

Defensive Strategies



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In the last issue, we began to present a set of range exercises that provide good practice for those folk who have handguns for defense, or who want to practice “just in case.” These exercises come from one of AWARE’s classes, Self-Protection with Handguns. (AWARE, Arming Women Against Rape and Endangerment, is the nonprofit organization where I have volunteered for many years.)

To continue where we left off last issue, set yourself up with an IPSC cardboard target or other person-sized target at 7 yards, which is a typical self-defense distance.

Before you start shooting, come up on target and dry fire a few times, returning to a neutral position between shots. Remember the trigger discipline we stressed in the last issue. Your finger should be on the trigger *only* after your sights are on target *and* you have made the decision to shoot. At all other times, your trigger finger should be firmly pressed against the side

Range Exercises for Self-Defense Practice (Part 2)

of your gun, not in midair within the trigger guard. The moment you have finished firing, before lowering the gun, your finger should come off the trigger and rest along the side of the gun.

Do you remember whether you favored the isosceles position or the Chapman? If not, shoot a few rounds from each to help you remember. Now, let’s continue with some more range exercises.

Exercise: Wall/Corner (High Cover).

In a building, you might have to shoot from behind a doorway. Outside, you might have to shoot around the corner of a building. In both situations, you want to be able to use the surface as cover for as much of your body as possible, while still being able to see your target well enough to shoot it if necessary. To simulate a wall, we staple an IPSC target to one of the upright posts at the shooting bench. You might have to get creative to figure out what to use as a “wall” where you shoot, but any big piece of paper, cardboard or even piece of fabric can be an imaginary wall. You aren’t supposed to shoot through it, but it must be a material that won’t cause a problem if a round does go into it. Arrange it so that you will be able to stand and shoot around either the right or left side.

Stand several feet back from the

corner of the wall. (“Hugging the wall” is a big mistake. It impedes your view, and your ability to move, it doesn’t make you any safer, and it encourages you to put your muzzle through the doorway or around the corner where someone could grab your gun.) Start with your body totally behind the wall, so you can’t see the target, and the target can’t see you, either.

Use the Chapman arm position, because the isosceles would expose too much of your body. To shoot around the left side, put your left foot forward as if to touch the wall if shooting from the left edge of the barricade; put your right foot forward as if to touch the wall if shooting around the right side. Rotate the gun 45 degrees away from the barricade. This is particularly important when you are shooting from the left side of the wall and with an auto pistol, to keep the ejected brass from bouncing back into the gun and causing a jam. Aim by looking over the bridge of your nose with your dominant eye. This minimizes your exposure to incoming fire. It isn’t a very comfortable position, but you won’t be there long. Fire as many rounds as you want, then retreat behind the “wall” and stay behind that cover while you speed reload, and then reengage the target. Do this from both sides of the wall.

Exercise: Low Cover.

In the real world, cover comes in all shapes, sizes, and heights. If the cover you have to use is the engine of a car, or a fireplug, you obviously cannot stand behind it. You need to kneel. On the range, this can be a dangerous operation when combined with drawing from a holster. If you use a holster, always draw before kneeling, and always stand before you holster your gun. If you aren't using a holster, be sure the gun is safely pointed downrange before you kneel, and open the action before you stand up. It is especially important to keep your finger off the trigger and the muzzle pointed in a safe direction before, during, and after you kneel. If you have any trouble kneeling or standing up again, don't bother with this exercise; it is safer to stay on your feet than risk an unintentional discharge as you stagger down or up again.

Dry fire the whole exercise a few times before you try live fire, and skip the speed reloads here. Just draw, or bring the gun to low ready, kneel, fire a few rounds, scan, open the action and stand (or keep the gun safely pointed while you stand and then holster).

Exercise: First Shot Speed.

If you have a timer, set it for a variable start time. When it beeps, raise your gun and fire one shot ASAP. When you are satisfied with your speed and accuracy, start firing two shots. See if you can consistently fire two accurate shots in 1.2 seconds or less.

Exercise: Multiple Targets.

Bad guys don't always come alone. Set up two targets, about 10 feet apart. Most police instructors agree that the best strategy when faced with multiple assailants is to shoot each person once, then go back and shoot again anyone who is still a threat. So, issue

your challenge, step off the line of force (particularly important with multiple targets), and shoot each target once as quickly as you can. If you weren't happy with the hits you think you got, fire at the target again.

Exercise: Simulated Stress.

Under stress, hands shake. Have you ever wondered how well you would shoot if you were trembling? Here's how to find out. To induce some additional stress, walk up to within 6' of your target. It will look bigger and more threatening than ever before. Draw your gun and aim at the center of mass of your target. Make your hands tremble, shaking in all directions for 6" or so. That's a very realistic simulation of extreme stress. While shaking, fire your gun to empty. Be sure you don't shake, stop, and shoot. Keep shooting while you are shaking. Look at the result. You won't win any awards for accuracy, but the shots are in the man-sized target, aren't they? That should make you less worried about your accuracy under stress.

Exercise: Gun and Phone.

Imagine you are at home, or on the street, and a situation seems to be arising in which you might have to use your gun. Or maybe not. Maybe the police can get there in time. You would like to call the police, but you would also like to have your gun ready to use if necessary. Which should you do first, draw your gun or call 911? Unless you know that you will have plenty of time, get your gun first in case you need it instantly, then get the phone and make the emergency call. Using a cell phone requires both hands, normally, so you will have to put your gun down in a safe way, use the phone, put the phone down, and then go back to your gun. Don't try to do either operation one-handed; that's unrealistic, and could be ex-

tremely dangerous even on the range. You might have to try several times to develop a method that allows you to get the police en route and your gun at the ready. If you try this on the range, do go through all the steps of finding, opening, and dialing your phone, but don't actually call 911; the police will not be amused by such a call, dial 888 instead. Notice how much attention it takes away from your target to use the phone.

All right, now. Didn't most of these range exercises sound both fun and worthwhile? There's really no reason not to practice a few of them every time you go to the range. There are no tests, no qualification scores to meet, just life-saving skills to practice.

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