



Force-on-Force Training with Strategos International

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November 2004



I recently read the book written and given to me by Kenneth R. Murray, **“Training at the Speed of Life”** *Volume One – The definitive Textbook for Military and Law Enforcement Reality Based Training*. Available at: <http://www.armiger.net>

Let me first of all state that I genuinely appreciated Ken giving me the book at the 2004 International Association of Chiefs of Police conference in Los Angeles and I appreciate even more the time, effort and labor of love it took to compile and organize the information that represents his 2-decade journey of “Reality-based-Training” (RBT).

The book is an EXCELLENT resource for anybody conducting this type of training as it is filled with thought provoking quotes, experiences, recommendations, and lessons learned, along with solid resource material.

That being said, anybody who knows me will immediately agree that I am not much for the status quo or living within the normal constraints of any given mental construct. Like many of you, I must thoroughly understand the whys and wherefores of any given process before adopting and propagating it. Even after adoption, one should constantly challenge the premises that may have originally been used to embrace and implement the doctrine.

I think an unceasingly attempt to build a better mousetrap is a healthy process and promotes the never-ending process of improvement.

This brings me to what I consider a critical point brought out by Ken in the book, starting on page 230, where he states “Stopping Killing your Students in Training”. The premise is if you communicate to them that they are “dead”, or they capitulate as if they are dead during a RBT scenario, you are creating significant problems downstream. Ken articulates a powerful and well-documented



argument not to engage in this practice. I think his general point is well taken and I agree.....sort of. “Killing” them and asking them to acknowledge their hits are two different things in my mind. So on that basis, I am writing. I am also going to address some style differences I perceive.

When Ken first met me, he was none too happy with me, as he had “heard about what Combative Concepts was doing”. Combative Concepts Inc. was a small tactical training company I started with another SEAL, Dave Maynard. I still remember the first meeting with Ken Murray quite vividly! Ken no doubt believed that we were out of control RBT renegades running amok.

Over the years, at a variety of venues, Ken and I have “interacted”, but more recently we have had some really great, productive conversations about the defining philosophies with regards to this type of training. We no longer collide (so hard), but rather have a couple of drinks and talk about a wide range of issues.

Outside of Ken, I am often asked something to this effect: "Why do you have participants in your force-on-force training take a knee and evaluate what just happened, if they are struck by a projectile during your training?" With a bit of inquiry, I find much of it stems from a conversation they had with somebody else specifically identifying Strategos International or myself as the delivering training that is not inline with their vantage point on how things should be in the world of RBT.

Before I address this question I would like to take a quick journey back in time. Please bear with me, there is a method to my madness.

I have been fortunate enough throughout most of my life to be exposed to highly skilled, athletes and coaches. I have also had the good fortune to walk in part of the shadow of some amazing battlefield proven warriors during my time spent with Naval Special Warfare. In some endeavors I have reached reasonable heights underneath their tutelage. This process has given me an "intuitive" feel for what is "right" in terms of human performance issues while under duress.

Unfortunately for those around me during my formative years had to endure the unbending layers of pride, ego, and obstinacy that generally fueled my never-ending quest for maximum performance. Hopefully to some degree I have broken down some of those barriers in an effort to refocus this drive for the benefit of those that truly do go in harms way.

I started competitively swimming at an early age. I never really enjoyed swimming per se (although I was competitive enough to be offered 4-year scholarships at a few major universities), but it was the game of Water Polo that really caught my interest. The inner dynamics of the game, the "combat" in the water was a constant draw and helped me learn to "get inside" the opponents head. The strategies of the conflict were far more attractive to me than the mundane discipline of piling lap upon lap in order to achieve efficiency and ultimately speed in the water.

I found that although speed, strength, and endurance were essential elements of the game; timing, position, communication, and accurate prediction of probable future events were something I had a strong affinity and aptitude for. My coach understood the "hidden" dimensions of the game and often discussed them with me during my rides with him to school, after practice or at the various tournaments.

I found out that a 145 lb guy (me) could outscore, out defend, and outplay a much larger opponent who was thinking within a relatively simplistic, technical/brute force framework.

At 16 years old, my coach allowed me to scrimmage with members of the U.S. national team (his colleagues) when they were hosting other countries. To say that I got my assed kicked up and down the pool was an understatement. As a Sophomore in high school, playing with men of this caliber was an intimidating and often painful experience.

But it taught me many lessons not learned with lofty words. The practical experience forged a strong mental confidence in me that could not be easily shattered by fellow high school level players.

