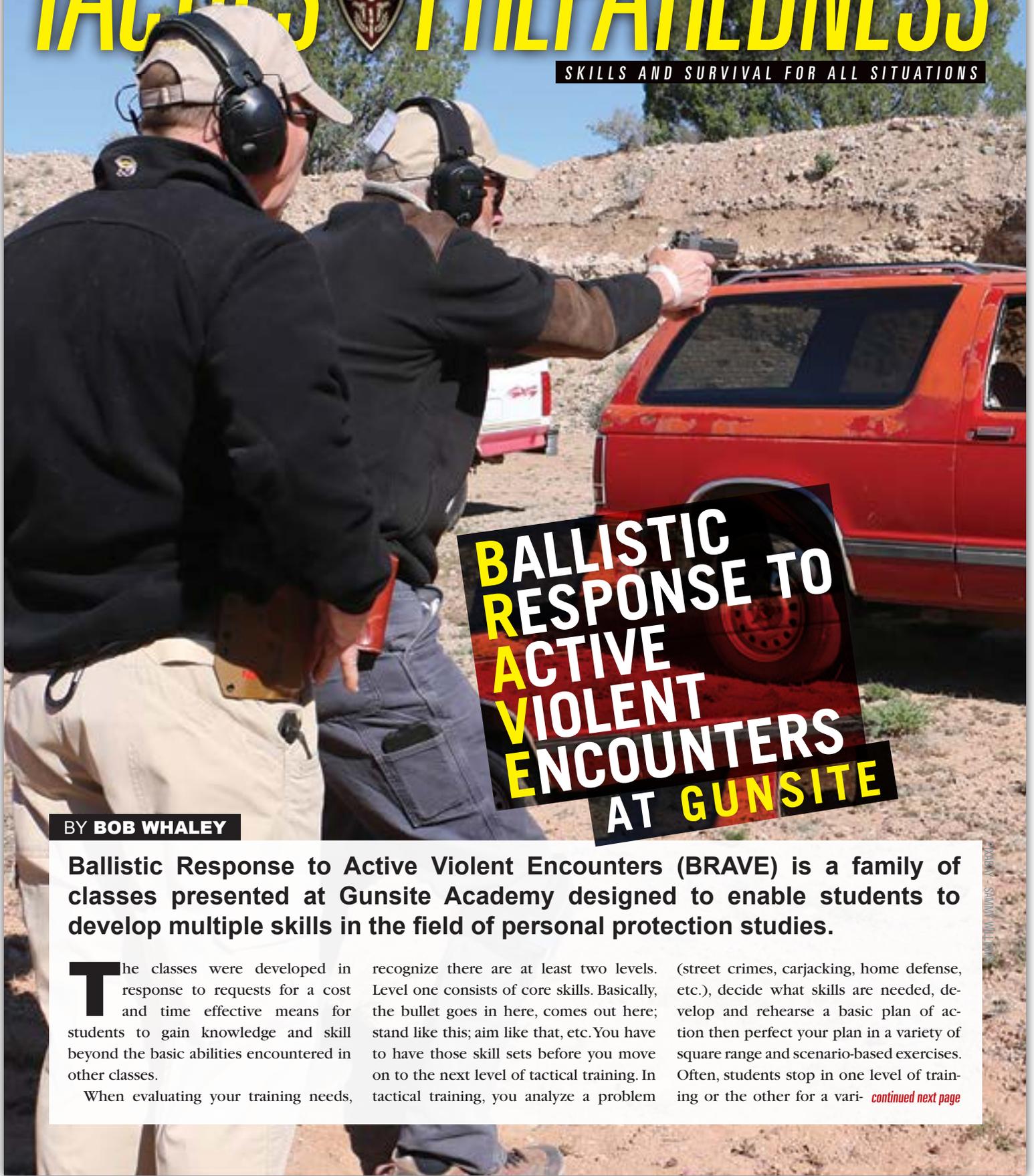


TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS

SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS



BALLISTIC RESPONSE TO ACTIVE VIOLENT ENCOUNTERS AT GUNSITE

BY BOB WHALEY

Ballistic Response to Active Violent Encounters (BRAVE) is a family of classes presented at Gunsite Academy designed to enable students to develop multiple skills in the field of personal protection studies.

The classes were developed in response to requests for a cost and time effective means for students to gain knowledge and skill beyond the basic abilities encountered in other classes.

