

# The Quick Or the Dead

by Gen Wallace M. Greene, Jr., USMC(Ret)

*"Snapshooting" is a method for self-protection first introduced by the police in Shanghai, China, where it was picked up by many of the 4th Marines serving there, including the author, who commanded a company in that regiment.*

*Don't squeeze that trigger!  
Freeze and yank it!  
Grip your pistol as if it weighs 30 pounds!*

This is certainly a strange way to run a pistol range and, needless to say, not the USMC way! But it was the method used to teach Shanghai municipal policemen how to shoot the .45-caliber Colt automatic pistol in the early 1930s. The results were surprising!

Marines have always been interested in snapshooting not only with the pistol or revolver but with all hand-held weapons; interested particularly for the sport of it, yes—but also for "business" use on street patrols and in close-in fighting where the first shot or the first burst kills and counts.

Let's see, then, just how the Shanghai police learned to snapshoot.

Before 1920, pistol shooting as practiced by the Shanghai municipal police was in accordance with the standard method of instruction used all over the world and still largely in use today. (Face left-right foot forward—left hand on hip—steady aim—squeeze the trigger). The result was that shooting by the police on duty was anything but good!

In 1920 a new method was introduced that called for practice under conditions resembling as closely as possible those under which police would have to operate in actual shooting affrays in Shanghai. Subsequent encounters with armed criminals produced results that were outstanding. This new method was soon adopted by the police in Hong Kong and the Malay States, and in 1925 was instituted by the San Francisco police. By 1937 this system of pistol instruction was firmly entrenched in Shanghai police training where it was picked up by many members of the 4th Marines who were on duty there at that time. In fact, this method, modified so as to apply to all hand-held weapons, was later used by several Marine units during the Pacific campaigns—notably by the 22d Marines.

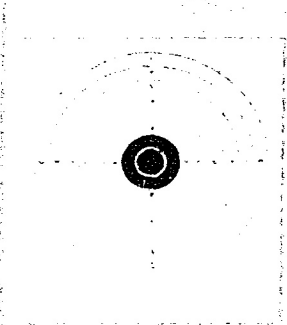
A comparison of the "old" and "new" systems should quickly convince anyone which method is the more practical for dealing with armed criminals, e.g., looters, or with armed military opponents at close quarters. And Marines can expect to meet both types of enemy in future operations.

So let's look at the two methods of pistol instruction—the "old" one in use up to 1920 and the "new," thereafter—and see why the change was made and what perhaps we can ourselves gain from such a comparison.

Under the "old" method a "perfect" stance



*Figure 1.*



*Figure 2.*



*Figure 3.*



*Figure 4.*



*Figure 5.*



*Figure 6.*



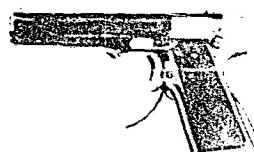
*Figure 7.*



*Figure 8.*



*Figure 9.*



*Figure 10.*



*Figure 11.*



*Figure 12.*



*Figure 13.*



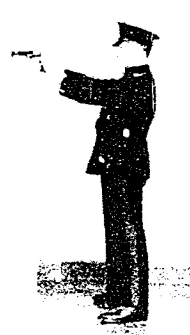
*Figure 14.*



*Figure 15.*



*Figure 16.*



*Figure 17.*



*Figure 18.*

was assumed, the shooter faced to the left with his right foot forward, left arm behind the back or braced on the hip, breathing restrained, right arm horizontal and straight, sights aligned on the target, then carefully squeezed the trigger to fire (Figure 1). Enough time was allowed in "rapid fire" to get off at least three times as many rounds as called for! Perfect quietness was observed at the firing point with ideal lighting conditions over the target. Bull's-eye targets were used at 10-25 yards with each hit valued according to its position (Figure 2). Obviously, this "old" method was designed for shooting at targets unable to fire back and had little practical value in the alleyway or in the bush. Mr. Fairbourne, then the musketry officer of the Shanghai police force, termed the "old" method as "a nice, harmless recreation for tired businessmen," and that it was—and is!