During this same time frame, my father who was an extremely unhappy, frustrated and often-violent man was increasing the level of his physical abuse on my older brother and myself. I remember running, hopping fences, climbing trees to avoid chains, hammers, screwdrivers and pruning saws. In fact my father tried to break my arm over a chair in front of the entire family over their tearful, screaming objections. My father was particularly cruel to my older brother and this forced me to face an important crossroad in my teenage life. Give in and let him continually dominate ultimately to be broken or learn to conquer the enemy that dwelled in the very place I was supposed to feel secure.

I asked my mother if I could train in some type of martial art. She said yes, but told me to do it secretly, because she did not know how my father would react to it.

My brother and I enrolled in a Kenpo Karate school that was quite a few miles away. We either took the bus or rode our bikes (you know the story...school was uphill both ways). For me, it was not about the belts, the physical fitness, or the points won in a tournament. It was about dealing with my deepest fear of confronting my own father who was a collegiate boxer, football player, and former military man and dealing with it head on.

To make a long story short, one afternoon my father returned home from an apparently distressful day at work. My older brother was cooking dinner for the entire family in the kitchen (we rotated this chore among six kids). My father started in and we all could feel it coming.

Increasing verbal abuse was going to lead to an explosion. I was doing my homework (if you can believe that) and my father proceeded to start attempting to pour several quarts of boiling hot liquid on my brother. I told my father not to do that.

He slammed down the pot and promptly started to punch me in the back of the head as I was seated at the table a few feet away.

During the fist bashing, something snapped inside me and I was free of any fear. I saw red, literally. I ejected myself out of the chair, rotated violently with a left hand back fist to my father's face, which opened the entire side of his face up (30+ stitches). The momentum carried me around where I dropped my other hand below my knees and reversed the rotation to impact the other side of his head. Same result on that side, face split wide open.

I hit him so hard that he buckled at the knees but before he could go down, I launched a kick to his lead leg coming from my now rearward right leg. It cracked his femur, and he went down.

I then thought about side kicking him as he was on his knees through a 10-foot high window, directly behind him. I then noticed I had an oak arm rest in my right hand and my dad was telling me to finish it or he would next time. I do not recall picking it up. I could barely recognize my father, as there was so much immediate swelling in face which was covered with blood. I remember time slowing down and me visualizing crushing his head like a soft pumpkin with the weapon now in my hand. It seemed like I contemplated doing it for a couple of minutes. It would have been an effortless stroke. I "woke-up", dropped the oak piece, and ran outside the door with tears streaming out my eyes.

My brother had called the police and they arrived in a couple of minutes. I remember an officer asking me what was going on. I told him I had to defend myself against my Dad and that no son should have to do what I just had to do.

They went in with me in tow to my father laying on the ground in a dazed state of mind with a large pool of blood on the linoleum floor, his clothes a deep crimson red.

My father immediately contradicted the now assembled family and the police officer told him to stop talking before he arrested him for child abuse. They brought him to the hospital where he spent several days in intensive care to deal with the head trauma. I was 17 years old and had established a new pecking order in the house.

I share this dark time in my life to let you know that I have always approached the study of combatives for one single-minded focus; that is Combat Efficacy. I am not interested in titles, accolades, associations, or credentials per se.

I later joined the U.S. Navy to become a SEAL and was the honor graduate or met the highest standard of every single school I ever attended while in the military. I was performance driven to say the least.

I got out the Navy (as we were not fighting anybody – very frustrating) and really thought I would never deal with the combative environment again. Although I had dabbled in other martial arts (and had a few other fights), I really did not see the value of spending my time as a practitioner because I generally carried a belt-fed machine gun around to deal with threats while in the military environment.

I enrolled in college to study computer science and music as a minor (my mother has her Master's degree in music). My older brother got all the music genes; I was left with the desire, but no real natural talent for it!

I stayed in the Naval Reserve and during that time, as I quite simply needed money to keep the lights on. My reserve Commanding Officer told me about a temporary active-duty over at a Fleet Training Command where the Navy was attempting to teach shipboard security forces to become more proficient at defending their own ships while in port against potential terrorist threats.

The lead instructors were both former SEAL's teaching there on a contract basis, one of them being Harry Constance, a highly decorated, energetic and really, really funny Viet Nam veteran. He later wrote a book called "Good to Go". I thought this whole thing was going to be a cake walk that would have little or no impact on my "vast knowledge" of warfare.....There goes that pride thing again.

