

TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS



MIKE OX'S AUTOMATIC AIMING SYSTEM

BY FRANCIS DUFFY

Mike Ox, author of *Real World Gunfight Training*, is also the creator of The Automatic Aiming System that consists of thirty-six drills taught with videos for shooters to carry out at home (available at AutomaticAiming.com).

The system trains proprioception, vision and vestibular abilities relevant to shooting at the highest levels of performance.

The first concept that Ox mentions is *proprioception*. This is a physiological function of the brain that helps you be aware of the position and movement of your body through time and space. Many of the drills in

Ox's training program help improve balance and proprioception. According to Wikipedia: "Proprioceptive signals are transmitted to the central nervous system, where they are integrated with information from other sensory systems, such as the visual system and the vestibular system, to create an overall representation of body position, movement, and acceleration."

The next concept presented in The Automatic Aiming System is the visual system. Eye movements serve the function of selective attention; that is, they focus on some objects or events while ignoring others. Visual perception helps us to interpret what's happening around us and is not the same as visual acuity (seeing clearly). The resulting perception is also known as vision, sight *continued >*

CONTENTS

- 01** MIKE OX'S AUTOMATIC AIMING SYSTEM
BY FRANCIS DUFFY
- 05** EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
PUTIN'S PLAYBOOK:
RUSSIA'S SECRET PLAN
TO DEFEAT AMERICA
WRITTEN BY REBEKAH KOFFLER
SUMMARY BY CHRIS GRAHAM
- 07** GEAR REVIEW:
CLUB K
- 08** COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR DOG:
WORDS, GESTURES, LEAD
BY PAT WATSON
- 11** L.A. WILD FOOD WALK:
OAK, CACTUS, WATERCRESS,
STINGING NETTLE AND CHICKWEED
BY CHRISTOPHER NYERGES
- 14** THE CANADIAN INSURGENCY:
A SPECIAL FORCES ASSESSMENT
BY ANDREW CURTISS
- 17** TRAINING FOR A
PHYSICAL AGILITY TEST
BY DAVE CADY
- 20** PROFILES OF COURAGE:
DR. PETER McCULLOUGH

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or eyesight. The various physiological components involved in vision are referred to collectively as the visual system

The third concept of interest introduced in The Automatic Aiming System is the vestibular system. The vestibular system, much of which is in the inner ear, provides us with a sense of balance and spatial orientation (ability to identify the position or direction of objects or points in space). The brain uses information from the vestibular system and from proprioception to help us understand our body's movements and to maintain balance from moment to moment. The last two major concepts are related to eye movements: Saccade movement and pursuit movement. Saccade movement happens as our eyes move from point to point. It assesses our peripheral field to identify direction, speed and distance of objects. Importantly, this eye movement also helps us converge our focus from the target back to the front sight and it helps verify the alignment of our sights. Once we have our sights aligned, we need to make a pursuit movement that will direct the image of the aligned sights onto the macula area of the eye to achieve visual acuity. This happens as we focus sharply on the front sight. The saccades and pursuit movements are separate, independent movements, but they must be coordinated to work together to engage in precision shooting.

These key concepts helped me understand why Ox's Automatic Aiming System is so valuable for beginner, intermediate and advanced shooters.

THIRTY-SIX TRAINING VIDEOS

The Automatic Aiming System came with a set of training materials: a large secchi target, a head band to hold a laser, a laser, three flat "letter pencils" with letters on them and representations of gun sights, two two-dot vision cards and access to the on-line training site with thirty-six "tough secchi target drills" training videos.

The ultimate outcome of The Automatic Aiming System is to improve shooting skills that depend on eye speed, neck stability and balance skills, especially when moving. Each of the thirty-six videos focus on one or more of those three key outcomes.

I practiced each of the 36 drills as described (Table 1). On average, I completed four of the drills each training day. Some of the drills were easy, some were hard, some deepened my understanding of concepts I

already knew, and all were beneficial. For me, the hard drills represented skill-sets that I was unaware of for improving my shooting speed and accuracy; especially those that focused on coordinating my visual, vestibular and proprioceptive systems. This is an account of experiences with the drills that I found most beneficial:

PENCIL PUSHUPS

The name of this drill confused me at first. The purpose of the drill is to coordinate the movement of the eyes to reduce visual confusion when shooting with both eyes open. For this drill, I used one of the flat pencils with letters and an image of a handgun sight at the top. I held the pencil at arms-length and then moved it closer and closer to my eyes. Sometimes I would see two pencils, but with repeated attempts I was able to maintain a single focus.



