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**Combat Mindset:
The Importance of Training**



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ABSTRACT

Combat mindset is the conscious or subconscious willingness to commit harm (lethal or non-lethal) against another (Grossman, 2008). During force-on-force training, officers often stop engaging a threat once the officer receives a non-life threatening injury from a simunition round. Survival instinct and combat mindset are essential to increasing the chances of winning during a violent attack. This can be described as war, as Grossman emphasizes, "When someone injures you because you wear a uniform-any uniform-that is war" (Schwartz, 2011, p.1). All officers should be trained on the importance of having a combat mindset and surviving a violent attack. In today's law enforcement operational environment, it only makes good sense that officers are trained in the importance of possessing a combat mindset. Realistic scenario-based training is essential, but officers should receive extensive training on understanding the social and psychological factors of combat mindset.

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INTRODUCTION

Providing law enforcement officers with the tools to survive a violent attack should be a priority for law enforcement trainers and administrators in all police agencies. Today's law enforcement officer is equipped with some of the most technologically advanced tools ever developed. These advances in technology have better prepared law enforcement officers to shoot, move, and communicate.

Less lethal options have been at the forefront of these hard technology advances in crime prevention, which includes the use of the Taser as a control measure (Byrne & Marx, 2011). In recent years, law enforcement training has evolved into well planned scenario-based force-on-force training, to assist in better preparing the law enforcement officer to respond to a real-world situation while in a training environment. While this paper will not focus on the attention required to maintain a high level of physical and mental conditioning, most law enforcement officers will concur that a law enforcement officer must be mentally and physically fit in order to increase the chances of surviving a violent attack. Training is conducted on topics such as marksmanship, weapon retention, defensive tactics, and handcuffing. Most agencies avoid the topic of instructing officers on the importance of possessing a combat mindset, a simplistic method of preparing for and surviving a violent attack. Nevertheless, law enforcement officers fail to receive the highly beneficial training on what it takes to not just survive, but also win in a violent attack, therefore creating a need for this training shortfall (Ballard, 2013). During force-on-force training, it is not unusual to see an officer stop engaging a threat once the officer receives a non-life threatening wound from a simunition round. Witnessing these training events has fueled a passion over the issue

of why law enforcement officers do not stay in the fight after a violent attack. On a regular basis, monthly, if not weekly, there are law enforcement agencies handling calls for service that involve active shooter events or police ambushes. These scenarios have played out in communities at a higher rate over the past 12 years as opposed to years previous to the year 2000, as outlined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation Law Enforcement Bulletin that discussed active shooter event statistics from 2000 to 2012 (Blair, Martindale, & Nichols, 2014). Law enforcement officers must be aware of the environment they are operating in, be mentally and physically prepared to do combat and must also rehearse for these events daily. Combat mindset is the conscious or subconscious willingness to commit harm (lethal or non-lethal) against another (Grossman, 2008). Law enforcement officers should be trained on the importance of having a combat mindset and surviving a violent attack.

POSITION

Combat mindset training encompasses three general areas; awareness (situational awareness), preparation (mental and physical) and rehearsals (Eimer, 2004). There are numerous professionals in both the law enforcement and military community who are experts in each of the above listed areas. It is important that law enforcement officers have an understanding of these areas in order to better prepare themselves to stay in the fight and survive a violent attack.

Dr. Bruce Eimer (2004) wrote about being psychologically prepared for combat survival and stresses the first key element as awareness. Merriam-Webster defines awareness as having or showing realization, perception and knowledge. The term situational awareness, as defined by the U.S. Army in relation to conducting

combined arms operations in urban terrain, is the degree to which one is able to maintain a common operating picture of all aspects of the tactical situation (Department of the Army, 2002). Eimer (2004) added that maintaining situational awareness is equal to being one's own bodyguard. In order to maintain awareness, an officer must remain on alert at all times and never let the guard down. Eimer (2004) pointed to three specific points to place in the mental tool box: officers should pay attention to everything, never let anyone slip through their guard, and if ever physically attacked, they should immediately launch a counter attack, like a lion, in order to destroy an attacker (Eimer, 2004).

The importance of awareness training would not be given the proper credit if the training did not include Jeff Cooper's (2006) awareness color code. Cooper is a U.S. Marine who served both in World War II and the Korean War. A Stanford University graduate, Cooper (2006) later became popular among shooting enthusiasts, developing shooting stances and teaching shooting skills to military, law enforcement personnel, and civilians. Cooper (2006) developed the code to focus on levels of alertness related to a person's mind, and he related the code to mental states and associated them with color codes. Condition white meant that the person was basically unaware and unprepared. Condition yellow meant the the person is relaxed and alert and there is no specific threat. Cooper (2006) reiterated that mindset while in condition yellow should be that today could be the day that an officer may have to defend him or herself. Condition orange means that something is wrong and has peaked mental curiosity. An officer will remain alert but will be looking for the specific threat. Condition red is a fight. This is referred to as being the mental trigger that has now triggered based on threat

established while in condition orange. Condition black is basically a mental overload and the heartrate has increased to the point where the officer will become counter productive. Cooper (2006) maintained that these levels of awareness are related to mental state and that a person's combat mindset is specific to the state of mind as related to the the situation the officer is currently in. According to Cooper (2006), the most important means of surviving a violent attack did not fall back on weapon skills or martial arts, but to a person's combat mindset.

