

# Jeff Cooper: An Irreplaceable Loss

By Barrett Tillman

If you don't know about Jeff Cooper, here's the short version: other than Mike Dillon, he's probably the major reason that you're reading *The Blue Press*.

For those of us who grew up shooting in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, there were three genuinely influential writers: Elmer Keith, Jack O'Connor and Jeff Cooper. O'Connor died in 1978; "Uncle Elmer" left the range in 1984; Jeff died this September but was still writing weeks before his death.

A few days after Jeff died, I had lunch with an old friend. We had seen first hand the profound extent of his influence: as a writer, instructor, innovator and personality.

My friend is an accomplished gunsmith who made an interesting point:

Jeff exerted tremendous economic as well as tactical influence. While he didn't invent practical pistol competition, he defined and then refined it. In doing so, he launched the M1911 industry that affects not only gunsmiths but also reloaders, leather/holster makers, instructors and the continuing deluge of 1911 clones. Look in any gun store display case: Colt, Kimber, Para-Ordnance, Nighthawk, Rock River Arms, S&W, SIG and now Taurus. Even without counting the custom shops, you're seeing Cooper at work.

That got me to thinking: What are the odds that somebody else will match Jeff as an influence across such a spectrum?

Precisely 0.00.

Jeff had synchronicity: he appeared at exactly the right time in exactly the right place. As a life-long hunter and a combat Marine officer, by the 1950s he was locked and loaded to disseminate what he knew – and continued learning.

I've been a professional writer since the 1970s but I don't know anyone else who was published for 50 years. Though his physical decline shocked those who had known him "back when," he retained his perceptivity as well as his enthusiasm almost until the end. His

last book, an anthology titled *Shotluck*, will be released by his daughter Lindy Wisdom next year. Meanwhile, his final columns in *Guns & Ammo* also will be published posthumously.

It's instructive that among his lesser accomplishments, Jeff was an NRA director for 21 years. As an eloquent advocate of individual rights, he had few peers.

By his decades of writing and instructing, Jeff personally or collaboratively brought about not only the practical pistol revolution, but invented the scout rifle and set the standard for everybody now engaged in firearms training.

As cofounder of IPSC he raised practical pistol competition to world recognition. Therefore, he was also partly responsible for the other action shooting sports: IDPA, Bianchi Cup and even Cowboy Action Shooting.

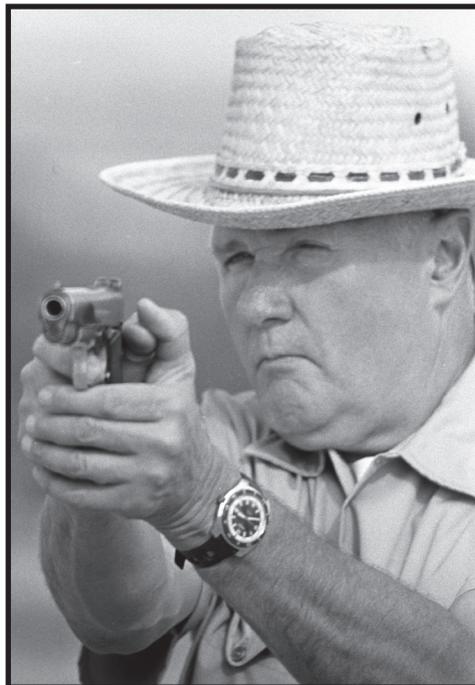
The 1970s were the defining decade of Jeff's life. IPSC was founded in 1976, the same year he established the American Pistol Institute near Paulden, Arizona. The two entities were joined at the hip: Jeff gave us the action pistol sports, and then taught the world how to shoot big-bore handguns fast and accurately.

Then there's Janelle.

Jeff said repeatedly that he could not have devoted the time to any of his endeavors without the unstinting support of his wife of 64 years. Therefore, when we contemplate what our sport and our way of life owe to Jeff, let us tip our hat to his gentle lady as well.

There's no room for anyone else to do what Jeff Cooper did with guns. But I severely doubt that even the next level of technology will permit anyone to exert a Cooperian influence upon the development and/or use of the Blaster, whatever it may be. The world's spun too many times for one person to retain that much sway in an increasingly "corporatized" industry and "globalized" world.

He was, and remains, irreplaceable.



## Jeff Cooper 1920-2006

This previously unpublished photo of Jeff Cooper was taken by Nyle Leatham at Gunsite in October 1975.