



Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC

Visible or Concealed, the Danger Is the Same: Carrying Mistakes That Cost Lives

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Carrying a firearm in public is a right that comes with profound responsibility. In a life-or-death scenario, decisions unfold in microseconds, and mistakes made in the lead-up to that moment can be costly, even fatal. Some who carry do so with good intentions but lack the knowledge, training, or mindset to do so safely, effectively, and legally. This article sheds light on eleven critical mistakes armed citizens make—errors that can get you killed, land you in prison, or result in the loss of your right to carry. I'll walk you through real-world examples, detailed analysis, and practical steps to help you avoid becoming a case study.

Mistake #1: Not checking the condition of your handgun. It's easy to develop bad firearms handling habits. You do the same thing every day, then you do something different, but you forget what you did. Is your handgun loaded? Are you sure it is? Is your magazine securely seated? Are you sure it is? Not knowing the condition of your carry gun with certainty could be a fatal mistake.

Example: Imagine you're facing an armed assailant. You see his handgun, you draw your handgun and press it toward the assailant, then press the trigger, and you hear the loudest sound in the world--"CLICK." It would likely be the last thing you hear. Is the cause a bad round, or your failure to load a round into the chamber? If you had carefully checked the condition of your gun before leaving the house, you would know.

Actionable Tips. Check the condition of your handgun every time before leaving the house armed. First, ensure that your sights are tightly secured. If you have a "red dot," check to ensure it is securely in place. Firmly seat a fully loaded magazine and load a round into the chamber. If your gun has a manual safety, engage it. Carefully holster your gun.

A short story. Paul and I, along with several of our friends, were training at the Blackwater Firearms Training site in Moyock, NC, about nine years ago. We were

preparing to engage in a “shoot and move” exercise by maneuvering from room to room through buildings. The instructor observed that we had optics on our AR-15 rifles. He said, “Be sure your optics are secured.” I said, “Roger that. Mine is.” We started maneuvering on the run and my damn optic fell off and I had to keep moving using my iron sights. Embarrassing, but an important lesson about checking the condition of a firearm.

Mistake #2: Inadequate Trigger Protection

In our classroom lessons and on our live-fire range, we repeatedly remind our customers to keep their fingers off the trigger—all fingers. We have seen pointer fingers on the non-dominant hand on triggers, we have seen middle fingers on the trigger, and we even saw a support hand thumb on the trigger. Many negligent discharges happen because of the trigger finger left on the trigger. Our admonition notwithstanding, we have customers who repeatedly leave their finger on the trigger after completing a shooting exercise, especially while re-holstering, and sometimes while doing emergency or tactical reloads.

Case Study: We were in North Carolina training with Veteran Green Berets. We were doing live-fire exercises. We had just finished one of the exercises and were waiting for further instructions when we heard a gunshot on the other end of the firing line. One of the guys with us experienced a negligent discharge and almost shot himself in the foot. Why? He left his finger on the trigger of his firearm while re-holstering.

Mistake #3: Poor Holster Choice

Whether you're carrying openly or concealed, your holster is the last line of defense against a negligent discharge. However, thousands of Americans walk around every day with bargain-bin holsters that do more harm than good. Some even carry with no holster at all—a practice so dangerous it borders on reckless.

Real Case: A man in Nevada was carrying openly at a grocery store using a soft nylon holster that barely retained his firearm. When he bent down to pick something up, his pistol fell out and hit the floor, discharging on impact. The bullet narrowly missed a child in the aisle.

Why It Matters: Every holster—regardless of carry style—must do three things well:

- Fully cover the trigger guard.

- Retain the firearm securely during movement.
- Allow for a smooth, safe draw.

Avoid "universal" one-size-fits-all holsters or those with weak clips and fabric construction. Choose reputable brands that use molded Kydex or heavy-duty leather, tailored explicitly to your firearm model. Whether you're carrying "appendix style" or at the three o'clock position on a belt, your holster is either your insurance policy or your liability.

Mistake #4: Inconsistent Carry Habits

One day it's on your belt, the next it's in your glove box, and sometimes it's in your backpack. Alternatively, maybe you open carry while walking your dog, but switch to concealed when heading to the store. Inconsistent carry habits destroy muscle memory, delay your draw, and cause confusion under stress.

Example: A woman in Georgia was legally carrying her handgun concealed in a purse. After dinner with friends, she was approached in a parking lot by a man demanding her wallet. She reached for her gun, but it wasn't in the purse. She had moved it to her car console earlier. She escaped, but the threat was real.

Takeaway: Whether you open carry or conceal, pick one method and stick with it. Train with that setup until it becomes second nature. The location, orientation, and access to your weapon must remain consistent. In a real encounter, your body will respond the way you've trained—or fail the way you haven't.

