

Age will overcome youth and enthusiasm 43

For most of us, the difference between 40 and 50 may not be much. But the difference between 50 and 60 is apparent, and 60 to 70 is a major-major change.

Time is distance; distance is time. In the ballistic time-space continuum, where you felt comfortable previously may now represent your outer limits. That's eminently worth knowing, whether the potential venue is a hospital or a courtroom – or both. How you adjust your current ability is a matter between you and your attorney, but consider this: If you've spent years at Level Eight and now you're Level Six, you need to reprogram the computer between the HP1s (a shameless plug for Dillon's HP1 Electronic Hearing Protectors) to reflect that reality. After all, other than shooting the wrong person, the only thing worse than shooting the right person too soon is shooting him too late.

An electronic timer is a good investment. It's totally objective, devoid of ego, and never-ever makes excuses. It'll tell you to 100th of a second whether you can still draw from concealment and make two A-zone hits on a ten-yard silhouette in 1.34 seconds. Or not. As Jeff Cooper constantly reminded students, "It's not what you once did, it's what you can do *now*. On demand."

By far the most senior shooter I ever knew was still popping caps at 90. John Hansbury enjoyed three careers, including the Coast Guard and Herbert Hoover's security detail. (For products of outcome-based education, HH was the 31st president, 1929-1933.) When I asked John why he'd started shootin' cowboy, he said, "Well, all my silhouette friends are dead!" He wasn't fast – he'd grown up as a bullseye shooter – but dang, he was accurate.

Consider this: If your *El Presidentes* are now 12 seconds with A-zone hits instead of eight (yes, Rob does 'em in three!), you are still nobody for most crooks to fool with.

There are other considerations that come with age. During a range session, my training partner asked a question: "Is a shoulder holster or cross-draw preferable for arthritic shooters?"

I'll call him "Mike." He retired his Bruce Nelson No. 1, the Sparks 55BN, and the Davis Liberty, because they forced him to lift the gun a little higher on the draw. He explained, "When I carry a five-inch gun, I prefer my old Rogers Hackathorn Special with its low-cut 'gamesman' front. If I am carrying a belt-high holster, like a Summer Special, I prefer a Commander-length pistol. Since I tore my rotator cuff, it's hard to lift the pistol high enough to clear leather. Lowering the top of the holster by an inch, and shortening the barrel by ?", may not seem like much, until you catch a half-inch of slide on the top of the holster a few times. I have flubbed enough draws to recognize the reality of my physical limitations."

Then there's Jim, a pistol (and rifle, and shotgun, and grenade) fighter from the RVN class of '67. At age 58 he said, "I have to move my holster in front of my hip to draw. I just can't lift my .45 high enough when my arm is that far back anymore. Makes it a bit harder to hide. Maybe I should do like Elmer Keith, and just wear it in the open all the time!"

Lesson learned: Attention to detail pays dividends for senior gunfighters at least as much as anyone else.

Realize that arthritis affects strength and agility. Time for a reality check: If you comfortably shot .357s or .45s for decades, your ability to grip the gun (and ergo recoil control) may have weakened. Put your ego into cold storage and consider downsizing to a .38+P or a hot 9mm. If your condition continues degrading, well, ol' shooter, the .380 on your belt beats the bejabbers out of the magnum in your safe. Ev'ry dang time.

Tweaking the Mental Trigger

Every defense-conscious shooter should have long since set his/her mental trigger: "In *this* situation I'll let him/them go *that* far before I shoot." No, of course we cannot anticipate every scenario, and it's a percentage bet that if you do have to shoot, it'll be under unexpected circumstances. But we can shave the odds more in our favor with some judicious games of "What If..." and conducting meaningful practice.

However, comma...

As we age, we change. Without putting too fine a point on it, we become less capable. Our reflexes degrade; our vision worsens; our agility suffers. We even think differently. Something about brain chemistry: I wouldn't presume to explain the physiology, but I'm reliably informed that it happens.

That means resetting our mental trigger. The time-distance continuum alluded to previously comes into play. Whereas 15 years ago we could move to cover in Situation A, now we're slower, perhaps hobbled by arthritis, and do not have that option. Therefore, a manageable Situation A degenerates into a Situation B in which judgment looms even larger. *There's three of them with knives and a tire iron. They want my money. Do I:*

- Give it to them and hope they're satisfied?*
- Brandish and hope to scare them off?*
- Try moving to cover and hope they don't catch me?*
- Challenge them and prepare to shoot if they break the 21-foot line?*

A wrong decision could put you in the jail, hospital, or morgue, in approximately that order.

And while we're at it, let's discuss the fabled seven-yard rule. It's been with us for decades – a generally recognized distance from which a knife-armed opponent can cut you even if you're

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