

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

=====

Ground Combat Training
Verses
Firearms Training

=====

An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College

=====

By

Michael Flynt

Humble Police Department
Humble, Texas
May 2004

Abstract

At the current time there are no mandates or standardized requirements for a minimum proficiency skill level on ground combat or close quarter battles for law enforcement officers. This can often lead to officers or suspects being injured during a physical confrontation. Another problem associated with this, is that not only does the officer or suspect suffer but agencies and public images also suffer. The intent of this research is to explain that ground combat is a diminishing skill if not continually practiced. There needs to be a level of proficiency expectations for all officers to maintain and demonstrate through a standard qualification process. Without mandating a minimum requirement, officers may not achieve or maintain minimal skill levels on their own. A survey was sent out to fifty agencies primarily comparing if agencies meet minimum TCLEOSE firearm requirements or exceed them. Agencies were also asked if they had any mandatory requirements for ground combat training. The results of the survey were then compared and illustrated in a bar graph. It was discovered through extensive literary research that experts in the field of ground combat recommend ongoing training for officers to improve their skills. Experts also support that the skills will be lost if not practiced in an ongoing forum. The survey further illustrates that agencies follow the

requirements for firearm training as set fourth by TCLEOSE and a vast majority have no requirement for ground combat training. It was concluded that the skills will be lost if not practiced and officers having a false sense of ability may be prone to fall into a relaxed state of confidence, resulting in potential injury during a physical confrontation.

Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction.....	1
Review of Literature	3
Methodology	7
Findings.....	10
Conclusions.....	15
References.....	17

Introduction

With the rise of technology, police officers can easily find themselves in a problem situation during a physical confrontation. Perhaps this is due to the lack of a mandate for repeated “Ground Combat” training, which provides the officer with a second nature skill, as compared to mandated firearm training, which requires the officer to demonstrate proficiency at a minimum of one time per calendar year. This research project will address the question: Is there a need for a formal ongoing mandated ground combat training curriculum for police officers?

The intended method of inquiry will include a review of written and/or published data on the subject of ground combat training. A survey will also be utilized, along with personal interviews from various tactical instructors. The intended outcome is to exhibit that police officers are involved in physical confrontations more often than shootings. Additionally, the intended outcome is to demonstrate that a majority of these confrontations result in complaints filed on officers, as well as civil litigation. It is anticipated that this research will find that a vast majority of departments comply with the basic requirements set forth by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education. The research will also expose that the vast majority of departments do not

have policies regarding ongoing training or proficiency standards for their officer's ground combat skills.

Additionally, the research will prove that most officers are under-trained when it comes to ground combat. This lack of training can result in injuries to officers and display a poorly projected departmental image.

The benefit of this research offers that, department administrators will implement a set standard of ground combat training for their departments, which is at least comparable to their firearms training curriculum. This may result in fewer officer injuries and in a reduction of complaints. Overall, it would be hoped that the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education would institute a requirement regarding the mandatory training of ground combat for peace officers. Perhaps, when these situations are caught on camera it will not project a negative image when an officer is involved in a physical confrontation. Frequently, these situations are reported as beatings and can have that general appearance when the officer's skills are at a low standard and he resorts to street fighting techniques. Lastly, if the officer has developed and perfected his ground combat skills, this would result in a lower number of injuries for officers and thus reduce worker compensation claims and save departments in lost time and manpower.

Review of Literature

Information gathered from this author's research literature supports the hypothesis of a need for ongoing defensive tactics training for law enforcement officers. Researchers, along with experts in the field conclude that skills taught in ground combat or close quarter combat courses are a diminishing skill. If the officer does not continually practice these skills he/she will lose them. Literature also supports that if these skills are not second nature to the officer, he or she will hesitate in a crises and the tactic will no longer be effective.

Recognizing the pressure put on the modern officer not to rely heavily upon the use of their firearm in a dangerous situation, while keeping in mind that criminals have not become any less dangerous (Hibbard, 1980), again supports this theory. With this thought presented, it must be stated that by no means is ground combat training a replacement for the use of deadly force when warranted. It is only a recommendation that the skill of ground combat be perfected through training and have a standard of evaluation implemented to further assist officers in their daily job performance. The primary reason for all of the techniques is to restrain and control a suspect or assailant without the use of excessive force and without undue risk to the officer's safety or to the safety of the public (Hibbard, 1980).