One of the programs included something I had never done before....Force-on-Force training utilizing Sheridan pump, paint-projectile pistols. They were using red pellets, wool caps, and eye protection with no other face protection.



We later chronographed the guns at speeds in excess of 350-375 FPS....That would account for lots folks immediately dropping to the ground when struck in the cheeks, lips and throat.



This was at a time when Simunition® F/X rounds were a distant rumor. We initially saw some .38 rounds and were intrigued by them. Availability was non-existent. During reserve exercises we were using wax bullets launched from S&W .357 magnums.

What we quickly noticed that "best practices" for entry work and team tactics were not so good. I was instantaneously hooked on this way of training. I can still remember the first scenario that I was involved in. It has a hostage situation on the bridge of the decommissioned ship the training center had custody of. I remember seeing the "hostage taker" holding a gun to the head of "hostage". I remember immediately closing down to point blank range and blasting the instructor in the side of the temple and watching him slam to the ground wincing in pain. It was SO REAL to me. Up to that point they apparently have been successfully getting folks to be indecisive and subsequently chewing them up.

At the time we were using about 200 rounds a week for the 36 student classes.

Several years later fate would put me together with another SEAL, David Maynard who had already spent countless hours using paintguns with an organized team he personally cultivated. They were a very good 10-man team in the competitive circles of organized paintball tournaments.

Dave and I hit it off. Dave started “secretly” adding more rounds to the week’s allotment of the 200 “authorized” rounds for scenarios.

Over the course of a 2-year period, Dave and I essentially rewrote the entire scope of the course and the program evolved into a 5-day course that encompassed three, 10-hour days of rigorous, and I do mean rigorous force-on-force encounters. Round count was in the 5,000-7500 range per week of training. This training was prefaced with another very demanding practical shooting course. Annually the school put through 1,800 students, counting both related courses. I still get emails from students that attended those course years ago detailing the level of realism experienced. There were thousands and thousands of opportunities to serve as an active role player with Opposition Force. We literally covered that training platform in paint from stem to stern, top to bottom. After the festivities we brought in 3 fire hoses to clean the ship up!

By sheer repetition, patterns and practices emerged that slowly took shape in terms of quantifiable behaviors. The next question was to ask was what were the desirable behaviors in this environment and how does one shorten the learning curve in term of training efficiency for the next generation.

It is also interesting to note that our courses were subject to a laborious process of evaluation in order to ensure conformity to establish educational standards. As the course curriculum model manager for off-site schools we had additional responsibilities. On top of that, the Navy considered our courses “High Risk” so there was an additional layer of administrative responsibility that was subject to regular scrutiny.

Education specialists would pour over the curriculums point-by-point, objective-by-objective and test-by-test. They wanted and simply required an absolutely objective standard. Think about developing a curriculum and standard for maintaining a high-tech missile launcher for all Fleet commands and you will get the idea.

As the director of security forces training on the Pacific Coast, I had extensive conversations with these members of the higher evolved strata of society. I told them over and over again that the approach they were advocating was untenable for the actual objectives we wanted to achieve.

Finally a bevy of them descended upon our division to show us exactly how to accomplish it. With clipboards in hand to scientifically evaluate each and every action, objective (terminal and enabling) during the defense of a ship under attack by a mock terrorist force they quickly ran into a hurricane of previous unseen “issues”. Welcome to reality!

To quote Will Smith in I- Robot “Somehow I told you so just doesn’t quite get it”.

They left the platform with the following recommendations. Continue to provide written testing platforms to meet training and educational requirements. Continue to provide practical exercises; participation in X number of them implies successful completion of the course.

In addition to this constant repetition over a 10-year period, Dave and I decided to strike out on our own and create a company called Combative Concepts Inc.



We approached local SWAT teams and simply stated that if they would pay for the consumables and provide criticism we would like the opportunity to test our training concepts out on them. This endeavor started gaining momentum and before we knew it, we were training in all different locations with a wide variety of folks. Direct feedback from these teams taught us many, many things including how poor we were at communicating what we were now getting a hold of in terms of practical application.

We also regularly ran a drilling clinic on Thursday nights at a large warehouse facility, where for a minimum fee you could participate in the pre-designed drills or scenarios being offered that evening. Police and military members came from all over the area to test and hone their skills. It was a “fightclub” of force-on-force so to speak.

I later sold my interest in Combative Concepts to start the SureFire Institute as its founding director. Through this institution we further refined our practical skills, teaching methodologies/presentations and made countless critical observations and refinements.

