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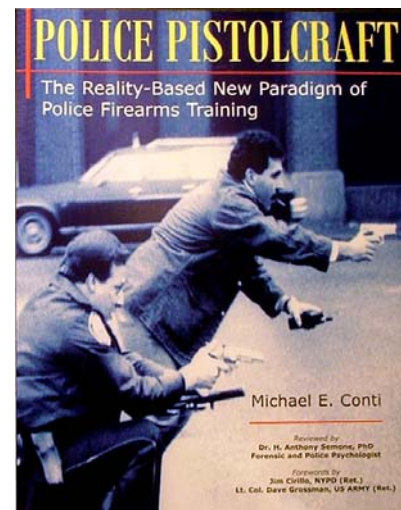
In 2000, the Massachusetts State Police inaugurated a new firearms training unit under the direction of Trooper Michael Conti, giving him a blank slate to work from. Mike formulated an entirely new approach to MSP's training, incorporating a re-creation of W.E. Fairbairn's and Rex Applegate's House of Horrors. To date MSP officers have taken over 4000 trips through it. Mike's new book, Police Pistolcraft, details the rationale of MSP's New Paradigm and the lessons learned in the House of Horrors. We believe that Police Pistolcraft is a seminal book that will be a cornerstone of a revolution in professional police firearms training. It is available from Saber Press. Below are two excerpts from the book. – RM

From Chapter 2, Pages 37-38

In January 1998 I participated as a guest instructor at the annual American Society of Law Enforcement Trainers (ASLET) conference in Mobile, Alabama. On the first night of the conference, I attended a general meeting and sat in the audience. A panel of senior instructors, many of them noted experts in the field of firearms training, had been assembled. After addressing various issues—most of which endorsed the core training beliefs of the Modern Technique—the matter of the re-emergence of Applegate and the Point Shooting technique was raised by one of the moderators. This gentleman then expressed his views on the subject, which were less than favorable and not based entirely on the facts as I had begun to learn them straight from the Colonel.

As it was an open forum, I made a few comments in an attempt to clarify the salient points being discussed. The atmosphere in the room became a bit heated. A few other instructors in the audience then began to express their own dismay with the way we trained our officers and more specifically, with the apparent training failures that continued to surface on the street. In response to the exasperated looks on the faces of some of the experts on the panel, I then posed this question:

“If the data generated for the last thirty years overwhelmingly indicates that officers required to score a minimum of 70% hits in training only achieve hits of 20% and less in real world encounters, then does that data not indicate a serious training failure on



our part? And,” I continued, “if that is true, is it not our responsibility, our duty as professional police firearms trainers, to address this failure and fix the problem?”

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After a few moments of uncomfortable silence from the members of the panel—during which I might add, more than a few members of the audience sat looking expectantly at the panel and nodding—the moderator finally said, “Well, I suppose what you’re saying deserves some attention. Why don’t we go down the panel and see what each member thinks.”

Starting at one end of the panel, each member was polled. I was a bit dismayed when each either skirted the issue, or didn’t respond at all! To say I was a bit disappointed—not truly surprised, but disappointed—is an understatement. The reason I wasn’t really surprised was because the panel was comprised mostly of

professional firearms instructors, not professional police officers. A few had some part-time experience in law enforcement, one had a military background and no law enforcement experience—the usual mix that is found whenever you examine the vast majority of the modern day firearms training experts and/or gun gurus.

Then, the question landed in the lap of the last member of the panel, Jim Cirillo. I had heard of Jim for years, but had never met him. A legendary member of the New York Police Department, Jim had served with the Stakeout Squad in the early 1970s. In a matter of a few short years, he had been involved in 17 documented close-quarter gunfights with armed criminals. Twelve men he faced had been permanently retired from a life of crime and taken up residence in a cemetery. Jim was the real deal. In addition, not only had Jim been operational, but he was a highly-regarded firearms trainer as well. Not only could he do, but he could teach.

