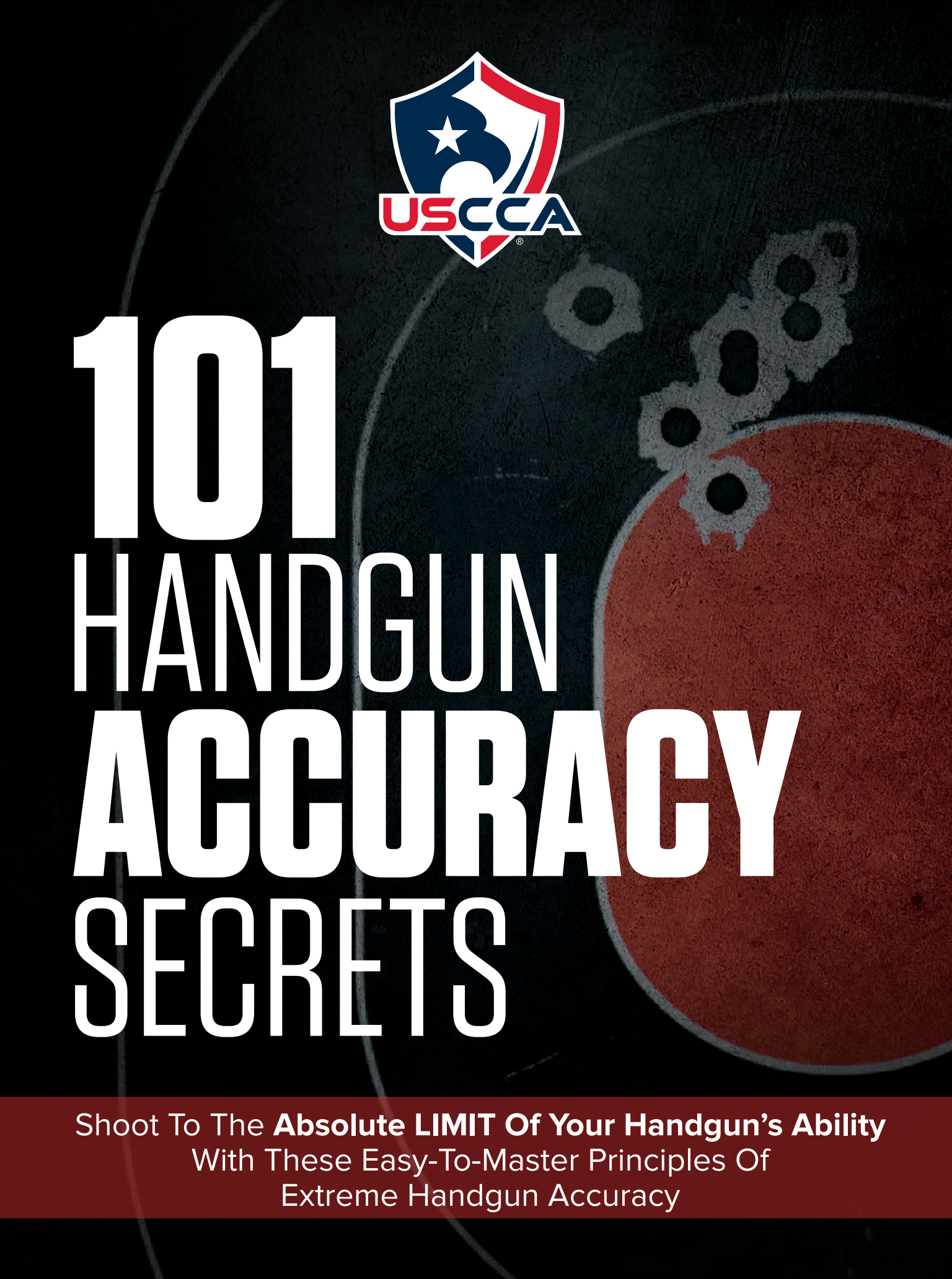

101 HANDGUN ACCURACY SECRETS

Shoot To The **Absolute LIMIT Of Your Handgun's Ability**
With These Easy-To-Master Principles Of
Extreme Handgun Accuracy

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INTRODUCTION

BY KEVIN MICHALOWSKI

THERE'S THIS GUY I know who always asks me the same question when I show him a gun: "How accurate is it?"

And I always tell him the same thing: "It's as accurate as you can be with it."

The truth is, accuracy is a great big can of worms. Yes, when the time arrives, accuracy is important. You are, after all, responsible for every round you send downrange. You need to be able to hit what you are aiming at. But you have lots more to think about before your gun even comes out of the holster.

Here's the way I see it: In a self-defense situation, accuracy is pretty far down the list. Before you start screaming, allow me to share that list with you:

Situational Awareness: This is the key to effective self-defense. If you don't pay attention to what's happening around you, you'll likely fall victim to a surprise attack. At THAT point, you might be so far behind the curve that your super-accurate pistol will be of little help.

Conflict Avoidance: If you've been paying attention to what's going on around you, at some point you'll be able to use that information — combined with your training and experience — to remove yourself from an area that is or might become unsafe. Conflict avoidance involves your situational awareness skills (Did you make note of suitable escape routes?), verbal skills (Can you de-escalate a situation?) and good judgment (Do you know when to get the hell out of a situation?). Check your ego at the door. Escape if you can.

Defensive Skills: Can you keep your attacker off you if you have to? Have you learned how to protect and access your weapon during a close-quarters deadly fight? If you don't think about things like positioning, defensive movements and defensive/offensive strikes in order to give you access to your weapon, your bullseye skills are useless.

Combat Accuracy: This simply means putting bullets into the bad guy quickly. In a recent episode of my weekly video blog, *Into the Fray*, I showed how I could draw from cover and put a round on target in two seconds. That's a long time. I'm slow; those two seconds might be the rest of my life. They might be the last two seconds I have to do anything. So, in that amount of time, I want to be thinking, moving and shooting.

If you are standing still, hitting a bullseye from 25 yards and thinking you have mastered everything there is to know about accuracy … think again. Self-defense with a firearm is about more than shooting straight. There are several elements that come into play before you even have to worry about your accuracy.

My suggestion, then, is that you focus on accuracy as one important part of an overall system of self-defense. The content that follows in this guide is a good place to start.

Keep in mind, though, that everything you do leading up to the shot will be scrutinized. If you don't have a lawyer now, you should think about getting one.

Practice shooting. Make sure you have good sights and a reliable, accurate firearm, but don't think that good shooting is all you need to come out on top of a deadly force situation.

Stay safe. Train hard.

Kevin Michalowski
Executive Editor
Concealed Carry Magazine

SIGHT ALIGNMENT

BY KATHY JACKSON

MARTY HAYES, owner of the Firearms Academy of Seattle, is fond of telling new students the one and only real secret of accurate marksmanship. Are you ready? Here it is, the secret of accurate shooting:

"Your sights must be aligned on target at the moment the hammer falls."

That's it. That's the key to accurate shooting. Everything else — grip, stance, smooth trigger press, follow-through — all of those are just detailed ways to help ensure that your sights are in the right place when you send the shot. If your sights are lined up with the target when that happens, you will hit the target. If they aren't, you won't. It's that simple.

So how can a shooter be certain that the sights will be lined up on target when the primer pops?

DIFFERENT TYPES OF SIGHTS

Handgun sights come in a variety of configurations. There are three-dot sights, blade sights, U-shaped sights, V-shaped sights, "dot-the-i" sights, peep sights and scores of other varieties.

All of these different sighting systems are designed to ensure that the barrel of the gun is held in the correct orientation to the target on the vertical and horizontal axes. This ensures that the shot will land neither to the left nor right of, nor high or low from, the intended point of impact. When the gun's barrel (represented by the sights) is properly lined up with the center of the target at the moment the shot breaks, the bullet will hit the center of the target.

Handgun sights will vary from style to style and model to model, but their basic function remains the same: They allow you to reliably hit what you're shooting at. Some sighting systems, such as the revolver sights on the far right, are installed at the factory and are not replaceable. All of the other handguns pictured have replaceable units and, depending on your needs and preferences, you can have them replaced with any number of dozens of differing pistol sights.

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRONT AND REAR SIGHTS

Since the purpose of sights is to align the gun properly, it's important to understand how they're designed to do that.

The front sight might be a blade or a dot. If it's a dot, it might be large or small. The rear sight might be a U-shape, a V-shape, two dots, a straight line or a simple raised notch in the back edge of the slide.

