

Freeze Frame

By Timothy L. Hale/Army Reserve Public Affairs

August 2011

Vol. 1, No. 1

Improving Your Conference Photos

We all have to photograph conferences – they are a fact of life with military photojournalism.

While a conference may not have the “WOW” factor as compared to shooting a training event in the field, conference photography is a necessary event that highlights what the Army Reserve is doing to make us more efficient.

There are two issues to consider when photographing a conference:

- The first and probably most important factor is variations in room lighting.
- Second is photographing the subjects in the room. A group of people sitting at tables listening to a speaker just doesn't make for compelling images.

Working with lighting

Most conferences are held in cavernous hotel meeting rooms with mixed light sources ranging from fluorescent, incandescent and even tungsten lighting. Each one of these light sources has a different color temperature that will affect your final images. Include a flash on your camera's hot shoe and you have even more color temperature issues to contend with.

Throw in those wild carpet patterns and crazy wall coverings and you have a recipe for background distraction and ultimately, photographic disaster.

Here are the steps that I use to compensate for all of these issues.

- 1 – Shoot in RAW
- 2 – Boost your ISO settings to 800 or higher but usually not more than 1600
- 3 – Use a Manual White Balance setting. I usually find that 2500K (2500 Kelvin color temperature) is a good starting point
- 4 – Shoot with a 2.8 f-stop or faster if you have it
- 5 – If necessary, boost your Exposure Compensation to +1, +2 or +3
- 6 – Because you may be shooting at a slower shutter speed, it would be a good idea to either use a monopod or steady yourself against a wall or on the edge of a table
- 7 – Finally, I RARELY use a flash. It's distracting and you run the risk of having shadows where you don't want them.

Once the assignment is finished, choose your selected images for editing in

Photoshop, Bridge or Lightroom.

Because you shot the images in RAW you can color correct, if necessary, to bring out the true colors of the images.

I usually try to base the correct color on two factors:

- 1 – Skin tones
- 2 – The Army ACU uniform

Skin tones should be self-explanatory but I will add this thought. The last time I checked, most skin tones are not orange – unless they are an Oompa Loompa!

As far as the ACU uniform goes, we all know what they look like. It has shades of green and light sand or tan in it – NOT BLUE! If your uniforms look blue, you're not color correcting properly.

Shot Composition

I have a simple philosophy with pretty much every photo assignment I go on. Angles, angles, angles. If you shoot on the angles, you can't go wrong. Angles help lead the viewer to the place you want them to look.

I also like to use reverse angles. Shoot the speaker from the audience perspective then reverse it and shoot from the speaker's point of view.

Get down low and use a long conference table to lead the viewer to the speaker.

Play with the angles and see what works best. Then, the next time you have to shoot a conference, you'll remember what worked and what didn't. That's the joy of digital photography — we have a nearly endless supply of frames at our disposal.

The final thought is use the slideshow screen, if available, for a silhouette. Yes, it is a bit cliché but it gives you one more shot to publish if you have a suitable cutline. You probably wouldn't want to use it as a stand-alone image but more of a supporting image.

Attached are some examples from a recent budget conference I photographed in Atlanta. I've also included some before and after images so you can see color adjustments and cropping to enhance the images.

While my methods are not the gospel by any stretch of the imagination, I have found the techniques outlined above work for me. Give them a try and with practice your shots will improve.

-30-

Timothy L. Hale is an award-winning photojournalist for the Warrior-Citizen magazine at the U.S. Army Reserve Command Public Affairs Office at Fort Bragg, N.C. He is a member of Nikon Professional Services, National Press Photographers Association and National Association of Photoshop Professionals. When he isn't on assignment for the Army Reserve, he owns a photojournalism and graphic design service and he also freelances for an international photo wire service. He has been shooting professionally since 1981.

BEFORE

- Too dark
- Color balance is off
- No real point of focus
- Shot from back of room



AFTER

- Image was lightened
- Color balance corrected
- Tightened the crop



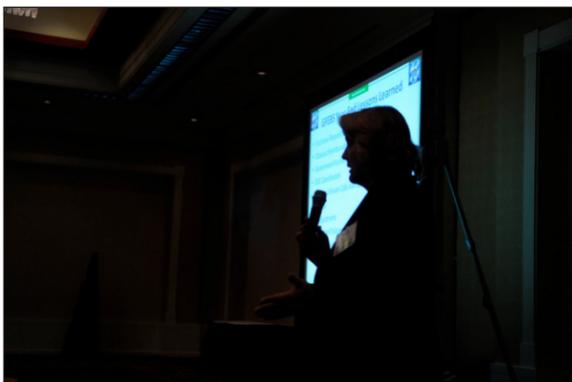
- Too dark
- Color balance is off



- Image was lightened
- Color balance corrected
- Tightened the crop



- Color balance is off (green color cast)
- Shot needs cropping



- Removed green cast in Color Balance
- Cropped vertically
- Adjusted Contrast and Levels to bring out black

