

TACTICS PREPAREDNESS

SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS



SHOOTING
AND THINKING

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BY: KEN JAVES / PHOTOS BY OLEG VOLK www.a-human-right.com

I have seen a sizable number of shooters who can consistently hammer the X-Ring, but fall apart when faced with a scenario that required problem-solving with a gun.

I also hate to admit that I was once counted among their number. There is a common misconception among both individuals and organizations, that accuracy is the only way to measure proficiency with a firearm. An example of this can be found in the United States Marine Corps where “every Marine is a rifleman.” The Marine Corps has traditionally outperformed all other branches in the instruction and maintenance of marksmanship fundamentals, but outside of the more

elite units that have had the opportunity to cross-train and seek instruction beyond the confines of the Corps, individual abilities are notably lacking in the areas of weapon manipulations, awareness, mindset, stress management and problem solving. Progress has been made in the last ten years through the development of the Combative Marksmanship and Combat Hunter programs, but the shortcomings still surface during force-on-force training exercises and in urban combat.

The Marine Corps is not the only organization that suffers from an inflated sense of ability based on a narrow view of what constitutes competence. If you are part of a group that emphasizes a singular skill as a measure of capability you may want to explore outside training opportunities and the standards of others to get a wider understanding of your capabilities and limitations. A wider evaluation will be a better measure of your potential combat performance.

continued on next page



It was day three of five of a survival exercise and all I brought with me was a knife and a plastic tarp.

I had not eaten since we started. I was parched from not having found a source of water. My nights were cold and I was pretty miserable. Were my skills that bad? Apparently so. I was only 17 and most of my survival knowledge came from a couple of books. Clearly the authors knew some things that I did not.

Success favors the prepared and I thought that was me. But failure can be a good teacher too, and I was humbled. I had overestimated so many things on that trip that it led me to seek training. It led me to know my gear and how to live without it. It led me to a level of confidence that allowed me to prosper a few years later when I repeated the exercise.

Many people, myself included, tend to think of themselves as ready for anything. But in doing critical analysis of my own abilities and failings, just as I did after the above mentioned trip, I continuously have had to reconsider my skills and preparations.

Here are seven areas where I have run into trouble:

GEAR

Overdependence on gear is not a good thing. I am a complete gear geek. I love the latest flashlight, tactical bag, knife or rifle accessory. I read catalogs like a pro. I collect gear like a hoarder. I have totes of knives. I have bags of bags. I have more unused gear than I can house in my garage. Now I have taken over the loft of the tack shed as well. It is an addiction. But how does it help?

Many years back, I was going on a 50-mile hike. I hadn't been out since I was a Boy Scout. Much had changed. A trip to REI convinced me that I was way behind the times. I bought all kinds of new gear and accessories, plus food. When I weighed my pack for a week-long trip, it weighed 76 pounds. "No problem," I posited, "It will get lighter as I eat."

If you walked the Oregon Trail in 1848, you would find abandoned items all along the trail. Everything from china to pianos abandoned due to their weight. That is what my back trail would have looked like had I not been in a national park. Instead, I had to car-

ry that weight, which dropped to a paltry 60 pounds after I ate everything. It is hard for me to imagine what I was even carrying to get to that weight. But since I was lacking in skills, I compensated with gear. Since I didn't know how to break firewood between two trees, I carried both saw and axe. Since I didn't know how to create a minimal shelter, I carried a four-person tent that was 12 pounds—I wanted lots of room, you see. Since I did not understand fuel consumption on my new stove, I carried five fuel bottles. On and on it goes.

Over the next several years, I became much better trained and less and less dependent on gear. If you are properly trained, you can improvise gear or change tactics to do without it. I have seen a lot of people buy gear; sometimes lots of gear, then they stow it away for a time they will need it. They never train with the gear. They are not ready to use it and they have no plan should they lose it.

Learning to survive with nothing is a challenge, but I have done it several times. It is

SIX MISTAKES TO OVERCOME

BY: KEVIN REEVE

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not pleasant. In fact, it sucks sometimes, but there is a big difference between being uncomfortable and dying. Once you learn that, then gear becomes a luxury, not a necessity. If need be, you should be able to live without it.

COMMUNITY

I remember a survival camping trip I attempted by myself. I got into camp, set up a shelter, made a fire, boiled some water and made myself dinner. I dropped into my bedroll and prepared for a good night's sleep—until I heard a loud snap. I shined my flashlight out and saw a pair of glowing eyes ... and the bruin behind those eyes. I had a saddle gun with me, so I pulled the Winchester from the sheath, chambered a round and laid it next to me. I tried to go back to sleep, but that wasn't going to happen. When you are part of the food chain and not necessarily the top of the food chain, your awareness peaks. Next morning, I was very tired, but I had to go to the stream, collect water, boil it, mix some oatmeal and then clean up breakfast. By 10:00 am, I was beyond tired. I hiked around my camp, gathered more firewood for the night and gathered some more water. Bottom line: because I was alone, I had to do everything.

