



# MAY 2026 NEWSLETTER

## DRILL OF THE MONTH

Throughout 2026 we will be running a Drill of the Month in each edition of the newsletter. The goal is help motivate folks to get to the range and actually shoot their defensive weapons, and to have some fun in the process. Each month we'll post a drill or a short course of fire. You are encouraged to go to the range, shoot the drill, and then post your thoughts and a photo of your target on the Rangemaster Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/rangemaster/> .

## MINI-CASINO DRILL

Rangemaster's Casino Drill has become a well known industry standard, and it is a pretty good test of all around defensive skill with a handgun. If you can, on demand shoot it clean under the 21 sec par time, you are pretty competent with a handgun. On many ranges, however, the target stands are 18" wide, set up for cardboard IDPA and USPSA targets. The Casino target is 23" wide, and the numbered shapes line right up with the sticks on an 18"

frame. Shooting the sticks to pieces on the first run sucks, so I devised an alternate drill for such ranges.

On the Mini-Casino, start with the target at 3 yards. Your pistol will be loaded with 6 rounds, 1 in the chamber and 5 in the magazine. Have 2 spare magazines on you with 7 rounds in each. On signal, draw and shoot 2 rounds into the 2 circle, 3 into the 3 circle, 4 into the 4 circle, 5 into the 5 circle, and 6 into the circle bearing the number 6. Reload each time the gun runs out. Circles must be shot in numeric order. Par time is 21 seconds, with all hits if you want to run it as a time limit course. For hit factor scoring, take total time and add 1 second for each miss. Here is my run at the beginning of a range session, 17.52 seconds, clean. Here is a link to print your own target at home: <https://tinyurl.com/march-dotm>



# Shooting Incident, Valuable Lessons

A Rangemaster certified instructor sent me this report recently. There are some valuable lessons herein.

"I had a student involved in a shooting two weeks ago. -----, Illinois, police officer on duty. Aside from the academy, he only trained with me. Probably 5 or 6 classes. Handgun, rifle, force on force, medical.

Shot an admitted child molester charging him with a blade. Twice in the upper thorax, Glock 21, department issued Federal HP.

Offender went down. Blood pressure came back up, decided he wasn't done, got back up and charged again, 4 more rounds into the thorax, DRT.

I just think you should know that you, and all the other instructors I've learned from, deserve the credit. All I did was pass on the lessons all of you taught me.

My student went home to his wife and four children because of your lessons.

Thank you for everything you do!"

Lessons from this incident:

1. Handguns usually take multiple hits to stop an aggressive attacker.
2. If the Bad Guy goes down, don't assume it is over. When one is lying on the ground, getting blood to the brain only takes 1/3 of the blood pressure it takes when standing upright.
3. When he goes down, track him to the ground with your weapon, remaining ready. If he is armed with a firearm, he can return fire from the ground as long as he is conscious. Don't relax too soon.
4. Pistols suck, all of them. In this case the defender had a .45ACP. Still just a handgun. Rapid, precise hits are needed, regardless of pistol caliber.

## **Situational Awareness Isn't Just Paying Attention, by Jim Shanahan**

For as long as most of us can remember, we've been told that situational awareness is simply a matter of paying attention.

Stay alert.

Look around.

Scan your surroundings.

Keep your head on a swivel.

Condition yellow.

It sounds reasonable. It feels responsible. And it's completely incomplete. Because paying attention isn't a skill. And it sure as hell isn't a survival strategy.

People don't get hurt because they weren't looking. They get hurt because they didn't know what to do with what they saw.

That gap, between noticing and acting, is where most situational awareness advice fails.

The missing piece, the thing that turns awareness into readiness, is what I call the Decision Engine. It's a simple decision process that does something most situational awareness advice never addresses. It forces perception into action.

The Decision Engine asks four questions:

- Who can help me?
- Who can hurt me?
- Where am I going?
- Where are my people?

That's it. Those four questions are the difference between noticing something and doing something about it. They turn random environmental input into decisions you can actually act on.

When someone tells you to "pay attention," what they're really saying is, you missed something, and now I'm annoyed.

It's not instruction.

It's not coaching.

It's a critique with no solution attached.

Because telling someone to pay attention assumes they already understand what matters, what doesn't, what's normal for that environment, how fast things are changing, what their options are, and which option is correct. That's a lot to assume.

Without a way to organize information, attention is just noise. People don't need sharper senses. They need a filter. The Decision Engine provides one.

This is where things usually go off the rails.

Condition yellow.

Stay vigilant.

Be switched on.

In fairness, these ideas didn't start out useless. Jeff Cooper's color codes were meant to describe mental states and barriers to violence, not permanent lifestyles. Somewhere along the way, though, they turned into bumper sticker advice.

Ask the internet about situational awareness and someone will proudly announce, "I stay in condition yellow all the time." Cool. I bet your cardiologist loves that!

But here's the real problem with buzzwords. They don't answer the moment that actually matters. If you see something concerning, what do you do next?

Do you move or stay put?

Do you change direction?

Do you engage or disengage?

Do you prepare a tool?

Do you create distance?

