



# 1835 BOOK EXPLAINS HOW TO QUICKLY AND EASILY BECOME A SKILLED COMBAT SHOOTER

In 1835, Lt. Col. Baron De Berenger published a book titled: Helps And Hints - How To - Protect Life And Property. In a portion of the book, he details the elements of skilled combat shooting which can be learned easily and without extensive or expensive training. Though only three pages long, it is a seminal work on close quarters shooting where most all gunfights and casualties occur.

The Colonel recognized the difference between range and on the street shooting, which still is a hotly argued subject. He based his simple, practical and effective method of shooting on his observations of the combat situations of his day.

As to why the method, which [P&S](#) mirrors, has not taken hold in our Military and Police Agencies and among civilian gun owners, is a puzzle. In my opinion, that's due to:

1. the strict adherence to institutionalized shooting dogma, which has resulted in the well accepted but atrocious hit rate of less than 20% in armed encounters, and
2. a head-in-the sand approach by most trainers and "those in charge" as to what actually happens in close quarters combat situations, plus
3. the [US military's prohibition against its use with the 1911](#) because of a design flaw in the 1911 (the standard issue sidearm of US forces for over 70 years).

The elements of the Colonel's shooting method are set out on three pages of his book. That text is below.

I have taken the liberty of modernizing some of the text to make it easier to read, as the English of the early 1800's can be a bit difficult to readily absorb and understand on a first read. I also have added some Notes: that provide added support for the statements made.

[Here is a link to the book that can be downloaded for free as a PDF.](#) Photos of the three pages from the book follow the text.

We begin with page 237:

### **Pistol shooting:**

Having promised to give you some instructions, I must confess that little if any real life threat pistol shooting comes from range shooting although it may be fun. And the skill acquired, however great, in the case of a real life threat need, will be laid aside.

It is amusing, and it proves cleverness, when we see a person snuff a candle with a pistol ball, or cut a wafer in two. But what is the use of that, when a highway robbers, housebreakers, etc.. will not allow the time for taking a deliberate, or rather slow, aim through the sights. In battle it would be destructive to yourself to do that. Even the duelist must not take aim aided by the sights.

My humble opinion is that a pistol only with a front sight can answer every self protection purpose, provided that one has acquired the habit of dropping the pistol neatly on an object intended to be hit while looking at the sight rather than the pistol.

That is easily done with the pistol, and with very little practice, much as is done by the swordsman and the billiard-player who hit their target by looking at it rather than along the tool.

Self defense requires rapid pistol shooting, which precludes taking deliberate aim along the barrel. Nor can you be certain of your usual steadiness of nerve when you look into the muzzle of a pistol presented at you and about to release its lethal charge at you. But that should not be of concern when shooting to snuff out the harmless blaze of a candle.

Practice to be useful, should be able to be employed in the case of a real life threat situation.

And the practice I advise, is to point suddenly, with your finger, at objects when you are alone. And then shutting one eye, to look along it while holding it still, to see if your aim has been correct or not.

By practicing this for some time you will acquire much skill before you resort to the same practice with a pistol. And which, at first, you should use without powder, and with a snapper instead of a flint. By pulling the trigger and immediately looking along the barrel, you will see how much you have erred in your instinctive presentation.

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[Note: Here's what the US Army says about our instinctive ability to point accurately. It's found in the US Army Field Manual 3-23.35: Combat Training With Pistols M9 AND M11 (June, 2003).

"Everyone has the ability to point at an object....

"When a soldier points, he instinctively points at the feature on the object on which his eyes are focused. An impulse from the brain causes the arm and hand to stop when the finger reaches the proper position.

"When the eyes are shifted to a new object or feature, the finger, hand, and arm also shift to this point.

"It is this inherent trait that can be used by a soldier to rapidly and accurately engage targets."]

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The ease and simplicity of this practice should soon lead to a shooting test. And accordingly, keep in mind that you ought to pull the trigger by a motion, or rather pressure of your finger only. And the middle finger is preferred instead of the forefinger, and especially for a beginner. Anatomically it is less likely to diverge your pistol when pulling at the trigger ([more on using the middle finger on the trigger](#)). Also, instead of pulling with the end of the finger, your passing the whole of the first joint beyond the trigger is also desirable anatomically.

