Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network, Inc.

The Value of Competition

An Interview with Michael Bane

by Gila Hayes

What are you going to do to improve your firearms skills this summer? Perishable skills require practice, challenges, and evaluation to maintain or improve. Marksmanship and safe gun handling are no exception, and to our great good fortune, there are a variety of ways to improve, including formal training, individual practice – both live fire and dryfire, and enjoying shooting sports. Competitive shooting in particular builds interest and motivation to fulfill our responsibility to remain skilled and safe.

I enjoyed an interesting conversation about competitive shooting with journalist, firearms expert, and television producer Michael Bane who has shot competitively since the late 1970s. A longer, chattier video version of our conversation is at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jQNSIIPKVI if you prefer video.

eJournal: Welcome back to the Network studio, Michael, and thank you for another contribution to our monthly member education journal. A few weeks ago, your podcast (https://www.michaelbane.tv/category/podcast/) discussed competitive shooting. I realized that not only are your opinions informed by decades of participation in a wide variety of matches, but you are one of my generation that still regularly shows up at matches. What got you started shooting competitively and what keeps you going back?

Bane: When I was a kid, I read Colonel Jeff Cooper's *Guns and Ammo* column, so by the mid '70s, when they founded IPSC (International Practical Shooting Confederation), I was familiar with the concept of practical shooting. I was living in New York in the late '70s, but as soon as I moved back to Florida, I bought my first 1911, a Commander length steel-framed 1911. I had about $300 worth of modifications done, which took all the money I had in the world. It had a big upswept beaver tail and a Smith and Wesson revolver sight just like the Colonel's.

I began shooting matches. I had published one article in *American Handgunner,* so when I went to the first Florida invitational combat match, I was placed on the squad with Tommy Campbell, then at Smith & Wesson, Walt Rausch, Jim Cirillo, Jake Jatras and Dave Arnold. Afterwards, Jake came up to me and said, "Are you busy? You want to start a new shooting sport?" We wrote out what became the United States Practical Shooting Association (USPSA see https://uspsa.org/) on yellow pads. I shot those matches and was very active.

Later, I was lucky enough to work as a crash test dummy while we put together the concept of the National Range Officer Institute. Then Bill Wilson asked if I would work with him to help get IDPA (International Defensive Pistol Association see https://www.idpa.com/) up and going. I taught some of the very first safety classes for IDPA in the West; Ken Hackathorn taught them in the East. I was involved in those shooting sports from the ground up. I love the idea of practical shooting. I just love it.

eJournal: That's not all, though. You've shot rifle, shotgun, and some of the .22 sports, too.

Bane: I have a huge amount of time in a practical pistol. I spent like 10 years shooting cowboy action, which is just fun. I've shot combat shotgun, sporting clays, and a lot of three gun. I shot a little precision rifle, too, but that's too much like a religion – you have to sell your car just to pay for the tripod. I've shot NRL .22 (National Rimfire League see https://nrl22.com/), and some specialized matches.

I just love to compete. Even now that I'm old and decrepit, I shuffle through the matches. Last year, I did ICORE (International Congress of Revolver Enthusiasts see https://www.icore.org/). I may go back and do that again. I love shooting revolvers and it was a real hoot, even though I'm down so low on the stats, I hoped somebody would keel over dead so I wouldn't be in last place.

Competition was really booming until the end of 2019, then it tanked. They still ran some matches, but I stopped going because you had to wear a mask and they banned picking up expended cases for fear of COVID cooties. I'm pretty sure the chamber gets really hot, but they were like, "No, no exceptions." It hurt competition, but it drove people to training because the training operations continued.

Our gun culture rests on three legs. It's a tripod. One leg is concealed carry, which is a very big leg. The second leg is training, which has been driven by concealed carry. The third is competition. Over time, those three legs change balance. Training is so much bigger than it was five or ten years ago, but I think competition is making a comeback. The training community, I think you'll agree, is very ambivalent about competition.

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eJournal: What is the history of the tension between competitive shooters and "pure tacticians?"

Bane: I'm going to say this harshly. In the early days, the pure tacticians couldn't hit the ground. Back then we didn't have huge numbers of vets coming back from war who had been trained by the military and had serious battle experience. A lot of the instructors would say, "We don't believe in competition; we do pure training." I'd ask, "Pure? Based on what?" If nothing else, competition is an experimental medium. What if I spent $45 on a new widget, and I DQ'ed (disqualified for a safety violation) because it got in the way?

There was always that tension. In the early days, there was a split between the "gamesmen" and the "martial artists." I have a black belt in Budokon and studied multiple other martial arts. When I went into practical shooting, I was very much on the side of the martial artists. Eventually you get up one morning and think, "Boy, I'm tired of being last! Can I get a compensator on a .38 Super, and just run it?"

There's always been that tension, and now it's exacerbated by the fact that there are zillions of instructors, some from the returning military, and some are great instructors: Kyle Lamb, Chris Costa, Travis Haley, Kyle DeVoe, who have done landmark work.

Is competition training? Yesterday I saw a headline on the internet by a really good instructor that said competition is not training. I thought, "Can we stop? We know it's not training."

eJournal: At least they aren't still saying that competition will get you killed. I wonder, are good tactics and clear thinking under chaotic conditions at odds with or compatible to the procedures that we habituate at matches?

Bane: I once talked to an Israeli Special Forces guy I knew, an IPSC champion in Israel. He came to the United States and shot matches. I asked him, "As Israeli Special Forces you shoot people for a living, right? That's your job description. Do you ever have any problem with match scars?"

He goes, "Do I look like an idiot to you? I can tell the difference between a buzzer in my ear and a bullet that goes past it. I have techniques that I use when bullets are going past my ear, and I have techniques I use when the buzzer goes off. In 20 years of doing this, I've never seen a problem with it."

Jim Cirillo, New York City's Stake Out Squad, your good friend, and Marty's, was in many ways my mentor; I loved the guy. He was a vicious competitor. I asked him, "Do you ever have any trouble transitioning between real life and matches. Is there anything you might call match scars?" He goes, "I don't think so."

We filmed a program for *Shooting Gallery* (https://www.outdoorchannel.com/show/shooting-gallery/1630) that was an advanced concealed carry class. There were two groups of students. One group trained on their own every week, were very focused and were very good shooters, but they did not believe in competition. The others were C-class USPSA shooters.

