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# LINEUP

80



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**26 MAGAZINE MADNESS**  
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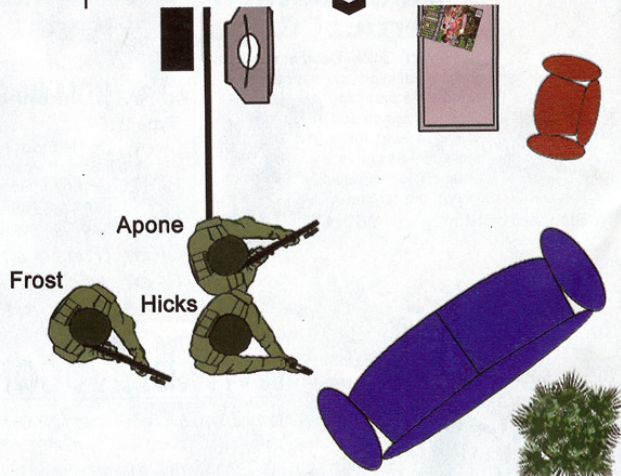
**46 EXCELLENCE ON A BUDGET**  
Train Smart, Buy Smart  
**BY MIKE JONES**

**52 FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION**  
SIG P229 and .357 SIG Cartridge  
**BY GERARD VALENTINO**

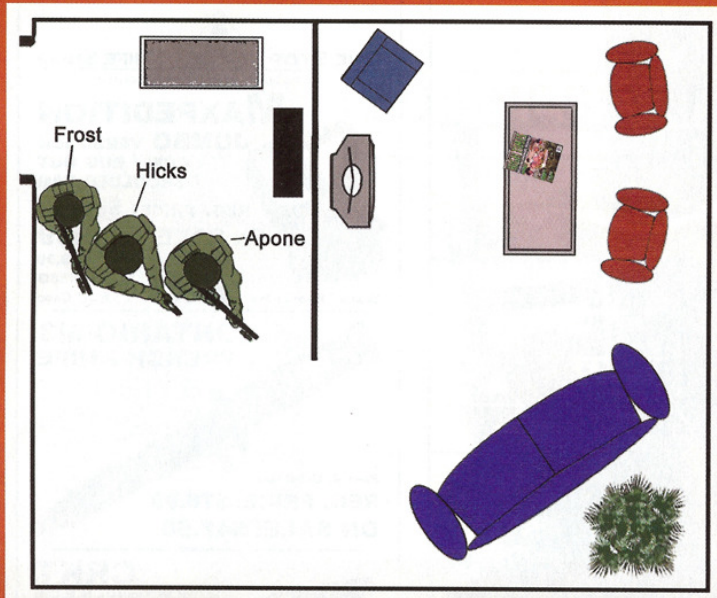
**56 HOT WHEELS**  
Vehicle Survival Training At BSR  
**BY TODD BURGREN**

**62 SKILLS FOR EMERGING UNCERTAINTY**  
Other Than Shooting Training  
**BY JEFF RANDALL**

**68 ALL THE RIGHT ANGLES**  
Four-Count Room Clearing Technique  
**BY DAVID R. REEDER**







In Diagram 1, three operators move in subsequent to an entry. Apone, Hicks and Frost are in an anteroom. They want to move around the wall into the living room. We'll number the structure from their entry. The 1 side is behind the stack to the left as you view the diagram; side 2 is top, 3 to the right and 4 on the bottom. Apone is in the lead with a carbine, followed by Hicks (pistol), then Frost (carbine).

The team does the four-count assessment before beginning their movement:

1. Where are we going? The living room.
2. Who is going? We all are, but Apone is first.
3. What's the greatest threat to that person? The big couch and houseplant in the 3-4 corner.
4. Who's covering that threat? Hicks is. (He'll move up beside Apone to watch behind the couch.)

# ALL THE RIGHT ANGLES

» BY DAVID R. REEDER

## FOUR-COUNT ROOM CLEARING TECHNIQUE

The identification of threat angles is the most difficult part of a tactical operation.

This may appear most obviously in soldiers new to MOUT (Military Operations on Urban Terrain), but I've seen it in SWAT operators and snakeeaters as well. Unfortunately, this is often because tactical instruction is method-based rather than principle-based, i.e., the distressing predisposition to emphasize cookie-cutter tactics. This methodology can be significantly improved upon by teaching problem-solving in a tactical environment. Four-Count Room Clearing is a viable and effective technique for the instruction of new operators or giving seasoned ones a new perspective.

I learned this method when I joined the cadre of the Bold Lightning Urban Warfare School, Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. I watched the Course Chief, a great snarling troll of a Master Sergeant, use it over and over again, and saw the light suddenly

dawn in the eyes of any number of students from all military branches' numerous police tactical units. The technique is startling in its simplicity, which counts in its favor—and it works.