No matter how the sights are configured, the front sight should be vertically "aligned" with — i.e., no higher or lower than — the rear sight. If the rear sight is a basic straight line, simply place the dot of the front sight right on top of that line, as if you were dotting an "i."

Otherwise, place the front sight so that it is centered within the notch of the rear sight. There should be an equal amount of light on either side; this will keep your shot from going to the left or right of where you aim.

Except in the case of "dot-the-i" sights, the top edge of the rear sight should be held exactly even with the top edge of the front sight. Holding the top edges of the front and rear sights on the same plane will prevent your shots from hitting high or low.

When the sights are held in the correct relationship to each other, the shot will go neither high nor low, neither left nor right. The gun will be aligned with your eye and with the target on both the horizontal and vertical axes.

Some sight designs that pair a large front sight with a comparatively small rear sight will tempt you to "bury" the front sight while shooting. This will cause your shots to hit low. Pay special attention to the horizontal axis (keeping the top edge of the front sight in line with the top edge of the rear sight) until you have become very familiar with using these types of sights.

WHERE TO PUT THE FRONT SIGHT

Now that you have the front and rear sight in the correct relationship to each other, where do you place the front sight in relation to the target?

Most handguns will have their sights aligned on the horizontal axis to provide either a "combat hold" or a "target hold." These "holds" simply describe where the shooter is placing the sights in relation to the target and where the round will strike the target. A gun that is sighted in for a combat hold requires the shooter to place the front sight where it covers the exact center of the target, while a gun sighted in for a target hold achieves greatest accuracy when the front sight is aligned at the center of the bottom of the bullseye.

Generally speaking, handguns that are appropriate for self-defense will use the quicker but less precise combat hold.

Remember Benjamin Martin's advice to his son in the movie *The Patriot*? "Aim small, miss small." This is an excellent piece of shooting advice: When you are faced with a large target, pick a small area within that target upon which to center your shots. For instance, when looking at a cardboard IPSC target, rather than aiming for "somewhere in the center," try to hit the triangle which makes up the top part of the capital A in the A-zone.

As discussed above, remember that the correct placement of the front sight on the target must happen at the same time as the front and rear sights are held in the correct relationship to each other.

WHERE TO FOCUS

No matter which sighting system is on your handgun, it is important that you learn to keep your eyes focused on the front sight the entire time you pull the trigger — and during follow-through after the shot breaks.

Physiologically, it just isn't possible for the human eye to focus on a near object and a far object at the same time. This means that when your eye is focused on the front sight, the target will be blurry. And when your eye is focused on the target, the front sight will be blurry. Some people (mostly young folks) can switch their focus back and forth rapidly enough to fool themselves into thinking that both are in focus at the same time, but it's not true. Only one or the other is in focus at any given time.

What all this means is that you will need to decide which is more important to have in sharp focus: the large target or the tiny front sight. If you want to shoot accurately, you absolutely need to keep that tiny front sight and what it is doing in focus. (This is why shooting instructors always tell their students to concentrate on the front sight.)

If you are prone to missing high, it is possible that you are shifting your focus from the front sight to the target at the last possible moment before you send the shot. When you shift your sight to the target, it's very common for the muzzle to rise slightly in response — just enough to cause the shot to land high rather than in the center of the bull.

WHAT ABOUT THAT WOBBLE?

It is normal for the sights to wobble a bit when you're holding your firearm on target. Accept that fact. The wobble is a normal event, and it happens to every shooter. Human beings are not machines, and not a single one on the planet can hold a firearm with machine-like stillness and immobility. The wobble will always be there.

Sometimes the wobble will be worse than other times. As we age, our hands naturally become a little shakier. After a few swallows of tea, coffee or caffeinated soda, most people experience slightly shaky hands (though most of us never notice it). When there is a lot of adrenaline in your system — when shooting in front of someone you wish to impress, for points in a match or under the significant stress of a deadly force encounter — hands will always shake. It's just a fact of life.

So what to do about it? First and foremost, you need to admit that you do shake. Don't try to deny it or force yourself not to do it. You must accept the wobble and pull the trigger smoothly while the wobble is happening. If instead you fight it or try to snatch the trigger back during that brief, absolutely perfect moment as your front sight trembles across the center of the target, your shots will go low. Don't say I didn't warn you.

You must accept the wobble for what it is: a minor, natural event that cannot really keep you from hitting the target unless you overreact to it.

Keep your sights aligned as evenly as you can, but do not try to snatch the trigger back at the magic moment when the sights are absolutely, totally, perfectly aligned. Instead, smoothly increase pressure on the trigger while keeping the sights aligned on the target as steadily as you are able.

By steadily increasing the pressure on the trigger while keeping the sights lined up as steadily as you are able, you ensure that your sights will be aligned with the target at the moment the shot is fired.

And what's the entire secret of accurate shooting?

"Your sights must be aligned on target at the moment the hammer falls."

ACCURACY SECRETS

- No matter how the sights are configured, the front sight is designed to be placed on the same vertical axis as the rear sight.
- Many handguns have replaceable sights. If the sights on your handgun aren't working for you, you should experiment with different types of sighting systems if at all possible.
- When the sights are held in the correct relationship to each other, the shot will go neither high nor low, neither left nor right.
- Guns that are sighted in for a combat hold require the shooter to place the front sight where it covers the exact center of the target, while guns sighted in for a target hold achieve greatest accuracy when the front sight is aligned at the center of the bottom of the bullseye.
- Generally speaking, handguns that are appropriate for self-defense will use the quicker but less precise combat hold.
- "Aim small, miss small." When you are faced with a large target, pick a small area within that target upon which to center your shots.
- It is important that you learn to keep your eyes focused on the front sight the entire time you pull the trigger — and during follow-through after the shot breaks.
- Especially if you are prone to missing high, it is possible that you are shifting your focus from the front sight to the target at the last possible moment before the shot goes off.
- It is normal for the sights to wobble a bit when you're holding your firearm on target. Accept the fact that the wobble is part of shooting.
- If you fight the wobble or try to snatch the trigger back during that brief, absolutely perfect moment as your front sight trembles across the center of the target, your shots will go low.
- By steadily increasing the pressure on the trigger while keeping the sights lined up as steadily as you are able, you ensure that your sights will be aligned with the target at the moment the shot is fired.
- Your sights must be aligned on target at the moment you fire. If your sights are lined up with the target when the shot goes off, you will hit the target. If they aren't, you won't.

Good trigger control starts with dry-fire practice. After you are able to hold the gun steadily on target through the trigger pull, you can progress to live ammunition.

TRIGGER CONTROL

BY MASSAD AYOOB

TO HIT WHAT YOU'RE SHOOTING at with a handgun, trigger control is "the heart of the beast." It seems to be far more important than, say, sight picture. At close-combat distances, a poor sight picture might pull the shot out of the heart and dump it elsewhere in the chest, but a convulsive jerking of the trigger can cause the shot to miss the whole human-sized target.

The late Ray Chapman was the first world champion of the combat pistol. He used to say that shooting a handgun well was simple, it just wasn't easy. That's true in spades for the trigger control element.

After the decision to fire has been made and the gun is on target, the shooter must bring the trigger straight back in a manner that doesn't pull the gun off the mark. The rearward pressure should be smooth, it should be uninterrupted and it should be evenly distributed.

With any physical skill, we must crawl before we walk and walk before we run. Trigger-control development should start with dry-fire, progressing to live ammunition only after the shooter is conditioned to hold the gun steadily on target as the hammer drops. Dry-fire should always be practiced with a safe backstop, as if it were live, as a hedge against the day human error finds us with a round in the thought-to-be-unloaded firearm.

When it's time for live ammo, the pace should begin with careful, slow fire, progressing into faster and faster cadenced shot sequences until true rapid fire is achieved. With any complex psychomotor skill — a chain of physical events, which firing a gun most certainly is — the quickest route to learning to do it fast is to start by doing it slowly.

■ *Regardless of the style of sidearm, certain aspects of proper handgun grip remain constant: The gun must be held firmly in order to ensure its proper operation, the fingers must be kept away from the muzzle, and the shooter must be able to comfortably run all major operations of the gun. Depending on the type of handgun, some of these aspects can be more challenging than others.*

FINGER PLACEMENT AND HANDGUN GRASP

Historically, we have been taught to manipulate the trigger with the tip of our index finger or with its "pad," which means that the whorl of the fingerprint is centered on the trigger. However, this history comes largely from bullseye shooting with cocked revolvers and light-trigger, single-action semi-automatics. Target guns tend to be heavy, usually somewhere between 34 and 60 or more ounces. A light touch from the sensitive fingertip will serve us well if our pistol is a gently held 48-ounce High Standard .22 with the recoil of a mouse burp — and we're shooting at NRA's specified rapid-fire rate of five shots in 10 seconds.

