

The most minor of distractions must be exploited in order to win the day.



TAC PRO
SHOOTING CENTER
Tel 254-968-3112

FAST AND FURIOUS!

FORCE-ON-FORCE

I am lying on the ground in a pool of blood.

Through a haze induced by the wound causing the excruciating pain in the back of my head, I see the scumbag that attempted to rob me at gunpoint unconscious, fifteen feet away. I remember him coming out from the side of the building asking for spare change. It struck me strange that some-

one looking for a handout would have his hands in his pockets. I acquired a firing grip on my Glock 9mm and challenged him verbally. Everything went into slow motion as he produced a snub-nosed revolver. I drew immediately and began to fire. He went down and I moved forward to disarm him. Struggling to

remain conscious, I can see his partner going through the cash bag I was taking to the night deposit box. The Louisville Slugger in his hand explains my current condition. I had forgotten that criminals often prefer to operate in pairs to bolster each other's courage and serve as backup in case something goes wrong.

This story is real.

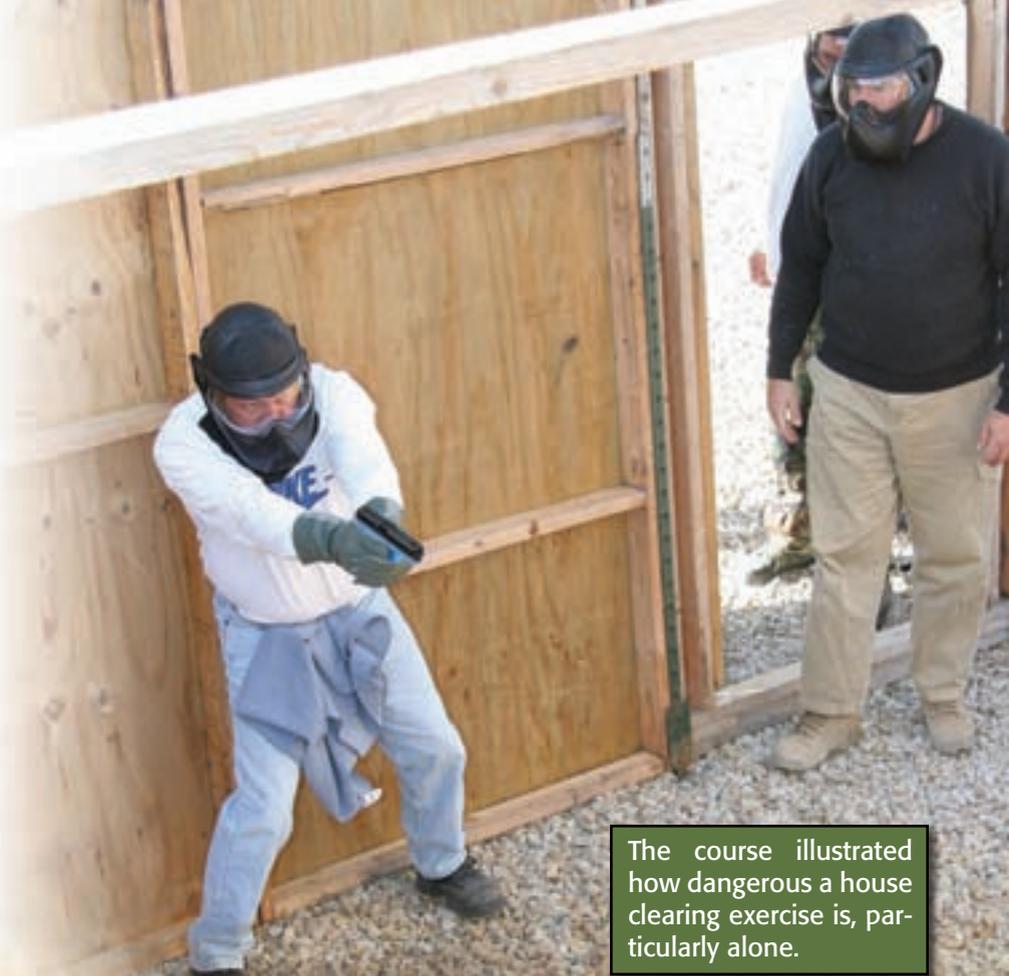
It also happened eleven times as each of the students of Bill Davison's Force-on-Force course confronted this real world scenario with an unhappy ending. Many met the same fate as the business owner in real life. All knew from Davison's instruction that they must break free from the tunnel vision focus on the immediate threat and scan the area for additional attackers. All of the students had prior training that repeatedly emphasized these points. Yet, even on a familiar range and wearing protective gear, tremendous stress was created by