Weapons have changed a bit, but the mortal mistakes have remained unchanged. Officers are dying because they performed a poor search, handcuffed improperly or simply got careless. They are dying because of bad habits. Officers are dying because of the sloppy “routine” they got away with numerous times before finally encountering an opportunist looking for just such a lapse in routine, conveniently enabling the suspect to attack a law enforcement officer (Greenwood, 1979).

This again supports the hypothesis that officers need to have ongoing ground combat training not only to perfect their skills but also to prevent them from becoming routine in their duties. Trainers could also utilize this time to educate officers on current trends and available statistics.

Some other factors that have compounded the present problem in recent years are the fact that height and weight requirements have been modified to the point where an officer today often finds himself facing a difficult, much larger and more powerful suspect (Roth, 1976). An officer needs superior methods to neutralize any physical or technical disadvantage (Roth, 1976). The psychological security blanket that the officer’s gun provides may diminish his reliance on empty hand and baton techniques (Roth, 1976).

Most officers will never (in their entire career) fire a gun while effecting and arrest. Yet the baton and unarmed techniques so often used rarely require any kind of qualification. It would seem that the faculties that are called upon most often should receive at least equal attention (Roth, 1976).

From a defensive tactics perspective, it is important that an officer learns how to use effective restraint techniques and have backup techniques should the restraint techniques fail. When involved in stressful situations without such knowledge and skills, an officer might escalate to a higher, and perhaps inappropriate, use of force, either because the officer does not feel comfortable using a lock, it fails, or he/she becomes fatigued (Kelly, 1998).

During a real fight for one's life, it is virtually impossible to deliver a stylized technique effectively; the speed, chaos, viciousness, confusion, and utter terror associated with a real fight precludes this. The nervous system simply becomes overloaded with a flood of sensory stimuli. The brain cannot be treated like an electronic dictionary of self-defense responses and expect to select the right "technique" to counter a "matching" attack under extreme duress (Perkins, 2000).

In summation of the aforementioned information, each author supports or recommends that training in ground combat is a vital skill in the law enforcement community. Authors have documented and referenced the Uniformed Crime Report Statistics, indicating that officers are continuously involved in physical confrontations on a daily basis and unfortunately some are hurt or regrettably killed. This alone, should be the driving force for requiring ground combat training and a standardized qualification scale.

Methodology

A comparison to mandated proficiency requirements and ongoing training towards firearms, Texas Peace Officers are not required to display any form of proficiency in ground combat training. Nor is there any uniformed standard requiring the ongoing training of officers in this same area. The problem presented is that without this requirement officers are allowed to slip into a relaxed state of proficiency. With this in mind, ground combat and its tactics are proven to be a diminishing skill if not practiced on continual bases.

To answer this problem, there should be a requirement by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education that law enforcement entities train their officers in ground combat on a continual bases. Or perhaps the agency itself should require ongoing training and

require qualifications by its officers. This statement is based in comparison to the requirement of law enforcement entities to keep records on their individual officer's firearm proficiency and have on going firearms training procedure. Following the standard for firearm proficiency, departments could have at least one officer certified as a ground combat instructor. Departments could then establish a training curriculum and document each officer's proficiency in ground combat along with continual training.

During the research stage many articles were found that support this inquiry, along with Supreme Court rulings in regards to state-of-the-art training that is task related to the officer (Harris vs. Ohio). It can be easily supported by the Uniformed Crime Report (UCR) statistics that officers are more likely to encounter physical confrontations than be involved in shootings. A survey has been utilized to discover how many departments are actually mandating ground combat training.

Lastly, and most importantly experts in the field of ground combat training state that this is a diminishing skill and there is a need to practice and maintain maximum skill level proficiencies.

Departments ranging from ten officers (small) up to two hundred and seventy six officers (large) have been surveyed to compare any variances in training provided to their officers. Understanding that this problem is not

restricted to geographic regions the survey will extend to all Texas regions. This survey consisted of ten questions that compare firearm training requirements to ground combat training requirements. Fifty questionnaires were sent out and thirty-four were completed and returned. This information is totaled together with emphasis on comparison to firearm training and ground combat training. There will also be a comparison of departmental policies and opinions regarding whether or not there is a belief that ground combat training should be mandated by the replying agencies' representative.

Findings

This author determined that ground combat techniques, as well as a great many hand-to-hand skills are considered a diminishing skill by all experts. With that in mind, ground combat techniques must be practiced by each person in order to keep his or her reflexes sharp. Without the practice, each person can loose levels of skill and techniques. This re-enforces the author's original hypothesis of a need for ongoing training and a standardized qualification for officers to achieve.

