

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND TRAINERS: A few thoughts...

By Paul Howe

I finished up a Shoot House Instructor course earlier this past year and wanted to share a few thoughts and observations. Over the past 35 years I have watched old and new techniques used by both young and seasoned professionals. Some move fast, some move slow, some move efficiently. I want to write about being efficient in tactical training/response and selecting the proper instructor.

History

I started full time training over 20 years ago in Special Operation and then started my Training Company CSAT, once I retired from the military. This is not a plug for my business, but rather my observations over the past two decades. When I first started training LE, I researched their missions:

- Hostage Rescue
- High Risk Warrant
- Search Warrant
- Barricaded Person
- Miscellaneous missions (Vehicle Assaults, Bus Assaults, etc.)

With the research on LE missions, I broke down written and unwritten techniques that I have used on operations into written guidelines with right and left boundaries. I taught how to safely set up scenarios using live ammunition. I went further and broke tactics down into areas or "parts of a target."

- Movement to Breach Point
- Breach point
- Hallways and T Intersections
- Rooms
- Consolidation

I used Hostage Rescue as my base because if I can teach you to "push through" or treat a threat as a "speed bump," then I can easily show you how to hold and fortify on a High Risk Warrant when the offender chooses to shoot at you.

Special Ops generally differs in solving High Risk Warrants in that they are paid to bring the subject back at all costs. Law Enforcement officers are subject to numerous legal restraints that the spec ops soldier is not. Some

cannot understand the option of "holding" on a high risk warrant. They don't understand the concept of "not rescuing dope."

With the flood gates open and the numerous special operations commandos coming back from overseas and the conflicts winding down, everyone wants to teach and make a buck. I say make a buck as many do not invest the time and energy to make it a profession.

Many officers feel they do not have the background or knowledge to question these soldier trainers and take what they say as Gospel. Extensive combat experience does not directly relate to many Law Enforcement missions. A healthy training environment and confident instructor will encourage questions and ensure he answers all questions students bring up. This is part of being a competent instructor.

LE Cultivating Their Own

When I started my LE training career, most tactical teams were that in name only. They were out of shape, could not shoot and their tactics were less than stellar. Training accidents and deaths were common and LE were injuring or killing more of their own through poor training and tactics than bad guys were. One long time tactical officer I know mentioned that he does not know how they did not get anyone killed or shoot any innocents in the 90's when he first started. Many teams were lucky. Unfortunately, many teams were not.

Over time, things changed as the tactical community evolved. Tactical LE has gotten on board with physical fitness and is now in better shape than I have seen before. They can shoot. They have refined their tactics and know when to push and when to hold. They are evolving to meet the growing threats and violence in the world. I applaud them.

SWAT teams are becoming more and more team players and teaching their shifts and fellow patrol officer's techniques and work ethics to help them survive the hazards of their professions. SWAT set the standard with physical fitness and push for higher weapon qualifications. This has had a trickle-down effect which helps bring patrol to a higher standard.

Having said this, SWAT teams must understand that they are not Delta Operators and cannot require their team or patrol officers to maintain the same standards. Special Operations can select from a talent pool of hundreds of thousands for physical fitness and work ethic. Once in, Spec Ops soldiers can train 24/7 with generally unlimited ammo budgets and training facilities. The average patrol/SWAT officer cannot. A competent instructor must understand this and tailor their training and physical to allow for this.

I know some instructors that routinely hurt students in their training due to unrealistic physical expectations and training events. This is unacceptable. You must teach them how to get to those levels first and have a mechanism to cull them from the training before they get hurt.

Training Choices

For years LE/SWAT have looked to special operations/operators for tactics and techniques. This should continue, but you must vet your training choices.

- Training dollars and time are precious
- Undoing a training scar that a poor instructor puts on you is even more costly.

Recently I went to a region and ran a Shoot House Instructor class. The class was filled with professional and great officers I have worked with in the past. About three years elapsed since I was in the region. Some of the new tactics they were using set me back a bit, - both safety wise and common sense.

One drill we executed and videoed was a two person entry in an "L" shaped room with two threat targets in opposite corners and a hostage target in the middle. Fifteen two-person teams entered and executed the drills. Out of the 15, 10 teams did it right and five did it incorrectly, in my opinion. Most officers locked on the first target and the number one person did not see the second until either prompted to look at his corner or until the number one person saw and engaged it. We actually practiced it prior to the run in the shoot house next door. One-third of the teams could not do a simple two person entry. Most locked down on the first target and the number two did not check his corner and engage the other threat, protecting his partner.

I questioned students and many were confused as they have had other instructors come in and preach running the walls and other "high-speed" tactics. Instead of shooting the first obvious bad guy with the gun first, many times officers would check a corner first and then shoot him. In my mind, reaction time has started and you are giving up a known threat to look at an unknown. That is what your number two person is for when doing dynamic entries. He is there to clear the opposite corner and protect you.

