



## THE QUESTION OF KILLING

*"...You don't have to like it...  
... You just have to acknowledge it. ...."*

BY CR WILLIAMS

Call it Reality and define it this way: If you are forced to shoot someone, they will probably die.

And while I for one hope that shooting someone just makes them stop attacking me or someone else, The Reality is that--especially if I shoot them where everyone else says I should--if I do have to shoot them, then they will most likely stop their attack because they die as a result of the gunshot(s).

Therefore, if you, I, or anyone else wants to have a better chance of surviving not just the fight, but what will happen after the fight is over, we need to reach some sort of accommodation with this ahead of time. Because according to the last set of statistics I've seen, we'll need to deal with Reality between 60 and 70 percent of the time, and no less than half the time, that we have to shoot someone in self-defense.

Understand this: In the eyes of the Law, the gun is Lethal Force. Not 'Stopping Force'--Lethal Force. Shoot someone, and it doesn't matter to the Law that you just wanted to stop them; you have still employed Lethal Force. Deliberately shoot to wound, it won't matter; you have still employed Lethal Force. (Shooting to wound isn't guaranteed to just wound, either; people regularly die after being wounded in the arms or legs.)

You don't have to like it. You just have to acknowledge it.

Reality appears in its purest form when we contemplate the defense of someone else, particularly someone we don't know, who is under threat of death. I'm betting it will be easier, in the heat of the moment, to kill in our own defense, or the defense of family and friends, than in the defense of a stranger, especially an adult stranger.

Consider this situation, which was raised by another member of the USCCA forum a few months ago:

You are shopping inside a store, out of sight of the front counter/register, when a robbery starts. You move cautiously until you can see the robber, standing with a gun pointed directly at the head of the cashier. He is completely unaware of you behind him. You are armed, and you have an ideal position and time for a precisely aimed shot into the back of the robber's head. In most states, the conditions for lethal-force employment are satisfied. The question was not could you, legally, take the shot without warning the robber (though in some areas it is not legal to do so; you must check laws in your area to be sure); it was, would you take the shot without warning?

The issues involved here (once legal questions are set aside) are mental, emotional, philosophical, and even cultural. They are wrapped up in this question: To save someone you do not know, can you see yourself shooting someone in the back of the head without warning?

Don't toss it off as something that is unlikely to be required of you. There was a recent incident, a daylight robbery at a crowded Burger King, where a CCW holder had close to that choice. And consider: If you can't work out your answer to this, a worst-case kind of decision, are you going to be sure you can pull the trigger in lesser cases when things are more clear and immediate?

Some who read this have already done this, or something similar, or have been about to do so in the past. They can answer in the affirmative quickly. Before any of the rest of you snap off a 'Hell, yes! I could do that!' response, I need you to do a visualization--a formal, studied, hard-core visualization:

Isolate everything except the Guy With Gun (hereafter referred to as GWG), the person he is pointing his gun at, and you. Assume everything is legally in place for purposes of the visualization. If you chose to pull the trigger, you have the law behind you in this specific case. So:

The base of GWG's skull, say ten feet in front of you, sights of your weapon right on the 'spot'. Trigger pressure, sound of shot breaking, recoil, recovery, back on. Shot is on--you may see a hole where it hit. Likely GWG falls pretty much straight down, just collapses in a heap. You'll follow him down with your weapon just in case a follow-up is needed.

You will begin to notice other things: The spray of bones, blood, and brain matter from where the round exited, maybe spattering the original target, who is looking very dazed and maybe beginning to moan or groan or scream. Checking GWG, you'll notice the larger, ragged hole approximately where the nose used to be. Blood will be running, maybe spraying, out, and beginning to pool on the floor under his head. His eyes, if they haven't been ruptured or even blown out by the shot, will be open and empty.

He will be dead, and you will have killed him.

You will have been in the right to do so, given the situation as described and as I have isolated it, within the visualization.

Can you do this without warning?

Can you?

Some of us, despite everything that is on our side in this, will want and need to issue a warning before they fire. Part of the urge to warn is based on the hours and hours of stories, of movies, of TV, where good guys face their battles directly. Want to or not, we absorb this a bit as we go along. Part of the urge to warn is based on parents and teachers and guidance/authority figures teaching us how to get along with others and 'play fair' and be polite and to give others a chance. (Not a bad thing in general, you know--I like getting along with people, myself. It does get in the way sometimes, though.) Part of it is a lot of people we encounter as we grow up who don't have the correct idea of when and how to do violence--the, "violence never solved anything" group.