However, in defensive shooting with a concealment handgun, the dynamics change. Now we have a 20-ounce baby Glock that must be stabilized against a 5- to 8-pound trigger pull, or a 12-ounce Smith & Wesson AirLite "snubby" with up to a 12-pound trigger pull. Now we have recoil that can truly live up to its colloquial name, "kick." Now, rapid fire means five shots in one second before our homicidal attacker can reach us with his tire iron.

DIFFERENT JOBS REQUIRE DIFFERENT SKILLS AND DIFFERENT TOOLS

For a heavier than "target" trigger pull, you'll find that getting your finger deeper onto the trigger will give you more leverage. The sweet spot is what the old double-action revolver masters called "the power crease" and what medical folks would call the distal joint of the finger on the palmar side. With longer, heavier pulls, this index finger placement simply gives the shooter more biomechanical advantage for a smooth, straight-back pull that won't allow the muzzle to deviate off target.

Similarly, the light grasp so long favored by target shooters is poorly suited to stabilizing the handgun against a heavy trigger pull or to keep it from shifting in the shooter's hand when jackhammer recoil must be dealt with. Half a century of handgunning has taught this writer that a very firm grasp — a crush grip, if you will — better serves both needs.

The harder you hold the handgun, the less it will shift in your hand during recoil. It will feel as if it's "kicking" less. That's not happening; grip force doesn't alter the laws of physics. What's happening is that your body is more efficiently managing the recoil. The gun is not moving as much and is coming back on target sooner. A strong stance that puts body weight into the gun helps considerably here too. The less the recoil moves your body, the less likely you are to develop anticipation that makes you jerk the trigger and bring the shot low.

The firm grasp also helps trigger control. Our fingers are subject to a sympathetic reaction called interlimb response. When one finger moves rapidly, the others want to open and close with it. This creates a phenomenon the old masters called "milking." When the fingers close as if upon a cow's udder in sympathy to the index finger's movement on the trigger, they pull the gun down and toward the weak-hand side. If you're a right-handed shooter and have been hitting low left, that may well be the diagnosis.

If "milking" is the disease, a hard grasp is one proven cure. If the rest of the fingers are already closed as tightly on the handgun's grip as they can be, they can't close any more in sympathy with the index finger's rapid activation of the trigger.

FIT FACTORS

No shooter will shoot his or her best without a gun that fits his or her hand. A key dimension of that fit is "trigger reach."

The gun should sit in the firing grasp with the barrel in line with the long bones of the forearm, the web of the hand high on the back strap of the frame and the finger naturally in its "sweet spot" on the trigger. If the gun affords too short a trigger reach, a longer trigger on a 1911 pistol or larger grips that cushion the back strap and push the web of the hand further back can solve the problem. The new generation of polymer-frame auto pistols with replaceable back straps in various sizes, pioneered by Walther, help here too.

SHORTCUTS

There are shortcuts to achieving good trigger control. Not many, but a few. One is what I call an "Exemplar Drill." The new shooter takes his or her firing stance and grasp and is responsible for sight alignment. The veteran shooter places his or her gun hand over the shooter's, with the experienced trigger finger in front of the novice digit. The old-timer presses the newcomer's finger slowly back against the trigger the first few times to show him or her what a good trigger press should feel like. Then, the new shooter and the veteran pull the trigger together at the same pace. Finally, the trainee is pulling the trigger, with the trainer's index finger just lightly touching the trainee's to monitor the movement and make sure he or she isn't backsliding into poor technique. I learned it from Ray Chapman, Chapman learned it in the Marine Corps and the USMC Marksmanship Manual circa 1930 had it in print. Sometimes, old secrets get lost and have to be rediscovered.

For the shooter working alone, a laser sight is a great tool for developing trigger control. Put the red dot on the target, and hold it there through the trigger stroke. Do it dry-fire to start. It conditions the shooter to the feel of smoothly stroking the trigger back without deviating from point of aim. Progression to live-fire is smooth and natural. Then switch to the conventional sights: The smooth trigger pull should remain constant.

As Chapman said, it's simple, but it's not easy. It takes time and dedication. Sometimes, you'll need to open your mind to new techniques or work with a gun that you're not familiar with but which might be a more suitable fit to your hand. After you've "got it," you'll feel the light bulb come on, and now it will be up to you to maintain a training regimen to "keep the feel of it" and make a smooth trigger pull happen faster and faster. Stay with it, and you'll be a better shot before you know it.

Different styles of handguns have different styles of triggers. This 1911 has a single-action trigger, meaning the trigger does nothing other than release the hammer. This makes it one of the smoother and lighter triggers available.

ACCURACY SECRETS

- To hit what you're shooting at with a handgun, trigger control is "the heart of the beast."
- A convulsive jerking of the trigger can cause the shot to miss the whole human-sized target.
- The shooter must bring the trigger straight back in a manner that doesn't pull the gun off the mark.
- Trigger-control development should start with dry-fire, progressing to live ammunition only after the shooter is conditioned to hold the gun steadily on target as the shot is sent.
- The pace should begin with careful slow fire, progressing into faster and faster cadenced shot sequences until true rapid fire is achieved. The quickest route to learning to do it fast is to start by doing it slowly.
- "Rapid fire" means five shots in one second before our homicidal attacker can reach us with his tire iron.
- For a heavier trigger pull, you'll find that getting your finger deeper onto the trigger will give you more leverage. The sweet spot is what medical folks would call the distal joint of the finger on the palmar side.
- The harder you hold the handgun, the less it will shift in your hand during recoil. A strong stance that puts body weight into the gun also helps considerably.
- If the rest of the fingers are already closed as tightly on the grip frame as they can be, they can't close any more in sympathy with the index finger's rapid activation of the trigger.
- No shooter will shoot his or her best without a gun that fits his or her hand. A key dimension of that fit is "trigger reach."
- A laser sight is a great tool for developing trigger control: It conditions the shooter to the feel of smoothly moving the trigger straight back without deviating from point of aim.
- Maintain a training regimen to keep the feel of the trigger pull and make a smooth trigger pull happen faster and faster.

■ *Properly gripping your firearm will ensure that you'll be ready to engage a threat when necessary, and it will also ensure that your firearm will function as designed.*

PROPER GRIP TECHNIQUES

BY LARRY CORREIA

PROPER GRIP IS ONE of the keys to proficient shooting. Without knowing how to hold the handgun correctly, you will lack in control and accuracy.

In the days of yesteryear, everyone shot pistols one-handed. This still works great for things like Olympic pistol games, where pure accuracy is king. A one-handed grip with a bladed-off stance works great for slow-fire bullseye shooting, because there is very little outside influence to disturb the gun. But we're talking about defensive pistol shooting, where calm, leisurely accuracy goes right out the window; instead, it's about being fast and acceptably accurate while under a great deal of stress.

The key to that is control. A two-handed grip will provide a great deal of control, so if you've got two hands available, use them to your advantage. A very experienced instructor once told me that the thing to remember is "meat on steel." The more meat (hand) you can get on steel (the gun), the more control you will exercise.

First off, let's talk about your primary hand — the hand that is the first one on the weapon and the one controlling your trigger. You want to get as high up on the gun as possible without getting struck by any moving parts. A common mistake made by a new shooter is that he or she will grasp the gun low on the grip, leaving a large gap between the web of his or her hand and the tang of the gun. The problem is that anytime you give the gun room to move, it will move. If there is an air bubble there, the gun will freely shift into it.

Moreover, the lower you grip the gun, the greater amount of torque you'll feel as the gun recoils. The higher you place your hand, the more in-line the bones of your

wrist will be with the barrel, and the less the muzzle will rise.

On the flip side of the coin, don't grip a semi-automatic so high that you're in danger of being hit by the reciprocating slide. I have very big hands, and I have a small Bulgarian Makarov that I shoot occasionally. These two things don't go together very well. I have to make a concentrated effort every time I shoot that little monster to keep my primary hand lower than I otherwise would, because otherwise the slide bites the web of my hand. This is the same reason that, though I worship at the altar of St. John Moses Browning, I can't shoot a stock Hi-Power or GI 1911 without leaving skin on the gun.

When it comes to a solid grip, a gun that fits you more naturally will be easier for you to shoot than one that you struggle with. A gun that is too small for a big-handed shooter is problematic, just as a gun that is too large for a small-handed shooter is. This is a major reason why spouses should never just pick out a gun for their significant others without their input. As an instructor, there is nothing more painful to watch than the 4-foot, 6-inch petite lady trying to shoot the HK USP .45 her husband picked out for her because he thought it was the greatest gun in human history.

