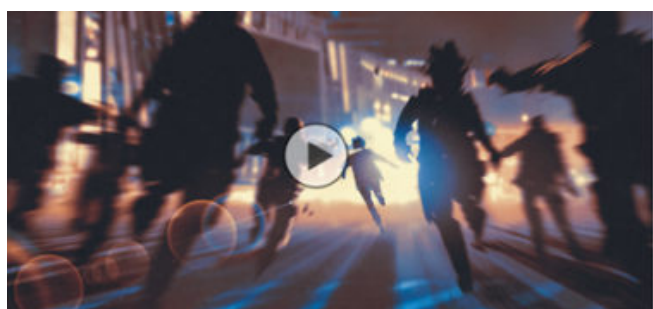


Is There a Place for “Fast Draw” in Survival?

Anyone who has ever watched any westerns, is familiar with the fast draw. The good guy and the bad guy meet on the street... facing off against each other with their six-shooters... and may the best man win. The best man is always the good guy, as predictable as the sun rising in the morning. As kids, we used to pretend we could do that too; at least back in the time I grew up. Today, somebody would probably call the police, if they saw a couple of kids playing out that scenario with cap guns.

Granted, the Old West gunfight, as we know it, is pretty much entirely an invention of Hollywood. The only documented gunfight in the Old West was the Gunfight at the OK Corral; and that wasn't the fast-draw contest we've been given to believe. Rather, it was nine men, four against five, mostly missing with a combination of pistols and rifles. Nevertheless, in the 30 seconds the fight lasted, six men were shot. Three of them died from those wounds, while the other three recovered.



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There are other stories of other fast-draw gunfights, such as the first one, in which Wild Bill Hickock killed David Tutt, back in 1865. But in reality, most men in the west had fought in the Civil War. They weren't about to be buffaloed by any tinhorn with a gun and wouldn't go in for the theatrics of a meeting at high noon.

While we don't settle things with six-guns on main street anymore, there's always a chance of some variant of that reappearing, especially in a post-disaster world, where there's a breakdown of law and order. I doubt that it will ever manifest in the formal challenges on Main Street, as depicted in those westerns; but it could happen on a much more informal basis.

What do I mean by that? I mean someone trying to jump a prepper as they are working around their home, perhaps in the garden. The assailant would show up with some sort of gun in hand, expecting the prepper to cower and give him whatever he wanted.

So, what do we do in that situation?

Whatever sort of assailant shows up at your home or survival shelter, and however they are armed, you're better off facing them with a rifle or even a shotgun, than a pistol. Not only is a rifle much more accurate than a pistol, but the higher-velocity pointed bullet will do more damage. Nevertheless, we all have pistols and practice shooting with them; because as Clint Smith said – "A handgun is so that you have something to fight with, while you're making your way back to where you left your rifle." Of course, most gunfights are over long before you could get to your rifle.

Basically, the idea here is that a pistol is essentially a defensive weapon, while a rifle allows you the ability to fight both defensively and offensively. When we consider that "The best defense is a good offense" (attributed to George Washington), we must do more than just defend ourselves in that post-disaster attack; we must turn the tables on our attacker. Can the fast-draw help us do that?

Let's Define the "Fast-Draw"

The fast-draw, as Hollywood has depicted it, is a truly amazing act of shooting. There are a few experts today, who have refined this method of shooting, mostly for the purpose of show. They can draw their gun from a holster, fire at a target that's six to ten feet away (depending on the specific shooter), and reholster the pistol, faster than you can see it. The fastest such draw was recorded to be 0.208 seconds, shooting at a balloon target, located eight feet in front of him.

In this sort of shooting, which is what Hollywood wants us to believe was commonplace in the Old West, the entire act of drawing the gun, aiming it from the waist and shooting is one continuous action, resulting in an aimed shot that hits the target. The shooter is relying on what is known as "instinctive shooting," where they instinctively shoot where they are looking, just as many people instinctively point their index finger where they are looking.

There are several problems with this type of shooting though. The first is that shooting any gun, while it is still moving, is a surefire recipe for inaccurate shooting, not accurate shooting. The second is that it ignores safety; specifically, the safety of anyone who might be behind the intended target or to either side. A missed shot could easily hit someone else. Finally, it appears that some gunmen would keep shooting until their gun ran out, just to try and score a hit. That's a lot of lead flying around to hit innocent bystanders.

A More Practical Fast Draw

Let me start by saying, there is definitely a place for a fast draw in self-defense. It's just that the kind of fast draw in the movies isn't the kind we need. We need something that is going to allow us to get our sidearm into action quickly,

while also giving us the ability to fire an accurate shot. To accomplish this, we need to break the movie fast draw down into three distinct and separate parts.

As I understand it, many law enforcement officers practice a form of fast draw, preparing for the possibility of having to deal with an armed criminal. If the criminal happens to “get the drop,” then the only possible chance the police officer has is to either talk the criminal down, or wait for the right moment to use a fast draw to get their own gun into play. But the fast draw they use, is more akin to the three steps I just mentioned, rather than what the supposed gunslingers in the Old West did.