Mistake #5: Lack of Training and Real-World Practice

Too many people think a concealed or open carry permit means they're ready to defend themselves. We remind our customers that just because they carry a gun—open or concealed—doesn't mean they are skilled at using it. We discuss how we sometimes encounter customers who have extensive shooting experience, including hunting and range time. However, do they have defensive shooting skills? With the possible exception of customers with real combat experience, the answer is "No"! This is why our emphasis is on defensive shooting.

Most permit courses don't include any real-world training. Drawing from a holster under pressure, moving and shooting, weapon retention, and decision-making under stress are rarely covered in training. People who carry in states that have no training requirements

or are “Constitutional Carry” (no permit required) rarely, if ever, have defensive shooting training unless they seek it out on their own.

Story from the Range: During a defensive pistol course, a man with years of open carry experience fumbled his draw and dropped his firearm during a simulated attack. The instructor had to stop the drill and explain: “Wearing a gun every day doesn’t mean you’ve trained with it.”

Real Risk: Whether your gun is in plain sight or hidden, you need to practice drawing, re-holstering, and shooting under stress. You should know how to:

- Draw safely from concealment or open carry.
- Retain your weapon during a physical struggle.
- Use cover and assess threats quickly.

Dry fire training at home, retention drills with a partner, and dynamic range time are not optional—they're essential.

Mistake #6: The Hero Complex

Some armed citizens feel empowered to “step in” when something seems off. However, this mindset can backfire fast. Your job as a law-abiding carrier isn’t to police the world—it’s to protect yourself and your loved ones from deadly threats.

Tragic Example: In 2021, a man openly carrying a weapon in a Colorado supermarket tried to stop an active shooter. He successfully engaged and neutralized the threat, but was then fatally shot by police who mistook him for the attacker.

What Went Wrong: Good intentions. Bad tactics. Zero communication. You must weigh every action you take with awareness of its legal and tactical consequences. Drawing your firearm could make you the next target for the attacker or law enforcement.

Rule To Live By: Unless someone’s life is in immediate danger and you can intervene without becoming a greater liability, your safest move is often to be a good witness. Let the professionals handle it when possible. Defending yourself is one thing. Seeking out conflict is another.

Mistake #7: Ignoring State and Local Laws

The legal landscape for firearms is a minefield. Laws vary wildly between states, and sometimes even between cities. Maryland is a particularly challenging state for carrying a handgun in public. What's legal in one place can land you in jail in another. Many people cross state lines or into restricted areas without realizing they've just committed a felony. A handy resource for learning about each state's (and the District of Columbia's) gun laws is found at <https://www.handgunlaw.us/>. This site is updated frequently. It also features a travel planner that allows you to ensure compliance with gun laws for each state you travel to and through. Another resource for Maryland residents is *"The Maryland Use of Force Handbook"* (Harris & Cohen) (Available at Amazon.com). Maryland Shall Issue (www.MarylandShallIssue.org) is an advocacy group for the Second Amendment. They follow legislative proposals and testify against those that threaten Second Amendment rights. *(Although you don't need to be a member to get their legislative updates, membership only costs \$25. I am a member of their Board of Directors and I can assure you that MSI is fighting on your behalf. Get some skin in the game and become a member. It costs a lot of money to litigate these assaults on our rights).*

Common Mistakes:

- Carrying into a government building without a proper exemption.
- Traveling with a loaded firearm across state lines in violation of federal transport laws.
- Assuming your concealed permit allows open carry (or vice versa).

Case Study:

A Pennsylvania man traveling through New Jersey with a loaded firearm in his glove box—legal in his home state—was arrested during a routine traffic stop. New Jersey law does not honor Pennsylvania permits. He faced felony charges.

Solution: Familiarize yourself with the law wherever you carry. Use apps, official state websites, or consult a firearms attorney for guidance. Moreover, strongly consider legal defense insurance—it could save your financial life.

Mistake #8: Weapon Visibility and Poor Concealment ("Printing")

For concealed carriers, "printing" is when the outline of your firearm shows through your clothing. In states where open carry is frowned upon, printing could cause panic—it can lead to confrontation or even police involvement. For open carriers, being overly conspicuous can make you the first target in a crisis.

Example: A concealed carrier in a shopping mall was printing badly through a thin shirt. A nervous shopper alerted mall security, which then contacted the police. The situation escalated quickly, and the carrier was detained at gunpoint until things were sorted out.

Tip: If you carry a concealed weapon, dress around it. Utilize layering, dark clothing, and high-quality belts and holsters to minimize the appearance of printing. If you open carry, do so discreetly, without tactical cosplay or attention-seeking behavior. Be the "gray man"—not the one everyone notices.

