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BY MICHAEL MARTIN

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR **SHOOTING ACCURACY** IN FOUR SIMPLE LESSONS

DEFENSIVE FIREARMS INSTRUCTOR SECRETS

To get you consistently on-target,
even when the pressure is on...



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The Fundamentals: DEFENSIVE SHOOTING ACCURACY

During the defensive firearms courses that I teach, I'll continually differentiate between the skills required for defensive shooting, and the skills required for being a good "marksman" on the range. Unlike relaxed exercises on the range with paper targets at 50 feet, dynamic critical incidents are usually fast, and they're usually close, with nearly ninety percent falling between 9 and 15 feet. In addition, when we're under the extreme stress of a violent attack, our higher brain will very likely check out, and to one degree or another, automated responses will take over. Because of that, if we have a choice between a complex method of doing things and a simple method, we're going to have to pick simple. If we have a choice between a method that embraces those automated responses or fights them, we need to pick the method that embraces them. As you'll see in this booklet, we're going to look at these defensive shooting fundamentals as a set of building blocks—if you can master one skill, the next skill becomes easier to accomplish.

On the other hand, if you blow one of the skills, it will affect the rest. Mastering these fundamentals won't qualify you for the U.S. Shooting team or win you the Bianchi Cup, but they *will* provide the proper building blocks to work toward defensive accuracy, which I'll further define in this booklet.

Your goal when practicing these skills should be consistency, which allows you to effectively bake the fundamentals into the neural pathways of your brain (creating what most people would call "muscle memory"), which I'll explain further in a moment. Whatever skill or task isn't previously hardwired into those pathways, is probably not a task that you'll be able to accomplish during a violent attack. They say that "practice makes perfect," but that's not quite true. Practice makes *permanent*, so for every evolution of these fundamentals that you conduct on the range, take the time to make them, well, perfect. The great news is that there are just four building blocks to master, including grip, stance (or "shooting platform"), target alignment, and trigger control.

I'm going to start with what I consider to be the basis of all other shooting fundamentals, namely, taking up a proper shooting grip. This section not only explains why I think a proper grip is so important, it also provides a number of illustrations showing exactly how to get your grip right.

In the section on shooting platforms, I'll introduce you to the shooting stance that was a staple of nearly every police academy for nearly four decades, but I'll also explain why most police academies and civilian training courses have moved beyond the Weaver stance, and are now teaching what Rob Pincus would describe as a "natural and neutral" shooting

platform, designed to match the body's and the mind's automated responses to the extreme stress that will accompany any violent attack.

The topic on target alignment will discuss the balance of speed versus accuracy, and what your options might be when moving from one end of the scale to the other. Those topics will include using unsighted fire or "point" shooting, using a flash sight picture, and using precise sight alignment, which are the three major options when it comes to aligning your barrel to the target. I'll also discuss when one option might be preferable over the other, but I'll also explain why the automated responses that you'll very likely experience might just choose the method for you. I'll wrap up this booklet with a topic on trigger control where I'll explain how you can train yourself to press the trigger without disrupting target alignment, and how you can learn about your trigger's reset point.



BY MICHAEL MARTIN

MUSCLE MEMORY

We've all tossed out the phrase "muscle memory" when talking about learning a repetitive skill, regardless of whether that "skill" is playing golf, playing the piano, or drawing from the holster. Unfortunately, muscles themselves have no "memory," so, where exactly are these repetitive skills being stored? The answer is the cerebellum, which is the brain's memory center. When a certain skill or movement is practiced repeatedly, pathways are actually modified in the cerebellum to store and link individual movements, similar to how individual still frames are stored and linked on a spool of film. The more the skill or movement is repeated, the stronger the pathways linking the individual steps. The result can be near automatic playback of the stored memory of movements. As an example, new students learning to draw from the holster will learn that there are four steps involved, and they'll practice those movements in four distinct steps. But after thousands of repetitions, those four movements will have become fluid, and the "experts" may not even be able to answer the question, "How many steps does it take to draw the handgun from the holster?" To them, the process is fluid and automatic (they might even say, "It takes just one step.") No one knows just how many times a task or series of tasks will need to be repeated before it's ready for "automatic playback," but suffice to say, it's going to be more than plinking at the range a couple times a year. Dry firing, drawing from the holster with a cleared firearm, and virtual simulations are all ways that these pathways can be built, all without a shot being fired.

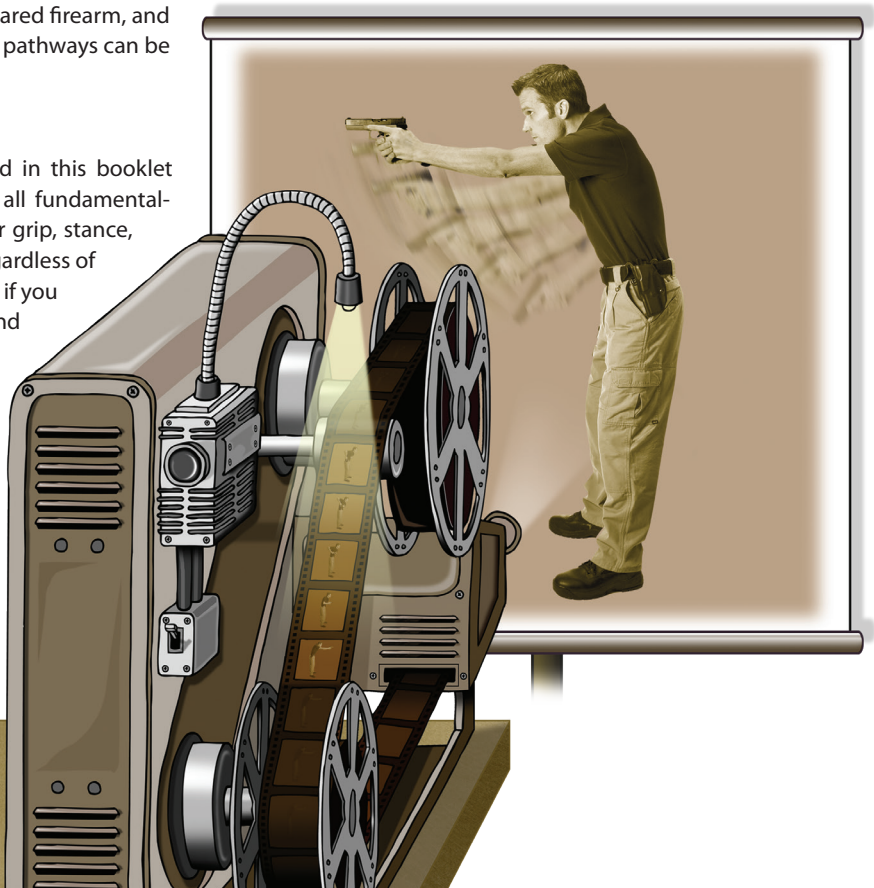
MAKING PATHWAYS PERMANENT

The range exercises that are explained in this booklet all have one thing in common—they're all fundamentally rooted in the building blocks of proper grip, stance, target alignment, and trigger control. Regardless of how fast you might draw from the holster, if you haven't mastered a proper grip, all you'll end up with is a very fast miss, and that won't impress anyone, especially a bad guy. If you've mastered unsighted fire, but you haven't put in thousands of repetitions disengaging your gun's safety, you might find yourself with an inoperable gun when it counts, because the situation didn't give you time to *think*, it only gave you time to *act*.