The Bold Lightning instructors never took credit for it nor said where they'd learned it, but in the end I don't think the author matters if it makes our operators safer and more effective.

Here's the deal. It doesn't matter if you're assaulting Fallujah in battalion strength, cordon-and-searching in al-Thawra or serving a warrant in the Cass Corridor. All room clearing comes down to just two things: angle intuition and cornering, every time. Everything relates to angles (operator's position-perspective in relation to a threat) and corners (vertical and horizontal).

If you correctly intuit the angle or

corner that concerns you, then identify how best to deal with it, you've increased the likelihood of successful mission completion. The particular tactics you use to prosecute your operation don't matter. Slow and deliberate or violent and fast, Four-Count Room Clearing will apply.

It does not matter if you're hook-and-crossing or cross-and-hooking, button hooking, moving tandem or bouncing up and down behind a body bunker on a pogo stick. It can all be broken down at the most fundamental level to four things that must be identified. Those four things are:

1. Where are we going?
2. Who is going?
3. What is the greatest threat to that person?
4. Who is covering that threat?

It won't be found in any field, technical or SWAT manuals that I'm aware of, but





Given this four-count, we wind up with Apone covering the main threat area (#1 in the count), with Hicks moving up to pick up his flank (#4 in the count) as depicted here. It's a big area and has additional threats, so Frost can move up and help if need be. Probably Hicks will take a look to clear behind the couch and then they'll move into the living room.



it's a pretty good guideline for learning and conducting clearing operations.

There's always more to a successful operation than this, certainly more if you have to cross the street or go from rooftop to rooftop under fire, but I submit to you that if you can answer these four questions—even subconsciously as you read the structure and flow through it—then you are more likely to kill or capture your opponent and keep from sporting new holes while doing so.

I'm not here to argue the best method for taking down this or any other room. Tactics are like boots, beer and bullets—everyone has a favorite brand or caliber. Blow a hole in the wall, port the window or drop down the chimney like Santa in heavy armor. Whatever. I'm using the illustrations solely to diagram the Four-Count Room Clearing method.

The four-count can be extended to additional threats and operators. We'll add a side door (call it an attached garage), so upon entry the room looks like this.

They do the four-count here, carrying it out to the next threat and movement need.

1. Where are we going? The living room.
2. Who is going? Apone is.
3. What is the greatest threat to that person? The doorway to the attached garage, with the big houseplant behind it.

4. Who is covering that threat? Hicks is. (He will cover it, moving up beside Apone to watch behind the couch.)
- Next count in the series:

1. Where are we going? To the couch (to cover Apone).
2. Who is going? Hicks is.
3. What is the greatest threat to that person? The doorway out to the attached garage.
4. Who is covering that threat? Frost is.

