



Tactical Talk

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Washington

"The very atmosphere of firearms anywhere and everywhere restrains evil interference - they deserve a place of honor with all that's good"

-- George Washington

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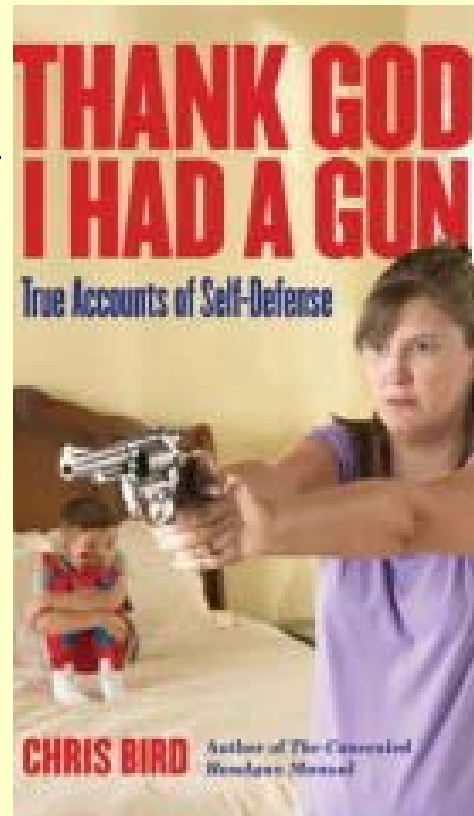
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New Book

Recommended Reading

Our friend, Chris Bird has recently released a new book entitled Thank God I Had a Gun, True Accounts of Self Defense. Chris is a crime reporter for a major newspaper in San Antonio as well as a life long shooter. His book The Concealed Handgun Manual is an excellent textbook for anyone who is considering carrying a gun for personal defense.

In his new book, Chris examines in detail fourteen incidents in which ordinary citizens used guns to defend themselves against predatory criminals. Drawing on his experience as a reporter, Chris combines background information on the participants, details the incidents, and explores the aftermath the armed citizens endured following the incidents. I highly recommend Thank God I Had a Gun. You can get a copy at Rangemaster for only \$19.95. 303 pages, photo illustrated.



Safety With Firearms

By Tom Givens
(www.rangemaster.com)

Carrying a firearm is an enormous responsibility, and one which must be taken seriously. An armed person literally has the power of life and death over every person he comes in contact with, and the ability to take life on the spot, without appeal. With this kind of power comes responsibility and accountability. Accountability seems to be a foreign concept to many modern people, who are accustomed to decisions made by committee, and to shifting the blame to someone else for any misfortune that befalls them.

It's funny—in backward, primitive, Third World countries poor, ignorant, uneducated people think evil spirits live in rocks and trees. We make fun of them and call them animists. In this country, poor, ignorant, uneducated people think evil spirits live in pistols. We call them Liberals. It's the same thing. Your pistol is an inanimate chunk of metal, wood, and plastics. It has no will and no soul. It is neither good nor bad. It is absolutely morally neutral, and will serve a good man or an evil man equally. There is not a single case in all of recorded history of a gun getting up and shooting someone. Human intervention is required to make anything happen with any firearm.

It is incumbent on you, as the gun's operator to obtain proper training in its use, learn the rules, and abide by them. Remember that your gun was built to endanger lives (political correctness aside, that is what a defensive weapon is for!). If you do endanger someone's life with that gun, we want that to be a conscious, willful decision on your part, not a careless, negligent act.

Let's get this straight. There are almost no "accidental shootings". An "accident" is the result of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events. Almost nothing that can happen with that pistol is unforeseeable or uncontrollable. What we have are "negligent shootings," and that is another matter entirely. To negligently shoot someone, you must be careless, or inattentive, or sloppy, or cavalier with your deadly weapon, and that is simply inexcusable and should be punished severely. I can immediately recognize a professional gunman by simply observing his gunhandling and safety habits for a few moments. The professional respects his weapons and treats them responsibly. Sloppy or careless gunhandling is the mark of the doofus.

There are four firearms safety rules that you must learn, internalize, and make part of your character. If you religiously obey these four simple rules you will never have a problem with your firearm. This is a zero tolerance business, however, so follow these rules every time you handle your gun. These four basic rules apply to all firearms: handguns, rifles, shotguns, submachineguns, flamethrowers. They apply all of the time: on the range, in your home or business, on the street.

RULE NUMBER ONE:

ALL GUNS ARE ALWAYS LOADED.

Don't pay lip service to this rule, be serious about it. If it's a gun, it's loaded, treat it that way. If you want to shoot it, shoot it. If you want to tinker with it, clean it, show it to your buddy, or anything else other than firing it, clear it first. When you clear a gun, you open it, remove the ammunition, and leave the gun empty and inoperable while you administratively handle it.

To clear a revolver, open the cylinder, eject the rounds, double check the chambers, and leave the cylinder open. In that condition the revolver is physically incapable of firing.

To clear an autopistol, first remove the magazine. Then pull the slide to the rear, ejecting the round from the chamber, whether you think one is there or not. Then lock the slide open with the slide latch. Visually inspect the chamber to be certain the gun is really empty. Only then it is clear and can be safely handled.

