



PERFORM ON DEMAND

DON'T TRAIN TO DIE

BY FRANCIS DUFFY

I recall training at the Blackwater training facility (now Academi Training Center) in Moyock, North Carolina.

We were engaged in Simunition training inside a shoot-house. One member of our team was shot with a Simunition round and he stopped fighting. The instructor said loud enough for all of us to hear: "Train to live. Don't train to die." By stopping, our team mate took himself out of the fight. He was training to die.

The Spartan Firearms Training Group, LLC has been delivering high quality firearms training since 2016. We have trained thousands of Maryland residents and we train with some of

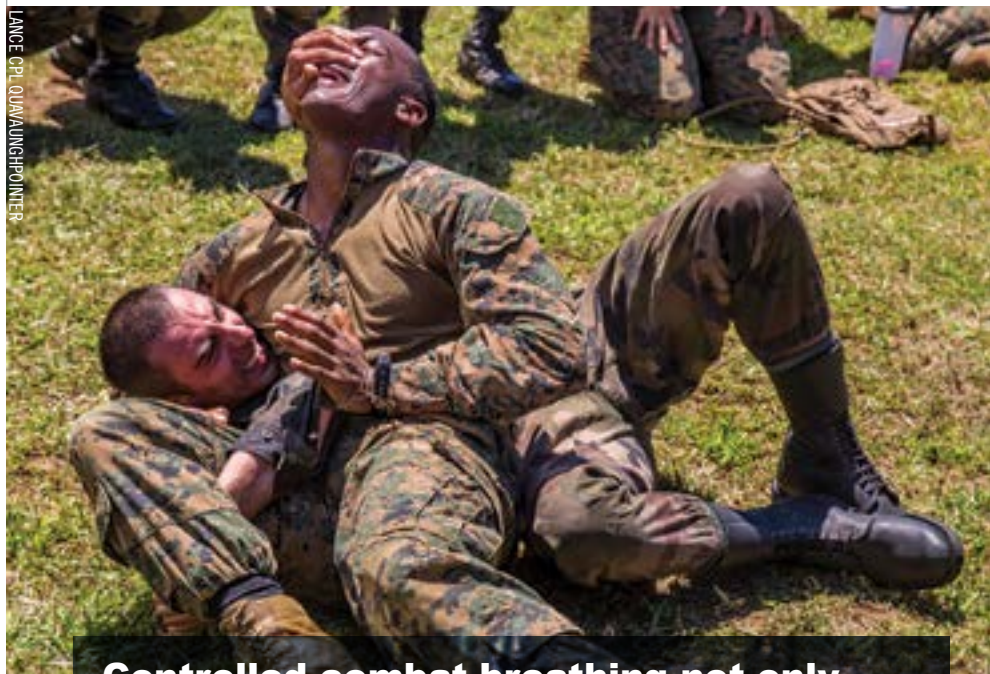
the best veteran special operations warriors in the world. We take what we learn from those warriors and pay it forward to our customers.

One of the things we learned from those warriors and from my own experience serving in Special Forces is about the critical importance of being able to perform on demand. Performing on demand means responding to a deadly force threat quickly and effectively.

The ability to perform on demand requires mental toughness. Mental toughness does not mean having guts or being exceptionally

brave. Mental toughness is about preparing yourself mentally, physically and emotionally to perform on demand when faced with a deadly force threat.

You develop mental toughness by designing and following a specific training routine. The training routine we recommend has several components: combat breathing, using a centering statement, using positive self-talk, performing firearms skills perfectly, visualization, engaging in Simunition and shoot/move drills, and combat conditioning.



Controlled combat breathing not only helps with firearm skills, but can also get you through strenuous physical demands.

COMBAT BREATHING

Use combat breathing before you start your dry practice or live-fire training. Here's how: Breathe through your nose. Breathe deep into your abdomen. Inhale for a count of 6 seconds, hold for 2 seconds and exhale for 6 seconds. Repeat for a few cycles.

