

**D**efensive shooting is all about training to fight with a gun, and the key word is fight. This is very different business than competitive target shooting. Recently, I had the opportunity to take John and Vicki Farnam's Defensive Handgun Course. It was reality-based training at its best. John and Vicki are the principals of Defense Training International, Inc., a mobile, tactical, firearms, training school. What follows is an overview of their defensive handgun course, a preparatory course on how to survive in a real fight for your life, and how to avoid one if at all possible.

*Impress your enemies, not your friends.—John S. Farnam*



# JOHN AND VICKI FARNAM'S

John Farnam is an internationally acclaimed firearms instructor, and the author of three books and numerous articles. The course text, which is a "must read" for all defensive handgunners, is John's comprehensive book, *The Farnam Method of Defensive Handgunning*, published by DTIPublications (Tel: 303-443-9817). Vicki Farnam, John's wife and business partner, is also an accomplished firearms instructor and shooter in her own right. She is the co-author of the acclaimed, *Teaching Women to Shoot: A Law Enforcement Instructor's Guide*.

This was John's class. Vicki worked in a supportive and adjunctive role. John and Vicki complement each other magnificently and make an awesome teaching team. The two-day class I attended took place over a weekend. School began with the academic portion of the class, which took up all of Saturday morning.

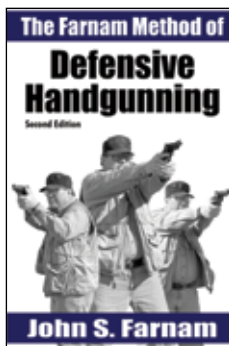
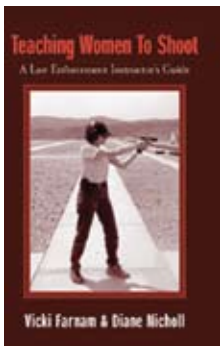
John's lecture style is both academic and poetic. He is eloquent, interesting, witty, comical at times (always to illustrate a point being taught), knowledgeable, thoughtful, friendly, approachable, student-oriented, and dead serious when he has to be. He speaks with clarity, decisiveness and authority. He's attentive, he commands every bit of your attention, and you can be sure that everything he says is based on hard won, real-life experience.

**There are no safe guns.** John made it clear from the outset that lethal weapons training is dangerous, guns are dangerous, there are no "safe guns," life is dangerous, and we all should start thinking of ourselves as dangerous and harmful if we have to be.

With that said, John takes safe gun handling very seriously, and he enforces his rules with no exceptions. He runs a "hot range" and a very "tight ship." Suffice it to say, no safety violations went unnoticed or uncorrected during the two days that we spent on the range.



AFTER THE LAWLESSNESS IN NEW ORLEANS FOLLOWING HURRICANE KATRINA, IT WAS A GOOD IDEA TO ALSO TAKE JOHN'S URBAN RIFLE CLASS.



## LECTURE HIGHLIGHTS

In the classroom, John covered the things you need to know and apply to stay alive and avoid or prevail in a lethal encounter: the “stealth lifestyle,” blending into a crowd, how to avoid being selected as a victim, mindset and mental preparedness, the force continuum, the psychophysiological aspects of lethal encounters, threat evaluation, risk identification and reduction, dealing with aggressors, controlling the focus of one’s attention, the psychology of winning in a fight (and in life), and ways to disengage from a potentially violent encounter.

He also covered basic gun handling safety rules and essential considerations in equipment selection. John explained, “Every technique works to one degree or another. We teach techniques that work in the greatest number of circumstances.” He encouraged us to learn to use a variety of guns the way they come out of the box because, “The one you get to use when you need a gun may be the one that slides across the bar room floor amidst the blood, beer and sweat.”

**Be decisive.** To raise one’s odds of surviving a violent encounter, John emphasized the importance of “thinking and doing” over “feeling and dawdling.” He asserted, “You can feel any way you want; it doesn’t change anything.