RULE NUMBER TWO:

NEVER POINT A GUN AT ANYTHING YOU ARE NOT WILLING TO DESTROY.

This is incredibly simple, yet we see it violated all of the time. The sole function of a gun is to launch bullets. The sole function of bullets is to make holes. Don't point a gun at anything you don't want a hole in.

A handgun is so short that it becomes an extension of your fist, so you really have to pay attention to this rule, or you will wind up waving your gun around, endangering others or yourself. The best way to prevent this is simply leave the gun in its holster unless you really need it in your hands. Most of the time, if you shoot someone negligently from being startled, or struck, or tripping, it was because you had a gun in your hand when it should not have been there. Most of the time if your gun is taken away and used on you, it was in your hands when it should not have been.

If you have your weapon out in anticipation of firing it, go to The Ready Position, with both hands locked in a firing grip, trigger finger straight, gun pointed downward to your front. Accurate fire can be delivered within a fraction of a second from this ready, but the gun is under control and pointed in a safe direction.

Andy Stanford once suggested visualizing a "Star Wars light saber" about eight feet long sticking out of the muzzle of your pistol. Anything this intense beam of light crosses gets cut in half. If you mentally project that light beam, it helps you keep up with your muzzle and control it.

RULE NUMBER THREE:

KEEP YOUR FINGER OFF THE TRIGGER UNTIL YOUR SIGHTS ARE ON THE TARGET.

A modern, properly functioning handgun will not fire unless you put pressure on the trigger. It will fire, however, any time pressure is applied to the trigger. If your sights are on a target, you have decided to shoot it. Only then is there any reason to have your finger in contact with the trigger. If you wander around with your finger on the trigger, you will eventually have a negligent discharge, which may cost someone dearly.

RULE NUMBER FOUR:

BE CERTAIN OF YOUR TARGET AND WHAT IS BEYOND.

You must know for certain what you are shooting at, and why. Never shoot at sounds, or shadows, or anything else you cannot positively identify. Make your decision BEFORE you press the trigger, because you can't change it later.

RANGE RULES

1. Do not handle your weapon off the firing line.
2. When loading, unloading, etc., keep your muzzle pointed downrange (toward the target area).
3. Plant your feet on the line, don't fidget about.
4. Don't dangle your pistol at your side. The piece should be at the ready, on target, or in the holster.
5. Don't turn around with a gun in hand. If you turn your head to speak to a range officer, an instructor, etc., keep your weapon pointed downrange.

Immediately obey all commands of a designated range officer.

Proper safety equipment should always be taken to the range, and practice should never be conducted without eye and ear protection.

If you do not wear corrective glasses, you must wear safety glasses or shooting glasses whenever engaged in live practice. Ejected cases, blown primers, lead spit from the flash gap of revolvers, and bullet splash from target frames or impact targets are but some of the eye hazards encountered on a firing range. Your eyes are vitally important--safeguard them!

Your hearing should also be protected by wearing good quality ear plugs, muff-type hearing protectors, or both. Repeated exposure to gunfire without hearing protection will result in irreparable hearing damage. Failure to wear ear protection now will be tragically regretted in later years, I assure you. If practicing on an outdoor range, a cooler of soft drinks or water will be appreciated. Never mix alcoholic beverages of any kind with gunpowder; the mixture is bad for you. Save the cold beer for after the guns and ammo are stowed away for the day.

A few Band-Aids or a small first-aid kit are useful on a range where small nicks and scratches are common. If you shoot on an isolated, unsupervised range, never practice alone. If you should be injured, the presence of a training partner could be critical.

Observe the safety rules religiously, and insist that others present do the same. Firearms are inherently dangerous; if they were not, they would be useless! Your first mishap with a gun could be serious or even fatal, so don't allow even one.

by Randy Harris, Rangemaster student

I have always been intrigued by the Old West and western movies and western culture. Most red blooded American boys grew up watching westerns on TV and reading about the Old West in books. After all, the American Culture is somewhat the Cowboy way. We fight for what is right. We put in a full days work. We don't let our friends down, and we keep our word when we give it. We'll fight to right a wrong, but don't go looking for trouble. My heroes have always been cowboys and I spent many an hour in my childhood with my toy six shooters keeping my back yard free of rustlers and robbers.

As I got older I began getting into the combative use of the gun. I practiced long and hard to develop my shooting skills, but there is more to it than the hardware aspect. I looked for books to read on mindset and technique and tactics and stories of shootings and what worked and what didn't. What I realized was that even though the west was not always as WILD as popular culture makes it out to have been, there were a fair number of folks getting into a fair number of gun-fights. Maybe we could learn something from them? After all, if you learn from those that have done it, then maybe looking back at some Old West gunfights might be a good place to go for things that might help keep us alive today.

So What did I find? Well, I started reading everything I could get my hands on. I soon found that there were a few individuals that were involved in multiple gunfights and seemed to always come out on top. So the obvious question was " why?". My research led me to find that the dynamics of the confrontations are really no different than they are today. So if the dynamics are the same, then we can look at what they did to survive their fights and apply that to ours today.