That said, with good technique and practice, you can learn to shoot a gun well even if it isn't a perfect fit. Anyone who's ever been issued a particular gun by an agency is aware of this. But we live in America, and this article is directed at permit holders, so thankfully we can buy whatever the heck we want. Why wrestle with a gun you're not comfortable with if you don't have to?

Next, how hard should you hold the gun with your primary hand? I've heard a few things over the years that are pretty intuitive ways to explain this. Hold the gun like a firm handshake — or about as hard as you would hold a hammer to drive a nail. You don't want to squeeze the gun to death, because that is just going to cause shaking and fatigue, and you don't want to hold the gun too weakly, because then it will shift more under recoil (and, on some semi-automatics, might even cause malfunctions).

■ *New and hobbyist shooters often neglect off-hand (or "other strong hand") shooting. Though it can be extremely challenging at first, competence with your sidearm in either hand is essential for using it effectively in a lethal force incident.*

Now that you've got your strong hand on the gun, what do you do with your support hand? As a firearms instructor, I've seen pretty much every kind of grip you can imagine, and most of them are absolutely terrible.

My personal favorite bad grip is the "1980s Cop Drama Grip," where the support hand holds the strong arm's wrist. This does absolutely nothing to control the gun. The next bad grip is the old "Cup and Saucer." With this grip, the shooter just lays the strong hand on top of the support hand. Unfortunately, under recoil, the strong hand just moves up and away from the support hand. The worst grip of all, though, is the "Self-Correcting Grip." I call it that because you will only do it once. Basically, this is the one where the support hand is up high, encircling the strong hand, but the support thumb is placed over the web of the strong hand … right in the path of the slide. Ouch! Once in a while, somebody manages to do this grip during a class. There is usually no small amount of cursing involved.

Most shooters just take their support hands and mash them on top of their strong hands. The problem with doing this, however, is the old adage about "meat on steel." For many shooters, depending on hand size and the size of their firearms, their support hands sometimes aren't touching any steel at all. The strong hand thumbs are blocking the grip, so the shooters are left squeezing "meat on meat," which is better than nothing but isn't allowing the shooters to reach their full potential.

Now this is where everyone is different, and some experimentation is in order. While holding the gun in your primary hand, try moving your strong thumb up higher — out of the way — then mash your support hand down on the grip. Then place your strong thumb on top of your support hand, both thumbs pointing downrange, alongside the gun. If your gun has a frame-mounted safety, your strong thumb will often fit right on top of it, giving it a comfy place to ride and ensuring your safety remains off while shooting. This is usually referred to as a "High-Thumbs Grip."

Your support fingers should be on top of your strong fingers. I hesitate to use the word "interlaced," because that always causes confusion among students who then try to weave their digits together, but your support fingers should naturally fall onto the low spots between your strong fingers. Now your support hand can exert some pressure on the firearm.

This doesn't work for everyone (once again, it depends on hand and gun size), but experiment with your gun until you

find whatever gives you the most "meat on steel." What you're going for here is to make your support hand do some work also. If you can get a relatively neutral grip, where your support palm is putting equal pressure inward on the gun, your support hand can actually help you shoot more accurately than when employed in one of the aforementioned grips.

TRY THIS EXPERIMENT

Take your strong hand. Make a fist, about as hard as you would squeeze your gun. Now move your trigger finger back and forth like you're pulling the trigger. Now imagine that your support hand is squeezing the gun and helping control it. Loosen up your strong hand a little bit, and now pull your trigger finger as fast as you can. You should notice a significant difference in how freely your trigger finger can run. If you make your support hand help control the gun, you'll discover a far greater degree of trigger control.

There is a lot of argument about just what point of your trigger finger should be pulling the trigger. Personally, I'm not sure there is one right answer, as it depends on the shooter's hand, gun size and trigger weight/distance/reach. When I shoot a single-action gun with a short, light trigger, I find that I shoot with the pad of my finger; when I shoot double-action, with a longer, heavier pull, I find that I use the crease of the distal joint.

ONE GIVES ME MORE CONTROL; ONE GIVES ME MORE LEVERAGE

I'm a huge proponent of dry-fire practice. I honestly believe that if you go to the range to practice the fundamentals of shooting — stance, grip and trigger pull — and you're spending 30 cents every shot, you'll run out of money way before you become proficient. But if grip is all about controlling the gun, how can you simulate recoil during dry-fire?

Now this is not a perfect solution, but I do find that it helps. This drill works with semi-automatic firearms only, and you will need someone to help you. (For safety concerns, any time you dry-fire, make sure that the gun is unloaded, make sure there is no live ammo in the room, check that the gun is unloaded, make sure you're still aiming at a backstop that will stop a bullet and then check to make sure the gun is unloaded. Did I mention to check to make sure the gun is unloaded? Good.)

Remove your firearm's magazine so that the slide will not lock to the rear. Get into your shooting stance and take up your grip. Put the front sight on your dry-fire target. Have your partner stand off to your side. All rules of gun safety still apply while doing this drill; at no time is the muzzle ever to point anywhere other than the dry-fire target. After you are in your stance, your partner will reach up and forcefully rack your slide all the way to the rear, then let go.

It isn't the same as real recoil, but you will notice a few things: If you found that you rocked back quite a bit, it shows you the weak points in your stance. Often this is when you will need to lean into the gun more. Remember, you're driving the gun — it isn't driving you. But more in line with the topic of this article, did you have to shift your grip? If you find yourself having to flex your hands and adjust your fingers after your partner runs the slide, it's showing you all of the spots in your grip where meat wasn't properly contacting steel. Have your partner give you a moment to adjust your grip, then try it again.

After you've done this drill a few times, you should have isolated all of the spots where your grip is lacking. Ideally, after your partner runs the slide, the gun will come right back down and you won't have to shift your hands at all. Everything will be nice and solid. Now practice that grip. Remember how it feels. That way, when you go to the range and you're shooting live ammo, you already know what you need to do. Once again, this is a valuable drill, but anytime you're manipulating a firearm with a partner, it is extremely important that the muzzle is kept in a safe direction. Remember, your partner should stand off to the side, taking care to NEVER get in front of the gun.

After you have some confidence in your grip, you must practice at the range. An ideal grip will allow you to rapidly engage the target and repeat as necessary. Keep an open mind, and be willing to experiment with different finger placement until you find what allows you to exercise maximum control. Practice until you're ready to fight your attacker — not your technique.

ACCURACY SECRETS

- Having a good grip is key to being a proficient shooter.
- A two-handed grip will provide a great deal of control. The more "meat" (hand) you can get on "steel" (the gun), the more control you'll exercise.
- You want to get your primary (trigger) hand as high up on the gun as possible without getting struck by any moving parts.
- The higher you place your hand, the less the muzzle will rise.
- When it comes to a solid grip, a gun that fits you more naturally will be easier for you to shoot than one that you struggle with.
- With good technique and practice, you can learn to shoot a gun well — even if it isn't a perfect fit. But why wrestle with a gun you're not comfortable with if you don't have to?
- Hold the gun about as hard as you would a firm handshake.
- You need to experiment with your off-hand to find the best positioning, but your support fingers should be on top of your strong fingers. Avoid the "Cup and Saucer Grip."
- If you make your support hand help control the gun, you will discover a good degree of trigger control.
- Dry-fire practice is very important in helping you find the best grip for you.
- A weak grip can cause a semi-automatic pistol to malfunction.
- An ideal grip will allow you to rapidly engage the target and repeat as necessary.
- Practice until you're ready to fight your attacker — not your technique.

■ *Gunfights are extremely dynamic and, as such, can sometimes deny you the time to acquire a traditional three-dot sight picture.*

POINT SHOOTING

BY GABE SUAREZ

POINT SHOOTING: now that should stir up some controversy, right?

I was once in the "sights all the time at any distance" camp. Then the reality of reactive gunfighting on the street showed me that there are plenty of times when you will not be prepared for the fight and will have to either catch up against uneven odds or risk dying. At those times, any shortcut that will keep you alive is worth all the money in the world.

Gunfights are either reactive or proactive. In a proactive gunfight, you have the information and justification that you need to draw your pistol and shoot. You can call it being proactive or even being preemptive to the bad guy's actions. Recently, one of my New Mexico students told me of a case where an estranged husband visited his wife at the deli counter of a local market and proceeded to stab her multiple times with a butcher knife. The restraining order she got against him did nothing to protect her, but a local CCW permit holder who saw this moved into position, drew his pistol and — reportedly using his sights — shot the attacker to death. That is a proactive, preemptive gunfight: no startle, no catch up, no problem. The only things needed are a pistol, marksmanship skills and the will to use them.

