



*Vigilance, Restraint, and Responsibility:
The Mindset of the Armed Citizen-Guardian*

By

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*[This article offers a preview of themes explored in the forthcoming Spartan Firearms Training Group book, **The Armed Citizen’s Transformation Journey: The Path to Responsible Self-Defense**—an examination of preparedness, judgment, and the modern citizen-guardian mindset. It also builds on the April 21 Tip of the Week: “Training is a Moral Obligation.”]*

We recognize the importance of the armed citizen-guardian™ mindset. A citizen guardian’s mindset includes being vigilant, restrained, and responsible. *Vigilant* means being aware of the surroundings without being overly paranoid. There is a difference! Some people take the term situational awareness too literally. They might see a person always scanning the rooftop like they’re in a war zone. That isn’t real situational awareness. Situational awareness is quieter than that.

Situationally aware people recognize:

- Exits when entering buildings

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- Look up from phones in parking garages
- Behavior that doesn't belong in the environment
- Listening to that voice inside that tells you something is wrong.

Most of the time, nothing bad happens. Praise God for that! Awareness gives you time, and time provides options.

Restraint is equally important. Public discourse often encourages anger and emotional responses. It seems like everyone is mad about everything. Social media helps this situation. People argue about everything from politics and sports to traffic, parenting, and absolutely absurd things with such ferocity that it would have embarrassed people twenty years ago.

Responsible behavior is important, too. Armed citizens can't afford to be emotionally immature. During conflicts, armed citizens have a greater responsibility to remain calm, not less. This requires a great deal of personal maturity, including:

- Swallowing pride
- Walking away from arguments
- Refusing to escalate
- Avoiding fools whenever possible.

As the self-defense world says, the best gunfight is the one you were never in. That sounds like a cliché, but it's true. Trained and responsible concealed carriers understand that avoidance is not weakness. Often it is wisdom. Unfortunately, some people carry handguns for the wrong reasons. These include insecurity, egos, fantasies, and so forth. Usually, these individuals can be easily identified by their constant discussions of hypothetical situations. They talk the talk, but don't walk the walk.

Few real professionals discuss violent subjects openly. Those who do speak with caution, knowing what violence costs. Violence leaves marks on people, whether physical or

emotional. Even a completely justified act of self-defense can cause deep emotional scars that linger for years. Movies rarely capture this aspect of violence. When the gunfight ends in the movies, so does the story. However, in real life, that is not how it works.

There are police investigations. Civil lawsuits. Media attention. No sleep. Guilt. Family problems. And possibly feelings of guilt, even though the actions taken were lawful and reasonable. Responsible armed citizens think about these aspects prior to ever carrying a firearm in public.

Training is very important. We aren't referring to just standing on a flat range shooting paper targets. Anyone can shoot holes in paper when everything goes perfectly. Real training involves making decisions, using your own judgment, and learning how stress affects the mind and body. Learning about the laws governing self-defense also falls into this category. Understanding how quickly fear, ego, and panic can destroy good judgment is also important. *Spartan Firearms Training Group* instructors teach more than just marksmanship.

Carrying a firearm obligates you to learn moral boundaries along with mechanical skills. Moral boundaries are often considered subjective and variable in today's society. Carrying a firearm puts pressure on the individual to answer tough questions. Examples of these questions include:

- What are you willing to do to protect innocent lives?
- Are there certain situations that I need to avoid?
- Am I able to exercise restraint under duress?

These are serious questions that require serious consideration. You may have others. Carrying a firearm does not automatically make you a protector.

Many times, carrying a handgun responsibly is less about aggression and more about discipline.

- Discipline to stay alert.
- Discipline to avoid unnecessary conflict.
- Discipline to continue training.
- Discipline to control emotions during stressful situations.
- And perhaps most importantly, discipline to remember that carrying a firearm is for the protection of life, not to prove something.

This type of thinking changes how people move through their daily lives as preparedness becomes part of their daily routine. Not paranoia, nor obsession, just preparedness. You begin to pay more attention in transition areas like parking lots and gas stations. You realize who is around you. You become harder to catch off guard. You minimize distractions. You think more critically about where you travel and which situations you put yourself in.

Eventually, these behaviors become habitual. Therefore, we encourage students in our wear and carry course to think of preparedness as a lifestyle, not something you turn on and off like a light switch. Armed citizen-guardians understand this concept. They understand that evil exists everywhere, even in mundane places. They understand that law enforcement typically arrives after violence occurs and not before it starts. Armed citizen-guardians understand they will not suddenly become heroic figures in their worst moments. Instead, they will likely fall back upon whatever level of preparedness they have acquired. Understanding this often humbles people; or at least it should.

In conclusion, a prepared armed citizen-guardian is not looking for admiration or praise from others. Some prefer to remain anonymous. Armed citizen-guardians do not carry guns to impress strangers or prove points online. In fact, many avoid speaking publicly about their firearms.

They silently accept their responsibility to be prepared. Perhaps this silent acceptance is the most overlooked aspect of concealed carry in American society today. Armed citizen-

guardians are not trying to be heroes; they are trying to be prepared because preparedness makes a huge difference!

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 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—initial and renewal for Maryland and Washington, DC and initial Utah.

- Handgun Qualification License (HQL) training
- Emergency Casualty Care Course—E-Triple C
- Long-distance precision shooting
- Private, 1-on-1 firearms training
- Private group training

Our training calendar is available at [Firearms Training Maryland | Events Calendar](#).

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