

The Modern Technique of the Pistol  
Greg Boyce Morrison  
Jeff Cooper, Editorial Advisor

reviewed by John M. Buol Jr.  
<http://SensibleShooter.com/>

Jack Weaver was interviewed by American Handgunner magazine (May/June 2008) about how he created the Weaver Stance and the history of practical shooting. These developments led to what is known as the The Modern Technique of the Pistol. Greg Morrison, under advisement from Jeff Cooper, wrote a book of the same name that stands as the definitive text of the subject.

## Overview

This 1991 effort codifies the then-current doctrine of defensive pistol as taught by the American Pistol Institute (API), now under different management and called Gunsite Ranch.

The forward begins with "The Evolution of the Modern Technique", as described by co-creator and chief proponent, Jeff Cooper. Dissatisfied with handgun technique of of the time, Cooper attempted to improve handgun technique by helping put forth an "Advanced Combat Pistol Course" just after World War II.

Upon separation from service, and free from bureaucratic restriction, he formed several shooting clubs and ran a number of different competitive venues with the help of several like-minded marksmen, mostly from the civilian sector. Over the course of time, consistent winners and their technique began to surface in these varying, freestyle matches. These events would lead to the creation of the International Practical Shooting Confederation and lay the foundation for a number of practical shooting disciplines. The best, most consistent techniques of the day were codified into the "Modern Technique of the Pistol." and Cooper founded API to teach it.

The Modern Technique consists of three components, or the "Combat Triad":

1. Marksmanship
2. Gun Handling
3. Mind-Set

The book begins with Mind-Set, which includes the "thinking side" of the triad, ranging from safety procedures, combat mind-set, and basic, individual tactics. A section on training psychology is added.

Gunhandling is next, which includes loading and unloading, magazine exchanges/ammunition management, the presentation (drawing), Guard (ready) position, and malfunction clearances.

Marksmanship, is comprised of Accuracy (the ability to hit), Power (wound potential, to stop the threat), and Quickness (the ability to hit before it is too late.) In addition to raw fundamentals, this includes the firing of pairs and firing from different positions, such as kneeling, prone, or with a flashlight.

The basic guidelines defines five elements:

- 1) The Weaver Stance
- 2) The Flash Sight picture
- 3) The Compressed Surprise-break
- 4) The Presentation
- 5) The Heavy-duty Self-loading pistol.

The Modern Technique was a *major* improvement in practical/defensive handgunning and cemented Cooper's deserved reputation as a shooting and firearms innovator.

It has been pointed out that Cooper and company didn't invent every element of the Modern Technique. For example, there was at least one book demonstrating a two handed, eye-level handgun stance remarkably similar to the Weaver published when Cooper would have been in his pre-teens, decades before the Modern Technique was prototyped. Old-time range masters in the law enforcement community have noted that their individual departments began using Modern Technique-like training before Cooper made a name for it and founded his school.

However, where a handful of individuals may have made a few realizations about improved defensive handgunning, Cooper and company actually *did it*. He didn't merely speculate and talk to a few colleagues, but held open events to develop, test and prove ideas, found a voice to broadcast what he learned via the gun publishing industry, and then formed a school to teach it. This caused a total shift in philosophy for defensive handgunning at all levels of law enforcement, military and civilian. Most instructors in the field are borrowing his ideas and following the example, if not copying outright.

Bottom line, this book provides a solid doctrine for the effective use of a defensive handgun. Anyone who studies and practices what is in this book, or better yet, attends a training event, will become a deadly pistolero.

### What is Bad about The Modern Technique of the Pistol

Morrison points out that "... the Modern Technique has yet to reach its zenith." If this book is an indicator, that may be due in part to API's seeming inability to grow beyond the last developments of the late 1970's. The techniques are presented as one-way-only in an antiseptically clean, almost rigid, doctrine. In other words, the book seems a bit forced and API is ignoring post-Modern Technique developments created in precisely the same crucible (practical pistol competition) from whence it was forged.

Cooper started as a freestyle innovator, bucking tradition and a fixed, dated doctrine in order to find a better way. Upon making important improvements, he and his disciples now preach a fixed, slightly dated doctrine, ignoring any freestyle innovators who buck their tradition.

For example, self-styled "martial artists" whine about the "gamey" elements and "rooney" guns sometimes found in current competition and aren't willing to look for potential improvements.

On the technique side, both marksmanship and tactical thought has progressed.

Since the early 1980's, virtually every successful practical pistol contender has used some Isosceles stance variant, finding it provides a better, and faster shooting platform. According to Modern Technique purists, that is impossible and they attribute it to light loads and gamey guns. Never mind the fact that .38 Super pistols are required to shoot the same power factor as .45 ACP (until recently, a hardball-like 175+ Power Factor) and generate ballistic performance on par with full .357 Magnum loads.

Compensators do nothing to prevent recoil but only serve to hold the muzzle down and keep the gun "flat" to increase shooter performance. And if one still can't see past that gear, then look at the Limited, Production, and IDPA shooting divisions, the places where most practical pistol shooters compete. You'll find that even the winners often shoot "Cooper approved" cartridges (.45 ACP, 10mm) and rarely shoot from Weaver. Modern Technique purists stick to their tradition while ignoring the fact that many of these shooters are accomplishing superior results.