Jim, who had been fairly silent to this point, then boomed out in his New York accent, “Hey! Maybe the kid’s right. If there is a problem, we need to look at it. We can’t be afraid to consider these things, to look at other ways of doing our job as trainers and police officers. In fact we have to do it. It’s what we’re all about, right?” Again, nods from audience members, some uncomfortable silences and sideways glances from the other members of the panel, and then the discussion moved along to other matters.

From Chapter 6, Pages 123-127

We are all issued a brain and a body at birth. Unfortunately, we are not issued an owner’s manual for either one at that time. While many people do study and learn about how their bodies work, most of us go through our entire lives never truly understanding the theories pertaining to how our brains work, how our brains and bodies work—or don’t work—together, or even why we do many of the things we do.

In regard to survival, using the Triune Brain Model as described by Colonel Grossman, the process can be explained like this: While the human brain is an

extraordinarily complex organ, for our purposes we will reduce it to three generalized components; the medulla (brain stem), the midbrain (mammalian brain), and the cerebrum (forebrain). It has been noted that the human brain, divided into these three sub-categories, can be seen as a model of evolution. The medulla for instance—the relatively small tissue that serves to connect the spinal cord to the brain—can be likened to a reptilian brain in that it is only responsible for carrying out parasympathetic bodily activities such as maintaining heart and respiration rates.

For these reasons I refer to the medulla as the lizard when explaining this process.

Next on the upward evolutionary scale is the midbrain. The midbrain, comprised of a number of various complicated interrelating components, is where our subconscious mind lives, and can best be described for our purposes as the “animal brain.” The midbrain’s primary function is to keep the organism which within it resides alive—period.

The midbrain can best be described as the “puppy,” because in many ways it is similar to a K-9 in that it can either be left alone to run wild or can be trained to respond to various stimuli in a number of different ways.

Finally, we arrive at the forebrain. The forebrain is the “human” component, if you will, the place where our conscious mind and all the unique parts of our personality that define us as individuals reside.

When facing a threat, what essentially occurs is this:

- the forebrain (you) takes in information / stimulus indicating imminent danger
- the midbrain (puppy) is immediately alert, and, based primarily upon its perception of the danger and prior experience, gets aroused to various degrees
- the puppy sends arousal signals to the medulla (lizard), which, being a lizard, simply responds to these arousal signals without thought, and activates various glands that in turn dump a number of powerful, naturally-occurring chemicals into the blood stream. These chemicals then elevate heart and respiration rates in direct correlation to the intensity of the puppy’s arousal signals. In addition, these chemicals may produce a number of physiological side-effects, such as dry mouth, tremors, sweating, etc.
- the forebrain (you), already facing an immediate threat, suddenly experiences these physiological side-effects, and, if it doesn’t understand what is happening and why, may become more fearful, triggering a stronger response from the puppy, which in turn triggers a stronger response from the lizard...

Now, what is most interesting here about all these goings-on as far as we are concerned is that the puppy—our subconscious—will generally only respond to the threat based upon what it knows will work to save you. Furthermore, since the puppy—when startled into a fear state—is governed by what psychologists refer to as “biological imperatives” (i.e. Freeze, Flight, Fight, and Dissociate), it usually will try to plug one of these powerful survival-based response drives into the equation to try and save you.

In matters of survival based upon responding to an immediate severe physical threat from a member of its own species, the puppy will generally tend to want to fight or take flight. (Should the threat not be perceived as either immediately life-threatening and/or severe, other behaviors may be exhibited. The first of these, “posturing,” may take the form of shouted commands or threats. The second, “submitting,” may be expressed

by the subject by holding up the hands, palms out, indicating submission to the threatening opponent.)

Since the puppy best learns how to respond through experience, that means if running away or submitting has saved the day in the past, the urge to flee or surrender may be overwhelming. If, however, fighting or posturing has been used successfully to control a threat in the past, then that will probably be the emitted response.

