

Chapter 10

Practical Pistol Competition

Excellence needs no justification; it stands as an end in itself. According to Parkinson's penetrating dictum, happiness is its by-product. And in all human activity, from commerce to warfare, the fountainhead of excellence is competition. Only when man is measured against man can he discover his capacity for achievement. In meeting any set standard, a man is only partially tested, but when he matches himself against all comers, there is no upper limit to what he may accomplish. Competition among athletes is what broke the 4-minute mile. Competition among brothers-in-arms is what produced the "three-hundred-plus" fighter pilot. Competition between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. is what put man on the moon.

And modern, open, freestyle, diversified, big-caliber, pistol competition is what has taught us how to shoot. Before its advent, we shot a good score on an irrelevant course of fire and thought ourselves competent. Now we know that no matter how good we may become, we are not good enough. Someone can do better, and, in practical pistolcraft, this matters. It can easily be a matter of life and death.

Conventional target competition is an excellent sport, and its champions deserve all our respect. Their achievements are masterpieces of nerve control, but they hardly relate to weaponry. Practical (or "defensive," or "combat") pistol competition, on the other hand, produces true skill-at-arms, and skill-at-arms is an ineffable personal comfort to anyone living in this savage century. Timidity in the face of violence is unbecoming to God's Image. Personal skill-at-arms can overcome it; and only when it is overcome, can a man live at peace with himself.

This is the value of practical pistol competition. It has produced the "swordsmanship" of the modern age. There are those who are distressed by this, maintaining that such skill is "anti-social." Perhaps it is, but only to the degree that man himself is anti-social. It seems we must fight, whether or not we wish to fight. A reasonable man can understand the need to know how to fight well. It is also worth noting that skill is the reward of determina-

tion, dedication, and self-discipline more than natural talent, and thus is more commonly found in the righteous man than in the criminal. A good man is safer in an armed society than in one where only bare hands matter.

So practical pistol competition is frankly and openly a simulation of defensive combat. It is defensive in that it is reactive—a way of measuring one's ability to finish a conflict someone else starts. It is therefore as diversified as possible, yet governed by dogmatic principles, for when its principles are violated, it becomes just another pastime without practical application.

PRINCIPLES

The first principle is the balance, previously noted, of accuracy, power, and speed. All problems must require hitting a target, large or small, close or distant. In this there is no departure from target shooting, except that the target must not be graduated into meaningless rings, but rather must simply locate a fight-stopping hit. To assure power, competition is limited to service cartridges, fully loaded, and, since many of these are insufficiently powerful for serious work, the shooter who uses a really adequate weapon may be granted certain scoring advantages, as we will see. To assure speed, the practical match is always shot within a very short time allowance, or scored on a time scale which gives victory to the quickest man who also hits. Speed without accuracy is useless, but so is accuracy without speed, and both together may not suffice without power.

The next principle is diversification. No program of practical competition should ever hold the same match twice in the same year. Moreover, whenever any one course of fire becomes too well understood by any great number of contestants, it should be abandoned for a time, no matter how good it may be, and replaced with an unfamiliar set of challenges. When a new course of fire is introduced, it should be without advance notice, so that the shooter who wins must rise to the occasion without practice.

True to the reactive concept, each firing string must commence

with the pistol holstered and safe, hands off the equipment.

The shooting system used must not be specified. If a man wishes to shoot single-action, or from the prone position, or one-handed, or standing on his head, he is free to try. Only thus can we discover what works best. The course poses the problem, and the shooter must be left free to solve it. The contestant must not be told how to load his piece.

There must be no allowance for action type. Any serviceable, powerful pistol is eligible, and all compete together without handicap. Specifically, time allowances for revolvers and auto pistols must be the same.

The same problem must not be posed in differing time intervals, as with the 8, 6, and 4-second stages of the International Rapid Fire Course. The practical shot shoots as fast as he can hit, and does not try to carry a clock in his head. (Five "eights" in four seconds is infinitely preferable to five "tens" in eight.)

The final principle is realism, often termed "combat logic." This requires that each problem posed by any course of fire must be an approximation of a realistic combat situation. Course designers must be sure to avoid firing strings that do not represent an actual encounter. In general, this rules against firing more than two shots on any one target in any one string (but this point is not inflexible).

THE PRACTICAL PISTOL TARGET

We have settled on this target as most useful, but its use is not invariable. Targets may be balloons, or steel plates, or even bullseyes in some cases. It is important that the target is not brightly colored, or a contrasting black and white, and that it is varied from match to match. The use of one target color tends to the use of sights which are useful with only one color scheme.

