

COMBAT SHOOTING

with Massad Ayoob



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 **DEDICATION** 

This book is respectfully and appreciatively dedicated to
my brother and sister instructors.

The ones who trained me, and still do ...

... the ones I've taught alongside...

... the ones I've trained...

... and the ones who came before any of us, but left artifacts to pass
on to us the precious lessons, often written in blood, that they had gathered
for us so we could pass them forward in turn.

I've put as many lessons from all of them as I could into this book.

Mas Ayoob

June 2011

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FOREWORD

I first met Massad Ayoob in 1990, when I invited him to teach a two-day “Judicious Use of Deadly Force” seminar at a gun range where I worked. Little did I know that this encounter would change my life forever. Having already been trained in use of deadly force as a police officer and also as a police firearms instructor, I thought I was pretty well versed on the topic. Those two days though, where he dissected each and every aspect of the deadly force encounter, opened my eyes to a whole new way to look at the subject of use of deadly force in self-defense; that being to filter each and every aspect of teaching how and when to shoot, through the filter of the likely jury assessing whether or not your act was reasonable under the circumstances.

That year, not only did I take the aforementioned course, but I also took three other week-long classes from him, flying back to New Hampshire to complete the trilogy of LFI-I, II, and III, and along the way being asked by Ayoob to join the staff of the Lethal Force Institute.

When asked to write the foreword to this particular work of his, I must admit I was both honored and a little horrified. He was both my mentor and friend. Would I do him and this book justice? The good news is I don’t have to, the work speaks for itself, and speaks volumes.

I asked for a pre-release review copy of the book, and upon reading it, the years of working with him on the range and in the classroom seemed to fly by in my memories. I could hear his words, and came to realize that this book, *Combat Shooting with Massad Ayoob*, was a compilation of his life’s work to date, a history I am lucky to have shared with him for the past 20+ years.

The five different sections of the book, dealing with mindset, learning combat shooting, men we can learn from, competing as a way to sharpen your skills and choices that need making is a novel, but effective way to communicate the volume of information which an armed citizen should (and in many cases MUST) know before going armed in our society. Invoking the words of Jim Cirillo, Charlie Askins and even Wyatt Earp drives home the point that modern day training for the deadly force encounter shares much of the same techniques and mindset that earlier generations of armed Americans successfully used to succeed in deadly force encounters. We are fortunate to have their exploits to study, and their words to heed.

Over the past decade or so, we in the business have heard the constant drum beat of the crowd who say that shooting in competition will teach you bad habits, and will likely get you killed. I agree with Ayoob and many of my contemporaries who have

not only tried to quiet that voice, but also urge others to get involved in competing with a gun in hand. But, there is a point to the anti-competition crowd that is worth considering. If ALL you do is compete, and you learn how to run the gun under stress shooting a sport, then it is likely that under the stress of the gunfight, your body will naturally seek to relieve that stress by using familiar shooting techniques. That is why competition should not be your only training venue, but instead used as a test to see if your skills are honed and your techniques are sharp. Ayoob explains this concept admirably.

As a man grows older (I am in my mid fifties as of this writing), he starts to look back at his life and mentally reviews the worthiness of his many experiences, and plots his course for the remainder of his days. Twenty years ago, I took Ayoob on as a mentor in the business of teaching the how and when of using the gun for self-defense, one of the more intelligent choices I have made. I look forward to the next 20 years to see how the final chapters of this fascinating career play out, and hope to share a good portion of the next two decades with Mas, on the range, teaching, learning and competing.

Marty Hayes
Onalaska, WA



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to these pages, and needless to say, thanks for buying the book. (Hopefully, that will be the only thing I say needlessly here.) The topic is a broad one, and if the late editor Dan Shideler had assigned this book title to a hundred of us who work in the field, he'd have wound up with a hundred markedly different manuscripts. If you look at the six editions of *Gun Digest Book of Combat Handgunnery* that have been published over the years, you'll see that Jack Lewis and Jack Mitchell, Chuck Taylor and Chuck Karwan and I, all had different interpretations and ended up writing very different books under the same title. It's a broad subject, and a subjective one.

That's as much true on the readers' end as on the writers'. It's not all about mindset, though that's certainly part of it. Only one section on competition shooting? Yep, 'cause competition shooting is only one piece of the puzzle. Only three famous gunfighters profiled in depth? Yup, because that was all there was room for in a book that wasn't just analytical biography of been there/done that role models. Nothing on how to draw a pistol? Nope, that would be *Gun Digest Book of Concealed Carry*. What, no catalog of firearms? No, that would be *Gun Digest*.