Such gunfights, or should I say shootings, make up the lore of sighted, marksmanship-based shooting methods. All you need, the advocates say, is an alert mind, a clear sight picture

and a manageable trigger. But such fights, while very supportive of certain skill sets, are not the norm. The norm is a gunfight where the criminal, or group of criminals, has begun the attack upon a relatively unprepared victim. (Were the victim paying attention, he or she would likely have been able to avoid the entire thing.) That would-be victim must first realize what is happening; when the incoming information reaches a tipping point that indicates he or she must act quickly or perish, he or she must react faster than the bad guy. Does it sound difficult? Does it sound dangerous? Right on both counts.

What is lacking is preparation. I know all about the Color Codes of Awareness and about mental preparedness. I also know that human beings are fallible. We are overworked, preoccupied and sometimes even physically sick. We are rushed, and we carry the weight of the world on our shoulders. Hardly conducive to living in a state of Condition Yellow or relaxed alertness, eh? Rather than living in Condition Yellow — as my late friend Jeff Cooper described it — we often lapse into Condition White: Often sadly inevitable, it is the situation we might find ourselves in when the fight unexpectedly comes to us.

Let's analyze what happens in a gunfight. You might see the bad guy. He appears to be a bad guy because of his attire, his demeanor or maybe even the way he looks at you. Whatever it is, something about him isn't right. You are receiving bits of information constantly. You notice his eyes and where he is looking. You begin to notice that all the customers in the store are also looking at him. You notice that they appear scared. He is about 5 feet away now and you notice his gang-style clothes seems big for his small frame, and you begin to wonder if there is a weapon hidden under them. Then you begin to notice the outline of a pistol butt and his hand resting on it. It is beginning to move from the belt line toward you.

His first words don't even register as the adrenaline dump in your gut begins to shoot through your veins. "This is how it happens," you think.

Now let's look at the rest of the story: You draw your pistol. Actually, it's more of a desperate "grab and shove" toward the bad guy than a perfect and correct shooting school range draw. You are looking right at him. Your hunter/predator eye is drawn to the movement of his hand and fixes on his gun. It is small and black. Your pistol is out by now, pointing at him one-handed as your body screams, "MOVE!" Still transfixed by the image of him, and visually drawn to the gun moving toward you, you pull hard on the trigger once, twice, three times. Not the controlled trigger press you perfected in school, but hard trigger smashing. Your eyes have not left him as he falls dead at your feet with a loud thud. His gun clatters against the floor.

THE NORM IS A GUNFIGHT WHERE THE CRIMINAL, OR GROUP OF CRIMINALS, HAS BEGUN THE ATTACK UPON A RELATIVELY UNPREPARED VICTIM.

That is a reactive gunfight and the most likely scenario for most private citizens who carry concealed.

So what is the answer, point shooting or aimed fire? Are sights useless? Should we rip them off our slides and train only inside elevators? Not at all. Point shooting and sighted fire are two different ends of a continuum of shooting. You use what you need and what is called for, depending on the fight at hand. This description was first coined by a man in Federal service who posts under the nom de guerre "7677" at Warrior Talk (warriortalk.com), and it explains the situation quite well:

"Shooting is a physical act that does not change. There are degrees to your visual focus (fully on threat, fully on sights or somewhere in between). So analyze your shooting system. If all you are training on is proactive sighted fire, from open carry and from a stationary shooting position at medium distance, you might not be prepared for what an attacker has in store for you."

ACCURACY SECRETS

- Gunfights are either reactive or proactive.
- The reality of reactive gunfighting proves that there are plenty of times when you will not be prepared for the fight — and will either have to catch up against uneven odds or risk dying.
- The norm is a gunfight where the criminal, or group of criminals, has begun the attack upon a relatively unprepared victim.
- Rather than living in Condition Yellow, we often lapse into Condition White: Often sadly inevitable, it is the situation we might find ourselves in when the fight unexpectedly comes to us.
- Gunfights happen VERY, VERY quickly: A "draw" turns into a "desperate shove."
- Point shooting and sighted fire are two different ends of a continuum of shooting. You use what you need and what is called for, depending on the fight at hand.
- If all you are doing is proactive sighted fire, from open carry and from a stationary shooting position — at medium distance — you might not be prepared for what an attacker has in store for you.

SHOOTING WELL UNDER PRESSURE

BY JACK RUMBAUGH

SO FAR, YOU'VE HAD the fundamentals of shooting presented to you. It's easy to perform any of these skills on demand when you are on the range under no pressure at all. But what happens when a sense of urgency is introduced to the equation? If you are not properly prepared to deal with the pressure, it is likely that your performance will be less than stellar. How do we gain the confidence to perform well when things get tough? There are several training methods that are useful for simulating different types of pressure. Let's find out what they are and how to use them effectively.

DRILL THE FUNDAMENTALS

The first step you should take is to practice the fundamentals of shooting until they become reflexive and smooth. As you become more familiar and well-practiced with the necessary techniques, the more confident you will become. It will take time and hundreds (if not thousands) of repetitions to really make a technique "yours" — to learn it to the point that you can perform it on demand without serious conscious thought. Making sure you understand sight alignment, trigger press, grip and stance — and how each of these areas interact — is extremely important. After you have these fundamentals firmly established in your toolbox, you are ready to introduce that sense of urgency into your training.

MEET THE TIMER

Introducing a time factor into your training can generate some of that pressure we're looking for. The modern shot timer is a valuable tool to have in your training gear, but be careful. Never make

the holstering process part of your timed drill, as getting your gun back into its holster too quickly can lead to both accidents and the development of bad habits. You should always reluctantly and carefully holster your pistol.

You can introduce time pressure into your dry practice or your range session very easily. A simple drill is to safely prepare for dry practice (triple checking your firearm is empty and that there is no ammo in the training environment) and then set the timer for a random start and a 2-second par. When the timer sounds, you acquire your pistol, present it to the target, get your sight picture and alignment and press the trigger … all before the second beep.

After that is easy for you, set the timer for 1.75 seconds. As that becomes easier, reduce the time. Whatever you do, though, DO NOT sacrifice technique for speed. It's always easier to learn the right way a little slower than to try to unlearn incorrect technique.

You can take the timer along for your live-fire range sessions as well. There are numerous standard drills you can incorporate into your range time, such as the famous "El Presidente" Drill (two shots into each of three targets a foot apart, reload, same, all starting from a surrender position with your back to the targets). Using a timer, you can quantify how long it takes you to perform a certain technique properly. As you gain skill, you can see how you have improved. The timer is extremely useful in generating some anxiety in your training, and the more you train with a timer, the less this anxiety will affect you.

COMPETE WITH YOUR GUNS

Compete! If you want pressure, competition gives you a healthy dose. The first time you head up to the line, heart in your throat, waiting for the beep, you'll see what I mean. I have had the pleasure of competing in IDPA, IPSC and indoor and outdoor GSSF matches — and I can tell you that the first time is stressful. The more you compete, the easier it gets. The pressure will always be there, but the manner in which you perceive and handle it changes. Try out different shooting sports. Each one has slightly different stressors involved. Not only do you have the stress of a time constraint, but you also have points involved. On top of that, there is usually a set of rules to follow. Failure to follow the rules might result in a disqualification. More stress. And if you go with friends, you have the stress of not letting them beat you. After you have run a few courses of fire, you won't even break a sweat.

NOTHING RAMPS UP THE ANXIETY LEVEL LIKE FACING ANOTHER HUMAN BEING WHO WANTS TO STAB OR SHOOT YOU.

TRAIN IN FORCE-ON-FORCE

This is my favorite way to add stress to training. Nothing ramps up the anxiety level like facing another human being who wants to stab or shoot you. Working with a live opponent introduces an element of chaos to your training that cannot be duplicated with any other method, and the most cost-effective way to do this is with airsoft pistols. There are other options out there, to be sure, but they are not readily available to private citizens and they tend to be quite costly. Airsoft is easily obtained, is very reasonably priced, requires no special safety gear other than an airsoft mask and a sweatshirt and does not require much clean-up after a session. All you need is a broom or a vacuum cleaner.

After you have the equipment and a training partner, you're ready to go. The simplest drill runs as follows: You and your opponent stand 21 feet apart — and on the go signal, you both draw and fire. You can mix things up with unequal initiative, shortening the distance or trading a contact weapon for the pistol. The only limiting factors are the space available and your imagination. As you run more drills, you will find the anxiety level becomes less of a distraction. You are learning to deal with the stress in realistic training, and — hopefully — you will be able to deal with the stress in a real situation more effectively.