A lone citizen in a grid down scenario has to do security, especially at night. He has to chop the wood, weed the garden, administer first aid, cook and clean up. If he is attempting this by himself, he will soon burn out. Community and the economy of scale it offers are the only solution for long term survival. Find those around you who have skills that compliment yours. Look for a medic, a gardener, a vet, a rifleman and a blacksmith to just name a few. The more diverse the skill set the better the chances of survival.

I have always wanted to be a lone survivor. It would be cool to be the guy who can go into the woods by himself, armed only with his teeth and come out later having gained weight, wearing clothes of his own making and carrying new improvised tools and weapons. But a couple of early attempts at survival led me to conclude that the idea of the strong individualist who handles it all himself is not optimum. There might be some who can do it, but most of us will need others. Our first motto at onPoint Tactical is that "training trumps gear." Our second motto is that "community trumps training."

PHYSICAL ABILITY

Four years ago, I decided to accompany my



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OVERDEPENDENCE ON GEAR IS NOT A GOOD THING. IF YOU'RE HAVING TO HIKE IT OVER MANY MILES ON FOOT, YOU NEED TO CONDENSE GEAR TO A MANAGEABLE LOAD WHILE HAVING THE PROPER EQUIPMENT FOR SURVIVAL. ←

son on a fifty-mile hike in Yosemite. I had done this exact same hike when I was in my early thirties. It was tough, but I remember making the 4,000 foot ascent without a lot of problems. Fast forward 22 years and now I am 55. I am heavier by fifty pounds and in nowhere near the physical condition I was at 30. But, I thought to myself, I have proven to myself that I am mentally tough and can push through anything.

I severely underestimated the effect of age and weight and though I did push through on the basis of pure mind over matter, I did not enjoy it. By the time we reached our first camp at 10,300 feet elevation, having climbed from 6,000, I was a total waste. I did not bother with dinner. I rehydrated, strung my hammock and crawled in my bed. I did not attend to the matters that needed attending. I was simply too tired. Yeah I made it. No I was not worth anything. I arrived in camp two hours after my son. It was a bit embarrassing. A mighty woodsman—unable to function.

I, like many people, was not operationally fit. I could force myself to do hard things, but that is not the same as being capable of doing it without mental coercion. There is no substitute for physical conditioning. In a grid down scenario, when calorie input may not match calorie output, being physically fit will help compensate.

MENTAL TOUGHNESS

I have never killed a man. I think about that a lot. I believe that in the dystopic future that I am pretty sure we will face, I will have to cross that Rubicon. I wonder if I have the capacity to act. I am pretty sure I do, but many have either not thought about it or they have romanticized it. I have a retired Special Forces soldier as a mentor and friend. The guy spent a good part of his adult life as a professional soldier, doing what professional soldiers do. He is as mentally tough a person as I know. He knows what it takes to be a Spartan, a stoic; to suffer in silence. I get the suffering part, it is the silence part I fail at.

From the previous example, I remember being at about 8,500 feet. I had 2000 more feet in elevation to gain. I was out of water. I was footsore. I was filled with dread. I knew at my current rate of speed, I would arrive at camp by approximately midnight. But I realized I had no retreat. The only way out was through. So I girded my loins and forged ahead. Now this is not an 11,000 foot mountain in Afghanistan, carrying a 90 pound ruck, like my buddies in the military did day in and day out, but for me it was a mental challenge that required mental toughness. Survival is first about the mental game: the acceptance of reality.

I have learned that mental toughness is

not just accepting reality, it is reveling in it. I learned a saying from some Marines I was training. They said, "Embrace the suck." I love that concept. It wasn't "endure the suck and complain loudly." It was *embrace* it. Accept it and revel in the challenge.

HUMAN BEHAVIOR

I have often heard "preppers" say we are nine meals from anarchy in this country. I remember working in Louisiana after one of the hurricanes. We were in a camp providing security for lineman restoring power. By the third night, the sound of gunfire became so frequent and so close, that we were more than a little bit concerned. We seemed to be descending into chaos with a progressive loss of the rule of law. We made a strong show of force when probes came, and by the fifth night, law enforcement officers had returned in force to keep the neighborhood safe, but it raised some ugly questions in my mind.

In a simulation I run, I ask students how they would drive if all traffic laws were removed and there were no cops on the street. Then we expand that discussion to this question: If you knew that there was no accountability for your behavior in any form, how would that affect your behavior? If you knew you would never be tried or convicted for any crime, what would you do? I hope most of us have a high enough level of moral reasoning to decide that it is better for everyone if we do not all come unhinged, but there are many members of society who only obey the law because of the fear pun-

ishment. Once that fear is removed, they become sub-human (calling the behavior animalistic is an injustice to animals.) We see this in the conduct of narcos along the Mexican border. It is hard to conceive of the level of violence and complete disregard for human life witnessed there, but that is likely to happen here too when people are hungry and desperate and there is no law to stop them.