That begs the question, "When can you quit practicing the fundamentals, and just focus on the advanced stuff?"

The short answer is, never. One of my good friends who happens to be a retired Navy SEAL, once took the time to estimate how many rounds he'd fired in his Navy career—his conservative estimate was somewhere above one-and-a-half *million* rounds. Yet if you asked him how he started each range drill to this day, he'd tell you that he always starts with dry firing, and a number of basic drills to reinforce the fundamentals, before he moved on to more complex exercises. Regardless of whether his training exercise for the day was rappelling from a helicopter into a fortified compound, or landing a zodiac onto an oil platform, he'd start and end the day with dry firing, and a review of the fundamentals. If that's good enough for the Navy SEALs, it should be good enough for us.

Whether you're learning to draw from the holster or learning the Macarena (you know who you are), repetition of any task begins to build new pathways into the cerebellum, connecting individual movements into a continuous series of movements for near automatic "playback." Similar to how a film projector can take individual still frames and make them appear as though they flow together into continuous movement, the cerebellum can do the same thing with these repetitive tasks. The key here is that you'll need to practice them until they become repetitive.



Lesson One:

PROPER GRIP

I'M GOING TO START WITH

what I consider to be the most fundamental of all shooting fundamentals, namely, learning how to take up a proper grip when using a handgun. For those of you who may never have had formal handgun instruction, it may sound a little basic to discuss the proper way to “grip” a handgun—in other words, don’t you just pick it up, point it down range, and start pressing the trigger?

Well, in a way, it isn’t any more complicated than that, but before stepping into *how* to take up a proper grip, it’s probably a fair place to start by talking about the *goal* of a proper grip. If your answer is to hold the handgun, you’d only be half correct. The *ultimate* goal of a proper grip is creating and maintaining control of your handgun during the firing cycle.

WHAT’S MORE IMPORTANT, GRIP OR TRIGGER CONTROL?

Other instructors might take issue with my choice of grip as the most important fundamental over other shooting fundamentals. That’s a debate I recently had with a fellow instructor, who argued that precise trigger control had to be more important than grip. To demonstrate

this, he had a number of us stand on the firing line and fire one round at a target at 50 feet while daintily holding our pistol with our thumb and middle finger, and slowly pressing the trigger, all while maintaining perfect sight alignment. Of course, most of us hit fairly close to our point of aim. His point was that if you could make an accurate shot at that distance with almost no grip pressure at all, then trigger control *must* be more important than grip. While it was a cute trick to show at the range, taking four or five seconds to fire one round at a stationary target 50 feet away had about as much to do with an actual critical incident as Wii Sports Resort has to do with competing in the Ironman Triathlon. Here’s why: As trainer Rob Pincus would point out, critical incidents are usually *fast*, they’re usually *close* (with nearly 90 percent falling between nine and 15 feet), and when rounds are fired, *multiple* rounds are usually fired—in other words, the mythical one-shot stop was usually just that, a myth. So much for one round fired at 50 feet having any meaning. If multiple rounds might be necessary to stop a bad guy from stabbing you, beating you, choking you, or raping you, then it stands to reason that the faster you can put those rounds on target, the sooner the stabbing, beating, choking, or raping will stop. Two things are going to affect your ability to deliver rounds quick-

As Rob Pincus would point out, critical incidents are usually fast, they're usually close and when rounds are fired, multiple rounds are usually fired. In other words the mythical one-shot stop is just that; a myth.

ly—first, how quickly you can bring your firearm back on target after the muzzle flips during recoil; and second, how quickly you can cycle the trigger (more on that in a minute). To quote Pincus, "Anyone can hit with a sloppy grip if they use the sights, but a solid grip is required to shoot intuitively, and to get faster follow-up shots."

That's not just a theory of Rob's, it also finds its way into competitive shooting. While comparing choreographed competition to an actual critical incident can only go so far, this comparison might be worth it. When asked how they're able to deliver so many rounds on target so quickly, many competitors will explain that a good solid grip and full arm extension allows them to



PROPER GRIP

1 When setting up your grip, the pistol should be placed firmly into your firing hand like you are making a fist, with the web of your hand high and centered on the back strap. The firing hand thumb should be high, to create a space for the support hand.

2 Notice that when setting up your grip, the trigger finger remains off the trigger, and outside of the triggerguard.

3 Wrap the fingers of your support hand firmly around the firing hand with the index finger pressed firmly against the bottom of the trigger guard and the meaty part of your support hand nestled into the open space on the grip left by the firing hand. To create the perfect "seal" between both hands, the thumbs are stacked, with the third knuckle of the support hand nestled in the space between the first and second knuckle of the firing hand. No part of the firearm grip should be visible between your fingers, or between the strong hand and support hand.





4 Solid isometric pressure should be applied from the front and the rear (described as a “push-pull” action, with the shooting hand pushing forward, and the support hand pulling back), which will aid in recoil management. The majority of pressure holding the firearm in place should come from the isometric tension between the two hands, rather than from trying to hold the pistol in place by finger pressure alone. That allows your trigger finger to work independently of the other fingers on your shooting hand, avoiding what’s referred to as “milking” the trigger.

5 As seen from above, the tip of the trigger finger, when placed on the slide, should be directly across from the tip of the thumb on the support hand. Most new shooters will find their support thumb being much farther back than the tip of the trigger finger—this is corrected by rotating the support hand farther forward, resulting in what’s referred to as a “thumbs forward” grip.

press the trigger as fast as they are physically able. In fact, they’ll often refer to that technique as “mashing” the trigger (which is not exactly the kind of trigger control that my colleague had in mind). If we bring that theory back to how it might apply to surviving a critical incident, a solid grip means more rounds on target in a shorter amount of time. Any sloppiness in your grip means a lack of control during recoil, a higher muzzle flip, and slower follow-up shots. Think about it this way. Instead of the range exercise that my colleague used in an attempt to prove that trigger control was more important than grip, let’s try a new exercise, but this one with a different set of rules. Instead of firing one round at a target 50 feet away, let’s place the target at 12 feet (right in the heart of where most defensive shootings occur), and fire as many rounds as we can into the target’s center of mass in three seconds. Using my colleague’s technique, you’d be lucky to place more than one round on target, as you fought to bring the handgun back under control after firing

the first round. On the other hand, if you fired using a good solid grip and your arms at full extension (both techniques combining to manage your firearm’s recoil as much as possible), you’d be able to press the trigger as fast as humanly possible, and accurately deliver, well, a lot of rounds in that same three seconds.