I want to reiterate that you must never sacrifice proper technique for speed in any of these drills. The key contribution of the drills we've outlined is to desensitize yourself to the stresses that you would find yourself exposed to in a defensive situation. The more you perform under pressure in training, the better you will perform under pressure when it counts. During a crisis, you will invariably default to the level of your training, so let's keep that level high.

ACCURACY SECRETS

- If you are not properly prepared to deal with pressure, it is likely that your performance in a critical scenario will be poor.
- Be sure to practice firearms fundamentals until they become reflexive and smooth.
- Making sure you understand sight alignment, trigger press, grip and stance — and how each of these areas interact — is extremely important.
- Introducing a time factor into your training can help generate pressure, which can make your training session far more reality-based.
- Never make the holstering process part of your timed drill. Holstering too quickly can lead to injuries and the development of bad shooting habits.
- Competition gives you a healthy dose of pressure, which improves the real-world application of your training.
- Use airsoft pistols or something similar to train "force-on-force." Nothing ramps up the anxiety level like facing another human being who wants to stab or shoot you.
- The more you perform under pressure in training, the better you will perform when it counts.

ACCURATE OFF-HAND SHOOTING

BY GEORGE HILL

THE ONE CRUCIBLE for firearms tactics that doesn't involve people shooting back at us is competition. IPSC, IDPA, Cowboy Action … whatever your flavor of choice is, they are going to ultimately throw you a curve ball by asking you to shoot with your weak hand. Everyone's scores will take a dip on a stage that requires weak-hand shooting.

This tells us something in a very clear, numeric and measured way: We all have to work on our weak-hand shooting. There is no "magic trick" that can help us here — and no matter how good we are with our strong hands, we are not as good weak-handed.

Is this going to have any real-world value to us? Absolutely. Look at the way we present ourselves in a defensive situation: knees bent, head up, eyes forward, arms up and out. Our arms are going to be the first things injured should damage come our way. In a defensive situation, we might have to ward off a knife attack or a swing from a club, or we might catch a bullet in the strong arm or hand. Something else might occupy our strong hand, like a friend or loved one, and we are controlling them to move them to a safer position. Anything can happen and if you lose your strong hand, then you've probably lost 75 percent or more of your ability to engage your target effectively. What if you're coming around a corner that would expose most of your body before your strong hand is able to cover the target? You would be much safer if you could switch hands and navigate the corner with confidence. What we need to do is to raise our skill level so we can lower our liability with weak-hand shooting.

■ *Almost anyone can discharge a firearm with their non-dominant hand, but it takes practice to do so accurately. Time spent on the range training pays off when circumstance denies you your strong hand and time isn't on your side.*

Since there is no magic trick to weak-hand shooting, it is a simple matter of coming back to the basics and taking your time … without taking *too* much time.

Let's start from the draw. Since we most often carry our weapons concealed, our weapons are usually not in a convenient location for weak-hand draws. This is going to require some stretching, bending and maybe even some grunting or colorful language, but we need to be able to access our weapons. To practice this, raise your strong arm and put it on your head to keep it out of the way. There is no specified draw technique here, because all of us pack our guns differently. If you pack crossdraw or in a shoulder rig, this challenge will pose no problem. If you pack in a typical manner — with the gun just behind your strong-side hip — you might go across your front or around your back (depending on your position or flexibility). Whatever works for you, do it. The point here isn't how you do it — it's that you do it. This needs to be realistic and practical for street-level deployment. Practice this standing until you work it out, then practice it sitting. In competition, you will not be required to draw with your weak hand (for safety purposes). In competition, you'll have to draw the weapon normally and transition it to your weak hand. This transfer is easy, but it's something you'll need to practice.

To transfer the weapon safely to your weak hand, very slightly loosen your grip and let the pistol tilt slightly forward. Then place your weak hand behind your shooting hand, slide it up under the top of the backstrap and slide your shooting hand back down and away as you grip the pistol with your off-hand. Practice moving your gun back and forth between your hands. Because weak-hand shooting means weak-hand reloading and holstering, if you can shave a half second off this transition, every time, you can shave full seconds off the clock at each string. Little bits of time add up quickly — and in a lethal force encounter, little bits can mean a lot.

Back to shooting. With the gun in your hand, you should now be able to engage your target, shoot your gun dry and reload it — all one-handed. Some shooters will hold their guns between their knees or use their holsters to help reload their weapons. Whatever you do, this is something that has to be practiced a lot, because if you have to do it when it counts, no one is going to wait for you to figure it out.

The same methods of shooting a weapon weak-handed are just like strong-hand shooting … the only difference is that it can be like learning how to shoot all over again. Your hand isn't as stable. Your trigger is alien to your finger and pulling it isn't so smooth and steady; it's more of a spasmodic twitch that you're not ready for.

When shooting weak-handed, there are psychological hurdles and physiological challenges that must be overcome: psychological, because you think you are handicapped when weak-handed; and physiological, because you have not developed the muscle memory to accomplish the tasks of control manipulation and recoil recovery — let alone just holding the weapon steady.

They call your weak hand "the weak hand" for several good reasons.

Backup guns and off-hand shooting often come into play under the same kinds of circumstances: Either a primary weapon is dropped, the dominant hand is injured or a fight is severe enough that a gun is run dry or taken away from the defending party.

Typically, the muscles are not as strong, trained or sensitive as those in your dominant hand. What you are going to find on the range is a lessened ability to hold your weapon stable, and your trigger manipulation will no longer be the thing of beauty it was in your other hand. In fact, you'll likely find that you've suddenly become ham-fisted.

Before you even start practicing shooting weak-handed, you need to get that hand up to speed. Try typing with just your weak hand or dialing your cell phone with your weak hand. These skills don't necessarily transfer to shooting, but you need to rewire your brain to your left hand and let it know that it can do some fine-motor-skill activities. I know a local doctor who ties the shoelaces on his right foot right-handed and on his left foot left-handed just to keep that dexterity up. He can also tie the knots on a fish hook with just his left (weak) hand too. You might consider getting a squeeze ball to help improve your grip as well. (I've found that these are handy items to have anyway, if your job requires you to talk to strangers.)

While in a fight, you'll want to move, but if you're down to a weak-hand-only shot, I would hope you're ready to employ every trick in the book. Try holding the weapon at a slight angle — about 1 o'clock — rather than straight up and down. You can hold your gun steadier with this slight angle, and you can manage recoil better this way. The angle is going to be different for everyone; try this on for size next time you are at the range.

The most important thing about shooting weak-handed is to take your time, concentrate on your sight picture and work on breaking the shot consistently. You should devote 10 to 20 percent of your shooting to firing weak-handed, and — like everything else in the shooting sports and self-defense — practice, practice, practice!

ACCURACY SECRETS

- We all have to work on our weak-hand shooting.
- Our arms are likely going to be the first things injured should damage come our way.
- We need to raise our skill level so we can lower our liability with weak-hand shooting.
- There is no magic trick to weak-hand shooting; it's simply a matter of coming back to the basics and taking your time — without taking *too* much time.
- First, you must master drawing with your off-hand. You might have to adjust your carry position to make this possible.
- To transfer the weapon safely to the weak hand, loosen your grip and let the pistol tilt forward. Then place your weak hand behind your shooting hand, slide it up under the top of the back strap and slide your shooting hand back down and away.
- Learn to reload your weapon one-handed and practice it often.
- There are psychological hurdles and physiological challenges that must be overcome to shoot weak-handed.
- You should practice doing everyday things such as typing and dialing the phone with your weak hand to build up its muscles. Get a squeeze ball to help improve your grip.
- Try holding the weapon at a slight inward angle (1 or 11 o'clock). This aligns the bones more naturally.
- You should devote 10 to 20 percent of your shooting to firing weak-handed.

ACCURATE SHOOTING WHILE ON THE MOVE

BY JACK RUMBAUGH

SHOOTING ON THE MOVE is by nature a complex skill set. You have to move while presenting your pistol and placing shots on your adversary with acceptable combat accuracy — all without getting shot. Some of the skills we will employ deserve their own in-depth study, but those are for another time. Let's break this down to the components and outline each one.

Gunfighting is 50 percent shooting and 50 percent not getting shot. I'm of the opinion that most important is the "not getting shot" part. If this were not so, movement would have no place in our toolbox. There really is no big secret to movement in a gunfight: You put one foot in front of the other and start walking. It gets more complicated as you dive deeper into dynamic movement, but we must walk before we run, so to speak. As you realize you are facing an attacker, you simply move off the "X" (where you are originally standing when the action begins) to one of several angles we'll discuss in just a moment.

