Conflict Scenario Training
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Imagine having the ability to implant artificial memories into a fighter's brain that can be recalled instantly in a crisis situation giving the fighter needed tactical solutions. That's exactly what the United States military and law enforcement agencies have been doing for years to prepare their personnel for conflict. Unfortunately, civilian martial artists have had the same access to these "implants" for years, but have virtually ignored this growing trend.

Artificial experiences may sound futuristic, and in some cases how they are achieved are, but the basic techniques used by today's military and law enforcement to produce efficient fighters is anything but "high-tech." The key component to any realistic conflict based program is Conflict Scenario Training. In other words, role-playing; using actors to simulate a potential conflict likely to be encountered.

Examples of scenarios used by today's military include battlefield conditions, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping missions, and other military objectives. Law enforcement scenarios include crimes in progress, shoot-don't-shoot situations, and arrest and control tactics. For the martial arts world the possibilities for realistic scenarios are endless: simulated carjackings, muggings, rape prevention, robberies, hate crimes, gang attacks, etc.

Learning Modality

The human brain is a pattern-seeking, pattern-detecting organ. Our behavior, including future behavior, is based upon our past experiences. We learn through three levels of modality: visual (seeing), auditory (hearing), and kinesthetic (touching). When you participate in scenario training you are actually stimulating all three levels of the learning modality. The more realistic the training the more powerful the experience will be.

Although scenario training is not "real" in the true definition of the word, scenarios trigger the same psychophysiological responses that are experienced in an actual crisis. Thus, participation in scenarios creates artificial memories that have the same "feel" as the real thing, and are recalled just like real experiences. Let me give you an example of what I mean from my own experience.

When I was in the police academy (the Orange County Sheriff’s Training Academy, California, Class 104) running through scenarios, learning how to conduct building searches, a woman popped out from underneath a kitchen sink cabinet armed with a gun. Back in 1991 we used laser training weapons similar to the military's MILES system. I confess that she caught me slightly off guard, and we had a "shoot out" between the kitchen and dining room. The result of that scenario is that to this very day, when I am doing building searches, I always check cabinets, cupboards, and cubbyholes where a person can hide, because that conflict scenario that I experienced on that training day is forever etched in my mind. Although that particular academy scenario was not "real," in the sense that she was only a role player firing a laser, the lesson learned from it was very real, and had a profound impact me.

The obvious benefit to having "been there, done that" of scenario training is that they help reduce "reaction time" if confronted with the real event in the future. If you have
experienced a similar past event, either real or in a scenario, and you have been trained to take the appropriate actions, you are less likely to succumb to mental paralysis or "freezing up syndrome" induced by shock or fear associated with the real thing. If you've seen it before, you know what follows.

**Components of Conflict Scenario Training**

There are five components of conflict scenario training which are foundational to law enforcement and military training programs, which you can adopt for your own training program. These components are especially important for martial arts schools in that they will help make a program that much more professional.

1. **Academic studies** - learning everything possible, in a classroom setting, about the subject matter: history, statistics, case studies, nomenclature, and theory.

2. **Physical training** - preparing the body for the tasks at hand through various forms of physical training: flexibility (stretching), cardiovascular fitness (aerobic), muscular fitness (strength and endurance), and body composition (good diet).


4. **Practical Application** (also known as "Prac App") - movements and combinations, which were learned in the techniques phase, are tested, along with all necessary equipment, in a spatially accurate environment that simulates the conflict zone in which you will fight in. Prac App is also referred to as "walk-throughs." For example, when SWAT teams are taught how to move down a hallway together they may start by learning the techniques (proper speed, staying together, proper weapons position, etc.) in a large room, perhaps nowhere near a hallway. When they move onto Prac App they will take what they have learned and apply it by walking through a set of cones to simulate a hallway or actually find a real hallway to move through wearing full tactical gear and carrying their actual duty weapons while going "dry" (no ammo).

5. **Scenario Training** - learning through simulations, either by human participants (role players) or computer simulators, for the purpose of conflict stress management, risk assessment, target identification and acquisition, and to develop the O.O.D.A. (observe, orient, decide, act) process.