We filmed them doing advanced, hard, tricksy drills. Both groups performed evenly. They could draw and shoot quickly, but one group stumbled over what you'd consider basic gun handling skills. When the group that didn't compete had a jam, they had to flip an index card in their head and *[mimes a tap-rack clearance]* go like, "Okay, okay." The C-class USPSA shooters never slowed down when their guns jammed. If you compete, you have to factor in jams, which happen in so many fascinating and different ways. The non-competitors thought the C-class USPSA shooters were so fast clearing jams and reloading. I'd add that competitors reload without ever thinking.

eJournal: If we can agree that competition builds "automaticity," a term Karl Rehn taught me, and competitors excel at drawing, reloading and clearing malfunctions, then the question becomes what glaring gaps need to be addressed away from competitive shooting? Where do we fill in those gaps?

Bane: Tactics, tactics, tactics, tactics! I'm stealing from Jim Cirillo who said, "You know what the problem with competition is, Michael? Nobody's shooting at you, and they tell you which targets to shoot: 'Go shoot that one. Go shoot that one three times.'"

The problem with competition scars is when we take the gun out of the holster and point it at the target, we are going to shoot because the range officer said two shots on each of those targets, one shot on the plate. We don't have to think whether we should shoot or not. At a match, I look at the course of fire and say, "Okay, I'm going to shoot that, and I'm go this direction."

There's a danger in that. In the real world, you may have to draw your gun, right? As a competitive shooter, you're prepping the shot. *[Mimes drawing and pointing]* At the worst time of your life, you're doing the same thing you do in competition. As the gun comes up, I am pulling the trigger, I'm moving the trigger back to the wall, right? At the wall, I'm going to break the shot. Well, you don't want to do that in the real world unless you're really sure it's the one-percenter biker gang taking over your neighborhood.

That's a dangerous thing that classes and matches have done a long time. Darryl Bolke has often said we should train more to draw to a low ready. They do this at Gunsite Academy now. Why do you draw to a low ready? Because then you're not pointing the gun at anybody.

Karl Rehn says no more than one percent of shooters ever go beyond the basic concealed carry class. That's a terrifying

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number. I have always suggested that people take classes from people who know what they're doing: Gunsite, Thunder Ranch, Massad Ayoob. Those are people who wrote the books. People say, "I'm way beyond basic." I say, "You're not. I've taken the Gunsite 250 class something like nine times, because the basics never change."

More than anything else, I want those basics to be there for me. As a competitor, how many times have I drawn the pistol? A million times? That's a fair guess. I see people come out of training with half a day of holster work. They can't draw. Forget the standard of bringing the gun into play in a second and a half; they can't do it in three minutes. There's no way to get better at gun handling than by handling a gun over and over again.

eJournal: Over and over again, with someone correcting you when you point it at your hand.

Bane: The advantage of competition is that you are on a range with a safety officer attached to you who is going to make sure you do it right. For your first year in competition, you don't really know what to do.

When I ran the National Shooting Sports Foundation's media education program, I had 25 instructors that were best in the world: Todd Jarrett and Chris Edwards and other great, great people. I noticed really quickly that we'd give the safety briefings, but it took time on the range with somebody saying, "Stop! No, stop! Don't do that," before the participants were safe.

John Farnam says there's no such a thing as a safe gun. I agree. They're dangerous. We can handle them safely and we can handle them in such a way that we don't put ourselves and other people at risk.

You have to practice for competition, so you're getting a huge amount of time with the gun in your hand and all of it adds up. Gun handling is so important. You have to be able to manipulate it, load it safely, unload it safely and know what happens when it doesn't work.

Out of my experience as a competitor, range officer, range master, or match director, one of scariest things I ever did was for an IPSC world match. They made me range master in charge of hopeless cases. They said, "You get the people from countries where they don't have safety rules and you're going to get them through the match without them shooting themselves." They failed to give me one guy as a hopeless case. He had rigged a Star semi-auto – because he's from Spain – so the safety couldn't be engaged, "because it was faster." It was fast enough to put a bullet down his leg. He said, "I can't engage the safety." *[gesturing]* Bam!

eJournal: The specific ways that the guns we carry work are often different than the way certain competition guns function. Unless I'm mistaken, you're really big in rimfire competition. The obvious difference is less recoil, but often, the .22s work differently. I mean, a rimfire pistol generally has a bolt, not a slide, and that's just the beginning. Does your mind actually make the separation your Israeli friend talked about? Why do you shoot .22 matches?

Bane: Yes, it does. My crazy friend Paul Erhardt, editor of the *Outdoor Wire,* and I have worked together for 30 years, maybe more. We are big fans of shooting multiple, different disciplines with different kinds of guns. I'm proud to say that Ken Jorgensen, the late Nelson Diamond, and I invented the Rimfire Challenge Shooting Association and we've managed to bring tens of thousands of new competitors in through that window.

I was at the Rimfire Challenge World Championships in October last year and I said to one of the kids I filmed, "So, did you beat your dad?" and he goes, "Every single time." I'm like, "Cool, so how old are you?" He's 11. "How long have you been shooting?" Three years. I watched girls sitting around bitching and talking like high school girls do, then step up to the line and run seven plates in under 1.2 seconds. I talked to KC Eusebio, a fine, fine competitor and he goes, "I don't even know what they're seeing." Two competitors shot a six-plate string in under one second. I've shot a lot of plates and I never shot that well.

For 22 years, I produced the TV program *Shooting Gallery,* and I traveled around the world and shot guns. Invariably, in every country, somebody would come up to me and say, "I'm sure you're familiar with this." Sometimes, I couldn't be totally sure that it was even a gun, but everything has a trigger and some way of cocking. Focus on the commonality of the guns and work outward from there.

I went to Bill Rogers' Shooting School, easily the hardest shooting school in the country; it's a nightmare. Bill Rogers and Andy Langley, who was working with him, said that everything has commonality. Back in the old days, I was taught to ride the trigger, reset, click, that's how we did it. Bill said, "I will break you of that if it kills you. If I have to strangle you, you will walk out of this course and never ride a trigger again."

I said, "Why?" and Bill goes, "Commonality of all firearms. There are some that don't work to reset. If I hand you a Thompson submachine gun, it doesn't work the same way as your pistol. If I hand you an MP5, it doesn't work the same way as the Thompson or your pistol. What you need is the ability to shoot anything."

The commonality for guns is that they have to be loaded, there's a trigger that makes them fire, and there's a way to cock them to set the mechanism. I saw the same commonality when

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I went through the Eastern Bloc weapon familiarization course at Gunsite. I want to recognize the commonality. It's one of the reasons I drift back and forth between sports.

eJournal: Beyond the obvious fun, I want to explore motivation. Face it: one competitor is at the top of the scores and all the rest of us are below. What keeps us lesser mortals going back to matches?