Feelers are losers. The body bag will look exactly the same.” John advised that we become “thinkers, not feelers.” He emphasized the importance of clearing one’s mind of clutter, thinking about what you’re doing, having a plan, and making a decision in a critical situation.

John said, “You might be wrong, but never in doubt.” There is no room for doubt because doubt causes hesitation and hesitation leads to dithering. John reminded us of Theodore Roosevelt’s dictum, “The best thing to do is the right thing; the next best thing is the wrong thing; and the worst thing is nothing.” This might as well be a lesson in positive living. John explained, “Learn to get the crap out of your mind and get on to the front sight!”

## SAFE GUN HANDLING

**All guns are loaded.** John pointed out, “We carry serious guns for serious social purposes all the time. Fighting guns are designed to be carried loaded. That’s why we carry loaded guns and we handle all guns the same way all the time.” In that regard, John emphasized, “We train so that we don’t miss and don’t have accidents. There is no right way to do the wrong thing.” Having done the wrong thing 21 thousand times without injury is no excuse to keep doing the wrong thing.

Safety rules were explained and strictly enforced. John instructed that at the end of the day, before we left the range, he would ask us to decide how we wanted our gun—loaded and holstered (the only way to carry), or unloaded and in a case. Unloaded in one’s holster and loaded in one’s hand were not options. He allowed no gun handling off of the line; guns stayed holstered. John, Vicki and their assistant instructors policed the range like hawks and demanded continuous “muzzle consciousness” and attentiveness. That one second when you’re handling a loaded gun and become distracted is when the serpent strikes. Seventy-five percent of gunshot wounds are self-inflicted accidents.

John and Vicki’s loaded gun handling safety mantras are: (1) establish your master grip as soon as you grasp your handgun; (2) keep your trigger finger off of the trigger and high in register (i.e., extended along the frame and in contact with the slide of an autoloader and along the top of the frame of a revolver) except when your sights are on the target and you’ve made the decision to fire; and (3) always be aware of the direction in which your muzzle is pointed.

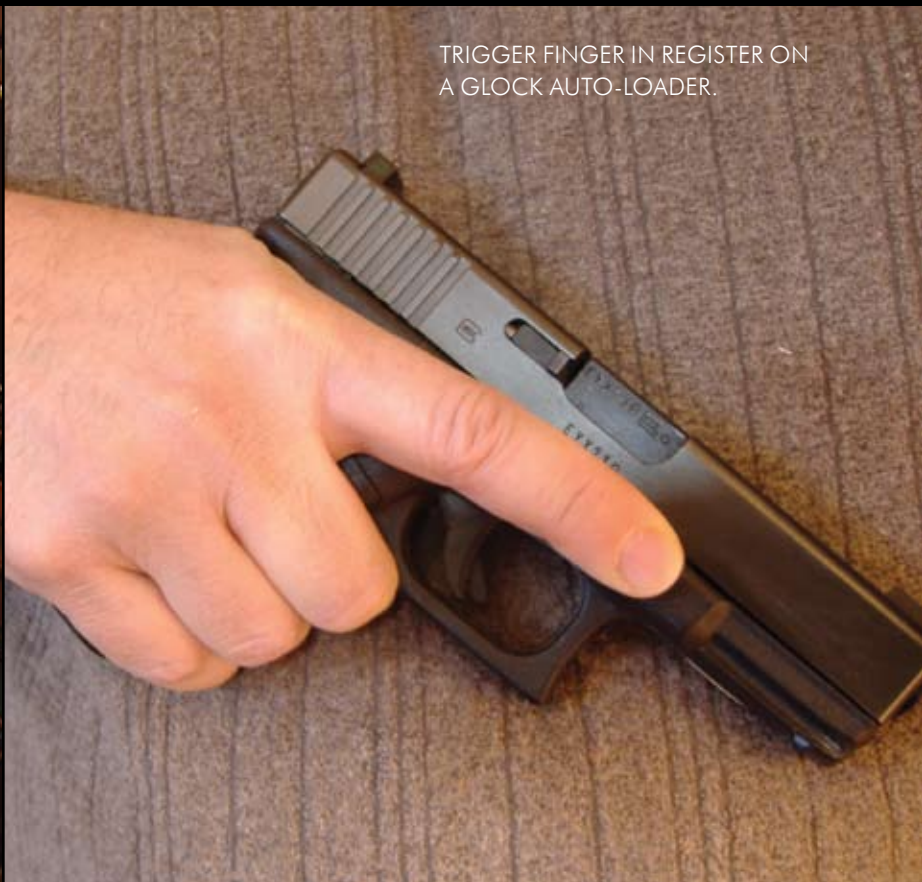
John said, “There is only one ‘go’ button—the trigger. Under five constellations of circumstances, you can pull the trigger without being aware that you are doing it, and you’ll have a unintended