Under the "new" method, a natural stance was assumed; the shooter faced the target squarely or with one foot forward—left arm free for use if required—with pistol in the center of the body (Figure 3). The pistol was gripped with muscles tensed just as in a sudden shooting affray firing with a "straight arm," a "half-hip," or "hip" (Figures 4, 5, and 6). Each shot was fired in a fraction of a second, preferably in bursts of two or three shots. A close miss would spoil an opponent's accuracy. Conditions on the range were as near as possible to those that the shooter would contend with on duty. Offstage shooting, shouting, whistle-blowing, and other distractions were employed. Firing was also done through smoke and darkness.

Man-size targets (Figure 7) were used with hits anywhere counting. A wounded man was often of more value to the police than a dead one! All shooting was done at distances not exceeding 10 yards.

An interesting and exciting variation followed the range work. The shooter took position with his pistol in holster at a point about 50 yards from a small 2-story house. At signal, or when fired upon, the shooter drew his pistol and raced to the house, entered through a basement window, and commenced working his way upwards from the cellar to the first floor rooms. From there, the shooter went up a narrow stair to a second floor, all the time firing on fleeting target silhouettes that presented themselves in every shape, size, and position with sounds of firing. This was a real fire and movement course. When it was all over the shooter was judged by the number of hits on target, his time, and his movement. As Mr. Fairbourne used to say to his policemen, "This is the sort of shooting you will have to do. For you it is a case of the *quick* or the *dead*! Take your choice!"

It is also interesting to observe the way in which

the Shanghai police carried and loaded their pistols. The pistol was carried in a holster on the left side of the belt (Figure 8). At close quarters, the left forearm could then be used to prevent the opponent from snatching the pistol while the right arm was available for drawing the pistol from the holster (Figure 9). The safety catch on the pistol was permanently pinned down and could not be used (Figure 10)! This was done because of the many accidental killings and woundings that had resulted from failure to properly use the safety catch when the weapon was loaded.

The pistol could be loaded and fired in one third of a second in the following fashion. Hold the pistol muzzle down in front of the center of the body (Figure 11). Keep a firm grip with the left hand on the slide. Push the receiver forward and downward as in Figure 12. Note that the left hand and arm have not moved. Release the hold on the slide allowing it to spring forward. Simultaneously, bring the pistol to the position shown in Figure 13. Also note the position of the left arm. The above movements in Figures 12 and 13 should be continuous and completed in the fraction of a second. Pistols were never carried with the hammer at full cock. The excuse that it was easier to load with a cocked hammer was never accepted. Further, in the case of a civilian suspect, Mr. Fairbourne would dryly add, "The suspect would object, and rightly so, to having a cocked pistol presented to him whilst being searched!"

The "one-hand gun"—in this case the .45-caliber Colt pistol—was designed for the quickest possible work at close quarters. Shanghai police records showed that in shooting scrapes most hits were three yards or under. Hits over five yards were considered lucky.

The first shot fired, hit or miss, gave a two second advantage over your opponent. The police motto was, "*Speed—more speed—and still more speed.*" It was an education to witness an experienced policeman go into action with his pistol!

If, at the end of a shoot-out, one had only partially expended a magazine with the pistol cocked and one round left in the chamber; you were taught to take prompt precautions for safety by removing the magazine, but remembering that it was neither necessary nor useful to drop the magazine on a cement pavement or in the mud!

As previously described, in the ready position the pistol is in the center of the body. This is accomplished by holding the pistol as a continuation of the right arm (Figure 15); then twisting the wrist slightly to the right-hand side, which will give the position as shown in Figure 16. With this grip no alinement of the sight is necessary. One has only to face the opponent, raise the arm and you are "on."

When firing at a distance greater than 10 yards, both hands were used on the pistol (Figure 17) or the weapon was braced against a pole, building, or other surface (Figure 18).

In the French sector of Shanghai, two-man patrols of Annamite police would move down the center of a street in single file with pistols drawn and (carried as shown in Figure 15) as they walked—safety catch down—the chamber empty—but ready to go!—instantly loading and firing in one motion as they had been taught. The first burst would be off like a fast draw in a frontier saloon of the old West!