So if we agree the primary purpose of a solid grip is to create and maintain control of the firearm during the firing cycle (thereby allowing rapid follow-up shots), then it’s going to be important to have as much physical contact between your hands and the firearm as possible. To do that consistently, follow the instructions outlined in our step-by-step illustrations. As Pincus explains in his book, *Counter Ambush*, “Consistency is the major factor here. The more consistent your points of contact are with the gun, the more your brain will recognize that you’re in the right position to shoot, and the more efficiently you will be at shooting.”

Lesson Two:

SHOOTING PLATFORM

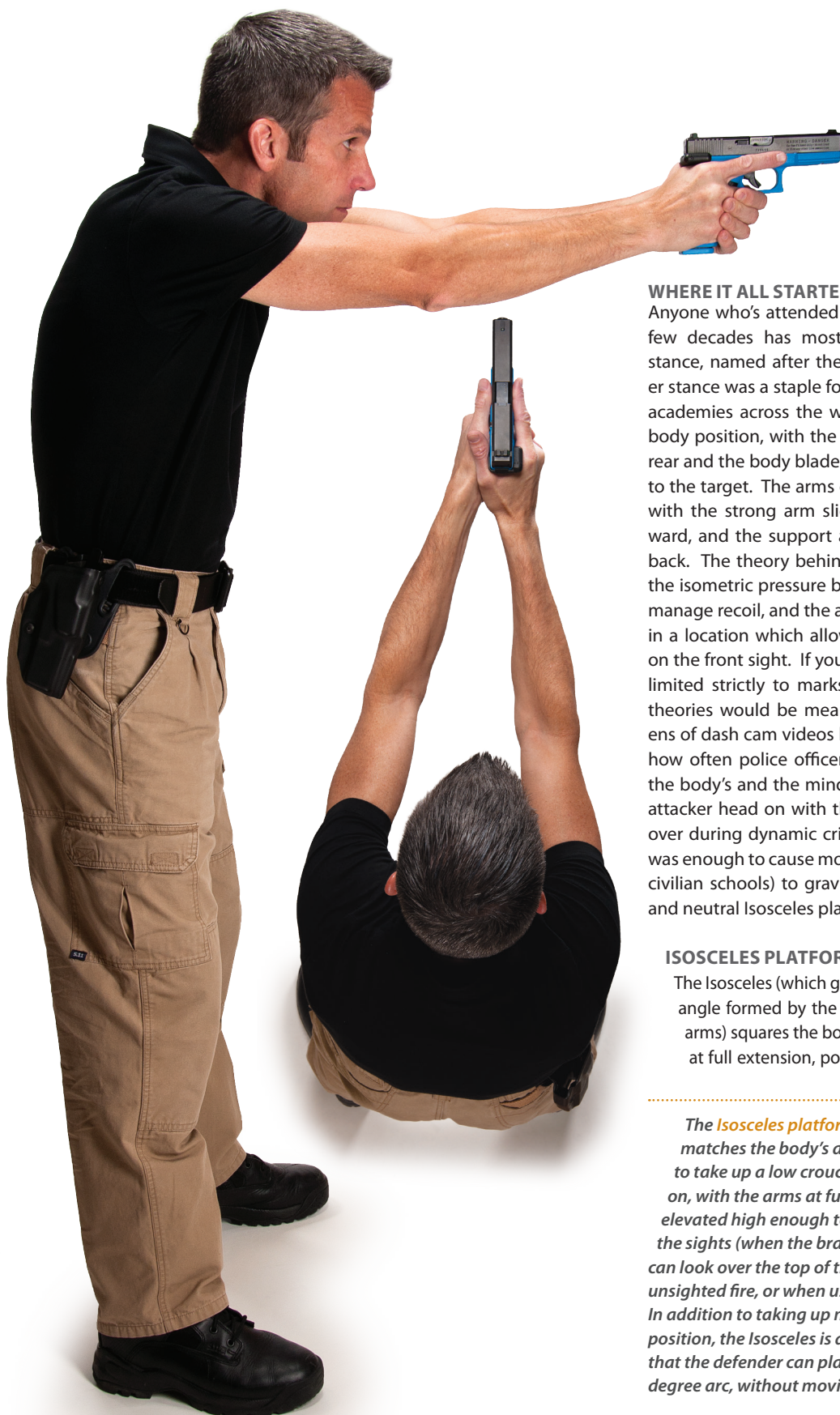
IN THE CLASSROOM OR ON THE RANGE,

the term “shooting stance” usually implies a specific position for the arms, the head, the upper body, the legs, and the feet. When it comes to the “perfect” stance, instructors can argue for hours about the optimal angle of the shoulders to the target (if any), how far apart the feet should be, and whether the arms should be flexed a little, flexed a lot, or not flexed at all.

While you might have the luxury of perfecting each of those body positions when standing on the firing line at your local range, under the extreme stress of a violent attack, you’re not going to have the time or the luxury. In fact, I’ll often mention in my classes that the only “perfect” shooting stance occurs at the range, and that during a dynamic critical incident, you’ll have to be prepared to shoot from whatever awkward position you find yourself in, which might include being seated, rapidly retreating, or lying flat on your back. In addition, there is now ample evidence from a decade of police dash cam videos that suggest that the “automated responses” that occur during violent attacks, will have more of an effect on our body position, than will dozens or even *hundreds* of hours spent on the range. While it’s often said, “we’ll fight the way we’ve trained,” those dash cam videos suggest that we should, “train the way we’ll fight.” So let’s talk about those automated responses,

which if you’re interested, originate within an almond sized structure in the brain called the amygdala. The amygdala contains most of the brain’s alarm circuits designed to react to any imminent threat, which would include a violent attack. When its alarm circuits are tripped, the amygdala has a direct connection to the motor cortex (that is, it skips the reasoning and planning part of the brain) in order to take immediate action, such as: freezing our legs if we were about to step in front of a speeding bus; raising our hands to protect our head from a flying rock; or ducking into a crouch, orienting toward a threat, and pushing the arms out to full extension to defend against the threat. It’s that last automated response that has been recorded time and time again on dash cam videos during police shootings, and it’s the one that we’re going to focus on when it comes to discussing a “natural and neutral” shooting platform.