Another underlying fact that has to be addressed is that unfortunately not all officers will take a personal interest in this matter. This attitude will result in the lack of training on their part. This is possibly why TCLEOSE

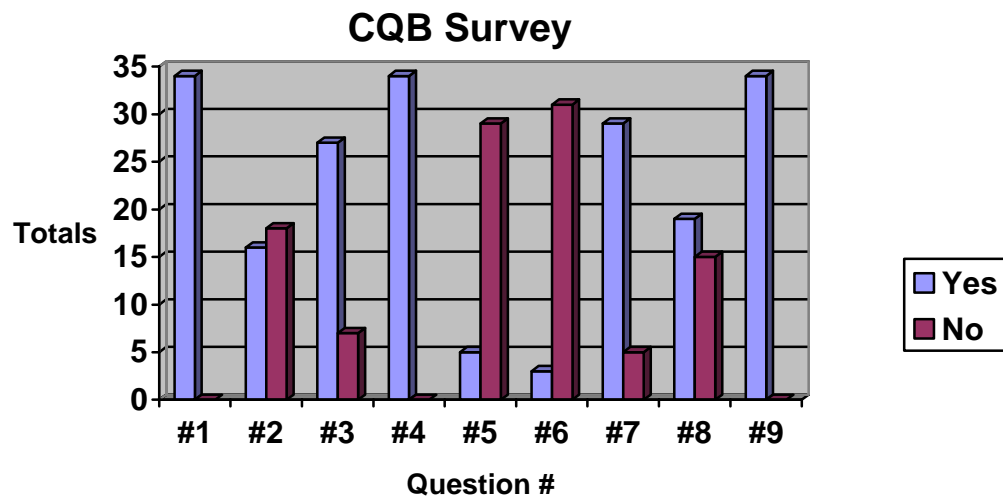
has set a mandatory requirement for proficiency in firearms. With regards to firearm training; it has been noted by firearm instructors that officers have arrived for annual qualifications and their firearms are in poor condition and in some cases have not been taken out of the holster since the last qualification.

Unfortunately, it is reasons like this and the diminishing skill concept that mandated training should be considered. As stated throughout this research, ground combat training is a skill as is firearms, if a person does not practice this skill it will be lost. This will occur over a period of time and the officer may not even realize that the skill is lost. The officer will continue on their day-to-day activities and at the most inopportune time, their skills might be tested. This test might manifest itself in the form of a physical confrontation with a suspect during an interview, arrest or any other situation. This of course is not the time for the officer to realize that their ground combat skill has become ineffective. An out-of-practice officer might resort to basic instincts and engage in an all out fistfight. This is usually the time when either the public or media is watching and the general appearance suggests that the officer is “beating” the suspect. If the officer had only practiced and perfected their skill level, the attack could be countered in a way that the appearance is not of a “beating” and the officer

could perhaps subdue the suspect, conserving energy and reducing risk of personal injury.

Why require a standardized qualification course? As with firearms, if the officer does not meet a minimum requirement or perhaps demonstrates an unsatisfactory level of performance, the officer can be further trained and their skill level can be improved. Qualifications are the correct time to identify any areas of weakness or concern, not during an actual encounter.

If department administrators would review statistics and implement a training requirement; this author is positive we would see a decline in job related injuries to officers involved in physical confrontations. This author further feels that there would be an increase in personal health which could equate to better job performance and productivity. Below are the results of the research survey broken down into a bar graph format. Fifty survey forms were sent out and thirty-four were returned.



<u>Question</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Does your agency conform to TCLEOSE's annual firearms qualification?	34 / 50	0 / 50
Does you agency exceed the minimum firearm requirements set forth by TCLEOSE?	16 / 50	18 / 50
Does your agency support ongoing or advanced firearms training for their officers?	27 / 50	7 / 50
Does you agency have a written policy regarding firearms proficiency?	34 / 50	0 / 50
Does your agency require or mandate any CQB or ground combat training?	5 / 50	29 / 50
Is there a written policy regarding CQB in your department?	3 / 50	31 / 50
In your department's use of force continuum, is physical force or strong-arm tactics cited?	29 / 50	5 / 50
In your opinion, are a majority of your department's injuries associate with physical confrontations?	19 / 50	15 / 50
Do you feel that mandatory training requirements for CQB would be appropriate for all departments?	34 / 50	0 / 50

After reviewing the information provided from the survey, it became apparent that all responding agencies do in fact conform to the minimum firearm standards set fourth by TCLEOSE, while almost half exceed the minimum requirements. Additionally, almost two thirds of the agencies support in some form additional or advanced firearms training.

