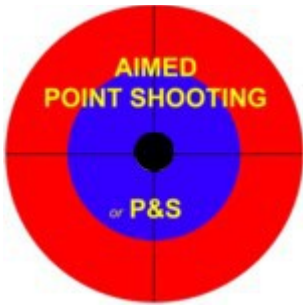


IS THE FRONT SIGHT PRESS TECHNIQUE PRACTICAL, OR IS IT FRONT SIGHT FOLLY?

The Front Sight Press (FSP), aiming and shooting technique is often touted as being the one and only way to shoot. And it is similar to, if not the same as the Flash Sight Picture technique taught by the U.S. Army.

The Flash Sight Picture technique is described in detail in the Army's Fundamentals of Pistol Marksmanship (1979), and FM 23-35 Combat Training With Pistols & Revolvers (2003). And it has several requirements that "must be met" to use it successfully.

If one looks closely at those "must be met" requirements, and considers them in the light of what is known about real life and death pistol gunfights, serious questions come up about the use of the Flash Sight Picture technique or FSP in gunfights.

Some of the requirements, are unrealistic, and plainly impractical for application in gunfights.

The Army's main training focus is on **marksmanship**, and to meet qualification courses that call for shooting at "long range" pistol distances, and within time limits that have little connection to real armed encounters.

For example, the marksmanship manual describes a standard course of fire as consisting of three stages. The first stage is ten shots in ten minutes, and fired at 50 yards. The second stage is two strings of five shots each timed fire, with 20 seconds allowed for each string, and fired at 25 yards. And the third stage is two strings of five shots each fired rapid fire, with 10 seconds allowed for each string, and fired at 25 yards for a 30 shot total.

The Military Police Firearms Qualification Course, described in FM 19-10 (1987), calls for 50 shots in 7 min. and 12 sec.. The number of rounds allotted and shooting distances are: 10 rounds at 35 meters, 20 rounds at 25 meters, 15 rounds at 15 meters, and 5 rounds at 7 meters.

In the combat pistol standard course, target distances start at 31 meters, and with no more than two targets at 7 meters. Single targets are exposed for 2 or 3 seconds, and multiple targets for 4 or 5 seconds.

Such training, does not reflect real gunfight situations, where according to the literature: "the average hand gun shooting affray takes place at a distance not exceeding 20 feet."

Also, gunfights do not occur in ideal conditions, as is assumed in the marksmanship portion of the Field Manual.

Gunfights often occur in bad light or at night, and most last only a few seconds, so there may be no time to use the sights.

In addition, our instinctive Fight or Flight response is activated automatically in real close quarters life threat situations, and as such, a shooter can expect to experience a greatly accelerated heart rate, binocular vision, loss of fine motor skills needed for sight alignment, tunnel vision, focusing on the threat, and other effects that materially affect shooting performance.

The US Army does recognize the problems with using the Flash Sight Picture technique at close quarters and at night.

For combat at distances under 15 feet, and when firing at night, the US Army Combat Pistol Field Manual (FM), calls for the use of Point Shooting.

However, only one small paragraph in the FM is allotted to Point Shooting. And that information, is more in the order of a footnote rather than a well thought out and detailed description of the shooting method that one would most likely use at close quarters.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE FSP TECHNIQUE

The core requirements of the FSP technique are the fundamentals of marksmanship, and per the combat pistol manual, after a soldier becomes proficient in them, he progresses to advanced techniques.

The fundamentals are set out below in condensed form. As you go over them, you decide based on what you know about real gunfights, if they are unrealistic or impractical for application.

THE THREE FINGERED GRIP

The Combat Training manual states that the weapon must become an extension of the hand and arm; it should replace the finger in pointing at an object.

For a One-Hand Grip, the weapon is placed in the V formed by the thumb and forefinger of the strong hand (firing hand), with the front and rear sights in line with the firing arm.

The lower three fingers are wrapped around the pistol grip, putting equal pressure to the rear until the hand begins to tremble, and then relaxed until the trembling stops. Also, if any of the three fingers on the grip are relaxed, the grip must be reapplied.

The thumb rests alongside the weapon without pressure.

And the trigger finger is placed on the trigger between the tip and second joint, so that it can be squeezed to the rear, and it must work independently of the remaining fingers.

