

COVER STORY

# **PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPAREDNESS**

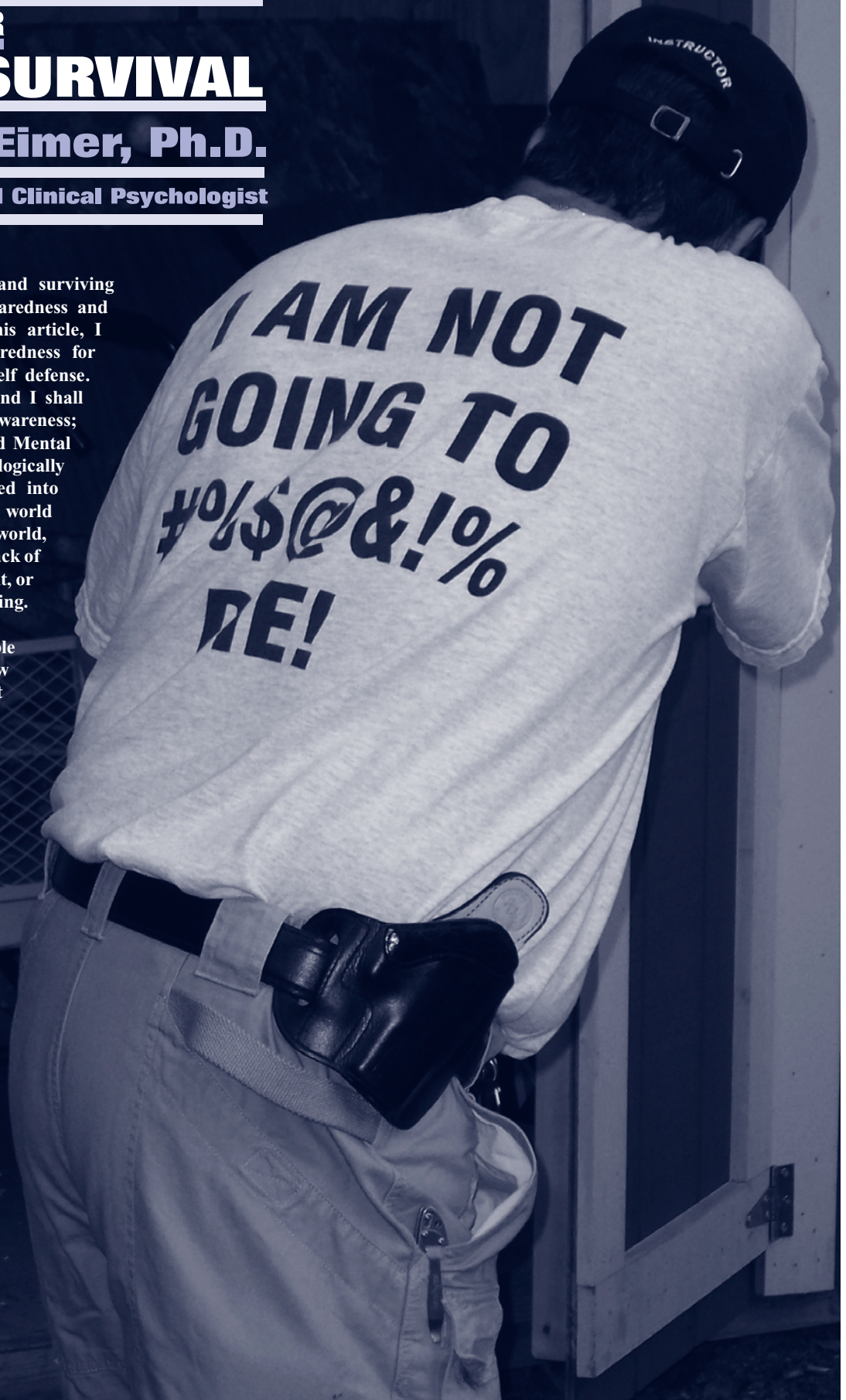
## **FOR COMBAT SURVIVAL**

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**W**inning a fight for your life and surviving depend on both psychological preparedness and well practiced fighting skills. In this article, I shall focus on psychological preparedness for combat survival in the context of self defense. It encompasses four key elements and I shall discuss each of these: Situational Awareness; Positive Self-Talk; Fear Control; and Mental Rehearsal. When you are psychologically prepared for survival you are tuned into reality, and the reality is that the world is a dangerous place. In the real world, unawareness of an imminent threat, lack of preparedness to effectively deal with it, or denial of its presence mean not surviving. So, let's keep it real and survive.

