



INSIDE S.O.C.P.

By **Clyde Gentry III**

THE UNITED STATES MILITARY employs some of the most sophisticated weaponry known to man, but behind every SCAR (Special Operations Forces (SOF) Combat Assault Rifle) is a Special Operations soldier who must use his split-second tactical mind and array of skills to stay out of harm's way.

Mixed martial arts and the military are certainly no stranger to one another with countless former/current military personnel competing and benefit events supporting, but two programs bridge that gap between a sport and the people who protect our freedoms every day. While the Modern Army Combatives Program (MACP) readies the everyday Army soldier, the Special Operations Combatives Program (SOCP) prepares the elite — that soldier who stands out from the rest of the pack to undertake the most dangerous missions. SOCP wasn't spear-headed by some highly-decorated commando; it was the passion of a North Carolina-based MMA instructor who found his calling in life.



BACKGROUND

Greg Thompson was the first man to receive a black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu from Royce Gracie. Founder of Team ROC, he was one of the most sought-after instructors in the South, training many fighters including Tim Kennedy and Tara LaRosa. Located close to Ft. Bragg in Fayetteville, Thompson took on several military students, but not under regimented means. After all, Ft. Bragg is known as the “home of U.S. Army Airborne Forces and Special Forces,” so he was bound to teach folks who would, could and have seen combat. Prior to 9/11 as Thompson would tell it, “Soldiers literally cared more about how to beat someone’s ass in a bar.” But that all changed on that fateful day, and due to Thompson’s notoriety, he was hand-picked to train would-be air marshals who would protect us in the skies.

Even with all of the applicants, many of whom came from high-level police or military training, many trainers just couldn’t cut the mustard. Not only that, but many of the applicants were strong in one thing, but not the other. “The one thing I learned while working in that system was there was a lot of crap mixed in with what people taught ... stuff that didn’t translate to the actual ‘fight.’ I couldn’t understand why they were teaching that stuff.” Much of the training was typical for martial arts, but hardly applicable for a true “life or death” situation. Drills with dummy opponents to stand there and take the technique. Open space. Best conditions. How would this work in a scenario plagued by so much uncertainty?

TACTICAL REASONING

While teaching the would-be air marshals, Thompson developed H2H (hand-to-hand) that employed various techniques and applications inherent to reality hand-to-hand combat. “There wasn’t enough scenario training and you only had a short amount of time to teach these guys unfortunately,” said Thompson. “I started really analyzing what I was teaching and the way I was teaching. It’s not what you can show a guy or what

you can get him to do; it’s what can he do six months from now without any training. You have to cultivate natural instincts. It’s truly understanding their strengths and weaknesses, keeping it simple and showing them to be aware of their surroundings. You need real world, no-shit scenarios.” So when Thompson began shifting his teaching to Special Operations on a rudimentary basis, his own methodology evolved.

And those scenarios weren’t two men in a nice open area with one of them standing there ready to be taken down. Furthermore, in terms of meeting the needs of his students, Thompson became entrenched with the level of real world experience he had at his finger tips. If a student said he didn’t like something or had a better way, Thompson would workshop it and that technique might become part of the course. But there was something missing about the H2H program that was germane to almost every situation: cuffing.

“I was fascinated about realistic cuffing, just as I was with jiu-jitsu in the beginning. I would evaluate the person (cop, soldier, or otherwise), what tools did they have and where, what environment were they in, did they have back-up, etc. All these things were tactical variables that needed to be addressed before the technique could be properly shown. What’s your use of force or rules of engagement in dealing with the person you are having to cuff? Cuffing had a lot to do with making sure he couldn’t get his hands on you, more so than simply running away. We even have different levels of training from someone who is semi-compliant to someone who goes ape shit, and how to deal with those situations. You may not shoot everybody, but most likely you’ll cuff everybody and learning those techniques is paramount. When you pull a gun on someone and they throw their hands up, you need to have a tactical way to put cuffs on them because that is where 70% of the hand-to-hand altercations arise out in the field. You have to know that and listen to what is going on.”

SOC: DECLASSIFIED

In an interrogation room in Iraq, a 300-pound insurgent was cuffed incorrectly by an untrained soldier, but decided to bide his time for an escape. Once the room was clear leaving one soldier, the insurgent attacked, but unfortunately for him, he went up against the wrong guy. The soldier was 200 pounds and had been well trained. Though he got jumped and was taken by surprise, the soldier used his ground fighting technique to turn the tables, and ended up getting topside to mount an offense. The insurgent ended up dying due to blows from the altercation.

