



By Mike Conti

## Opposing Views: Refocusing on the Front Sight Concept, Part II

**“There are two levers which move men:  
fear and self-interest.”**

—Napoleon Bonaparte

**F**or decades, the debate has raged over the proper way to aim a pistol during a lethal force encounter. Though many individuals have chimed in on this subject over the years, two very strong and charismatic figures have come to represent the primary schools of thought that may be employed.

On one side has stood Col. Jeff Cooper, widely regarded as the father of the modern technique of the pistol, whose belief in the importance of using the sights is clearly established. On the other side stood the late Col. Rex

themselves true patriots. Yet the disparity between their beliefs remains unsettled. Far from being an innocuous subject, this debate has fueled countless arguments, and been the focus of numerous articles, books, studies and experiments.

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Applegate, whose belief in the need for point shooting skills in close quarter combat never wavered.

In addition to their life-long devotion to their individual beliefs, both of these men shared other characteristics that are, unfortunately, observed less often in today's society. They were never afraid to address critical issues and neither was timid in expressing his opinions. As veterans of World War II, both men proved

The emotional response this subject generates is understandable, for nothing less than human lives are at stake. Truth be told, many professional trainers throughout the country also have a personal stake in which technique is perceived to be correct. My intent in raising this issue yet again, however, is not to try and generate another round of arguments, or achieve any type of notoriety. My motivations here are as base as

Napoleon's description of what motivates men—fear and self-interest. My fear is of attending more funerals of police officers. My self-interest lies in my desire to avoid having others attend mine. To these ends I have devoted a great deal of time and

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effort, and I believe that what I have learned is worth passing along to the law abiding members of our society and those who serve it.

First, let me assure the many readers who have written me that I do indeed understand the concept as taught by many firearms instructors regarding the use of the front sight during close quarter engagements. Most proponents of this technique suggest that the weapon be held in some variation of the low or even high-ready position while you are searching for and/or evaluating a threat. Once a threat has been identified and the decision to fire made, then and only then do you raise the weapon to eye level, focus on the front sight (even if you only achieve a “flash” front sight picture) and fire the weapon. I have trained with this system extensively over the years, and enjoyed great success with it on the training range against paper, plastic, and metal targets. I have also enjoyed success with it while hunting, for the decision to shoot a suitable game animal is predetermined, the act of shooting it deliberate.

Experience has taught me, however, that when involved in real life encounters, under most conditions it is extremely unlikely that your eye will be able to go from the threat and back to that front sight during those few fleeting moments that characterize the average engagement. And here is where, in my opinion, the issue has become dangerously clouded, especially in regard to law enforcement applications.

We know from FBI studies that the average police-involved lethal force encounter occurs at extremely close range (88 percent occur within 20 feet, 76 percent within 10 feet, and 56 percent within five feet) and is usually over in seconds. The majority of these encounters also occur in low light. In addition to the body's natural startle response that may prohibit focusing on

the sights is the reality that, as police officers, our focus needs to be on the subject we are dealing with so we can determine, moment by moment, if it is time to shoot. We must be looking for the gun, the knife, the wallet, the badge, or whatever it is the subject has or is doing in order to evaluate the situation. Should we need to shoot, we must be able to deliver rounds into the threat while our eyes are locked onto it—for that is where your focus will be during those few terrifying moments.

We also know from studying the data gathered for more than 30 years that—in the U.S.—police officers have an average hit rate of less than 15-20 percent when engaged in gunfights. And the majority of these officers were trained to focus on the front sight. Bottom line: Not only are we missing, but we're missing close in.

Part of the reason we miss is simply because we have not been training for what we actually do. Most police

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firearms training programs still emphasize the use of the sights, highly stylized shooting stances, and firing at static, non-threatening targets from various distances. What these types of programs do not take into account are the effects of the chemical dump generated by the body's response to stress. These include the natural desire to crouch when facing danger, and the feeling that there is “not enough time” to access those sights when operating in conditions other than the controlled environment of the range.

In the next installment, we'll take a closer look at the point shooting technique as taught by Col. Applegate, and the tool we've adapted that puts true fear back into the training equation.

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