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# To Look or Not to Look?



By Duane Thomas

Many firearms instructors absolutely insist that during a speed reload the student not look at the gun, but rather keep his eyes on the target area. The idea is that if you look at the gun instead of the bad guy while reloading, an aggressive opponent could make a move on your cover position while your visual focus is elsewhere. This theory comes from several real-life incidents where cop-killers have strolled up to police officers fumbling over reloading their guns, and killed them.

However, when we examine the events in question, we find the officers involved were invariably (a) armed with revolvers, (b) poorly trained and practiced, and (c) attempting to reload with loose rounds, one cartridge at a time. I'm not saying you might not get charged during the reloading process, however if you have an empty gun and Mr. Bad Guy is coming at you, you want that puppy reloaded NOW! Experience tells me the whole process goes much more swiftly and smoothly when I use my eyesight to visually verify magazine/mag well alignment just before I slap the mag into place. Still, I've been at classes where the instructors react like overbearing mothers who've just caught a kid's hand in the cookie jar if you even glance at the gun during a reload. "Ahh! You took your eyes off the target!" they screech, horror dripping from every syllable.

Frankly, I just don't buy it. Reloading the gun already requires a dexterity-dependent series of movements that's going to be hard enough to execute under stress, anyway. To knowingly make it HARDER by robbing yourself of your eyes strikes me as more than a little stupid, especially during combat. Under stress, perhaps contorted into an unusual position to take advantage of available

cover, I can pretty much guarantee you're going to screw up the reload unless you take a split second to visually index the magazine relative to the gun just before it enters the mag well.

I've heard those same instructors sniff disdainfully, and say, "Well, our reloads will always be perfect, and with a perfect reload you don't need to look at the gun." Great. In my opinion, any plan or system that only works if you do everything perfectly sets itself up to fail when real human beings have to execute it under stress.

Besides, if you leave the gun up in front of your eyes instead of dropping it down around belt level as so many people do, you never lose peripheral awareness of anything to your front, anyway.

In a real-world scenario, when you run out of ammo Priority Number One is to get the gun reloaded and back up and running again as fast as possible. So you have two choices: (1) try to execute the reload without looking at the gun, probably fumble, lose precious seconds, and finally have to look at it anyway to finish up, or (2) as the hand holding the fresh magazine nears the mag well, take that fraction of a second to glance at the gun, get the whole process over with smoothly and swiftly, then instantly direct your visual focus back to the target area. The choice – I hope – is clear.

Another argument the "don't look" people make is, "Well, let's say your shooting takes place at night, and you don't have enough light to see the gun. Things just got a whole lot harder, didn't they?" Thank you for making my point. Things do indeed get a whole lot harder when you can't look at the gun during the reload. So you take the visual advantage when you can, and rely on muscle memory when you can't. Make sense?