Unlike teaching his MMA classes or working with air marshals, Thompson’s escalating work with Special Operations posed a daunting task: How do you teach someone who barely has a week before they are faced with a possible life or death situation? “I had to streamline a lot of MMA training and apply that to what the soldier can retain; I had to get down to the meat and potatoes about what is going to keep him alive. There is nothing more gratifying than teaching a soldier, who then went off to the battlefield and returned, telling me they tried this technique and it worked and saved my ass.” H2H not only became a book, but it sent shockwaves through the community, and eventually it came full circle.

THE BRIDGE

As Thompson’s work with Special Operations flourished, he learned about MACP from one of his students who said his program and MACP had some similarities. In 2002, while MACP only had two levels, Thompson took a trip down to Georgia and met with the program’s creator, Matt Larsen, a former U.S. Army Ranger who is often called the “Father of Modern Combatives.” Since Thompson’s work didn’t carry over to the regular Army, and Larsen’s MACP wasn’t task specific for Special Operations, the two compared notes. “MACP had a lot of great ground fighting foundation, but it didn’t have cuffing, fighting in a kit, prisoner detention, or what I call task or scenario-specific



training. I saw it as having half the answer because every one of my instructors needs this level of training to even be considered to teach Special Operations. They have to know how to fight in a reality setting, and MACP gets them there."

After spending time with MACP, H2H evolved into SOCP to meet the needs of the Special Operations community in a structured manner similar to MACP. "It was designed specifically for Special Operations for cuffing, prisoner handling, detaining, fighting in kit and over objects, and fighting multiple assailants with or without your weapon. Unlike teaching MMA where it's one on one, SOCP is geared toward training a team to tactically think as one. So when a Special Operations soldier kicks down the door, and finds a dominant position, he has to know how to act and interact with his team to secure the location. The program was adopted by the ATF last year, and other agencies are going to it because they realize this is the first system that actually bridges that gap between realistic fighting foundation and fighting in a kit as a team. It solves all the problems in that environment."

Examining the methodology of SOCP, a technique is shown, drilled, and then they fight – not necessarily allowing someone to perform the technique cleanly, so much so as to act out a real world scenario. Variables such as tables and chairs, darkness and fighting in a 40-to-60 pound kit are added to make the experience as real as possible. "We encouraged people to give their opponents a hard time to see where they are flawed. It can be the best technique in the world, but if you don't train it and it can't work force-on-force, it's not going to be there for you."

Thompson was quick to point out that SOCP isn't the only program geared toward Special Operations, but said many of those programs aren't geared toward reality. "A lot of people were teaching the soldiers stuff that didn't pertain to their needs right now. They were learning takeaway and crap like that. I'm not going to mention anybody else's system, but there was a lot

of 'Special Forces training' that was all gun and knife takeaway, and stuff that really just was not happening in the field, unless the guy just stood there and came at you exactly how you were taught, which is hardly ever the case. It was bullshit."

Thompson's experience stems from working with Royce Gracie, Randy Couture, Dan Inosanto, Greg Nelson, and others, while always keeping an open mind while training with the best tactical soldiers on the planet for over 10 years. "I'm not married to any style or technique, or any particular concept; I just try to find the *answer* for that particular situation. When you develop a program, you have to think of the situation."

SOCP: DECLASSIFIED

The following story was told to Mr. Thompson by one of his students:

Early during the war in Iraq, two Special Operations soldiers entered a building with #1 going left and #2 going right. Unbeknown to either, an insurgent came out of the darkness and fired a shot at #1, clipping him in his left hand, ironically his trigger hand. Thinking fast, #1 drove the insurgent back, and despite not being able to fire his weapon, he kept the shooter from getting off another shot. Eventually pushing him over an object and pinning him down, the insurgent desperately tried to shoot the SO soldier, but pressed against his body armor, the weapon malfunctioned. #2 had his rifle drawn on what was taking place from across the room, but couldn't get a clean shot. Clearing his sector, #2 remained composed and made a b-line toward the two with the insurgent now waving his pistol toward the soldier. Because #1 was draped over the insurgent and using his body to keep him from getting off a shot, #2 was able to move into place and blasted the insurgent in the head with his rifle. "This type of scenario happened a lot early on, where a hand-to-hand situation broke out but the other team couldn't get off a shot. This really taught me the importance of reacting tactically instead of trying to engage

knowing that from farther away, the hand-to-hand could create a friendly fire situation. He didn't take the shot, and at great risk to his own life, he was able to save both of their lives. Unlike MMA, you are fighting as a pack — you are not fighting as one man. If you and I are on a basketball team together, but every time you get the ball, all you are thinking about is shooting, that doesn't serve the team well. You have to work together as a team, just like in Special Operations."

