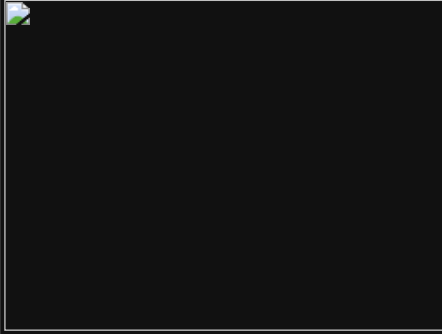


Handgun Combatives

Friday, March 27, 2015

Ready or Prepare? Choose wisely...



Ready: adjective \ˈre-dē\; prepared to do something, properly prepared or finished and available for use, almost about to do something

Prepare: verb/ pre-pare \pri-ˈper\; to make (someone or something) ready for some activity, purpose, use, etc., to make yourself ready for something that you will be doing, something that you expect to happen, etc., to make or create (something) so that it is ready for use.

While ready and prepare appear to be similar, when it comes to the positioning of your combat handgun nothing could be further from the truth. In true ready, the gun is oriented in a position in which it can be fired with **minimal** motion as nothing else will do in the tight time frame and distances of pistol combat. In a preparatory position, the gun is out of the holster but held in a position that keeps persons around the shooter safe in the event of a negligent, involuntary or accidental discharge of a live round. An important point: If the gun is not oriented in a position that would allow the "safe" discharge of a round **then don't use it!** This includes both bystanders **and** the person holding the handgun.

I have had the good fortune to attend courses held at the best shooting facilities and by travelling instructors and all had a signature ready position in which their doctrine is built around. There is nothing wrong with this but it should also be understood that no single ready position will work for all situations! How could it? Conflict is fluid by nature and the threat(s) will move and so should the orientation of the gun. We have known since the days of The Spartans that the person who will win in a fight is not the fastest or most accurate, but the one who can adapt the quickest to the rapidly changing situation and the ready position must be part of this change/adaptation.

In my classes, I teach what I call "The Arc of Ready" which is a battery of three Ready Positions that can be adapted with minimal motion but change the forward orientation of the muzzle dramatically. They can also be used with one or two hands. While few students believe it at first, I make the point that one ready position is NOT faster than the next and then I demonstrate by shooting each position at 20 feet in to a heart sized target using an electronic timer as the start signal. I can usually deliver an accurate hit in the .6 to .7 second region and taking into account it takes between .22 and .27 to hear and react to the beep of the timer, this leaves around .4 second for a response and shot. Considering the blink of an eye is .32 second, this is a minimal response time and I am quite satisfied with it.

It is essential for the reaction/response time from ready be as fast as possible for obvious reasons. Recently the Force Science Institute undertook a study looking at various trigger finger and ready positions to see if one was faster than another. Their results were interesting and reinforced my position on the speed of action for various ready positions. Here is their newsletter entry...

From the **FORCE SCIENCE INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER...**

"1. New study: How much do finger placement & ready position matter?"

In terms of reacting fast to a sudden deadly threat, does it matter how you carry an unholstered or unslung weapon or where you rest your trigger finger before making the decision to shoot? In other words, does any one of the various ready positions commonly taught in police firearms training really give you a significant edge in response time?

Results of a two-part study by the Force Science Institute reported in the current issue of the peer-reviewed journal Law Enforcement Executive Forum provide some answers that may surprise you if you're a strong advocate for particular positioning.

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"The findings have implications for training and can also be of critical use to investigators in certain officer-involved shootings," says Dr. Bill Lewinski, FSI's executive director and lead researcher in the study, believed to be the first of its kind in police circles.

The full study, including photographs of positions analyzed and detailed statistical tables, is scheduled to be published soon in the Law Enforcement Executive Forum. Their Web address is: <http://letsbeforumjournal.com/>
Here are the highlights:

PART 1: HANDGUN FINGER PLACEMENT. "The first, and seemingly most basic, position officers learn during their firearms training," the researchers write, "is where to index, or place, their finger outside of the trigger well when handling their gun to minimize the risk" of accidental or premature discharge while still allowing the fastest possible response to a deadly threat. With 52 federal officer volunteers from the Dept. of Homeland Security, Lewinski's team tested four handgun finger-indexing positions "predominately taught and practiced" by LEOs and military personnel:

- The index finger points straight ahead, resting across the trigger guard
- Essentially the same position, but with the finger bent slightly so the tip rests against the vertical side of the trigger guard
- The pad of the straight index finger rests slightly above the trigger guard, on the pistol's frame
- The straight finger is angled more sharply upward, with the pad resting on the gun's slide.