In relation to situational awareness and maintaining a good reactionary gap, it is important for law enforcement officers learn to anticipate threats and solve problems as they appear. Sun Tzu referenced that when preparing for battle that "knowing the place and the time of the coming battle, we may concentrate from the greatest distances in order to fight" (Tzu, 2003, p. 29). While there is never a gurantee to preserve life, possessing a combat mindset and having situational awareness will give law enforcement officers an increased chance to not only survive, but win during a violent attack.

Mental and physical conditioning are extremely important in the process of not only possessing a combat mindset but also understanding combat mindset. The United States Marine Corps teaches combat mindset to all recruits upon entry into the Corps (USMC, 2008). Recruits are taught that the mental conditioning is trained to towards a conscious state of awareness, which prepares the recruit to operate effectively under high stress situations and life threatening situations. The training is geared around replicating as best as possible the conditions on the battlefield and creating stressful and chaotic moments so that the recruit is better able to perform his duties while under

stress. The USMC stresses being aggressive, confident and relaxed as a part of developing a combat mindset. These 3 character traits stress always prevailing, being confident to the point where it is not second nature, all while being relaxed enough to perform physical and mental tasks without hesitation. Maintaining a high level of physical conditioning leads to having a stronger body and stronger mind. A stronger mind leads to a stronger Marine. The overall conditioning of the mind and body enables a person to anticipate threats and respond to them appropriately. The bottom line is the the USMC teaches combat mindset at the recruit level to help recruits better understand the effects of mental and physical stress on the battlefield so that the recruit knows and understands how to compensate for the effects (USMC, 2008).

One of the most important factors could be as simple as understanding heart rate. Grossman ties this in with Cooper's color code system where he relates condition white and condition yellow as a heart rate from 80 to 115 bpm and then condition red as the optimal level of performance at 115 to 145 bpm. Anything from 160 to 175 bpm could be catastrophic for the law enforcement officer as skills rapidly diminish as the officer travels through fine, complex and gross motor skills. Understanding the effects on the body is paramount to winning in combat (Grossman, 2008).

Finally, it is important to teach law enforcement officers the benefits of rehearsals. Mental rehearsals to a law enforcement is like having a "dry run" (Eimer, 2004). Rehearsals allow law enforcement officers to gain a tactical advantage by going through a violent attack in their mind repeatedly so that in the event that a violent attack happen, the law enforcement officer will be better prepared to respond. The acronym, OODA, stands for Observe, Orient, Decide and Act. Complete knowledge of the OODA

Loop model is very beneficial to law enforcement officers and assists in the ability to rehearse and mentally prepare for a violent encounter. Tom Perroni (n.d.), a nationally known tactical trainer, believes that OODA and Combat go hand in hand are essential for being effective in a fight. OODA was developed by Colonel John Boyd, United States Air Force, as a measure to assist fighter pilots in winning in combat during the Korean War. Observation is the ability to scan the environment and gather information from it. Orientation is the use of that information to form a mental image of the circumstances. Decision is to consider available courses of action and select a course of action. Action is to execute the desired course of action. The important take-a-way for law enforcements who are being trained in OODA is for the law enforcement officer to understand that when in a fight, it is crucial that the law enforcement officer move through the OODA loop faster than the threat. This is where fight or flight takes action. An officer should move through the OODA loop faster than the threat, meaning that the officer gets to the action step and executes that action before the threat does so. The OODA loop works the same for the threat and the law enforcement officer should focus on action first (Perroni, n.d.).

COUNTER POSITION

There will be barriers that must be successfully negotiated when considering providing instruction to law enforcement officers on the subject of possessing a combat mindset. First, in general terms, the word combat may seem aggressive and perhaps even overly aggressive as far as law enforcement training. Police administrators and citizens may shy away from the term for this specific reason alone. The term, combat mindset, may not be considered politically correct when discussing law enforcement

training and issues related to training. Citizens may express concern over this aggressive term and have the belief that the agency is training law enforcement officers to kill people. This is far from the truth. Law enforcement officers should be prepared to do ethical combat each day.