History often provides memorable lessons, and those who don't know their history may be destined to repeat it. For example, Wild Bill Hickok certainly knew how to fight. Yet, he was shot in the back of the head and murdered by a punk during a moment of unawareness while playing a poker game. At that moment in time, he had let his guard down and was not paying attention to potential threats in his immediate environment. Thus, he didn't get the chance to stop his attacker, and he was murdered in cold blood.



Good guys and gals like us normally don't go out looking for a fight. Therefore, to paraphrase noted master firearms trainer, Clint Smith; if a fight finds its way to us, it will not be what we want it to be, it will be what it is. That means we have to be psychologically as well as physically prepared for worst case scenarios. But, who am I to be talking about this?

### MY BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR WRITING THIS ARTICLE

I am a licensed clinical psychologist, armed, law abiding citizen and defensive shooter. I carry concealed, and I take home defense seriously, because I do not want to be a victim. Therefore, for me, the issue of psychological preparedness for combat survival is just as real as it should be for any law enforcement officer, or for anyone else. In an emergency, I'll call 911 just as fast as I can, after I've dealt with any immediate threat. The fact is that the police (God bless them) cannot be counted on to get there on time to save you if you are attacked. That is why the police usually arrive after a crime has been committed. So, you must be prepared to deal with a criminal aggressor before the cavalry arrives.

Many years ago, the brother of a friend of mine was murdered in a home invasion, and in more recent years, a physician in my neighborhood was similarly murdered in his home by gun wielding gangbangers. Despite my rage at these tragic events, I am ashamed to admit that there had always been a part of me which felt that if my "moment of truth" ever came, I'd turn yellow! However, the cowardly, opportunistic attack on the United States on September 11th, 2001, was my "final straw", and initiated major changes in my outlook.

Unfortunately, it appears as if practically everyone was unprepared for what was to happen that morning even as it was happening—but never again! 9/11 was our nation's wake-up call. Today, we as a nation are better prepared to preempt and defend against an attack within our borders. We can no longer afford to let down our guard.

On a personal level, the impact of the 9/11 tragedy led me to make a commitment to myself that I will never again leave myself open to being a victim. Violent criminals are terrorists, and terrorists are violent criminals. Both are cowardly opportunists. They choose easy marks. Colonel Jeff Cooper, in his landmark book, **Principles of Personal Defense**, and his student, master trainer Gabe Suarez, on his web site,

<http://www.suarezinternational.com>, discussion forum, <http://www.warriortalk.com>, and in his book, **The Tactical Pistol**, explain the best defense against an attacker. It's a decisive, aggressive, lightning quick, ruthless and vicious counter-attack that takes your attacker by surprise.

In order to be ready, we must remain ever on alert. As individuals, we can never afford to let down our guard. So, you would do well to etch the following ideas into your subconscious mind: 1) I pay attention to everything around me. 2) I let no one slip through my guard. 3) If physically attacked, I immediately counter-attack like a lion and destroy my attacker. Feel free to reword these ideas to fit with your feelings. Write them down as self-suggestions on an index card and carry it with you. Reread these self-suggestions to yourself over and over again. This is one step in cultivating the combative mind set for survival.

### HOMELAND AND PERSONAL SECURITY

Following 9/11, I came to the realization that "homeland security" depends on each and every individual law abiding citizen exercising their 2nd Amendment rights. To my "post 9/11" way of thinking, every law abiding citizen has a stake in maintaining our "homeland security" and a responsibility to do their part. That means being psychologically prepared to use lethal force in defense of one's own life and limb.