From there, Strategos International was formed and we are still climbing the ever-growing mountain.

I say all this to let you know that my perspective does not come from a causal viewpoint. It comes from over 20 years of persistent, passionate and hands on involvement in this type of approach.

Now let's Review the other Side of the Coin



Our over-arching goal is to create thinkers, not technicians that can recite chapter and verse using the vernacular of the tactical arena. I know countless operators that stand on somebody else's name for the defense of their positions yet has never really introspectively looked hard and deep at what they were actually saying and doing.

Simply stated, we do not let people run through a hail of training projectiles and allow them to fool themselves into believing they are successfully improving their individual skill level.

We focus heavily on principles as opposed to technical minutia.

We also steer and mold our training to create an individual or team that can flow and adapt when presented with new variables.

Almost any good practitioner of any high performance human activity will address and understand the concept of flow. Flow is that ethereal or difficult to define state of being that those who really embrace an activity learn to work within and appreciate.

Too much structure as the defining approach in any given study of human activity can inhibit this sought after state. On the other hand, too much freedom without thoroughly understanding the technical underpinnings can and often does lead to sloppiness and unintended consequences. I believe there is a balance here. I also believe there is a fairly large left and right lateral limit for latitude in style approach.

To categorically state that all highly structured events in training are “wrong” is wrong.

To hold the view that the introduction of highly unstructured events in training is “wrong” is also equally askew.

What we found out through enormous number of force-on-force encounters, you can create teams that could be incredibly adaptive, innovative, powerful, and decisive, using particular **drilling** practices quicker than one might believe. Training must be specifically constructed to bring these desirable traits out. It can only become manifest if and only if that team has the core ethos to embrace sound doctrine that may be found outside their own mental box. If they are rigid in mind, chances are they are rigid in movement.

Note, I did not say excellent scenario construction to create these teams/individuals, I said drilling practices.

Drills are the key in my mind. In fact most of the training we conduct is not scenario based at all. Scenarios are time-consuming, difficult to properly setup and orchestrate, and involve a limited number of encounters, as they should reflect the real world where very few shots are ever fired. Don't get me wrong, scenarios are excellent finishing tools and must be carefully considered. We are by no means scenario experts. This is where others shine much more brightly than us!



I had a key trainer in this industry recently ask me something to the effect, “When are you going to get rid of those paintball guns and switch to the exclusive use of Simunition® F/X training weapons? What you are doing is dangerous and it will get people killed. In fact a DEA officer was killed right after using a paintgun in training, because he could not properly fire his Sig 226 in a real encounter following the training.”

This is one of those series of statements that make me go...Hmmm

First of all; I refuse to predicate an entire approach on the actions of few weak-minded, lesser skilled individuals that do get killed in gunfights. We will always have them among use, why would I ever use that as the training standard?

I further responded with, I have been to the authorized Simunition® Safety Supervisor Training Course and I am fully aware of the espoused doctrine. Have you been through one of my training courses? “Uh....no.....” Okay then, your conclusions or assumptions may be in error, as you have no real first-hand reference points to base your opinions relating to how and why we conduct force-on-force training.

The fact of the matter is, I can point to a slew of Simunition® training related deaths. Do I think it was the conversion kit or the ammunition? Do I think it was the content contained in the supervisors course that created these mishaps? Do I think we should stop “Reality-based-Training” because of these clear lethal risks? Absolutely not. They can and should be 100% mitigated and hence the Safety Supervisors Course and Ken Murray’s new book.

Rolling Back what We do

This idea that forcing officers to acknowledge hits weakens their will or programming them for failure in actual combat is not something I subscribe to. Here is a few excerpts from participants that were forced to undergo the so-called negative effects of acknowledging they are hit during training:

FYI, one of your former students (of the one-day low light training) was involved in a very nasty shooting last night (8/13/00). He did an excellent job. Basically, they were clearing a studio apartment that was supposedly the victim of a burglary 'in progress'. As officers were clearing the 'vacant' apartment, two armed gunman suddenly rushed through the front door with guns pointed at the officers. Your former student quickly engaged in a gunfight causing the gunman to retreat to the front door area (the other gunman fled). With no way out and the fear of the gunman waiting outside, the officers decided to handle their exit on their terms..... To the officer's surprise, the gunman was outside with his gun drawn waiting for the officers to run after him. Another exchange of gunfire resulted in the gunman taking one to the arm and another to the right eye. No injuries to the officers. I spoke with the officer and he credited your training for his success in this scenario. So..... in the interest of applying your training to more than just a select few, I am asking if you'd be interested in conducting your training here? Please let me know what your fees would be.