WHERE IT ALL STARTED: THE WEAVER STANCE

Anyone who's attended a shooting school in the past few decades has most likely heard of the Weaver stance, named after the late Jack Weaver. The Weaver stance was a staple for nearly four decades at police academies across the world, and takes up a "bladed" body position, with the strong side foot placed to the rear and the body bladed at approximately 45 degrees to the target. The arms create solid isometric pressure with the strong arm slightly flexed and pushing forward, and the support arm elbow down, and pulling back. The theory behind the Weaver stance was that the isometric pressure between the two arms helps to manage recoil, and the arm position places the firearm in a location which allows the shooter to easily focus on the front sight. If your shooting requirements were limited strictly to marksmanship at the range, those theories would be meaningful. The problem is, dozens of dash cam videos have proven that regardless of how often police officers had trained on the Weaver, the body's and the mind's natural reaction to face the attacker head on with the arms at full extension took over during dynamic critical incidents. That evidence was enough to cause most police academies (and most civilian schools) to gravitate toward the more natural and neutral Isosceles platform.

ISOSCELES PLATFORM

The Isosceles (which gets its name from the perfect triangle formed by the squared shoulders and straight arms) squares the body to the target, with both arms at full extension, pointed directly at the target. The

*The **Isosceles platform** is more natural, and it matches the body's and mind's natural reaction to take up a low crouch, face the attacker head on, with the arms at full extension. The firearm is elevated high enough to allow the shooter to use the sights (when the brain allows it), or the shooter can look over the top of the sights when using unsighted fire, or when using a "flash sight picture." In addition to taking up more of a natural body position, the Isosceles is almost direction neutral, in that the defender can place rounds in nearly a 180 degree arc, without moving the feet.*



Jack Weaver

THE WEAVER STANCE was developed by L.A. Deputy Sheriff Jack Weaver, in an effort to win Jeff Cooper's "Leatherslap" competition in Big Bear, California in 1959.

At that time, the typical competitive shooter shot from the hip or one-handed from the shoulder, and according to Jack, "What started out as serious business soon produced gales of laughter from the spectators as most of the shooters blazed away..." and "with guns empty and all 12 rounds gone but the 18-inch balloons still standing, they had a problem: load one round and take aim or load six and blaze away again." By the time the 1959 Leatherslap rolled around,

Jack had realized that, "A pretty quick hit was better than a lightning-fast miss," and decided to bring the pistol up using both hands and use the pistol's sights, rather than just shooting from the hip. Jeff Cooper commented, "Jack walloped us all, decisively. He was very quick and he did not miss."



stance is designed to match the body's and mind's natural reaction to face an attacker head on and to push the arms out defensively, which allows shooters to "train the way they'll fight." In addition, since both arms are at full extension, recoil and follow-through are easily managed—shooters will find the firearm

dropping back on target immediately after the muzzle rise. Since the arms point at the target using

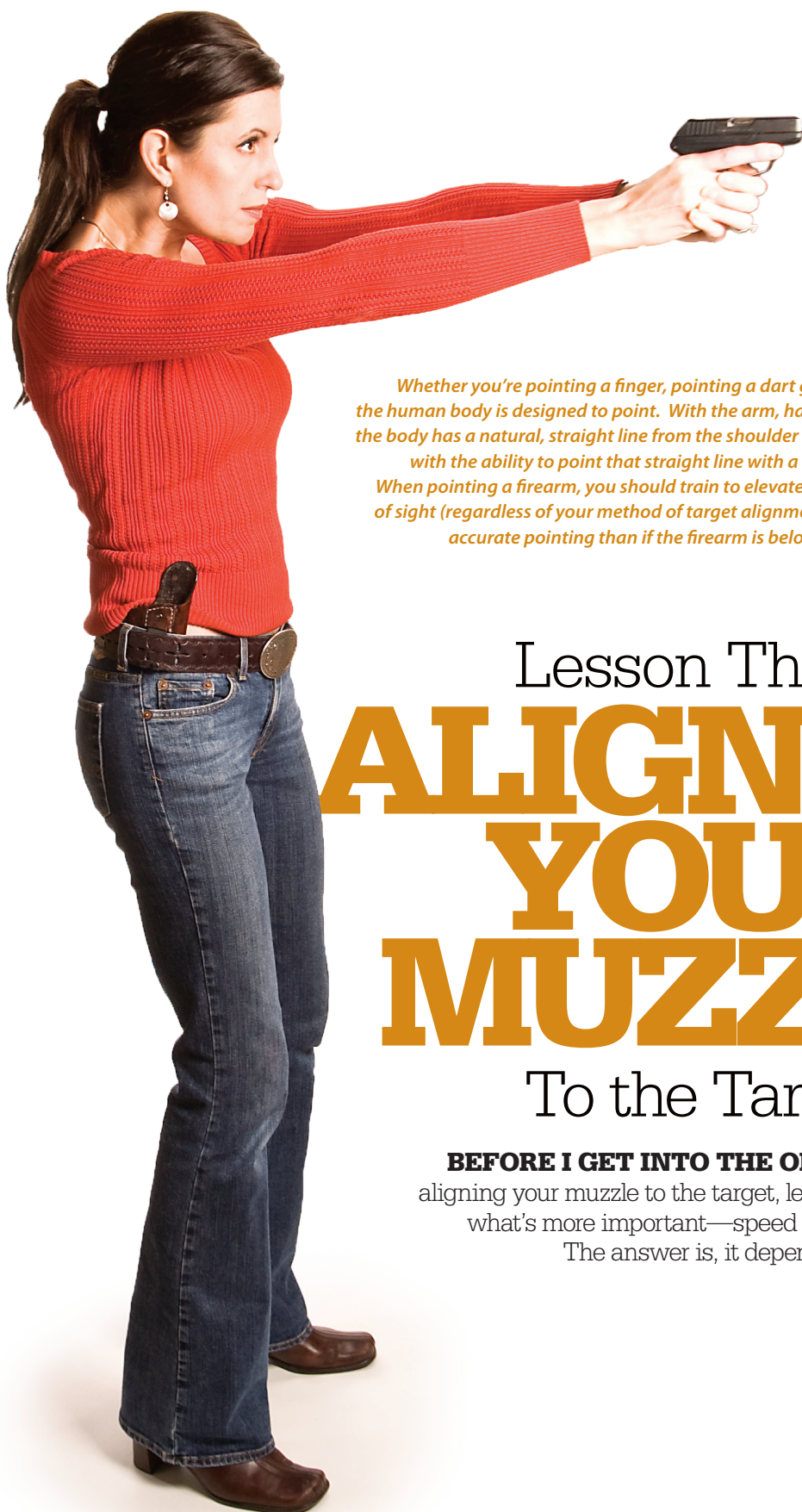
the Isosceles, it also provides a simple, repeatable method of using unsighted fire in a stress situation. You'll

notice that I didn't refer to any specific position for the legs and feet—in a perfect situation, the feet would be firmly positioned under the body, but the "natural and neutral" nature of the Isosceles doesn't require that, in fact, the only real focus on the Isosceles

is to face the target, and push the arms out to full extension (or as far as possible) which creates a natural, straight line from the shoulder to the fingertip. We're born with the ability to point that straight line with a high degree of accuracy, especially when we're talking about the distances of most self-defense shootings, with nearly ninety percent falling between 9—15 feet.