CENTERING STATEMENT

While training, use a slogan or a thought to center yourself before pressing the trigger. This should be something that is embedded in your subconscious and quickly accessible. One I learned from the instructor who teaches our emergency casualty care course is "not here, not now, not this way." In other words, "bad guy, you are not doing this to me...not here, not now, not this way." When I am engaged in dry- or live-fire practice, while looking at the target, I repeat this thought before pressing the trigger.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Develop the practice of using positive self-talk about your gun handling and marksmanship skills. Don't self-criticize—do self-praise. It really does have a positive effect on your subconscious and ultimately on your performance; for example, I often use statements like: "I am an excellent shooter. I hit the target all the time. I press the trigger to the wall and then break the shot."

PERFORM SKILLS PERFECTLY

Many people believe that gun handling and marksmanship skills are developed on the range doing live-fire drills. Competition shooters and skilled warriors know that firearm skills are developed along several different pathways that include proper instruction, an uncompromising dedication to dry practice, and comparatively little live-fire practice.

You use an unloaded firearm to engage in dry practice with absolutely no ammunition in the training space. You can practice most of the firing cycle skills through dry practice. These skills include: drawing from concealment, acquiring the target, aiming (sight alignment and sight picture), reloads, immediate action, use of lights, and trigger press. You will likely be unable to practice resetting the trigger without racking the slide repeatedly, however, a company called DryFireMag (www.dryfiremag.com) sells magazines that allow you to dry fire and experience trigger reset without racking the slide. You cannot manage recoil while doing dry practice drills.

Practicing correct skills incorrectly or practicing the wrong skills correctly creates training scars that are difficult to fix. We experience this phenomenon on the live-fire range with some of our concealed carry students. Some of them have years of shooting experience, but have never received proper instruction on safe and efficient firearm skills; for ex-

ample, they use inferior gripping technique, or they use an inferior trigger press, or they do not properly align their sights. When we see this happening, we give those students real-time feedback. When we see them repeat the same errors again and again, we know incorrect skills have been programmed into their brains and that programming interferes with learning and executing superior skills.

Neural pathways are created in your brain to accommodate new skills. Myelin coats the neural pathways as you continue to train a particular skill. The myelin becomes thicker as you train. The neural pathways layered with thick coats of myelin become very efficient, which helps you to use those skills quickly and effectively without thinking. But there is a catch.

If you practice a correct skill incorrectly you are training your brain and subconscious to implement that skill incorrectly. If you practice incorrect skills correctly you are training your brain to use the incorrect skills. You are training yourself to fail in both instances.

The myelin that is created is not removed from those neural pathways that have been trained to fail. You will need to create new neural pathways to accommodate superior skills practiced correctly, and that requires good instruction and time.

If you are ever faced with a deadly force threat you must find solutions in the moment. You will not have time to contemplate all of your options. You must react with speed and effectiveness. If the solutions you need in the moment are not correctly trained into your subconscious you will likely not survive.

When you are engaged in skill-training you are also programming your subconscious to perform. In the data-analysis world they say: "garbage in, garbage out." Once the wrong skills or the correct skills trained incorrectly are programmed into our subconscious it will take even more effort and time to correct and rewrite the subconscious training programs into new neural pathways.

VISUALIZATION

Visualization is a process for using mental imagery to see yourself doing something before actually doing it. Top athletes and skilled military operators use this process to imagine how they will perform in real time.

We advise our wear and carry students to engage in visualization. We tell them to imagine possible scenarios in which they could possibly find themselves; for example, imagine

yourself walking across a parking lot and gunfire breaks out. What will you do? Imagine you are in a convenience store and an armed robber enters. What will you do?

The late Colonel Jeff Cooper, founder of Gunsite Academy, famously offered advice to his students. He said something like this: If you face a deadly force threat you must think “I knew this could happen one day and I know what to do about it.” Visualization combined with your skills-training helps you to “know what to do about it.”

