

Unarmed Combat Training, SSF Manual, 1983

UNARMED COMBAT TRAINING MANUAL SPECIAL SERVICE FORCE, 1983

By

MAJOR WILLIAM SOUCIE, CD

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS

By

ERNEST B. BENO, OMM, CD, BRIGADIER-GENERAL (RETIRED)

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The booklet on this CD was produced by Lieutenant Colonel (Retired), then Major Bill Soucie, Battery Commander of “E” Battery (Para), 2RCHA, Petawawa in 1983. Bill developed this military Unarmed Combat program to use as a basic guide to train soldiers and instructors in the Special Service Force. Prior to and while developing this booklet, Bill ran several basic and instructor level Unarmed Combat courses, training and motivating several dozens of soldiers and leaders.

The training in Unarmed Combat in my time had a spotty record. Some units trained in this considerably, most chose not to. Some treated it as a sort of specialty, others as part of routine fitness and combat training. More often than not it received scant attention – of interest only to a handful. Yet we all professed to be soldiers, fighters and warriors – and it now strikes me as odd that we did not train much more deliberately and intensely in the art (as some would call it), techniques and general practice of Unarmed Combat. For in training in unarmed combat one develops many skills and concepts that have a much wider meaning in the art of war and fighting of battles – whether at higher levels or face-to-face. And, there are lessons in daily life – one of them being that you establish a routine of personal fitness training on a regular and routine basis.

Since time immemorial armies have trained their soldiers in the martial arts – to elevate an individual’s confidence and their fighting spirit. On reflecting back and re-reading (thumbing through) Bill’s booklet, several issues pop out to me. Bill’s concept of military unarmed combat really is a reflection on warfighting in general, even though written for fighting on a personal level. Within this booklet you will find elements of the principles of war, the principles of business practice, the principles of inter-personal relationships, the principles of managing your own life, as well as the principles of how to defend from, strike and overcome a foe. Let’s look at these principles:

- **Balance and Harmony** – Bill describes the importance of balance, whether defending, attacking or being prepared for any eventuality, and the importance of regaining balance after every move. Co-related is the need for harmony within the body – the mind, heart, spirit, senses, muscles, nerves, joints and bones work together to strike, or to avoid or absorb strikes. Working with a common purpose and focused on one object multiplies the body’s strength and counters the moves of the foe.

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- **Centre of Gravity** – Bill uses the term Centre of Gravity to explain how one retains balance and harmony, while shifting it to add power and strength to offensive and defensive moves. He also describes the importance of disrupting the opposition's Centre of Gravity to knock them off balance and overcome them or deliver a fatal blow. Sensing and understanding the importance of the Centre of Gravity is of vital importance.
- **Awareness** – Throughout this booklet Bill stresses awareness - knowing what is going on in the mind of your foe, and in the surrounding situation. Without specifically saying so, Bill implies the need to remain calm and in control of your own emotions and body. Mind over matter, and see all, hear all, sense all.
- **Anticipation** – Anticipate your foe's likely actions and reactions so that you can defend from or neutralize the former and use the latter to your advantage. Be ready for the next move, and the one after.
- **Agility and Flexibility** – Be prepared for any situation, Adjust to your foe and to any opportunities or changing circumstances. Be agile in mind and body, and adapt quickly.
- **Offensive Action** – We see in Bill's booklet the necessity to move to the offense at the right time, and proportional to the need – and to follow through to ensure success. One must strike with effective movements and the full use of force. Make maximum use of all the right and moves, force and weapons. Surprise the opposition, and shock them – with speed, accuracy and power. Move the body such that you maximize power with minimal effort. A quick, well placed offensive strike may avoid prolonged action and possibly worse outcomes.
- **Blocking and Defence** – Bill explains how one can defend oneself from attacking foes, and the foe's weapons, and how one should block the strikes of the opposition. Thus the energy of the attacker is worn down, while with balance one can regain the initiative. And, in blocking and defending one protects one's personal centre of gravity. With the right blocks and defence, one can turn the foe's momentum to one's own advantage.
- **Economy of Effort** - Bill emphasizes using the force and means that will best achieve the objective while retaining balance and the ability to react to the unexpected. Remain calm and in control.
- **Counter-Attack** – Response with shock and speed to the offensive moves of the opposition, and in fact, use your foe's momentum to your own advantage. Seek to turn the situation around when your foe is unprepared.
- **Training** – Throughout the booklet Bill emphasizes the importance of training – individual training and the training of groups. His training concept is one of progressive training from warm-ups and very basic moves to ever-increasing complexity and application of power. And then practice, practice and practice. He describes the importance of having a training rhythm and ensuring individual safety, and emphasizes leadership training by developing instructors.

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One can readily see the significance and benefits of a comprehensive unarmed combat training regime for soldiers. With individuals it would raise not only their fitness levels, but also their personal confidence and their ability to handle themselves in a tight situation – thinking it through and acting if and as required. With the self-discipline, personal confidence and known personal capability, one can prevent or reduce the escalation of violence. However, the bottom line is that in war one must be capable in one-on-one confrontation, and he/she with the best instincts and training is the one that will survive.

At a higher level, one can see a remarkable similarity between the principles espoused by Bill Soucie and the Principles of War (or the principles of business), and many lessons can be learned about personal development (being all one can be) and inter-personal relationships. As you can see, unarmed combat training has many ancillary benefits, far beyond the individual and physical.

Again, on reflection, I believe that the Army would benefit by integrating unarmed combat training as a fundamental component of Army fitness and warfighter training. Not only would individuals benefit, but Army thinking and culture would benefit. Unarmed combat training brings fitness, agility, confidence, balance, awareness and determination – and reasoning. If better emphasized in training we'd be better prepared for challenging operational situations at all levels from one-on-one, to tactical to strategic. This will become ever more important in the post-Afghanistan era when the Army will need the wherewithal and means to motivate individuals and teams, and remind them continuously that war is all about overcoming an enemy by employing the ways and means that will best assure defeat of the foe and success for our own soldiers and units. Unarmed combat training makes for exciting and challenging individual and team training, as well as leadership/ instructional training all of which will clearly benefit the Army in the next armed conflict and preparing for all future challenges.

My thanks to Bill Soucie for developing and running unarmed combat training for the Army so many years ago, and for leaving this training manual as a positive and constructive legacy.

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Ernest B. Beno, OMM, CD
Brigadier-General, Retired
The Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery
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