*While the **Weaver stance** looks pretty cool, a decade of dash cam videos has proven that during dynamic critical incidents, we'll be more likely to take up a stance that matches the body's and mind's natural reaction to face the attacker head on, with the arms at full extension. In addition to placing the body in an unnatural position, the Weaver is also not "neutral," in that it's designed to place rounds in just one direction. For example, trying to place rounds at a second attacker to the right side of the defender, would require the defender to literally rotate their body 90-degrees to the right.*

Considering most adults have at least a two-foot reach, that means that the distance between your gun and your attacker, will most likely fall between 7—13 feet. Stepping back to the original theory behind the Weaver stance, it was believed that the Weaver allowed the shooter to position the firearm for easier acquisition of the firearm's sights, leading to more accurate fire. That's a great argument if you're trying to make a silver dollar sized hole at 50 feet, but it's less meaningful if you're trying to hit an attacker a dozen feet away (or one who's already on top of you), when speed will typically be critical, and trying to align your front sight, rear sight, and the attacker will be the last thing on your mind.



Whether you're pointing a finger, pointing a dart gun, or pointing a firearm, the human body is designed to point. With the arm, hand and finger at full extension, the body has a natural, straight line from the shoulder to the fingertip, and we're born with the ability to point that straight line with a high degree of accuracy. When pointing a firearm, you should train to elevate the firearm up into your line of sight (regardless of your method of target alignment), which allows even more accurate pointing than if the firearm is below your line of sight.

Lesson Three:

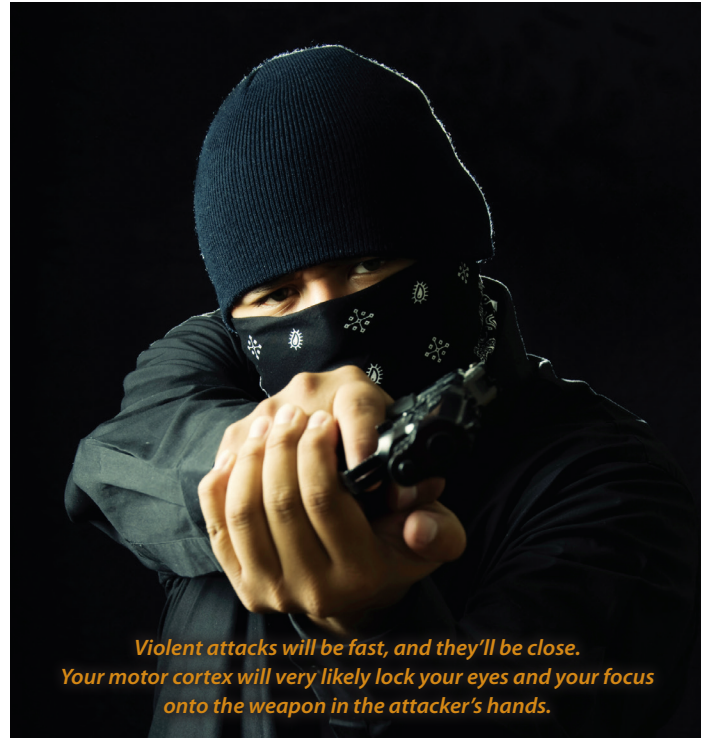
ALIGNING YOUR MUZZLE

To the Target

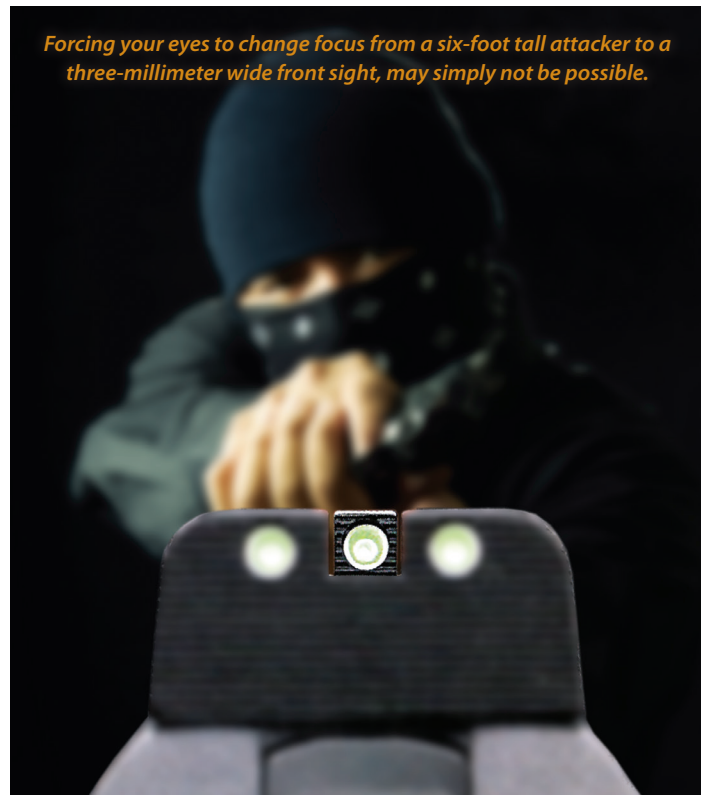
BEFORE I GET INTO THE OPTIONS FOR
aligning your muzzle to the target, let's first talk about
what's more important—speed or accuracy?
The answer is, it depends.