Bane: Sometimes I bitch piteously because I finish badly. I tell my girlfriend, "I'm done. I am so friggin' done," and then it turns out I'm not done because I remember something about competition that is critical. I spent a number of years in high-risk sports, where if I made the wrong decision, I didn't get to come home. The major learning experience for me is that stress has to be dealt with. The only way that I've ever understood how to deal with stress is to be inoculated against it the same way you might be inoculated against smallpox. You're given a vaccine of cowpox, which is a muted down smallpox. The next exposure you're like, "Oh, I kind of know how this works." That's critical.

I talked about being involved with high-risk sports in my book *Over The Edge* (https://www.amazon.com/Over-Edge-Regular-Odyssey-Extreme/dp/0575400854). A lot of the mental techniques I was taught in shooting turned out to be critically important because sometimes you really need to be able to do a specific activity very, very specifically. If somebody is trying to kill you, I would say that would be one time when everything has to work at that exact moment. How do you do that?

Anything I can do to inoculate me against stress gives me a baseline. It's like rock climbing. You start climbing rocks so low level that your dog could scramble up the rock face, but then it gets harder and harder and harder. Part of that is increased skills, which is what training gives you, but the second part is your mind saying, "Well, okay, I haven't fallen yet." That's stress inoculation.

A timer in competition will blank your brain. You get a new shooter, and you say, "Ready?" They say, "I've studied this; I've got this. I do a five-step draw, take the trigger slack out..." But then, "Beep!" and they're like, "Where am I? Where's the gun? Wait, I need to go to the bathroom."

Stress inoculation is critical, so your brain doesn't shut off. We shot a lot of blind stages in IDPA. On a blind stage at a match, you're not going to see the stage until you walk to the box. By the time I walk 10 steps from hearing, "Michael Bane, you're up," when I step into the box and they say, "Load and make ready," I have a plan because I've seen X number of stages, I've built X number of stages, I've run X number of stages. I know, "I need to do this, I need to do this, I need to step here, here's cover, I need to do these things."

Malcolm Gladwell in his book, *Blink,* says it takes about one hundredth of a second for a human to make a snap decision. An example he uses is speed dating from the 1980s and '90s. You sat down and spent 60 seconds with somebody. Gladwell found that by the time the person sat down, they had already decided about the person sitting across from them. He also spent time with art authenticators. High-end authenticators walk into the room, see a painting, and go, "It's a forgery." They can't tell you how, but they immediately know, and then they move forward, and prove it.

We have this ability to analyze situations really very quickly. It's why we're at the top of the food chain. We're not here because we have big claws or run fast. We're here because we are stone-cold analyzing engines.

eJournal: Match experiences help us trust that internal computer that is apparently so capable if we don't get in the way of it.

Bane: You have to trust it because in a really bad moment, you're not going to have time to engage your frontal lobe. There was interesting research years and years ago, when two big jumbo jets in the Canary Islands crashed and caught on fire. A lot of people died. The question was, if you're on the ground, and the fire isn't burning rapidly out of control, why are you dead?

The answer was that you need to have a reaction programmed in your head. If you don't, you're going sit there going, should I stand up, should I stay here? Should I go up front? Should I go to the back? Now they tell you, "In the event of a loss of oxygen, put this mask on. Exit lights will come on and you will move to those," and you're thinking, "Any idiot knows that." No, as a matter of fact, if you don't have it in your head, you can't perform it.

You learn that in competition. You plan everything and then the buzzer sounds and it's like "Where am I? I need to go to the bathroom. I think I left my car unlocked. Can I leave? I mean, take the gun, really, I don't care, you finish the stage." At matches, you learn that things screw up and you have to assume that in real life things will screw up, too.

Because I'm not a cop, one of the rare times that I have ever put a gun in somebody's face was on my way home from the National Tactical Invitational match. In the course of three days of filming, I ran something like 25 or 30 convenience store robberies. I played the crook, the clerk, or the innocent bystander over and over and over. On the way home, I ran into the grocery store for some milk. I stepped in, the door closed behind me, and a biker guy with two girls stands up, grins, and drops his hand into his jacket. I think, "This is like stage number eight. Good grief."

That was because of pattern recognition. Once I recognized the pattern of his hand dropping into his jacket. I had to move,

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there was no choice. I dropped my hand into my jacket and loudest sound ever was when the safety came off my little bitty 1911. Click! The guy looks at me and goes, "What should I do?" It wasn't the first time he'd seen a gun pointing at him. I had him get down on the ground.

How many times have we drawn the gun? How many times have we drawn the gun from concealment? We know the patterns. Where did we learn those patterns? When I see somebody do things I know from pattern recognition, I have to move.

The only way to get a fluid draw is to practice drawing. I've done it a million times. I've done it from appendix, from three o'clock, from cross draw, from a shoulder holster. Not only do I have those motions, but I also understand the patterns. A lot of what we get from training that we do not get from competition shooting is pattern recognition for threats.

John Hearn's class *Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why* is really great. What are the factors that make it more likely that you'll come out of a situation? One of them is how quickly you recognize a threat. In other words, minimize lag time. I wish competition had multiple, different starts: a timer, saying, "up, shoot, hey," even a blinking light like John Murphy has used. One reason Rob Pincus' Intuitive Defensive Shooting is hard is because he forces you to think before you shoot. You cannot shoot faster than you think. You are limited because you must recognize the threat then complete the actions you do to minimize it.

My good friend Mickey Schuch has been writing recently that the purpose of a civilian defender is to break contact. When I had the biker on the ground, I went to the police, and they said, "Did you check him for guns?"

I said, "Do I look like a cop to you? I didn't do anything. I got him on the ground. I got my girlfriend away, because that's my job."

"What about the people in the grocery store?"

"Are any of them married to me? Are they relatives? No." They can all have a gun just like me, but the key thing I want to do is break contact.

As John Shaw said years ago in our first book, more than anything else, training buys you time. You may see an opportunity with that time. Andrew Branca's early book, his very first, red-covered book, discussed a chain of events, a tree structure in which every decision leads to a branch. Do you have a branch for "run" or "break contact" or "go home?" You should.

You want to go home. What maximizes that? Think back to Darrell Bolke teaching to draw to the low ready. That maximizes your chances of exiting the situation, because literally from low ready to bang is what? A10th of a second, less than a 10th of second, it's inconsequential.

eJournal: It's all about using lag time or processing time, getting the most out of that microsecond. Don't dither, do something. Don't stand there, don't freeze, do something.

Bane: You need to get that programmed into a lot of things you do. When I took my girlfriend to New York to run the New York Marathon, I wanted to take her to my favorite Chinese restaurant in Chinatown. We got there about midnight.

