that is that people think that a live fire shooting range is the best place to train for these skills, and it's really not the case. You need to use all kinds of other methods and training environments, such as where you might actually be using these skills. You can't train those live fires, say at home. If you're planning to defend your home and your family with a firearm, you can't do live fire at home. So it's actually more realistic to practice these skills at home.

Another thing is that people think that—there's a misconception out there that you can't focus on your front sight when you're under stress. In a way that's true. If you're training normally, like most people are taught, is to go to a range and fire some rounds at a paper target, and that's all the training you do, well you're probably not going to be able to focus on your front sight.

But if you train under stress with something like airsoft, and you get your mind in a place where you're able to focus under stress on your front sight, you will be able to do it. You do that through repetition and muscle memory, and building perfect neural pathways that allow you to be able to send that neural impulse that allows you to focus on your front sight when you're under stress. Because when you're under stress what happens is your

brain releases all these hormones and that's what tends to give us these reactions, these stress responses, that most people are used to. But you can avoid that through proper training.

Jeff: Let's address the elephant in the room here. One of the things I know you're a big proponent of is open-eyed shooting, having both eyes open to acquire and fire on a target. There's a lot of people out there who—again, we're talking about people that are typically used to going down to the local range. They line up their sights. They're trying to get that ultra tight shot group there. They're lining it up. They've got one eye closed, the other one open, and they're trying to do that.

So in the dynamics of a real gunfight, though, most people, their eyes naturally open, just because the brain is trying to basically bring in data to be able to make decisions on. But let's talk about why this works in a real gunfight. Why shoot with both eyes open? What is the tactical advantage of this, for those people that are just traditional one-eyed shooters?

Chris: Traditionally people will be shooting at a static target on a range, a paper target that's not moving. You can get away with it when you do that, even though when you close one eye, your other eye, you end up losing about 15 percent of your visual acuity in the other eye when you close that eye. But in a real gunfight, in any dynamic shooting situation, things are moving. You're going to be moving. Your target's going to be moving. There's going to be other things in the environment that are coming into play, and you don't want to take away half of your visual input so you can focus on your front sight.

You can teach yourself to do that. It's really easy to do. In about a week's time you can train at home to teach yourself to shoot with both eyes open. The key is being aware of your environment, and you can't do that with one eye closed.

Jeff: Yeah. It makes total sense. One of the things I really like about your training also is that you're a real brainiac when it comes to brain science. You talk about neural pathways, and basically how to engrain these different practices and things like that. But what I like about your training is that you take it from almost like a research standpoint. You're working with the brain anyway. So finding out what works, what doesn't work, with what you already have.

A lot of people try to develop training, or they will use theory based upon what works in a relaxed environment, or down at the relaxed environment down at the local range and things like that, and not what really happens in the dynamics, when the adrenaline's pumping and your heart's in your throat, somebody's charging at you and things like that.

The things that happen neurologically and physiologically in the body override, a lot of times—most of the time—the training. Because look, not everybody's training like a Navy SEAL. Right? Most people, how often do they actually get to

the range? I can tell you from being in the military, you engrain these things over and over again. But most people are not in the military, or even law enforcement aren't necessarily training non-stop to be able to engrain these things.

So there are things that people, they get in maybe a class. They can perfect it by the end of the class and it seems like everything's good to go. But without reinforcement of that, it seems like it really kind of falls apart. I want to talk with you more about how we really truly adapt this for people that they can really engrain it more and more.

But listen, everybody. We're talking with Chris Sajnog of navysealshootingtactics.com about *The New Rules of Marksmanship* and why open-eyed shooting is such a critical skill for a real gunfight. We've got a lot more coming up in the next segment of our podcast including: the dynamics and the mechanics of open-eyed shooting; breaking bad shooting habits and instilling new skills the right way; and your fast action plan for an at-home gunfight training. All this and more coming right up, but first check out this special message.

We're back with Chris Sajnog of navysealshootingtactics.com, talking about why and how open-eyed shooting will help you survive a real gunfight. Now is where we start to get into the how of shooting with both eyes open in order to master this critical skill quickly. So let's go ahead and jump back in to our interview now.

Chris, I can see a lot of people out there that are listening to this, or watching this video or whatever, are saying, "Okay. Well, if I have to shoot with both eyes open that sounds super easy. I just open both eyes." Is it really that simple, just open up both eyes? Or are there more dynamics to the technique of using open-eyed shooting for tactical purposes to acquire and engage the target that's in front of you? What's the actual how-to for making this work?

Chris: That's a pretty big question because in a sense, yes, it is really that easy to open both eyes and shoot. But a lot of people think you need to be some tier one ninja to be able to do it. The truth is, you just need to practice the skill to be able to do it. The biggest thing to overcome is that we have two eyeballs, most of us anyways, so that means that we actually have two pictures that are being sent to our brain.