I could go on for many pages using scores of historical gunfight examples but I will keep this confined to a few examples of fights involving two individuals. On one hand we have a famous lawman. A Civil War veteran and peace officer who developed a reputation as the "Prince Of Pistoleers". This man was James Butler Hickok, better known as "Wild Bill". The other was a man of considerable skill with a pistol who was just as short tempered as he was fast and accurate. This man was neither a lawman nor served in the army, but developed his skill at arms on his own from regular practice and combined that with a fierce will to win to become possibly the most dangerous man in the Old West....John Wesley Hardin.

We'll look at Hickok first. In his famous gunfight with Dave Tutt July 21, 1865 in Springfield, Missouri they both met in the street "showdown" style. This was actually not very common regardless of what TV westerns lead us to believe. This fight stemmed from a watch won in a poker game, stoked by a rivalry over the same woman and ended with a man lying dead.

Hickok had lost the watch to Tutt in a card game the previous night due to the fact that Hickok was unable to pay a debt he owed. Tutt took the watch as collateral. Tutt also went about town making a spectacle of wearing the watch and telling all who would listen that Hickok could not pay his debt. Hickok warned Tutt to cease and desist, but Tutt would not stop. So when they met in the town square the next day the fight was on. Hickok told Tutt to take the watch off, Tutt responded by pulling a pistol and firing. Hickok pulled his pistol, took careful aim and fired, sending a bullet through Tutt's heart from a distance of about 50 yards! Hickok immediately wheeled and pointed his pistol at Tutt supporters to his rear and they decided discretion to be the better part of valor and left.



So what is there to learn here? A non gun culture guy might say "Hickok was a good shot" and they would be correct, but there is more here. Hickok was reported to have aimed carefully while Tutt fired at him. Hickok fired a single decisive shot while his opponent fired wildly hitting nothing. So maybe accurate shooting wins gunfights? And we see that Hickok turned and did a 360 degree scan after his opponent was down. How many of us practice this today in order to not be the victim of your opponent's possible accomplices?

Another gunfight Hickok was involved in was July 17, 1870 while he was town Marshal in Hays, Kansas. In this one the classic saloon brawl turns deadly. Hickok had apparently angered members of the 7th cavalry (Custer's command) by roughing up and arresting one of their comrades. Three soldiers approached him and jumped him in a barroom and came close to ending his life. One jumped on his back another grabbed him by the arms as a third pulled a 1863 Remington Army issue pistol and stuck it to Hickok's head and pulled the trigger. The gun misfired and in the confusion Hickok was able to free his pistol and shoot two of the soldiers and make his escape back to his hotel room where he retrieved his rifle in case of further attack. Here we see a case where multiple assailants end up in a grappling situation with their victim. The victim has to access his weapon mid fight and shoot his way loose of the villains. Fortunately, the bad guys had a faulty weapon.

Does this sound very similar to what we see today with multiple assailants. Not all fights are one on one affairs. Sometimes the bad guys bring friends. And do you work on in-fight weapons access? Anyone can draw a gun from an exposed holster on the range, but things get more difficult and desperate when attacked by multiple opponents and you have to fend them off in order to access your pistol. This is where something like Suarez's *Combatives for Gunfighters* and Southnarc's *ECQC* come into play. We also see here the intangible element of luck, as the misfire saved Wild Bill. Sometimes luck is all that saves you. Gunfights are dangerous affairs. The last item here is we see Wild Bill, faced with superior numbers did not stand and shoot it out he got clear and armed himself with a rifle in case of further attack. The rifle has ALWAYS been a more effective tool than the pistol and still is today.

The final Hickok fight we will look at is the October 5, 1871 gunfight in Abilene Kansas with Texas gambler/gunman Phil Coe. Phil Coe and Ben Thompson (another gunman of some fame from Texas) owned the Bulls Head Saloon in Abilene. There had never been any love lost between the three as Hickok was a Union veteran and the two Texans were Confederates. The 6 years since the end of the war had done little to make feelings any better about the war. Coe had once bragged to Hickok that he could "kill a crow on the wing" with a pistol, as a warning to Hickok. Hickok replied "Did the crow have a pistol? Was he shooting back? I will be". The animosity just grew and grew.

The argument began over the sign in front of the Saloon depicting a bull in a "indelicate" pose. Hickok ordered that part of the sign be painted over and Coe said "no". Hickok requisitioned two painters to paint over the bull's offending anatomy and Coe was infuriated. He began stirring up trouble for Hickok among the Texas cowhands in town and a general disturbance ensued. That night as the cowhands all but rioted in the street Coe stood in front of the saloon firing his pistol. Hickok came up asking who was firing. Coe said he had shot at a stray dog. Hickok demanded his pistol, and in a flash Coe fired at Hickok. Hickok returned fire striking Coe in the stomach. Coe's shot had gone between Hickok's legs striking the dirt. As Hickok turned and did his 360 degree scan to insure he was not shot from behind, a man with a pistol ran toward him. Hickok aimed and fired. Suddenly he realized he had just shot Mike Williams -his own deputy- who had heard the shooting and came running to Hickok's aid.

From this we can learn a few more things. When we scan for other opponents we need to look closely so we do not shoot without identifying the target first. This can prevent a friendly fire incident from happening. The guy approaching with a gun may very well also be wearing a badge. We can also apply the reverse of this. It might not be a bad idea to present our gun "low profile" as we turn and scan. That way we will be less likely to get shot by responding officers. Again we see Hickok taking aim and making good COM hits. Accurate shooting still stops opponents.

