

Montana Trooper

The Warrior Pyramid

By Brian Willis

To be a warrior is to learn to be genuine in every moment of your life.
—Albert Einstein

The Warrior Pyramid is a concept that was developed to assist those who have chosen the path of a warrior to better understand what is required for total preparation for this honorable calling in law enforcement, military service, corrections, and other warrior professions. Pyramids bring to mind images of powerful structures that have been around for thousands of years and have withstood the test of time due to their structural integrity. That structural integrity comes from all four sides being evenly developed. A three-sided pyramid would always leave itself open to the forces of nature and become vulnerable.

The blocks used to build the pyramid must be strong to ensure the overall strength and integrity of the structure. Those blocks represent the learning that takes place during a warrior's lifetime. Some represent formal training sessions, others represent informal or self-directed training, and the rest represent lessons learned in battle. This work will examine briefly the four sides of the pyramid and then focus on the side that truly sets the warrior apart from others—mental preparation and conditioning. This is the one side that is *completely* within the individual warrior's span of control.

First, however, let us examine the mortar that binds the blocks together, as it plays a critical role in the structural integrity of the pyramid and is the start of mental preparation and conditioning—commitment. Commitment binds together all of the building blocks of skills and tactics for war-



Brian Willis

riors. Bound together, these blocks have tremendous strength to weather any storm and withstand the test of time. Without commitment, the blocks stand in isolation and are more likely to break down or be lost in that moment of truth. The question then becomes this: "Commitment to what?"

Winning—Sir Winston Churchill said, "Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be; for without victory there is no survival." Warriors understand that winning is always the goal and the only acceptable option in any confrontation. Now, winning takes many forms. It can range from the use of effective communication skills to gain the voluntary compliance of an enemy or subject to the use of lethal force to win a confrontation by taking the life of the enemy. It can be setting and accomplishing short- and long-term goals in training, combat, or any aspect of a warrior's life.

Training—William Jennings Bryan once said, "Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved." Warriors understand this about destiny and make a personal commitment to continually train their mind and body. They understand that all they ever need to train is themselves and a commitment to train. Training partners, training equipment, training courses, training facilities are all "nice to haves," not "need to haves." Warriors know how to improvise and create all these things. They also understand that they can always train in their mind. Others make excuses and abdicate the responsibility for training to their agency or organization; they are not willing to commit their personal time and money to train. Here is the unfortunate reality for those with this

type of thinking: There has never been, and never will be, an agency killed or injured in combat. It is police officers, corrections officers and soldiers who get killed and injured in the line of duty, not agencies. Although there is an onus on agencies to provide training to their personnel, those on the front lines must make a personal commitment to train, since they are the ones who go into harm's way.

Family—In *The Gates of Fire* author Steven Pressfield wrote "Spartans excuse without penalty the warrior who loses his helmet or breastplate in battle but punish with loss of citizenship rights the man who discards his shield. Because the warrior carries a breastplate and helmet for his own protection but his shield is for the protection of the whole line." Warriors understand the importance of family and make a commitment to them that they will always be the priority. Family includes parents, siblings, children, significant others, and close friends. Family also refers to their brother and sister warriors with whom they train and go into battle. In order to fulfill this commitment, they must also fulfill the commitments to training and to winning.

THE FOUR SIDES

As mentioned previously, the structural integrity of a pyramid relies on the even development of all four sides. The four interdependent sides of the Warrior Pyramid are skills, tactics, fitness and mental preparation and conditioning.

Skills—Warriors must develop a level of competency in the skill sets necessary for their job. This includes the skills of verbal and nonverbal communication, empty-hand skills, skills with all their weapons systems, and vehicle operation skills.

Tactics—Once warriors develop a degree of proficiency in all skill areas,

more ►

Montana Trooper

continued

they must then develop an understanding of the tactical and operational application of those skills. Tactics includes the ability to use empty-hand skills in close-quarters battle and multiple-assailant confrontations, edged-weapon proficiency, weapon-retention, disarms, and ground fighting. It also comprises downed officer rescues, rapid intervention, cover and movement, building clearing, vehicle stops, and vehicle assaults. The list of tactics necessary will depend on the type of missions the warrior will be tasked with throughout his career.

Fitness—Warriors must develop a strong foundation of aerobic and anaerobic fitness. They must then develop a level of combat fitness. Combat fitness refers to training the body and its energy systems in preparation for high-intensity, short duration confrontations that warriors often find themselves in. In addition to strength and endurance, warriors must also develop explosive speed and power in preparation for

these combative events.

Mental Preparation and Conditioning—It has been said that "the mind of a warrior is what sets him apart from others in the midst of battle." What is it about the mind of a warrior that allows him to perform at higher levels in the middle of combat? In the military, as well as in law enforcement, everyone goes through the same basic training. Yet in the field people perform at different levels. Some excel under pressure and consistently perform at the highest levels, while others are frozen with fear or overcome with anxiety. Even among the top performers there are a select few who rise to the top and lead the others. This is not a new problem; it has been around as long as men have engaged in battle. In 500 BC, Heraclitus identified this issue when he wrote to his commander, "Of every 100 men, 10 should not even be here, 80 are nothing more than targets. Nine of them are the real fight-

ers. We are lucky to have them, they the battle make. Ah, but the one. One of them is a warrior and he will bring the others back."

WHAT SETS THE WARRIOR APART?

What is it then that determines how people will perform in the heat of battle? Of all those who serve in the warrior profession, what is it that separates the nine who are the real fighters from those who are nothing more than targets? And what is it about "the one"—the warrior? If it is the mind of a true warrior that sets him apart from others in the midst of battle and in all aspects of life, then what is different about the way that he trains and prepares his mind?