When evaluating your training needs,

recognize there are at least two levels. Level one consists of core skills. Basically, the bullet goes in here, comes out here; stand like this; aim like that, etc. You have to have those skill sets before you move on to the next level of tactical training. In tactical training, you analyze a problem

(street crimes, carjacking, home defense, etc.), decide what skills are needed, develop and rehearse a basic plan of action then perfect your plan in a variety of square range and scenario-based exercises. Often, students stop in one level of training or the other for a vari- *continued next page*

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THE FIRST DAY IS A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF BASIC SKILLS.

ety of reasons. Time and money constraints are often reasons students don't round out their skills. We sometimes see students who have awesome shooting skills with no tactical capabilities or the reverse; students who are hell on wheels tactically but can't hit the county they're standing in. BRAVE is designed to remedy that problem.

Students are given a mindset presentation that covers everything from what, when and who to look for as indicators of a problem such as subjects loitering, changing direction to follow or intercept an intended victim. They are given examples of grooming and touching as an intimidation or distancing behavior. During role play sessions, instructors demonstrate the behaviors during controlled encounters with students to provide the opportunity to build experience with simulated unknown contacts. We also provide information on how the brain functions in a crisis, physical fitness as a component of personal protection, equipment selection, being a "gray man" and other topics relevant to the subject at hand

From there, it's off to the range where training day one is spent completing a comprehensive review of core skills from basic pistol classes. In BRAVE, students are expected to know how to run the gun, so instructors don't teach those skills unless we see a safety problem. If a student is doing something counter to Gunsite instruction, but are effi-

cient and safe in their operation, we let them roll with what they know. BRAVE is all about developing plans for response to real world problems, not learning how to run the gun

The range session starts with a 5 + 1 drill taken from the Combat Shooting and Tactics curriculum. CSAT is a friend of Gunsite and I'm not bashful about adding good drills from other institutions. In the drill, students will perform five dry repetitions of a presentation to the target with a single dry press of the trigger. The pistol is loaded and the action is repeated with a live round fired. The pistol is unloaded and the entire 5+1 is repeated a total of five circuits. This comprehensive drill allows students to perform multiple evolutions of critical skills while instructors get a good idea where the students stand regarding overall skills. From there, we press a number of drills Gunsite students will recognize from previous classes.

Too often, we see instructors develop tactical responses based on their favorite techniques rather than what happens in the real world. In other words, the process is "hey, this (insert technique here) is cool. If somebody comes at me like this, it'll work great so let's act like that's how people will attack us" whether their concept is based on reality or not, we don't have to wonder about how criminals tend to attack. There are hours of video that have captured real criminal attacks. If we spend just a little time watching

those assaults we can get solid ideas about how we can respond effectively to assaults. That-right-to-left thinking is the corner stone for developing the plans we practice in the various BRAVE formats. Seeing and avoiding is the highest priority, you can't prepare for every contingency, but understanding tendencies and having a basic plan for them puts you ahead of the curve.

Training day two is spent practicing hand combat tactics. Hand combat at a shooting school?! Blasphemy! If someone says, "I have a gun ... I'll just shoot 'em", they have put themselves in a dangerous position. You have to have the ability and capability to work smoothly through force options from withdrawal to physical presence to empty hand techniques to intermediate weapons to deadly force and back without batting an eye if you don't want to make a bad situation worse. Poor decision making will increase your physical risks and poor deci-

sion making will increase your legal risks. BRAVE emphasizes stand-up techniques with an introduction to ground defense.

Day two also includes a medical brief. In a self-protection event, bullets flying around have a tendency to cut meat. Some of that meat getting cut might belong to you or someone you care about. In those critical first moments, you'll only have the knowledge and equipment you bring to the fight to save the lives you care about. The medical brief we present in BRAVE classes was developed and is audited annually by doctors on staff or associated with Gunsite Academy

Another key component of BRAVE has to do with using subject matter experts to develop and verify information presented in the class. For example, we can talk about legal issues related to self-protection issues and, as a former cop, I can give some pretty good examples how situations went sideways or came out in favor of the good guys. When it comes to a detailed legal discussion, however, that's the realm of the lawyer, particularly the lawyer

versed in self-defense law. In any brief we give on legal issues, as an example, any information is forwarded to contacts we have to vet the information for accuracy, just like we do with the medical brief. The brief on brain functions, for example, was developed with, and approved by, neurosurgeons, college professors, psychologists and psychiatrists. We want to know that technical information we present is the most accurate we can provide.

