

Lt. Col Dave Grossman's **Bullet-Proofing the Mind** A MUST for every concealed-carrier

by Chad D Baus

Amateurs talk hardware. Professionals talk software. It doesn't matter what's in your hand or between your legs. It matters what's in your heart and in your head."

- Lt. Col. Dave Grossman[1]

It is every bit as important to spend time and money getting training for the mental aspects of defending oneself in a deadly force encounter as it is to spend time and money on preparing for the physical aspects such as obtaining the right equipment and learning how to use it. Enter Lt. Col Dave Grossman's powerful mindset-oriented seminar, "Bullet-Proofing the Mind."

Speaking from Experience

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman is a West Point psychology professor, Professor of Military Science, and an Army Ranger. He is the author of *On Killing*, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize, is on the US Marine Corps' recommended reading list, and is required reading at the FBI academy and numerous other academies and colleges. He has testified before U.S. Senate and Congressional committees and numerous state legislatures, and he and his research have been cited in a national address by the President of the United States. Today he is the director of the Killology Research Group[2], and in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks he is on the road almost 300 days a year, training elite military and law enforcement organizations worldwide about the reality of combat.

Recently, I attended Col. Grossman's course, along with about 100 other men and women, a crowd that I estimate to have been about a 60/40 mix of Fulton County (Ohio) Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #135 Members and fellow Buckeye Firearms Association supporters from all over the state.

Four Steps to a Bullet-Proof Mind

Grossman spent the day walking us through the four steps to a Bullet Proof Mind:

1) Understand the magnitude of the threat.

Grossman struck hard on this theme from the minute the all-day seminar began, setting the stage with two powerful questions:

"Can we take the lessons learned in blood and lives at Columbine and the World Trade Center and apply them so we'll never take this [path] again, or do we have to wait until our kids die?"

and

"Could we agree our responsibility is to keep our kids and grandkids safe?"

To set up his next theme, Grossman delivered the first of what became throughout the day a host of riveting real-life case-studies, recounting the story of an officer who took a .22 round in a non-vital area, yet collapsed, not because he was incapacitated but because Hollywood had taught him that he was supposed to fall down when he got shot. Thus his second step to a Bullet-Proof Mind:

2) Don't focus on the minority who were hurt.

Grossman advised that "stuff you think you know about combat can destroy you. ...Basing what you think you know about combat on Hollywood is like basing what you know about eloquence on Disney's 'Dumbo'."

"Hollywood loves the pity party," Grossman observed. "Don't fall for it. Chew it up, and spit it out."

Grossman's next complaint about Hollywood leads to the third step toward Bullet-Proofing the Mind:

"Hollywood creates the macho man myth."

3) Don't be a macho man.

This third step toward a Bullet Proof Mind takes on a bit of a dual meaning. "Every good cop knows there is no shame in calling for backup," Grossman noted. He used that truth to encourage people who have survived a deadly-force encounter to call for back-up in dealing with any level of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Grossman spent 75% of the all-day seminar on the fourth and final step toward a Bullet-Proof Mind:

4) Hunt down and eliminate every bit of denial in our lives.

"Denial is the enemy," Grossman repeatedly warned. Citing examples ranging from the 9-11 terror attacks to a litany of school shootings, including one in his hometown of Jonesboro, AR. Grossman's own son was attending school in Jonesboro that day, and when Grossman first learned of a shooting at a middle school he had to turn on the television to find out whether or not it was his son's. It was not.

"The worst thing that can happen is someone coming to kill our kids. *Folks, someone is coming to kill our kids.*"

In effort to shake his students from their denial, Grossman noted that we are facing both Internal and External Threats. The Internal Threat is that "kids and perverts are coming to kill our kids." The External Threat is that "terrorists are coming to kill our kids."

Citing the horrific attack by Islamic terrorists on the Russian school in Beslan, Russia[3], where after more than three days of rape and murder, more than 350 people died - half of them children.

To illustrate the level of denial in this country, Grossman noted that when HBO did a special on the Beslan terrorist attack, they completely omitted any mention of rape.[4]

Grossman posed the question of how many kids have been killed by school fires in the past 25 years in all of North America. The answer, ZERO.

He then noted that in 1998 alone, school violence has resulted in 35 dead, 250,000 injured. And lest you think 1998 was an anomaly, Grossman noted 48 died from school violence in 2004.

The reason fire doesn't kill school kids, Grossman explained, is that "fire guys have set up multiple redundant, overlapping layers of protection." No one calls such extravagant fire prevention efforts into question, "yet we try to prevent violence," Grossman observed, "and people think we're crazy. DENIAL!"