You must combine your movement with a smooth presentation. The goal is not to present and then move or move and then present; they should be one motion. As you move, there will be angles of movement that will be more advantageous to you to use. The situation will dictate which one will be the most appropriate. Using the clock analogy, you might find that movement to the 11 o'clock position will work well and movement to another angle will be less than optimal. You never want to backpedal, as you'll always lose; your adversary will be able to move forward much faster than you can move backward.

When you're forced to defend yourself with a gun, you need to move as you react to the threat; if it isn't stopped within a few seconds, you need to continue moving and defending yourself until your attacker no longer poses a danger to you or others.

This is where force-on-force training really shines. You can get all the repetitions you'll need to practice the skills of moving, presenting and engaging your target at various angles.

One thing that needs to be mentioned: The fitter you are (within what is possible considering your age, injury status and general health), the better off you will be when moving. Being able to move briskly and still have something left in reserve — should you need it — is extremely desirable. Movement means greater chances of survival.

Another piece of the puzzle is your presentation and where you carry. We have found through hundreds of scenarios in our Interactive Gunfighting classes all over the globe that a botched presentation puts you so far behind the curve that you are unlikely to catch up. A smooth and polished presentation from concealment is key. In a defensive context, it's not important what you can do from your uber-cool IPSC speed rig but what can you can do with your everyday carry gear. Also, where you carry will affect your presentation. I have found time and time again that appendix carry is a superior choice. It keeps your pistol near your centerline, provides you with greater economy of motion than other methods of carry and is faster to presentation. If you can carry this way, I highly recommend giving it a try.

We've talked about movement and presentation; now we're finally on to shooting. You should, at this point, have a firm grasp of the fundamentals needed to shoot accurately. The particular skills you've internalized so far might not serve you in a dynamic environment, so we need a new set of skills to plug into the equation. The phrase I used in the first paragraph was "acceptable combat accuracy." By this I mean that you are able to get hits on a man-sized torso target at typical close-quarters combat distances. We aren't talking about the precision 50-yard shot for score. We're talking about survival at 12 feet. To get the acceptable hits at typical close-quarters battle (CQB) distances, you need to take into account a couple of key issues: distance and time.

As the distances compress, the less time you have to react — much less get that perfect sight picture we all train so hard for. You'll need other techniques to use in those situations. The term we use to describe what we need to do at typical CQB distances is "sighting continuum." It's simply a sliding scale — from "point shooting" to perfect sight picture and alignment. You simply see what you need to see of your sights to get those good hits we were talking about. For instance, you might employ some form of body-indexed shooting technique to get your hits at 2 yards, but as the distance increases, you might need to transition to a flash sight picture to get your good hits. You might use what is affectionately called "metal on meat" shooting — where the metal of your pistol is simply super-imposed on the meat of your attacker. As I said earlier, you simply see what you need to see to get the hits you need to get.

WE AREN'T TALKING ABOUT THE PRECISION 50-YARD SHOT FOR SCORE. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SURVIVAL AT 12 FEET.

Again, I cannot stress enough that a traditional two-handed grip is not going to be effective for what you might have to accomplish during a lethal force encounter. There will be places in your range of movement where a two-handed grip will be out of the question. There are angles of movement that favor shooting with the left hand over the right. Certain circumstances won't allow you to do much more than barely clear your holster and fire as quickly as you can.

We have found that the body hates tension and will always try to go with the path of least resistance. If you try to keep a two-handed grip on your pistol, there will be a point when you have created tension in the body and your tendency will be to unwind and backpedal. (As mentioned, that is to be avoided.) For a right-handed shooter, this is obvious moving toward 1 o'clock. If you try to maintain that two-handed grip, you'll quickly find yourself backpedaling. If you drop one hand and go right hand only, you'll gain a few more steps … but, again, you'll begin to backpedal. The only sure way to keep your muzzle on target is with an eventual transition to your left hand. Ambidextrous shooting is a valuable skill to master, so make sure you do so.

It's very important to note that these techniques must be practiced to be perfected. Work movement into your dry practice. Work on alternative sighting methods at the range, work on your transitions and combine all of your techniques during your force-on-force training. You'll be glad you did.

ACCURACY SECRETS

- Gunfighting is 50 percent shooting and 50 percent not getting shot.
- There really is no big secret to movement in a gunfight.
- You must combine your movement with a smooth presentation.
- The situation will dictate which movement or direction will be the most appropriate.
- You never want to backpedal.
- The fitter you are, the better off you will be when moving.
- Movement means greater chances of survival.
- A smooth and polished presentation from concealment is key.
- Distance and time are key issues in getting the acceptable hits at typical CQB distances.
- The term "sighting continuum" describes what we need to do at typical CQB distances. It's simply a sliding scale — from "point shooting" to perfect sight picture.
- There is an area where movement and sighting intersect. There will be places in your movement where a two-handed grip will be out of the question.
- There are angles of movement that favor shooting with the left hand over the right.
- These techniques must be practiced to be perfected.

HOW TO CURE A FLINCH

BY KATHY JACKSON

WE'VE ALL EXPERIENCED IT: mysteriously misplaced holes on our targets. The holes are low, below the bullseye and usually left of the centerline. What in the world could cause that?

A flinch happens when your muscles clench suddenly in anticipation of the shot firing, yanking the muzzle of the gun downward and off target at the last possible moment. It can be made worse by firing without adequate hearing protection, firing large-caliber guns with unexpectedly solid recoil or firing guns that just don't feel good in your hands. Every shooter on the entire planet has dealt with a flinch at one time or another. There are no exceptions; it's the one experience all shooters share.

Sometimes a habitual flinch can result from just a single negative experience. I've met more than one woman whose first exposure to shooting was when a jokester relative handed her a full-power .357 Magnum or a 12-gauge shotgun loaded with 3½-inch slugs and told her to pull the trigger without warning her what to expect. Such a rough introduction to the shooting sports can create seriously negative opinions about shooting — and often leaves an enduring flinch.

Since every shooter has dealt with a flinch, most shooters have some method of coping with a flinch when one develops. It's worth listening to experienced shooters at the range and finding out what works for them. The only "solution" I would warn you away from is the "non-solution" of mechanically adjusting your sights so that the gun hits high and right when it is fired by someone without a flinch. That's a range trick, not a solution.

■ *Though nothing replaces time spent sending projectiles downrange, dry-fire exercises, especially with a laser-assisted pistol such as the SIRT, are equally important and can be a lot easier to work into a busy schedule.*

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosing a flinch is not difficult. Sometimes you can feel yourself getting ready to flinch; that clenched, quivery feeling in your muscles right before the shot fires is often a telltale sign. The most certain way to diagnose a flinch is to fool your muscles into believing that you are about to fire live ammunition, when in fact you are going to dry-fire the gun. Here's how to do that.

If you have a semi-automatic handgun, you can diagnose and then cure your flinch by purchasing snap caps, which are inert ammunition-shaped objects you can load into your gun. (They are the same size and shape as your regular ammunition but usually come in bright colors.) When you load a snap cap into your semi-automatic handgun and pull the trigger, all you will hear is a click. Snap caps are not live ammunition and therefore cannot fire, nor will they cycle the gun's action.

This method works best if you have two or three magazines. Fill the magazine with a couple of live rounds, a snap cap, a little more live stuff, another snap cap and so on. Randomly mix the number and order of snap caps and live rounds. If you only have one magazine, have a friend fill it for you while you look elsewhere. If you have two or more magazines, fill them yourself and then shuffle them around so you do not know which one is which.

Using these specially prepared magazines — on the range when the firing line is hot — safely load your firearm as you ordinarily would. To accomplish this same task with a revolver, you can either randomly mix snap caps in with live ammunition in the cylinder or you can randomly leave a few empty holes where ammunition would ordinarily go. Before you close the cylinder, close your eyes and gently rotate the cylinder. Close the cylinder without looking so that you do not know how the ammunition is lined up in your gun.

Now your firearm is loaded partially with real ammunition and partially with snap caps that will not fire. The next step is to fire the gun. Line your sights up on the target, focus on the front sight and steadily increase pressure on the trigger until you send the shot. When you get to a snap cap, you'll hear a click instead of a bang, and, if you've been flinching, you will graphically see the muzzle end of the gun take a deep dive instead of remaining steady (as it should).