When you shoot with both eyes open, you're going to see either two front sight posts or two targets, depending on where you're focusing. This is completely normal and people need to understand this. The key is through practice. Again, it just takes a couple minutes a day of practicing this. You can do it at home, teaching your brain which image that you want your brain to use for your front sight, and which image you want your brain to use for your target or your environment. It's just a matter of teaching your mind which image to use. Because again, we all are going to see two images.

That's the biggest thing I always hear is, "Oh, Chris. I can't do that. When I try to focus on my front sight I see two pictures. How do I get rid of the other picture?" It's like, well you could poke out your other eye. But you probably don't want to do that. So just teach yourself to do it. It's really just a matter of—people can do it right now—is pick up a pencil and hold it at arm's length, point at a target, and open and close your non-dominant eye to teach your brain which image to use for your front sight post.

Jeff: You know what—I didn't realize you were going to bring this up, actually. I'm really happy that you did, because I haven't seen anybody else talk about this. This is something I learned in the military, out at the M-16 range trying to get that 300-yard target so you can get the expert classification. It was some guy from Kentucky that shows me—he called it the ghost sight.

Even shooting the M-16 at long range with both eyes open, typically what you try and do is put that front sight post on the target. But the target was so blurry it would throw off the targeting and that damn thing would not—the target would never go down. Once I started shooting with both eyes open and realize that that sight is still there, but I can see the target much better, and I can place that front sight post on the target, everything changed from that point on. I've never seen anybody else talk about this, until you just brought this up now.

So I've used the same thing with extreme close combat shooting. We call it a ghost sight. I'm not sure what other people might call it or if anybody else is using it out there. But it's a way that—like you're putting out there. People really have to just—you can do this with your own weapon right now. Safely, of course. But point of direction, keep both eyes open. You will notice that with your dominant eye one of those pictures will be clearer. It will just naturally kind of gravitate there, but it does take a little bit of training as well.

But it is kind of a new discovery for a lot of people. I keep waiting for more people to bring this up and experience this as a new way of shooting. I'm glad that you've instilled it in your program for *The New Rules of Marksmanship* as well.

Let me ask you this, Chris. We have a lot of people out there that this is going to be a new concept for them. Because they've trained so much in these old habits of single-eyed shooting. There are Cyclops shooters out there. Anytime you try and break a habit, whether it's a good habit or a bad habit—it doesn't matter. But it's hard to break habits, especially if it's something for those people that are more experienced, or they're actually out there training and doing this, whether it's dry fire or live fire.

Are there any keys that you've found in your training of—you've trained military, civilians, law enforcement, everybody. Part of that I'm sure has got to be in breaking some of those habits. You're seeing people that are well trained and probably very engrained habits out there. Are there any other tactics, or tips, or techniques that you have for helping somebody break the habit that becomes

more instinctual so that they will be more instinctively an open-eyed shooter when it comes to an actual gunfight?

Chris: The biggest thing with this, and really any part of training, is people need to understand that to change anything that you're doing now you need to change who you are and what you believe you're capable of. Because we all, say, go to the range and shoot a certain way, and that becomes part of us and what we think.

So if you've been shooting for 20 years with one eye closed and that's what you've been doing, you believe you're a one-eyed shooter. And on the other hand, you also believe, whether you say it or not, that you can't shoot with both eyes open. So you need to tell yourself a different story. You need to tell yourself, I am capable of doing this. Then it's just a matter of opening that other eye and trying it out.

Then another part of that, too, is people will overestimate what they can do in a short period of time. So say for instance I think I can go to this shooting course and learn how to shoot with both eyes open over the weekend, and then I'm going to be good at it. Well, that's not going to happen. You're going to learn how to do it, but it's not going to be part of who you are. So people will overestimate that, but they underestimate what they can do over a longer period of time.

So say in a year. And that may sound like a long time, but it's really not. If you just think about if I practice at home with a pencil, or some focus strings, or anything, you're doing dry fire training with your front sight post, five minutes a day, within a year you will master it. So people underestimate that. Don't go into training and think, oh, if I just do this once or twice I'm going to know how to do it. Everything that is worth anything takes time. So just be prepared for that.

Jeff: **Yeah. It makes total sense. You're right. A lot of it really does come down to the psychology of getting rid of old habits. It really becomes a psychological thing, but with reinforcement you can really put this in.**

Let's talk about this. So Chris, you're really big into dry fire, which I love. We talk a lot about that on our blog and in our podcasts and things like that. I think most of your course, if I'm not mistaken, for *The New Rules of Marksmanship*, nobody even has to go to the live fire range for this. This is something that you really can get better training at home, because that's the area that you're going to be most likely defending anyway. You're not going to be in a range—well, it would be kind of weird if you're defending yourself at the range.

