

Move off of the line of attack.



At a Massad Ayoob Group seminar, students learn handgun retention techniques.

DEFENSIVE HANDGUN TRAINING FOR THE NON-MARTIAL ARTIST

[BY BRUCE N. EIMER, Ph.D.]

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed. — The Second Amendment (ratified 1791)

There is a famous old saying that brought up to date goes something like this: “God made man and woman, but Colonel Sam Colt made them equal.” In other words, a violent world without the legal individual ownership of firearms simply favors the physically big and strong over the phys-

ically small and weak. The right to keep and bear defensive firearms makes it possible for the small and weak to equalize the playing field. The purpose of this article is to discuss the implications of this well established fact in light of current training trends.

Seasoned street fighters and mar-

tial artists clearly have the advantage in physical confrontations. However, many people simply do not have the physical abilities or opportunities to learn to fight hand to hand, or with knives, sticks, or what have you. Nowadays, there appears to be a disturbing trend raising the standard that people who own firearms for personal defense must be able to do all these other things as well. This trend appears to be setting up expectations that may not be realistic or reasonable for everyone who chooses to exercise their



above: Model experts such as champion shooter Todd Jarrett to get your basics down.

right: Incorporate retention into your draw from the holster so you don't give your gun away.



Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms for personal defense. Perhaps defensive firearm instructors need to recognize this in their objectives and training curricula for non-warriors—people who either are too physically challenged to learn martial arts or who simply are uninterested in devoting the necessary time and effort to study various combative disciplines.

The whole point of having a gun is to be able to defend yourself effectively against persons who are bigger or stronger, armed or unarmed, and who would use their greater size or strength to terrorize you or do you harm.

TEN DEFENSIVE HANDGUN PRINCIPLES FOR NON-MARTIAL ARTISTS

You do not have to be a martial artist to be a competent defensive

handgunner. However, just being able to shoot accurately is not sufficient either. To be capable of defending yourself effectively if deadly force is warranted, you must study certain topics. If you are planning to enroll in a basic to intermediate defensive handgun class, make sure the class will cover these essential principles of armed personal defense. They all fall into the category of *tactics* and you should be studying tactics from the beginning. Tactics are not just for SWAT cops. Tactics mean having street sense, tact, perception, insight and judgment. In a fight, the combatant with the most smarts has the advantage. It is possible for the determined, wily and wise senior citizen to gain the upper hand against the young and not so wise aggressor.

1. Awareness and boundary management are your most important tactics. Good training teaches you



Shooting straight with your .38 will beat the bad guy's jive with his .45



PRACTICE USING COVER AND CONCEALMENT.

to avoid having to use your training. However, if you have to use your training, you want to be good enough to win. So train yourself to see trouble coming and to get away while you still can. Keep abreast of the latest criminal scams and ways to avoid being ensnared. Be aware of your personal space and very protective of it. Don't let strangers and acquaintances breach the boundaries of your personal space. Always look for avenues of escape. Do not permit yourself to be cornered or surprised. Always keep at least one hand free—as when you are carrying groceries through a parking lot.

2. Distance is your friend. Typically, the farther you are from an attacker, the safer you are. Distance favors the skilled pistolero. Distance also makes it more difficult for you to be injured or killed by a violent attacker with a contact weapon such as a blade or bludgeon. Learn how to shoot and move off the line of attack. If you stay planted, you will be.

However, when you move away from an attacker, do not just back step, because you are likely to get overrun or trip over your own feet. Move to the side, diagonally, or in a zigzag pattern unpredictably. The goal is to move away from the arms and hands of your attacker.