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# DEFENSIVE HANDGUN COURSE



FARNAM SPORTING S&W MODEL 340PD  
SNUBBY REVOLVER IN A RUSTY SHERRICK  
SHOULDER RIG.



TRIGGER FINGER IN REGISTER ON  
A GLOCK AUTO-LOADER.

discharge as a result: (1) when you're tired; (2) when you're distracted; (3) when you're startled; (4) if you lose your balance; and (5) as a result of a sympathetic, inter-limb interaction. That is why the most likely time of an accidental discharge (AD) is within two seconds of the last AD!"

Thus, John pointed out, "When loading, unloading, performing a chamber check, and performing user-level maintenance, we need to have an attention span sufficient to complete the process. Interruptions will provide the deadly catalyst! As with parallel parking a car, handling guns requires that we pay full attention to what we're doing throughout the procedure."

John recommended that when moving or stationary, the manual safety should stay "off" any time both hands are on the pistol. John said, "Taking it 'on' and 'off' continually is a waste of time and adds a plethora of extra steps. The trigger finger should be in register until the sights are on the target and the operator has decided to shoot. Having one's finger on the trigger and the pistol simultaneously pointed at a 'target' about which he has not yet made up his mind, is an invitation to catastrophe. ...However, manually decocking pistols, like the SIG, need to be decocked before moving, so that the trigger is returned to its forward position where the finger expects to find it."

### THE "FOUR D'S OF WINNING A FIGHT"

John teaches that we want to: (1) divide our attacker's focus, (2) disrupt his plan, (3) disable his body, and (4) destroy his will to fight (if it gets that far!). In regard to numbers 1 and 2, he teaches disengagement routines which incorporate rehearsed verbalizations, moving off of the line of attack, and using a less than lethal force option if necessary and possible, such as O.C. pepper spray. Successful disengagement can usually be accomplished via posture and firm verbalizations, but you must be practiced and have your "tape-loops" ready to go!

**Divide his focus.** For example, if you're being approached by a stranger asking for money, your immediate goal is to

verbally and physically divide the intruder's focus and then disengage by verbalizing something like, "Sorry sir, I can't help you," as you keep moving away. If he continues to press the issue, you might yell, "Now back off buddy!" or "Get away from me now!" If someone is closing in on your personal space, you might verbalize (with eye contact and a commanding presence), "Can I help you sir?" No matter what he asks for or says, your answer should always be the same, "Sorry sir, I can't help you." Your verbalizations should be rehearsed to the point where you can run them off like tape loops when they are triggered by danger stimuli.

**Disrupt his plan.** You disrupt the assailant's plan by moving and being unpredictable. Whatever you do, don't freeze! If the stranger attacks you, you believe that your life and limb are in jeopardy, and you have no other options for avoiding imminent death or grave bodily harm, you may have to employ your final option and draw your gun. If being held at gunpoint and given the verbal challenge/command, "Don't move. Drop your weapon!"; does not deter the attacker, you may have to shoot to stop the attack in order to avoid becoming another violent crime statistic. Your goal is to disable the attacker's body and destroy his will to fight.