These beliefs led me to begin serious personal training in the defensive and tactical use of handguns, long guns and hand to hand fighting skills. Being serious about survival means knowing how to fight and being prepared to employ lethal force swiftly and decisively to stop an attacker intent on taking your life, or the lives of your loved ones, if the need arises. This also entails knowing when the use of lethal force in self defense is justified and when it isn't. For detailed discussions of this issue, I refer you to excellent books by Massad Ayoob, **In the Gravest Extreme**, and John Farnam, **The Farnam Method of Defensive Handgunning**.

It bears remembering that because we card carrying, armed, civilian, good guys and gals act only in self defense, we are likely to be a wee bit behind the time curve if some creep launches a deadly attack against us. Unfortunately, we are reacting to the bad guy's actions. His threatening behavior, or attack, is our cue. His cue is our apparent vulnerability. This is where alertness and situational awareness come in, but more about this in a moment.

Just so you know, I have never served in the military, I'm not a cop, and I have never been in a gun fight or seen "the tiger" (thank God!). However, given my professional background as a clinical psychologist, and my personal background as the son of a Holocaust survivor, the psychological keys to combat survival are of special interest to me.

Disarmed citizens are at the mercy of violent criminals and tyrannical governments. Only the strong survive, and strength comes from knowledge, skills, psychological preparedness, and having the right tools for the job. The job is self defense and survival. The right tools are firearms. Being psychologically prepared for survival entails knowing how and when to use your weapons, and having them when you need them (hence, "concealed carry"). However, having a weapon will do you little good if you are caught unaware and do not have the chance to employ it (like poor Wild Bill Hickok). Worse yet, if you are unaware, and/or untrained in weapon retention techniques, your weapon can be taken away from you and used against you (one of the arguments employed by the anti-gun crowd). So, the first step in survival is situational awareness. Ignorance and denial of these facts are inconsistent with survival. They are consistent with extinction. History bears this out.

### SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

The first key element is "Situational Awareness". Situational Awareness means being your own bodyguard. It means learning Colonel Jeff Cooper's color codes and training yourself to tune into the appropriate level of awareness to the circumstances. Cooper's color codes comprise a system for cuing yourself into the appropriate level of alertness, situational awareness, readiness and activation to the circumstances. It is a continuum that ranges from "Condition White" (completely tuned out and unaware) to "Condition Black" (you're in a fight for your life).

It is important to point out that the rationale for the continuum is that you cannot shift directly and abruptly from "Condition White" into

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***"I am NOT going to #@%ing die today!"***

“Condition Black”. Just as you cannot shift from reverse into drive in your car without first going through neutral, you must go through the intermediary states of awareness and readiness.

“Condition White”. This condition is never appropriate when you are outside the safe confines of your castle, and even then, it may only be wise to settle into this level of unawareness for brief periods. Certainly when you are in a deep sleep, you’re in White. So, you’d better have good door and window locks and a good alarm system.



**Sequence showing a defense against a knife attack.**

“Condition Yellow”. We should train ourselves to be in “Condition Yellow” most of the time. “Condition Yellow” does not mean being paranoid. It means remaining alert and aware of what is going on around us. Thus, if there is a potential problem that may need to be solved, we are ready to move up the continuum of alertness, readiness, and activation. Thus, we need to train ourselves to seamlessly transition from “Condition Yellow” into “Condition Orange” should the need arise.

“Condition Orange”. Going into “Condition Orange” means that there’s something up that feels not quite right. You’ve turned up the flame on the burner and you are ready if the situation escalates into a real and imminent threat. If the situation does escalate, you then go automatically into “Condition Red”.

“Condition Red”. In “Condition Red”, you are prepared for a fight. You expect there’s to be a fight, but you are not fighting just yet. All conditions spell “GO”, and you are “red hot to trot”, yet you remain cool because you are analyzing your tactical options. If he does ----, then, I’ll do ----. You’ve transitioned to this stage of activation through the continuum so you are not taken by surprise. You are readying yourself to

prevail and survive, and you are confident that you will retain the upper hand.