The unique "pencil pushups" help maintain focus.

NEAR-FAR DRILLS

I enjoyed and appreciated this drill because it deepened my understanding of a concept we teach our students at the Spartan Firearms Training Group; that is, keep my eyes on the target as the gun is drawn and pressed out to the target, then shifting my focus from the target to where I think the front sight post will be before it actually gets to that point. Shooting speed can be increased by mastering this skill.

GAZE FIXATION

One of the issues I have as a 73-year-old shooter is struggling with maintaining focus on a point for longer than five seconds with my transition lenses (prescription glasses). The ability to maintain focus is critical, in my opinion, for making precise shots. This drill helped me practice maintaining my focus for

TABLE 1: THE THIRTY-SIX SECCHI TARGET DRILLS

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Proprioception and Extending Proprioception | 19. Still Head Rotating Body - Still Head Rotating Feet (2 parts) |
| 2. Pencil Pushups | 20. Still Eyes Head Nod Metronome |
| 3. Near - Far Drills (Set the Macro) | 21. Letter Pencil Lunges |
| 4. 2 Fingers 2 Dots | 22. Lunges & Transitions |
| 5. Lines and 8s Laser on Head | 23. 8 Direction Leans |
| 6. Gaze Fixation | 24. 90 Degree Saccades |
| 7. Flat Brock String | 25. Legged 90 Degree Progressions (3 parts) |
| 8. Compass Rose Both versions eyes and head still | 26. Over The Shoulder Saccades (3 Parts) |
| 9. Laser Wrist Drills | 27. 8 Direction Lunges |
| 10. Letter Saccades | 28. Flick Eyes Head Follows Touch and Step-Touch (3 Parts) |
| 11. 8s with a perpendicular head | 29. Stereo Dots |
| 12. Pencil ROM and 2 Pencil ROMs | 30. Eyes Closed Finger on Wall 1 Leg Balance |
| 13. Letter Discernment | 31. Walking 8 Directions with a Still Head |
| 14. Laser Lines and 8s Holding Laser Shoulder | 32. 1 Legged Lines and 8s (3 Parts) |
| 15. 8 Direction Transitions | 33. Crossovers (Head Laser, Pencil, Pistol) - 3 parts |
| 16. Ambush Drill | 34. Mirror Saccades – HB |
| 17. Still Head On Draw | 35. Read Phone While turning Head – HB |
| 18. Secchi Draw Straight 22 45 90 (3 Parts) | 36. Head Still Reload (2 parts) – HB |

**Mike Ox's
secchi target.**

five seconds at a time. To complete the drill, I used the secchi target. There are orange dots at each of the cardinal points (north, south, etc.) on the target. While I kept my head and neck still and looking straight ahead, I shifted my gaze from dot to dot without moving my head and held focus for five seconds each time.

FLAT BROCK STRING

This was a difficult drill for me. I learned that the drill is helpful for reducing visual confusion, which occasionally happens to me as I aim with both eyes open and I see two front sight posts.

I used one of the two-dot cards and an ink pen. I held the card in front of my face with the flat surface toward the ceiling. I then placed the point of the ink pen on the far edge of the card. Then, I slowly moved the pen toward my eyes. As I did this, the visual image was supposed to change in a precise way. Often, I wasn't able to see the images that Ox said I should be seeing (visual confusion). After several attempts, I started to see what Ox said I should be seeing (reduced visual confusion).

LETTER SACCADES

This was a challenging drill for me. There are four strings of letters on the secchi target, one set on each of the corners. Saccades is a technical term for rapid eye movement between fixed points. With my head in a stable, forward-facing position, looking at the center of the target, I would quickly shift my eyes

to read a letter in one string of letters then shift my focus to read a letter on the opposite string of letters, then shift back to the first string and read the next letter in the string, then shift focus to the next letter in the second string until all the letters were spoken out loud. Early on, I would lose track of which letters I needed to read next.

One of the new and intriguing concepts I learned from this drill is something called *saccadic suppression*. One-tenth of a second before you shift your eyes to find the next target (in this case a letter in a string of letters) you are "blind" for five-one hundredths of a second. In practical terms, when searching for the next target your visual acuity temporarily decreases.

8S WITH A PERPENDICULAR HEAD

I really liked this drill because it focuses on increasing my head and neck range of motion. I attached the head band with the laser to my head and then slowly and smoothly rotated my head and eyes in large figure 8 movements. The ultimate benefit of this drill is to help me make quicker shots and to shoot better while moving.