*Gen Greene now describes snapshooting as it was practiced by a regiment in World War II. Readers should find the comparisons between the early police technique used in a crowded urban environment and the military version used in close combat in the jungles of the Pacific to be interesting.*

The Marine Corps identified the need for an effective snapshooting technique as it entered World War II. With the attack on Pearl Harbor and the immediate prospects of an all-out amphibious campaign in the islands of the Pacific, the Marine Corps intensified its training for operations in jungle terrain and individual close combat.

As early as February 1942, the 1st Marine Division was conducting snapshooting demonstra-

tions and practice in an open area in front of the tent camp at Camp Lejeune. As the months wore on, this training grew into a very sophisticated course staged in thickly wooded training areas using electrically operated “pop-up” targets and automatic scoring systems. On the west coast the 2d Marine Division engaged in similar training at Camp Pendleton. Headquarters Marine Corps took a close interest in the equipping and conduct of snapshooting training.

Training of this type was also carried out by units moving overseas, which set up their training courses in actual jungle terrain prior to mounting out on an amphibious operation.

One of these units was the 22d Marines, commanded by Col John Walker with Maj Floyd Moore as the operations officer (R-3), which joined the 3d Marine Brigade in western Samoa prior to the assault against Kwajalein and Eniwetok Atolls in the Marshalls. This regiment was unusual in that it was organized into fire teams and was led by some very forward-thinking officers who constantly tested and developed new techniques in jungle combat and survival; among these was snapshooting. This ability was tested under fire during the intense fighting on Engebi, Eniwetok, and Parry Islands to which the 22d was committed in February 1944.

Here, then, in his own words, is a description with pictures of snapshooting as developed by the regimental R-3:

Instruction and practice in snapshooting must be a part of the combat training of every individual. Its importance in fighting in close country and at night has been clearly demonstrated in the encounters our fellow Marines have had with the Japs. Snapshooting is not a substitute for aimed fire, but is rather a supplementary type of fire which is extremely valuable in sudden close range encounters with the enemy wherein the man who can get off the first shot with a reasonable amount of accuracy is the one who survives. Snapshooting ranges are from about 5 to 40 yards. In a great many instances the person fired at cannot be seen. He may have only been heard or the flash of his firing seen. At very short range a sudden movement of foliage, a shot, any other unexpected sound, or a sudden appearance of an enemy individual all tend to startle any man and make him freeze in position for a fraction of a second. Also he has a definite tendency as he freezes to face in the

direction of this unexpected occurrence. Our problem is to utilize this momentary immobility to make him instinctively fire his weapon in order to bring fire of reasonable accuracy on the enemy promptly. When the enemy feels that he has a definite advantage (for instance when he is lying in ambush) there is nothing more demoralizing for him than to be fired upon quickly and accurately by the very person he felt was at a disadvantage. Furthermore, this quick opening of fire may well serve to warn our units that something is amiss more quickly than any other means. When operating in an area where contact with the enemy is probable, as when a small unit is acting as a patrol or as a point for a larger force, and some unusual noise or movement at short range is noted, our forces should immediately take cover and investigate. But, if during that short startled pause or even while taking cover, fire is brought to bear on the enemy, his advantage is largely lost. Only

men who are in the direction of the enemy would open fire initially since our own troops must not be endangered by our own fire. This opening of fire serves to indicate promptly the presence of the enemy and his location.

The object of training in snapshooting is to develop the ability to shoot instinctively and without aiming at close range. It is a case of being ‘the fastest on the draw’ even though no draw is involved!

The correct position is of the utmost importance since the accuracy of the fire will largely depend upon it. The position must be perfectly natural, and one the particular individual will naturally take. However, there are several points to bear in mind. *First*, in order to reduce the target presented to the enemy, there must be a definite crouch. Everyone remembers reading of the crouch of the two-gun man of the Wild West! *Second*, the best direction will be obtained if the shooter allows himself to face directly toward the target since his eyes or ears

## RECOMMENDED POSITIONS FOR SNAPSHOTTING



*Armed with rifle.*



*Armed with pistol.*



will almost automatically face his entire body in that direction, if permitted. *Third*, the body must be well-balanced; and if poor footing does disturb the balance, the tendency must be to fall forward, for that will be the natural movement in seeking cover. In general, the most natural position will usually be one approximating that of a charging football lineman. *Fourth*, the position must be such and the weapon held in such a manner that it will be automatically aligned on the target both in direction and elevation as the firer freezes.