Bill Davison (foreground) oversees a student and instructor practicing one of the simple techniques taught in the course.

the scenario and by targets that moved and shot back. It was enough to cause many to forget their training and they became fixated on the first target they noticed. Frankly, that is what this course is really all about—an opportunity to experience a real gunfight without anyone going to the hospital or morgue. Force-on-force training has long been used by military and law enforcement to hone their skills in realistic scenarios.

The demanding training needs of these professionals led to the development of products like Simunition®. These fire small paint cartridges from Simunition's firearms and allow students to safely use the same skills they develop on the firing line in live confrontations. Everything common to a firearm—manual of arms, recoiling slide, ejecting brass, sight picture, and the occasional malfunction—is common to Simunition weapons as well. The Simunition's cartridges are brass-cased cartridges containing a plastic cup filled with a marking agent protected by a plastic cover. During firing, the plastic cover is discarded and the plastic cup



The course illustrated how dangerous a house clearing exercise is, particularly alone.

⊙ BY TIM McCORD AND KELLY McWETHY
⊙ PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM McCORD

TRAINING AT TAC-PRO



Notice the student's weapon at slide lock. Davison stresses the critical importance of practicing stoppage drills as a life-saving skill.

travels a trajectory similar to a live 9mm round for about ten yards. After that, it drops more rapidly and is affected more by wind but remains effective to about twenty-five yards. Upon striking its target, the water-soluble, colored soap used as the marking agent leaves a small star-shaped mark where it strikes to indicate the hit. This can prove useful, as students experiencing a surge of adrenaline don't always realize they have been hit during a confrontation, especially when the hit strikes the protective gear worn by the student. Strict monitoring by instructors, as well as barrel inserts and slides that will not accept live ammo, are used to ensure that only the Simunitions are used during training.

Unfortunately, few ranges offer Simunition force-on-force training to civilians. Legal concerns, a necessary skill base in the students, higher instructor-to-student ratio and higher maintenance and equipment costs mean that those ranges that do offer force-on-force training often choose to rely on less expensive alternatives such as Airsoft. While these can provide a valuable training experience, they do lack several elements common to Simunitions. Airsoft weapons do not always have the same manual of arms as the weapons they mimic. They may not recoil the slide and show a changing sight picture as part of the firing process. They also do not afford the same opportunities to practice weapons clearance in a stressful environment.

With a Simunition weapon, malfunctions are cleared just as they would be with that type of firearm. An instructor can yell at you all day long to move to cover as you stand on the range punching paper and practicing clearance drills. The same lesson can be taught in a fraction of the time when the target is moving and shooting at you with Simunitions. Another reason these lessons are learned much faster is that Simunitions present a stronger negative incentive compared to many alternatives (like plastic BBs). The small plastic cup of the Simunition's marking round strikes with more force than Airsoft and gives the student instant feed-

back that he is doing something wrong.

Tac-Pro Shooting Center in Mingus, Texas is one of the few ranges nationwide that have chosen to make the investment and offer such training to qualified private citizens. Much like the business owner who inspired the aforementioned training scenario, there are many citizens who are qualified to carry firearms and who can benefit greatly from this type of training. I joined ten other such students in taking the first Simunition's Force-on-Force course offered to us in Texas. In order to take the course, students must first have attended Davison's Primary and Intermediate Pistol courses. This ensures that each student has the common



The speed with which a situation can turn fatal was a revelation for many.

training and skills necessary to guarantee safety during the force-on-force course.

Safety was stressed throughout the entire course. Students received instruction in how to don and wear the protective gear properly and were briefed on the rules that would govern all the scenarios we would experience. For our class of eleven, we had Davison as the primary instructor with four assistants to give a student-to-instructor ratio of 2-1. The high number of instructors made certain that each student received plenty of personal attention and that safety procedures were rigorously followed.

The professionalism of the instructors was demonstrated well on the first day as we met for the initial class brief and then proceeded outdoors to learn some basic strikes and disarm techniques. This was the first indication that this was no ordinary marksmanship course.

