SURVIVING THE THREAT:
The Psychology of Survival In Life-Threatening Encounters

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OFF-DUTY CONFRONTATION
ON THE STREET

“WHERE ARE YOU FROM?”
AS YOU LISTEN TO THIS AND OTHER INTERVIEW SEGMENTS, AS WELL AS THE QUOTES FROM THE OFF-CAMERA INTERVIEWS, PLEASE CONSIDER SOME QUESTIONS:

• Are these exceptionally capable individuals?

• Do they have some special ability they were born with or is their survival the result of somethings they have learned?

• Can these skills be taught by others and mastered by the learners?
THREATS TO OFFICER SURVIVAL

- Physical assault and injury
- Shootings
- TC’s and traffic stops
- Ambushes
- Other dangers/confrontations
METHODOLOGY

- Literature Review
- Roll Calls & Group Interviews
- Individual Interviews – Police Officers & Military Veterans
- Post Officer-Involved-Shooting
- Post Categorical Uses of Force
A DIFFERENT KIND OF INCIDENT: A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME

TIM:

A foot pursuit and a head-on collision with an SUV
TIM’S THOUGHT PROCESS AND BEHAVIOR:

- Shock and intermittently unconscious
- Life-threatening, multi-system injuries
- After the first 72 hours of hospitalization, "I want to go home."
- Eight surgical procedures in thirteen days of hospitalization – outpatient rehabilitation and physical therapy
VIDEO SEGMENT

SERGEANT TIM
“You go to war the way you are, not the way you wished you were.”

Captain Rick Smathers
Naval Special Warfare Center
IT’S ALL ABOUT PREPARATION
THE WILL TO SURVIVE:

- WHAT IS IT?
- WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?
- CAN IT BE TAUGHT?
- CAN IT BE LEARNED?
WILL TO SURVIVE:

THE WILL AND

THE ABILITY
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

MINDSET
MINDSET:

- The mental approach you bring to the job
- Vigilance – sometimes hypervigilance
- An automatic conscious response
- Warrior mentality
- Pro-survival thinking – every situation is winnable
- Think offense not defense
- Ready to move forward and fight for your life
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

**PSYCHOLOGICAL FITNESS**
PSYCHOLOGICAL FITNESS:

- Alertness
- Calmness under pressure
- *Strength of personality – the real deal – external and internal*
- Relationship dynamics and communication with coworkers and others
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

PROFESSIONALISM
PROFESSIONALISM:

- Mission focus
- Discipline
- Self-control
- Use of force
- Commitment to duty, community and country
VIDEO SEGMENT

DETECTIVE JEFF
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

PHYSICAL FITNESS
PHYSICAL FITNESS:

- Commitment to a fitness routine
- Strength and endurance
- Resilience and hardiness
- Physical recovery and the will to fight on
PHYSICAL FITNESS:

- “The body can endure more than the mind can imagine.”  
  Navy Seals

- “What the mind can conceive, the body can achieve.”  
  Vince Lombardi
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

MENTAL TOUGHNESS
MENTAL TOUGHNESS:

- Belief in oneself
- Aggressiveness
- Decisiveness
- Perseverance
- Commitment to using deadly force in defense of life
- Bullet-proof mind*

*Lt. Col. Dave Grossman
MENTAL TOUGHNESS:

- Shooters
- Reluctant Shooters
- Non-Shooters
“The time to decide whether you can kill another human being is not in the middle of combat. If you do not make that decision in advance, I guarantee that you will hesitate to make it later, and that hesitation may make the difference between you living and dying.”

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman (Ret.)
United States Army Rangers
MENTAL TOUGHNESS:

- "I didn’t raise you to be a wimp"
- "No scum bag is going to keep me down"
- "I knew I was shot, but I wasn’t going to think about it"
- "I am going to kill that m-f-r"
- Insisted on walking to the ambulance with suspect on scene
VIDEO SEGMENT

SERGEANT TIM
WILL TO SURVIVE IS: 

CONFIDENCE
CONFIDENCE:

- Based on background, training, experience, fitness, skills and preparation

- Determination – “I am not going to lose.”

- NASA – Avoidance of all thoughts about losing with focus on thoughts of success
VIDEO SEGMENT

DETECTIVE GUS
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

MANAGEMENT OF FEAR
MANAGEMENT OF FEAR:

- Self-awareness
- Understand the fear response and how to manage it
- What are the body and mind doing?
- The psychophysiology of fear – The Sympathetic Nervous System
MANAGEMENT OF FEAR:

Common reactions:
- Arousal – adrenaline
- Rapid breathing and pounding heart
- Time slows down
- Sounds become muffled
- Tunnel vision
- Reaction time
- Cognitive changes
- Memory effects
MANAGEMENT OF FEAR:

- **Fight – Flight – Freeze**
- React as you have been trained, conditioned, and worked in the past
- Ability to take decisive action against a threat in the face of fear
- **GOAL:** Preservation of your life-saving skills – cognitive, tactical, physical and psychological – during the confrontation
VIDEO SEGMENT

DETECTIVE JEFF
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

ANGER AND RAGE
ANGER AND RAGE IS:

- Mixed opinions
- Involuntary reaction
- Controlled vs. chaotic/disruptive
- If it is absent, are you in the right mindset?
ANGER AND RAGE IS:

- Rage as a motivator or energizer
- “I’m not going to let this m-f-r get away with this” OR…..
- “It’s just business”
WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

WHAT I LIVE/
FIGHT FOR
WHAT I LIVE/FIGHT FOR IS:

- Self
- Family
- Partners/Coworkers
- Friends
- Faith
- Duty
- Country
WHAT I LIVE/FIGHT FOR IS:

DEFINING MOMENT
- Impact on present
- Impact on future
- “The voice inside”

“Black Hawk Down”
VIDEO SEGMENT

DETECTIVE GUS
VIDEO SEGMENT

OFFICER JOE
THE WILL TO SURVIVE IS:

- Preparation
- Mindset
- Psychological fitness
- Professionalism
- Physical fitness
- Mental toughness
- Confidence
- Management of fear
- Anger and rage
- What I live/fight for
“When faced with a violent assault, my life depends upon my reaction without hesitation. There is no time to ponder, because to ponder is to possibly perish. My response, if attacked, must not be fear, but aggressiveness. I must block out all thoughts of my own peril, and be alert and confident in stopping my assailant. I must expect the unexpected and do the unexpected. Above all, I won’t give up and I will survive.”

Phil Duran and Dennis Nasci
Tactical Attitude
2000
HOW DO WE GO FROM DESCRIBING AND UNDERSTANDING THE WILL TO SURVIVE TO EFFECTIVE TRAINING, LEARNING, AND COMPETENCE?
The End
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