I mentioned that day two touches on physical fitness. If you think you are serious about personal protection and you didn't take time to do *something* to improve or maintain your level of physical fitness, you are wrong. Time is the great thief. Unless you are pushing harder every day, you're not in as good shape today as you were yesterday and you won't be in as good shape tomorrow as you are today. You have to do something every day to get ahead of the process, or at least slow it down when that is no longer possible. Murphy's Law suggests your adversary is always 22, so we give a brief on fitness concepts and offer suggestions how students can improve in this



DRY AND LIVE FIRE DRILLS, ALONG WITH ROLE-PLAYING, ARE USED FOR HOME DEFENSE AND STREET CRIME SCENARIOS.



vital area without causing injury or exacerbating existing conditions. We start with what we have and dedicate ourselves to day-to-day improvement.

Suggestions are based on the functional fitness concept with an emphasis on supporting the ability to fight. We provide a variety of resources to develop an effective program based on individual needs and limitations. Just two of the resources mentioned are Pat McNamara (former army Delta operator and tactical trainer) and Phil Daru (former professional MMA fighter and a professional trainer for other MMA fighters). To set the example, instructors work out after class most days so students can see how simple it can be to address the fitness requirement.

Training days three, four and five present training in home defense, response to street crimes and vehicle defense. We use a variety of dry and live fire drills and role play with airsoft and blue guns to develop, verify and reinforce basic response plans. The format presents no less than a one-to-one ratio of dry to live exercises. Dry training is where you learn and perfect tactical responses. Live fire training is an additional level of verification if appropriate. As a full-time SWAT officer, I attended as many tactics classes that never launched a live round as classes that put hundreds of rounds downrange. In terms of learning real tactics, the non-ballistic classes were often more effective in conveying information.

We start home defense with a discussion of evaluating your home from the perspective of the criminal and how to “harden the target” by improving locks, lighting, doorframes and area denial landscaping. Next, we talk about the psychology of the home invader. It’s about using terror and intimidation to control territory. The sooner you can escape the event, limit the crook’s ability to control space and people and/or intervene, the better chance you have for a positive outcome.

Response to street crimes is heavy on presenting a strong, capable persona. Most criminals aren’t looking for a fight. They want an easy target. If you look like you can take care of yourself (better when you actually *can* take care of yourself), the less likely it is you will be picked as a victim. To facilitate that outcome, instructors provide additional opportunity to role play unknown contact scenarios. Students are able to add polish to the basic response plans from day two and can add “tactical posturing” to their repertoire. If



DECISION MAKING UNDER PRESSURE IS AS NECESSARY FOR SELF-DEFENSE AS IT IS FOR ANY OTHER TACTICAL SITUATION.

things go south, we practice multiple evolutions of engagements within touching range. These exercises include single target and multiple suspect engagements with movement to cover.

Vehicle defense starts with an examination of a typical sedan-style vehicle and pickup truck for potential cover points. Spoiler alert, there aren’t many, but those that exist can be exploited with proper body positioning and “stacking” of points to maximize cover options. Up next, students practice presenting the pistol from a seated position to insure they don’t flag their legs. It would be embarrassing—and cut down your fighting potential—to shoot yourself while trying to save yourself from an assault.

After the basic presentation training, we transfer skills to inside the vehicle. We work an organized basic plan to engage a hostile target from inside the vehicle when such action would become necessary. The basic response includes putting the car in park (you don’t want to get dragged exiting the car), remove the seat belt (I have seen coppers ripped off their feet when the seat belt they didn’t know they were caught in snapped tight, and I have to admit, I laughed.) We present the pistol, engage the threat if appropriate and then get the heck out of the bullet magnet. You can’t learn skills like this just reading about them, you have to do them. Safety and sanity can be provided by a qualified and experienced instructor.

All the domain specific training goes back to the brief on brain functions and how the

brain reacts in an emergency. Basically, the portion of the brain that responds to danger uses familiar patterns to respond to emergencies. By practicing a plan based on real world events, we give the brain a chance to “see” a similar problem and build a baseline response, shortening the time it takes to respond to the emergency. Plans don’t have to be perfect, they only need to be close enough to make the connection. Your brain will improve the plan at hyper speed and launch a program if you’ve done the work of front-loading good information. The plans we develop are based on principles supported by tactics, techniques and procedures that allow students to execute “in the moment” with minimal additional thinking required.

Time, money and, in today’s environment, ammunition are always at a premium. We never have enough of any of those elements. The Gunsite BRAVE family of classes provides a training vehicle to develop tactical capabilities in a time and cost-effective way. ✓

BIO

Bob Whaley (www.Gunsite.com) is a retired St. Louis County Police lieutenant. He spent 15 years assigned to his department’s Tactical Operations Unit (SWAT). Other assignments included: patrol, intelligence and crimes against property. Bob has received training from and holds certifications in a variety of tactical applications and weapons platforms. He attended his first Gunsite class in 1989 and became a staff instructor in 2005.