“Condition Black”. I like to use “Condition Black” as the last stage. “Condition Black” means you’re in the fight. Recall that most fights occur in less than favorable conditions? Recall Murphy’s Law? Remember that most gunfights occur in low or no light (i.e. in the dark)? So, if you have prepared up to this point, you’re ahead of the game. You are employing every advantage at your disposal, and because street fights and gun fights are ugly, and dirty and not fair, you do not give your attacker any benefit of the doubt, or any chances to kill you. You fight dirty and cheat to prevail and survive to live another day. Perhaps that is why this stage is called “Condition Black”.

### POSITIVE SELF-TALK

The second key element is “Positive Self-Talk”. Self-talk is the voice we all have in our head that tells us what’s going to happen and what will happen if that does happen. Noted psychologist, Albert Ellis, has written that we are all born with a biological predisposition to think negatively, pessimistically and irrationally. If that’s true, and I think it is, then we have to work at countering this. The bottom line is that if you think you’re going to lose a fight, then you probably are. But it works the other way too. Assuming you have the requisite physical skills and training, if you think you’re going to win a fight, you have a much better chance of winning. If you expect a fight, you must tell yourself: I am NOT going to ----ing die today!

It is a good idea to become more aware of your inner self-talk, or inner voice. First practice asking yourself, What am I feeling right now? Scared? Sad? Mad? Glad? (and so forth). Once you become familiar with identifying your typical emotional states or feelings, practice asking yourself, When I feel this way, what am I thinking (or telling myself)? By doing this, you will become familiar with the types of repetitive thoughts and mental images, or pictures your mind generates in response to different situations. Then you will be ready to make a habit of asking yourself, What am I feeling and thinking right now?

If your inner self-talk is negative and self-defeating, it is necessary to practice countering it with positive, but realistic, self-talk. For example, replace negative self-talk and self suggestions such as, “I can’t learn to do this” with realistic, positive self-talk such as, I can learn to do this, and I will learn it. Replace negative mental images or pictures with mental pictures that program your subconscious mind for mastery, victory, and survival. For example, if you see or imagine yourself looking like an easy mark to a

couple of punks, practice imagining yourself displaying a more confident and self-reliant demeanor. I’ll discuss this more in a moment. In other words, you have to become your own coach. Simple techniques for doing this are covered in detail in my recent book, **Coping With Uncertainty: 10 Simple Solutions** (2002, New Harbinger Publications. <http://www.newharbinger.com>).

### FEAR CONTROL

The third key element is “Fear Control”. Noted author and security consultant Gavin de Becker wrote a book about **The Gift of Fear**. By that he means that fear is not necessarily a nuisance to be ignored, denied,



**Sequence showing a defense against an attempted gun snatch.**

or stuffed away. Fear is a feeling that should be acknowledged and then responded to as a signal that there may be a problem or threat that needs to be dealt with. Fear must be heeded for the information it can provide. Fear is your body’s and mind’s automatic response to a perceived threat. When you

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perceive an immediate, external threat, and feel the fear, it's time to move from "Condition Yellow" to "Condition Orange", and as far down the color continuum as the situation dictates. However, if it turns out that there is no external threat, it's nice to know how to turn off the fear response.

When we are confronted with a threat to our survival, our body automatically prepares for fight or flight. The perceived threat triggers what Massad Ayoob, the author of the **Stressfire** System, has clearly explained as a physiological, "Body Alarm Reaction", or "B.A.R.". When the "B.A.R." is triggered (and we're not thinking "lawyer" here!),

***"Fear is your body's and mind's automatic response to a perceived threat."***

there's a massive adrenaline dump into our bloodstream. This stimulant hormone causes our heart to race, our blood pressure to rise, our muscles to tense, our visual and auditory focus to narrow, our visual and auditory acuity to increase and our breathing to quicken and become shallow. If we are trained to fight, and there is no opportunity to preclude the fight, our body is physiologically prepared to do so reflexively. If we perceive an opportunity to flee and avoid the fight, our body is also prepped to do that. So, the B.A.R. is adaptive, to a point. However, if it gets out of hand, we are in trouble.

If the B.A.R. gets out of hand, or if we are not prepared to fight, and we perceive no opportunity to flee, then, we'll tend to freeze. This is definitely not a good option in the face of the tiger. Freezing results from fear getting the better of us, and this does not equal survival. To survive, fear must be controlled.