We see most of Hickok's fights generally being line of duty affairs where he is trying to either apprehend someone or disarm them. On the other hand the majority of John Wesley Hardin's fights were a case of an argument turned deadly, or him trying to keep from being apprehended. John Wesley Hardin grew up in a very violent period in east Texas during and just after the Civil War. Back then there was little order and what order there was, was the occupation force of the Union army and afterwards their political appointees backed up by federal troops. This was during the lawless days of reconstruction. Hardin grew up with gun in hand and a resolve to survive. It would serve him well in the years to come. Whether Hardin was a homicidal maniac or just a guy with a quick temper that gambled and drank is open for debate, what is not open for debate is his skill.

We will now take a look at a couple of Wes Hardin's fights. His first gunfight was at the age of 16 in November 1867. He had been visiting an uncle and had gotten into a friendly wrestling match with an ex slave named Mage who was employed there chopping cotton. Hardin and his cousin both wrestled Mage who happened to be a very large man. Somewhere along the way Mage got angry and threatened to kill the two boys. The next day as Hardin rode his old horse home he was confronted on the road by the ex slave. Hardin says Mage charged him with a large stick. Mage took hold of the reins and tried to hit him with the stick. Hardin drew his pistol and fired, but Mage kept coming. Hardin fired several shots finally felling the attacker. Mage died later that month.

Here we see a large attacker with a contact weapon who requires more than one or two rounds to stop. Isn't that what we work in Force on Force drills today? Shoot till the threat is down. Hardin is believed to have been carrying a Colt Dragoon. So even multiple rounds from a .44 didn't immediately stop this enraged attacker. Something else to consider. Maybe placement is more important than bore diameter? It is also interesting to note that after this Hardin was more likely to shoot for the head. Many of his future victims were felled with a bullet in the brain.

We now skip ahead a few years to late 1870 and see Hardin traveling. The hotel he has stopped in has a bar and a very attractive woman sits in there apparently upset. Hardin approaches her and strikes up a conversation. She claims to be having relationship problems and he tries to comfort her. She asks if he'd like to go upstairs and apparently the prospect of a pretty and vulnerable young woman was more than he could resist. Upon entering the room however there is a loud banging on the door. She says it is her boyfriend and he will kill Hardin. The boyfriend enters and confronts Hardin, pistol pulled. Hardin says he didn't know she was his girl and apologizes. The man asks Hardin to hand over his money. Hardin agrees and says he does not want any trouble. Hardin then drops the money at the man's feet. As he takes his eyes off Hardin and bends down to pick up the cash, Hardin draws a pistol and fires a round through the man's head. Turns out the man and woman had been running this same scam for some time.

Here we see how not all bad guys are even guys, and you can be tricked into really bad situations if you are not careful. Girls can be bad guys too! However Hardin showed calm under duress and was able to use misdirection and a ruse of his own to reclaim the initiative and shoot a man who had him held at gunpoint.

Next we will look at an incident in 1871 on a cattle drive to Abilene. Hardin's herd has been getting mixed up with a Mexican herd that was coming up the trail behind them. An argument ensued and Hardin was shot at by one of the vaqueros. He rode back to his own camp and with his cousin, armed himself with a pair of pistols. As the Mexicans got closer Hardin and his cousin mounted their horses and charged them. Hardin ended up killing 5 of the 6 vaqueros, his cousin killing the other. This made Hardin a bit of a celebrity and word of this exploit soon found its way to Abilene and Marshal Hickok.

Not exactly the best way to handle a livestock dispute these days, but if a fight is imminent it is best to be on the offensive not the defensive. That is something that Hardin was always prepared to do. He had no qualms about shooting first when a fight became apparent. If we wait too long to act, we can dig ourselves into a hole we cannot get out of. We all have to develop our "line in the sand" where if it is crossed we are prepared to fight. Otherwise we end up so far behind the curve that we can never catch up. That is why being able to pick up on pre assault cues and see the fight coming is so important. Once you know the fight is about to be on it is time to get proactive, not reactive!

The final one we will look at is the May 26, 1874 killing of Brown County Texas deputy Charles Webb. This was the shooting for which Hardin was convicted and sent to prison in 1877. That day Hardin had spent his birthday gambling on horse races and generally carousing and having a good time. That evening he was approached by a deputy from another county while standing in front of a saloon. He recognizes the man who approaches with one hand behind his back. Hardin asks Webb if he has any "papers" on Hardin and Webb says no that he is not there on business he was just there to enjoy a night on the town. Hardin asks him then to join him for a drink and turns to walk toward the doors of the saloon. As Webb approaches he points the pistol he was holding behind his back and fires hitting Hardin in the side. At that moment one of Hardin's friends yells for Hardin to "look out"! Hardin lunges sideways at the same moment drawing and firing from probably a retention type position and shoots Webb in the face with his Smith and Wesson .44 American.