Dan Shideler had wanted this to be a thinking man's book, with lots of quotes from thinking men. I've tried, in his memory, to make it so. An unexpected cardiac event took Dan from us before the book was fully underway, and his premature departure is in my opinion a loss to the entire shooting community. He had been a joy to work with on the first volume of *Massad Ayoob's Greatest Handguns*, and in his approach I saw his deep understanding of not only firearms, but this thing we've all come to call the Gun Culture. I miss him still, and hope that this book has turned out as he wanted.

I need to thank some other editors for permission to reprint here work I did originally for them. That includes group publisher Shirley Steffen and editor Linas Cernauskas at Harris Publications, which has published my annual Complete Book of Handguns since 1993; Roy Huntington, editorial director of Publishers Development Corporation and editor of *American Handgunner*, where I've been on staff for over 30 years; Jeff John, my editor at *Guns*, where I've served for a like period; Sammy Reese, who edits the PDC annuals; Dave Duffy at *Backwoods Home* magazine where I've been firearms editor for some 16 years now; and Bob Young, my editor at *Black Belt*. Without them, some of what you're about to read would be less fresh for relying on a much older memory of the events. Thanks also to Gail Pepin, who did much of the photo work with me, and Herman Gunter III, my tireless and sharp-eyed proofreader. And of course, thanks as well to Marty Hayes, one of the best trainers in the business

and the founder of the Armed Citizens Legal Defense Network, for writing the foreword.

I started this book with the section on mindset, because that's where it all begins with the practitioner and therefore, is the core of the matter. Next comes a structured guide to learning combat shooting, because that's where the practitioner gains the ability to weave together the necessary elements of this multidimensional discipline. In the middle of the book we analyze the experience of three gunfighters who all "faced the elephant" more than once. It's striking how much they have in common, and on how many levels. Next is an introduction to the competitive element of combat shooting, and a rationale for why—though it's not complete training in and of itself—competition can be an extremely useful component of training, skill maintenance, and skill assessment. Finally, we close with some of the choices the serious combat handgunner has to make if they're going to get the most out of the whole endeavor.

I've left quotes as they were, and different writers, editors, and publications have different styles. Among the many quotes, you may see ".38 Spl." and ".38 Special," "bullseye" and "bulls-eye," etc. It's not my place to second guess another writer or editor's writing style, so I "played those as they lay."

There's the occasional website address for an organization or trainer, but I didn't put in a whole lot of those. They can change over time. Google can always find the current ones for anyone interested.

I hope, wherever he is, Dan Shideler is pleased with this book he assigned me to write. And I hope, wherever you are, you're pleased with it too. None of us knows when we'll actually need our skills in this discipline, which is why we need to keep them sharpened.

*Stay safe,
Mas Ayoob
June 2011*



AUTHOR WILL SHOOT AMBUSER above with Simunitions .38, but not before being shot himself, in a force-on-force exercise at the National Tactical Invitational.

CHAPTER ONE

MINDSET

In the word “gunfight,” the operative syllable is *fight*.

John Steinbeck’s classic quote, popularized by gunfighting instructor Jeff Cooper, was: “The mind is the weapon, all else is supplemental.” Men have fought each other to the death since they dwelt in caves. All the gun did was expand the personal distance potential.

For decades, I’ve taught my students that the four priorities of surviving a violent encounter are:

1. Mental awareness and preparedness.
2. Proper use of tactics.
3. Skill in combatives, which includes—but is not limited to—the firearm.
4. Optimum selection of equipment to cope with the predictable threat.

Note that awareness and preparedness are taught together, even though at first blush they appear to be separate concepts. The reason for this is simple: they are two sides of the same coin, and the one without the other is useless. At Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the awareness was there, but the preparedness was not. The blips on the radar screen were observed...but they were dismissed, and in minutes, one of the mightiest battle fleets on Earth was on its way to the bottom of the harbor.

Awareness begins with the realization that armed conflict with a violent human can occur. It does not require a high risk occupation; any of us can simply be picked as the next victim by one of the many predators that roam abroad in society.