The manual recommends a two-handed grip to steady the firing hand and provide maximum support during firing. And the grip should be checked for use of the natural point of aim.

"To check it, the weapon is griped and sighted properly on a distant target. The eyes are then closed for three to five seconds while maintaining the grip and stance. When the eyes are opened, and the firer checks for a proper sight picture."

If the point of aim is disturbed, the stance should be adjusted by moving only the feet, not the shooting arm. If the sight alignment is disturbed, the grip is adjusted by removing the weapon from the hand, and then reapplying the grip.

The process is repeated until the sight alignment and sight placement remain almost the same when the eyes are opened. This enables the firer to determine and use the Natural Point of Aim.

The text notes that during combat, one may not have time to establish a Natural Point of Aim, and that the position may have to be adapted to available cover.

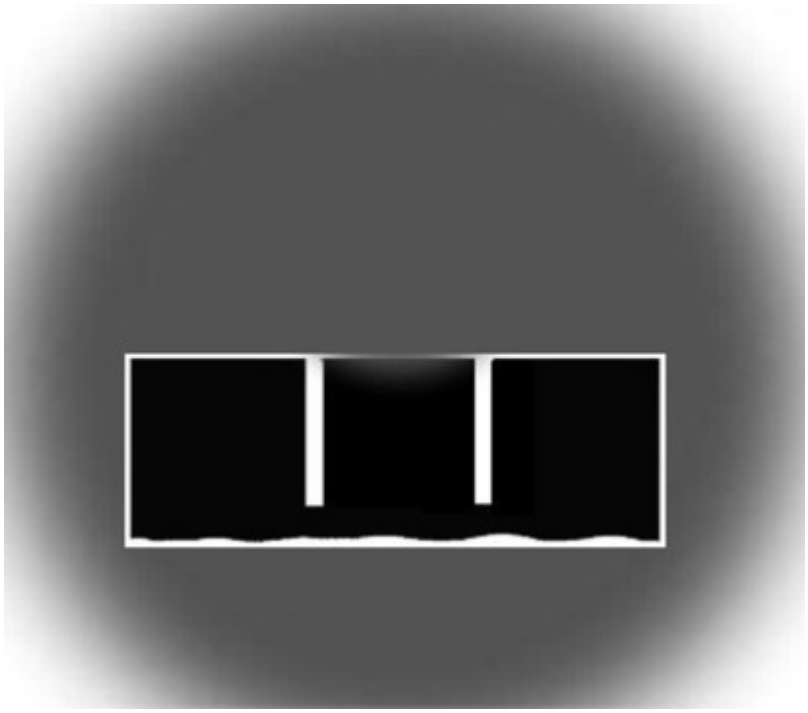
AIMING

Aiming involves **sight alignment** and **sight placement**.

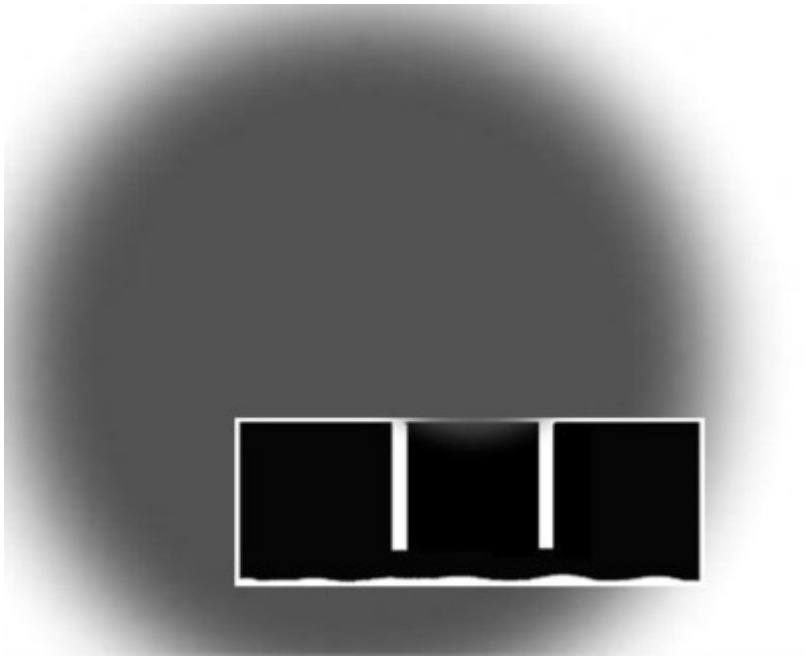
Sight alignment is the centering of the front blade in the rear sight notch, and the raising or lowering the top of the front sight so it is level with the top of the rear sight.