There's probably some other influences involved too. My point is, they all come together so that a lot of us, like it or not, admit it to ourselves or others or not, want to or not, aren't comfortable with the idea of killing someone in a calculated manner like this.

This discomfort may not be such a bad thing, I think. Millions of people who were not at all uncomfortable with this could make for a pretty hairy societal environment, don't you think? I for one do not want a lot of people running around who get happy about the thought of killing someone, whether necessary or (especially) not. I prefer that the vast majority of us have some compunctions where this idea is concerned. I think it's better that way for everybody.

Nonetheless, sometimes it's not good for us to hesitate. This may be one of those situations.

So, first, before you consider specific actions and tactics, make sure you can pull that trigger if you decide at that moment that it is necessary and best to do so. Then, you can go over what and when.

But first, determine and decide that YOU WILL.

Otherwise, the rest will not matter.

And let some of us be honest: There are those who simply cannot contemplate such a no-warning shot. Understand this: You are not cowards; you are not stupid, you are not wrong for being like this. You are, rather, who you are, and only and completely that.

As long as you are honest about this, I will support and defend you and your right and honesty in making that decision, whether I agree with it or not.

If you are one who must make the warning, though, then make sure you a) understand that fully and b) get your tactical and technique ducks in a row right now. It's important that you do so ahead of time.

Good luck to you all in this. Conditioning yourself to such a calculated shot is not as easy as some, maybe most, of us think it is.

But if I'm the one at the wrong end of GWG's gun, I'm going to be praying hard that you've done it.

Besides the general need to avoid hesitation about pulling the trigger when the need is upon you, there is another reason to acknowledge Reality and come to whatever terms you can with it. In the aftermath of a shooting incident, especially one in which one or more of the attackers are killed, you will need as much of an internal 'edge' as you can get to avoid saying the wrong things at the wrong time to the wrong people. You will be confused enough, stressed enough, trying hard enough to limit your responses to what is needed to keep you from being judged the wrong way, without the added strain that would come from having given no thought and made no preparation to meet the idea that you have, unwillingly as it was, killed another person. Others who have not thought this through (as much as it could be) ahead of time have said things they didn't mean to say, letting the strain of death at their hands overtake them, and those words have been very hard in most cases to take back. In some cases, those un-thought, un-considered words have not been retrieved and have put otherwise good people who did the right thing into prison.

Think about it now. Do what you can to avoid the peril of not thinking about it later.

Now there is the question of how: How do you prepare to face Reality? Is there anything, technique or mechanism, short of joining the military and taking their training, that might help us avoid fatal hesitation and confusion in the time that may come?

There may be other mechanisms that will work; I can suggest two that might help you, but can't guarantee that they will. (Not sure that anybody can, actually.)

As a foundation to any other techniques you might try, get very familiar with the laws in your state and area that govern the introduction and employment of lethal force. This is one of the things--personal beliefs and personal morals will be others--that will help you make the decision to produce the weapon and then to fire. It may not help you much to know that the law is on your side, but it should help some. And some help is better than no help at all.

That done, I believe one thing you should do is to put yourself on automatic pilot as much as possible. The decision to produce the weapon and then to open fire must be conscious (as much as possible within the constraints of the situation you find yourself in), but after that the fight and how you conduct it should be as automatic as possible until it is over. You make things automatic through continued training, practice, and education, through the answer of 'what-if' questions that you ask yourself in spare moments and through the second method of conditioning that I will suggest helping you handle Reality--focused visualization.

Focused visualization is not another what-if, neither is it a casually-attended-to daydream. It is more than a mind's-eye picture; done well it is a mind's vision, hearing, touch, smell, and maybe taste event. It is possible with a little effort to generate a detailed-enough image within your mind that your emotions are affected. That is the goal. You want to produce a complete picture of the fight from start to finish and some into the aftermath of it, and you want to guide yourself through the reactions you have and the actions you take following the fight in your mind so that, if ever it comes for real, something in your mind will say to itself 'I have been near to this', and so will not panic and drive you the wrong way. Focused, self-guided visualization of this nature is an accepted tool with a long history of helping people at all levels of many kinds of activity develop their skills and temper their responses to stress, and I believe that it can be used to help us deal with Reality as well.

So there it is. The Reality as I see it, and some ideas to help you deal with the Reality if it ever comes to you.

I hope it never comes to you.

But if it does, I hope you've given it some thought ahead of time. I believe it will be at least a little easier for you if you have.

Good luck.