

Pistol Shooting: The Art (Part 7)

by Edwin C. Hall

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As I mentioned last time, these articles are a bit behind due to the lag between getting them out, the breaking into separate parts, and the printing time. This particular one is being written a little after I came back from Camp Perry. I successfully got points for every shot downrange, and as much as they wanted to, I kept them from naming me the National Champion. With that out of the way, let's get into the meat for this month.

The single most important thing you need to do is develop proper trigger control. Everybody gives different numbers, but here I'm going to say 95% of the physical part of shooting well is in the proper use of the trigger. The other 5% are all those hundreds of little extras. (Those used to help set up the proper trigger.)

The text book description is something like, "Bring the trigger straight to the rear in a manner that doesn't disturb the sight alignment." This leaves a lot of room for misinterpretation, or at least ambiguity. It doesn't really say how, it merely gives one part of a huge endeavor. Yes, the trigger must come straight back, but how do we get it there? Shall we just yank it back? I do that a lot. It doesn't quite give me the results I'm looking for when I do. No, I guess we'll have to delve a little further into this trigger trouble.

How many adverbs can we come up with to describe the movement of the trigger? Straight? Smooth? Constant? Increasing? What about constantly increasing? I'm sure there is a continuous supply of terms. How about a visual representation. Let's play. Get a pitcher of water, a small glass, a butter knife and two forks. Place the knife across the forks so that it has one of its flat sides level. Balance the glass centered on the flat side of the knife. Pour the water into the glass at a steady rate. Notice how the water rises in the glass and think of the rising level as the rising pressure on the trigger. It shouldn't be too difficult to fill the glass without it falling over. As the water overflows the top of the glass it represents the hammer falling. Now look back at how the water increased in level. If you poured at a constant rate, the level rose at a smooth and constant rate respectively.

Next, fill the glass down with air. (You can't empty it. Air gets in when you remove the water.) Now just dump some water back in with short but plentiful torrents. Notice how it can knock the glass over and the water gets away before it is supposed to? Notice that it doesn't always. (Sometimes we get a good shot from a jerk.) This splashing is like improper trigger manipulation. This is what we don't want. In fact, you can fill the glass rather quickly with a smooth rapid flow. What we want is a steady increase in pressure until the hammer falls. How do we accomplish this great feat?

By bringing the trigger back with no hesitation. Expect the round to fire. Know that it will fire. Once this is established, align the sights and do not allow them to misalign, no matter where they travel on the target. If you hesitate for any reason, if the trigger finger stops its momentum, if it doesn't feel right, let off the pressure and then put the gun down. Never start to put the gun down without first releasing the trigger.

There is a very subtle difference between a good trigger pull with a surprise break and an almost good trigger pull with what we think is a surprise break. You know those shots that just would not break until that exact instant you moved out of the black? You helped it at that last instant. I've done that a lot. I've finally realized that I was hesitating and then helping it to fire. You probably don't believe that you're doing it, but take a close look. Actually, take a close feel, and you can notice the difference between a good straight clean pull from slack take-up to firing, with no hesitation, and one which starts and stops several times before it is finally helped to fire.

How do you get to that correct trigger? Remember when you dry fire how you can put the gun up and pull the trigger right back? With no hesitation or flinch or whatever. That's what you need to do with rounds at the range. Put the gun up and bring back the trigger. Know that it will fire. Align the sights. If you hesitate, stop everything and restart. Constantly visualize bringing the trigger back in that way, even while you're shooting. Know that it is going to go, "Bang!" Accept that it is going to go, "Bang!" Keep the sights aligned until it does.

Franklin C. Green was, I believe, the only Air Force shooter to win the national championship title. He has also made some audio tapes on shooting. In one of them I heard recently, he described aligning the sights and then manipulating the trigger as being backwards. He claims you must initiate the trigger and then put attention on aligning the sights. He says that otherwise you'll go back and forth between the two. He further says, the trigger has to be a continuous motion and can be initiated and then allowed to continue without having to divert your attention to it again.

If you can get the trigger to come back without hesitation, you will find that not only do the shots break well, but they will quicken; a great help in rapid fire. If you can develop a trigger pull as described by Frank Green, you can spend your time keeping the sights aligned until the shots are downrange. If you think trigger, then sights, then trigger, then sights, you are probably hesitating every time you switch back to the sights. Start the trigger, keep it moving and put your attention on the sights. Come on out to the league and give it a try with us. Hope to see you there.