BALANCING SPEED AND ACCURACY

If we're talking about a typical day at the range or in the field, we'll usually measure the effectiveness of the shots that we've fired based upon their accuracy, rather than on how quickly we were able to get off the shot (missing fast when you were hoping to get that trophy buck won't impress anyone, including the buck). In a defensive situation however, we won't have the luxury of taking an unlimited amount of time to get the "perfect" shot; instead, we'll need to balance the two factors of speed and accuracy. Those two factors will constantly be in balance, and we'll need to make a split second decision on which factor is *most* important for the specific circumstances we find ourselves in. For example, if we're trying to hit an active shooter in the middle of a crowded mall, *accuracy* will be ultra critical; but if a knife-wielding attacker is already stabbing us, then *speed* will be critical, and a margin of error of ten or even fifteen degrees will still mean a hit. Your decision on speed versus accuracy will not only affect the outcome of the situation, it will also affect how you choose to align your muzzle to the target. Three primary methods are used for target alignment—using unsighted fire or "point" shooting (which prioritizes speed over accuracy); using a flash sight picture (which provides an equal balance of speed and accuracy); or using sighted fire (which prioritizes accuracy over speed). You shouldn't necessarily think of each of these methods as being absolutely distinct, instead, you can think of them as being on a sliding scale. On one end is unsighted fire (which is not the same thing as unaimed fire), which literally ignores the sights and gets the firearm up on target as quickly as possible, and at the other end is sighted fire, which requires us to focus on the front sight, and precisely align the front sight, rear sight, and target, for as accurate a shot as possible. Everything in-between, including a flash sight picture, is a combination of the two to one degree or another. Here's the catch—during a violent attack, that pesky amygdala buried deep in our brain (mentioned in the last topic) might just limit how far we can move toward the accuracy end of the scale. Here's why: The brain's automated responses to an attack will most likely include the motor cortex locking our head and eyes on what the *brain* perceives as the most critical part of the attack. Evolutionarily speaking, that might have meant the teeth of an attacking wolf; today, that might mean the knife or gun in the hand of the attacker. The net effect means that it may be difficult, or even impossible, to see our firearm's sights, eliminating sighted fire as an option.



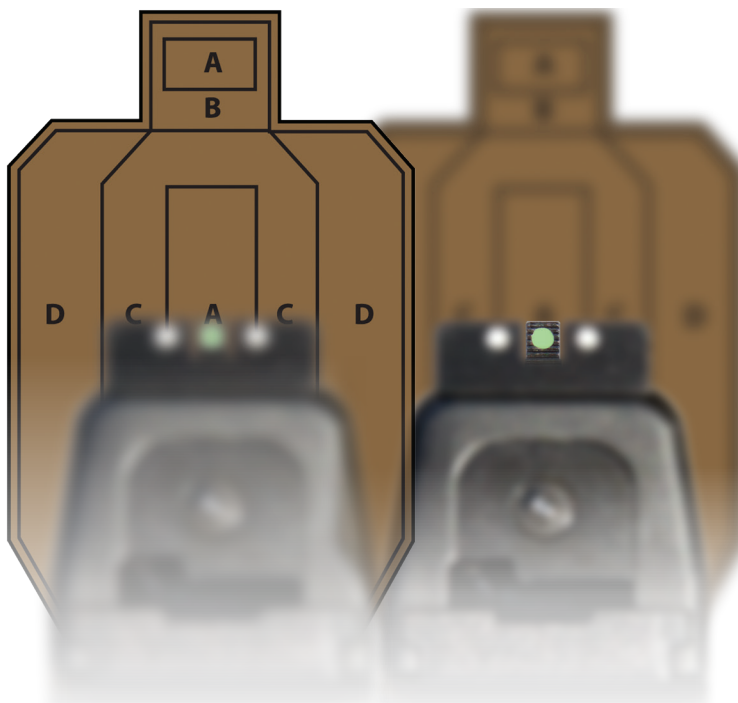
*Violent attacks will be fast, and they'll be close.
Your motor cortex will very likely lock your eyes and your focus
onto the weapon in the attacker's hands.*



*Forcing your eyes to change focus from a six-foot tall attacker to a
three-millimeter wide front sight, may simply not be possible.*

Flash Sight Picture

A “flash sight picture” occurs when the shooter is able to get a rapid “overlay” of the sights on the target, without focusing on the front sight, and without taking the time to gain perfect sight alignment. The shooter looks for a “flash” of the sights on the target, to verify proper alignment, rather than using the sights to gain proper alignment.



Sighted Fire

When the requirements for precision require that you must use sighted fire, it's important to focus on the front sight rather than the target for the most precise shot. The front sight will be in complete focus, the rear sight will be semi-blurred, and the target will be the blurriest thing in your sight picture.

That's actually okay—unlike a scored competition on the range, the goal of defensive shots isn't to place rounds into a dime-sized hole. Instead, our goal is what's referred to as defensive accuracy. Defensive accuracy can be thought of as any round that *significantly affects the attacker's ability to continue his attack*. Defensive accuracy doesn't mean that we need to place our shots in the same dime-sized hole that we might go for when we're trying to impress our friends at the range, but it also means that we can't simply “spray and pray,” with no regard for where our shots land. The great news is that even when using unsighted fire, our accuracy can still be amazingly impressive at the close distances (with nearly ninety percent falling between 9–15 feet) that would typically accompany a violent attack. Working up the scale from speed to accuracy, let's take a look at each of the three methods of target alignment one at a time.

UNSIGHTED FIRE

Point or “Intuitive” shooting doesn't discard the idea of alignment, it simply makes the pistol's muzzle an extension of the arms and hands, and points the fully extended arms and hands at the target. Think of this as no different than how you'd extend your arm and point your finger at *any* object. At the close distances that would typically accompany an attack, you'd have no problem accurately pointing at an object much smaller than the size of a human being. As mentioned in previous topic, the Isosceles stance enables point shooting by its nature—with the arms at full extension, the barrel of the firearm is pointed directly at the target. In other words, the firearm becomes an extension of our arms and hands—where they point, the gun points. When using this method, my advice is to focus on the *exact spot* where you want your rounds to land, rather than focusing on

the entire target. Just like pointing your finger at a spot on the wall is more specific than pointing at the entire wall, focusing on a spot on the target will enable more accurate shooting. Speaking of accuracy, the average person's margin of error with point shooting will deviate by only a few degrees from his or her natural point of aim, allowing for tight shot groups at 9–15 feet, and even tighter groups at closer distances. Finally, think about point shooting in the same way you “shoot” a squirt gun—you don't use the squirt gun's sights and yet, more often than not, you can hit your “target” center of mass.