Awareness encompasses alertness. There is no better way to quantify that than the color code, popularized beyond the military by the aforementioned Col. Cooper. He described four levels. In *Condition White*, one was totally oblivious to what was going on around him and likely to miss an early danger cue. A person in Condition White would be unprepared, slow to react, and likely to survive a homicidal attack only through luck factor or what I’ve come to describe as “schmuck factor.” (With “luck factor,” we survive simply because we were lucky. With “schmuck factor,” we survive only because our attacker was an even bigger schmuck than we were. Neither is a reliable strategy for survival.) Next up is *Condition Yellow*, which the Colonel described as a constant state of relaxed alertness. It simply means knowing what is

going on around us at any given moment. If a friend said, “Close your eyes and describe who is within ten feet of you right now,” you could do so. If a companion said, “Don’t look at the GPS or the street sign, but tell me where we are right now,” you could. Cooper made the point that a well-adjusted man or woman should be able to spend their entire waking life in Condition Yellow with no adverse psychological effects.



SKILL WITH THE SAFETY EQUIPMENT is #3 priority. This qualification target was shot under time with S&W .44 Magnum Mountain Gun and Federal 180 grain/1600 foot-second hollow point.

After an adult lifetime of trying to follow Cooper’s advice and live in Condition Yellow (and passing his advice on to a great many students) I’ve come to believe that it’s even better than the Colonel predicted. That is, it is not only without negative effect, it brings a positive effect. You may have started out looking for possible bad things, but your enhanced observation allows you to notice good things you were missing before. A common remark when I meet old students goes like this: “I took you seriously when you talked about ‘casting out a sensory net’ and Jeff Cooper’s color codes of awareness. I’ve been looking for bad guys ever since. I haven’t found many...but I’ve become a people-watcher. I notice the way the young lovers look at each other, the little boy playing with the puppy, the smile the passing grandmother gives her granddaughter...and thank you for that, because I was missing it before.”



SAFETY, SAFETY, SAFETY. These shooting glasses saved the eyesight of a top firearms instructor in Idaho.

You know how people are always telling us to stop and smell the roses? I think the corollary is that when you're actively looking for thorns in the bush, you can't help but smell the roses.

The next notch up on the color code scale is *Condition Orange*, a heightened alertness that occurs when we know something is (or may be) dangerously wrong. At this point, we actively focus on gathering intelligence to determine exactly what that potential danger is. We are looking and listening and analyzing. We are particularly monitoring things like avenues of access and egress (for us, or for potential opponents), and looking for cover—cover that we can take, *and* cover an opponent may be hiding behind in ambush.

At the top of the Cooper scale was *Condition Red*. This was armed encounter level: the moment of truth.

It is time for a brief digression. It is said that when Jeff Cooper was a young Marine j/g in the Pacific Theater during WWII, the USMC had already developed a color code that had five levels. In that particular framework, Condition White meant something like "Safe at Base." Condition Yellow was the alertness one would have on patrol. Condition Orange was an intensified level when something led the Marine to believe that contact with the enemy was imminent. Condition Red was one or more enemy soldiers in sight, and at the top was a fifth level: Condition Black, or combat in progress.

I've always felt the latter, five-level version of the color codes made more sense in the domestic sector, for the armed private citizen as well as the law enforcement officer, as distinct from military operations. In this Condition Red, we are confronting someone who more likely than not is a dangerous criminal. It escalates to *Condition Black* when that individual actually attacks.

The continuum as related to the gun is as follows. A person totally in Condition White might not even want to be armed. One does not have to be armed to be in Condition Yellow, but if one is armed, one should definitely be in that state of mental awareness. The homeowner hearing the burglar alarm go off, or the police officer receiving a radio call to respond to an armed robbery in progress, should instantly escalate to Condition Orange. They don't know the exact nature of the danger or the exact "face of the enemy" in question, but they are aggressively looking for those things. At this point, the gun may or may not be drawn depending on the totality of the circumstances, but the firearm should most certainly be instantly available. In Condition Red, we have spotted the potentially lethal gunman, and it is probably now appropriate to take him at gunpoint—an act that would be felonious aggravated assault if done without just cause. Condition Black is a lethal assault in progress: the opponent is trying to kill or cripple you, or kill or cripple someone you have a right or even a duty to protect. It is at that point that we unleash deadly force, and actually open fire.



CHOICE OF GEAR is fourth down on the list. Lead hollow point .38 Special "FBI load" proved a good man-stopper with both snub-noses and 4" service revolvers.



SAFETY IS A CONSTANT CONCERN in all forms of combat shooting. A carelessly overpowered handload blew up this heavy frame Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum Highway Patrolman.