An "impact target" is one that registers a hit electrically, and may be of any size or shade.

PRACTICAL PISTOL RULES

These are approximately the rules of the Southwest Pistol League (U.S.A.), and will serve well for any organization contemplating a pro-

Practical Pistol Competition

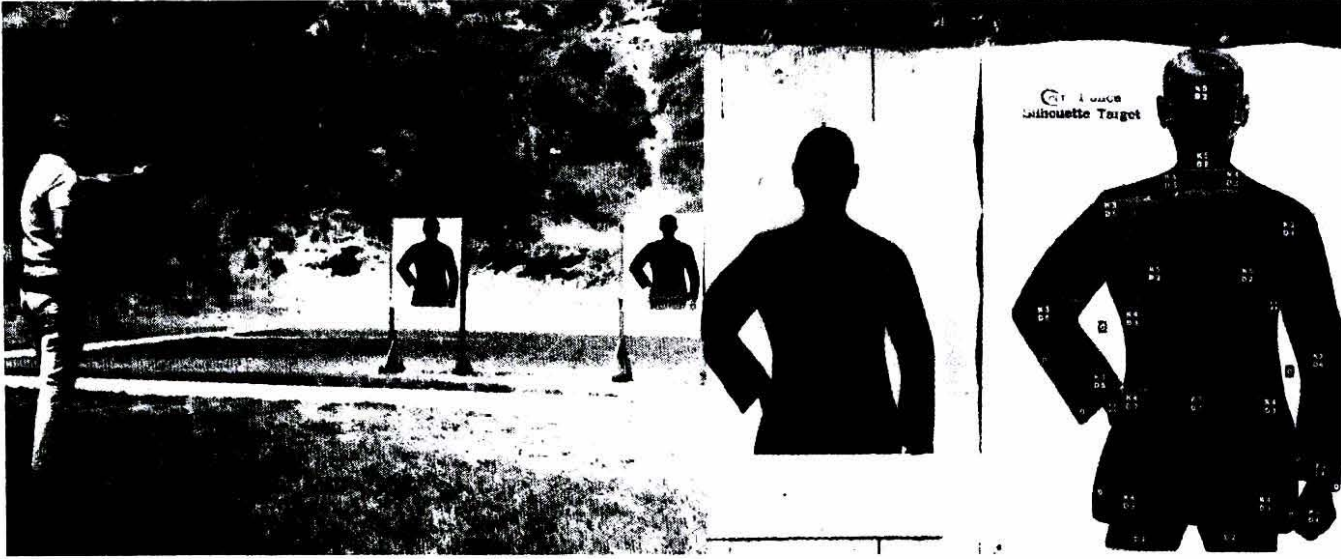
gram of practical pistol competition.

1. Pistols used in competition shall be serviceable and safe. If any pistol is observed to be unserviceable or unsafe, it shall be withdrawn at the request of the contest director.

8. No entrant shall wear or use two pistols.
9. The general lower limit of pistols used in competition is the 9mm Parabellum cartridge. Action type shall not be restricted.
10. In cases where metal targets are

shall have hammer fully down or be cocked and locked by a manual safety.

12. A premature shot, in the holster or into the ground closer to the firing line than six feet (or two meters), shall disqualify the entrant.
13. Optical sights shall not be



Combat training calls for firing at targets marked to resemble the vital and non-vital areas of the human form (top, left and right); a shooter who cannot face a paper target so marked would have trouble indeed if he faced a real adversary in combat. The conventional ring targets can be used, if that's all that is available, by placing the scoring rings in position over a silhouette target (bottom).

2. In any single contest, a contestant must use the same pistol, ammunition, and sight setting in all stages of the contest; except that a contestant may use another pistol of the same type, action, and caliber as that with which he commenced the contest if his starting pistol becomes unserviceable during the contest.
3. All types of pistols will compete together. No contest will be restricted to any one type of pistol, and the same condition of time, distance, or scoring shall apply to all pistols equally.
4. There shall be no restrictions on overall weight of pistols or weight of trigger pull.
5. There shall be no restrictions on sights, sight radius, length of barrel, or number of rounds loaded.
6. Detachable shoulder stocks are not permitted.
7. Extension magazines for auto pistols (containing a larger than normal number of rounds) are permitted only on reload, and