FLASH SIGHT PICTURE

When the situation you find yourself in pushes the requirements away from speed and toward accuracy, it may be necessary to use your firearm's sights to achieve a more precise shot. For the *most* accurate shot, three indexes must be aligned—the front sight, the rear sight, and the target. But as mentioned, the automated responses experienced during a violent attack may literally force your eyes to lock on the attacker, making it difficult (or impossible) to focus on the front sight. However, if you've trained to elevate the firearm up into your line-of-sight, it may be possible to at least gain what's referred to as a “flash sight picture.” Put simply, a flash sight picture occurs when the shooter is able to get a rapid “overlay” of the sights on the target, without focusing on the front sight, and without taking the time to gain perfect sight alignment. A flash sight picture will have the target in perfect focus, with the front sight and rear sight both visible (but out of focus) on the target. Said another way, the shooter looks for a “flash” of the sights on the target to *verify* proper alignment, rather than using the sights to

attain proper alignment. As mentioned earlier, it's important to look at the exact spot where you want the round to impact. Then, when the firearm is elevated into your line of sight, a "flash sight picture" occurs (the front and rear sights overlay the spot that you want to shoot) and the trigger is pressed.

SIGHTED FIRE

If your brain allows it, the most precise shot will require that you switch your focus from the target (where the brain and eyes will want to focus), to the front sight. This is the best method to ensure proper sight alignment. When focused on the front sight, it will be in complete focus, the rear sight will be semi-blurred, and the target will be the blurriest thing in your sight picture. When targets are up close (9—15 feet), misaligned sights are more forgiving, but as your target pushes out beyond typical attack distances, even an alignment error of 1/16 of an inch will translate to more than 12-inches of error at 50 feet. Double the error in sight alignment (or double the distance), and you'll double the error on target.

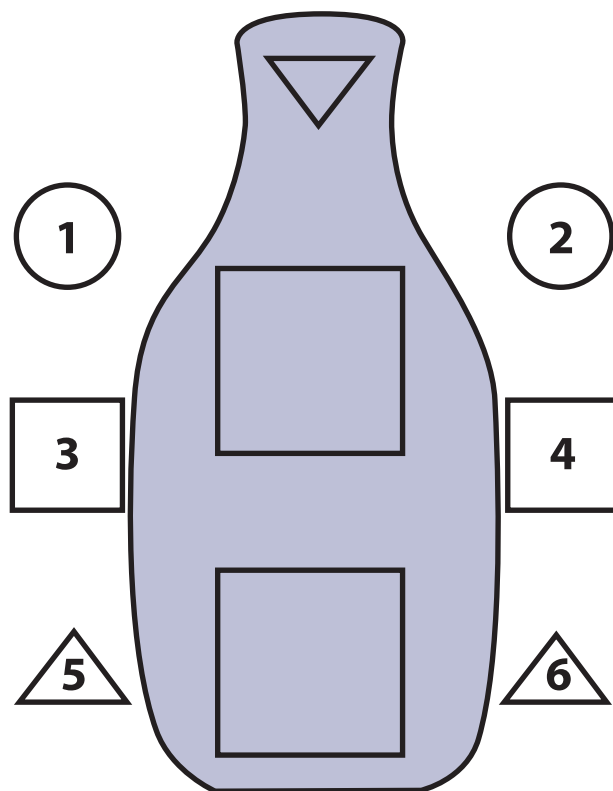
RANGE EXERCISES

Reading about accurately putting rounds on target is one thing, but proving it out on the range is another. The problem is, most range exercises have one thing in common—they're usually not timed; and the typical goal is to make as small a hole as possible to impress your friends; and to make you feel good about yourself, your firearm choice, and your grasp of the shooting fundamentals. To push my students beyond that comfort level, I typically recommend a balance of range exercises—ones that push the students toward the speed end of the spectrum, ones that push them toward the accuracy end of the spectrum, and ones that force a balance between speed and accuracy. Two of my favorites are the "Aim Small/Miss Small" and the "SEB" drill.

THE "AIM SMALL, MISS SMALL" DRILL

In the movie "The Patriot," Mel Gibson's character advised one of his sons to "Aim Small, Miss Small." While I normally don't look to the movies for shooting tips, in this case, it's good advice. Like golfers have known for decades, training on a smaller cup while putting, produces greater accuracy when presented with a larger target. That same, "Aim Small, Miss Small" theory applies to shooting accuracy. To run this drill, the shooter starts from the low or high ready position, and fires a single round at the back of any target. The shooter then fires strings of two to five rounds at the hole he or she just made.

Goal: This exercise is designed to force an intense concentration on accuracy by making the "target" no larger than a bullet hole. Many shooters will allow their degree of "slop" to be dictated by how large their target is, so the "Aim Small, Miss Small" drill is designed to force extra attention on precision.



THE "SEB" DRILL

The "SEB" Drill is my favorite speed and accuracy drill, taught to me by Rob Pincus from I.C.E. Training Company. Starting from the holster or from the low or high ready position, the shooter will fire on command of an assistant at an SEB target. The assistant will vary the commands between calls of "Up!" and one of the numbers (such as "Two!") On a call of "Up" the shooter will fire at the large square in the high center of the silhouette, and on the command of a number, the shooter will fire at the appropriately-numbered shape surrounding the large silhouette. The assistant can choose to call more commands of "Up" or more commands of the numbered shapes, in order to vary the shooter's need to balance speed with accuracy.

Goal: This exercise will force the shooter to vary his or her balance of speed and accuracy on the same target and within the same exercise.

Things That a Coach Can Watch For: Watch for shooters attempting to shoot the smaller, numbered targets with the same speed that they use to shoot the larger square in the silhouette. If they are consistently missing the smaller targets, they'll need to slow those shots down. On the other hand, if they are shooting with a consistent speed for the large and small targets and consistently hitting each target, they can afford to speed up their shots on the larger square.

The trigger finger should fall naturally on the trigger, with the trigger centered between the fingertip and first knuckle, or nestled within the crease of the first knuckle. If the finger doesn't fall naturally in this range, the grips are too big or too small.

Lesson Four:

TRIGGER CONTROL

IN LESSON ONE, I pointed out that since dynamic critical incidents are usually fast, they're usually close, and when rounds are fired, multiple rounds are usually fired, that it stands to reason that the more rapidly and accurately we place rounds on target, the faster the violent attack will end. If a proper grip and full arm extension solves half of that equation, then the second half of the equation is solved by a smooth and efficient trigger cycle.

You'll notice I said trigger "cycle" rather than trigger "press." That's because in order to deliver multiple rounds quickly, you'll not only need to efficiently press the trigger to the rear, you will also need to efficiently and smoothly release the trigger to its reset point, before once again firing the gun.