My name is Steve Mescan and I took you Team Tactics Course in May of 1999. I am a SWAT Team member from the city of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police. I would like to take minute to express one of my experiences.

On August 27, 1999 I was returning to the station in a quiet area of the city, at approximately three in the morning. The front of Zone 6 station is almost all glass and not bullet proof. While walking into the station, two gunman in a vehicle, one with a 9 mm, and the other with a .45 cal, opened fire on me and three other officers. The first round missed my head by inches and then I was struck in the foot once by a 9mm and then with shrapnel from a .45 caliber.

As the gunfire erupted I found myself, even though I had been shot, on my shooting platform, working the angle, and rather than running from the threat putting them under duress. Though I did not fire a shot, because my backdrop was full of residential houses, the suspects who were caught stated they saw me point my gun out towards them, which caused them to flee. In all 29 shots were fired at the station.

I credit the training I received from you and your cadre as to the reason this incident didn't turn out worse. First I realized the back lighting situation and immediately told another officer to turn the lights off. I began to move at the suspects to acquire a site picture while doing so I caught myself "breathing up" and controlling my adrenaline. I knew I was shot, but because of the type of training and duress that I was put under during those three days at Team Tactics, made 29 rounds feel like a walk in the park. I believe that the training I received helped me not react so quickly, that I simply reacted with emotion and began to "spray and pray" out the front of the station house.

Instead, I was able to remain disciplined and turn the tides of the encounter. I would like to thank you and your staff for the training I received. It may have saved my life and the lives of others. I can say, as a trainer, that the Team Tactics Course was the best course I have been to in my seven-year career.

Keep up the good work and if there is anything I can do for you guys please don't hesitate to ask! I Hope to train with you again in the future!!

*Steve Mescan
Pittsburgh SWAT*

Ken Good and his cadre continuously demonstrated how truly effective and properly conducted Force on Force training will have students "running their own mental videos" over and over in their heads - long after the training is over - searching for the points things "went south", the "point at which" the one critical mistake I made occurred, how to avoid that / what I need to do differently "next time", what I did right, what my partners did right, etc., etc.

I could go on and on with guys that we initially trained all the way to the present that are currently in the sandbox that take the time to email me their thoughts and perspectives. But I believe the point is made. Those that go in harms way speak the loudest. Those that have been in gunfights prior to training and after the training we advocate have stated the approach in a powerful, deep-seated one that will manifest itself when called upon.

Why are the letters and emails not streaming in telling me that the training is taking them in the wrong direction?

I believe more than anything else, folks do not successfully engage known threat's at relatively close ranges simply because they have not had the repetitions necessary to properly execute the host of options available to them in these encounters. They have no valid reference points.



Without these repetitions the initial response to being fired upon is to quickly establish the position I refer to as "vertical fetal". Cover is immediately sought and the head and eyes are lowered as if protecting oneself from a falling object. The weapon is brought out of the picture perfect position for return fire and directed to parts unknown.

We originally constructed a drill to specially deal with the innate phenomenon. It was called the "gauntlet" drill. The shooter was forced to walk out in the middle of a maze of potential firing points and directed to walk forward. Hesitant, tentative stepping was not allowed. You had to maintain what we refer to as a "shooting platform". Threats of various levels and distance were initially presented to the shooter and he had to quickly determine shoot or no shoot. If fired upon (the threat could fire one round) and struck, the shooter was permitted to fire back one round. If the shooter hit the threat before he got a shot off, the threat was to stand down.

It was a three-dimensional shooting gallery with pain penalties for not paying attention and a reward for finding and eliminating the pain potential with accurate, fire. No spray and pray permitted. One-round was all you had to get the job done.

Initially the threats would be presented in front of the shooter, but over subsequent runs, the threats would develop from the side, then the back, then multiples would start appearing. Then we would start the same process over with a partner and then done again with 2 pairs at a time.

We videotaped this and put the replays in a slow motion so that participants could see first hand, frame by frame; from the outside perspective what they were actually doing during the initial observation and orientation phase of the drill. It was quite revealing. But once consciously understood and acknowledged, the participants over a several day period would eliminate a large percentage of non-productive flinching, ducking, and overreactions. They would begin to function more like shooting machines. If threat, then shoot. No hesitation. Additionally the number of no-shoot targets being engaged would significantly drop.

Drills, Drills, and more Drills

Drills allow one to see over and over again what it looks like to have somebody point a gun at them and engage them.