**Disable his body and destroy his will.** In this regard, John teaches the "zipper" method. The objective is to turn off the attacker and stop the aggression as quickly as possible. This usually means inflicting lethal shots—shooting at the navel and then shooting up the attacker's midline, like a zipper, until the attacker stops coming at you.

### DAY ONE ON THE RANGE

I shot the course with my 9mm Glock 19 and my .45 caliber Glock 30. With my Glock 19, I used a cowhide, IWB holster made by master holster maker and my friend, Matt Del Fatti. With my Glock 30,

I used a horsehide, Greg Kramer IWB #3. To keep it real, I used self-defense, jacketed hollow point (JHP) ammunition in 9mm, Cor-bon's DPX ("Deep Penetrating X Bullet"—highly recommended by John), Black Hills JHPs, and Federal Hydra-Shok JHPs; in .45 ACP, I used Black Hills and Federal Hydra-Shok JHPs. I fired over 1000 rounds, and both of my Glocks and all of the ammo shot accurately and functioned as reliably as a Swiss clock. Glad I have some left for carry!

John was equipped with three concealed handguns: a Glock 38 in .45 GAP, in a low profile, Hoffners Ultimate Shirt Tucker ITP, Inside-the-Pants, Kydex holster; a Smith & Wesson 340PD Airlite revolver in a Rusty Sherrick leather shoulder holster; and a Kel-Tec 3AT in .380 ACP carried in a Comp-tac "Centerline holster" suspended around his neck on an adjustable lanyard. He also carried Fox Labs O.C. pepper spray, and two Cold Steel, combat, folding knives (their Ti-Lite and Vaquero).

**Lethal threat containment and management.** The defensive shooter must practice and become adept at precision and discretionary shooting under stress. Throughout both days on the range, John and Vicki, with the assistance of their helpful adjunct instructors, taught the correct use of movement, verbal challenges, cover, and other tactical skills.

We learned and practiced disengagement from close encounters, weapon control and retention, close range shooting, hostage shots, shooting and moving, and shooting multiple targets under radical time pressure. The Farnams started us on square, paper, humanoid targets and then moved us on to steel, rotator targets, so we could track moving targets with multiple shots.

**Administrative procedures and tactical basics.** The first day we learned the proper way to chamber check and clear a handgun, and other administrative techniques, such as administrative loading, unloading and reloading. We also learned and practiced such "tactical basics" as the "interview stance," the draw from concealment, covering suspects at gunpoint, properly and safely re-holstering,

PHOTOS (LEFT TO RIGHT): MATT DEL FATTI RIG, BLACK HILLS AMMUNITION, COR-BON DPX AMMUNITION.





PHOTOS (TOP TO BOTTOM): SHOOTING STEEL, REDUCING STOPPAGES.

and marksmanship fundamentals (Farnam high thumbs grip, Weaver stance, trigger manipulation, first shot, and multiple shot strings). On Saturday evening, we learned low-light shooting techniques (with and without a flashlight) and practiced in the dark.

**Keep moving!** John and Vicki continually reminded us of the importance of movement and cover. When you are not shooting, you should be moving and seeking cover. We moved as we challenged a threat, we moved as we drew our pistols, we moved before and after we fired, and we moved as we kept our guns running.

### DAY TWO ON THE RANGE

Day two commenced with a warm-up shoot. Then John and Vicki covered speed reloads on the move. Later in the day, they also covered tactical and military reloads (conserving the partially spent magazine). The day was made interesting with man-on-man competitions, and team exercises and drills using the steel, rotator targets, which made us employ the skills that we covered.

On day two, John and Vicki also taught immediate action drills for “non-diagnostic” stoppage reductions. They had each student also shoot every one else’s gun as part of their “running guns drill.”

### QUALIFICATION EXAM

By the end of the second day, most of us were tired and on stress overload. However, to pass the course and earn our DTI pin and certificate, we had to shoot and pass John’s rigorous qualification examination. The bad news is that no one passed on the first round. The good news is that John and Vicki let everyone do it as many times as it takes to pass—criterion-based learning at its best!