Obviously, for our purposes, we want the officer to do the latter in the vast majority of situations.

The remaining two behaviors, freeze and dissociate, may also occur, especially if the puppy has not been properly trained and/or prepared properly. While these behaviors may prove useful under certain limited circumstances (consider the potential victim who freezes in place and is therefore overlooked by the predator) they are generally considered undesirable for our purposes.

As far as utilizing the House of Horrors program to train the puppy to respond reasonably and appropriately to a variety of situations, there is one other consideration that must be understood. According to many of the experts, the subconscious mind cannot differentiate between real memory and imagined memory. This indicates that any number of experiences/circumstances—if made real enough to the subconscious mind—can be stored in the subconscious, being effectively “filed away” for future reference.

While primarily associated with “imaging” techniques as used by many professional athletes (during which an individual visualizes himself performing some physical activity in a specific manner in order to aid actual performance), we have verified that this acceptance of imagined memory as real not only occurs during simulation training when there is enough stimuli to achieve a high arousal state in the participant, but is greatly enhanced.

This is the secret behind the powerful effectiveness of the House of Horrors program—while predicated upon simulated experiences, it is fueled by actual fear and adrenaline, resulting in stored memories that are nearly as vivid as any generated by real experiences.

Because officers are advised that there is actual potential danger to them in the form of mannequins armed with pain-penalty producing weapons; and because the officers know ahead of time that they will be required to make life or death decisions in a matter of milliseconds just like in real life; and, perhaps most important, because they are dealing with the unknown, they enter the course in a heightened state of stress and awareness. (In one experiment we did, an officer wearing a heart monitor reported an immediate increase in his resting heart rate from 77 to 84 [bpm] just because he was

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advised he was the next participant.) As soon as they begin the course, this heightened state of awareness is increased to the point where a true high arousal state is achieved. Once that happens, as far as the subconscious mind is concerned, everything in the House of Horrors is actually happening in real time!

Because the puppy believes it is real, several things occur. First, the puppy stimulates the lizard to start producing the chemical milkshake and injecting it into the officer's system.

Second, the body reacts to the chemical dump and brings about the physiological changes we would expect under the circumstances.

Third, based upon what we condition the puppy to do when faced with various threat stimuli, and how we reward it when it performs correctly and correct it when it does not, the puppy is trained and learns how to respond in ways we consider reasonable and appropriate. (Operant Conditioning)

Fourth, by providing these types of experiences to the puppy while in a high arousal state, we have allowed it to produce and store actual performance-based memories that it will draw from in the future when faced with similar situations, thereby allowing it to learn—in a controlled environment—both through its successes and mistakes (Stress Inoculation).

In addition to the benefits gained through the Stress Inoculation process, I believe this last element is also very important due to the fact that time and again officers have reported “remembering” entire accounts of similar real-world situations while responding to an individual House of Horrors event lasting no more than a few seconds, and will often base their present actions on their past experiences (see next section). Following this train of thought, it would only seem logical that the opposite would also occur, wherein officers would remember House of Horrors experiences during similar actual real-world events.

Finally, by having the puppy experience (what it perceives to be) actual dangerous situations and allowing it the opportunity to successfully defend itself and others, we foster true confidence in its abilities to do so, as well as create a positive association with the techniques and tools (pistol, ASR, baton, etc.) it uses to accomplish its goals. (Classical Conditioning).

Regarding the very powerful Classical and Operant Conditioning methodologies that are such obvious and intrinsic components of the modern House of Horrors course, it must be noted that we did not simply add this into the mix—it was there from the beginning. And I do mean the very beginning. Early film footage showing W.E. Fairbairn guiding a soldier through the WWII version House of Horrors was used initially to format our modern version.

POLICE PISTOLCRAFT: The Reality-Based New Paradigm of Police Firearms Training, by Michael E. Conti is available from Saber Press at www.saber-press.com

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