In Colonel Cooper's code, developed by a wartime Marine who killed enemy soldiers with his sidearm in both a hot war and a cold one, it made sense to combine Conditions Red and Black into a single Condition Red, and that the circumstances would determine whether we shot our opponent or not. That makes sense in military combat, when one's very mission is to shoot and neutralize enemy combatants on sight.

In domestic society, it doesn't work that way. Cop or "civilian," you are far more likely to be in a situation where you need to take someone at gunpoint (Condition Red), than you are to be in a situation where you have to shoot someone (Condition Black). On the witness stand, we'll be cross-examined as to what our standards and our state of mind were at the time we fired the shot or shots in question. Topping the spectrum with a single "Condition Red" allows a lawyer with an unmeritorious case to

argue, “So, this Condition Red thing, you’re telling us that capturing a man at gunpoint without bloodshed, or killing him...that’s all the same to you, and doesn’t make any difference?”

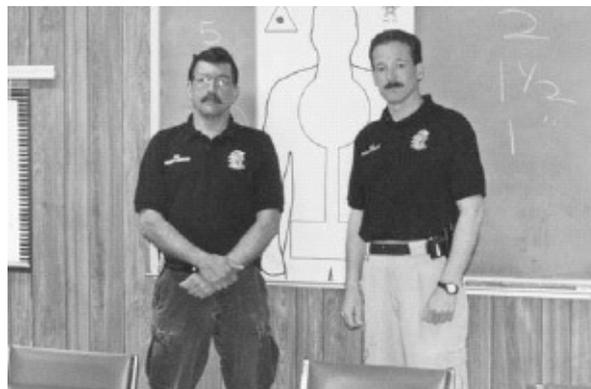
The five-color system allows the person who was forced to fire to delineate a documentable standard that shows he or she could indeed distinguish between the two situations, was able to determine that this was a “shoot situation” instead of a lesser “gunpoint situation,” and credibly explain and authenticate why.

PREPAREDNESS

Awareness allows you to see the danger coming in time to do something about it. Perhaps, ideally, you may avoid it entirely if you are not bound by an occupational oath to “ride to the sound of the guns” and confront and contain the threat.

Preparedness encompasses some of the elements that follow. Preparing by learning and practicing tactics. Preparing by developing skill in hand to hand combat as well as with your weapons, both lethal and “less-than-lethal.” Preparing by determining beforehand the best tools for managing the most predictable threats, and acquiring those tools, and the skill that makes them effective.

But within the framework of this topic, preparedness goes farther than that. It encompasses the realization that the use of deadly force in self-defense may have unpleasant legal, social, financial, and psychological effects. The few seconds of the fight itself will be the worst possible time to realize this, because until one has come to terms with it, one is likely to hesitate to use that level of force. That means that the winning combatant is, all other things being equal, likely to be the one who has most certainly determined beforehand that he or she can handle that aftermath.



PEERS LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER. Author, left, with LE training authority Dave Spaulding at Montgomery County, Ohio police academy. Both served for years on firearms committee for American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers.

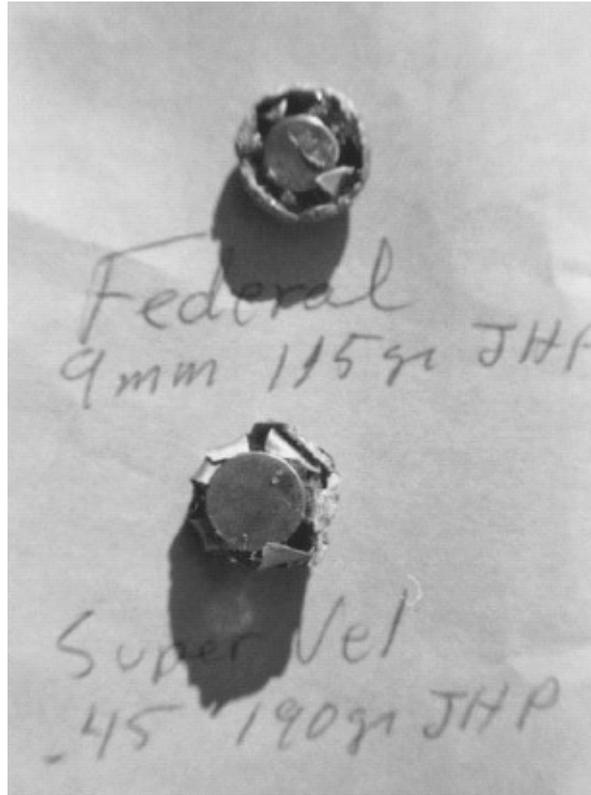
And, the history of combat tells us, it is likely to be the one who knows what he or she is fighting for.