Drills allow you to see what looks like to gun somebody down from a variety of positions, lighting conditions, and given the constraints of their chosen profession.

Drills allow you to develop valid orientation to the incoming stimulus and therefore eliminate many acts of desperation, fear, and purely primitive reflex. Again, this results in a lower number of improper engagements of no-shoot threats and a lowers the percentage of misses that commonly occurs in these types of fights.

I think at the core, you have to create an individual that can remain relatively calm under duress so a multitude of tasking can successfully be accomplished.

This means repetition, repetition, and more repetition. Not just any repetition, but repetition of the right kind, doing the right things. This is not a new or novel concept. This has been known for generations.

Back to the individual who told me what we do (having never seen it) is “dangerous”. I responded with, when I went through the Safety Supervisors Course, I shot 3, count them, 3 rounds in all the given scenarios I was involved with over a 3-day period of instruction on how to deploy this realistic gunfight technology. Although the course is definitely not designed to be a tactics or shooting skills oriented course, instinctively there is something wrong with this picture (at least in my mind).

I then asked this individual if he was willing to sponsor my company with Simunition ® Marking cartridges on the magnitude of 5000+ rounds (the number of paint projectiles we go through a course in a week) for 20-25+ weeks a year. Do the financial math.

What I have concluded is that if you can get individuals and pairs to learn to properly flow through well-conceived drilling methodologies, these same people that will comprise a team, bring that powerful flow capability to the larger element while participating in scenarios.

Pairs that have learned to immediately micro flank when required, horizontally and vertically displace, tread the ground properly, bi-laterally shoot, communicate, maintain breath control and situational awareness, remain calm when fired upon, maintain posture, manage ammunition, find cross-angles, understand pace issues, and have developed and unwavering, unflinching desire to pressure the opponent at every opportunity, generally make really good substrate for a team.

These attributes and skills are best cultivated at drilling level, not the scenario level.

Let's take a drill that we do and use it as a practical example. We have a drill we call the 2 vs. 2 drill (one of many).

The goal of the drill is fairly simple. Your pair is to prevail over the opposing pair. This is not a judgment drill much like firing your weapon live fire on the range. One goal, hit/eliminate the targets presented in front of you.



Two pairs start at the opposite ends of the field that is populated with obstacles (cover and concealment consisting of vehicles, 55-gallon drums, and whatever else you can drag out there). The field is generally over 100 yards in length, 50+ yards wide.

You can choose to move at any distance, speed, angle that you desire within the given training area. You can shoot whenever you want, at whomever you want, at whatever speed, method or number of rounds you desire.

The drill is done with pistols, rifles, day and night.

The drill in fact teaches you a multitude of things that are required to accomplish your goal of hitting the moving, thinking, and return firing targets in your area:

- Posture
- Breathing
- Movement
- Relative Relaxation
- Horizontal & Vertical Displacement
- Proper Use of Angles
- Ammo Management
- Communication
- Pace
- Flanking
- Closing
- The Value of Bi-lateral Shooting
- Sighted or Unsighted Fire
- A Myriad of Lighting Issues
- And Much More....



While participating in this drill, you are required to acknowledge when somebody on the opposing force impacts you with a projectile by taking a knee in place, your drill is over in terms of engagement.

Tell me how the drill is going to work if all participants in the drill simply choose to ignore the fact they are getting hit. Do we just stop doing it because the risk outweighs the known learning benefits cited above?

Tell me what the benefit is when an individual successfully maneuvers himself behind an opponent and unleashes an accurate volley of rounds up and down the spine and back of the head of an opponent only to see that opponent turn around through the hail of bullets and begin to return fire until both individuals are hurling empty weapons at each other?

As I live on the East Coast now, I have had the privilege of meeting and interacting with some of the boys from NYPD Emergency Services Unit (ESU). Last year, I was invited to a large training exercise where the head trainer for ESU (awesome person, experienced operator, several shootings) and I were discussing this exact issue. He also held the opinion that no members of the "good guys" should ever go down. Fair enough.

As this particular exercise unfolded, the team leader rolled out of his vehicle to address a disturbance directly in front of him. As he did so, another individual clearly appeared out of a second story window. He had a Simunition ® F/X converted AR15, very accurate.

The team leader subsequently received at least 10 rounds to the head and simply moved back a couple of feet. He took another 5 rounds to the head. He then ducked down behind the vehicle and started barking orders, only to return to the exact same spot he just got shot from to give additional direction. He took another 5 rounds to the head. He then casually walked closer to the building and eventually made entry. The construct of the scenario and the rules of engagement allowed for this type of behavior and he was taking advantage of it either consciously or sub-consciously.