Massad Ayoob published his "heretical" list of Modern Technique improvements for law enforcement in his 1983 book, "Stressfire", demonstrating potential problems and offering potential solutions. API's book was published seven years later, but none of that is here. The book also ignores other potentially useful close range techniques, such as Applegate-style, eye-level pointing, target focus, arms-length tuck/retention position shooting, etc.

On the equipment side, API propose very basic accompanying gear and lightly tuned 1911s. I appreciate that very much. However, one should be able to see and use potentially new gear if it offers an improvement. Note that in the 1950s and '60s, tuned 1911 .45 pistols were "rooney" guns, as few in law enforcement carried them, and the military used only rack-grade, unmodified 1920's era pistols. But today, Modern Technique purists ridicule new technology, such as optics, even though they are finding their way in law enforcement and military circles, and miniaturization may make them practical for carry pistols.

### What is Good about The Modern Technique of the Pistol

That all said, the method of defensive handgunnery as presented in this book can be quite effective. In some respects, the "Modern Technique" may be a bit out of date, at least not completely state of the art, but that isn't a huge problem. Technique is merely a means to an end.

The important thing is to learn a usable doctrine and then actually STUDY and PRACTICE it. The Modern Technique is, at worst, usable doctrine.

The best part of this book is in the Appendix, "Practice Suggestions for the API Graduate" and "Target Reading." Most books pretending to offer information on marksmanship fail utterly because they don't provide any standard of performance. How can I know if I'm shooting well if I don't have a standard for comparison? Here is the standard suggested from API:

## Practice Suggestions for the API Graduate

Target: API "Option" (similar to the old IPSC Option, but with a camouflaged coloring). A basic silhouette, 18x30 inches, with six inch shoulder cuts for the head, a 10-inch X ring and 14-inch outer ring, a four inch circle inside the six inch square head.

Use your carry gun and holster.

Part 1: Head shots.

3 yards. Single head shot, starting holstered, in 1.5 seconds.

7 yards. Single head shot, starting holstered, in 2.0 seconds.

Part 2: Mozambique drill (simulating a failure to stop)

3 yards: Fire a pair to the chest (X ring) in 1.5 seconds. Come down to Guard position, eyes on target. At a second fire command make a single head shot in 1.0 seconds. Repeat the entire drill.

7 yards: Repeat the 3 yard drill, allowing 2.0 seconds for the pair to the chest and 1.5 seconds for the head shot.

Part 3: Facing a target at 10 yards, fire a pair of hits to the chest (X-ring), starting holstered, in less than 2.0 seconds. Repeat if desired.

Part 4: Face to the right (3 o'clock) of downrange, and place yourself 10 yards from the target. Begin holstered. Turn, draw, and place two hits to the chest in 2.0 seconds. Repeat from the left (9 o'clock) and from a position where you have your back to the target (6 o'clock).

Part 5: Facing a target at 10 yards, draw and place two hits to the chest, reload, and hit twice more in 5.0 seconds.

Part 6: Quick assumption of kneeling. Facing a target at 15 yards, assume the braced kneeling position, and place two hits to the chest (X ring) on the target in 3.5 seconds. Push this drill back to 25 yards when you can.

Part 7: Quick assumption of roll over prone. Facing a target at 25 yards, assume the roll over prone position and place two hits on the target in 7.0 seconds. Push this back to 50 yards when you can. Seven seconds is still enough time, or you may wish to shorten the 25 yard time to about 5 seconds.

API's recommendation is learn to balance speed, and to not shoot faster than you can maintain all hits on the target with at least 80% X ring hits. Shooting "clean" (100% X ring hits) means you should shoot faster.

This hardly represents the pinnacle of practical pistol performance, however, any shooter who could clean this course on demand is fairly competent and more skillful than most law enforcement, military and civilian handgun owners and carriers.

## Target reading

Even a service, rack-grade pistol will shoot a golf ball sized group at typical combat distances, slow fire. Shooting faster will see that group open up, but it should be no bigger than a large grapefruit or perhaps your wide-open hand, and remain centered on the target, in the X-ring.

Groups that get abnormally large indicated that the shooter is focusing on the target, not the front sight.

12 o'clock groups indicate "heeling", pushing away with the heel of the hand at firing, or raising the front sight too high when shooting at distance. Combat zero should be 2.5 inches high at 25 yards

9 o'clock indicate the firing wrist or grip is offset to the right, or trigger is pressed wrong, or support arm is moved out and upward.

3 o'clock, too much gripping pressure and twisting to the right, often in DA auto pistols.

6 o'clock, mash instead of surprise break, or increasing firing hand pressure as the trigger is pressed. Keep separate from PIP (post ignition push) IF the hits are still good, timing will bring the gun down in recoil.

10-11 o'clock indicates a lack of followthrough, such as starting to reload too soon.

"Baja California", hurry and get it over with, down at 7-8 o'clock, indicates some combination of flinch and trigger mash.

Once again, learn a usable doctrine, study it and PRACTICE. Find a class, or a club running events that suit you and attend. You won't learn anything until you actually go out and do it.

Jack Weaver Interviewed:

<http://www.americanhandgunner.com/webblastWVR.html>

Weaver Stance history:

<http://weaverstance.com/history.htm>