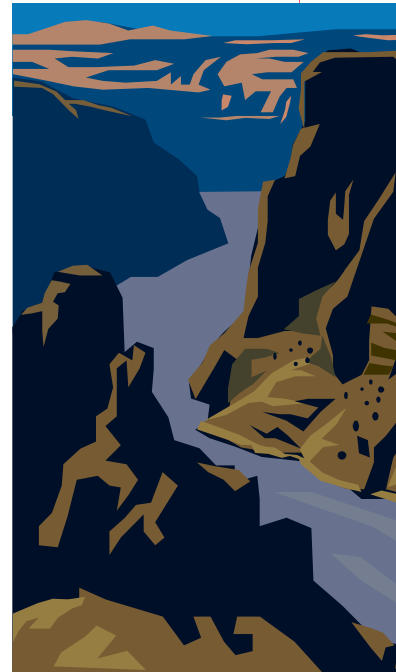
Just looking at sheer dynamics and not getting bogged down in the obvious questions surrounding the shooting of a law enforcement officer (even if he shot first from ambush), we have an assailant with pistol already drawn employing a ruse to get close to the victim. When the victim turns, leaving an opening, the assailant raises and fires his pistol. The "victim" here got off the line of attack and was hit with a peripheral hit instead of center of mass and was able to draw and return fire from a "stanceless" retention position while getting out of the way and score a headshot to end the altercation. How similar is that to a mugging/murder attempt in an alley in any city in America today? The ability to get off the "X", get your gun into play and fire quickly is just as important today as it was back then.

While not all the scenarios are still something we would run into on a daily basis (I doubt I'll ever get in a dispute over cattle) they all do share characteristics of dynamics that we do still encounter in physical confrontation today in 2006. Just as it was in 1869 accurate shooting still ends fights. Hits to the chest and head stopped people then and tend to do the same today. Sometimes you will not be able to just "Don't let them get close and shoot" like is taught in some places, but may have to physically fight off multiple assailants in order to even access your weapon and shoot from retention to make space to get away. Rifles are still best if they can be accessed. When the shooting is over make sure no one is coming up behind you by doing a 360 degree scan. And LOOK at who is coming not just glance and shoot if someone is approaching! The life you save may be a brother officer or a family member.

We also see where we need to be aware of our surroundings and don't be quick to trust unknown contacts. They may just be employing a ruse to get close enough to be able to overtake you. If the fight is on, then the fight is on! Get proactive! You owe them no mercy. Get off the "X" and shoot them to the ground! If you are hit, keep fighting! Handguns are still underpowered when compared to long guns. Even if you get hit, odds are you will survive. But only if you keep from getting hit multiple times. Finish the fight! And practice is essential. Both Hickok and Hardin practiced with their armaments religiously. It is an interesting side note that both men were eventually killed by ambush from behind. They had developed the skill that made their killers so fearful of their ability that they had to resort to shooting them from behind.

It is interesting to look back at where we came from. Sure we carry Glocks and AKs today and not 1851 Navy Colts and Winchesters. We have smokeless powder and 15 to 20 rd mags, instead of six shooters and big clouds of smoke when we pull the trigger, but the software hasn't really changed much since Cain and Abel. People still fight much the same. The dynamics of confrontation are still the same. The bad guys still get close to rob rape or pillage and often bring friends. You still are less likely to get hit if you move. You still have to hit the bad guys in important places to reliably stop them. So maybe looking back at where we came from will help keep us safe while we get to where we are going.

Earlier we looked at how the dynamics of confrontation and the issues that we deal with today are essentially the same as they dealt with in the Old West. Things may not be exactly the same, but the similarities vastly outweigh the differences. After all how different is an alleyway mugging with a knife on a hot summer night in 1870 than the same event in 2006?

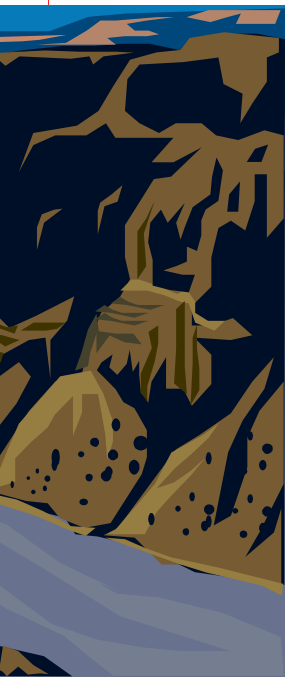


For many of us TV has been our only frame of reference for what gunfighting in the 19th century was like. Unfortunately the majority of the western movies and TV were stylized, sanitized and modernized and glamorized renditions of how events really happened. You simply can't have the good guy have a fistfight go less than a couple of minutes in a western movie. It also doesn't make for good cinematography for a gun fight to be a clinch situation with a flurry of strikes to the bad guy's midsection followed closely by a contact shot to the sternum. "Walk down" gunfights where both parties start at different ends of the street look much better on screen. Boxing match length fist fights also film better than a quick strike to the throat, a punch in the nose followed up by kicking their now downed opponent. Hollywood and reality rarely converge.

So when we look a little closer at what REALLY happened, we see a lot of similarities to what still happens in life and death struggles today. The hardware may change, but we still have the same operating software! Last month we looked at some specific gunfights and what we can learn from them. This month I'm going to hit upon several issues that we might just think of as "modern" issues but were in fact issues back then too.

We left off with the 1874 killing that would ultimately send John Wesley Hardin to prison in 1878. Hardin's capture shows us a few things too. Among these are dispelling the myth of open carry in the old west and the importance of a smooth fumble free draw.