On a hot range, each participant fired from each finger position three times with his or her duty handgun. Once a member of the research team gave a signal, the officers could shoot whenever they wanted. They were instructed to move their finger to the trigger as fast as they could and, after firing, to wait for at least five seconds between rounds to assure that the finger was repositioned properly before the next shot. The shooting was captured by high-speed digital cameras that allowed for precise, frame-by-frame computer analysis later to measure the time in hundredths of a second from the initial movement of the finger to its contact with the trigger.

RESULTS. "Until this analysis was completed, it was unknown what time differences might exist between these various positions and whether any position had a significant benefit of speed," Lewinski told Force Science News. What is now known?

"Contrary to what many officers are commonly taught," the researchers report, "there is no significant difference in contact time" between the various finger-indexing positions—with one exception: **Positioning the finger to rest on the pistol slide is statistically significantly slower than the other options.**

Starting from that position, the officers on average "were roughly 0.08 second slower in making contact with the trigger and over 0.10 second [slower] to fire than all other positions.... While many law enforcement officers argue that indexing the finger on the trigger guard, curved or straight, is faster than on the frame, the difference in mean time to trigger contact [among positions other than the slide position] is less than 0.04 second."

That difference, Lewinski says, "would likely be inconsequential in a gunfight."

PART 2: TACTICAL READY POSITIONS. Another area that "little to no research has examined" prior to the new study is the amount of time it takes officers to react to a threat and move their weapon from an unholstered ready position to a firing position. "Therefore," the researchers' state, "it is unknown what positions may most benefit officers with the quickest responses during deadly use-of-force situations."

To fill that informational void, Lewinski's team tested 68 volunteers from the Los Angeles PD at the department's training facility. All were measured for how fast they could fire their duty handgun from various starting positions; nine were also checked for speed with a Remington 870 shotgun.

The drawn-handgun ready positions, commonly trained for use "when entering a threatening situation," included:

- The Bootleg, where the pistol is held one-handed, pointing down and slightly concealed behind the officer's leg
- The Belt Tuck, where the gun is held with two hands, pulled in close to the body at navel level
- The Close-Ready, with the gun pulled in somewhat higher than the beltline with the muzzle pointed slightly down
- The High-Ready, with the gun thrust forward in an isosceles grip at shoulder height, muzzle slightly depressed
- The Low-Ready, same grip but with the arms and gun pointing down at about a 45-degree angle
- The High-Guard, gun pointing up and held single-handed beside an officer's head, a position widely trained in England but not generally favored in the US (except in Hollywood entertainment productions!).

RESULTS: When officers took time to aim, they were fastest in firing a handgun when starting their movement from the High-Ready position, at an average of 0.83 second. This contrasted sharply, for example, with the Bootleg and High-Guard positions, where the respective averages were 1.32 and 1.13 seconds. "A suspect can fire several rounds into you in that amount of time, while you're just getting into position to defend yourself," Lewinski says.

"Without aiming," the researchers report, "officers moving from the Low-Ready position were fastest overall, firing in an average time of 0.64 second."

"

Overall," Lewinski says, **"the handgun timings indicate that the closer the ready position is to a final firing position, the faster the officer is likely to be in getting off his first round."**

IMPLICATIONS: "As with any skill, regular, high amounts of repetition in practice at high speeds will greatly benefit officers in reacting and moving as quickly as possible," the researchers write. Indeed, Lewinski estimates that with diligent practice, you can cut your times for getting your finger on the trigger and your weapon on target by at least 50%.