And **sight placement** is the positioning of the weapon's sights in relation to the target.

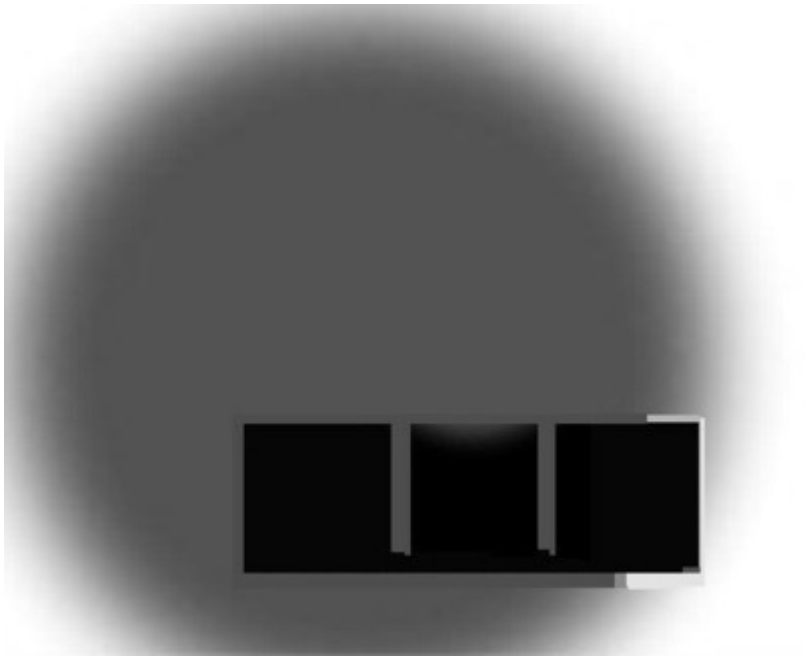
A correct **sight picture** consists of correct sight alignment, with the front sight placed center mass of the target.



Sight alignment is the more important of the two, because if the sight alignment is correct, then even if the sight picture is partly off center, the target will be hit.



Here is that same picture showing the sights without highlighting.



And here is that same picture indicating the likely gunfight condition of bad light, or where the sights and target are black, or hard to distinguish from one another.