As a slight aside, this is also a good time to practice your ability to clear a misfeed with a clearing sequence that is often called "Slap, Rack, Bang." When you encounter a snap cap or any other failure to fire in a semi-automatic handgun, slap the baseplate of the magazine to be certain it is firmly seated in the gun, rack the slide to clear the non-functioning ammunition out of the

way, assess the target to be sure it still needs shooting and then bang (pull the trigger again).

Having diagnosed the problem, it's time to cure it.

PRESCRIPTION: DRY-FIRE

The first and most important method of dealing with a flinch is lots of dry-fire. Dry-fire, as I'm sure you've picked up, is going through the motions of firing the gun when there is no ammunition in it. You can do this at home as long as you have a safe backstop and as long as you follow every single one of the rules for safely dry-firing a gun.

If you are uncertain whether you can safely dry-fire in your home, DON'T. You can always safely dry-fire on the range. There is no rule that says you must always use ammunition at the range — it's perfectly safe and acceptable to dry-fire there instead. No one will be surprised, because good shooters often dry-fire at the range as just one facet of their regular practice routine.

Just as if you were firing live ammunition, grip the handgun properly, align your sights carefully and slowly increase pressure on the trigger until the trigger's break point is reached. You should keep your eye glued to the front sight and continue holding the trigger to the rear (without lessening your finger's pressure on the trigger) for a full two seconds after the trigger has been completely pulled.

As you focus sharply on the front sight during dry-fire, you might notice that the sight wobbles a bit. This is normal — not something to worry about or fight against. In fact, if you pay special attention to the front sight, you'll see that no matter how badly your hand is shaking, the area on the target that is actually covered by your "wobble zone" is really quite small.

As long as your trigger pull is smooth, every single shot will fall within that very small wobble zone, close to the center of your target. But if you try to snatch the trigger back to get an absolutely perfect shot during the brief moment when your front sight wobbles across the exact, perfect center of the bullseye, your shot will land very low and much further away from the center.

The POW — or "Plain Old Wall" — Drill is basic but very effective. Dry-fire at a specific spot on a wall, noting any movement of your muzzle as the shot breaks. Reducing movement during the trigger press drastically improves accuracy.

Do not try to muscle the wobble away. The more you clench up, the worse the wobble becomes. And don't try to race against it by snatching the trigger back. Simply increase the pressure on your trigger while accepting the wobble for the normal phenomenon that it is.

Even though you have accepted this normal wobble of the front sight, remember that you are still trying to hold the front sight as steady as you can. Don't allow it to dip or sway as a result of your trigger pull. If you find your trigger pull also pulls the sights out of alignment to the right or to the left, adjust the amount of trigger finger you have resting on the trigger.

As you execute the trigger press, you begin to feel the tension within the trigger mechanism increasing, making the trigger pull feel increasingly heavy. Do not allow this to slow down the rate at which the trigger is traveling to the rear. Instead, press the trigger at the same speed during the entire process, increasing the pressure upon it steadily until the trigger breaks. Never think about the trigger's break point — let it surprise you, every time.

In order to keep from thinking about the trigger break, some folks find that chanting "front sight, front sight, front sight" helps keep their minds from trying to anticipate the shot.

Finally, one last important step: After the trigger breaks to the rear, do not take your finger off the trigger for at least two full seconds. Keep the sights steadily on the target and continue holding the trigger completely to the rear while you count: one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand.

Try to dry-fire for at least five or 10 minutes every day or so.

PRESCRIPTION: ON THE RANGE

On the range, try to do exactly as you have practiced in dry-fire. Get the sights lined up on the target, focus sharply on the front sight and gradually increase pressure on the trigger. Do not think about the shot firing. Do not try to "grab" the magic moment when your sights are completely and perfectly centered on the bullseye. Instead, accept that the front sight will wobble a little bit and concentrate on keeping it as steady as you can while you put increasing pressure on the trigger. Do not try to figure out when the shot will fire. Let that be a surprise to you.

If you need to chant "front sight, front sight, front sight," do so; any-

thing to keep your mind from anticipating when the shot will fire. Again, you want the shot to be a surprise.

Practice good follow-through. After the shot goes off, continue holding the trigger completely to the rear while you line the sights back up and focus sharply on the front sight. Count one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand while you hold the trigger to the rear. Then, and only then, release the trigger and allow it to come forward.

If you feel your muscles getting ready to flinch, take a deep breath. Then safely unload your firearm, and practice dry-firing right there on the range until you have settled down a little. Any time you feel ready to flinch, consciously relax every muscle in your body — except the ones you need in order to shoot safely — and go back to dry-firing until you feel ready to try it again.

CHECKUP

After you've fired live ammunition for a while, it's time for a checkup. Mix snap caps in with your regular ammunition again, as you did for the initial diagnosis. This time, you're simply going to shoot and keep shooting. Since you have been doing so much dry-fire, you know exactly how the sights should look when you pull the trigger on an unexpected snap cap — exactly as they do when you were expecting to fire a live cartridge.

By the way, it's kind of embarrassing to find that muzzle dipping downward so dramatically when you come across a snap cap while firing. The only cure I've ever found for that embarrassment is to acknowledge and then conquer the flinch.

PRESCRIPTION: MORE DRY-FIRE

If you're still flinching at the range, set up your safe dry-fire area again because you need to practice dry-firing some more. This time, you're going to do something different; you're going to try balancing a coin (on its flat edge) on the front sight while you dry-fire.

Lay a penny across the top of the front sight. Then dry-fire as usual. Align the sights, focus on the front sight and steadily increase pressure on the trigger while keeping the coin balanced on top of the front sight. Can you do it?

LAY A PENNY ACROSS THE TOP OF THE FRONT SIGHT. THEN DRY FIRE AS USUAL. ALIGN THE SIGHTS, FOCUS ON THE FRONT SIGHT AND STEADILY INCREASE PRESSURE ON THE TRIGGER WHILE KEEPING THE COIN BALANCED ON TOP OF THE FRONT SIGHT. CAN YOU DO IT?

Practice until you can keep the penny balanced on top of your handgun during each and every trigger pull — without fail. Make a game of it. Instead of using a penny, get a roll or two of dimes and use them. Every time a dime falls off, pick it up and put it into your penalty jar — and then get out another dime. When the jar is full enough, you can use the contents to buy ammunition or professional firearms instruction only. (No cheating!)

Continue to regularly practice your dry-fire drills, especially when you cannot get to the range as often as you know you should.

FOLLOW-UP CARE: REGULAR CHECKUPS

Now that your flinch is under control, you should take your snap caps to the range from time to time to check on your progress and to prevent the flinch from returning in full force. Remember that you will need regular dry-fire practice too.

Most shooters have recurring bouts of flinch trouble. This isn't unusual, but it means that it is once again time to focus on the basics.

ACCURACY SECRETS

- A flinch happens when your muscles suddenly clench in anticipation of firing a shot, yanking the muzzle of the gun downward and off target at the last possible moment.
- Sometimes a habitual flinch forms from just a single negative experience.
- The most certain way to diagnose a flinch is to fool your muscles and brain into believing that you are about to fire live ammunition.
- The first and most important method of dealing with a flinch is lots of dry-fire, or going through the motions of firing the gun when there is no live ammunition in it.
- As you focus sharply on the front sight during dry-fire, you might notice that your front sight wobbles a bit. This is normal and expected — not something to worry about or fight against.
- Do not try to muscle the wobble away. The more you clench up, the worse the wobble becomes.
- Let the hammer fall or striker click surprise you every time.
- Some folks find that chanting "front sight, front sight, front sight" helps keep their minds from anticipating the shot.
- After the trigger breaks to the rear, do not take your finger off the trigger for at least two full seconds.
- Try to dry-fire for at least five or 10 minutes every day.
- Practice good follow-through. After the shot fires, continue holding the trigger completely to the rear while you line the sights back up and focus sharply on the front sight.
- Lay a penny across the top of the front sight and then dry-fire as usual, trying not to knock the coin off of the front sight.

CONCLUSION

THIS CONCLUDES our report on firearms accuracy. We hope you've found a few guidelines by which you can greatly improve your aptitude while armed.

If at all possible, we strongly urge you to seek out professional firearms training.

Remember that the learning process for ANY given practice never ends. There is always room for improvement. In addition to seeking professional, hands-on training, immerse yourself in books and other reading material that will help you build mental advantage and improve your state of readiness — not to mention make your hands-on training much more effective. Socialize with other people of a similar mindset. Compare strategies, train together and stay safe.

David jumped into action and saved his children and innocent bystanders from two armed robbers. Without the self-defense education, training and legal protection of USCCA Membership, David's story could have ended very differently.

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