When you cannot master the basics, you are not "high speed." What is "High Speed" for SWAT. Waking up at 0300 and then executing a hostage rescue using simple techniques and making the shot that counts.

Vetting Tactical Instructors

I see a great deal of former special ops guys wanting to teach (and make money). Unfortunately they may not have the credentials. They may be one hell of an operator, but a piss poor instructor. We had many like that in my era.

Many have not broken the code and fail to research LE missions and adapt. Many want to lean on what unit they served in and how many months they served overseas. War stories are great, but they do not equate to sound tactics and techniques.

Flashy range fire techniques are generally one-dimensional and work in limited situations and not across the tactical spectrum that law enforcement faces.

Simple Questions to ask:

- Is your safety/techniques on the flat range the same as in CQB or Exterior Movement?
- Do they understand the different LE missions? Ask them what a BP (Barricaded Person) is and if you get blank stare, you know the deal.
- Do they understand use of force?

These veterans are great guys and I appreciate their service. The problem is you may take two steps back to go a step forward in your training. Many times their "latest and greatest" tactics only confuse the team and it also trickles down to patrol officers should your SWAT officers train them.

If you want to find out if an instructor is worth spending your money on, send two of your mature tactical instructors to one of his classes. This way if he is unsound, you have not wasted an entire year's budget and created a massive training scar on your group.

Physical Fitness

High Intensity Programs (HIP) have come on the scene since I left special ops and my personal opinion is still out on them. An Orthopedic Surgeon said that if it were not for Kettle Bells, Cross-Fit and old men trying to do young man sports, he would not be in business.

A major LE agency in the U.S. has been doing one of these fitness programs for 15 plus years and they are starting to see the long term negative results of some of this type training.

My opinion is that human nature wants to shortcut the learning curve and physical curve and get maximum results in a short time. We want to be efficient in training, but sometimes sacrifice safety and our bodies in this pursuit.

Some of these training systems were designed to work with individuals in an advanced level of fitness for short periods of time or "fillers" for when they cannot perform their routine workouts due to the locations they are in. I don't believe HIP program designers reverse engineered the systems for the beginning user. With that, instructors were not properly trained and vetted and that people want to go fast and strong before their bodies were ready. Next, the workout structures don't appear to complement the next session and simply tear down vs. rest and build.

Chronic back problems have plagued young officers in their 30's and 40's as a result of these programs. I personally don't believe you should train at your maximum every day. It is like driving your car as fast as it can go in the city and on the open road all the time. It will wear out/break in short order.

A simple stair-stepped weight and cardio program will get you what you need and keep your body functioning well into your end game of life. Physical training should be a life-long goal. If you wreck your car along the way, it is difficult to get it fixed and get to your destination.

Remember, five-toed running shoes were all the rage at one time....

Cultivating Your Own Cadres

I would like to see more LE trainers out there. SWAT types with patrol backgrounds have incredible experience and knowledge that can speak with confidence to the patrol officer and the SWAT officer. This includes all the various missions and situations they can encounter and how to safely respond. These types can also educate the constantly evolving chains of commands. Also, you are constantly in a people business where the special ops type trainer can solve most problems with a bullet or a muzzle strike. Law enforcement officers must respond to chaotic situations, using their judgment, discretion and tools at hand to bring order.

Law Enforcement is as much of a profession as it is a science. The state academy I went through was 345 hours and I did not have a clue as to what I was doing by today's standards. I was lucky when I was in a small town. I would have survived a bigger city with my positive mindset, but I would have needed a great FTO to set me straight. My learning curve would have been much steeper and I would have screwed up more often.

Today's training methods, classroom teaching techniques and information collection and distribution are light years ahead of what I remember. The other thing that has increased in 40 years is the levels of violence. Violent confrontations and lack of respect for law enforcement in general have grown with the political winds of hate and liberalism.

With the growing level of violence, more and more police candidates are selected for their college degrees with no background in dealing with people or violent situations. The learning curve with this type of candidate is extremely steep and some don't survive as they cannot make the transition. When I started my path, Vietnam Veterans were heavily seeded in Law Enforcement and violence was no stranger to them. Now we have more violence and more "polished" recruits without the ability to "flip the switch" in high risk confrontations and professionally solve the problem at hand.

Pitfall and Professional Hazards

The LE profession is a deadly serious business. Young officers eager for action will get it one day and they need to be ready. They also need to be mentored in how to pick and choose their battles. If you get in enough fights and have your nose broken enough and have to get more dental work than you care to, you will learn. I believe older and more tactically mature officers need to pass these lessons learned to younger officers.

As for SWAT officers, if you push the fight enough, you will find it. Make sure the fight is a worthy and just one. Hostage rescue is a noble and just cause, just be smart about it and train for it.