Mistake #9: Situational Unawareness

The most advanced firearm, best holster, and all the training in the world won't help you if you don't see the threat coming. Situational awareness is what keeps you one step ahead of danger. Colonel Jeff Cooper developed a color code to help people stay focused. The colors represent mental conditions: white, yellow, orange, and red. Later, condition black was added ([The Cooper Color Code for Awareness](#)).

Another helpful resource is a book titled "*Left of Bang: How the Marine Corps' Combat Hunter Program Can Save Your Life*" (Van Horne & Riley, 2014) (Available at Amazon.com). The authors developed a methodology for young Marines fighting in Iraq to help them identify danger before they were caught off guard. The methodology uses behavioral profiling skill-sets. We introduce our customers to the methodology in our wear-and-carry classes.

Real Encounter: A man openly carrying was mugged at a gas station while pumping gas. The attacker blindsided him, disarmed him, and fled with both the weapon and his wallet. His eyes were on his phone, not his surroundings.

- Stay in Condition Yellow:
- Head up, eyes scanning.
- Know exits and possible threats.
- Avoid distractions like loud music or staring at your phone.

- Whether your gun is visible or not, if you're carrying, you're a target. Act like it.
- Be ready to act—quickly!

Mistake #10: Neglecting Firearm Maintenance

Every day carry exposes your firearm to lint, moisture, sweat, and dirt. Over time, this can cause corrosion or malfunctions, especially in deep concealment or hot climates. Carbon residue accumulates every time you shoot your handgun. If the gun is not cleaned, especially after shooting at the range, the accumulated carbon can interfere with the handgun's operation.

Example: During a defensive handgun course, a participant's concealed pistol repeatedly failed to cycle. When examined, it was found to be caked with carbon buildup.

Bottom Line: Clean your carry gun monthly, and especially after range use. Inspect for corrosion, check the holster for debris, and clean your gun regularly to maintain its optimal performance.

Mistake #11: Having a False Sense of Confidence

It is easy for people who legally carry a firearm to become victims of the normalcy trap, that is, believing nothing bad would ever happen to them. They think, “I have my gun, I’ll be fine.” Unless you train on a regular schedule with unwavering discipline, the normalcy trap and a lack of dialed-in skills will put you at risk of being killed or seriously wounded.

Example: Jason decided to check out a sketchy part of town late at night, thinking his concealed handgun made it safe. He walked into a situation he couldn’t control and barely escaped harm. A gun doesn’t make you invincible.

Bottom Line: Don’t go somewhere with a gun that you wouldn’t go without it.

Final Thoughts: How You Carry Is a Reflection of How You Live

Carrying a firearm—open or concealed— isn’t about looking tough or feeling powerful. It’s about protecting life—yours, and potentially someone else’s. That responsibility demands more than simply owning a gun or having a permit. It requires daily discipline, honest self-assessment, and continuous training.

Every mistake listed here has cost someone their life, their freedom, or their peace of mind. You don't need to be a Green Beret, Navy SEAL, or law enforcement officer to carry responsibly, but you do need to carry with intention, knowledge, and humility.

Remember:

- Carry smart.
- Train the way you fight, not fight the way you train (please reflect on the implications of this).
- Know the law.
- Stay alert.
- And above all, respect the significance of what it means to be armed. Your life—and the lives of those around you—may depend on it.

About the Author

Francis (Frank) Duffy is a veteran of the 6th and 5th U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (the Green Berets), a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a Green Beret combat diver. He is also a certified executive protection specialist.

He is a certified instructor for the NRA (rifle and handgun instructor), the Maryland State Police, and the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA). He is a certified concealed carry instructor for the District of Columbia.

He is also a member of the Board of Directors for Maryland Shall Issue, an all-volunteer, non-partisan organization dedicated to preserving and advancing gun owners' rights in Maryland. He is the co-founder and Vice President of Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC. He can be reached at 443-472-0216 or via email at frank@spartanftg.com.

Individuals interested in scheduling a private, one-on-one firearms training session should contact Frank.

About the Spartan Firearms Training Group

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC (www.spartanftg.com) is a Special Forces Veteran-Owned business formed in 2015 by Paul and Francis Duffy. At the end of March 2025, we entered into our 11th year of business, and we have trained thousands of Maryland residents in a variety of ways, including:

- Concealed carry training
- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care training
- Long-distance precision shooting training
- Home Defense training
- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar can be found at the [SFTG Calendar](#).

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WHEN FACING A LIFE-THREATENING EVENT, YOU WILL FALL TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR TRAINING, NOT RISE TO THE LEVEL OF YOUR EXPECTATIONS. TRAIN THE WAY YOU FIGHT!

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