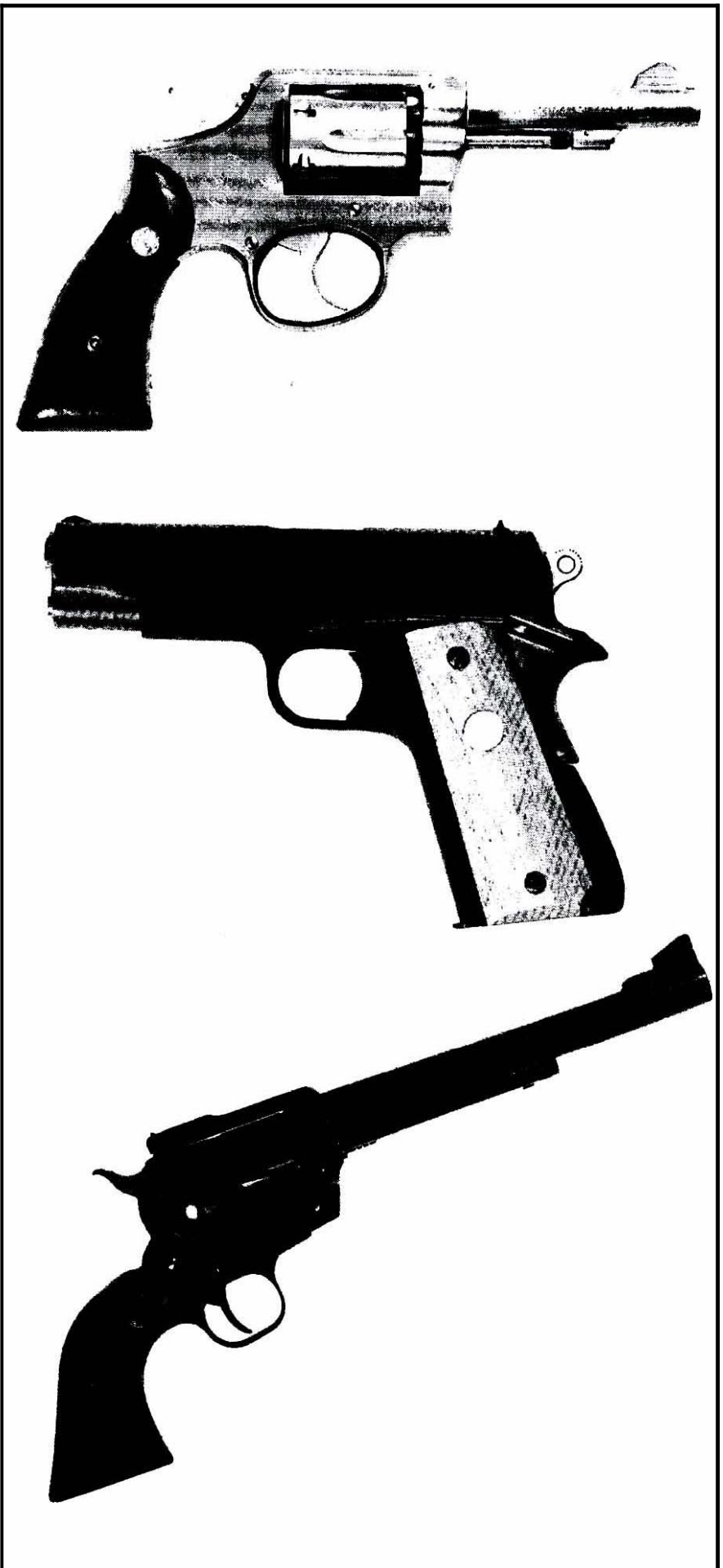
used which may be damaged by excessive penetration, the club conducting the contest may prohibit cartridges that may damage the equipment. Metal piercing and incendiary or tracer ammunition is prohibited.

11. Pistols shall be holstered and safe. Revolvers shall have hammers fully down. Auto pistols

banned, but must be used throughout the entire contest if the entrant desires to use them at all.

14. Every championship event in any one calendar year shall be different from every other. All courses shall place proper balance between speed and accuracy.