The cab stops and I opened the door, and Chinatown's quiet. I said, "Denise, get back in the cab now. Cabbie, let's go, go, go, go!" We left and she asks, "Why? Why?" I said, "Chinatown's never quiet. Somebody's getting hit." It turned out that happened. I don't want to be in the crowd when somebody gets hit. If things don't seem normal, you can't say, maybe it'll clear up in a minute.

eJournal: That's right, you better move. Take action.

Bane: Colonel Jeff Cooper of Gunsite believed if you want to be a fully, well-rounded defensive shooter, you need to hunt. In hunting, something dies. There's a consequence of pulling the trigger. There's a sound when the bullet hits flesh and then eventually you cut it up and there's blood everywhere and there's blood on you. You should be aware of all that happening.

The other thing that hunting teaches you is that there is no time. Animals have minds of their own and they move. How long does it take for an animal to run? Luckily, I've never lost an animal. I've been to Africa four times, been to Texas and New Zealand, and I've never lost an animal. One was close and the other was a 16-hour stalk in the Kalahari Desert to follow a blood track. It was a learning process. That was my first African hunt.

You can't dawdle. You're on the sticks and thinking, "I got an OK sight picture, but if I work on it just a little, if I can get a little bit better..." No! It needs to be, "Bang." You have to act. Every shot, every situation, whether hunting or a violent situation is a chaos system. That means you can't know how it's going to go because there are so many factors acting on the system. Got an OK sight picture? Bang.

I went nilgai hunting in Texas. We did 10 or 15 stalks that didn't pay off and at the end of shooting light, we did a stalk and there standing in the field was a nilgai bull looking at another nilgai bull. His attention was distracted. He's not looking for me; he's looking for that other guy who wants his girls. Chaos system. There was an old falling down fence. I found a fence post, bang, shot the bull and they all told me, you're going to have to track it because even with clean heart shot, nilgai can run several hundred yards into the mesquite brush. You'll have a really sucky evening. Through the scope, I saw his legs bunch, and I thought he's going to run. As soon as he pushed off, I shot him right behind the ear because I didn't want to track and lose him.

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All those decisions had to be made in a very short time. The question was, can I make that shot? Yeah, it's a sporting clay shot, not a rifle shot. It's a small round moving target. What do I have to do? Swing through the moving target, exactly the same as sporting clays. I have to swing the gun past the animal and keep moving because the bullet is going to be in the barrel. Skills from competition translate into the real world. Several of my PHs have made a point, "You shoot quick."

eJournal: That decisiveness grows out of knowing what to look for and acting on it. That can be a real hard-won lesson and not all of us have learned it. How do you cure indecisiveness?

Bane: You know how to cure that? Competition will cure it because you've got a structured situation. When you miss the 50-yard popper, typically what you'll see in a competition shoot is two shots close together – bang bang. Why's that? Because the shooter very, very quickly picked up the fact that the 50-yard popper didn't move. If you watch an IPSC match or a Steel Challenge match, you'll see pick-up shots so fast that you can't understand how they knew. Part of it is they know what a good shot felt like. You have to shoot lot until you get to a point where you call your shots.

eJournal: There are many paths to that internal knowledge, but I think that you make a good pitch that competition is the most accessible and frankly attractive path. If a Network member was ready to try competition, what do we recommend? Common questions are where do I find matches? What should I avoid? What should I seek out? What about my budget?

Bane: Well, a couple of things. First, just tell yourself that regardless of the competition, whatever match you go to first, you're going to think, "I can't do this!" The great American Aikido master George Leonard wrote a book called *Mastery* about how people learn. It is an absolutely brilliant book about human learning theory. He was adamant that to learn, you have to be willing to play the fool. Be willing to step up and have people look at you; once you do it a few times, it's not too bad.

What I would say is, okay, what's closest? Go to the websites for the various sports, USPSA, IDPA, maybe even Cowboy Action. Then go and watch a match. When you're watching an 80-year-old grandmother moving through sequencing with cowboy guns and she's as smooth as water, you go like, "Huh, it turns out ability is not necessarily tied to age."

You can look at people shooting the match and think, "I can do that," and if you want to start on something like Rimfire Challenge (https://www.rimfirechallenge.org/), it's really simple. It's .22 rifle and pistol, and you get to shoot some plates. The plates are never in another county; I think the farthest plate is like 18 yards for rifle. Go to a .22 match and don't look at the 11-year-old who smoked his father 25 times in a row. Instead, you think, "Hmm, can I do this?" With the rimfire match, you don't have a holster, so it's all from low ready. You say, "I have a white belt; I'm starting out here. I'm an idiot. I'm going to get through this."

Don't choose three gun for your first sport because it's three guns and that means that you have to practice thrice as hard. Three-gun matches are hard because there are so many things you have to think about. You're transitioning between guns, and you're doing this and that, and then the rifle targets are in Cleveland, and it's like a 10-inch plate. Since you're the last shooter of the day on that stage, the 10-inch plate has been hit 200 times, and it looks exactly like the dirt around it and you're thinking, why didn't I have a bigger scope?

eJournal: Good scopes are expensive. For beginners, the budget question is important. Maybe we should start with maybe a local IDPA or ASI (https://asi-usa.org/) match.

Bane: If you start at IDPA, remember you can shoot the gun you carry, but I would suggest a couple of things. First, you have to understand the rules and you'll probably need to do some kind of local safety class because they also want you to know the rules. Pop for an outside the waistband Kydex® holster and one of the vests that they use in IDPA games. Start small and say, I'm going to shoot this concealed carry match, so I got one of these cheesy vests. The reason? You're learning how to sweep the cover garment, get a firing grip on the gun, and safely bring that gun into play. Later, you can use your carry gear. But first learn A, and then you can go to B, and then you can go to C. Same with USPSA.

Carry gear works fine in IDPA. If you want to play super games, you're going to have to buy super gaming toys. There's a reason golf clubs are expensive. Nobody ever carves their own clubs, but you don't have to. I spent two years shooting nothing but a Glock 19. I shot it in IDPA. I shot it in USPSA. I shot it in training classes. And did I win? Absolutely not. I didn't get the Cadillac; I didn't even get a Yugo, but I learned to shoot a Glock 19 pretty well. That was the point. I wanted to get something from the matches to make me overall a better shooter.

Remember that ultimately you have to practice. You simply cannot shoot match after match after match and expect to be better. You can expect to be the same. When I shoot a match, what did I screw up? The 50-yard pepper popper or did I miss the three-yard target? Did I miss it because my eyes swept over it, and I pulled the trigger here and put two holes in the ground? I need to know what I need to fix.