Generally, most civilian martial arts schools are very good at providing their students with the components of physical training and self-defense techniques, but fall short when it comes to academic studies, practical application, and scenario training. But, before we move onto our main topic of scenario training here are some helpful hits to bolster deficient areas.

Concerning academic requirements a martial school should stay on top of crime trends in their area and pass them down to their students. After all, most adult students enroll themselves in a school for the sole purpose of learning how to defend themselves from potential threats in their area. Knowing these crime trends, of course, will also serve as
the basis for some of your scenarios. If your region is experiencing an increase in armed robberies at knife point, for example, then you should include this kind of scenario in your training. In addition to crime trends, a basic education of criminal laws (the state Penal Code), as it applies to martial arts issues, should also be a part of any good academics program. Being ignorant of local, state, and federal laws is a recipe to legal disaster, both civil and criminal.

When it comes to practical application many martial artists think sparring and reaction drills fulfill this requirement, however, there's more to it than that. One aspect of Prac App, often overlooked by martial artists, is wearing the exact same clothes that you'll fight in. When I train law enforcement officers in defensive tactics and military personnel in combatives (our professional terms for martial arts training) I have my students wear exactly what they would wear on a real call-out or mission. If they are on a tactical team they’ll wear the full 50 - 60 pounds of tactical gear that they normally would, because that's exactly what they'll have on if they go toe-to-toe with a suspect. Likewise, if a student wears a business suit while working undercover as a detective or bodyguard, they train with me in a business suit; an old one of course. You too should also conduct your Prac App training wearing the same type of clothes that you are most likely to get into a conflict in. Again, it doesn't mean you have to learn your techniques wearing them, only that you should "try" them out during this phase of your training to determine their restrictions.

In addition to clothing and equipment, practical application also means testing techniques in the type of environment that you'll actually fight in. For example, if you're likely to be attacked in an elevator, then tape off a space the size of an elevator on the mat or floor where you train. Better yet, try using an actual elevator if you have access to one. You'll find out real fast what works and what doesn't when techniques are "field tested." Obviously, there's not much room inside an elevator, and close quarters type techniques is the only option.

Prac App, through proper attire and spatial studies, actually serves to help you get to the final level of your training - scenario training. Although setting up your own scenarios may sound complicated and expensive, you'll find that you can conduct your own scenarios at any level, and at a budget that will meet your needs. There are only three elements required to conduct scenarios: a stage, props, and role players.

The Stage

Setting the "stage" (creating a realistic training environment) is crucial when it comes to scenario training. The military has understood this for years and has invested millions of dollars in providing adequate facilities. In 1993 the U.S. Marine Corps officially opened one of the most realistic scenario training centers in the country called the Military Operations Urban Terrain (MOUT) Training Facility at Camp Pendleton, California. At a cost of $8.4 million, MOUT is a replica city built on 27 acres of land sandwiched between several hills and a running creek. There are 26 buildings (some built battle damaged), 1/4 mile of underground storm drains, telephone poles, street lamps, vehicles and debris. As the name of the facility implies, the area is used to train Marines, and other "guests," how to fight in an urban environment. In addition to company and platoon size battle scenarios, using blanks or BB guns, which take place there, it's not
uncommon for small Special Operations (SPECOPS) teams to sign out a building or two to practice hostage rescue scenarios and other surgical strikes.

In November 2007 the United States Army built their deluxe MOUT training facility at Fort Irwin, California. The $12 million site includes 41 main buildings, a government complex and a consulate and another 24 smaller structures such as guard towers. The Army plans on having this as the National Training Center and when it is completed it will have 500 buildings making it the largest in the world.

In addition to "kill houses" (buildings designed for live-fire training), and other facilities for scenarios, the U.S. Army utilizes public areas as well to bring scenario training to a higher level. In order for a soldier to obtain the coveted U.S. Army Special Forces "tab" (the arched patch with reads - SPECIAL FORCES), and be able to sport the famous green beret, he must first pass the most realistic scenario training the Army has to offer - the third phase of the "Q Course" (Special Forces Qualification Course) known as "Robin Sage."

