

Gracie Survival Tactics – The Inside Scoop

The Non-Lethal Techniques Every Law Enforcement Officer Should Know

by [Brandon T. Vaughn](#) 01/06/16



Over the years my position/role/career as a martial arts instructor has offered many opportunities and experiences that I wouldn't have had otherwise. The most recent of which took place last month, November 16th through the 20th, and took me back to California, a place I first had the pleasure of visiting two years ago when I participated in the Gracie Academy Instructor Certification Program in 2013.

My second visit to California would also be connected to the [Gracie] Academy, only instead of Torrance, this time I would be going to Pleasanton, a suburb in the San Francisco Bay Area approximately 25 miles east of Oakland, CA. I decided to take advantage of a formal invitation to all CTC Certified Instructors to assist and participate in any upcoming Gracie Survival Tactics (GST) Instructor Certification Courses. Eager to get an inside look at this program only available to active or retired law enforcement and military personnel, and in desperate need of a vacation (even if it would be a working one) I jumped at the opportunity. I'm glad I did. It was an incredible opportunity to learn the GST curriculum first hand, meet some of my fellow CTC Instructors, and get some "mat time" with Ryron Gracie himself.

Adapting To Meet a Changing Climate



For those of you who aren't familiar with the program, Gracie Survival Tactics (GST) is the Gracie Academy's Defensive Tactics Program for Military & Law Enforcement Personnel. Created by the Gracie Academy to meet the ever changing needs of their clients, the GST program is itself an amalgamation of two earlier combative/defensive tactics programs. Gracie Combatives, an intensive course based on the most effective techniques of

Gracie Jiu-Jitsu developed for the United States Army, and G.R.A.P.P.L.E (Gracie Resisting Attack Procedures for Law Enforcement), a non-violent and court defensible program developed for police officers. Both of the aforementioned programs were originally developed by Rorion Gracie, eldest son of Gracie Jiu-jitsu founder Helio Gracie, and creative mind behind the UFC.

Since it's inception Gracie Survival Tactics (GST) has been taught to countless Federal, State and International military and law enforcement agencies including the FBI, the Secret Service and the US Border Patrol. During my five days assisting with the GST Instructor Certification Program I was able to meet men and women from a wide range of agencies and hear many of their first hand accounts of situations that they have found themselves in while on duty. As well as some of their concerns with the level of self-defense training that their agencies currently have in place.

The Road to Certified GST Instructor

For law enforcement or military personnel (active or retired) wishing to learn Gracie Survival Tactics (GST) for their own continuing education, the complete 23 lesson course is available on www.GracieUniversity.com via online streaming video. However, if you are an officer wishing to implement the GST program at your department or agency the only way to do so is by completing the GST Instructor Certification (Level 1).

The Gracie Academy teaches anywhere from 5 to 10 of these instructor certification courses a year varying by location. Some are hosted by the Academy itself at their main location in Torrance, CA while others are hosted by various agencies around the world or by individuals within those organizations. The particular course I volunteered to assist in was hosted by a member of the Pleasanton Police Department with the actual training sessions taking place in the gym of a local high school.

The week long course began at 8am Monday morning and started with Ryron Gracie giving a brief history of Gracie Jiu-Jitsu, including its creation, their work with the US Army and the development of Gracie Combatives and how working with the military and law enforcement over the last 20 years led to the creation of the techniques that we would be learning over the next five days. He then moved seamlessly into the first of eight techniques that we would cover that day, setting the pace for the rest of the week. Ryron would teach a technique, using either myself or one of the other four instructors that were there to assist in the course, then when he was sure that everyone understood the technique he would release them to practice the technique with their partner. At this time the assistant instructors would walk around and observe the participants doing the techniques, offering feedback and making any necessary corrections.

Day two and three began with the class reviewing all the techniques that they had learned the day before while. After the review period, which lasted anywhere from 10-15 minutes, we would move on the block of techniques that would be taught that day. The training sessions ended with a series of fight simulation drills in which the participants would combine several techniques from previous sessions with the ones that they had just learned, thus building their muscle

memory and making them more familiar with how the individual techniques can be used in any possible combination.

While the first three days were dedicated to the learning of the GST techniques, day four was dedicated to instructor training, where the participants learned the most effective ways to teach the GST techniques to their colleagues when they return to their individual agencies/departments. The fifth and final day of the course consisted of a final evaluation to test the participants overall comprehension of all the material covered during the previous four days.

The GST Advantage



What sets Gracie Survival Tactics apart from other defense tactic programs currently being taught to law enforcement and military personnel is its lack of reliance on striking techniques (ie. punches and kicks) which may not be effective against an assailant who may be physically larger or stronger or who may be under the influence of a substance that dampens their ability to feel pain. Instead, all the techniques in the GST program are based on leverage, timing, and efficient use of energy. This means the techniques can be employed effectively regardless of gender, size or athletic ability.

With the number of fatal police shootings reported to be nearing 400 nationwide in 2015, and allegations of excessive force at an all time high, GST provides law enforcement officers with a much needed alternative to relying solely on their firearm or secondary tools (ie. baton, stun gun, pepper spray) in situations where the use of deadly force could have possibly been avoided. The GST curriculum also address the high rate of instance where law enforcement officers are shot in the line of duty by an assailant using the officer's own firearm by including weapon retention techniques in the curriculum as well as a variety of effective techniques that allow an officer to get back to their feet and create distance in the event that they end up on the ground underneath an assailant.

A Fear of Change

With a seemingly endless list of benefits and advantages, it's hard to imagine that all law enforcement agencies aren't already taking part in the Gracie Survival Tactics program.

From conversations I had with some of the men and women participating in the GST Level 1 Instructor Certification Course, I learned that one obstacle the newly certified instructors will encounter when trying to implement the program in their own department may be the very officers that they are trying to help.

Whether it stems from an over reliance on the tools they have at their disposal or the lack of continued fitness requirements after they graduate from the academy, some officers seem resistant to any self-defense training outside what is mandated annually by their state. When you consider that 40% of officers that are shot in the line of duty are done so with their own weapon, it would seem that all law enforcement officers would be eager to learn any technique that, would not only teach them how to retain their weapon, but also how to subdue a suspect without the use of their firearm or auxiliary weapons.

Another obstacle that new GST Instructors may have to deal with is a natural resistance to change, either from the administration or from their department's defensive tactics instructor, in the event that the GST Instructor doesn't also serve that role. Strategies on how to address these and other common concerns are included in the support materials that each course participant receives on the final day of training.



Final Thoughts

Gracie Survival Tactics is quickly proving itself to be not only a valuable resource for law enforcement officers, but to military personnel as well. As I am writing this article, the United Nations Security Service has become the most recent agency to adopt Gracie Survival Tactics.

My experience at the GST Level 1 Instructor Certification Course in Pleasanton, CA was like nothing I have experienced before and I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to not only assist, but to participate in the training as well. As a martial arts instructor I've had the opportunity to teach students of all ages how to defend themselves. Even if learning self-defense was not their primary reason for enrolling, it was still a skill they acquired while working towards whatever their personal goals were. Having said that, I have to admit that there was something exceedingly rewarding about working with individuals that will most likely be using the techniques you are teaching them a regular basis.

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