Some students cried; some cursed under their breath. John, Vicki and their instructors coached everyone through their “speed bumps,” encouraging each student to stay focused, “stay in the fight,” “fight through it,” and “solve the problem.” By the end of class on Sunday, everyone was exhausted, and everyone felt accomplished. We all eventually passed, although most of us had to fight through our own demons, as we repeated the final drill, until we got it perfect. Our pin and certificate of completion from Defense Training International was truly earned through sweat (no blood), and in some cases, tears.

To pass this rigorous course, we had to apply all of the things that we learned and absorbed throughout the long training weekend. Psychologically, each student had to have a plan; stay focused; act decisively and without delay; jettison the clutter from his mind; let nothing get between him and his front sight; and recover quickly from mistakes, errors, and frustrations. In order to accomplish this, we had to keep our emotions in check—think and not feel—and never dawdle. This is just how it has to be done in real life to survive a lethal force confrontation.

My own personal plan for passing the final qualification course (as I repeated it over and over) was to keep coaching myself with the following self-talk: Keep moving and scanning (for additional threats) ...Try to disengage. For example, “Excuse me sir, can I help you?” “Sorry sir, I can’t help you!”—Note: Use the same answer every time). ...Keep moving and scanning (for additional threats) ...Keep moving and draw (to combat ready) ...Issue a challenge (Warn the identified threat. For example, “Police! Don’t move! Drop your weapon!”) ...Oh shit! Stop, front sight (acquire sight picture and verify sight alignment)... Trigger, press, reset; front sight, press, reset; front sight, press, reset; front sight, press, reset (press off a four-shot string zippering the attacker right up his midline starting at the navel) ...Move, move, move! Look around and scan (my 360 degree world for threats after shooting and while moving) ...Move, move, move! I’m going to win this fight and go home tonight. Fight through it! I can do it! Keep it running!

End Note: The lawlessness that followed Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans should have taught us that self-reliance is the key to survival and ultimately victory over chaos and evil. We can only depend on ourselves. When we’re in deep shit, there’s no one to help us but us. John pointed out, “The harsh lesson of Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath has taught us that we cannot expect anyone to ‘take care’ of us, and only when you take care of yourself, can you be effective in taking care of others.”

If you’re committed to carrying a gun for lawful self-defense, you can begin taking better care of yourself and those who depend on you by taking John and Vicki Farnam’s Defensive Handgun class. After all is said and done, the purpose of training is to prepare ourselves to be victorious in a dangerous world, not just to prepare ourselves to be “safe” on a range. So, in order to stay safe, we must take calculated risks, and expect victory and nothing less.

### Sources:

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www.leather.com
- C. Rusty Sherrick Custom Leather Works. Tel: 717-361-7699 www.c-rusty.com

**Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D. is a board certified, licensed, clinical and forensic psychologist, NRA Certified Firearms Instructor, NRA Life Member, Glock Certified Armorer, a Utah Dept. of Public Safety Concealed Firearms Instructor and an Author in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As the co-owner of Personal Defense Solutions, LLC, Bruce teaches concealed carry classes and NRA Basic Pistol and Personal Protection courses, as well as offering individual shooting instruction. He also teaches CCW classes that prepare people to apply for a Florida Non-Resident Concealed Carry Weapons Permit which is honored by 28 states. For more information, he can be reached by phone at 215-938-7283 (938-SAVE) and by e-mail at Dr.Bruce@PersonalDefenseSolutions.net or CCWInstructor@PersonalDefenseSolutions.net. For a schedule of upcoming classes, you can log on to the PDS website: www.PersonalDefenseSolutions.net. Bruce is also the co-author with Stephen Rementer of the Pennsylvania Lethal Weapons Institute, of the *Essential Guide to Handguns: Firearm Instruction for Personal Defense and Protection*, which is published by: Looseleaf Law Publications www.LooseLeafLaw.com. 800-647-5347**