Some would suggest that since everyone in basic training receives the same mental preparation and conditioning,

more ►

Montana Trooper

continued

these components are not the deciding factors. The difference, they would argue, lies in the area of control. The training cadre has control over physical skills training. They determine what drills will be conducted, how many repetitions of any given skill will be performed, what information will be presented during the academic sessions, and in which exercises the students will participate. What they do not control is what goes on inside the mind of the individual soldier or officer. The most powerful weapon a warrior possesses is his mind. Yet it cannot be inspected by the trainers. It does not come with an owner's manual or a manufacturer's guarantee. Inside the privacy of the mind lies the key to unlocking the warrior spirit and the blueprint of a true warrior. Let us examine the aspects of mental preparation and conditioning that separate warriors from others in the midst of battle.

THE WINNING MIND

This is the law. The only purpose of fighting is to win. There is no possible victory in defense. The sword is more important than the shield, and skill is more important than either. The next weapon is the brain. All else is supplemental.

—John Steinbeck, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*

Warriors possess the winning mind and know that the only purpose for fighting is to win. They are confident in their skills and abilities, they are committed to their mission, and they are physically and mentally prepared to do whatever is reasonable and necessary to accomplish that goal. They have worked past the childhood philosophy that it is not whether you win or lose that is important, but rather how you play the game. Warriors understand that neither training nor combat are

games, and winning is important. Their training allows them to understand that every situation is winnable. This is not to suggest that they have the "superman syndrome" and think they are impervious to harm, but rather to suggest that they understand that in combat there will always be unexpected elements. Warriors train hard for the unexpected, so when it happens it is neither hard nor unexpected. Warriors think offense, not defense. In combat they become the predator and use cunning, skill, ferocity, speed, strength, power, cover, movement, and team tactics to be successful. They commit to winning, not survival. They understand that survival for many people is defensive in nature and that if they win, they will also survive.

IMAGINATION

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more ►*

Montana Trooper

continued

knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.

—Albert Einstein

Imagination is a powerful component of the subconscious mind that works continuously to shape our beliefs and expectations, yet for most people it lingers untapped below the level of consciousness. A warrior's imagination is focused on success. We discussed previously the importance of training. Warriors train the way they want to fight. They train with imagination and emotion, knowing that only then will they fight the way they train.

What does it mean to train with imagination and emotion, and why is it so important? When warriors train they always imagine using those skills in combat to ensure that they win the confrontation; others simply go through the motions. At the firing range, others simply see a paper target in which they need to get a certain number of holes to qualify. Warriors, however, imagine that someone is attempting to kill them, attempting to take them away from their family. Warriors prepare to succeed in armed combat while others simply prepare to qualify.

In the combatives room, warriors imagine their training partner is an actual attacker who is attempting to hurt or kill them and take them away from their family. Others simply go through the motions, seeing only their buddy, and they go easy on each other so neither of them look bad nor get injured. Even in training, warriors always keep fighting until they have won. If they do something that is less desirable, they fix it and make it more desirable. If they get slashed, stabbed, or shot in training, they fight through it, becoming even

more aggressive in defeating the threat, knowing that they may get injured in combat and still have to win. Others simply go through the motions. They stop when they do something less desirable and harangue themselves for screwing up. When they get shot or stabbed, they stop and say, "I'm dead. I would have been killed by that." Warriors, on the other hand, understand that if you are dead, you don't know it. If you are alive, you keep fighting. Warriors always imagine themselves winning confrontations using all their skills, tactics, and knowledge. Outside of the training arena warriors harness the power of imagery, which allows them to focus and direct the imagination.

In Takashi Matsouka's book *The Cloud of Sparrows*, he talks of a warrior who is denied access to his firearms to physically practice for an inevitable confrontation, so the man must train in his mind:

The only place he could be sure of privacy was his own mind. So that's where he practiced. Draw. Cock the hammer on the upswing. Sight the heart. Squeeze the trigger. Cock the hammer on the recoil. Sight the heart. Squeeze the trigger. There was an advantage to this. His mind was a portable room; he could practice anywhere he was, anytime.

HUMILITY

A warrior is on permanent guard against the roughness of human behavior. A warrior is magical and ruthless, a maverick with the most refined taste and manners, whose worldly task is to sharpen, yet disguise, his cutting edge so that no one would be able to suspect his ruthlessness.

—*The Power of Silence, Carlos Castaneda*

There is much confusion about the true warrior spirit within the warrior professions. There are many who think that being a warrior is about machismo, about bravado. They think being a warrior is about racing to all the hot calls, or starting fights to show others how tough they are. They think it is about taking unnecessary risks for the glory or the accolades. True warriors, however, understand that one of the many virtues of a warrior is humility. Warriors do not need to start fights to show others how tough they are. They are confident in their skills and tactics. They understand that there is a time to fight and a time to walk away. When they fight, they fight to win. They fight with tenacity and ferocity. When they walk away, they walk away with their heads held high. They walk away with pride and honor because it is a choice. Because of that humility, warriors also have an aura of professionalism that they bring to every conflict.

Regardless of whether you believe warriors are born or made, the Warrior Pyramid provides a framework for the development and preparation of all warriors. As you continue on your journey through life working toward being 'The one,' 'the warrior who will bring the others home,' let this serve as a guide for you. Continue to ask yourself, "What condition is my pyramid in?"

About the Author: Brian Willis is an internationally recognized thought leader, speaker, trainer, author, the 2011 Law Officer Trainer of the Year and the president of the innovative training company Winning Mind Training. Brian can be contacted through his website at www.winningmindtraining.com □