Another critical skill you can learn in competition probably easier than any other way is something I learned from Mike Seeklander and Gabe Suarez. At what level can you hit a headshot every time? Bang! That's really important to know, because if you have to shoot somebody in the head, you want

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to know that you can make that shot. That's a critical thing to know. A long time ago, Brian Enos said that a target will define the sight picture you need.

In terms of budgeting for competition, don't spend anything until you've gone to a couple of matches with what you have. One thing I found in every competition, regardless of what it was, the good shooters will help you.

It's useful to watch other people on the stage. In the very first match you go to – a rimfire challenge, sporting clays, cowboy action, whatever – say to them, "This is my first or second match. Could you please put me down in the rotation? I need to see how this works." Never be afraid to do that, because everybody at their first match had to ask, "What's going on?"

The good shooters will help you if you say, this is only my second match, I just got my safety card. Don't listen to everybody, though. My girlfriend said, "If you happen to be a girl and you go to a practical pistol match, everyone is your friend, everyone. And 75 percent of what they tell you is wrong. So be careful." People do want to help you, especially in a sport like three gun where it's just complicated as hell. Every competition I've been in, we've worked hard with and for new shooters because they're our life's blood.

eJournal: I hope we send some Network members to matches, because there is so much to be taken in, so many gifts, so much personal development, so many "I can't believe I just did that" things to learn about yourself. The "light bulb" moments are endless.

Bane: They are. You got to put yourself out there and you have to make yourself receptive. You can't go to a match and sit there and think, "I wish I could do better." No. Instead, it's like, "I wonder what I can steal from this guy. I'm pretty sure I can crib something from him. Why are they loading the way they're loading? Why are the gun and ammo on their belt in a certain way? Why are the magazines for the rifle in a certain position?" Will it be the same for you? Not always, but at least you have a place to start.

eJournal: You know what? I always learn from you when we talk, and that's what also keeps bringing me back to MBTV on the Radio podcast because every week there's some interesting topics and some crazy music choices. Did I really say that?

Bane: Wait, when was the last time you heard Robert Mitchem sing *Thunder Road*? I mean, honestly, you can't get that even on satellite radio.

eJournal: Your music choices are out of this world, but I always learn something from your podcast. What I'd really like to come out of our time today, in addition to prompting members to go find a match and try it, is I'd like people to start listening to you because I think you're a greatly under-utilized resource. There's years and years of experience there and fun. How do we learn more about your work, Michael? Where do we check?

Bane: It's really easy. https://www.michaelbane.tv/ I do a weekly video that's only like eight or nine minutes long. The podcast is 45 minutes a week, 50 weeks a year and I've been doing it for 21 years, which is enough BS to go from here to Mars.

eJournal: I would love to see members start learning from that because you know what? If it's not fun, we don't do it. When it's fun, we keep coming back and if there's one thing you bring to this, it's you help us have fun.

Bane: Right, it should be fun. It should be. If it's fun, you're more likely to continue doing it. I mean, I certainly get the mentality that *[delivered as a somber warning]* "Right now someone is training to kill you, and if you're not training at that same level ..." I get that. There's been times in my life when I've been there, but mostly I just like guns.

Maybe competition that keeps me coming back. By the way, if you change competitions, that works, too. You've been shooting USPSA and you're sick of it, shoot three gun then go shoot cowboy action for a while.

eJournal: Michael, it's been fun. Thank you so much for sharing this with us.

—

Take advantage of Michael Bane's extensive online programming at the links above, and don't miss his excellent books Trail Safe and Over the Edge which are available on Amazon or through used booksellers.

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President's Message

by Marty Hayes, J.D.

This month, advisory board member, long time friend and mentor John Farnam penned a message regarding the latest active killer episode, on the Florida State University campus. His words speak perfectly to the ongoing incidents of spree killings, and given the upcoming NRA meeting for which we are busily getting ready (I hope you came by to see us), I have asked John if he would allow me to re-print his message, to serve as a replacement to my President's Message. He has graciously agreed. We will be releasing the journal the day after the meeting, so if you were there, too, I hope you enjoyed it!

Less Than Five Minutes!

by John Farnam

19 Apr 25

"Less than five minutes…"

At yesterday's school-shooting in Tallahassee, FL, two innocent victims died, and at least six more were injured.

To their credit, local police were on the scene immediately. They aggressively moved-in, locating, confronting, and shooting (non-fatally) the single perpetrator, effectively ending the danger and the event. In fact, this police response was among the most competent we've ever seen!

Still, the VCA had adequate time to harm multiple innocent victims.

As always, shallow media types are speculating endlessly about "motive" of the VCA, as if that were relevant.

The real issue, as my friend and colleague, Ed Monk, has been passionately proclaiming for the past several years, is how can we decisively stop these mass murderers any faster than we are now?

When the murderous shooting starts, there will be yet another gunshot victim every few seconds, and that will go on until the murderer is definitively stopped. Police response can range from minutes to hours, depending upon a host of factors.

Everything we've done so-far to address this issue, like installing numberless cameras (connected to monitors that no one is watching) has accomplished little to reduce that deadly timeline.

Every moment of inaction will be fatal to yet another hapless victim. Of the foregoing there is little doubt, as we have seen over and over.

With history as our guide, we can fully expect these mass shooting attacks to continue, at schools, churches, and other places where the blithely defenseless congregate.

"Motives" will vary. Outcomes will not!

Armed Tribunes ("Sheepdogs," if you prefer that term), continuously present and in a position to respond at once (with deadly force) is ultimately the only tactic that will keep casualties to an absolute minimum during these terrible events.

Israelis have reluctantly learned this bitter lesson. The armed and ready are ever-present any time Israeli children congregate.

One can only speculate how many more innocents will be murdered/maimed before we, as a civilization, accept this same abject, but incontrovertible, verity!

"We deal in lead, friend."

–"Vin," (played by Steve McQueen) to "Calvera," (played by Eli Wallach) in the 1960 feature film, The Magnificent Seven, an American adaptation of a 1954 Japanese film, Seven Samurais.

John Farnam is president of Defensive Training International and has personally trained thousands of federal, state and local law enforcement personnel, as well as non-police, in the serious use of firearms. The DTI class schedule is posted at https://defense-training.com/schedule/.

