

Pistol Shooting: The Art (Part 3)

by Edwin C. Hall

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Will you look at this? The editor printed another one of my works. I hope that means you're finding them useful, or at least entertaining. Let's recap a little. Why? Because I want to and I'm writing this. I mentioned a few things like attitude and varying understanding in the first part. I also brought up comfort, consistency and working with the sight picture. Then in part 2 I got real detailed about the trigger and working to keep a good active sight picture. Remember all that? I didn't. I had to look back to see what I had written. Anyway, these are a few things that I try to work on regularly. Which brings me to the first point for this month's edition.

All through my shooting years, about 11 for pistol, I rediscovered many details that I shouldn't have had to. Every single time, I said to myself, "I should have written that down." When you find a particular grip for a certain gun that works, write down the details about it. When you find that bringing your focus to the rear sight first and then back to the front works better, write it down. When you find out there are 5 clicks of difference between 50 and 25 yards, write it down. Better yet in this instance; mark your adjustment legibly for 50 and 25. When you discover that raising your arm is better than adjusting your wrist, to bring the front sight up or the dot from the bottom of the scope, write it down. I could go on and on, but I'll tell a brief story instead.

When I was in Germany, I shot my Ruger .22 quite a bit and did OK. Then one day I took my S&W .22 out to the range and found it shot even better. So I took it to the next match and did terrible with it. I immediately put it away and went back to my Ruger. For two weeks, including an important match, I couldn't hit anything until I discovered that I had been trying the grip I had used with the S&W. As soon as I regripped in the "old" way, I was back in the center, but it was still too late for that year of competition. If I had written down the particulars of how I held it, my finger placement, etc. I think I could have swapped back with much better results. Well let's move on because I know everybody's already taking lots of notes.

I'm going to bounce to some areas this time that you may find a little different from other articles. I like to hit on the purely mental side quite a bit. If you're disappointed, sorry, I'll get back to hands on next time. I know you've heard at least some of this from the "masters" all ready, but if I can say it in a way that makes sense and helps, then I'm glad you saw it again here. This first item has to do with those flyers in among those good strings.

For many of us, we start out flinging lead down at that huge piece of cardboard with gigantic circles on it and get really frustrated when very few touch the black, let alone the X. Then after we get a little better, we start getting mad because we had 8 good hits in the black, but 2 were out in the 6. Then there are those other guys who are so upset because they shot a 98.

During your shooting "career" your scores will vary, sometimes greatly, from match to match. It is much more important to step back away from the individual matches and look at the overall trends. Here's why: Let's say your average for Timed Fire is 80. (For those who are not there yet, please put your average into this.) That average got to be 80 by shooting a lot of targets below as well as above. When

you shot those targets above 80, you knew that you had figured out what to do right. When you shot the ones below 80 you tended to doubt your ability and searched for the reasons you "couldn't shoot." What most likely happened here was just odds and averages. Sometimes you will have good strings and sometimes bad, but they average out.

If you can ride through a downswing, without getting emotionally involved in it, you will most likely find that you end up near your average in the long run. What happens more frequently is that we get mad, try to drastically change things to "see if that might work," or just keep trying to figure out what's wrong. Sometimes there is something wrong, but if you spend your time searching for it, you're wasting effort you could be putting into figuring out what you do when it's right. Let's pick at this in even more detail. You just shot three beautiful 9s. Then one went into the six. Why? Don't try to figure it out! Never try to figure out flyers! Try to figure out how you got those others to make it into the 9. Ask yourself, "How can I shoot an X?" and see what happens. Then see how your target measures up against your average. Better yet, look at the bigger picture. Check on your overall average, but remember, to keep your average, you will shoot below as well as above it.

Let's digress a moment to those flyers. You should never try to figure them out, bad or good. Mentally throw them away. They have no interest for you. What is of interest is any grouping. If you have a group in the 8 and 9 ring at 7:00 and a perfect X that you tried real hard to get, that X was probably a flyer. Even if it wasn't, that group is still much more important. If you have a group, you're demonstrating consistency. Throw the flyers away!

It looks like I'm about out of space for this month so let me summarize a bit. I started out with the importance of writing down bits of information. Remember that some of that information will contradict earlier entries. That's OK; it shows growth. Next I touched on odds and averages and the need to ride through the downswings. Then I tried to establish the importance of groups to the total exclusion of flyers. I know I mentioned a lot about actual shooting, but I want you back in front of that wall when you're not at the range. OK? See you at the league.