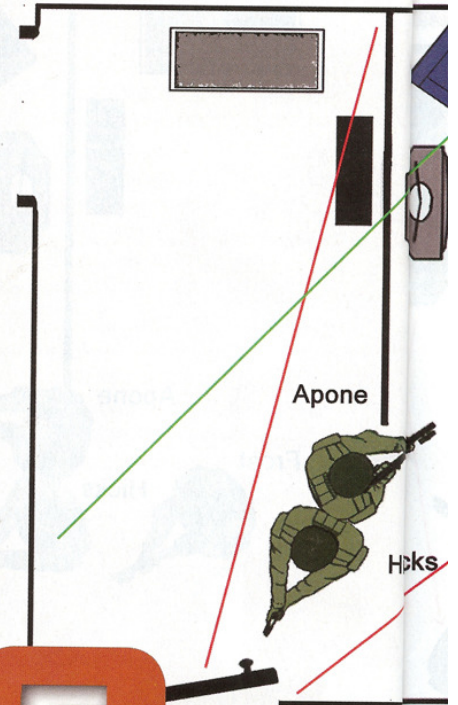
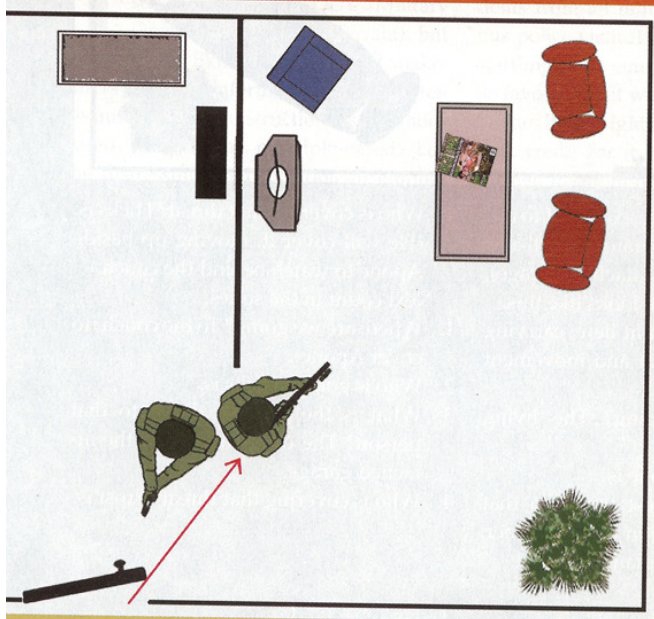
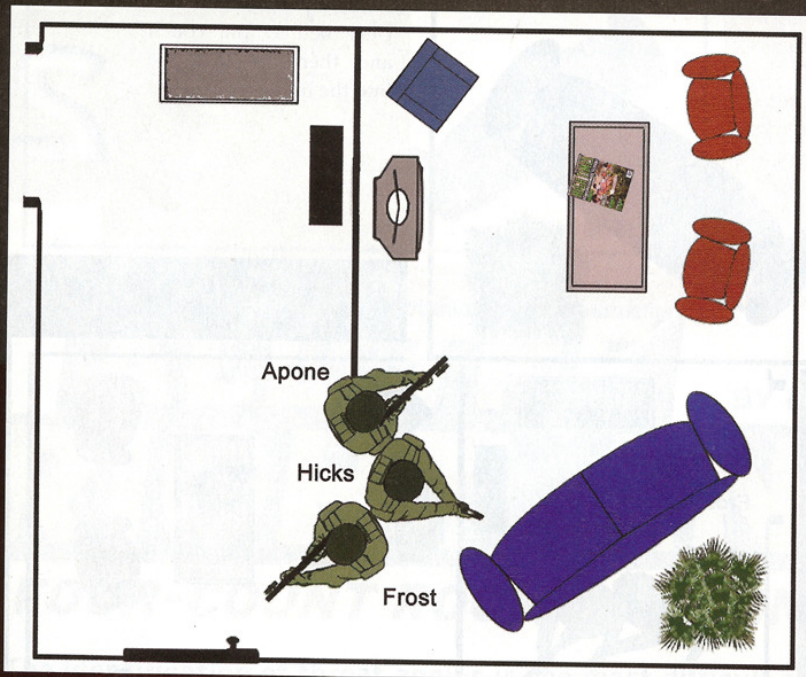


We four-count where Apone will be, which determines where Hicks must be, which then tells us where Frost has to go. This puts the operators in the positions of Diagram 4.

Again, you can switch out the destination and the movements, but ultimately it all boils down to identifying the threat angles and corners that need to be addressed.

There is one all-important aspect of angle-work and cornering that must be

understood for even something as simple as the Four-Count Technique to work: understanding the leading edge of the angle (angle intuition). Most of us know this already, but it's something that's frequently overlooked, underestimated or just plain discarded under stress. Simply put, the leading edge of the angle (LEA) is always going to be the farthest point at which an operator can be sighted (and potentially engaged) from a particular vantage point.



5

Let's say just Apone and Hicks are working the room. They've decided to take the living room first, then the attached garage. Note the door is now open and the couch removed. The LEA will be that point of the movement where either man can be shot from either the living room or the garage—and it will change as they move. Their distance relative to the threat may change, meaning proximity, without altering LEA, but only if they advance or retreat along an unchanging axis. The moment they alter their position relative to the threat, they change the LEA (or LEAs).

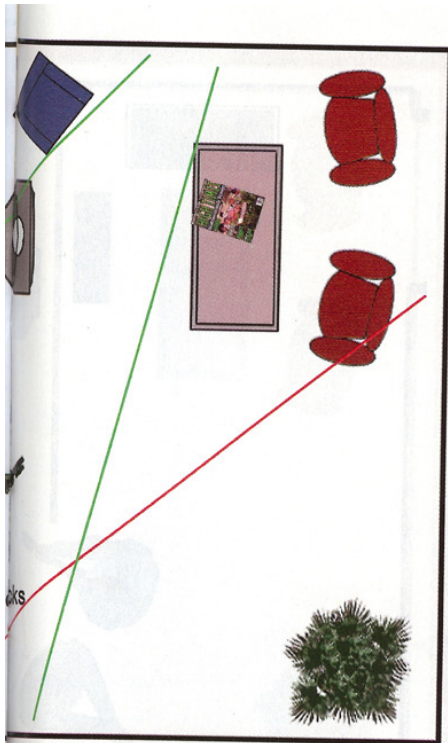
Think of the wall with the door as the flat line of a protractor. If the operator working that threat is at 30 degrees relative to the threat, he

4

6

Hicks is of no use to Apone. He wouldn't be even if they were touching shoulders. He has to be interposed between the possible threat and his partner. If he hasn't intuited the LEA and put himself there, he cannot effectively protect Apone.





is going to be at 30 degrees whether he's three feet away or five feet away. If he corners to 35 degrees, however, every aspect of the problem, including possible threats, changes. This will continue with every step he takes, either complicating or simplifying the tactical problem, depending upon the structure.

