

Infrared lasers have proven themselves in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the fact is, visible red and green lasers are starting to find homes on the pistols and carbines of America's lawmen, too.

THE LASER

EDGE FOR MILITARY & POLICE

» IMMEDIATE
» DECISIVE
FIRST-SHOT
ADVANTAGE

By Kevin R. Davis

» As the black-clad tactical team stealthily enters the felony-warrant suspect's dimly lit lair, thin lines of red extend out to the walls of the home, making red dots that seemingly dance wherever they shine. Hollywood. Save for my omission of the hero detective with his two-inch .38 revolver leading the way, doesn't this scenario fit almost every TV show or movie that depicts a modern police tactical team in action? But do these lasers really have a place on modern S.W.A.T. teams? I freely admit that I haven't always been a fan of laser sights.

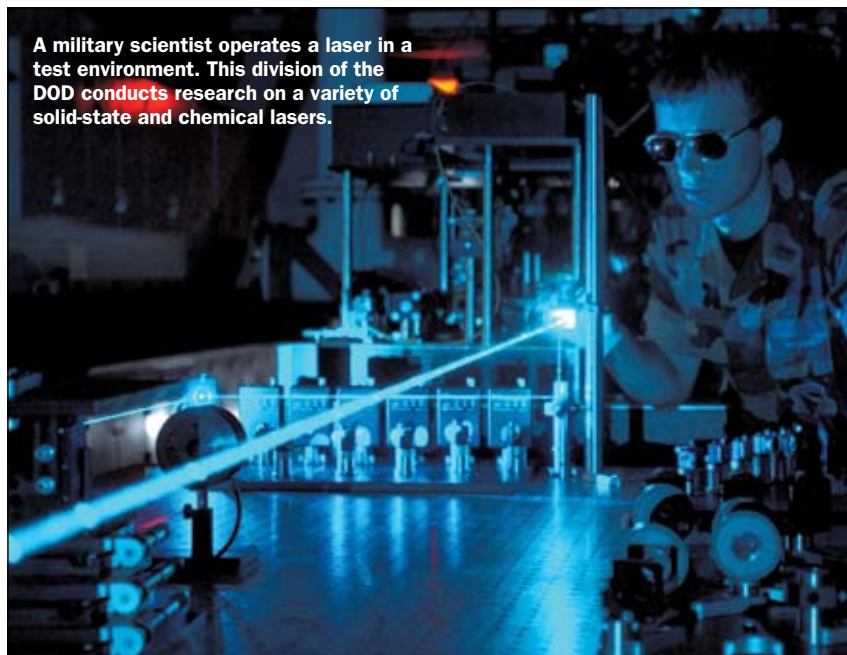
Years ago when these devices were big and bulky, a former tactical team commander insisted on having them mounted on our MP5's. The L.A.S.E.R. (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) units were large, not rugged enough for tactical ops and, although painstaking to zero, were easily knocked out of alignment. Couple this with the lack of white lights in subdued lighting, all you could see was a red dot, not what the dot was on. I also once won a pistol with integral red laser in a raffle. In low or subdued lighting it was easily seen, but in daylight on dark targets it all but vanished. As with most things firearms and equipment related, over time improvements have been made. Lasers are smaller, easier

to work with, frequently are paired with white light units and are now available in a green more easily seen in daylight.

But the question is, do visible lasers (as opposed to infrared units that the military uses with great success in Iraq while wearing NVD's (night vision devices) have a place in modern law enforcement, corrections or military operations? To answer that question we first look at the many uses for today's laser sighting units.

Training with Lasers

In firearms training, lasers have been used successfully in several different ways. Mounted under a semi-auto pistol with the red dot aligned to sit on top of the front sight, a new shooter in dry fire can learn trigger control by watching the red dot on target and learning to press the trigger without slapping or jerking. This can be duplicated in live fire until the student learns the basics of trigger management then the laser can be removed, with the student now focusing on sight picture. In order to diagnose problem shooters, the laser can be sighted in below the shooters view



A military scientist operates a laser in a test environment. This division of the DOD conducts research on a variety of solid-state and chemical lasers.



Insight Technologies Carbine Visible Laser (top) and White Light/Laser Combo unit.

so that the instructor can see the dot move prior to or during shooting. If, for instance, the red dot drops to six o'clock the shooter is raising their head and looking for the hits. A right-handed shooter that is jerking the trigger will have the laser dot move down and to the left. Add a video camera and you can record the laser's movement prior to and after the shot is fired. Many shooters that jerk, slap or flinch may believe they are holding the sights perfectly still—but the laser will show differently.

Faster on Target

Lasers mounted on pistols can also get the shooter to "place the dot," i.e. orient the muzzle on the target throughout their draw-stroke. We encourage shooters to aim the muzzle toward the threat as soon as the pistol clears leather (or plastic nowadays...). This position is Count Two of a Four-Count draw-stroke. Count Three is when the gun hand meets the support hand in front of the shoot-

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er's sternum area. Once again, the muzzle should be pointing at the target and this can be confirmed by watching the red dot. Count Four is the pistol up at eye level with arms extended. By watching the laser move between Counts Three and Four the instructor can insure the student is not "bowling" (pointing the muzzle at the floor and then raising it) or "casting" (pointing the muzzle high and then shoving it downward) both of which can equal misses. Crimson Trace and LaserMax make lasers that can be affixed to either the rail mounts so preva-

lent in today's semi-auto pistols or on pistol grip panels.

