

# **Officer Survival: When he's got the drop on you**

by Louis Marquez, Police Combative Training Academy

You're on patrol and a message comes over your mobile computer terminal. It reads: "Check business; complaint saw someone in the area; business closed for the night."

After acknowledging the message, you drive to the location, park your unit, and get out with a flashlight in your hand. Under your breath you mutter something about this being another "water haul" and a "waste of time."

But this is the job, and it's your duty to check it out. So you walk around the building. And just as you round the corner, you realize this isn't a false alarm.

Standing in front of you is a suspect with a gun. He's got the drop on you at point-blank range. There's no way that you can draw your weapon before he can fire.

What do you do?

I can assure you that if this happens, the only thing that will help you be victorious is your prior training in weapon disarms. Otherwise, you are at the mercy of this suspect. And as we all know, suspects don't have much mercy.

## **Turning the Tables**

Incidents like the scenario I just detailed claim the lives of many good cops. That's why when Hans Marrero and I founded the Police Combative Training Academy we decided to include techniques and tactics for turning the tables on such attackers in our defensive tactics curriculum.

Disarming a suspect who has the drop on you is a subject that is rarely addressed in academy or in-service DT programs. And when you look at the alarming statistics of officers killed with their own weapons, that's unacceptable. Every officer should be trained in a fundamental disarming skill set.

Hans and I were well aware of this shortcoming in police DT training, and we set out to do something about it. Our techniques are derived from years of "real world" experience in law enforcement and military service. They also factor in all the components of the equation, including fear management, closest weapon to closest target decision making, joint manipulation, pressure points, the effects of adrenaline on you and your attacker, and intensity.

Yet, even though they are comprehensive, the best thing about our techniques is that they are simple to execute, easy to learn, and you can remember how to do them under the most stressful of situations. As one of my firearms trainers, Al Clark, liked to say, the questions you have to ask yourself about any police tactic are: Will it work? Is it

necessary? And finally, can you perform it under stress? I believe that our weapon disarm techniques achieve these goals and then some.

In my more than 30 years of experience in the martial arts and in military and police service, I have been exposed to myriad disarming techniques and tactics. Some were excellent. But many were so complex and dependent on the suspect's actions that I immediately discarded them as I believed they spelled a recipe for failure. Others afforded so many options, depending on angles, weapon types, hand position, etc., that they were utterly useless in real-world combative situations.

Hans and I didn't want to add to the confusion. So we concentrated our efforts on designing a combative skill set that will work in the real world and will immediately incapacitate and disarm an armed attacker.

The disarming techniques demonstrated by Hans in the photos accompanying this article are easily retained, medically endorsed, bio-engineered, and highly effective from any angle. They have been proven and tested in battle, on the streets, and in the jails.

But don't ask us, ask our students.

We recently received a call from one of our students, a New Jersey state corrections officer. He was assaulted by two inmates who were armed with chains, and he successfully disarmed them and neutralized the assault by employing our techniques.

### **Psy Ops**

OK, let's walk through some of the concepts of our disarming techniques.

First, let's not overstate their effectiveness. Our disarming techniques are not the solution to all confrontations with all armed attackers. If the bad guy really wants you dead, he'll fire before you can make your move.

But if the suspect holds a gun on you and he's hesitating and he hasn't decided what to do, or if he just wants to toy with you, then you can take him.

Gaining the advantage over an attacker is not just physical; it's also psychological. When a suspect has a weapon on you, he feels like he has the superior position. You want to do everything possible to bolster his confidence in this regard. I even encourage officers to acquire a few acting skills, so that they can portray themselves as being helpless and as a victim.

The reason for all this subterfuge is simple. Your odds of completing a successful disarm increase dramatically if the suspect believes he has the upper hand.

When a suspect has the jump on you, remember the international sign of surrender; get your hands up. This gives you an immediate tactical edge and positions you for the disarm techniques.

Now here's where the psychological aspects of disarming an attacker come in. By assuming the posture of surrender, you've indicated to the attacker that you won't be trouble. This is good. You don't want to alert him to your plans.

Keep the attacker off guard by attempting to humanize yourself. In other words, talk to him. We all know that telling a bad guy that you have kids won't make him any more sympathetic to your plight. He will shoot or stab you anyway. But talking to him may lull him into a false sense of security. This is why we encourage verbalization and communication skills that relay a submissive and helpless position to a suspect in our weapon disarm training module.

### **Making Your Move**

Once you attack, the bad guy's gun may discharge while you disarm him. Since our technique is designed to give you control of where the muzzle points, it's unlikely that you will be hit, but if the suspect's weapon does discharge, you may suffer some slight discomfort such as powder burns or hearing impairment. You will only win if you can fight through this pain, and remember, a minor injury beats death or serious injury at the hands of some scumbag.

Also, remember that hesitation will get you killed. You can't take away an attacker's weapon unless you throw yourself fully into the attack. You must be aggressive and you must commit to your move. Otherwise, you will lose.

### **Work at It**

Some of the techniques that Hans and I have studied over the years require the attacker to come at you with his weapon held just so. It's not like that on the street. You can't ask the bad guy to come at you with his pistol held straight out in one hand.

Our technique lets you disarm an attacker who makes his move from any angle (front, rear, side, oblique, etc.). Practice it from all of these angles.

And as you practice, be aware that the key to these moves is the "C" step, a 180-degree move performed with your rear foot. Pay very careful attention to the "C" step in the photo demonstration on page 64. Its purpose is to get your body off the line of attack, in this case the "business end" of the weapon.

### **Technique Notes**

The technique depicted in the step-by-step photos that accompany this article is the only technique in which we teach officers to grab the attacker's weapon. The rationale behind this tactic is that by twisting the weapon violently back toward the attacker, you will dislocate his trigger finger. This is part of the effect of the technique. A joint dislocation is a very painful experience and usually has the desired effect of immediate compliance.

Initially, we teach our students to use both hands to take away the attacker's gun. But this technique can also be executed with one hand. The one-hand technique is very practical, if the officer has been injured or disabled. Additionally, the technique is easily mastered and with continual training it can be applied to multiple attackers with multiple weapons.

Our second technique is based on a properly applied "wrist lock." A properly applied wrist lock is devastating. It quickly displaces the suspect's balance, gains control of the weapon, and places him in a compliant posture. Using this wrist lock, you can move from surrender to a dominant tactical position with very little effort. And once you achieve tactical dominance over your attacker, you can safely handcuff him and await backup.

### **A Thousand Words**

The best way to teach you these techniques is to show them to you. So in the photos that accompany this article, Hans demonstrates our disarming technique when attacked with a pistol. And on the POLICE magazine Website ([www.policemag.com](http://www.policemag.com)), you will see how the technique can be used for edged weapons and for handgun attacks at other angles. These techniques are not limited to handguns and edged weapons; they can be employed against long guns, bats, chains, etc., with very few modifications. In fact, special ops have used these techniques in combat.

Hopefully, you will never come under such a life-threatening attack by an armed suspect. But it does happen, and you should be prepared to disarm the suspect and turn the tables.

Louis Marquez is a veteran officer who retired as a detective with the Austin, Tex. Police Department. He is chief tactical trainer of Police Combative Training Academy ([www.policecqb.com](http://www.policecqb.com)) and a member of the POLICE Advisory Board.