

Firearms And The Martial Artists



As I travel throughout the country, both as an instructor and student, it is evident that many martial artists are arming themselves with firearms. Highly publicized acts of violence throughout the country have prompted many individuals to arm themselves in an attempt to enhance their personal safety. Statistics collected by the Federal Bureau of investigation indicates that more than 760,000 aggravated assaults occur in the United States each year. Of the reported aggravated assaults 21.8% are committed with firearms. Many states have adopted laws which allow individuals to legally carry firearms after they complete a state certified firearms training course.

Martial artists have a history of utilizing weapons as a part of their defense system. Karate students spend many hours becoming proficient with traditional weapons such as nunchucks, bo staffs, swords, sai, and other martial weapons. I do not believe an individual would consider entering combat using a traditional martial weapon without many hours of practice under the supervision of a qualified instructor. Most states require that individuals who received handgun carry permits have eight hours of training which consists of a review of state laws regarding the use of lethal force and passing a qualifying firearms course under the supervision of a certified firearms instructor. In many states, once an individual has met the state requirements, he may carry firearms legally without receiving additional or continuous training and may carry a weapon different from the one he qualified with during the training course.

In comparison, law enforcement officers are required to receive a minimum of 40 hours of firearms training which covers: the application of lethal force,

decision-making during critical and high stress incidents, weapons proficiency during body stress alarm events, and must receive a qualifying score on a variety of certified firearms courses under the supervision of state certified firearms instructors. The officers must train and qualify with the weapons they will use in the performance of their duties. Officers must continue their training each year in both weapons proficiency and the legal application of use force. Law enforcement officers are also required to undergo a psychological evaluation before they are allowed to carry firearms. These qualifications are minimum requirements for officers and are usually not accepted as a standard as most police agencies require their officers to receive many more hours of training in weapons deployment and proficiency.

A firearm should not be considered a weapon which requires minimum training to utilize during a life-threatening event. While statistics indicate that most armed encounters occur within a distance of only 5 to 7 feet; most individuals will find it difficult to properly deploy a firearm and strike a moving target during an armed encounter. The improper deployment of a firearm can create a dangerous situation for the person attempting to use the weapon and other individuals who may be in the area. As martial artists, if we decide to arm ourselves with modern-day weapons then we should follow the martial tradition of ensuring we study under the guidance of a qualified instructor, practice weapon proficiency, know how to safely deploy the weapon, understand the dynamics of physiological and psychological response during combat, and dedicate the time needed for continuous training. We should recognize the responsibilities which come with carrying a lethal weapon and make a decision whether or not we are willing to commit to the training required.

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