Intimidation or Show of Force

There is a reason why many non-lethal devices (Taser, Kimber Jet Protector for instance) are equipped with laser sights. Oftentimes the mere placement of the red dot on the suspect will be enough to get them to submit. Although this cannot be counted on and the force option may still need to be applied, it has worked countless times for street police officers and corrections officers. A stout warning, the non-lethal or firearm pointed at them, coupled with a red dot indicating where they are likely to be hit certainly adds a psychological intimidation factor to the equation. You must be prepared to shoot if necessary (either less-lethal or deadly force if called for) but if the suspect or prisoner gives up well...the best gunfight or use of force is the one that doesn't happen.

Some lasers (the awesome green GLARE MOUT manufactured by B.E. Myers and available through N-Vision Optics LLC) are so powerful they can be used at extended distances as a non-deadly warning device or by "dazzling" a subject. The GLARE MOUT has been used in Iraq to warn vehicles to slow or stop before checkpoints. When I witnessed a demonstration of the GLARE MOUT at a recent SHOT Show, the green dot was clearly visible on a wall that was all the way across the length of the Las Vegas Convention Center. The GLARE MOUT can also be used to thwart an enemy

sniper by either blinding the sniper with the powerful light or signaling counter-snipers as to the enemy sniper's location.

Sighting Aid

With our aging population, many older citizens as well as law enforcement officers wear bifocals or trifocals. This can cause problems with the shooter when they must use two or three different parts of their corrective lenses to see the sights or the bad-guy. Just like the red dot sights so popular on carbines because they only require the shooter to place the red dot on target, the lasers red or green dot is placed on the suspect



Go green! According to LaserMax's studies, our eyes are roughly four times more sensitive to green than to red under bright lighting conditions.

while visual focus is on them not the pistol's sights.

A S.W.A.T. operator moving down a hallway behind an armored body bunker can use a laser equipped pistol to fire if necessary, while minimizing exposure behind the shield. This same concept can be used behind protective cover. Taking cover, for instance, behind a low concrete wall in low light, the operator can locate and identify a threat using a standard flashlight held out and away from them (FBI flashlight technique) and then place the dot of the laser-equipped pistol on the threat—all while safely ensconced behind a bullet-resistant object. If the officer or operator can smoothly press the trigger of the pistol while the dot is placed on the suspect regardless of position, they should achieve hits. This can be done in lighting conditions that prevent traditional sight-

ing and in all manner of positions—supine, face down, target at your head or at your feet. Imagine a 2-inch revolver with its short sight radius now equipped with Crimson Trace's Lasergrips or LaserMax's J-Max revolver laser.

Considering that the "average" police gunfight (if such an animal exists...) occurs in low or subdued lighting where seeing your sights may be a problem, laser sights make sense as an option for today's lawman, especially if coupled with a good white light.

Going For The Green

Traditionally lasers have been red. Recently green lasers have been developed that increase the brightness of the laser dot regardless of the ambient light. According to vision experts, the color green is the easiest for humans to see regardless of the lighting conditions because it lies in the middle of the visual spectrum. The green lasers available from LaserMax, Viridian and Beamshot offer a brighter aiming point whether used day or night. This increased brightness over red lasers is true regardless of the darkness or dark clothing of the target. The ability to better see your aim-



Crimson Trace laser grips easily install to the back strap of your Glock, which enhances the command and control of the weapon.

ing point is why I think green lasers will soon overtake red lasers in sales.

The Future Of Lasers

Yes, I am an old dog (or at least older dog...) and you can teach me new tricks. The companies that produce laser sights are listening to the troops on the street. They are designing brighter, smaller and more ergonomic products that can withstand the abuse that only soldiers and cops can give them. In the Global War

on Terror or the war against crime on our nation's streets, LEO's and military personnel are looking for an edge. In situations that often occur at bad breath distances, lasers can offer an option when traditional sighting cannot occur. Whether the dot is red or green it can have an impact when it's dancing across the chest of a subject with evil in his heart and malicious intent—near or far, lasers do have a role on streets.

LASER CONTACTS

- BEAMSHOT**
800-520-8435; beamshot.com
- CRIMSON TRACE CORP.**
800-442-2406; crimsontrace.com
- LASERMAX**
800-527-3703; lasermax.com
- N-VISION OPTICS LLC**
781-505-8360; nvisionoptics.com
- VIRIDIAN GREEN LASERS**
800-990-9390; viridiangreenlaser.com

NEW-SCHOOL LASER TRAINING

Marshall Schmitt, now retired from the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, works as a trainer for LaserMax (800-527-3703; Email: Training@lasermax.com). He suggests that police agencies have policies regulating laser sights, which should include a qualification program with and without the laser attached.

Wes Doss from Khyber Interactive Associates is currently conducting training for Crimson Trace (800-442-2406; www.crimsontrace.com). He believes that a handheld white light must be used in low light in addition to the laser sight equipped pistol because you must operate the flashlight independent of the pistol.

Laser training in both of the above cases will cover installation and maintenance of the laser sight. Training will also include use of the sight in a well lit environment as well as subdued or low light. Learning to use the laser from eye level as in conventional aimed fire is taught as well as lowering the gun slightly so that you can see more of the suspect with the focus on placing the red or green dot on the suspect's high center mass. Training also can encompass



unconventional shooting positions in which the pistol sights may not be able to be used such as while on the ground.

Crimson Trace also offers free training DVDs. Three titles are available from Crimson Trace: *Laser Sights: An Effective New Training Tool*; *Laser Training and Defense Techniques*; and *Shots in the Dark* (a 75-minute DVD featuring firearms trainer Clyde Caceres which was produced by Paladin Press). These video training programs can increase your knowledge of laser sights prior to or in addition to the hands-on training programs.