"Denial has no survival value" became a repeatedly used phrase throughout the day, usually to punctuate another case

study example of a place where the lack of preparation for a potential deadly force encounter (no one prepared because they were in denial) got people killed. Thanks to denial, "teachers aren't prepared for violence. ...If they had done a fraction of preparation for violence [at Columbine] as they had done for fire..."

"Why did we have to wait until after Columbine to change our training and coin the word "active shooter?" Denial!

Observing that the Virginia Tech mass-murderer chose the building he attacked because it had no ground-floor windows and only three double-doors that could be chained from the inside, Grossman asked "how many kids have to die before every class has two exits and a securable door?"

"If teachers can be fired for failure to do fire drills, how much more mean and ugly should we be to those who refuse to prepare for violence?"

The NEW Factor

Grossman noted that every one of the actions the Columbine kids committed was a felony. Yet many of their actions had been illegal for 100 years before that, with no problems. "Something is going on, and it ain't the guns," he warned.

Whatever is going on, it is world-wide phenomenon. We medicate ourselves, police ourselves, secure ourselves and imprison ourselves at rates unprecedented in history, and yet aggravated assaults and other violent attacks are at their highest. What the hell is going on?

"It is a myth that most school killers are on Ritalin," Grossman noted. "It is a lie. Only two were prescribed, and we're pretty sure they were off their meds [when they attacked]."

"They've all trained on the video games," Grossman observed. Citing research conducted for his book *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence*, Grossman advised that "the average kid has practiced over 1,000,000 kills in a simulator" (video game). Video games these days are "total virtual reality simulators", "simulating rob, kill, steal for hundreds of hours on end.

Grossman displayed a series of brain scans showing that kids of violence have underdeveloped forebrains and overdeveloped midbrains. In other words, there is scientific evidence proving that video games shut down the portion of

the brain that is logical and predictable. "The safety catch is turned off."

Not willing to allow anyone to think violent media is the only factor, Grossman warned students not to "get caught in a single-cause model". He stressed that while the violent media is definitely not the only factor, it is most definitely the NEW factor. "take existing factors, add one new factor, and you double or triple the risk. Take the factor away, you reduce the risk by two or three times."

Adopting the Warrior Mindset

"As the fire-fighter knows fire, so you must know violence." Citing an analogy that he would use throughout the discussion on the warrior mindset, Grossman explained that "1% of people are wolves. 98% are sheep in denial. 1% are sheepdogs. ...Only a predator can face a predator."

"Sheep have only two speeds - graze and stampede. They quickly sink back into denial. ...At Virginia Tech nobody put up a fight," said Grossman. "They waited to die. The only survival trick they knew was 'Freeze'. We're raising a nation of sheep. ...Once upon a time, America was full of sheep dogs."

It is important to note that "sheep are leery of predators. ...Sheep can't comprehend the mindset of a warrior sheepdog. Sheep wake up every day like it's 9-11."

Grossman said that the great destroyer in combat is stress, and the way to defeat stress is mental readiness.

"The most complex fine motor skill you'll ever need is to shoot a human being who is trying to shoot you," the veteran advised. "If we train so much for sports games, how much more should we for our lives in combat?"

So how does Grossman recommend we avoid the symptoms of extreme fear response? "Inoculate. Expose yourself to the 'disease' in a controlled manner. Firefighters face fire to train, we must face stress and fear. Through force on force training. The first time you go through a force on force scenario, your heart rate can jump to over 200 bpm. The more times you do it, your heart rate comes down. Inoculation."

When under stress, Grossman explained, the human voice shows stress. There is a loss of blood flow to the vocal cords, to the hands, etc. "You need to get to a place where we call for help after combat and sound like a pilot [during an emergency landing]."

To insulate the point of how simulating stressful or fearful encounters can inoculate against the destroyer of extreme fear response in combat, Grossman told the story of deputy sheriff Jennifer Fulford.[5] When she surprised three home invaders in a garage, she took incoming fire from all three, and was shot ten times (the bad guys were hitting her with about one in ever four shots). All the time, however, she was returning fire, and hitting with every shot. She killed one, lost use of her strong hand, did a left-handed, one-handed reload, killed a second one, and the third ran away. Today she has recovered and back on the beat. Fulford said "I am the product of my training," and went on to say that the whole incident was less stressful than her simulation training.

Having this kind of "steely determination is about having made the decision ahead of time" to kill or be killed, Grossman explained.