If you push the fight on missions doing dynamic where a surround and call out is the best option, you may learn the hard way. Use tactical maturity and pick and choose your battles. It is easy for a tactical team to push on and kill a mental person who is only threat is to themselves. The smart and patient thing is to wait them out and exhaust all your options.

A west coast team pushed a hit and lost two officers to a suspect firing a .380 pistol on a hostage rescue at close quarters. One officer was killed and the other moved on due to his injuries. Make sure that you use multiple breach points when you can. Remember even an untrained individual willing to fight can kill you with an unzeroed weapon.

The job is dangerous, so be smart. Leave your ego aside. Use all the brain power at hand to solve the tactical problems you encounter. Sanity checks from other team members and leaders are must.

Instructing Civilians

Some of these former Spec Ops guys develop a "cult" following and teach civilians. No problem, but the same issues that apply to Law Enforcement training, applies to civilians.

Civilians have no way of knowing if this instructor was good or bad in his military service. There are plenty of bad ones. Many good ones get out because they were injured and they naturally want to give back. I applaud their motivation

Look at the instructor's credentials and see how long they spent in Special Ops or LE. Why did they move or get out? If they were only there a year or so and got out, they were probably pushed out unless they were injured.

The problem with Spec Ops is that they do not air their dirty laundry and allow unsatisfactory individuals to migrate without putting a black mark in their record, demoting them or separating them from service. They allow their problems to go to the outside and become bigger problems in the training community. Still no one steps up and says, this guy is a turd. It is an unwritten rule that you don't call someone out. I personally think it is bullshit, especially when someone is dangerous or puts out dreamed up tactics or techniques that have not been validated. Training scars can be hard to erase and are sometimes unforgiving.

Panteao Productions and the Civilian Learning Curve

I became involved with Panteao years ago with the intent not to make money, but to produce a DVD that would help people pass my Rifle/Pistol Instructor class. It is six-days and many shooters would come not prepared to pass the standards. They wanted me to teach them how to shoot in that week and that consumed much of the important "How to Instruct" time.

Now future Instructor Students can watch the DVD, practice, come pass the standards and focus on how to develop shooters, timers, verbiage, running a line, problem solving, etc. By doing this, my life as an instructor has become much easier and the quality of students has increased. The students who do not come prepared are now shooter development tools in the class.

I was one of the starting instructors with Panteao and I am grateful for the opportunity to work with them. Part of Panteao's learning curve was dealing with mostly proven instructors, but also instructors wanting to make a video, believing it to be a spring board for their careers. Some were downright dangerous.

After filming over 34 instructors, the film crew got good at spotting who was competent and safe and who was not. They also got to see who brought applicable content to the table and who did not. Two of the 34 have been discontinued.

They also "deselected" instructors who were not as talented as they claimed to be and were unsafe. This was a steep learning curve on their behalf. They learned fast after seeing the entire field. With that, instructors were still recommended to them by clients and customers and it took time and vetting to figure out who was solid and who was not.

Still, people were hesitant to call it the way it was as they did not want to be known as the guy that dropped a dime. I see this as weak character.

I walked away from Special Ops because during a time when weak leadership was in control and they were not going anywhere any time soon. I decided to change my life and work with folks that would listen, namely American Law Enforcement (LE).

I was frowned on by a few who thought I should not speak out. When Americans lives are on the line, I feel you have a duty to speak out. That or you let a situation repeat itself and more people needlessly die. Too many hide behind secrecy to protect their ego and careers.

After training in the civilian sector for over 16 years, I have found that if you can train LE and they call you back, you have something. They are the most cynical group I have found as they are lied to by the public much of the time and their leadership is sometimes no better. Further, tactical teams are running missions every day in the U.S. They can generally spot BS tactics.

In short, if an instructor is successful at training LE, he will be a good civilian trainer. It generally does not work the other way around.

CONCLUSION:

To sum up the reason for this article is simple. A patrol officer in Garland, Texas used a pistol to take down two well-armed terrorists. I know little of the incident, but he used basic skills and a combat mindset to put two bad guys down.

The precedence has been set. He used skills learned in his career and enhanced by trickle down training from SWAT officers that worked with him, to terminate two threats. It worked and worked well. Simple proven technical skills learned from vetted instructors were handed down.

This simple and heroic act should sent a wave of confidence through the law enforcement training community that instills the knowledge that you have what it takes to get the job done, in the most extreme and dangerous circumstances. It is simply how you train to get there and how you cultivate your combat mindset along the way. This mindset can spill over into the civilian community as well. This is a true force multiplier for good.

Finally check out your trainer(s) and ensure they are who and what they claim. Training scars are hard to undo. Life is short. Train hard and efficient.

About the Author:

Paul R. Howe is a 20-year veteran and former Special Operations soldier and instructor. He owns Combat Shooting and Tactics (CSAT), where he consults with, trains and evaluates law enforcement and government agencies in technical and tactical techniques throughout the special operations spectrum. See combatshootingandtactics.com for details.