For fear to be controlled, it first must be acknowledged. Remember that fear is a natural response when facing the tiger and not a sign of cowardice. Now, once fear is acknowledged, the B.A.R. (Which both courageous fight and fear thrive on) must be controlled and harnessed to pump our fighting machine. The B.A.R. is physiological, but both physiological as well as psychological methods must be employed to control and direct it.

When fear gets out of hand, and the B.A.R. is in overdrive, psychologically, we feel that we are going to die. As a result, physiologically, not only do our muscles

tense up (or go limp), but we tend to hold our breath, feel tight in our chest, breathe shallowly (or heavily) from our upper chest, and/or hyperventilate and become dizzy or light-headed. Our body temperature drops and our hands and feet turn cold (and perhaps sweaty). Our stomach, bladder and bowels also react. We may feel butterflies or pain in our stomach, and we may lose bladder or bowel control. We may feel as if our body is going to explode or implode, or that we are going to jump out of our skin. All of the above result in our feeling more tense, vulnerable and out of control. There are three remedies that we shall cover in this article; the first one is physiological, and the second and third are psychological.

The first, physiological step is to become aware of our breath holding, erratic or shallow breathing or hyperventilation.

Since these types of breathing, intensify the B.A.R., we need to control our breathing.

You can begin to learn breath control by taking three to five slow, controlled deep breaths when you are by yourself in a safe environment (in Conditions White or Yellow). At first, you may feel somewhat light-headed, but with continued practice, the light-headedness will disappear and instead you will notice that you feel more relaxed, alert and in control.

I teach my clients (and also do it myself) to inhale deeply through their nose to a count of 5, to hold the breath for a count of 3, and then, to exhale forcefully through their mouth to a count of 8, blowing stress and tension out into the atmosphere. If this is too difficult at first, you can inhale as deeply as you can, hold, and exhale as forcefully as you can to lower counts, and then work up to greater breath depth and higher numbers as you get better at it.

Slow, controlled, deep breathing is a switch that turns down the B.A.R., which as I explained is the physiological component of the fear, stress and critical incident stress response. Slow, controlled deep breathing turns on the relaxation response. It's a good idea to practice this skill often throughout the day and enjoy how much more in charge you feel. It only takes a minute or so. Also, as you retrain yourself to become more aware of your breath, first in normal situations, and then in normal everyday stressful situations, you will eventually be able to employ your breathing to your advantage in a crisis such as a fight.

Of course, in the middle of a fight, you are not going to have time to focus on your

breathing. But, the point is that if you've practiced your controlled breathing, when your fear triggers the B.A.R. response, you'll automatically breathe away your unnecessary stress and tension.

The second, psychological step is actually the second key element discussed above; "Positive Self-Talk". If you were faced by three gang banging punks, but you had Steven Seagal, Chuck Norris, and Arnold Schwarzenegger on your side, you'd probably feel more confident wouldn't you? What would you be telling yourself? I'm sure you get the idea.

The idea is to talk to yourself in such a way that your body gets the message to turn down the B.A.R. to a level that is optimal to the circumstances at hand—i.e., enough activation and arousal to be able to use your training to smartly deal with your attackers and prevail. For example, faced with a home invasion in the middle of the night, you want to be telling yourself things like: We've planned for this. We are going to follow our plan. Step one is . . . Step two is . . . First get everyone into and secure our safe room. Now, give my family members instructions on their roles. This will work. We've done this before. So, verbalize: "Margie call 911. Angie, cover me."

Tell yourself: We are NOT going to -- --ing die tonight!! I am going to get my 12 gauge pump action Remington 870 shotgun at the ready with its mounted Surefire light, and also be ready to transition if need be to my .45 ACP Glock 21 along with my handheld Surefire flashlight. The noises are getting closer. I am going to bathe the hallway in light to locate and identify the intruders, blind them, and engage them if need be. I'm going to forcefully and confidently communicate to them that the police are on their way, that we are well armed, and that the intruders should leave our house immediately.