Robin Sage, a three-week final exam, is conducted in the Uwharrie National Forest in central North Carolina. There, the students (called candidates) must equip and train a guerrilla force and civilian auxiliary (roles played by local civilians), just as they will be required to do in future real-world missions.

Of course, the list is long when it comes to military facilities with areas specifically designed for scenario training: the U.S. Navy SEALs have facilities in Coronado, Camp Pendleton, San Clemente Island, California and Camp Peary, Virginia, the Ranger Training Battalions have their own in Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina, the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School is located at Hurlburt Field, Florida, and Delta Force trains at Fort Bragg's Special Operations Training Center.

As mentioned before, it's not just the military pumping money and resources into conflict scenario training, but law enforcement as well. With over 70,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States the number of training facilities surpasses the military. One such facility is the Orange County Sheriff's Department Tactical Training Center in Southern California. This is the same department I went through the police academy and then several years later served there as a sergeant on the Dignitary Protection Unit. In addition to classrooms and live-fire ranges the TTC have an elaborate training area called Laser Village. This training facility has what they call "a village scenario complex." It's a recreated city street comprised of a bank, gas station, fast food restaurant, bar, store, a few houses, street signs, mailboxes - the works. Both academy recruits and experienced officers train there day and night testing their skills against live role players using the Simunition (FX) weapon system (paint bullets fired from actual firearms).

Just north of the Orange County line the Los Angeles Police Department, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department and other surrounding L.A. agencies train in some of the most expensive, and most famous, scenario facilities in the world - the actual movie sets of Universal Studios in Hollywood, and other movie production facilities in Burbank, California. Like the military, there are numerous training facilities that cater to scenario training. The FBI has its training complex at Quantico, Virginia, the U.S. Marshal Services SOG have their 40-acre site in Louisiana, the U.S. Secret Service's facility is in Beltsville, Maryland, the Department of Energy Training Site is located in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and so forth. Even agencies that do not have facilities of their own will
conduct scenario training in their own city or county buildings, abandoned houses, or get permission from business owners to use warehouses, restaurants, and other buildings.

Unfortunately, most martial arts schools and individual practitioners do not have the resources that local, state, and federal governments have in order to train in state-of-the-art facilities, but that doesn't mean that you have to do without. A lot of training can be conducted "on location" (back alleys, parking lots, a friend's business, etc.). If you're going to do a scenario involving a mugging, for example, then a nearby alley would be ideal. This may pose no problem for a few martial artists who workout together on their own, but it may be a logistical nightmare for a martial arts school, not to mention possible insurance coverage problems. So, for schools I recommend turning your school into a stage.

For a lot of martial arts school owners my suggestion is going to seem radical and revolutionary, but if you consider what I'm about to suggest to you, you will have a glimpse into the future; the next evolutionary process of civilian martial arts. That’s what the Jim Wagner Reality-Based Personal Protection system is all about.

I recommend that the main training area of your martial arts school be painted entirely black; the walls, ceiling, floors, windows - everything. Then attach spotlights to the ceiling that will light specific areas on the floor. By doing this you will be creating a stage just like a drama department or a theatre would.

When techniques are being taught you can have the bright fluorescent lights on, but when you are conducting scenarios you will kill the house lights and shine a spotlight on the conflict zone. A blacked out studio with spots will create an illusion of unlimited space, it will set desired "moods," and simulate low-light level conditions. Obviously, the bigger the room the greater the effect. Many police indoor firing ranges are configured this way for the very same reasons.

Of course, once you manipulate the environment, the stage will come alive when props are introduced.

**Props**

As martial artists most of us are already used to using objects (props) to make our training more realistic, such as rubber guns when learning gun takeaway techniques. However, more can be included to enhance scenarios than just replica weapons.