After the position has been mastered, the important thing is to ensure that the weapon is fired the instant the shooter faces the target. Particularly in training, there is a tendency for the individual to attempt to correct his aim after facing in the direction of the target and before pressing the trigger. If this is done, the opening of fire will be delayed and the ordinary position might as well be used. The whole object is to open fire quickly

and the trigger must be *squeezed rapidly* as soon as the weapon is pointed in the direction of the target. It will be habitual for the weapon to be carried either loaded and locked or with a full magazine and an empty chamber. When contact with the enemy is expected, the former will be the most usual though the pistol can be fired as quickly if carried with an empty chamber as if carried loaded and locked. The individual must be drilled to the point that his first reaction will be to unlock or load even while turning to face the target. It can be both embarrassing and fatal to attempt to shoot with the safety on!

With the rifle and pistol, the initial fire should be one or two quick rounds. The second round is apt to be less accurate than the first. If armed with the .03 rifle, the shooter must remember to reload quickly. Submachineguns will usually be fired full automatic, but this must be done in small bursts of two or three rounds.

There will be three distinct types of weapons in which training in snapshotting must be conducted, depending on the type with which the individual is armed. These are the rifle, pistol, and submachinegun. We will now show you the position to be taken with each of these weapons (See photographs).

- **Rifle**—The position should be a crouch with the rifle horizontal and the butt held against the hip with the right elbow. The left hand should be in the rear of the upper sling swivel to reduce the tendency to shoot high. It is a very natural position and is easily assumed from any stance wherein the rifle is carried in a position of readiness.

- **Pistol**—The pistol is the most difficult weapon. The position should be a crouch with the weapon held in the front and center of the body. The arm should not be rested on the hip or against the side, but should be extended slightly in front of the center of the body with the

## RECOMMENDED POSITIONS FOR SNAPSHOTTING



*Armed with submachinegun (w/stock).*



*Armed with submachinegun (folded stock).*

elbow a little bent. In correcting the alinement, the wrist should not be moved. It should remain rigid in the way that is natural when the position is assumed and the alinement corrected by swinging the entire arm from the shoulder. There is normally a tendency to shoot low with the pistol.

• **Submachinegun**—Whether or not the submachinegun is equipped and carried with a folding stock, the position is essentially the same, though if no stock is present the gun can be held much closer to the body. The position is a crouch with the weapon held in front of the center of the body and the stock pressed back against the pit of the stomach. This position is possible because of the short length of the weapon, and will give much better accuracy than held with the stock at the side of the body. The left hand usually grasps the piece just in rear of the upper sling swivel. The submachinegun is probably the best and most accurate type of weapon for snap-

shooting.

In training men to snapshot, actual shooting will be preceded by several periods of dry runs. This, as well as the actual firing practice, is best done by having the men operate in pairs. One man corrects the position and alinement of the other. Men must be trained to face suddenly, and bring their weapons to bear on targets to the front and to the flanks. Each man must gradually learn his natural position and just how he must hold his weapon so it will be automatically alined on the target when he freezes in position. Actual firing should be done on silhouette targets. It is well to fire initially at a range of about 10 yards, and increase the range as the man gains confidence in his ability to obtain hits with this type of shooting. No firing should be attempted at ranges greater than 40 yards.

The following points will be stressed in such training:

- ▶ Snapshotting does not replace aimed

fire. It is valuable only at very short ranges such as are encountered in dense jungle, house-to-house fighting, and at night.

- ▶ The importance of a good position which involves a crouch, reduces the target presented to the enemy.

- ▶ Getting the shot off quickly is of the utmost importance. After a correct position has been acquired, there must be no pause in lining up on the target.

- ▶ Unlocking or unloading must be instinctive.

- ▶ The ability to face to either flank or to the front must be developed—a 90 degree spin. (For street and house-to-house fighting the ability to spin 180 degrees is necessary.)

- ▶ The weapon must be carried in a position of readiness with the hands grasping the piece at the exact spot required to ensure that the weapon is automatically turned in on the target when the crouch position is assumed.

U.S. MC