Hardin left Texas with the highest bounty of the time on his head (\$4000). He moved east to Florida and then to Alabama. He spent 1876 and half of 1877 living in the southeastern US living under the assumed name John Swain. He was finally tracked down and captured August 23, 1877 in Pensacola Junction, Florida which is actually present day Flomaton, Alabama. The capture took place in a railroad smoking car. As Hardin and traveling companions sat waiting for the train to leave, an "entry team" of Texas rangers and Pensacola sheriff's deputies boarded the train.



Accounts vary as to EXACTLY what happened. Hardin saw the rangers and knew they were there for him but he claims to have yelled out that he was being attacked by robbers maybe hoping to get help from other passengers. Sheriff William Henry Hutchinson and Deputy A.J Perdue had entered the car from behind Hardin and they both grabbed him and wrestled him to the floor. As the three men struggled on the floor, ranger John Armstrong came forward and struck Hardin over the head with the barrel of his pistol. One of Hardin's traveling companions Jim Mann, not knowing who the assailants were, pulled a pistol and was promptly shot and killed. Mann was not wanted for anything and it is doubtful he even knew who Hardin really was!

Hardin claims to have never gone for his gun because it was being carried concealed and he knew he'd never outdraw their drawn guns. He was going to wait until later and try to take them by surprise. When asked where his pistol was he claimed to be unarmed but upon being searched the lawmen found a .44 caliber Colt 1860 Army stuffed inside his waistband under his shirt. Another more popular version of this (that I believe is the version Armstrong gave the newspapers) is that Hardin went for his pistol but it snagged on his suspender and he was wrestled to the ground and hit over the head by Armstrong with a revolver. Hardin himself states in his book and in letters that if he had drawn he'd be "a corpse" as there were 40 men outside all about the train station acting as the perimeter team.

In this scene we see several issues that we still deal with today. Hardin's pistol was carried concealed inside the waistband and under his shirt NOT in an exposed belt holster. Many folks think that everyone moved about openly armed in the last half of the 19th century. In fact most states, cities and towns had laws against carrying firearms at all, or at least against open carry in public. It was big business for the police departments and city and town marshals assessing fines for carrying pistols in town. Guns were typically carried openly out "on the range" but in town they were carried concealed. In fact the shoulder holster and pocket holster were not 20th century inventions, but 19th century inventions to be able to better carry guns concealed. In fact El Paso Saddlery still makes a reproduction of the shoulder holster Hardin commissioned them to make for him in 1895.

Hardin was carrying concealed just like we do today. And just like we do today he had to be able to access the gun under duress. In this instance if we believe the "stuck in the suspender story" his normal quick draw was impeded by the way the gun was carried. Lets face it, even the fastest most deadly pistoleer in the west won't win if he can't get his gun into play! That is why it is so imperative to devote time to drawing your gun from your ACTUAL mode of carry not just open carry range holsters! On the other hand if we believe the accounts that he did not try to draw, we see where even for a man with a lightning fast draw, drawing against a drawn gun is a course of action he decided to avoid in order to wait for the right time later.

We also see here that an impact weapon (in this case a gun barrel) can very well beat a pistol in close quarters. As Hardin struggled to clear his pistol, Armstrong struck him in the head and knocked him to the floor. In fact he lay motionless so long that Armstrong thought he had killed him. It might just as well have been a sap, blackjack or baton. The point is that the mere presence of Hardin's gun AND Hardin's considerable skill, and even his awareness and ability to see the fight coming before it was on could not keep him from being knocked silly and wrestled into submission. For all the guys that think just being aware of your surroundings and carrying a gun and knowing how to use it will solve ALL your problems this incident from history shows that is NOT always the case! If you get "smoked in the melon" by an impact weapon, your pistol skills may never even come into play!

Hardin talks later about getting ready to affect a gun disarm in order to escape. "I knew my only hope was to escape. My guards were kind to me but they were not most vigilant. By promising to be quiet, I had caused them to relax somewhat. When we got to Decatur we had to stop and change cars for Memphis. They took me to a hotel, got a room and sent for our meals. Jack [Duncan] and Armstrong were now getting intimate with me, and when dinner came I suggested the necessity of removing my cuffs and they agreed to do so. Armstrong unlocked the jewelry [manacles] and started to turn around, exposing his six-shooter to me, when Jack jerked him around and pulled his pistol at the same time. 'Look out!' he said 'John will kill us and escape'. Of course I laughed at him and ridiculed the idea. It was really the very chance I was looking for, but Jack had taken the play away just before it got ripe. I intended to jerk Armstrong's pistol, kill Jack Duncan or make him throw up his hands. I could have made him unlock my shackles, or get the key from his dead body and do it myself. I could then have easily made my escape. That time never came again."