When I teach my Women’s Survival course I have female students wear jumpsuits. Over the jumpsuits they wore "tear away" clothes (clothes which were purposely weakened at the seams so they could be torn off the body easily). The male students, playing the roles of sexual predators, try to rip the tear away clothes off the "victims" during the scenarios if they can. The props (the tear away clothes) not only made the scenarios disturbingly realistic, but the students also learned when to strike, such as when the rapists were busy trying to strip them.

Tear away clothes are only one of many props used in this course. I routinely have my students fight from underneath blankets during "bed assaults," from inside an actual vehicle to simulate date rapes, and I even outfit the male aggressors with costumes (personal accessory props) which would fit over the protective gear. The costumes included outfits for transients, businessmen, construction workers, etc. Yet, such creativity is not limited to rape prevention courses. Props can be incorporated into every
type of conflict scenario. When simulating a carjacking or robbery I have the "suspect" wear a ski mask. Even a large stretched out ski mask over a protective helmet makes things more realistic. When simulating a bar fight I have the aggressor gargle with an alcoholic beverage beforehand so the smell will be on his, or her, breath. In addition, the "drunk" can be armed with a "breakaway" beer bottle (made of non-injuring breakable resin) which can be purchased through any theatrical supplier.

The problem with training in most martial arts schools is that training environment is "sterile:" free of debris or obstacles. In real conflicts tripping over objects is a very strong possibility. Props can help you get used to such likely circumstances. Just as they do on Hollywood movie sets, you too can take chunks of foam rubber (found in most hardware stores) and paint them to look like rocks, bricks or wood and scatter them on the floor in the conflict zone of your scenario. Styrofoam peanuts can be painted dark gray to simulated gravel. Sanitized trash (rinsed out milk cartons, cereal boxes, and plastic bottles) can be spread out over the floor to simulated alley debris which can get in the way and serve as tripping objects. Cardboard boxes can be stacked, taped together, and painted to represent furniture. Falling on empty boxes is a lot safer than on an actual dresser or nightstand. Cardboard boxes give way and collapse, which make them ideal props. Plus, they can be easily found behind any grocery store or other businesses (get permission first since many cities have scavenging laws).

The possibilities for props are limitless. When putting together scenarios just think of what kind of objects would be present in a real situation, and find replicas substitutes that will be safe and yet add realism.

Role Players

In order to have successful scenarios you must have role players (actors), and you need not conduct a talent search to find them either. Those you already train with will be sufficient to get started. Your scenarios will undoubtedly require physical contact, and already having trained martial artists will make the scenarios safer. Later on, when you are ready to create more elaborate scenarios you can get outsiders to play supporting roles which will not require any contact, such as bystanders, witnesses, "injured" parties, accomplices, etc.

Many scenarios you do will be straightforward and require little imagination, such as a "bad guy" attacking with a knife. However, if you to conduct a bar fight scenario, for example, it's going to take a little planning to make it go off right. To insure its success you must write up a simple script. Have the role players memorize their parts, keeping the amount they have to remember to a bare minimum. Bar fights don't just happen. Something ignites it. Therefore, you must have the role players assigned to say, and do things, in order. Here's an example for you to follow:

1. The student is seated at a table (cardboard table and plastic lawn chair to prevent injuries) with a friend (role player) in a bar.

2. A "drunk" (second role player) is at the next table being loud and obnoxious. The drunk looks over at the student and yells, "What are you looking at?"
3. The drunk stumbles over to the student's table and starts a fight with the student. Depending upon how much protective gear each of them have will determine how far the physical fight is to go.

   Of course the drunk will have alcohol on his breath (prop), a break-away resin bottle (prop), dressed in biker clothes or other subculture (prop), in a dimly lit bar (stage), with music playing loudly (stage), and a few customers chatting in the background (role players).

   With just these three simple steps you have a genuine scenario. Again, you can create any realistic scenario you wish if you are willing to burn some calories, and use some imagination. With a little planning you can turn routine lessons into blood pumping experiences.

   Conflict Scenario Training is a powerful teaching tool for both the military and law enforcement, and it should prove to be for you as well.

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