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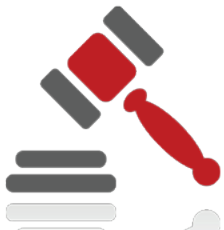

Attorney Question of the Month

This month, we consider legal problems that arise after one shoots an attacking animal. This question is most commonly posed in the context of unrestrained and vicious dogs, although members also express concern about being punished for using a gun to defend against a wild animal. To get the discussion started, we posed the following questions to our affiliated attorneys:

1. ***How does your state law define attacking or aggressive animals?***
2. ***In your area, when an attacking animal is shot, is the shooter likely to be charged with violating a law or sued?***
3. ***Network members are always interested in practical steps they can take to mitigate that risk, like documentation or reporting a dangerous animal in their neighborhood in advance, and also ask about the pros and cons of calling law enforcement after shooting an attacking animal. Your recommendations?***
4. ***Do you have suggestions for members who hike and camp and may shoot a wild animal that attacks? Should they notify authorities and what timeliness concerns apply if one is in a very remote area.***

The attorneys' responses follow.

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How Indiana Defines "Attacking" or "Aggressive" Animals

Indiana doesn't use a single definition for "aggressive" or "attacking" animals, but state law and local ordinances provide guidance. Under Indiana Code § 15-20-1, pet owners are required to maintain control of their animals and prevent them from causing harm. Many counties or political subdivisions may define a "vicious" or "dangerous" animal as one that has a documented history of unprovoked aggression, threatening behavior, or has caused injury to a person or domestic animal.

Whether an animal is considered "aggressive" often comes down to the facts on the ground—what the animal was doing, and how reasonable your perception of danger was in the moment.

What Happens if You Shoot an Attacking Animal in Indiana?

In Indiana, citizens are generally allowed to use force—including deadly force—against an animal to protect themselves or others from imminent harm. That said, use of force must be reasonable and necessary under the circumstances. If you shoot a dog—or even a wild animal—you may still face legal scrutiny, especially in urban or suburban areas where discharging a firearm may create a risk of harm to others.

While justified defense is a valid legal defense, it doesn't prevent law enforcement from investigating or an animal's owner from filing a civil lawsuit. Even if you avoid criminal charges, a civil claim for property damage or emotional distress could follow.

Mitigating Legal Risk: Practical Advice for Network Members

1. Report Known Threats: If there's a dog in your neighborhood that shows signs of aggression or has previously threatened you or others, report it to local animal control or law enforcement. Documentation goes a long way in supporting a future self-defense claim.
2. Maintain Awareness: If you carry while walking in your neighborhood, consider carrying pepper spray or a walking stick as a non-lethal first option. Demonstrating that you tried less-lethal methods before resorting to a firearm strengthens your legal position and is often more effective on aggressive animals.
3. Preserve Evidence: If you ever have to shoot, take photos or video of the scene if safe to do so. Witness statements, physical injuries, and even torn clothing can help document the encounter.
4. Call Law Enforcement Immediately: After an incident, call local law enforcement or animal control right away. This protects you from allegations of fleeing or covering something up and ensures your version of events is officially recorded early.

For Hikers and Campers: Wild Animal Encounters

If you're attacked by a wild animal while camping or hiking and must shoot to defend yourself:

- Self-defense is valid, but you may still need to justify killing certain protected species under Indiana's wildlife laws.
- Notify the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or the nearest law enforcement office as soon as it's feasible to do so.
- If you're in a remote area, timeliness is judged by what's "reasonable under the circumstances"—but don't delay once you have the ability to report.
- Preserve the scene if possible (e.g., GPS coordinates, photos, your gear), especially if you're alone and there are no witnesses.

[Continued next page]

Final Thought

As a gun owner in Indiana, you have the right to defend yourself—but exercising that right carries responsibilities. The best way to protect yourself legally is to plan ahead, document known threats, and be prepared to handle the aftermath.
If you have questions specific to your area or situation, we are happy to help fellow Network members navigate Indiana's laws.

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This is Attorney Don Green in Las Vegas, Nevada.

1. How does your state law define attacking or aggressive animals?

So long as the person reasonably feels that he is being attacked by an aggressive animal and that person is legally armed in an area in which he is authorized to possess or carry a firearm, that person may use the firearm to shoot an attacking or aggressive animal.

First is the animal that type which is inherently dangerous to humans: is it a pitbull, a tiger, or an armadillo, or a bunny rabbit?

Second, what are the circumstances in which the person has found himself in a confined area or in a yard or in a location where the animal is obviously going to attack that person or family members or friends in close proximity to him?

Third is this dog a police dog which in Nevada has the same powers as a police officer so, obviously you cannot shoot the dog because you are the bad guy unless it's a case of mistaken identity where you're telling them that you are the victim and not the perpetrator.

Fourth, the citizen is always going to face the potential for a civil suit, or some type of administrative sanctions for shooting an animal.

Remember, the burden of proof is going to be on the citizen to prove that it was absolutely necessary and reasonable at that moment to discharge the firearm towards an attacking animal.

2. In your area, when an attacking animal is shot, is the shooter likely to be charged with violating a law or sued?

There is a substantial likelihood of a civil action against a person who shoots an animal owned by another citizen.
There is always going to be the situation in which the owner of the animal is going to claim that the animal was not at fault and somehow or another accidentally got out of the yard or something.

Prepare for a lawsuit.

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Shooting a domesticated animal (usually a dog) in Georgia has a lot of similarities to shooting a human, but there are some significant differences. Shooting a human if it is not justified is a serious felony. Shooting an animal if it is not justified is a misdemeanor. If there is a human who has been shot, it is going to be necessary to call authorities (regardless of the condition of the human). There is not necessarily a legal requirement to call if an animal is shot, but morally a wounded animal would need veterinary attention.

There are no statutory standards on when deadly force can be used against a domesticated animal, but case law supports using deadly force to repel an attack. If there is a shooting of a dog that results in a conviction, there either was an eyewitness or the shooter incriminated himself (i.e., "confessed"). That leads one to believe that if there is no eyewitness, no statements should be made to the police. If there is a prosecution, unless there is a friendly eyewitness, the defendant-shooter is probably going to have to testify to establish the justification of the shooting. The location of the bullet wound is going to matter greatly. It's very hard to convince a jury that shooting a dog was necessary if the wound is on the hind quarters. That is viewed as the equivalent of shooting a man in the back. Juries just don't buy it.

Shooting a wild animal is somewhat different. There is no human owner "victim" the prosecutor has to deal with. Nobody cares about a dead coyote, but a dead poodle is going to upset somebody. If there is a prosecution, it is more likely to be a hunting violation than a cruelty to animal violation. But it's easier to make a case for an attack when there isn't an owner saying, "He would never bite anyone."

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How does your state law define attacking or aggressive animals?