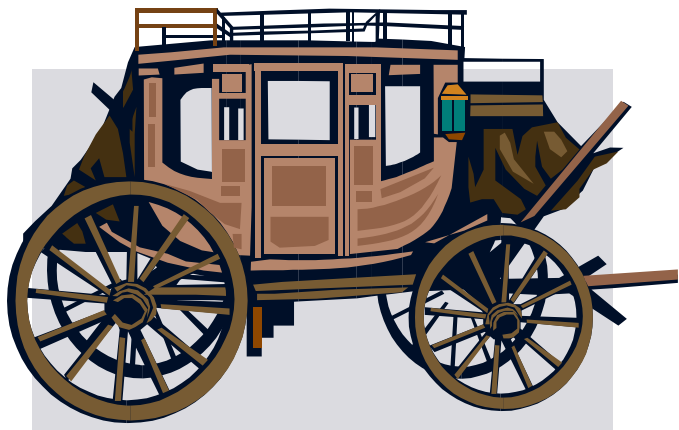
It is chillingly clear that had Hardin got hold of the pistol he would have probably tallied at least two more killings. This is no different than today when an officer transports a prisoner. Again, the mere presence of the gun is no real insurance even against an unarmed assailant. Weapon retention and disarm training can save your life! In another incident related from Pensacola a few weeks before Hardin's capture, one William Chipley, the superintendent of the Pensacola Railroad, had an altercation with Hardin's brother-in-law Brown Bowen.

According to the Pensacola Gazette, Bowen chased a black man through the terminal and hotel dining room. The man escaped as Chipley passed by while going to his office. Bowen shouted at Chipley asking why he had not stopped the man and Chipley replied he had nothing to do with it! Bowen proceeded to point his cocked pistol at Chipley who jammed his hand between the hammer and frame preventing it from firing. He snatched the gun from Bowen and hit him over the head with it. The confrontation ended with Bowen leaving swearing to kill Chipley. Here we see again that a weapon disarm is a viable tactic especially if the object of the disarm is very close. It is often much easier to take a gun away from someone than to outdraw the drawn gun. Most people probably look at the disarm as a modern "progressive" technique, but it has been performed as long as people have been pointing guns at each other.

Another "modern" item is the backup gun. How many carry a snubnose or small auto as a backup to their primary pistol? There is evidence of backup guns being carried by various individuals in the late 19th century. Wells Fargo detective James B Hume was known to carry a cut down Colt 1860 Army .44 cap and ball revolver. Hume was the man who captured Charles "Black Bart" Boles. Noted El Paso marshal Dallas Stoudemire carried a similarly chopped 1860 Army as a backup to his pair of Smith and Wesson .44 Americans. Wild Bill Hickok was known to carry a derringer or two in his vest as backups to his Colt 1851 Navy pistols. John "Doc" Holliday was also known to carry a .41 caliber Remington derringer also. Though it seems some folks did carry them documented cases of using them seems thin. There is however at least one account.

John Wesley Hardin was gambling over a bowling match one day. He had removed his pistols so he could roll, and an argument ensued. His opponent a man named Phil Sublette threatened him and went for his pistol. Hardin pulls a "Bulldog" pistol and sticks it in the man's ear! So not only did Hardin carry his two "belt pistols" but apparently also a "hideout gun" too! Hardin also mentions

drawing and firing a derringer at another man. But aside from these instances I have not found many documented cases of small backup guns being employed. The lack of documentation of usage however should not be viewed as an indictment against backups. Most fights just did not go long enough to empty one (or both) "primaries" and then pull the backup too! Much like today, carrying a backup is an insurance policy against a worst case scenario!



The last Hardin incident we will look at is his last. On the night of August 19, 1895 Hardin stood at the bar of the Acme Saloon in El Paso, drinking and rolling dice with a grocer named Henry Brown. Earlier in the evening Hardin had a heated exchange of words with constable John Selman. In the hours since then Selman had been fuming over the incident. Around midnight while Hardin stood at the bar Selman stepped through the doorway and shot Hardin in the back of the head. He fired several more shots as Hardin fell to the floor. Just like Wild Bill, Hardin met his end not in a shootout, but in an ambush from behind. Hardin had such a reputation as a gunman that even at age 42 folks were not lining up to challenge him. Ambush eliminates the advantage of skill! Though Hardin was armed, reportedly carrying a SW New Frontier 44/40 double action revolver and a Colt 1877 .41 double action, he was shot from behind and had no chance to get his gun into play.

It is also interesting to note that Selman said he shot Hardin in the head because Hardin was "known to wear a metal breastplate". The newspapers even reported no sign of a mail shirt on Hardin as it was rumored among the citizens of El Paso that he always wore one. Hardin makes no mention of ever wearing armor but his manuscript was not finished when he was killed. It is also unlikely that he would have mentioned it if he did wear a "vest" as it would not have been smart to "advertise". Wyatt Earp was also rumored to have worn some type of mail shirt under his shirt, but I can find no documentation of him ever actually doing so. Again, not the sort of thing you tell people.

Now before you say "RUBBISH" to this let us look at another historical event. Comanche chief Pohibit Quasha (also known as Iron Shirt or Iron Jacket) was rumored to be impervious to gunfire. He was in fact witnessed having been shot in numerous confrontations to no ill effect. On May 12, 1858 on the banks of the South Canadian River after pursuit by John "RIP" Ford's force of Texas Rangers and Brazos River reservation Indians, Iron Jacket's luck would run out. Indian sharpshooter Jim Pockmark patiently waited for the shot and put a .58 caliber musketball through Iron Jacket's unprotected side. It turns out that armor not magic is what had preserved the chief for so long. He wore an armor breastplate vest left over from the Spanish Conquista hundreds of years before. Hmm... maybe something to wear to stop bullets is a good thing? Interestingly though, we see that rifle fire is still a good solution to armored opponents!