The third, psychological step in learning to control your fear is Mental Rehearsal.

## **MENTAL REHEARSAL**

"Mental Rehearsal", which is the fourth key element of psychological preparedness for combat survival is like "dry practice". It enables you to practice employing all of the above techniques and your physical and tactical training in your mind enough times so that if the real deal ever transpires, you are ready.

Competitive shooters use visualization techniques as do other successful athletes. The key is to mentally visualize and go through in your mind (mentally rehearse) how you want to handle a challenging situation.

It works best if you first put yourself into a relaxed state using slow, controlled, deep



Pictured is one of the author's favorite concealed carry rigs: A belt slide that fits the author's baby Glock 26, along with all of the other 9 mm and .40SW caliber Glocks and the accompanying single magazine carrier. This rugged elephant hide rig is from George Wells of Wells-Made Concealment Gunleather. The holster fulfills the author's criteria for a good concealed carry holster in order of relative importance: (1) rides close to the body and doesn't print; (2) smooth draw; (3) comfortable on the strong side hip; and (3) easy one-handed re-holstering. Wells-Made Gunleather: 404-389-0899, [www.wellsmade.com](http://www.wellsmade.com)

breathing. When you are relaxed, you cannot also be tense, stressed, or scared, because relaxation and these other feeling states are emotional and physical opposites. So, by first getting relaxed, you calm your mind, and thus, you can think more clearly and concentrate better. You are more alert and aware and in tune with reality. Your negative self-talk (which is often exaggerated and unrealistic) is turned down. Your subconscious mind is more receptive to positive impressions. Thus, when you are in the relaxed state, it is easier to change the channel on negative, critical thoughts and images.

You can use Mental Rehearsal to run movies in your head of you dealing with a challenging situation (such as a fight scenario of one type or another), doing what you have to do and winning. Go through the steps. You are the producer and the director, so take full editorial privileges. Explore different scenarios, different variables, different tactics and different outcomes. You can slow your mental movie down and speed it up. You can run it forward and run it backwards. You can cut and splice segments. You can step into the movie and really be an actor, or just watch the movie.

You can also employ Mental Rehearsal as a means of learning techniques from an expert role model. First, you closely observe the expert performing the to-be-learned skill. Then, you mentally put yourself in the expert's shoes, so to speak. That is, using your primary senses (seeing, listening, speaking, and feeling your body and bodily movement kinesthetically), you actively imagine what it would feel like to be that expert as he or she performs the skill. If your fear or distraction level goes up, just interrupt the imagery rehearsal to get more relaxed with your neutral breathing, and then go back to your mental rehearsal. Noted firearms trainer, Lt.

Dave Spaulding, explains this process of "Neuro-Linguistic Programming" (NLP) in clear detail in his highly recommended book, **Handgun Combatives** (2003. Looseleaf Law Publications. <http://www.looseleaflaw.com>).

You can also employ Mental Rehearsal to trigger a mini Body Alarm Reaction and then practice employing Breath Control and Positive Self-Talk to turn the B.A.R. down and take charge of your body and mind. For example, practice desensitizing yourself to fear by purposefully seeking out and confronting uncomfortable and/or slightly risky and challenging situations that get your level of physiological arousal up.

For example, you can practice asserting yourself (not aggressively please!) with people who behave rudely or inappropriately. You can take advantage of situations that make you feel uncomfortable and practice handling yourself with aplomb in them. Be creative. The possibilities are unlimited. You can learn more about Mental Rehearsal in Bruce's forth-coming book, **Essential Guide to Handguns: Firearm Instruction for Personal Defense and Protection** by Stephen R. Rementer and Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D. Publisher: Looseleaf Law Publications.



"Now you see it. Now you don't." The picture on the right shows the author's Glock 19 in a Kramer horsehide #3 IWB Inside the Waist Band holster, another one of the author's favorite rigs. It is a highly concealable IWB that carries the gun low below the belt line and close to the body, and offers a comfortable ride, smooth draw, good retention and easy one-handed reholstering. In the picture on the right, you see the gun in rig with the author's shirt tucked in. In the picture on the left, the rig is totally concealed by the author's shirt and you don't see anything but the shirt. This highly durable and reliable, light weight holster is built like a truck and is a great choice for all year round concealed carry. Kramer Handgun Leather: 1-800-510-2666, [www.kramerleather.com](http://www.kramerleather.com) (P.O. Box 112154, Tacoma, WA 98411).

