

TRAINING FOR THE REAL FIGHT

OR

AVOIDING FANSTASY GUNFIGHT TRAINING

Realistic training for a future gunfight is critical for a successful outcome. My combat experiences have taught me to reevaluate my training system, work ethic and how to channelize my training regime into a more streamlined and effective package. It also confirmed some lessons while voiding others. Proven combat techniques may not be flashy and may require a bit more physical effort on the part of the shooter. Further, they may not win competition matches, but they will help ensure your survival in a shooting or gunfight on the street.

First, I learned through experience that I would rather be in a “Shooting” than a “Gunfight.” The difference is simple. A shooting is one-way event, all the shooting is done by me. The gunfight is where your opponent has the opportunity to fight back. I prefer the shooting to the gun fight as getting shot at leads to getting shot and this hurts.

How do you make shootings happen? Simply by seeing faster and anticipating the fight. It begins by setting yourself up in a tactically superior position before the fight happens. Further, equipment, physical conditions and mindset play critical roles in your success.

VISION AND SCANNING

One problem I generally see in LE training is that more emphasis is put on flat range fire rather than learning to see and discriminate faster, which are equally as important. I ask individuals if they see first or shoot first in a tactical situation? The answer is simple, you must see first before you can shoot. Seeing and processing the information faster than your opponent is the key to whether you are in a shooting or in a gunfight.

Scanning and discrimination drills should compliment your live fire training. I always suggest you look at the “Whole Person” and then hands in a tactical encounter to help prevent fratricide. This is especially true for active shooter response scenarios and multi-breach point operations.

TRAINING:

Into today’s tactical community, several training vehicles for combat exist. They take the form of the LE academy, in service training and real world encounters.

Other avenues that can be used are the IPDA and IPSC competitions and training. Even Cowboy Action Shooting (CAS) attempts to replicate a historical version of personal combat.

Beyond shooting, physical fitness is also critical to mission success. The better shape you are in, the less likely you are to get hurt and if you do get hurt, you will heal faster. I watch too many individuals today who rely on their weapon to solve all the problems. The problem is that you have to move that weapon to a solid shooting position not once, but multiple times during an engagement. This requires strength, stamina and endurance. Many folks do not have the physical conditioning to get to or stay in the fight.

COMPETITION VS. REALITY

Let's face it, competition is fun and if applied correctly, can help you in your marksmanship, weapon handling skills and confidence. With these attributes, also comes bad habits of moving too fast for the tactical situation.

Who dictates the speed of the fight? The bad guy and how fast he falls, does. It might be a fast or slow process (the bad guy dying), but one should get in the habit of solving one problem at a time before moving to multiple threats. You can shoot two rounds on paper or ping a piece of steel and move to the next target, but in reality, two rounds or the sound of steel being struck may not solve your problem.

I remember servicing a bad guy one night at about 7 yards with night optics. I was trained to do double-taps throughout my military career. I punched him twice with two 5.56 rounds and stopped for a split second in my mind and on the trigger, looking for a response from the bad guy. The problem was that he was still standing with an AK-47. I hit him with two more rounds before he began to fall the ground. To my amazement, he stood back up before collapsing a second time.

Lessons learned, shoot until they go down. Not one, not two, or three. I now teach a four in the chest, one in the head failure drill with the rifle. Why four? It may take the human body that long to react to the amount of trauma you are inducing (5.56). At the time of this incident, we were using military green tip ammo and the energy transfer was minimal. Realizing we had a stopping power problem, we developed a drill that would work on any determined individual and made it part of our training package.

As a final point, I would be cautious on using competition shooters to drive the equipment and training in a department. While generally faster shooters, I have watched them err on the side of equipment that was great for competition, but took away from simplicity and the common goal. I remember arguing in 1993 for a more effective round for our primary weapon (rifle) as the 5.56 Green Tip was not doing well. Others soldiers I worked with, competed in weekend matches, were more

interested in “square” triggers on the .45 for a uniform pull instead of the stopping power of their main battle rifle. We are still fighting rifle caliber problems today and sadly enough, service personnel have lost their lives because of it.

EQUIPMENT

As an assaulter, my body weight was around 230 pounds, but when tactically loaded with weapon, vest and helmet, it was closer to 310. This was simple assault gear and not a rucksack.

Fast moving raids require you to move efficiently and swiftly in, around or over obstacles with all your equipment. I have witnessed individuals packing their vest with excess ammunition or equipment that was a mental comfort item and not mission essential. This caused them problems in movement and fatigue.