Part of this is an acceptance of your role as a protector who is willing to do whatever is necessary to protect your family. You may be required to do things when there is no rule of law that you would never consider doing now. Do not be surprised. Do not underestimate the ability of humans to behave badly.

ROUTINES

I was watching a team of scouts move through an area below me. From my vantage point, I could watch their every move. I had night vision and they did not. I was sure I had the upper hand. I had done the same thing the night before. They didn't have a clue I was there, but then I felt a presence behind me. There, covering me with his weapon, was the team member who had not felt well enough to go out with his team—a ruse so I would not miss him. They had figured I would do the same thing I had done the night before. So they had one team member pretend to be injured and stay in camp. The team left on their patrol and I left on mine. But this supposedly injured scout followed me to the same location I had been the night before, and caught me unaware. They patterned

me. I was guilty of allowing myself to fall into the rut of repetitive behavior. Apache Scouts had a saying that you never took the same route twice. Why? So your enemy cannot pattern you. He cannot ambush you if he cannot pattern you. So avoiding routines becomes a necessity in a hostile environment.

It starts with the simple things. Yesterday, when I shaved, I started on the left side of my face, today I start on the right. Or yesterday I drove to the stoplight and turned left, today I turned left the block before. In addition to making it harder for your enemy to pattern you, it also creates higher awareness and a focus on the present for you. Routines are designed to conserve energy in the brain. It doesn't have to devote any thought to your commute because you are on auto-pilot. Deciding to do something different from your routine takes a lot of energy to overcome your brain's desire not to change. But variations to routine create new neural channels. It forces the brain into the present, instead of constantly playing the tapes from past conversations and situations. Once you start paying attention to what is going on around you a whole new world emerges. So practice this now. Vary your routines. Do simple things differently now. Get your brain used to it. It is a modern version of not taking the same trail twice. You cannot be patterned and the process raises your awareness.

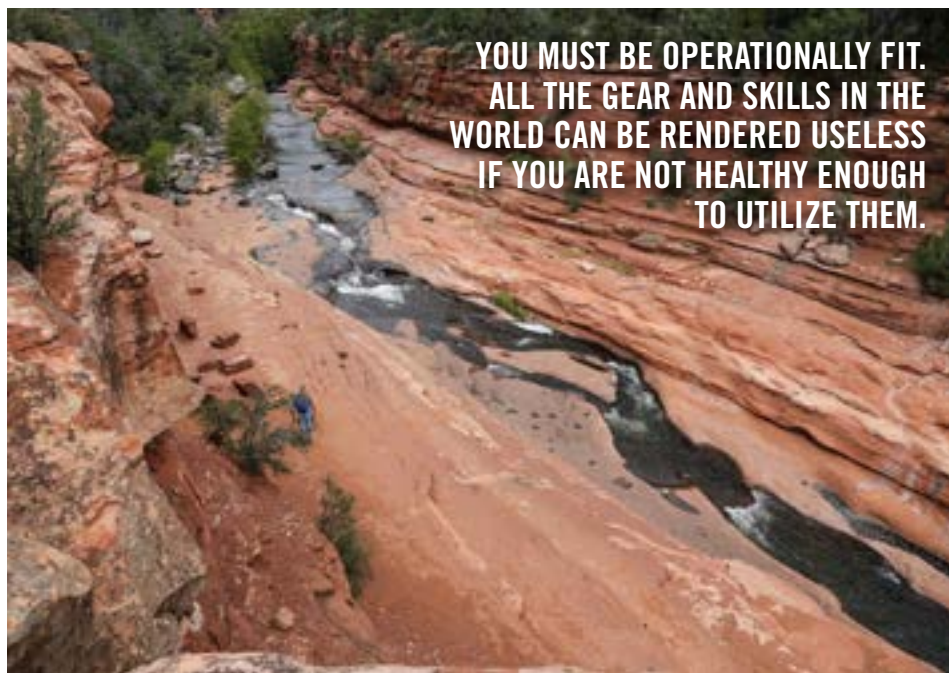
CONCLUSION

The only way to achieve mental toughness is by doing hard things stoically. The only way to achieve fitness is to train. The only way to develop skills is repetition. Making use of these observations requires effort. Most of us prefer to imagine that we will be able to perform without actually having to train to perform. I call this magical thinking. You will not rise to the occasion, you will default to your level of training. I hope your training is enough for whatever challenge you face. ✓

BIO

Kevin Reeve is the founder and Director of OnPoint Tactical Tracking School (www.onpointtactical.com). Kevin has provided training to law enforcement, SAR teams and the U.S. military in the arts of tracking, survival, escape and evasion and urban operations. Kevin also worked at Apple Computer for five years doing organizational development and executive coaching, as well as platform training and curriculum development.

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TO UTILIZE THEM.**



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