Merriam-Webster defines the term combat as the act of fighting especially in war. The initial response may be obvious to some, that law enforcement officers are not in the act of war. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, a former army officer and professor of psychology at the United States Military Academy, is one of the leading advocates on the study of human aggression and combat. Grossman has published several books on this topic and is recognized as one of the best trainers on combat and law enforcement. Grossman refers to soldiers and law enforcement officers as warriors. In Grossman's book, *On Combat*, Grossman talks about the fear of law enforcement officers and soldiers, who both move toward the threat that is attempting to hurt or kill them and how important it is for law enforcement officers to understand combat. Grossman compares law enforcement officers to firefighters in that just as firefighters must understand fire, law enforcement officers must understand combat (Grossman, 2008).

This is the exact mentality that all law enforcement officers must share and instill in the profession. Today, the city that officers protect is a battlefield. The increase in active shooter incidents (Blair et al., 2014) and police ambushes are justification alone to help train law enforcement officers to be more aware, mentally and physically prepared to survive in combat. While it might be true, the term "combat" should not be viewed of as being an aggressive term. Grossman stated, "When someone injures you because you wear a uniform – any uniform - that is war" (as cited in Schwartz, 2011,

para 2). The need is there and the time is now. Move forward and prepare law enforcement officers for the fight.

The need for combat mindset training is identified but one question from administrators and trainers may be on who should train law enforcement officers at an agency. In order to provide law enforcement officers with the best trainers possible, it is highly recommended that law enforcement agencies consider trainers such as Dave Grossman and Paul Howe, both of whom provide valuable instruction in the areas of combat mindset, surviving the violent, leadership and tactics. Grossman is often in the State of Texas at least once a quarter and offers training for approximately \$99 per student. The course, The Bullet Proof Mind: Mental Prep for Combat, is a eight hour course that is offered through Code 4 Public Safety Education Association based out of Medford, Oregon (<http://www.code4.org>). Paul Howe owns and operates Combat Shooting and Tactics based out of Nacogdoches, Texas. Paul conducts several tactical courses designed for SWAT teams, including a tactical team leader course that drills down into leadership and training for the fight. Based out of Texas, opportunity for training is frequent and Paul always makes himself available to the law enforcement community (<http://www.combatshootingandtactics.com/>).

As stated, some of the best instructors available to Texas law enforcement officers are in the area or operate in the state. While budgeting concerns and training budgets are always an issue, one should always consider the train-the-trainer option. The Lewisville Police Department Training Academy (Pedigo, 2009) currently teaches a short two-hour block on instruction on the topic of combat mindset. Basic Police Academy graduates receive this training upon graduation from the academy during

attendance at the Lewisville Police Department Mini-Academy. All law enforcement officers receive the training during a bi-annual Use of Force Refresher course in which students receive classroom instruction followed by scenario based force-on-force training. The combat mindset class includes instruction on the awareness color code, OODA Loop and the Federal Bureau of Investigation ten deadly errors (Pedigo, 2009). The training cadre includes the ten deadly errors, developed over 30 years ago, to drive in awareness as the first step to survival. The FBI ten deadly errors include: failure to maintain proficiency and care of equipment, improper search and use of handcuffs, sleepy or asleep, relaxing too soon, missing danger signs, taking a bad position, failure to watch the hands, tombstone courage, preoccupation and apathy (Pedigo, 2009). Petrocelli (2006) concluded that some mistakes are mental and some mistakes are physical. Petrocelli (2006) acknowledged that one cannot train a law enforcement officer for each event, but they can be trained to learn these ten deadly errors. This, coupled with a combat mindset, increases the ability to survive during a violent attack (Petrocelli, 2006).

RECOMMENDATION

Summarizing the reasons why law enforcement officers should be trained on the importance of possessing a combat mindset only makes good sense in today's law enforcement operating environment. Situational awareness, mental and physical conditioning, and rehearsals are paramount to mission readiness. This type of training only sharpens the minds of law enforcement officers. As law enforcement supervisors, managers, and administrators, every effort should be made to enhance law enforcement training. A well planned scenario-based, force-on-force training event

should be incorporated into all phases of training. In addition, law enforcement officers should be receiving training on understanding the social and psychological factors of combat mindset. Grossman (2008) describes these as the Killing Enabling Factors. Kevin Murray (2006), who authored *Training at the Speed of Life*, sums it up the best when discussing that survival psychology is often a short academic topic and is not incorporated into training. Murray (2006) eludes that it is often the psychology of an officer that needs more work, than actual weapons training on the range. Murray (2006) also speaks to the point that administrators often fear the public ridicule of acknowledging that part of a training program involves the killing of people (Murray, 2006). This is the opposite direction of where law enforcement needs to be moving. Regardless of whether the training is completed at the basic academy, mini-academy, in-service training at an agency training academy or is conducted off-site using a well known instructor, all law enforcement officers should be trained on the importance of having a combat mindset and surviving a violent attack. This just makes good sense and the cost is minimal compared to the cost of life.

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