

SURVIVAL PAPER

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SoftAir™ For Combat Training

There is no doubt that hardcore live-fire combat training as provided by the military services and professional organizations such as the Gunsite Training Center in Arizona is by far the best way to become proficient in handgun and urban combat. Unfortunately, the great majority of citizens do not have the time and funds available for these kinds of programs. The citizens that are in the greatest need of firearms combat training live in the urban and suburban areas where there is little or no opportunity for such training. In many of these areas, it may be necessary to keep ownership of a firearm a secret, lest it be stolen or confiscated by the enemies of freedom and safety. The endangered citizen is left to seek low cost and low profile training opportunities. There is no doubt that there are hundreds of thousands of “armed citizens” in these areas who have never actually fired their weapons and/or have had no form of combat simulation practice at all. Fortunately there are some alternative training opportunities that can go a long way towards improving the combat readiness of these citizens.

The Need For Training

Armed combat is undoubtedly one of the most demanding situations anyone can be in. In a matter of seconds you have to make life-and-death decisions and apply whatever skills you have to executing those decisions. You may be killed. You may kill an enemy. You may kill an innocent person or even a loved one. Even the most well trained soldiers and police officers often fail to act quickly enough or correctly under such pressure. For the average citizen to place a firearm in a drawer or closet and figure that they will “just wing it” when faced with a combat situation is just plain madness. When you hear about people surviving combat they often say “I was scared as hell, but the training kicked in”. In combat, criminals don’t need to think about what they are doing because they don’t care and they have done it before. Trained assassins and terrorists don’t need to think because they are trained and experienced. Untrained citizens think when there is no time to think and get killed. Any kind of training is way better than no training and the more training the better. Only a combination of repetition of critical actions and simulation of situations can assure effective performance in “the gravest extremes”.

Videos, Books and Dry-fire

Americans will spend big money on a piece of hardware and then skimp on information and education about how to use it. Unfortunately, this bad habit applies to many firearms owners. In the worst case, where you have no opportunity to actually fire your weapon, you certainly should acquire and study books and videos on combat shooting and go through unloaded dry-fire practice of stance, grip, trigger pull, movement, etc. in your home. Some videos set up “shoot/don’t shoot” and moving target situations on your TV screen. You can also practice moving about your home with your weapon, as if clearing rooms. Be sure that your weapons chamber and magazine are empty for this training. Better yet, use a SoftAir™ replica of your real weapon for such training.

Some recommended videos are: Gunsite Tactical Pistol #1 and #2, Gunsite Close Quarters Tactics #1, Gunsite Tactical Concealed Carry #1 and #2. These are \$29.95 each from Paladin Press, 7077 Winchester Circle, Boulder, CO 80301, 1-800-392-2400, www.paladin-press.com

Target Range Practice

Going into a combat situation with a weapon you have never actually fired is not recommended. Dry fire and SoftAir™ practice may help you get off that first important shot, but that big boom and kick that you are not ready for may ruin your performance if the combat situation continues. Even if you can only get out and fire off a few boxes of ammo each year, it will be well worthwhile. If you can become a good “target shooter” that’s great, but just consistently hitting the paper at 25 to 50 feet is going to be a big help in combat shooting. Remember that combat shooting is not target shooting. Target shooting is just to get you thoroughly comfortable with the feel, grip, trigger pull and action of the weapon. Here’s how to find a range near you. No, I don’t mean the distance to the target. I mean finding a place to shoot. About 8-months ago Mapmuse.com started a project to create an interactive map of shooting ranges across the US. They have provided space for written descriptions and photos of the range and links to the range’s website, if they have one. This is a great place to find ranges in your area. They are also looking for new listings, so if you know of a range that is not listed, let them know. The link to the shooting range map is http://find.mapmuse.com/interested/shooting_ranges.

Paintball and Paintless Paintball

Paintball guns do not closely resemble real firearms and paintball guns are seldom used for “combat training”. Played as a game, they are fun, but may establish bad combat habits. In a game, taking a risk to score is justified, but in real combat the only time you take a risk is to save your life or someone else’s. The “cover” that one uses to avoid being hit by paintballs or SoftAir™ pellets is only “concealment” from a real bullet. So you could get into a bad habit of taking shelter behind things that will not protect you in real combat. Under the proper conditions and controls, paintball can be used for combat training. The main drawback is that you need alot of space outdoors and indoor training is limited to some sort of abandoned structures since paintballs are messy. Recently some gamers are using “paintless paintballs” and the honor system. This lets them use rented building for games without making a mess.

Laser Tag

The military has had some success with laser tag, but it is still expensive and inclined to create bad habits if not well managed.

SoftAir™ or AirSoft™

SoftAir™, AirSoft™ and a number of other brands of training guns are available in a wide variety of types and designs. They fire cheap 6mm, 12g Plastic BB's at velocities ranging from 200 to 500 fps. You can get spring operated pistols for as little as \$15.00 and rifles for \$20.00 or less. Really good spring operated "sniper rifles" go for up to \$130.00. These require manually cocking the spring before each shot, which is not realistic for combat training. Very realistic, battery operated, semi and full auto pistols and rifles can be had for from \$25.00 to \$100.00. These come in a huge variety of simulations. You can get Glock's, SIG's, Colt's, Walther's, Baretta's, and S&W's to match your real handguns. You can also get AK's, Uzi's, M16's, even Schmeisser's and shotguns to match your longer firearms. These are amazingly close in feel and weight to the real deal. In fact, you need to be very careful that no one (especially children) could get them mixed-up. They come with orange muzzles to identify them. These are not weapons, but they are not toys ether. They can be used as "training devices". I made a target holder out of ½-inch PVC for about \$3.00 and placed it in the basement. I hang 17 x 22 inch paper combat targets on it and a few old towels in back to catch the BB's. The BB's just get through the paper, hit the towels and drop onto a plastic pan I placed under the target holder. I can practice various combat positions, drawing, turning, left-handed, right-handed, etc. at ranges from 5 to 20-feet. The SoftAir's™ I use are close to what I would have in a combat situation. I even have one with a laser and a blue night-light for night (lights off) practice. Next, I built 7 more target holder including one that held a target just 3-ft. off the ground and one with the target up a 10-ft. I arranged these in a small wooded area to create a combat course. This provided a cheap and useful training experience in town without live rounds flying around. SoftAir™ can also be used for person against person or team against team combat games just like paintball with no mess. Of course the honor system is required and safety goggles are a must.

This kind of training is of value in establishing combat shooting instincts and habits, but you still need to live fire your real weapon or weapons at a traditional "target range" to get the feel and experience of recoil, noise and aiming characteristics. You must also maintain every safety rule that applies to real firearms when you practice with any simulated or training weapon. While I was working on this article, a veteran police officer accidentally shot and killed another officer at a range a few miles from my home. Safety First!



SoftAir™ guns come in a variety of close simulations to the real thing. Note the orange muzzles.



Real Glock on the right SoftAir™ Glock on the left



Shooting a SoftAir™ in a basement range. Fun, cheap and useful.



Member engages hidden paper target to the left after engaging the one on the right.

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