I am using this example to illustrate the extreme of the rationale. At some point there needs to be an acknowledgement that this is not an acceptable way to teach somebody to win gunfights. It needs to be much more than, "Great job in the scenario, and oh by the way, you had 15 simulated .223 rounds pass through your brain bucket....But let's move on".

In my mind this is far more deadly than asking that officer to take himself out of the scenario for a few moments/minutes to recalibrate his actions/movement before moving on. I pointed this out to my good friend and he also agreed there was something inherently wrong with the decree that "you never do down" in this type of training.

Where this line is drawn is somewhat subjective in my mind.

We take a slightly different approach. In drills we force you to acknowledge your hits not matter how "trivial". We are not encouraging participants to quit, fall down and say "I'm dead", or even make an evaluation as to whether or not that hit or hits was survivable. This is an important distinction. For years, we used the phrase, "call your hits".

We tell folks, in an actual confrontation, fight till you are unconscious, and if you are unconscious, do not worry about it anymore.

I challenge anybody to poll the thousands of students I have interacted with over a 20-year period with a specific question. Does the training methodology presented instill a strong sense and drive to prevail, overcome, adapt, and dominate threats on a variety of levels while at the same time challenging you to become calmer and calmer while doing so or does it teach you to capitulate under pressure?

In scenarios we can and often do create generally unstoppable officers. However, if I am a controller, I will put the officer down for a few seconds if I see multiple hits as a result of sloppy behavior. I force him to acknowledge what just happened and then send him on his way to conquer the heathen horde.

In terms of training weapons, we take a hybrid approach. We do our high volume (read high cost of projectiles) with high-quality paint weapons, and then we do full mission profiles (low volume of fire – generally speaking) with converted firearms using Simunition® Marking cartridges so that you do have the opportunity to use the kit you are going to bring to the party.

What exactly is accomplished by forcing a participant in this type of training to take a knee when struck and evaluate what just happened? Although most certainly all bullet impacts are not fatal, just keep in mind we are not talking about jabs to the face either!

Let me also state that for 20 years I have forced my self to acknowledge my hits. It is the hardest thing to do at times. It is not easy for me, the instructor to admit/show the "students" they just shot the crap out of me. But ultimately it wins their respect if I do so.

I still get pissed and only want to fight more when struck. I do not consider myself killed, dead or otherwise...Stupid maybe...but not dead. This is virtually a universal behavior by most serious operators. Pain does not destroy them; it wakes them up. It motivates them to keep going and improve. They do not want to stop, period.

- By taking a knee, you are allowing yourself the opportunity to honestly evaluate not only what just happened moments ago, but it allows you to question your basic assumptions that were brought with you prior to this particular encounter as well as reevaluate your entire framework if that is what it takes.
- This time allows you to evaluate why your predictions of the future events were inaccurate.
- This time allows you to see (read replay) right then and there why choosing to hold that spot of ground was not a good choice.
- It allows you to replay the movement of a superior practitioner downrange that just gunned you down.
- It allows you to consider that fact that you may or may not have over or under extended.
- You have to think about what you did or did not say to your partner(s) prior to impact.
- You have to eat humble pie for a few moments and drop the shield of pride in order to learn how to avoid that series of pattern of events again.

The greatest value in force-on-force training is not weapons manipulation (Action Phase of the OODA Loop) but the immersion into and challenging of the processes associated with the far weightier phases of the loop: Observation, Orientation and Decision.

“Your Kung Fu is Weak!!!”

Let's not get too pushy here.

From my limited perspective, there needs to be an allowance for a wide variety of applications of the RBT tools. If a trainer needs to develop “in the can scenarios” that require quantifiable and specific skills sets to be addressed and liability to be covered with specific documentation, then script the heck out of it and do not allow any deviation.

One the other hand, if I have a team of folks that need to go in a highly dynamic and constantly changing situation, I am not going to set them up for failure by not allowing them to deal with a genuine element of chaos on the front end. I want these guys to experience the benefits of adaptive learning. Improvising will be rewarded; static, linear, easily read movements will be penalized.

Full-mission profiles might include highly skilled role players that are free to adjust as necessary to engage the incoming forces. Let the chips fall where they may.

I think this idea is considered to be dangerous by Ken Murray.