Davison affirmed that most fights, handgun or otherwise, occur at or near

contact distance. Training in weapons retention, disarms, knife defense and hand-to-hand combat are too often overlooked by concealed handgun license holders. Bill personally demonstrated each of the techniques. The students were then divided into groups of three or four to practice the techniques on a heavy bag, a moving and bobbing target, an instructor-held heavy pad or each other as the situation dictated. For many, this was their first introduction to martial arts. Bill encouraged us all to seek further unarmed defense training. Despite some enthusiastic and occasionally aggressive practice, the instructors remained pleasant and professional.

After a quick break for lunch, the class returned to begin the first of the force-on-force scenarios. Each student was briefed prior to the scenario. Safety was once again emphasized and each student was searched prior to entering the training environment to ensure no live weapons or ammunition were introduced. Scenarios could be solved a number of ways and, where possible, students were allowed to

continue the scenario with different solutions. Many of the scenarios took place in the tactical bay where a shoot house had been constructed of plywood. This served as a temporary structure while a permanent Close Quarter Battle (CQB) house is being built complete with movable walls and suitable for both frangible and Simunition loads.

The layout of the shoot house was almost diabolical in the sense that there seemed to be nowhere to hide. You cannot just hang out in one area and wait for the bad guy to show himself. There are too many ways to be flanked. Use of cover, dynamic movement, shooting on the move, constant 360 degree scanning, along with good old-fashioned marksmanship fundamentals must be orchestrated perfectly to survive.

We learned some harsh lessons during this course—lessons that could save our lives. What struck me most dramatically was how, under stress, the brain taps into the routines practiced repeatedly on



Still focused on the initial attacker, this is the price for failing to scan for additional threats.

the range. This was a horrifying epiphany for many of us.

The story is often the same. We live in urban areas where the nearest ranges are most often indoors. For the sake of convenience, that is where we get most of our trigger time. What we did not understand is that we are conditioning ourselves to be excellent targets.

An assigned shooting lane requires standing stock-still while firing. The target, naturally, is stationary as well. We do most of our practice firing with a solid two-handed grip, and shoot mostly for precision because everyone likes to shoot nice tight groups. We practice what we are good at and that which is fun. Clearing stoppages, shooting one-handed and drawing from concealment are not particularly fun. Unfortunately, in the real world, this can translate into being frozen in one position, unaccustomed to shooting from cover or from awkward positions, and staring at a double feed stoppage while we die unceremoniously from multiple gunshot wounds.

We learned that the stylized gunfights seen on television bear little resemblance to a real armed confrontation. The distances are short, a few yards to contact distance. The assault is over in mere heartbeats. The bad guys are not all terrible shots. It is not always easy to know who is a good guy and who is a bad guy. The bad guy is not going to fall as if struck in the head with a sledgehammer the first time a bullet finds its mark. There is no surrender. Once the fight is on, quitting is fatal. A gunfight is a brutal, cruel, confusing, horrifying event. There is no second place winner. These are things we have all read in books and S.W.A.T. Magazine and have been told by respected instructors. Now we finally get it. This is an understanding that most people attain only as a result of an actual gunfight that they may or may not survive.

Many concealed handgun license (CHL) holders receive little, if any, formal training and practice rarely. The stu-

dents in this class represent some of the best-trained CHL holders. All of them have received repeated professional instruction. Many are active competitive shooters. They practice regularly. Yet, all recognized the need for better and more focused training as a result of this course.

So the question presents itself: what should we be doing differently? Here are some of the things Davison will tell you:

- Practice primarily at those places, like Tac-Pro Shooting Center, where they have the facilities to train in a tactical manner.
- Shoot on the move.
- Learn to make effective hits on target while out of breath, off balance and under pressure.
- Practice drawing your weapon from concealment, the way you actually carry it on the street and with the urgency that your life depends on it.
- Practice on moving and reactive targets.
- Practice stoppage drills until they are second nature.

Many of the students remarked afterwards that the force-on-force course was the single most significant firearms training they had received. Be prepared to check your ego at the door. The slightest weaknesses in your training, practice routines or mindset will become obvious in short order. Everyone was amazed at how difficult it is to perform when your brain is experiencing the overwhelming levels of stress encountered through these scenarios. You have to experience it to appreciate it and that is truly the point of this course.

It is often said that there is no substitute for experience. A gunfight is a very unforgiving predicament in which to learn. At Tac-Pro Shooting Center you can file away life-saving experiences into your memory that may very well make the difference between survival and death. ☺

SOURCE:

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