AMBUSH DRILL

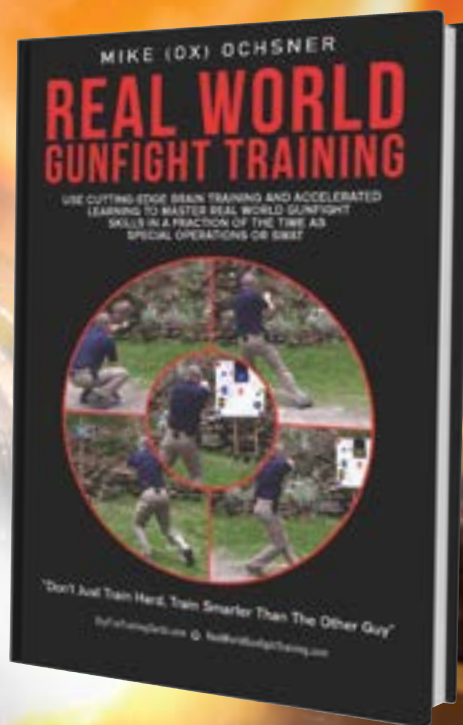
Many of the new shooters we train take too

long to align the sights, acquire a sight picture, focus on the front sight, and press the trigger to break a shot. This drill helps shooters to break a shot quicker.

For this drill, I used my SIRT pistol (laser equipped training pistol—no live ammunition) and the secchi target. I started with the SIRT laser aimed at the center of the target. Then, I started visually used the laser beam to trace the lines on the target. There are orange/red dots placed at prearranged points on the target. As I traced the lines, every time I came to an orange/red dot I would quickly "ambush" the dot. The goal was to have the laser beam on the dot as I broke the shot without disturbing the muzzle orientation. I really liked this drill.



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SECCHI DRAW STRAIGHT 22-45-90

This drill is particularly important because it focuses on turning, drawing, presenting the gun to the target, and pressing the trigger. I used a SIRT training pistol in a holster for this drill. I faced the target, drew and presented the gun to the target, kept the muzzle horizontal with the ground, focused on the front sight, and at full extension pressed the trigger. Then, I turned to a 22-degree angle away from the target. I drew the gun from the holster, turned to face the target and repeated the sequence. Then, I turned to a 45-degree angle from the target and repeated the sequence. Next, I turned to a 90-degree angle from the target and repeated the sequence. Finally, I repeated the 22-45-90 degree turns from my non-dominant side. I really saw the value of this drill for self-defense shooting.

LETTER PENCIL LUNGES, LUNGES AND TRANSITIONS, AND 8 DIRECTION LEANS

These three drills were, for me, very important drills to learn and practice. The first reason they are important is that in a real-life self-defense situation I know that I cannot and should not stand still to return fire. I will also likely need to move into potentially awkward and novel positions to return fire.

The second reason these drills were important for me personally, is that I am 73 years old and my sense of balance (vision, vestibular and proprioceptive systems) is occasionally awkward, especially when moving or walking down stairs. These drills help me improve my balance while moving.

The letter pencil lunge drill is designed to help me improve visual acuity while moving.

The lunges and transitions drill helped me learn to stay balanced while stepping in the eight cardinal directions (north, south, et cetera) while drawing, pressing the gun to the target and breaking the shot with my SIRT laser gun. Finally, the 8 direction leans drill is especially important for helping me maintain stability and comfort while moving or leaning from cover to put hits on a target.

There are other drills that I thought were quite valuable too, but these are several that were important for me. It is insufficient to simply watch the Automatic Aiming System videos. The point is not to understand advanced shooting skills, the point is to be able to perform advanced shooting skills and do it consistently. You have to actually perform the drills as demonstrated. If you only watch the videos, all you learn is the vocabulary. If you want to hone the skills, you must also practice the drills precisely. Mastery of a skill does not come with one repetition and I intend to watch the videos and perform the drills again until I have achieved the all of the gains I want. There is no way to get to the top without mastering the fine details and skills that Mike Ox presents in The Automatic Aiming System. ✓

BIO

Francis Duffy, Ph. D, is a U.S. Army Special Forces veteran of the 6th and 5th Special Forces Groups, a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a combat diver. Frank is also a certified executive protection specialist and is the co-founder and vice president of the Maryland-based Spartan Firearms Training Group (www.spartanftg.com).