So far as finger placement is concerned, given the study finding of negligible differences, **he suggests that you pick whatever indexing position is most comfortable for you and practice improving your movement speed from there.** Lewinski believes, however, that more important than improving the mechanics of weaponcraft is teaching officers to read potentially hazard scenarios early on, so they can detect threat cues quicker and better anticipate an adversary's actions, thereby getting ahead of the reactionary curve before the crisis point. "Without that skill," he says, **"they're likely to end up so far behind the action that things like the most desirable finger indexing and ready positioning won't really matter."** (Spaulding Comment: AWARENESS IS THE KEY TO YOUR PERSONAL SECURITY!!!)

For investigators, he says that consulting some of the time measurements revealed in this study can help determine the dynamics of certain officer-involved shootings.

For example, "we now know the average times it takes for an officer to move from a finger position or from a ready posture once he or she has made a decision to shoot. In that time before the officer can actually fire, a suspect's position can change substantially, causing the officer's rounds to impact in unanticipated places, like the suspect's back, for instance." **END NEWSLETTER**

As always, Force Science has done a thorough job but some of their Ready Positions are a bit befuddling and do not differentiate between a Ready and Preparatory position which is of critical importance. What they call The Boot Leg (something I have never taught but seems to occur with many officers) is certainly a preparatory position and if I am reading it correctly so is The Belt Tuck which is better known as SUL. Their Close Ready I call a Compressed Low Ready while The High Ready is better known as The Guard Position as made popular by Col. Jeff Cooper. Their Low Ready is aptly named and understood while The High Guard I have always known as The Temple Index and is also considered a preparatory position. The reason The Boot Leg, SUL and the Temple Index are considered Preparatory Positions is due to the orientation of the muzzle off the threat zone/battle space for safety purposes while the various Ready Positions orient the gun in a fast fighting posture. As Dr. Lewinsky stated, the further away from a fighting posture the gun is, the slower it will be into action which is certainly a matter of common sense, though common sense isn't always "common"...

I do not teach any of the Preparatory Positions listed in this study, though I have seen them used in my programs, as I feel they are not as efficient as what I do teach. I teach what I call A Ribcage Index in which the gun is held in the shooting hand only with the thumb flagged and the wrist locked (see photo) orienting the muzzle down. In this position, the gun can easily be defended and is oriented in a position in which I would be willing to discharge a round into the ground. As a matter of fact, I have done this on multiple occasions demonstrating where the round will strike which is in a two to three foot circle around my feet. Are you willing to do this with the gun held in SUL, Boot Leg or Temple Index? If not, **don't use it!** Another thing I like about the Ribcage Index is it is consistent with other movements I make. The position is nothing more than stopping along the arc of the draw stroke, meaning I can easily re-holster, go into a weapon retention firing position or a full extension of the arms in the same practiced manner as if I hadn't paused at the rib cage. It also keeps my support hand free to fend, fight or just push someone out of the way...something that cannot be done when the hand is buried under the gun.

Continuity of action/motion is important when building skills!

It is also from this position that I teach my students to "Check 360" instead of just turning their heads and seeing nothing...

As far as trigger finger placement goes, I have known for a LONG TIME that none of the commonly used positions will resist a true hard, convulsive grip of the whole hand. When the hand clenches, the fingers will fall into alignment and curl up, meaning the trigger finger will land on the trigger. I have found bending the trigger finger and applying inward pressure with the pad to be the best with a straight finger the worst. Bending the finger and making contact with the take down lever or slide stop button seems to offer no advantage over merely bending the finger and pushing inward. What about placing the finger up on the slide or in the ejection port? Well, besides being quite slow (as FSI revealed) it is also clumsy and uncomfortable when held for a time or the gun starts to get hot.

Understand the difference between a Ready and Preparatory Position and use them wisely. Make the motions when moving from one to another smooth, minimal and efficient and you will find you place yourself at a minimal disadvantage in a high threat zone. Adaptation is the key and the proper use of Ready and Preparatory Positions will help you PREVAIL!!

Posted by [Dave Spaulding](#) at [11:02 AM](#)



1 comment:



Tactical Tshirts April 1, 2015 at 9:58 PM

Very nice article, Dave. We really enjoyed the timer data relative to various techniques. Provokes a lot of thought.

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