Having solutions pre-programmed is important. Visualizations provide you with mental scripts that can be converted into solutions in the moment.

Here is one way to engage in a visualization process:

- Visualize yourself perfectly performing gun handling and marksmanship skills while training (dry practice or live-fire);
- Find a firearms training facility that has a 300-degree simulator that you can walk into and have bad guys on a screen shooting at you while you return fire with a handgun outfitted with a laser (where I live in Maryland there is a facility like this called the Gentry Club of Maryland).
- Visualize situations that you might find yourself in and imagine what you will do to survive.
- Occasionally, visualize a “worst-case” scenario where you are wounded or injured. Visualize how you will stay in the fight and prevail.
- Always see yourself winning the fight.

SIMUNITION

Some of the most realistic firearms training we have ever engaged in used Simunition and shoot and move drills. A Simunition round looks like a real cartridge, but the projectile is replaced with a plastic tip filled with a paint-like substance. Getting shot with one normally hurts (even with protective gear there are still parts of the body that are exposed. I still have a scar on my bicep from a Simunition round).

When you engage in live-fire training on a flat range the targets are normally stationary, they don’t shoot back, and you likely stand in one spot. This is not training for the fight of your life, although it is good for improving your marksmanship. Finding a training venue where you can engage in shoot and move drills, especially with other role players shooting at you with Simunition can be truly realistic and effective training.



Strength and stamina can help win the fight.

COMBAT CONDITIONING

Although strength and aerobic conditioning can improve your odds of surviving a gun fight, most deadly force encounters with a handgun don’t last long and some only last a few seconds. However, if you have to move quickly to find concealment or cover then strength and aerobic conditioning become very important and there is no way of knowing if the fight you are confronted with will be a gunfight. You may need to drag someone to safety.

Combat conditioning has three major components: strength training, cardio training and optimum body composition.

Strength Training: Mark Rippetoe, a famous strength trainer once said “Stronger people are harder to kill.” Strength training makes it easier to move your bodyweight for longer periods, which means your stamina increases.

Cardio Training: The cardio-respiratory system includes the heart, lungs and circulatory system. This system experiences significant stress when faced with a deadly force encounter. That level of stress requires an increase in cardio-respiratory capacity if you want to prevail. We encourage our wear and carry students to incorporate cardio training with their strength training.

Body Composition: The final component of combat conditioning is healthy body composition. Body composition is the relative proportions of protein, fat, water and mineral components in the body. It is calculated by measuring total body fat and fat-free body mass that includes muscle, water and bone.

Body composition varies among individuals because of differences in body density and degree of obesity. Healthy adult males have 6% to 24% fat while healthy adult females have between 14% and 31% fat. Your level or percent-

age of body fat will be significantly affected by your diet and training regimen.

A sensible and consistent combat conditioning program accompanied with a healthy diet will facilitate optimum body composition. Don’t neglect this aspect of combat conditioning.

CONCLUSION

Your life or the lives of your loved ones will depend on your ability to find fast and effective solutions, in the moment, for escaping or neutralizing threats. Competition shooters and top warriors relentlessly engage in dry practice. This means you have no excuse for not training because you can dry practice any time, day or night, and it won’t cost you a penny. You should also engage in live-fire training and shoot/move training with Simunition rounds. As you visualize possible deadly threat scenarios you might face, imagine yourself dealing effectively with the threat. Imagine a worst-case scenario where you have been wounded while staying in the fight and prevailing. Do not forget to work on your strength and conditioning. Not only will you improve your ability to survive a deadly threat, you will also improve your quality of life. Don’t train to die. ✓

BIO

Francis Duffy, Ph. D, is a U.S. Army Special Forces veteran of the 6th and 5th Special Forces Groups, a graduate of the Army Ranger School, and a combat diver. Frank is also a certified executive protection specialist and is the co-founder and vice president of the Maryland-based Spartan Firearms Training Group (www.spartanftg.com).