## COURAGE UNDER FIRE

Courage is often erroneously confused with fearlessness. It is not fearlessness. You can be afraid and still be courageous. Courage means having the nerve, tenacity, and the determination to win the fight "Courage under fire" means keeping your cool in a fight even though you are afraid. This is necessary in order to be able to use your brain to think and act tactically and intelligently and not panic. When you are psychologically prepared for combat survival, you will keep your cool in battle.

To quote master trainer, Louis Awerbuck of Yavapai Firearms Academy (<http://www.yfainc.com>), Senior Instructor at Gunsite Academy (<http://www.gunsite.com>), and author of the book, **Tactical Reality** (<http://www.paladin-press.com>): "Fighting is a mental game, and even though it helps to have a gun when engaged in a gunfight, a firearm is merely a mechanical power-delivery system. Many a big game hunter has left Africa in a shoebox because he thought a large bore rifle plus a small bore IQ equates mathematically to a small bore pussycat with a large bore attitude. Here's a closely guarded secret—it doesn't."

So, train hard and develop confidence in your fighting skills and abilities, but stay tuned to reality. That means don't take things for granted and don't let your guard down (Cooper's color codes), feed your computer brain positive suggestions (self-talk), control your fear, and keep rehearsing and practicing your skills. The "Winning Attitude" is remembering that you can't afford to lose the fight and doing everything within your power to win and survive!

**Bruce N. Eimer Ph.D.**, a licensed clinical psychologist and the co-author of the new book, **Essential Guide to Handguns: Firearm Instruction for Personal Defense and Protection** by Stephen R. Rementer and Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D. ISBN: 1889031658. Looseleaf Law Publications. Sept 1, 2004, [llawpub@erols.com](mailto:llawpub@erols.com), 1-800-647-5547. Bruce can be contacted via email: [dkeimer1@comcast.net](mailto:dkeimer1@comcast.net)

*PHOTOGRAPHY EXPLAINED: "FR&I" stands for "Firearms Research & Instruction" which is a mobile firearms and self defense training school which offers firearms (primarily handgun) training courses throughout the United States, as well as abroad. Pictured is Steve Silverman, FR&I's Director and Master Trainer, working with students. FR&I runs courses for law enforcement officers, security guards, as well as the general public. Legally armed citizens are taught non-lethal and lethal force self defense techniques, how to use a handgun for self defense, how to carry concealed, and how to make concealed carry a part of one's lifestyle. Basic and advanced handgun courses cover: mental conditioning and conflict avoidance, handling the stress of personal defense and combat, legal ramifications of lethal force, home defense, basic marksmanship, combat marksmanship skills, handgun safety, handgun tactics, deploying a handgun from concealment, night shooting and the proper use of flashlights, weapons retention techniques, disarming attackers, hand to hand fighting skills, and force on force training. And you don't need to be a martial artist. Steve Silverman can be reached at: 717-764-1399 or email at [www.f-r-i.com](http://www.f-r-i.com).*

*Steve is carrying his .40 caliber Glock 23 in a black leather belt scabbard from Wells-Made Gunleather. George Wells, owner and operator of Wells-Made Gunleather in Atlanta Georgia, is a custom maker of exceptionally high quality, form fitted, custom concealment holsters. A medical orthotist and prosthetist by trade and training, George has applied his professional skills to custom holster design. So, when George makes a holster for a customer, he not only molds the rig perfectly to the handgun, but also fits the rig specifically to that customer's body type and measurements for a perfect fit. This results in a holster that is exceptionally comfortable, fast, and concealable. "Fast" means allowing a quick draw, and easy one-handed reholstering. "Concealable" means the holsters ride close to the body under appropriate concealment garments. George Wells can be contacted at 404-389-0899. Wells-Made's web site is [www.wellsmade.com](http://www.wellsmade.com).*