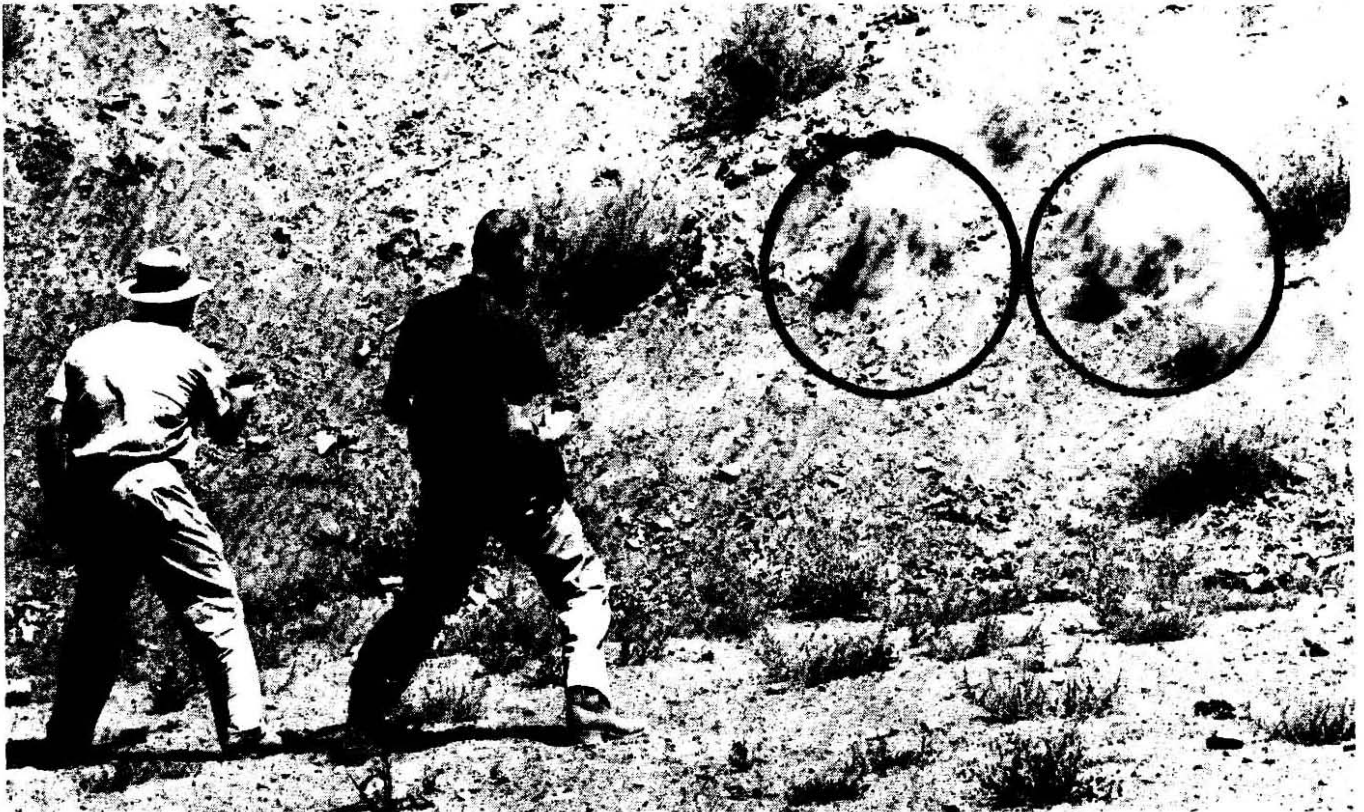
15. The minimum load requirements shall be determined by the organizing body.
16. All contests shall require the shooter's pistol to be drawn from a holster.
17. No contest shall require the use of a particular type of holster, nor shall any holster type which is permitted in any contest be barred from any other contest; however, in contests requiring a draw from a concealed condition, the degree of concealment may be specified and ruled upon by the club conducting the contest.
18. The holster must hold the pistol against a withdrawal force of twice its own weight, or be equipped with a latch which positively locks the pistol in and must be manually released for each draw.
19. The holster may not be tied to the shooter's leg.
20. There shall be no restrictions upon the stance, position, or technique adopted by any contestant, except that no firing for score shall be conducted from an artificial rest. Simulation of a shooting situation on a course shall not be meant to imply a restriction of stance, position, or technique.
21. "Normal Ready" designates a position in which the pistol is holstered and safe, and neither hand touches the pistol, holster, belt, body, spare magazine, nor spare ammunition. Spare ammunition must be carried in a manner suitable for continuous wear. The firing hand must be sufficiently far from the pistol to permit a plane to be passed between gun and hand without touching either.
22. Once the ready position is assumed, it may not be changed before the firing signal. "Creeping" (moving the hand towards the pistol in the ready position) is subject to penalty in score or forfeiture of a bout.
23. Pistols will not be loaded except as directed by contest officials.
24. During loading and unloading, and during remedial action in the event of a malfunction, the muzzle of the pistol must be directed downrange.