Color codes don't answer that. Buzzwords don't answer that. The Decision Engine does. Instead of telling you how alert you should feel, the Decision Engine tells you what to do next.

Who can help me?

Where is safety, distance, cover, or an exit?

Who can hurt me?

Who is acting outside the baseline? Who is closing distance or controlling space and tempo?

Where am I going?

What movement puts the geometry in my favor and buys me time?

Where are my people?

Who am I responsible for, and how does that responsibility change my options?

These questions turn vague awareness into pathfinding. They force you to think in terms of movement, position, and responsibility, not just observation.

“I Didn’t See It Coming”

After assaults or robberies, people almost always say some version of the same thing.

“I noticed something, but...”

“I had a weird feeling, but...”

“I saw him coming, but...”

They weren’t blind. They weren’t oblivious.

They just didn’t know what the information meant.

Their brain collected the data. There was no system to organize it.

If they had asked even one question, who can hurt me, or where am I going, the outcome might have been very different.

Situational awareness is not scanning, watching people, or living in a constant state of tension. Situational awareness is the ability to take meaningful action early. Action doesn’t come from alertness. It comes from decision making.

Most programs teach people to see danger. The Decision Engine teaches people to handle danger. That distinction matters.

Situational awareness isn't paying attention. It isn't paranoia.

Situational awareness is using a deliberate decision process to interpret space, time, and self, and acting early enough to create advantage.

Who can help me?

Who can hurt me?

Where am I going?

Where are my people?

That's the foundation of APS. That's the heart of the Deliberate Responder. These questions aren't a checklist, and they aren't linear. They're a thinking process.

I'm not offering the way.

I'm offering a way.

And that difference is what turns awareness into readiness.

## **The End of an Era**

I am dealing with a combination of serious health issues that are forcing me to make some changes. Since 2014 I have been conducting 33-36 classes on the road, literally all over the US. This year (2026) will be my last year doing this.

In 2027 I will be teaching 5-6 courses at my "home range" in Lakeland, Florida. I will continue to host the Tactical Conference and the annual Rangemaster Instructor Reunion/Conference. In addition, I may do 3 or 4 courses at other venues that are within a one to two day drive of my home. That will be it.

Many thanks to all of you who have made these last 12 years a literal blast. We have certified 3,000 basic pistol instructors, plus many who have gone on to more advanced instruction as trainers.



# The Lost Intent

*How Jeff Cooper's Combat Mindset Became "Situational Awareness"*

By Jeff Boren

Jeff Cooper created the Color Code to prepare good people to perform lethal violence when necessary. Today, it is often taught as a reminder to stay alert and pay attention. What began as a framework for building combat mindset has been repackaged into a friendly lesson on "situational awareness." It is more palatable, less controversial, and far removed from its original purpose. Cooper's real gift was not a color chart. It was a moral wake-up call. And it is one we are still trying not to answer.

## Introduction

Walk into almost any corporate seminar or civilian self-defense class today and you will hear the Color Code described as a way to "scan for threats" or "stay alert." Condition White is labeled unaware. Yellow becomes relaxed but attentive. Orange is framed as focusing on a potential threat. Red is often summarized as being ready to respond. It sounds reasonable. Harmless. Even helpful.

But that is not what Jeff Cooper meant. And he spent decades saying so.

Cooper was not concerned with whether you were looking around a room. He cared whether you had already made peace with the possibility that you might have to kill someone to survive. His Color Code was a psychological ladder. Each rung brought the mind closer to decisive action, action that most people are deeply unprepared to take.

## The Original Intent: Preparing Minds for Lethal Action

When Jeff Cooper developed the Color Code, he was not trying to make people more observant. He was trying to make them more decisive. In his view, the primary failure in self-defense was not technical incompetence. It was moral hesitation. Most good people had never truly confronted what might be required of them.

In his *Commentaries*, Cooper described the Code as a way to measure a person's "capacity... to cross the psychological barrier that inhibits [the] ability to take deadly action." That was the point. Nothing more. Nothing less.

When viewed through that lens, his definitions leave little room for reinterpretation. Condition White meant being unprepared and unwilling to take lethal action. If attacked in this state, survival depended almost entirely on the attacker's mistakes. Condition Yellow meant accepting the possibility that lethal force might be required. Condition Orange meant identifying a potential threat and preparing to act. Condition Red meant the decision had already been made.

There is nothing in those definitions about scanning environments, identifying exits, or maintaining awareness. Those ideas came later. Cooper was tracking mindset, not observation.

That distinction mattered to him, which is why he repeatedly emphasized that the primary tool was the combat mindset, not the gun, not the gear, and not even tactics.

## **A Philosophy of Righteous Violence**

To understand why Cooper built the Code this way, you have to understand how he viewed violence itself. He did not see defensive violence as an unfortunate necessity. He saw it as a moral act.

In *Principles of Personal Defense*, Cooper outlined seven qualities he believed were essential to survival: Alertness, Decisiveness, Aggressiveness, Speed, Coolness, Ruthlessness, and Surprise. One word in particular stands out.