Grossman went on to expand on his earlier advice to seek help in dealing with the emotional aftermath of a deadly force encounter, and then examined four things held in common by people who don't get PTSD:

1. Previously stress inoculated
2. Internal locus of control (predator vs. rabbit)
 - o Note: the predator feels no combat stress, predator IS combat stress
 - o Note: the predator on his own turf has enormous advantage
 - o Note: Grossman advised that "one of the best things you can do to prepare for combat is to hunt," calling it "the ultimate predator neuron training for combat."
3. Faith
4. Controlled emotions
 - o Courage is grace under pressure

Grossman noted that the goal of stress-inducing training is to avoid PTSD. "If there is no extreme fear response [feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror], there is no PTSD"

Surviving Gunshot Wounds

"All things are ready if our minds be so."[6]

Grossman taught the following tips for surviving gunshot wounds:

- If the threat is no longer viable, and if you've been shot, get yourself out of the line of fire. "Don't make your friends expose themselves to get to you."

- If the threat remains, stop the threat. "You can take a bullet to the heart and have 5 to 7 seconds before you will be out of combat. You're not dead! Keep going!"

Grossman's 5 D's for Securing our Kids

Denial

"Denial kills you physical, mentally, and financially. It has no survival value. Chew it up, spit it out, get rid of it. Moment of truth today - no more denial. Rid yourself of every ounce."

Deter

"We don't want to kill anybody. Deterrence is the goal."

As an example of a failure to use Deterrence, Grossman citing the example of the school massacre at Red Lake, MN[7], where a young school murderer shot his grandparents with the police-issued weapons he had stolen from his grandfather (a police officer), went to his high school and shot one of two unarmed guards who was manning the front door. "If [that guard] had been armed, odds are 10 to 1 he'd never have tried," Grossman said. "DETER. Those guards were given a responsibility for human lives without the tools to do the job! Never call an unarmed man 'security'. Call them 'run-like-hell-when-the-shooting-starts'."

Detect

"Every time he bounces off a hard target, it's a chance to Detect.

Delay

The goal is as many hard targets as possible. Once he is in the school, the only question is how many kids die."

Destroy (Defeat)

"We are at war. Our armed citizens and cops are the front line."

Grossman, who tailored this section to speak primarily to his F.O.P. hosts, preempted any police bureaucrats who were

already starting to add up the cost of the security they were imagining Grossman would recommend:

"The most important things we can do cost nothing. Our problem isn't the money, it's Denial."

He employed officers to carry off-duty, saying "If you're legally authorized to carry and you go out without your gun...everytime you see a fire-fighting sign, sprinkler system, etc., tell yourself the fire-fighter is more professional than I am."

Secondly, Grossman reminded officers that "Armed Citizens are the militia. Integrate concealed-handgun license-holders (CHLs) into your plan. We are at war. The idea that cops can do it all themselves is wrong. Use what is available to you. Integrate them into your plan from the beginning. One or two people in the first few minutes are worth 1000 people hours later."

Finally, Grossman advised his audience to "stay in shape. Piss on golf. Real Americans go to the range. Choose a sport with cardio or survival skill benefit. If you see a cop carrying golf clubs, do one thing for me. Look him in the eye and say 'baaa!'" Plan A is the British Model. Disarm everyone. It's not working. Plan B is the Israeli Model. Train/ arm everyone. Israel has few golf courses and a lot of rifle ranges!"

Grossman summarized the goal of his training as being better able to deter, less likely to panic, and more likely to live. A sheepdog says "I will lead the way. I will set the highest standards. ...Your mission is to man the ramparts in this dark and desperate hour with honor and courage."

This sheepdog hopes for a day when we once again are a nation full of them. With Lt. Col. Grossman as our Instructor, we are headed in the right direction.

Chad Baus is the Buckeye Firearms Association Vice Chairman and Northwest Ohio Chair.

Footnotes:

[1] Lt. Col Dave Grossman's Bullet-Proofing the Mind - A MUST for every concealed-carrier, February 15, 2008, <http://www.buckeyefirearms.org/node/5437>

[2] <http://www.killology.com>

[3] <http://www.youtube.com/v/j2Xf2P92fS8&rel=1>

[4] HBO Documentary Films, Children of Beslan,
<http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/childrenbeslan/index.html>

[5] " 'I Wasn't Going To Die There' (Deputy Sheriff Jennifer Fulford)",
September 18, 2005,
http://www.parade.com/articles/editions/2005/edition_09-18-2005/featured_0

[6] The Life of King Henry the Fifth, Act 4, Scene 3, William Shakespeare

[7] Red Lake High - Another in the sad legacy of victim zone tragedies, March 22, 2005,
<http://www.buckeyefirearms.org/node/2328>