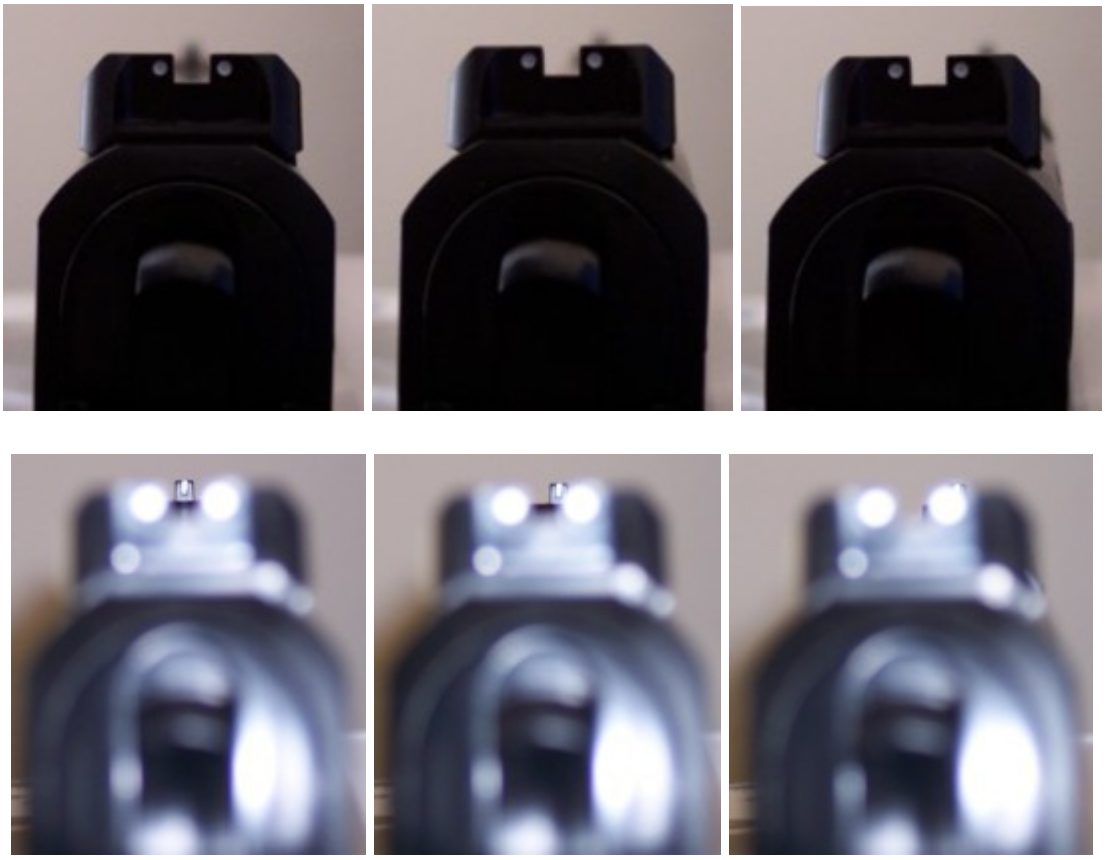
This photo is from the US Marine Corps Pistol Manual of 2003. It shows a real pistol with real sights. The drawings above it are training aids, which make it easier to see what one is supposed to see and do.

Maintaining correct **sight alignment** is difficult because of the way our eyes work. When the sights and the target (threat) are at different distances, it is impossible to clearly see both of them at the same time. That is because we cannot focus on close and far objects at the same time, and that presents the firer with an aiming problem.

The solution is to always make the last focus on the front sight not the target (threat). If that can be done, the front sight will be seen clearly, the target (threat) and rear sight will appear hazy, and the target (threat) can be kept in the line of fire if all other marksmanship elements are performed as proscribed.

Sight alignment is critical to accuracy because of the short distance between the sights (sight radius).

Here are two sets of pics each showing: good **sight alignment**, 1/8 inch of error in sight alignment, and 1/4 in of error in sight alignment.



In the pics, the sight radius of the gun sights is 6.88 inches.

This table shows the amounts by which a bullet will be off target center at varying distances given varying amounts of sight alignment error. The table was made up using a sight radius of 7 inches. As such, the results are very close to those using a sight radius of 6.88 inches.

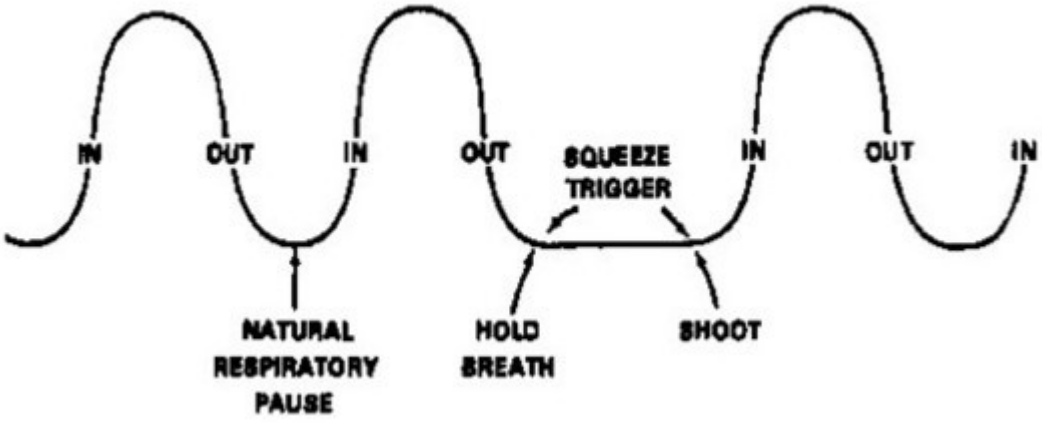
Muzzle Movement	1/8 in	2/8 in	3/8 in	4/8 in	5/8 in
Distances to Target	Amt. bullet will be off target center.				
5 feet	1 in	2 in	3 in	4 in	5 in
10 feet	2 in	4 in	6 in	8 in	10 in
15 feet	3 in	6 in	9 in	12 in	15 in
20 feet	4 in	8 in	12 in	16 in	20 in
25 feet	5 in	10 in	15 in	20 in	25 in