Title 7 MRSA section 3907: "12-D. Dangerous dog. "Dangerous dog" means a dog or wolf hybrid that causes the death of or inflicts serious bodily injury on an individual or a domesticated animal who is not trespassing on the dog or wolf hybrid owner's or keeper's premises at the time of the injury or death; a dog or wolf hybrid that causes a reasonable and prudent person who is not on the dog or wolf hybrid owner's or keeper's premises

[Continued next page]

and is acting in a reasonable and non-aggressive manner to fear imminent serious bodily injury by assaulting or threatening to assault that individual or individual's domesticated animal; or a dog or wolf hybrid that inflicts bodily injury on an individual or a domesticated animal who is not trespassing on the dog or wolf hybrid owner's or keeper's premises at the time of the injury and has previously been determined by a court of competent jurisdiction to be a nuisance dog.

"Dangerous dog" does not include: A. A dog certified by the State and used for law enforcement use; [PL 2017, c. 404, §2 (NEW).]

B. A dog or wolf hybrid that injures or threatens to assault an individual who is on the dog or wolf hybrid owner's or keeper's premises if the dog or wolf hybrid has no prior history of assault and was provoked by the individual immediately prior to the injury or threatened assault; or [PL 2017, c. 404, §2 (NEW).]

C. A dog or wolf hybrid that inflicts serious bodily injury on or causes the death of an individual who is committing a crime against an individual or property owned by the dog or wolf hybrid owner or keeper. [PL 2017, c. 404, §2 (NEW).]

For the purposes of this definition, "dog or wolf hybrid owner's or keeper's premises" means the residence or residences, including buildings and land and motor vehicles, belonging to the owner or keeper of the dog or wolf hybrid.

12-E. Feral cat. "Feral cat" means a cat without owner identification of any kind that consistently exhibits extreme fear in the presence of people.

As for wildlife, it is defined in what it does. ""§12401. Attacking domestic animals or destroying property Except as provided in sections 12402 and 12404, a person may lawfully kill, or cause to be killed, any wild animal or wild turkey, night or day, found in the act of attacking, worrying or wounding that person's domestic animals or domestic birds or destroying that person's property."

Wildlife attacking people is not specifically dealt with in Maine law. The law of justification in 17-A MRSA 103 applies.

Under the Endangered Species Act, self or other defense is provided here: "(3) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, it shall be a defense to prosecution under this subsection if the defendant committed the offense based on a good faith belief that he was acting to protect himself or herself, a member of his or her family, or any other individual, from bodily harm from any endangered or threatened species."

In your area, when an attacking animal is shot, is the shooter likely to be charged with violating a law or sued?

It is unlikely unless one is resisting a lawfully directed police dog or trespassing, or under section 103, one is responsible for the attack (crawling over the fence in a zoo).

Network members are always interested in practical steps they can take to mitigate that risk like documentation or reporting a dangerous animal in their neighborhood in advance, and also ask about the pros and cons of calling law enforcement after shooting an attacking animal. Your recommendations?

Maine's Fish and Wildlife laws require prompt notification of the Warden Service when nuisance animals are killed.

Do you have suggestions for members who hike and camp and may shoot a wild animal that attacks? Should they notify authorities and what timeliness concerns apply if one is in a very remote area?

See above re mandatory report - title 12 §12401. "All facts" must be reported, and deer, bears, wild turkey or moose must be field dressed.

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In Texas, there's no particular definition or threshold for when someone can use force, or deadly force, against an animal. It falls back on the "reasonable person" standard where a person can use force reasonably necessary to protect themselves and others.

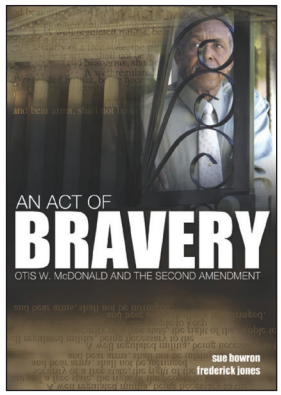
As far as reporting dangerous animals, that's possible depending on whether the local government has any sort of animal control. If someone lives out in the county then they can call the sheriff, but if that goes beyond a dispatcher making a sticky-note, I'd be surprised. As far as call law enforcement after the fact, lol, of course not. Never do that. Call an attorney first, let them contact law enforcement if necessary.

If you're in the wilderness in Texas, the odds of having to shoot a dangerous animal are exceptionally low. Perhaps a bobcat if you're out in Big Bend State Park. Otherwise, the only thing you're likely to see would be snakes, skunks, or coyotes, all of which can be killed on sight provided it's not otherwise illegal (like shooting across a roadway). In the exceptionally unlikely event someone has to shoot a hostile deer or other regulated game animal then a report is supposed to be made to a game warden who will likely seize the animal.

Thank you, affiliated attorneys, for sharing your experience and knowledge. Members, please return next month when we have a new question for discussion by our affiliated attorneys.

Book Review

Act of Bravery: Otis W. McDonald and the Second Amendment



By Frederick Jones and Sue Bowron
Create Space, LLC. Sept. 2012
ISBN-13 978-1479325023
128 pages, paperback, $14.95, eBook $2.99

Reviewed by Gila Hayes

In February, attorney Menashe Sasson's interview cited Otis McDonald's 2010 landmark gun rights victory at the US Supreme Court. While researching the case, I stumbled across *Act of Bravery: Otis W. McDonald and the Second Amendment, The Face of Gun Rights in America* written by McDonald's nephew, Frederick D. Jones, and co-author, Sue Bowron. I found *Act of Bravery's* most inspirational aspect the portrayal of Otis McDonald's humanity, the good and bad, growing up in a Louisiana sharecroppers' large family in the '30s and '40s. McDonald's story reminds us that when individuals resist states that infringe on human rights, good does indeed prevail.

Jones is an attorney and member of the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States. He recalls the day his uncle appeared before the Court. "Over a year had passed since my uncle Otis had called to say he was going to be a plaintiff in a Supreme Court case," he begins. "*Otis McDonald v. City of Chicago* challenged the right of a local government to pass a law that superseded the Constitution of the United States," he continues, explaining that the case disputed the constitutionality of "the 1983 Chicago ordinance that banned the use and ownership of handguns within city limits." What, asked Otis McDonald, his fellow plaintiffs, and his attorneys, was the purpose of the fourteenth amendment and its intent that all Americans receive equal protection under the law? Although affirmed during reconstruction, doesn't the fourteenth amendment continue to prohibit government discrimination and denial of basic human rights?

One of a dozen children raised by a sharecropper, Otis McDonald learned to read sitting with his father after supper most nights. He could read before first grade and loved school, but his schooling ended as he entered his early teens. After both his adoptive dad and his biological father died, he realized the farm was not where he wanted to grow old. McDonald moved to Chicago where he later enlisted in the Army.

McDonald served in post-war Germany, settling in Chicago after he was discharged. The military had not been kind to Blacks, nor were his early years in Chicago easy, but he persevered and moved up from janitorial work to complete an electrical engineering program at night school while working eight hours a day. He went on after that program to earn an associate degree in engineering.