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[Note: Walter J. Dorfner, a long time lead firearms instructor for the VSP, now deceased, said this about using the index and middle fingers to pull the trigger [in his paper](#) describing what I call P&S.

### **"FIELD SHOOTING WITH THE INDEX FINGER**

"When using the index finger to shoot, one can induce error by having too much or too little of the finger on the trigger.

"As the trigger is pulled, the curling action of the finger tip can cause the weapon to be pushed or pulled off target center.

"The amount of error is relative to the trigger weight. More error is introduced with double action firing when 10 or more pounds of force are needed to cock and fire the weapon, than there is with single action firing, when 3 or 4 pounds of force are needed to fire the weapon.

### **"FIELD SHOOTING WITH THE MIDDLE FINGER**

"When the middle pad of the middle finger was placed on the trigger, the force needed with double action to cock and fire the weapon, felt much lighter than the measured 12 pounds.

"With single action, the 4 pound force that was needed to fire the weapon, felt like simple air resistance.

"Also, as the middle pad of the finger was on the trigger, the curling action of the tip of the finger did not affect the fall of the shot.

"Another benefit was that the centerline bore was more closely aligned with the web of the hand. That provided for both a natural pointing of the weapon and better control of recoil forces.

"New shooters with limited hand strength, had a problem pulling the trigger smoothly with double action when the index finger was used to pull the trigger. That was not true when the middle finger was used to pull the trigger."]

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I strongly recommend to all, and especially to beginners, to practice with the left hand in preference to the right. It preserves the use of the right hand for purposes which the left could not be employed in. And to a new shooter, it shouldn't make any difference which hand is used.

If you are determined to use slow pistol shooting, and on taking laborious aim through the sights, you will find the following the best way to succeed.

Instead of either gradually raising (as most do), your pistol up and centered on the object you intend to hit, or dropping it down from the top onto the object, as others do. Make a smart presentation well to the left of your mark and up over it (if right handed, and reversed if left handed). Then, bring the pistol down diagonally from one corner to the other with the mark centered. And when it appears before your sight, you should instantly fire.

You may make your presentation closer to your mark to allow faster movement of your pistol, but always diagonally with the mark centered. Also, when compared with trials using an up and down motion of your pistol, you will find that with similar trials using diagonal movement, you will be much less subject to tremulous deviations.

Having provided this information, I still repeat that rapid modes of shooting are by far the most desirable, for wafer shooting is no more than a skilful plaything.

A friend of mine who is a "crack" wafer-shooter, happened to be wounded in a duel by a very inexperienced shooter. When asked how could he have looked steadily at him, and yet missed so very large a man, he replied: "...my steady look was not at him, but at his pistol, and which, just then appeared to me even larger than himself, big as he is!" His experience converted an antagonist into a friend.

Here are photos of the actual pages of the book:

not even in retaliation for the injury which the ever ready falsehoods of others may have inflicted upon him. Now for

**PISTOL SHOOTING.** Having promised to give you some instructions, I must confess my conviction that little, if any, real utility devolves from *the* mode pursued in common, and at pistol shooting galleries especially: although it may answer as an amusement, the skill so acquired, be it ever so great, in case of need, instead of being available, will have to be laid aside; I repeat what on a former occasion I maintained, namely, that "practice to be useful should take place in **THE** situation, and in **THE VERY** manner, in which the acquired improvement is likely to be called into action." It certainly is amusing, and it proves cleverness, when we see a person snuff a candle with a pistol ball, or cut a wafer in two, but what is the use of it? since highway robbers, housebreakers, &c. will *not allow time* for taking a deliberate, or rather slow, aim through sights; in battle it would prove *destructive to yourself* so to do: nay, as even the duellist *must not* take aim aided by sights, wherefore my humble opinion is, that a pistol having a *front sight only* answers every useful, that is, self-protecting, purpose, *provided you have acquired the habit of dropping your pistol neatly towards, or rather directly ON, the object you intend to hit, all the while looking at IT, rather than the pistol,* and which, with very little practice, is easy enough, since the swordsman and the billiard-player hit their object by looking at *it* instead of looking at or along *the tool*. Self-defence requires *rapid* pistol shooting, and therefore precludes a deliberate aim along the barrel; nor can you be certain of your usual steadiness of nerve when you look *into* the muzzle of a pistol presented at you, and menacing a *fatal* blaze, although you may make quite sur- of it when the *harmless* blaze of a candle points out the situation of its snuff, as a candidate for your sportive fancy.