“Improvisation can also lead to dangerous confrontations between student and a role player because in the absence of specific guidelines, the training staff will have a hard time anticipating what exactly the role player or student is likely to do next”

There is an extremely valid point here. I balance this point with; there is a fundamental difference in feel between choreographed kata and free-sparring within limits. Both can have a place. I cannot tell you how many guys think they can really fight because they operated almost exclusively within a known set of parameters. Take the gloves off and you see what is under the hood. Last time I checked, fighting did not look like the controlled environment of the dojo and in fact I had no idea what my opponent is likely to do next. That is reality.

I went to a SWAT conference on the East coast last year where I had the opportunity to share a plane ride and some dinner with Tony Blauer. Tony and I do not agree on all the specific methodologies or style of training for combatives but I will say that Tony has a powerful gift of capturing concepts with some really great phrases that just make good sense.

During dinner we were dissecting some ideas and Tony said, "All training is fake. It is our job as trainers to make the fake stuff as real as possible". Well stated.

Balls to the wall fighting when participants are unskilled, unfamiliar and unprepared is not a productive way to spend your training time either.

The key here for me is having good role players and a situationally aware controller that can improvise within limits. They need to understand when the person or persons they are facing are having a difficult time or are simply breezing through the situation. We used and still use a color code initiated by the overall controller of the situation. Going "Green" means, aggress them with everything you have. "Yellow" means back off because the current level of resistance is too high, but continue to offer friction with a view to keep it challenging but solvable. "Red" means absolutely back off as the person or team is simply overwhelmed and needs to be offered little or no resistance at this time until they obtain sufficient levels of skill to deal with it.

When you boil it all down, we are ultimately talking about fighting here, not a program or a set of volumes that can be manipulated on a computer screen.

This type of interaction cannot be metered by using a checklist. It is dynamically facilitated only by an experienced crew of trainers that have the best interests of the participants in mind. Prevailing over the student is not the goal. Teaching and pushing them to their personal limits is. Strong and weak individuals and team must be accounted for.

We have a saying in our combatives courses. As a good training partner, do not overly resist, but do not overly assist. On one hand you are frustrating your partner, on the other hand you are instilling a dangerous false sense of security. Train to improve your partner not prove that you are better than him. It is on the fly metering not specifically measured by a known set of parameters.

Back to the game of Water Polo. When I was a senior in high school, I transferred to a public school to play with my friends in an effort to capture the California state championship. We had 4 returning All-Americans and we were supposed to be the dominant force that year.

The coach of my new school John Schmidt (a member of the U.S. Olympic team) suddenly took a turn for the worse and died quite suddenly of a brain tumor.

The Volleyball coach who had no experience with this particular game replaced John. Then new coach was a particularly hot-tempered individual and was characterized by his overwhelming lack of regard for the actual talent and experience he had on the team.

Fundamentally, the offensive strategy of water polo is not energized by set plays. It is a series of probes, picks, drives, switches in an effort to create and take advantage of emerging opportunities that can be exploited. This new coach was going to bring his new paradigm into the game. He was forcing us to use set plays of his own design or better said, he was introducing a highly scripted approach to solve problems that will always develop dynamically. The amazing thing is there was nothing broke about this team! It was already a well-oiled machine.

To make a long story short he quickly managed to destroy the morale, the synergy and ultimately the entire core infrastructure of the team and it went down in a ball of flames.

A statement to me by this coach characterized my last game in high school. We were battling to stay in the regional tournament. I was the tournament's leading scorer at the time. My coach told me to stop scoring or he would take me out of the game. I asked him what the fundamental goals of Water Polo were. He could not answer the question! I told him it was to score as much as possible and prevent the opponent from doing the same. Then I asked him; which of those goals was I not supporting. No answer with words.

The last game the coach benched me for 3 quarters. We were losing. I was put in the water; fast broke down the pool and scored. He was good on his promise; I was immediately yanked back out of the water and sat down. We lost the game as the entire team was tied in knots not just because of me, but because his entire framework and approach stifled flow and the inner game required to win at that level.

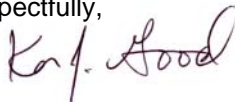
Fighting like Water Polo is not a scripted event. This especially holds true in the no holds barred world of gunfighting.

Be careful not to exclusively train like it is.

I will leave you with this, No one can fully teach you how to be a great painter or musician by chapter and verse. A good mentor will cultivate that which is within. It is uniquely inner human gift energized by creative personality and desire to bring the inward, outward for others to experience.

In many ways fighting is the same way, but the stakes are much higher.

Respectfully,



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