



SPARTAN FIREARMS TRAINING GROUP, LLC

Preloading--The Guardian's Edge:

A Clear Mind When Others Lose Theirs

[We teach our wear-and-carry students how to prepare for self-defense with a handgun. An essential part of preparation is mental, in which they begin to imagine various self-defense scenarios and how they might respond. This visioning process is technically known as "preloading." Preloaded responses significantly increase successful self-defense. This article examines preloading as an important method for visualizing potential responses to dangerous situations.]

Introduction

If you carry a gun, you've probably thought about how you would respond when facing a deadly force threat when your heart rate jumps, your vision narrows into a tunnel, your hands feel heavy, and your brain is on hold. That moment, that "am I actually ready?" feeling, is where the whole idea of *preloading* starts. You're basically recognizing that danger doesn't give warnings. It doesn't text you first. It just appears, and you address it as the person you were five minutes earlier. Preloading is a strategy to ensure you respond effectively to get home safely.

What Preloading Really Means

Preloading is thinking ahead in a practical, actionable way. It's you saying to yourself, "*If X happens, here's what I'm going to do.*" Then, you imagine (visualize) your response. Not because you're scared. Not because you want a fight. It's because you understand the stakes.

You're carrying a tool that can take a life or save one. You shouldn't believe that you will improvise as your adrenaline and cortisol levels blow through the roof, your vision

contracts into a tunnel, your blood pressure and heart rate skyrocket, and you lose fine motor dexterity. In extreme stress, some people lose control of their bowels or bladder, or both. It is a poor time to brainstorm possible responses to a perceived threat to your life in the throes of that kind of stress.

So preloading is:

- Knowing your personal “red lines”
- Deciding what you’ll walk away from as long as it is safe to do so
- Deciding what you *won’t* walk away from
- Practicing how you will speak, move, and react in response
- And doing it all before you’re face-to-face with a threatening person

Why This Matters More Than What You Carry

I’ve met some people in our classes who get their carry permit and never thought beyond the gun itself. They assumed the gun would automatically sort out the details of how to respond effectively to a deadly-force threat. It doesn’t.

When people freeze, it’s not because their holster was wrong. They don’t freeze because they didn’t have a red dot optic attached to their handgun. They froze because their minds lacked a plan, and they panicked. Danger shows up fast and messy. It doesn’t hand you a script. If you haven’t already laid down some mental tracks, your brain locks up and goes, “Wait—what? What do I do right now?”

Here’s what effective preloading gives you:

- 1. You move instead of stalling out.** Your legs, your voice, and your hands begin to move quickly and effectively. You respond quickly because you rehearsed your responses in advance. To paraphrase Lt. Colonel Jeff Cooper, you think, “I know this could happen one day, and I know what to do about it.”
- 2. You don’t talk yourself into something stupid.** Most bad decisions start with a scrambled brain and too much adrenaline.
- 3. You stay inside the law.** If you haven’t thought through your legal boundaries ahead of time, you’re gambling with your future during the worst moment of your life.

4. You don't torture yourself afterward. People who prepare cope better. They can live with their decisions because those decisions weren't made in blind panic.

Okay, So How Do You Actually "Preload"? It's not mystical. It's not complicated. It's just uncomfortable — because it forces you to imagine things you'd rather not think about.

You Visualize Real Scenarios—Not Scenes from Action Movies. For example:

- a guy yelling and closing the distance too fast
- someone breaking into your house at 3:00 a.m.
- the weird feeling when someone follows you across a parking lot
- the argument that suddenly turns sharper
- the stranger who won't take a hint
- the robbery where you're better off handing over your wallet
- the domestic situation where someone you love is the one losing control

You don't need a degree in psychology to walk through these scenarios. Just honesty and a little courage.

You Think In Terms of Actions, Not Fantasies. For example:

- "If someone confronts me verbally, I create space first."
- "If someone chases me toward my car, I don't dig for my keys — I change direction and get loud."
- "If a guy pulls a knife from ten feet away, I don't try to play hero — I move and escape if I can."
- "If I draw, I already know exactly what commands I'll use."
- "If I see a gun, I will get away if it is safe to do so."
- "If I hear someone breaking into my house at 3:00 a.m., I will barricade myself inside my bedroom with my handgun at the ready and call 911."

These aren't heroic scenes. They're just clear, simple, ugly decisions. You build and mentally rehearse scripts you can actually remember. Not fancy lines. Not tactical poetry. Words like:

- "Stay back."

- “Stop — don’t come any closer.” (I’ve used that command twice, and it worked both times).
- “Leave. I don’t want trouble.”
- “Call 911.”

Simple is what works when your heart rate spikes.

You Learn Local Laws and Take Them Seriously

No guessing. No macho shrugging. If you don’t know the legal requirements for retreat, non-deadly force, or deadly force where you live, you’re setting yourself up for a second disaster after the first one is over (Maryland folks, buy this book: The Maryland Use of Force Handbook, Paperback – November 3, 2024, by Roland Harris and Martin Cohen. Available at www.amazon.com/Maryland-Use-Force-Handbook/).

You Talk Through Your Plan With Real People

Spouses. Friends. Training partners. Your instructors. Sometimes someone else sees the blind spot you missed. Explain your thought process and get real-time feedback on the feasibility of your hypothetical actions.

You Train Frequently So Your Body and Mind Don’t Freeze

Dry fire. Movement drills. Live-fire draw-to-first-shot reps. Train dry fire weekly. Train live fire once a month. We strongly advise our wear-and-carry customers to train on an ongoing basis. Few do. Don’t be one of the few. Your life will depend on your training, for as they say, “You will not rise to the level of your expectations; you will fall to the level of your training.”

After Something Happens — Even a Close Call — You Review It Honestly

You sit down later and think:

- What did I notice first?
- Where did my brain go?
- Did I freeze?
- Did I overreact?

- Did I say anything dumb?
- Did I move the way I thought I would?
- What surprised me?

You don't shame yourself. You just learn. Every close call is a free lesson you'd be crazy to ignore.

The Heart of It All

Carrying a gun isn't about swagger. It isn't about winning fights. It isn't about being the toughest person in the room. It's about not leaving your decisions to chance.

Preloading (visualization) isn't paranoia. It's not fear. It's not fantasy role-play. It's maturity. It's preparation for the possibilities, not the probabilities. It's what responsible armed adults do so they don't become the reason a tragedy gets worse.

If you carry, you owe it to yourself — and everyone around you — to think ahead, decide ahead, and walk through scenarios when the world is calm, quiet, and safe. Because once things start breaking loose, the version of you that shows up is the version you prepared. And you want that person ready.

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 also 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:

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

Our training calendar is available on the [SFTG Calendar](#).

Paul Duffy can be contacted at 410-707-2992 Paul@spartanftg.com

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!