*There is MUCH MORE in all this than nine-tenths are candid enough to allow! The practice I advise, is to point suddenly, even with your finger, at objects, when you are alone, and*

then, shutting one eye, to look along it, before you alter its situation, to ascertain if your aim has been correct or not: by practising this for some time you will acquire much skill before you resort to the *same* practice with a pistol; and which, at first, you should use *without powder*, and with a *snapper* instead of a flint, that, by pulling the trigger, and immediately after looking along the barrel, you may ascertain if, and how much, you have erred in your (for so it will become,) instinctive present. The ease and simplicity which is connected with *such* a mode of practising ought to become a recommendation as to a trial: accordingly, bear in mind that you ought to pull by a motion, or rather pressure, of your finger only, and not by an action of the arm; the middle finger, instead of the forefinger, is to be preferred, (by a young beginner especially,) since the anatomical situation of *its* muscles is less likely to diverge your pistol by a pull at the trigger, than one from the forefinger, instead of pulling with the *end* of the finger, (as with a gun you ought to do;) your passing the whole of the first joint *beyond* the trigger is also a desirable mode, and on similar grounds.

I strongly recommend to all, and especially those who begin pistol-shooting, to practise with the *left* hand, in preference to the right; it preserves the use of the right hand for purposes which the left could not be employed in; and, the pulsation of the heart alone excepted, I see no reason why the left should not be preferred, since, to a beginner at any rate, it cannot make any difference *which* is practised for such a weapon.

If you are determined upon *slow* pistol-shooting, and on taking a laborious aim through your sights, you will find the following the best mode of succeeding. *Instead* of either gradually raising (as most persons do,) your pistol *perpendicularly* and *centrally upwards* from the bottom of *the* object

you intend to hit, or dropping it from the top perpendicularly down, and over it, as others do, I advise you to make a smart present, much to the *left* of your mark, and *high* over



it, (that is, if you shoot *right* handed, and reversed, if left handed;) thereupon, and viewing the mark with attention, to *draw* your pistol towards the bottom corner, the one which is NOT under *the* top corner you first aimed at; thus slowly to describe a *diagonal line* crossing a perpendicular one, which latter you must *fancy* as if falling through the mark: now, the very place where you cross by a diagonal movement, the *fancied* perpendicular line, will be *the* situation of your mark; and which, on perceiving the smallest part of before your sight, you should *instantly* fire at; or, you may make your angles *shorter* to move your pistol *quicker*, yet always *diagonally* over the mark in the centre; even by a quick *up-and-down* motion of your pistol you will perceive that the tremulous changes from the true line are great and many, whilst the making of similar trials *diagonally* will convince you that you are much less subject to tremulous deviations. Having stated these particulars, I still repeat that the other, the *rapid* modes of pistol shooting, are by far the most desirable, for wafer shooting is no more than a skilful plaything.

A friend of mine happened to be wounded in a duel, by a *very* inexperienced shot, himself a "crack" wafer-shot: on being addressed thus, "How could you, who looked so *steadily* at him, miss so very large a man?" he replied, "You mistake; my steady look was not at *him*, but at his *pistol*, and which, *just then*, appeared to me even larger than himself, big as he is!"—His candour was of more use to him than his wafer skill, for it converted an antagonist into a warm and truly valuable, because highly influential and opulent, friend, for life. It may not be amiss to remind you that having given you some information as to the best use of a pistol in LETTER IX., folio 125 to 128, and in LETTER XI., folio 157 to 160, it may be useful to re-peruse those pages.