Physically, you need to be able to move through an obstacle course with all your equipment to ensure that you can fight with your “combat weight.” Also, you quickly find what stays on and what falls off. Make changes as necessary. If strength and endurance is an issue, get in shape. Hit the pavement, get in a gym or better yet, do both. If when looking in a mirror, you see yourself wearing overlapping gun belts, do something about it.

As for combat loads, look at how much ammo and how many weapons you are carrying. I have watched folks carry 12-20 magazines on their body and in my opinion, it is too much. You cannot effectively maneuver with that weight nor sustain any aggressive operation tempo for any length of time. Generally 4-5 magazines in an LE environment is more than adequate for any situation.

Let’s do the math on this one. If you critically hit a bad guy with one out of three rounds you fire, that is 10 people per magazine (30 rounder). Carry five magazines and we are looking at 50 people you have critically injured. Multiply that times five officers on a tactical team and you have 250 folks you have neutralized. I think you get my point. If the situation becomes so critical that you need more ammo, you will have plenty of dead and wounded on your side who will not need theirs. If it makes you feel better, keep a few extra magazines in the trunk of your car.

MINDSET

My firearm training began with a revolver and limited rounds. I knew that I only had six and that I had to make each one count. I developed a mindset of dedicated accuracy, even though I might be a bit slower than the shooter on my right or left. Additionally, my first formal training was with the FBI course of fire out to 50 yards. This developed a sense of confidence that you could make a hit at further distances, if you did your part.

This mindset continued into my special operations career. Generally we were fighting a “G” who wore pajamas, carried an AK-47 and two magazines. They were on their own turf, acclimated and could run circles around you if you came to the fight too heavy. I would rather carry 7-8 magazines and be able to move and out maneuver the “G,” than to be slow and sluggish and let them get into a better tactical position before I did. Also, if I shot my ammo wastefully getting there, no “ammo fairy” was going to bring you more one the shooting starts. So, I learned to be efficient with what I had.

THE FIGHT AND SETTING UP YOUR OPPONENTS

I push the use of cover to all my students. Brick walls and dirt stop bullets better than your Kevlar or “Chicken Plate.” Many of the competitions that I have viewed or participated in have the shooter exposed to multiple targets during the course of fire. This is okay for the game, but if you overexpose yourself to multiple opponents, they can all shoot at you, where you can effectively focus on only one individual at a time. You loose.

Learn to engage/expose yourself to one threat at a time. Further, maximize the use of cover and minimize your exposure. Make the bad guy give you a full body shot to engage while you only give him your right eye and weapon. In short, make yourself a hard target. Most of the friendly casualties I observed were shot when they failed to use cover, or stopped in the open and not moving. This is also how I engaged most of the enemy that I know I got solid hits on. They were stopped in the open. I also had the chance to engage movers from a stationary position and within 100 yards, generally require a center hold for a solid hit.

Reference shooting on the move. It is a skill that all shooters aspire to learn and spend a great deal of time and effort trying to master. I have never had to use it in combat. When moving at a careful hurry, I stopped planted and made my shots. When the bullets were flying, I was sprinting from cover to cover, moving too fast to shoot. I did not find an in between. If I slowed down enough to make a solid hit when under fire, I was an easy target, so I elected not to.

As for shooting and closing on a target, it only makes the bad guys accuracy better and walking into a muzzle may help you to test your new vest sooner than you wanted to. Diagonal movement works, but again if you have to slow down too much, you are an easy target, and are generally in the open. Speed can act as your security in this case to get you to a point of cover.

KEY POINTS:

- **Seek out instructors from both the speed shooting world and those who have been to combat. Select tactics, techniques and equipment that work for both,**

but lean heavily on the proven combat techniques. It may not be flashy, but it works.

- **Always put in discrimination drills into your training.**
- **Train as you fight and with the same gear. During a shooting session with the team in all the tactical gear and ammo, take them on a short jog, O course or buddy carry and see how much gear they loose or if they can handle their own “combat weight.”**
- **Solve one tactical problem at a time and then move to the next one, don’t over expose yourself or sell the use of cover short.**

Realistic tactical training may not feel rewarding at first. There are no prizes or medals to be had. The reward is being able to solve a deadly social problem quickly and efficiently in your community. The other reward is being able to go home at the end of the day and give the wife and kids another hug.

BIO:

Paul R. Howe is a 20 year veteran and former Special Operations soldier and instructor. Paul currently 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 www.combatshootingandtactics.com for details.