### *Ruthlessness.*

Cooper believed society conditioned people to freeze when violence appeared. He viewed this as a sociological failure. His work was aimed at reversing that conditioning. The Color Code was part of that effort. It was designed to help people step mentally and morally into the role of defender rather than victim.

This transformation was about more than survival. It was about dignity. Cooper argued that a person who fights back, even unsuccessfully, retains self-respect. A person who submits does not simply lose the fight. They live with the knowledge that they surrendered their agency.

For Cooper, the willingness to use violence in defense of innocent life was not something to be apologized for. It was a responsibility.

## **The Great Transformation**

Over time, the Color Code was redefined. A system meant to track psychological readiness became a checklist for environmental awareness.

That shift changed everything.

The core question moved from “Am I willing to act?” to “Am I paying attention?” Those are not the same question. One prepares a person to move decisively under stress. The other prepares them to observe events as they unfold.

Today, the Color Code appears in workplace safety briefings, active shooter presentations, and corporate training slides. In many versions, lethal force is never mentioned at all. The result is a framework stripped of its original purpose.

## **Forces of Change**

This transformation was not accidental. Several forces pushed the industry away from Cooper’s intent.

Legal liability became a dominant concern as training expanded beyond small, like-minded circles. Teaching combat mindset raised discomfort, especially in civilian spaces. Situational awareness felt safer, both legally and culturally.

Market pressures followed. Awareness could be sold to anyone. Moral readiness for lethal action could not. As self-defense training entered the mainstream, its language softened to match the audience.

There was also a desire to distance the method from its creator. Cooper was outspoken, opinionated, and unapologetic about his worldview. Over time, separating the system from the man became convenient for some.

What remained was a cleaner, easier-to-market version of the Color Code. What was lost was the very thing that gave it power.

### **Cooper's Resistance**

Cooper saw this erosion happening and openly resisted it.

In his *Commentaries*, he warned, “There is a problem in that some students insist upon confusing the appropriate color with the amount of danger evident in the situation.”

Near the end of his life, he made his position unmistakably clear:

*“The color state is not dictated by the amount of danger to which you are exposed at the time. You may be in deadly danger and not be aware of it. On the other hand, you may be completely safe, yet be fully ready to take lethal action instantly if the circumstances warrant. The color state simply reflects your willingness to jump a psychological barrier against taking irrevocable action.”*

That is not an abstract clarification. It is a direct rejection of how the Code is commonly taught today.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

What happened to the Color Code is a case study in how hard truths get diluted. A system designed to prepare people for moral, psychological, and physical conflict was reshaped into something comfortable and marketable.

The cost is real. People leave training believing they are prepared because they learned how to be more aware. When violence erupts, they freeze, not because they failed to see the threat, but because they never confronted what action would demand of them.

The original Color Code was uncomfortable by design. It was meant to change people, not reassure them. Cooper was not trying to create alert citizens. He was trying to create capable defenders—people who had already decided what they were willing to do.

As instructors and students, we face a choice. We can continue repeating the modern version because it is easier to teach. Or we can return to the original and confront what it actually asks of us.

Because Cooper was right. The moment of truth is the worst possible time to decide who you are willing to be. That decision must be made long before the fight begins.

## References

Cooper, Jeff. *Jeff Cooper's Commentaries*, Vol. 12, No. 5. Gunsite Academy, 2004.

Cooper, Jeff. *Principles of Personal Defense*. Paladin Press, 1972, revised 2006.

Cooper, Jeff. *The Modern Technique of the Pistol*. Gunsite Press, 1991.

Cooper, Jeff. *To Ride, Shoot Straight, and Speak the Truth*. Gunsite Press, 1988.

Cooper, Jeff. Various columns in *Guns & Ammo*, particularly "Cooper's Corner," 1986–2006.

## UPCOMING TRAINING EVENTS

June 5-7, Instructor Course, Patriot, Eastaboga, AL  
(Tom Givens)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685eb5c6f02127913e3490f7>

June 13-14 Advanced Instructor,  
Patriot, Eastaboga, AL (Tom Givens)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685eb6cef02127913e34aacf>

Aug15-16 Advanced Instructor Royal Range,  
Nashville, TN (Tom Givens)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685eba6bf02127913e3503e5Aug>

Aug 22-23 Intensive Pistol Skills, Royal Range,  
Nashville, TN (Tom Givens)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685ebb3ef02127913e351a41>

Sept 11-13 Master Instructor Terre Haute, IN  
(Tom Givens)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685ebc58f02127913e353333>

Sept 18-20 Instructor Course Buford, GA  
(Tom Givens) (very nice indoor range)

<https://rangemaster.corsizio.com/event/685ebd40f02127913e353718>



FBI Academy, Quantico, VA- FBI's senior Firearms Training Unit (FTU) Staff shooting our instructor qualification course, 2018. They all passed, but only one shot 100%.



Royal Range, Nashville, TN



The Last Resort, White Hall, Arkansas (south of Little Rock). On November 2-6, 2026 we have a five day long Protective Pistolcraft Instructor Development Course at this range, followed by a Master Instructor Course the next weekend.

This is a great facility and weather will be perfect in November. See the schedule at [rangemaster.com](http://rangemaster.com)