All types of big bore pistols compete against each other in combat shooting, without regard to action type, caliber, or special equipment. Double action revolvers, such as the S&W Stainless steel .38 (top) or the Ruger .357 Magnum (bottom), can shoot against the big bore auto (center), but the auto is proving to king.

Practical Pistol Competition

25. After a bout, no shooter may leave his position until his pistol has been unloaded and inspected by a safety officer.
26. In the event a pistol cannot be unloaded, due to a broken or failed mechanism, the shooter will notify the contest director, who will take such action as he thinks best and safest. In no case will a shooter leave the firing line with a loaded pistol in his possession.
27. On courses requiring the contestant to run, pistols must be safe during movement, i.e., hammer fully down with all revolvers, and double-action autos without Condition One override, and Condition One chamber, or on the safety notch.
 - b. Double-action revolvers-hammer fully down. No half-cocks.
 - c. Auto pistols-hammer fully down or fully cocked and with the thumb safety on safe, never on half-cock.
31. On paper targets, a shot, the outside diameter of which touches any part of a scoring ring counts for the value of the ring. Radial tears in the paper extending outside the actual bullet diameter do not count.
32. If a shooter fires after the signal to cease firing, he shall lose the maximum value of each shot so fired, to be subtracted from his total score.
33. If a shooter has more hits on his paper than allowed in a given exchange in a man-against-man bout, or he shall lose the maximum value of one hit on a paper target.
35. When balloon targets are used, a balloon which is hit but merely deflates rather than bursting, shall not count as a hit.
36. When electric timing is used in man-against-man bouts, hits separated by five one-hundredths of a second or less shall be ruled a draw.
37. In man-against-man bouts, simultaneous hits shall count as a draw for each contestant. If correct action is taken, but no shots are fired, as in the Balloon Option, neither contestant shall score a point, but the bout shall resume as if no action had taken place.



- (cocked and locked) with single-action autos. Fingers must be outside the trigger guard.
28. During a contest, shooters not firing will refrain from handling their pistols except as necessary to the task at hand. The normal condition of pistols not actually engaged is holstered and unloaded.
 29. Aerial shooting is not permitted in connection with or in the vicinity of any contest.
 30. The ready condition of pistols in competition shall be:
 - a. Single-action revolvers-hammer fully down on an empty
 34. If a shooter fires before the firing string, the maximum value for each excess shot shall be subtracted from his score, except when it can be established to the satisfaction of the contest director that the hits in question are of a different caliber from that used by the contestant in question, or when it can be positively proved that another contestant was guilty. In the latter case, the contestant whose target was fired upon by another contestant will be allowed to fire the stage over.
- Combat Shooting competition can utilize randomly-shaped targets such as cans or rocks on a back-country course as long as all competitors get a try at the same string of targets**
38. Ties shall be broken in a manner decided upon by the club conducting the contest. However, this shall always be done by shooting, not by chance, and must be one or more stages of the contest being conducted.
 39. It shall be the responsibility of each contestant to keep account of his score along with the scorekeeper. If there is an error in the scorekeeper's final tally,

it shall be the responsibility of the contestant to protest the final results prior to awarding of prizes. Failure to file a protest with the scorekeeper prior to the above time nullifies any claims made thereafter.

40. The Standard Silhouette may be scored on the basis of "hits-and-Xs," in which hits establish the score and Xs break ties; or on the "5-and-4" basis, in which a hit in the X-ring counts 5, and anything on the paper, but outside the X-ring, counts 4, or on the African Count (below).
41. At the option of the organizers, the African Count (invented by the South African Practical Pistol League) may be used to regulate power. With this scoring system, any hit in the X-ring counts 5. A hit outside the X-ring, but still on the silhouette, counts 4 if the shooter is using a .44 Magnum full load (or the equivalent, i.e. **.44** Automag), 3 if he uses a big caliber pistol or a fully loaded ,357. 2 if .38 Special service load or 9mm Parabellum, and 1 for .38 target loads or .380. The rationale is that a center hit will suffice with even a light load, but with a marginal hit, one needs more power.
42. At the option of the organizers, the Comstock Count (invented by Walt Comstock, of Placerville, California) may be used to balance speed against accuracy. This scoring system, made practical by the availability of pocket calculators, divides score by time. The shooter takes all the time he needs to fire his string. Then his numerical score is totaled, and from it is subtracted twice the maximum value of a hit for any shot fired which does not hit the silhouette. This sub-total is then divided by the time, to the nearest 1/10 second, the shooter took to fire his string, from the starting signal to his last shot. The result is his score. The rationale here is that a practical shot should always shoot as fast as he can be sure of hitting, but no faster.