

Surviving An Edged Weapon Assault

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There are a number of 10, 20 or 30 hour knife defense courses being offered to police defensive tactics instructors. While their intentions might be good, it might be doing more harm than good. A good portion of the class is spent practicing against a number of knife attacks. In some cases, a certification comes with the training suggesting that the participant is now an instructor and can teach others. Certainly attending one of these mini-programs doesn't make one an "expert" or instructor in empty hand knife defense. Probably ten times that time won't even make someone proficient enough to defend against a knife attack risk free.

The damage that can be done by these courses is to give the participant a false sense of confidence that they could handle a knife attack empty handed. Also, we must consider how many hours of knife defense training does the instructor provide his/her recruits in an academy class? Usually, because of time constraints, it is probably watered down to only a few hours at most. The worst part, once recruits leave the academy, most will never practice these skills again. A number of studies conducted by San Francisco P.D. and the US Military confirm that psychomotor skills deteriorate without practice. Even skills performed with a minimal amount of stress i.e. handcuffing and pat down searches, after as little as 6 months to a year deteriorate without practice. Can you imagine what would happen in the case of high intensity knife attacks?

Most experts and those with knowledge in combat arts recognize the danger and fool heartedness of engaging an armed assailant empty handed if any other choice exists. "The edged weapon truly is the ultimate equalizer. In the hands of a novice, it's exceedingly dangerous. In the hands of an expert, you'd better pray that luck is on your side regardless of how good a martial artist you are. The knife offers no margin for error, so unless your attacker is an idiot, your chances of recognizing, intercepting and controlling him-or his weapon- are about as good as your chances of winning the lottery," so says Richard Ryan founder of Dynamic Combat and creator of the Tactical Defense Training System. Steve Collins, CEO of PS5, a UK special weapons expert and author agrees and says, "The vast majority of people who are attacked with a knife will be cut, no matter how skilled they think they are,..." These are just two opinions from people in the know and I wholeheartedly agree. After 40+ years of training in martial arts, defensive tactics and a number of forms of stick and knife fighting, I have learned to respect the lethality of the knife at close range. Another problem these certification courses present is that it might give a defense attorney or the public the impression that street officers who go through any knife defense training could safely disarm armed felons empty handed. They would then question why higher levels of force were needed or used. This might then be used against the officer in court.

What then can be the value of a knife defense program? There is some critical information that should be included in any introductory knife defense program. This information is far more valuable than a few hours of hands on training. The goal is to enrich the trainer's knowledge of knife attacks and the dangers they represent and in turn

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he/she should pass that information along to the recruits they instruct. Here is some important information that every street officer should know.

A determined unskilled knife attacker, “goal oriented person,” is as dangerous as a skilled attacker. What they lack in ability, they more than make up for in enthusiasm. Recognize that all edged weapons are dangerous regardless of size. Knives under an inch or two are often considered legal or “safe.” It is not the size of the blade that is dangerous but the skill and intensity of the wielder. Also consider, it is the small blades that are the most difficult to spot. Consider that a blade of about one inch i.e. scalpel blade, can penetrate vital organs or sever a major artery i.e. carotid, brachial or femoral. Severing a major artery can quickly result in psychological panic, weakness and could result in bleeding to death in a matter of minutes.

It is also important to know that there are an almost infinite number of concealed bladed weapons around and many are commercially produced. Since most edged weapons are used with the hands, it is critical to watch the suspect’s hands. If they are hidden or look in any way unnatural, there is a chance they might be holding an edged weapon. However, it doesn’t end here. Some street gangs have learned to conceal a single edged razor in their mouths. While struggling with one of these thugs, with their tongue, they could position the razor between their teeth and slash away. A common scissor can be more dangerous than a knife. The triangular shape of the blade creates a wound that is difficult to heal. In addition, scissors are usually covered with germs that would get deep into the wound and result in infection. Many street people are involved in drug use. Therefore, we must be alert to needles that might be used to stab.

It must be drilled into recruits that because you are stabbed or slashed it does not mean you are going to die, even if blood is spurting. They must continue to fight or disengage if possible. The sight of blood from a knife wound can be frightening and cause the person to think they are dying. Because of this, one might become incapacitated mentally and literally give up. This could prove fatal. Few people die from a single knife wound. If you die, it is likely from a loss of blood. Therefore, in training, instructors must drill into their recruits that being cut or stabbed doesn’t mean the fight is over or that they will die. The body on its’ own has a number of mechanisms to slow down bleeding known as auto-regulation. Swelling of tissues tends to slow down blood flow. Also, coagulants are released as part of the “fight or flight” mechanism which aid in clotting. Knowledge of first aid, knowing where and how to apply pressure and having first aid materials close at hand can be important to saving one’s own life or the life of another until medical help arrives. “We figure that about half of those who die from a hemorrhage die from a hemorrhage that could have been controlled with a tourniquet or pressure dressing if someone had been there to do it” says Lt. Cmdr. Joseph DaCorta, U.S. Navy. Additionally, Dr. Michael Shertz, a board certified emergency medicine physician says, “Nothing could devastate an agency more than several officers watching a fellow officer bleed to death after a serious fight.” There are new trauma dressings that are available and having them on hand with knowledge of their use could be a lifesaver.

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There should be knowledge and understanding of the “Tueller Drill” which was presented to the law enforcement community many years ago. It translated distance into time. The experiment demonstrated that the average person could cover roughly 21’ in 1.5 seconds. It did not suggest that 21’ was a safe distance from a person with an edged weapon. In fact, today it is being suggested that 35’ – 50’ is a “safe” distance from someone armed with an edged weapon. Considering there are few places where this distance is possible, it is important to look at other options. One such option is the positioning of an obstacle i.e. chair, table, pillar, squad car etc. in the path between you and the armed subject to prevent a rushing attack. If one is being charged, moving straight backward will not buy much time. Therefore, officers must be trained to move sideways or offline. This takes extensive training and practice because under stress, it is most likely one would step backward. As they move, officers must be trained to draw and aim their weapon, if that has not already been done, and get ready to fire.

The knife is far more common than a gun. Many people carry them and are willing and able to use them. Knowing something about who uses edged weapons can be helpful. The emotionally disturbed are quick to pick up something at hand and it could easily be an edged weapon i.e. kitchen knife or scissor. Many martial arts teach knife fighting tactics. Juvenile street gangs, outlaw biker gangs and prison gangs are quite adept and creative at knife assaults. Additionally, many trades’ people carry a knife for work.

A good knife defense program should provide a basic knowledge of anatomy. It is important to protect the major arteries like the carotid in the neck, femoral artery on the inside of the thigh and the radial and ulna arteries crossing the wrist. There should be some emphasis placed on the need for training in tactical medicine. If knife assaults are common, what training and first aid materials should be provided to assist police and first responders to assist injured parties until medical attention gets to the scene?

Lastly, never take a bladed weapon from someone’s hand. There are several little tricks where a blade can be reversed when handed over and one might find their fingers on the floor. Have them drop the weapon and step away.

Hopefully, many of these short knife defense programs sufficiently cover and stress this valued information.

Stay Safe!

About the Author:

Professor Arthur Cohen B.A., M.A. 7th Dan, is the CEO of Target Consultants International and has over 48 years of training in the martial arts and 25 years working with the law enforcement community. He is a charter member of both the American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers (ASLET) and the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association (ILEETA).

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