The final confrontation we will look into is the February 8, 1887 streetfight between gambler/gunmen Luke Short and "Long Hair" Jim Courtright. Luke Short was a gambler/gunman who had moved to Fort Worth, Texas from Dodge City, Kansas. He had been a half owner of the Long Branch Saloon in Dodge City. He was friends with Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday and had survived several altercations before moving to Texas. In Fort Worth he had bought into the White Elephant Saloon and ran afoul of town Marshall Jim Courtright.

"Long Hair Jim" Courtright was a gunman of some repute. He was a rumored to be a crack shot, even skilled enough to be able to shoot the dangling ear rings from his wife's ears without harming her. He was reputed to have killed between 6 and 10 men in the performance of his duties. However most of his duties were running a "protection racket" where he fleeced area saloon proprietors for payments for his "protective services". Short refused Courtright's offer for protection and the animosity grew between them.

On the night of February 8 an intoxicated Courtright called Short out into the street. Short came out to see what the commotion was. There he was confronted by Courtright. The two men argued for a minute. Short was a notoriously dapper dresser and during the argument he grabbed hold of the lapels of his vest. Courtright yelled out "Don't you pull a gun on me!" and Short answered, replying he had no gun. He told Courtright to see for himself.

As the two stood literally face to face Courtright pulled his pistol and projected it toward Short. Now as far as EXACTLY what happened is not clear. Courtright's pistol snagged on a watch chain. But it is unclear whether it was his own or Short's. At the distance they were standing EITHER is possible. Some reports had Courtright shoving the muzzle of his Colt Single Action Army .45 into Short's stomach and the hammer falling with Short's watch chain getting caught between the hammer and frame preventing the gun from firing. Other accounts have Courtright getting tangled in his own watch chain as he drew the pistol.

Regardless of whose time piece was involved, Courtright's pistol did not fire. At the same time Short pulled a .38 Colt 1877 DA "Lightning" pistol from his back pocket firing as it came up. The bullet struck the frame of Courtright's pistol and tore off Courtright's right thumb! Courtright passed the pistol to his left hand in an attempt to stay in the fight, but Short took this time to step back and fire three or four rounds into Courtright's chest. Courtright crumpled to the cold street.

The next day local hardware stores experienced a run on double action pistols. Word had gotten out about how fast Short had dispatched a gunman of Courtright's skill and reputation. Short had used the double action Colt to good effect, and folks thought that Courtright's demise surely had more to do with his single action pistol than picking on the wrong man. Much like today people thought it had more to do with the equipment than the skill and nerve of the operator.

In this final fight we see all the elements of a classic close quarter engagement stemming from an alcohol fueled argument. The combatants begin the fight at range close enough to touch each other. Courtright yells for Short to not pull a gun, likely in an attempt to make murder look like self defense. Even today what the witnesses hear may be as important as what they see! Again we see a draw getting fouled when it is made from street clothes and not from "range gear". Do we see a pattern developing? We also see projecting the pistol toward the target when you are in touching distance is a bad idea. Short's fast draw and shooting along the line of presentation of the pistol saved the day here.

Courtright showed good instinct if not good judgment. After being wounded in the gun hand he tried to pass it off to the off hand to stay in the fight. The problem was he was facing a skilled gunman. Training for the lowest common denominator of an opponent has always been bad for your health! And as always luck sometimes plays a part!

I hope this has shown a glimpse of how the REAL wild west gunfights were. They were fast, close up, violent affairs that rarely looked anything like TV or movies. They really are just like what we encounter today. The equipment changes but the dynamics are the same. If this interests you further you might read some of my source material: [The Life Of John Wesley as Told By Himself](#) by J.W. Hardin, [John Wesley Hardin, Dark Angel of Texas](#) by Leon Metz, [The Last Gunfighter](#) by Richard Marohn, [Wild Bill Hickok-Gunfighter](#) by Joseph Rosa, [Guns and the Gunfighters](#) by the Guns and ammo editors, and the History Channel's [Wild West Tech](#).

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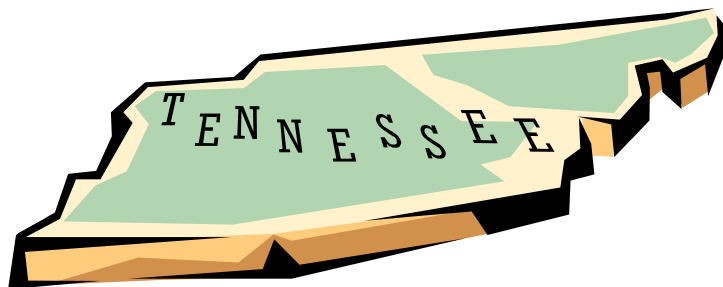


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Gun Permit Updates



In Shelby County, one person in every thirty-three now has a Handgun Carry Permit.

Your Tennessee Handgun Carry Permit is now valid in thirty states.

This means you can legally carry a gun on a Tennessee permit in all of the following states:

Vermont, New Hampshire, Delaware, Virginia, N. Carolina, S. Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, N. Dakota, S. Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Alaska.