Loren Christensen completed a distinguished career on a big-city police force, working one of its highest-crime areas for much of that time. He is also a lifelong martial artist and trainer. For his book *Warriors: On Living with Courage, Discipline, and Honor*, he asked several of us to write on various topics in the field of human conflict. My contribution was as follows:

WHY WE FIGHT¹

It is not enough to teach a practitioner *how* to fight. It is essential to teach him or her *why*. History is replete with ragtag patriots who kicked out of their homelands hardcore professional soldiers who had invaded them, a history we Americans celebrate every Fourth of July. Skill and knowledge aren't enough. There's that thing called "motivation."

The warrior skills, truth to tell, are so involved that they can become their own *raison d'être*. Why else would martial arts be a sport that creates a lifestyle, and why else would combat shooting be something practitioners do in a competition arena for their primary avocation? Let's admit the dirty secret: learning to fight, with or without a weapon in hand, can be *fun*, and sometimes the fun and the self-esteem of achieving a certain skill level can become the tail that wags the dog. When that happens, the result can be a national champion *karateka* or pistol competitor...but not necessarily the best prepared warrior.



BY THE 1970S, ammo technology had improved dramatically. Federal 9BP 115 grain 9mm, top; Super Vel 190 grain .45 ACP, below, both removed from animals they cleanly killed.

If you have been in this business long enough, you have come across the person who looks you in the eye and says, “I’d rather die than kill my attacker.” If you get that from a cop or soldier, your duty is to remove them from The Job, because they’re obviously not ready to perform it. When you hear it from an ordinary citizen, you have a little more room. My answer has always been, “That’s okay, because it’s your life... isn’t it?”

They normally answer “Yes.” Fine so far. Then I ask them the litmus test question.

“Tell me something. If that same guy you’d rather die than kill was standing over your baby’s cradle, holding a knife, ready to sacrifice your child to Satan—what would you do then?”

When you ask that question the answer comes boiling up out of them in pure reflex, before they can think about it, more than nine times out of ten. “I’d kill him!”

Then I pause for a moment, to let them reflect on what they’ve said, and ask them the final self-probing test question: “What’s the difference?”

We know the answer to that question. We know it because we have stood at the precipice of Death and looked down into the abyss, and it is a knowledge we have an ethical obligation to impart to those we teach.

The answer is, there is no real difference at all. Death is The Great Separator. Whether it is the parent who dies, or the child, either way each is lost to the other forever more, at least upon this earth.

You reading this, you who have been there at the edge of the Darkness and looking into the Void...remember. Did it not happen—at that moment, or very shortly thereafter—that you thought of your loved ones? How long did it take for the realization to hit you that you almost didn't see your children grow up, almost lost your last chance to say good-bye to your parents?

This tells us something, something we need to share with those we teach in the art and science of survival of violence. Hold that thought, and let's look to some analogous concepts to see how they fit in.

THE MANY ELEMENTS

The survival disciplines are multi-dimensional, and each inter-related discipline can be a life-long study in and of itself.

A conflict involving lethal force is, by definition, a near-death experience for the survivor. We can learn a great deal about how to face imminent death by studying not just combat survivors, but all survivors of near-death events.

Virtually all of us contributing to this effort are familiar with the splendid work done by Dr. Alexis Artwohl when she was police psychologist for the Portland Police Bureau, as published by her and her colleague Loren Christensen. Few are aware of a corollary study done in the early 1990s by Dr. John Woo, Chief of Psychiatry at the University of California, Irvine.

While the Artwohl study focused entirely on officer-involved shootings, the Woo study was geared to the perceptual phenomena of near-death survivors at the time of their incidents, and covered a broader spectrum. I came into it when Dr. Woo approached me to arrange interviews with Lethal Force Institute graduates who had survived gunfights. They would join a much greater body of research participants who had survived falls from high places, automobile collisions, train wrecks, plane crashes, near-drownings, sudden and cataclysmic medical emergencies, and other immediately life-threatening situations.

The same phenomena I had been studying, writing, and teaching about since the 1970s were all there when I read the results of the Woo research. Tachypsychia, the sense of everything going into slow motion. Tunnel vision. Auditory exclusion, or "tunnel hearing," and more. But Woo's study asked about one question that I had