For example: If the sights are 2/8 in. out of correct alignment, and you are at a distance of only 15 feet, you will miss a chest sized target (11 in wide x 17 in tall).

Further, if a target was to turn sideways and/or move, it would be very very difficult to aim with the precision needed to make a hit. Practically speaking, that would be nearly impossible in the likely gunfight condition of bad light, or where the sights are dark and the target is dark, or the target is moving, or when firing multiple times with the gun jumping and bucking in your hand etc.. It's no wonder that shooting accuracy is as poor as it is, and why it makes sense to use an alternate shooting method like P&S.

BREATH CONTROL

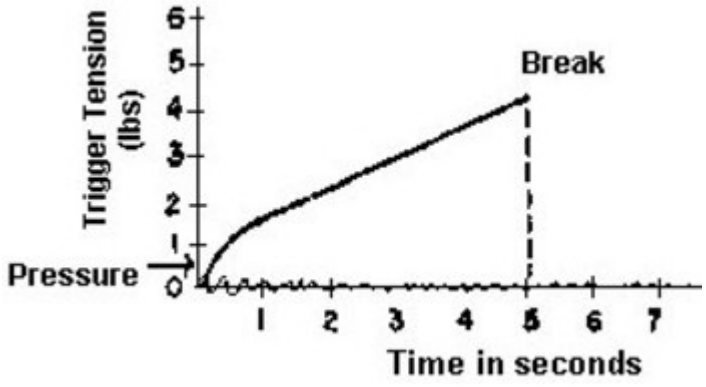
It is hard to maintain a steady position and also keep the front sight at a precise aiming point while breathing. As such, the firer should be taught to inhale, then exhale normally until comfortable, hold, and then fire.



TRIGGER SQUEEZE

Trigger squeeze is: the independent movement of the trigger finger in applying increasing and straight to the rear pressure on the trigger without disturbing the sight alignment until the weapon fires. The firer must continue the rearward movement of the finger even after the round has been fired. Releasing the trigger too soon after the round has been fired results in an uncontrolled shot, causing a missed target.

Also, the trigger squeeze of the M9 pistol, when fired in the single-action mode, is 5.50 pounds; 12.33 pounds when fired in double-action mode. The firer must be aware of the mode of firing and compensate for the differences in trigger weight when firing.



FIRING TECHNIQUES

Firing technique include the use of hand-and-eye coordination, flash sight picture, quick-fire point shooting, and quick-fire sighting.

HAND-EYE-COORDINATION

Hand-and-eye coordination is not a natural, instinctive ability for all soldiers. It is usually a learned skill obtained by practicing the use of a Flash Sight Picture (see below). And the more a soldier practices, the more natural the relationship between soldier, sights, and target becomes.

The eyes focus instinctively on the center of any object observed.

After an object is sighted, the firer aligns his sights on the center of mass, focuses on the front sight, and applies proper trigger squeeze. Most crippling or killing hits result from maintaining the focus on the center of mass. The eyes must remain fixed on some part of the target throughout firing.

FLASH SIGHT PICTURE

Usually, when engaging an enemy at pistol range, the firer has little time to ensure a correct sight picture. The quick-kill (or Natural Point of Aim) method does not always ensure a first-round hit.

A compromise between a correct sight picture and the quick-kill method is known as a Flash Sight Picture. As the soldier raises the weapon to eye level, his point of focus switches from the enemy to the front sight, ensuring that the front and rear sights are in proper alignment left and right, but not necessarily up and down.

Pressure is applied to the trigger as the front sight is being acquired, and the hammer falls as the Flash Sight Picture is confirmed.

Initially, the method should be practiced slowly, with speed gained as proficiency increases.

End.