Presenting the Gun

The first step in this process is the draw, more properly referred to as presenting the gun. This consists of uncovering the holster (if it is concealed), grasping the pistol, pulling it out of the holster, and raising it to shooting height, whether that be waist level or eye level. The actual movements needed to accomplish all that will depend largely on the type of holster being used, where it is located on the body and how many layers of clothing are concealing it.

Each shooter has to experiment for themselves, discovering the best position for their holster and type of draw they are going to use. The two are obviously closely related, making it so that what might seem like a good position to carry the holster, ends up requiring a difficult and time-consuming draw.

I’m a firm believer in the Special Operations adage of “Slow is smooth and smooth is fast.” Taking the smooth part of that and applying it to drawing a gun from a holster, a smooth draw is going to be faster than one which is not smooth. Carrying a gun on the belt, in the three o’clock position (the most common carry) requires a draw that is a minimum of three

separate movements, changing direction in the middle; you have to grasp the gun, pull it up out of the holster, then rotate it, while moving it forward.

A drop-leg holster, more akin to the gunslinger's "tied down" gun, makes this considerably easier, as there is more room to pull the gun up, helping avoid awkward arm movements. It can become one smooth movement, rather than two separate ones. Unfortunately, it's far from being concealed and would probably end up leading to a call to the local police.

If we stick with belt-mounted holsters, then there are a couple of things that can be done to make the movement smoother. Carrying the gun cross-draw is probably the best, as it makes for a much smoother movement, as the gun can be drawn and moved into firing position in one continuous arc. Staying with the gun on the right hip, canting the butt of the gun forward, so that it can be rotated out of the holster and brought to a firing position, rather than being pulled up out of the holster, is a huge improvement. This is what I use, when I can't use the drop-leg holster (most of the time).

Presenting the gun must end with the muzzle of the gun pointed in the direction of the target. From there, we move on to the second part.

Aiming at the Target

It may seem that there is no time for aiming in a situation which might require a quick draw; but it is still essential. If you don't bother to aim, you have no way of knowing where your shot is going to go. You obviously won't have a lot of time for aiming; but that doesn't mean you can just skip over that step.

Many law enforcement agencies are teaching their officers to do what is known as a "double tap." This is two shots, fired in rapid succession, aimed at center mass. The idea that one

bullet will knock an assailant down is another image that Hollywood has given us, and the idea of a double tap is to overcome the difficulty of putting down the bad guy with one shot. Two shots mean more energy transfer; but even more importantly, more damage to the body, resulting in more bleeding.

Here's the thing though; while a double tap may seem like two shots as part of one action, only aiming once, that's not true. The two shots are each distinct shots, albeit very close together. For the second shot, the shooter brings his pistol down from recoil and takes the second shot as soon as the sights are once again aligned with the target.

If people can learn how to aim so quickly when shooting double taps, we have no reason to believe that we can't aim that quick for a fast draw. The sights don't have to be aligned perfectly, as trigger control has more to do with accuracy than sight picture does. We just have to have a decent sight picture, not a perfect one.

While we're talking about aiming, I must return to the idea of instinctive shooting. Just like anything else, such shooting can be learned by anyone willing to practice enough. Work on it with just pointing your finger, until you can be confident that your finger pointing will be towards where you're looking. Then try it with an empty gun, pointing the gun at target after target, over and over again. Once you are sure your pistol's muzzle will be pointing at your target, each and every time, then go to an outdoor range somewhere, where you will have privacy, and try it with live ammo. Don't try it with anyone else around, just in case.

Pulling the Trigger

As anyone who has been shooting a while knows, the term "pulling the trigger" is inaccurate. Proper shooting requires squeezing the trigger, not pulling it. Squeezing allows us to

pull the trigger straight back, keeping the gun pointed at the target, whereas any other type of pulling is going to make the gun go to one side or the other.

A lot of shooters have trouble with jerking the trigger, especially new shooters. It took me years to overcome the problem of jerking the trigger, which I didn't think I was doing. But my consistent shot groups, low and to the left, made it clear that I was indeed jerking the trigger. A lot of time practicing with dry fire eventually helped me to overcome that tendency, improving my shooting overall.

The tendency to jerk the trigger is even greater when shooting fast draw, especially if the entire action is done as one single step. However, with the way we are breaking it down, there is an opportunity for a momentary pause, between aiming the gun and squeezing the trigger. That pause can be all you need, to ensure that you're not going to end up jerking the trigger and pulling the muzzle off target.



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This is the most critical part of shooting, making it the one place where “slow is smooth and smooth is fast” is the most critical. Yes, get that gun out of the holster as quickly as possible, aligning the muzzle with the target. But when it comes to making the shot, take your time.

As several characters in Louis L'Amour's books said to those they were training how to shoot, take your time to make that first shot count; because you might not get another shot. Many a fast-draw artist could get the gun out and shoot fast; but

their first shot went into the dust, between them and their adversary. We don't want that to happen; we want that first shot to count, as it might just be our only shot.