TRIGGER BREAK POINT

Where many students get tripped up in learning a smooth trigger cycle is because they haven't built their firearm's break point or reset point into their "muscle memory" (actually, the neural pathways in the cerebellum). Without knowing exactly

THIS AIN'T CAMP TOMAHAWK

Back in Boy Scouts, I was taught that for accurate shooting (from the prone position, with sandbag support), I should breathe in, let it part way out, hold it, and then slowly *squeeeeee* the trigger in order to avoid anticipating the recoil. While that worked at Camp Tomahawk, it's not going to work in the chaos of a violent attack with adrenaline screaming through your body, and an attacker just seconds from reaching you, or already upon you. In the time it would take you to "breathe in and let it part way out..." the fight might be over, yet many training organizations continue to teach the same type of trigger cycle for their defensive handgun courses as they do for their basic firearms familiarization courses or their hunter safety courses, and that's a mistake. New shooters (especially new hunters) are often taught that the trigger should be *squeeeezed*, and that the shooter should be "surprised" when the gun fires in order to avoid anticipating the recoil. While that might work from a prone position with sandbag support, it's bad advice for defensive shooting, most importantly, because an attacker can cover 10 feet or more for every second that you take to slowly squeeze the trigger. Secondly, trying to avoid anticipating the recoil causes you to, well, anticipate the recoil.

Wherever the trigger is placed, the finger must be pressed STRAIGHT to the rear so that muzzle alignment is not disturbed.

where the break point is (the point at which the gun will fire) shooters might begin their trigger press smoothly, and then "jerk" the trigger in the final stages of the trigger press. In other words, the shooter is *guessing* where the break point is, rather than *knowing* where it is, which can cause the shot to pull in the direction of the shooting hand.



At Rest
The trigger is fully forward.



Break Point
The point at which the striker is released,
and the gun fires.



Reset Point
The trigger resets at this point,
and can be pressed again, without letting the trigger
travel all the way forward to the rest position.

THE "TEN-TO-ONE" DRILL

To avoid the trigger "jerk" problem, the "Ten-to-the-One" drill is designed to force an intense concentration on learning exactly where a pistol's break point is, and to keep the trigger press nice and smooth from the trigger's rest position to the break point where the pistol will fire, without jerking the trigger. When conducting this exercise, students begin to realize that when they maintain a solid grip and flexed wrists and arms (as discussed in the lesson on "grip"), the trigger finger can be pressed smoothly, but *deliberately* to the rear, without affecting the alignment on the target. That is, nothing will move except for the trigger finger.

To run this exercise, the shooter establishes a proper grip and full arm extension, and aligns their muzzle to the target. With the trigger finger on the trigger, the shooter will slowly press the trigger while their assistant counts down from ten to one. When the assistant reaches "one," the student should have reached the trigger's break point, and the gun should fire—not before, and not after. After warming up, the assistant will speed up the drill with the commands, "Ten-to-the-five, four, three, two, one!" Eventually the coach will speed up the count so that the trigger press occurs in less than one second.

TRIGGER RESET

Without knowing exactly where the trigger's reset point is (the point at which the trigger will reset, and may once again be pressed to the rear), shooters will typically allow the trigger finger to travel much too far forward (sometimes even off of the trigger itself), resulting in slower follow-on shots, and a tendency to "slap" the trigger on subsequent rounds, disrupting target alignment.

The reset point of a trigger is easily identifiable by a tactile and audible "click" as the trigger is traveling forward. At that reset point, the trigger can once again be pressed to the rear, instead of allowing it to travel all of the way forward. You'll find dramatic differences in how far forward the trigger must travel before it resets when comparing different types of firearm actions, so you'll need to learn the reset point for your particular carry gun of choice. While practicing trigger reset should definitely be part of your dry firing exercises (or the next two exercises as explained in this section), I've found that one of the most effective ways of demonstrating when a proper trigger reset is *not* being performed, is to have an assistant videotape you during a range exercise. Most shooters are surprised to find out that not only are they allowing the trigger to travel all the way forward, in many cases, the trigger finger may be traveling so far forward, that it literally comes completely off the trigger, even bumping up against the triggerguard itself. That's inefficient, and doesn't meet the goal of quickly delivering rounds on target.

THE "PUSH YOUR LIMIT" DRILL

I learned about the "Push your Limit" drill from Rob Pincus, who designed the drill to not only build the neural pathways for knowing exactly where your trigger's break point is, but to also build the pathways for knowing where your trigger's reset point is, and to bring the two parts of the process together in an ever accelerating series of stages. The exercise is broken into three stages, with the first string of fire allowing the shooter to concentrate on the trigger's break point and reset point separately. The second string of fire will force the shooter to bring the two parts of the process together, and the third string of fire forces the shooter to push the trigger cycle time to the limits of his or her ability.



The setup for the “Rubber Band Exercise” is simple—it’s the same setup you’d use when shooting a rubber band across the room. In this case however, you’ll simply flex your trigger finger from a starting point of 90-degrees, and end with it at approximately 60-degrees. Concentrating on a smooth, even “trigger cycle,” will build those neural pathways, and will translate to the range and dynamic critical incidents.

Stage One: Using an SEB target (as shown on page 14) at a distance of 5 to 7 feet, the shooter will fire five rounds at target #1 (the circle in the upper left hand corner) on a count of “one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand,” etc., up to “five-one-thousand.” This will require a shot fired approximately every second.

Stage Two: Same exercise as above, into target #2 (the circle in the upper right hand corner) on a count of “one and two and three and four and five.” This will require a shot fired approximately every half-second.

Stage Three: Same exercise as above, into target #3 (the square in the middle left) on a count of “1, 2, 3, 4, 5” as fast as the shooter can count and fire rounds. This will require all five shots to be fired in approximately one second.

If the shooter was able to keep all 15 shots on the targets, the distance can be increased by 3 or 4 feet and the exercise repeated.

THE “RUBBER BAND EXERCISE”

While the two previous exercises require live firearms and ammunition, this last exercise can actually be done while sitting in front of your TV set at home. Like the “Push your Limit” drill, the “Rubber Band Exercise” is designed to build up muscle memory for a full trigger cycle from start to finish. Since a rubber band offers smooth resistance with no increase or decrease in resistance, it affords a simple method to practice your trigger cycle over and over again, while concentrating on a smooth trigger finger movement. My suggestion is to start this exercise by performing each trigger “cycle” by counting “one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand,” etc., which will require a “cycle” approximately every second. You can then pick up the speed with a count of, “one and two and three and four and five.” This will require a trigger “cycle” approximately every half-second. When doing this exercise, you should release your finger at the same speed and smoothness as you use to press it to the rear.

CHIEF INSTRUCTOR FOR USCCA EDUCATION & TRAINING:

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**"I said, please,
my kids are
here ... please
don't shoot!"**

Forced to Pull the Trigger
to Defend His Children...

David Jackson, USCCA Member

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.

When the smoke cleared, David's gun was confiscated, and he was taken to the police station for questioning. With his USCCA Membership, David was able to get connected with an experienced criminal defense attorney AND get the funds he needed to replace his permanently confiscated gun. After all, ***doing the right thing shouldn't cost you everything...***



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