Sadly, only 15 percent of the reporting agencies require or mandate any ground combat training leaving eighty-five percent with no ongoing training. Eighty-five percent is a large amount of officers performing day-to-day patrol activities, placing the odds against the officer when situations arise. With just slightly over half of the agencies reporting that a majority of their injuries are attributed to physical confrontations, this should give cause to concern of the issue.

Lastly, one hundred percent of the reporting agencies feel that mandatory ground combat training requirements would be appropriate. This should send a strong signal that there is a need to standardize this type of training and then mandate a qualification requirement. It is fair to say that with the increase in technology and law suit trends, agencies would take note of cases such as Harris vs. Ohio and stay on the cutting edge of training to head off future problems.

Conclusion

In today's world of higher technology and allocated resources to train law enforcement, officers often find themselves on the short end of the spectrum. Officers all too often have had little to no ongoing training in the area of ground combat which often results in injury to the officer or suspect. When a law enforcement officer is injured during a physical confrontation the results can be felt by all of his co-workers, by way of shift shortages. Agencies are not exempt either, when an officer is injured there are often worker compensation claims man power shortages that are usually filled by over time.

This study looked at the need for a mandated training program with a standardized mandatory requirement for qualifications in ground combat. The result would lead to the reduction of injuries to officers and suspects, further resulting in a protected relationship between law enforcement and the community. It is also anticipated that with higher skill levels and less injuries departments would see a reduction in worker compensation claims and lower overtime expenses.

During the research it was determined that experts agree that ground combat skills will diminish with time. Officers need to practice their ground combat skills in order to be prepared for any physical confrontation that

might occur at any given time. Statistically officers are more likely to be involved in a physical confrontation rather than shootings. This research in no way is intended to take any training away from firearms but should serve as a compliment to both disciplines through ongoing training and qualifications.

Many articles and books have been published that support this hypothesis and consequently the survey utilized during this research also supported the hypothesis.

This study has a relevant effect on law enforcement and considers that each day an officer is involved in any physical confrontation resulting in injury to the officer, suspect or perhaps resulting in a bad public image, subsequent training could have been eliminated such an outcome. It is hoped that through ongoing ground combat training officers may perform their jobs each day with minimal chance of injury.

References

- Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics. p.1-5, 8-10,173-177.
- Flesch, R.A. (1994). *Defensive Tactics for law enforcement, public safety & correction officers.* Longwood, Fla.: Gould Pub. p. 2-6.
- Garcia, David. (2002). *Common sense self-defense: 7 rules that can save yours life.* New York: Hatherleigh Press, p. xiii, xiv, 5-7, 41-47, 57.
- Given, Scott. (2000). *Unarmed tactics: A need for proficiency and qualification policy.* L.C.C.
- Greenwood, Colin (1979). *Police Tactics in armed operations.* Boulder, Colo.: Paladin Press. p. vii-xi, 18, 19, 27.
- Hibbard, Jack. (1980). *Weaponless defense: a law enforcement guide to non-violent control.* Springfield, III. Thomas. p. v-viii, 3-4.
- Kelly, Perry William. (1998). *The thinking officer's guide to police defensive tactics.* Springfield, III., Charles C. Thomas., p. 12,13,20,21,43-46,52,63.
- Perkins, John (2000). *Attack proof: the ultimate guide to personal protection*
- Roth, Jordan. (1976). *Officer Survival: arrest and control.* Santa Cruz, CA.: Davis Pub. Co. p. preface, 1-2.
- Sylvain, Georges. (1971). *Defense and control tactics.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall. p. intro, preface, 70-72.

**Ground Combat / Close Quarter Combat
Verses
Firearms Training
Survey**

Name and position:_____

Name of Agency:_____

Department size:_____

1. Does your agency conform to TCLEOSE's annual firearm qualification? Yes or No
2. Does your agency exceed the minimum firearm requirements set forth by TCLEOSE? Yes or No

If question number two is yes, how many times per year?_____

3. Does your agency support ongoing or advanced firearms training for their officers? Yes or No
4. Does your agency have a written policy regarding firearms proficiency? Yes or No
5. Does your agency require or mandate any CQB or ground combat training? Yes or No
6. Is there a written policy regarding CQB training within your department? Yes or No
7. In your department's use of force continuum, is physical force or strong arm tactics cited? Yes or No
8. In your opinion, are a majority of your department's injuries associated with physical confrontations? Yes or No

9. Do you feel that mandatory training requirements for CQB would be appropriate for all departments? Yes or No

If No, give a short reason