RECOGNITION

Though SOCP had been in operation for several years, it was not formally recognized by the Army because Greg Thompson was a civilian who started the program outside the military, unlike Matt Larsen's MACP. Thompson said that two people were responsible for bringing about the visibility that SOCP needed to really make it official in the eyes of the Army. Sergeant First Class Carl Haskins had been training with Thompson for years, was a MACP Level 4, and knew how important SOCP was in terms of readying Special Operations soldiers. Haskins was one MACP instructor with whom Thompson had the utmost of respect for, and his work with Thompson paved the way for MACP to introduce some cuffing and scenario-specific work. Not only that, he and Sergeant Major Conrad Fernandez, another of Thompson's trusted allies, were able to gain the interest of a visiting Three-star General who wanted to see a SOCP demonstration. To him, SOCP was merely another MACP, so there wasn't much of a difference ... or so he thought.

"We did a SOCP seminar and they could see the missing link on combatives, so it got some press. Other people under Special Operations wanted to see the program. The commanding general had us explain in a demo the difference between MACP and SOCP and show the task-specific stuff and his exact words were, 'We should have done this 10 years ago! Why haven't we done this?' We needed to make this a program of record because every soldier needs to have this program. This way, no



soldier will be able to drop below a certain standard. They will never bottom out and will have a tactical answer to any given situation." SOCP became the first officially designated combatives program for all U.S. Special Operations Forces on March 23, 2010. MACP has now adopted some of the SOCP techniques. SOCP is designed to evolve faster because of the direct feedback from active Soldiers.

BY THE NUMBERS

According to Thompson, there are over 67,359 LEVEL 1 MACP students since the program's inception 12 years ago. At LEVEL 2, there more than 7,708 who are certified; LEVEL 3 yields more than 1,689, and there are more than 417 LEVEL 4. In March 2010, SOCP crowned nearly 150 instructors. Unlike the Army and MACP, SOCP is only for a select few, and for instructors, it's about as elite as you can get. Special Operations soldiers only get one week of training; 40 hours to learn, comprehend and exact knowledge that could save their loves when faced with a hand-to-hand confrontation. Unlike MACP where a certificate can be rendered by passing the course, a SOCP instructor is a rare breed where only 70% make it. "They need to

understand how to fight for real, have some understanding of tactics, and they need the ability to convey information. He needs to be able to teach." As for the folks who want to see and experience the whole program, quite simply, they MUST be part of a Special Operations unit.

THE LEGACY OF SOCP

Greg Thompson the fulltime MMA instructor is now Greg Thompson the fulltime SOCP instructor. The program has branched out to ATF, FBI, Army Rangers, Air Force, and has broken out into a lot of special units. Though SOCP is strictly for Special Operations, Thompson created TACP (Task Application Combatives Program) specifically for MACP students to deal with specific problems facing the typical Army soldier. He also developed 3SD (Solo Soldier Self Defense), a program for the soldier in plain clothes who may not have his tools and be followed by insurgents. "I'm looking at branching out the program where the typical soldier can get some help, but my heart and soul is for Special Operations and that will never change. SOCP is a week-long course, and it's constantly evolving and changing. Unlike MACP where it takes time for information to trickle down through the

Army, we can literally make changes on the fly, workshop new techniques and situations via email, and get that information to the soldier right away."

While Thompson spends nearly every day on base at Ft. Bragg training soldiers and readying instructors, he plans on branching out to other bases and opening up SOCP to more soldiers. Thompson and his team have assembled a top notch website and have also produced DVDs to get more information out. The key, according to Thompson, is to train all the instructors the same way out of Ft. Bragg so SOCP is never watered down; there is no disparity from one instructor to another. Greg Thompson has literally changed the face of combatives for the Special Operations community, and his patented cuffing and fighting in kit techniques have saved lives overseas as well as here at home. With the constant fight against terrorism, it's reassuring to know that the men and women who undertake the most dangerous missions have one more tool to keep them safe.

To learn more about SOCP, visit the official website at www.ussocp.com.