A union member, McDonald was president of his local council, where he thrived as arbitrator between workers and management. The biography tells how he bought his home in Morgan Park, IL, describes the first burglary in which he and his family lost mostly home electronics, then the second burglary in which jewelry and long guns were taken. He installed an alarm and put bars on the windows. After another burglary, McDonald and his wife became hyper-vigilant and exhausted by being constantly on guard. Then he was attacked by two young thugs while he was driving down a neighborhood street. A drug dealer began operating out of a nearby house and the neighbors again burgled the McDonald home and garage.

Otis McDonald loved the outdoors. While hunting, he met a man who introduced him to the concealed carry movement in Illinois. Through these connections, McDonald was asked to be a plaintiff in a case to overthrow Chicago's handgun ban. *Act of Courage* doesn't detail the fights in the lower courts, relating only that as soon as the US Supreme Court decided *District of Columbia v. Heller* on June 26, 2008, the Illinois gun lobby filed what would become an equally monumental case: *Otis McDonald v. City of Chicago.* Attorney David Sigale, who is affiliated with the Network and practices in the Chicago area, joined forces with attorney Alan Gura who had argued the *Heller* case. Otis McDonald pressed the attorneys, "Are you in this for the long haul? All the way?" emphasizing that McDonald's way was to always finish what he started.

Jones observes, "Otis was in for an education. As he studied the case and saw the mechanizations of the legal process, he began to see a giant chess board with pieces labeled to further the Second Amendment cause. While gun control was the primary issue, it was played against moving pieces of the Constitution." He adds that McDonald was "stunned to find out that at least 55 amici curiae (translated as friends of the court) briefs were filed," and how few of the petitions put before the supreme court are granted. He describe Otis McDonald's awe at the majesty of the supreme court – both waiting outside before proceedings and sitting in the courtroom while the attorneys and the Justices labored to sort out the facts. The oral arguments were contentious, and many of the gun rights fighters didn't share McDonald's natural, inborn optimism. Nonetheless, the court held that, "The Second Amendment right of individuals to keep and bear arms in self defense applies against state and local governments as well as the federal government."

Later, in a press conference after the decision was announced, McDonald credited Christ for giving him his wife and family, his attorneys and the organizations and individuals that took part in the case, the endurance for the fight, and he thanked God for the Supreme Court Justices. In all the ups and downs he experienced – from celebrating the win to his sorrow when family members died – McDonald saw the events of his life as "the logical consequence of what God had in store for him."

I enjoyed *Act of Bravery,* and its portrayal of a human, fallible individual who was a great influence for good, not only for his family and close circle, but also good that ripples out far beyond his close circle to people who would never meet him but would benefit from his courage. McDonald died in the spring of 2014 at the age of 80.

Editor's Notebook

by Gila Hayes

A few days ago, my team and I attended what was once the preeminent yearly gathering of armed citizens -- the National Rifle Association Annual Meeting. With the election of our friend John Richardson and a goodly number of other men and women who are willing to jump out of the proverbial frying pan and into the fire to try to save the 154-year old organization, I pray for cohesiveness amongst armed citizens in the coming decades, because I don't think anything else can save this fallen giant.

In my opinion, yes, it will take decades. Snippy comments and pointed barbs have focused on the ousted executive vice president for about five years now. The time to stop pointing fingers passed quite some time ago. Are the glory days of heavily attended Annual Meetings gone forever? What reduced this once grand event from attendance by crowds so big that returning to our exhibit after a visit to the food court for lunch was almost certain to end with the lunch plates either clutched to your chest or spilt on the aisle carpet? For the past few years, carrying lunches back to the booth crew has been unfortunately smooth sailing with no human traffic jams to negotiate. This year was also far smaller than the glory years.

Over the weekend just past, these thoughts were hard to ignore, as armed citizens gathered in Atlanta, GA for the 2025 Annual Meeting. Leadership is a big challenge, one that starts at grassroots levels, ascends to state organizations, climbs the ladder to the board of directors and up to the executive offices – be that a corner office in a nice office building or a desk on the side of a factory floor. Leaders would do well to enjoy a re-reading of the classic fictionalized history of the Spartans, *Gates of Fire*.

I don't generally read historical fiction; real life is weird enough without analyzing it through the smudgy lens of a novelist's imagination. Several times now, I've put aside my general disdain to read and reread *Gates of Fire.* Recently, I indulged in an audio book performance of the story.

For me, Pressfield's account of the battle of Thermopylae is a novel about how legitimate leaders earn loyalty. As the story goes, faced with overwhelming discrepancy between the size of his army and the army of the Persians, the Spartan king Leonidas leads a suicide mission to a mountain pass. That sounds pretty grim, but the fictionalization of that historic battle and its participants is so very engaging that at the end, I had to ask, "Did I just enjoy a story in which the most prominent characters were killed?"

Loyalty all up and down the organizational chart depends on the quality of leadership. In Pressfield's telling, although king, Leonidas bore the same hardships as his army. "They could see their king, at nearly sixty, enduring every bit of misery they did. And they knew that when battle came, he would take his place not safely in the rear, but in the front rank, at the hottest and most perilous spot on the field."

Finding the defensive wall at the pass broken down, the Spartans dither and argue about how to and who should repair it until their gray-haired king picked up one stone, positioned it and placed another beside it. The book draws a compelling picture: "The men looked on dumbly as their commander in chief, whom all could see was well past sixty, stooped to seize a third boulder. Someone barked: 'How long do you imbeciles intend to stand by, gaping? Will you wait all night while the king builds the wall himself?' With a cheer the troops fell to. Nor did Leonidas cease from his exertions when he saw other hands joined to labor, but continued alongside the men as the pile of stones began to rise into a legitimate fortress. 'Nothing fancy, brothers,' the king guided the construction. 'For a wall of stone will not preserve Hellas, but a wall of men.'"

Gates of Fire is narrated in the voice of Xeones, who is not high-ranking enough to hold full citizenship. In the story, the Persians capture him and learn the story through Xeones' deathbed telling. On leadership, he tells Persian king Xerxes, "A king does not abide within his tent while his men bleed and die upon the field. A king does not dine while his men go hungry, nor sleep when they stand at watch upon the wall. A king does not command his men's loyalty through fear nor purchase it with gold; he earns their love by the sweat of his own back and the pains he endures for their sake. That which comprises the harshest burden, a king lifts first and sets down last. A king does not require service of those he leads but provides it to them. He serves them, not they him."

For me, leadership is distilled into the final six words: "He serves them, not they him."

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