But in any case, so you're really big into dry fire. In order to help people really master this technique—or not master, but at least start to get the concept of it, of open-eyed shooting—can you give us a drill, or something people can do at home, either with an airsoft gun or a training gun, or even if it's dry fire with their own weapon or something like that, an actual step-by-step drill that somebody can use right now to be able to start to put this skill to use for them?

Chris: Sure. I just want to touch first on, you talk about people going to the range and thinking that's where they have to do all their firearms training. I always say that is the worst place you can possibly train and learn. The classic scenario is people that are new to shooting will buy a gun. They'll go to a shooting range. Sometimes they'll even have somebody else load up their gun. Say an instructor loads up their gun, hands it to them. They don't know how to stand. They don't know how to grip the gun. They don't know how to focus. They don't know how to manipulate the trigger.

They don't know any of this, but they get handed this firearm and they're told, "Hey, don't point this at me or anybody else, because if you do you're going to probably kill somebody or die yourself. So go ahead and slap that trigger and see what happens." You do that, and an explosion goes off in your hand, and then now you've built that neural pathway. Because it was stressful, it's a very strong neural pathway that's going to be very hard to break.

So this is why I have students online that have had flinches or anticipate their shots for 30 years. I have them dry fire at home. I just tell them, hey, don't go to a range. Promise me you won't go to a range and shoot live fire for 30 days. Every time, without fail, their flinch goes away. Whatever their problem is, it miraculously disappears. Because we need to train without stress. Then you slowly want to add that stress back in. It's not that you're never going to train without stress, but you need to be making sure that you build these proper neural pathways.

The other thing. People will argue, how can it be realistic to train at home? Even using something like airsoft at home. That's something that I do and that I teach is I teach people to set up targets around your house. If you want to practice defending your home, get an airsoft replica of your firearm, and run around your house shooting targets and **pine corners** in your house and defending your family. That's something you cannot do at a shooting range.

Even at high speed ranges that I trained at as a Navy SEAL, there's very few places that we could shoot 360 degrees. Most people listening, if you turn sideways on a shooting range you're going to get kicked off the range. So shooting at a paper target that doesn't move, you can only face one direction, how in the world is that realistic? So I'm not saying there's not a place for it, but it's definitely not the end-all be-all of firearms training.

The next thing I want to say is when I talk about dry fire training I'm speaking of everything you do that helps make you a better shooter. So doing visual training, so enhancing your ability to focus, working on grip strength, working on meditation, planning out your training, drawing and manipulating your firearm, these are all things that you can do at home. It's a lot easier. You're going to get a lot more repetitions. It's a lot faster. But it's all firearms training.

So don't think of dry fire training simply as pulling a trigger when there's not a round in the chamber. That is one part of it, but think about all the other things that have to do with shooting that lead up to that final moment.

When it comes to drills that people can do at home, it is super easy. All you have to do is grab a pencil and hold it out at arm's length. Start off by closing your non-dominant eye and point at a target. So act like that's the sight of your gun. Point at a target. Focus now on the tip of that pencil and your target, whatever it is. It could be a light switch or a doorknob handle. It doesn't even need to be a target. These things don't matter. What you're doing is working on focusing. Once you have that, just open your other eye and teach your mind what that looks like. Once you get used to that, then start trying to do it with both eyes open.

So look at a target with both eyes open and try and put the tip of that pencil over that target using the correct picture with the correct eye, with your dominant eye. Again, if you just do that a couple minutes a day, I've found it usually takes about a week to be able to do that. If you try doing it at the range, it will take much, much longer. It could take years to try and do it at a range. Whereas if you just do it at home for a couple minutes a day, one to two weeks, you're going to be a tier one ninja.

Jeff: Yeah. That's awesome. What's cool is that that's something you can even do at work. Tactical firearms training at work. This is a really simple thing that somebody can do. Then transitioning from a pencil to looking at the front sight of your weapon. You'll start to understand how it applies no matter what. So that's great that you can use simple objects like that that don't freak everybody out, just for something that has this kind of application toward tactical firearms training. That's cool. Awesome.

Chris, thanks so much. I really appreciate all the time that you spent with us today. I know it's a simple topic. It's kind of a short topic. But to me it's one of the most critical elements of gun fighting that I don't see a lot of people talk about. I don't hear them. I don't see it being trained at ranges or anything like that. So I'm really glad that you really illuminated this a lot more for our audience today.

Listen, everyone. Chris has a really great online training program. If you ever got his book. I have his book from Amazon on *Navy SEAL shooting*. That was first how I learned about Chris. I'm really happy to have him as part of the network now. But definitely go check out his website because it takes what he has on his book, and puts it on steroids. It allows you to really train at home using his methods with video tutorials and things like that. He's got a great program over there. Again, go check him out over at navysealshootingtactics.com.

Until our next *Modern Combat & Survival* broadcast, this is Jeff Anderson saying prepare, train and survive.