3. Mindset. Your mind is your most dangerous and powerful weapon. As a senior citizen, use your “wise mind.” The late great Colonel Jeff Cooper wrote the classic tome about mindset, *Principles of Personal Defense*. In order to be ready, you must be aware of your environment's subtle cues, willing to act decisively according to the demands of the moment, and prepared to act. You must have the necessary skills and equipment, including a reliable gun and well broken-in holster, to get the job done. And you must be willing to use whatever level of force is necessary to stop the attack. If you are truly prepared to turn the attack back on your attacker aggressively, ruthlessly,

and with speed, my bet will be on you. As my friend, John Farnam of Defense Training International says, “Those who dither, die.” Those who act decisively and aggressively are most likely to win the fight and get to go home at the end of the day.

4. Choose the right handgun. In every defensive handgun class I teach, there are students with handguns that do not fit them. If a handgun is too big or small for your hands, you will have difficulty shooting it well. Manufacturers make handguns with adjustable back straps and grips to accommodate the hands that will be shooting them. Therefore, when you select a handgun for purchase, try out different guns. Look for one with the optimal grip size and angle, trigger reach and reset, trigger weight and length of pull, thinness or thickness, heft, and recoil characteristics. Consider choosing a caliber powerful enough to get the job done (at least .380 ACP in a pistol, or .38 Special in a

revolver), but that you can control and shoot accurately.

5. Learn and practice gun retention. You have to hold onto your gun! If a bad guy tries to disarm you, and he is successful, he is most likely going to try to murder you with your own weapon. You need not be a martial artist to learn handgun retention techniques. A good basic to intermediate defensive handgun class should teach you how to hold to your gun and how to thwart a gun grab. Gun retention also begins



A .45 in your trained hands is a force multiplier that could save your life.



This Don Hume Copy II Outside the Waist Band Holster with retention strap and fore and aft snap-on belt loops is easy to put on and take off.

with a good concealment holster that rides tight to your body, cannot be seen, and has good retention properties. It is helpful if the holster is easy to put on and take off, especially for arthritis-ridden people with

stiffness from bad backs and hips.

6. Focus on doing the basics well. All advanced tactical handgun skills are an evolution of the fundamentals. You must master the fundamentals of marksmanship, and a good basic defensive handgun class should cover them thoroughly: proper grip, stance, sight alignment, sight picture, trigger control, follow through, smooth presentation of the handgun from the concealment holster and safe return to the holster when the threat is gone.

Administrative loading and unloading of a handgun, reducing handgun stoppages and malfunctions, and emergency reloading must also be covered.

7. Practice using cover and concealment. Survival is not favored by a shoot-out on an empty street at high noon. If you want to survive and get to go home, you must be prepared to effectively use cover and concealment. Wherever you go, tactical awareness and readiness require that you note where there is cover (things that stop bullets) and where there is concealment (places you could hide from view), so that you can use cover and concealment if bullets begin to fly.

8. The gift of fear. Fear is a signal to be heeded. Heed it. Like physical pain in your body (and fear is felt in the body), fear tells you that something may be wrong, or about to go wrong. Ignore it at your own peril. Heroes feel fear,

but they act anyway.

9. Use all your senses and motor skills. Experienced gunfighters (seasoned law enforcement officers) have different gaze patterns than rookies. They notice more and do so more quickly than do the rookies. Visual scanning of your immediate environment should become a habit. Learn to do it efficiently. Learn to focus on what can hurt you—such as a potential as-

sailant's hands, as opposed to his eyes. Learn to listen and not just hear. In his Lethal Force Institute, Massad Ayoob teaches students how to pick up on the precursors of someone who is about to become aggressive or go for a gun. Learn and practice motor routines that can be carried out efficiently under stressful conditions. These typically involve gross motor as opposed to fine motor skills.

10. Learn the Law. This point needs little elaboration. You don't want to get caught carrying illegally because in most jurisdictions, it is a felony and a straight pass to losing your gun rights. Additionally, you must become very intimately knowledgeable about the moral and legal standards for the use of all levels of force, including deadly force.

In conclusion, the whole point of having a gun is to be able to defend yourself effectively against those bigger or stronger (armed or unarmed) who would use their greater size or strength to terrorize you or do you harm. You don't have to become a martial artist. However, you must learn the fundamentals and tactical common sense. ★

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