Look at Diagram 5—it's easier to illustrate than explain. Red lines define the potential threat from the door. Green lines represent threats from the living room. Apone is moving into the living room. He is exposed to the threat from the door as he does so. Likewise, Hicks, who is covering Apone from that door, is exposed to a possible threat from the living room. Moving like this, each man is more or less on the leading edge of the angle, effectively covering each another.

If Apone gets too far ahead, however, he has moved past the LEA and is now threatened. Could be he's moving too fast, could be Hicks is moving too slowly, could be one of them has tripped over a hookah on the floor—it doesn't matter. The same would be true if Hicks hung it too far out there or Apone lagged behind.

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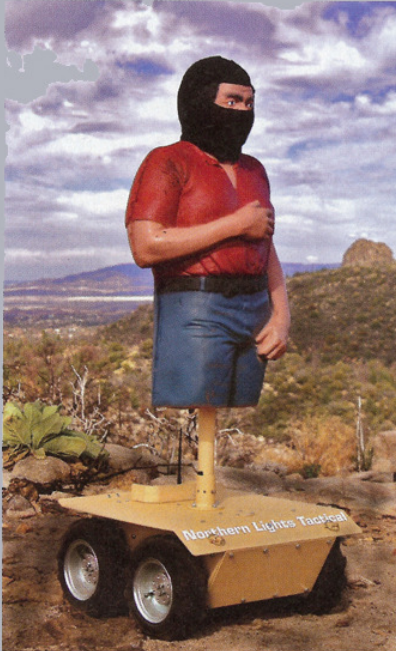
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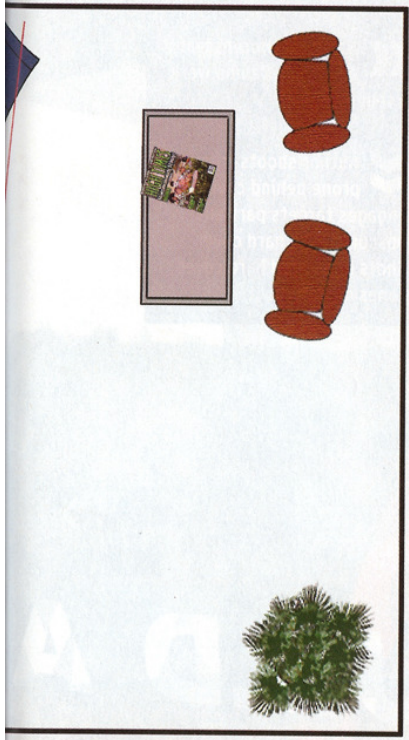


Apone cannot pick up any threat that could harm Hicks any farther "inside" the chairs or the issue of *High Times* because he's not on the LEA and wouldn't see it. On the other hand, if a crack-addled Tarantino fan with a chrome .45 and a mouth full of shiny new gold teeth is over by the blue chair, he can shoot Hicks because he is on the LEA.

By no means am I suggesting you stop to tick off the four questions on your Nomex-gloved fingers while a crank-stained scumbag is shooting at you during a live op. I'm certain, however, that if you or one of your students is having trouble with angle intuition, then doing numerous slow reps in a variety of threat areas using the four-count will help. It is also possible that in a worst-case scenario, if you're confronted with a real-world problem so challenging that you're wondering what the hell the next best move should be, perhaps running through the four-count will help you press on with the mission.

Ultimately the goal of every tactical





7

instructor should be to teach operators to problem solve. Principle-based MOUT, active-shooter response or SWAT is always going to be better than method-based instruction for the good guys involved, because it's impossible to teach every operator everything he needs to know. Instructing them on the best way to take down the local shoot house is not sufficient, even if they learn to do it perfectly. Choreographed assaults on any building are only 100% applicable in the building they're choreographed for. Operators need to be able to read a structure and react to its threats accordingly. Four-Count Room Clearing is one way to teach them how. ●

*[David R. Reeder is a 16-year law enforcement veteran and 18-year Air Force Security Policeman. A former SWAT officer and MOUT instructor, he now teaches for the Tactical Tracking Operations School and maintains a reserve police commission in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.]*

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