

TASER TACTICS:

FOUR SIMPLE RULES

[BY DON STAHLNECKER]



To use a tool effectively, you need to know what it can or cannot do. Here, Don Stahlnecker and Gila Hayes test the effectiveness and stopping power of the drive stun feature in a controlled setting.

It was the late 1970s, I was a kid, and the advertisement was in the back of a comic book.

Still, it *had* to be true. For just under ten dollars I could purchase my very own ELECTRONIC stun device that was guaranteed to PARALYZE an attacker of ANY SIZE. I was tempted. After all, I never missed an episode of Star Trek and I thought the phaser was the coolest weapon ever conceived. I figured that a phaser set to stun would be the best self defense tool ever. So the idea that I could actu-

ally own such a cool and handy contraption was overwhelming. However, ten bucks was a lot of money to a kid in those days, and I was still a little jaded from the x-ray glasses fiasco. So I never did order one.

It is now 2009. I still can't walk on the moon; I still don't have my very own household servant robot. But I do indeed own my very own electronic stun device that *will* paralyze an attacker of

any size. It is a Taser model C2.

Over the last ten years, law enforcement officers across the nation have proven that modern Taser devices work. The general public has noticed this, and more and more people are purchasing Tasers for personal protection. Unfortunately, the Taser is not yet quite as effective as a good Star Trek phaser. I have hopes for the future, but meanwhile,



the Taser still has a few limitations:

It only has one shot. True, the C2 does also have drive stun capability. However drive stun generates pain only, and has no incapacitation effect. Consequently the Taser's effectiveness against multiple attackers is limited. And even with one attacker, if you miss, well, that was it.

It has a limited effective range. The maximum range of the civilian Taser is 15 feet, but perhaps more important than the maximum range is the minimum range. Technically the Taser can be fired at point blank range, but the incapacitation effect begins to drop off rapidly as the distance drops below

three feet. This means that if an attacker has managed to grab a hold of you before you can deploy the device, it may have a seriously limited incapacitation effect. It will still hurt like crazy but the attacker may still be able to move.

There is no guarantee of incapacitation. Several factors can affect the level and duration of incapacitation. The electrodes may strike too close together generating plenty of pain, but little incapacitation. One or both electrodes might miss the attacker. The attacker may have friends near by willing to help him get free of the device. The attacker may have found out you own a

Taser and contrived some type of body armor. These issues and more mean that you can't rely entirely on one strike from the Taser to end an attack.

Do these limitations render the Taser useless for self defense? Not at all! When used properly, the Taser is quite effective. The trick is to use the Taser properly. And I don't mean simply that you have to know how to aim a laser and push a button. I mean you must have a plan of action that operates before, during, and after Taser deployment. The Taser isn't an end all body guard. It won't do *all* the work for you. You still have a part to play in the action. To this end I offer you four rules of effective Taser usage. Note that these rules apply to the civilian use of the Taser. Police use the same tool, but for a different purpose, and with completely different tactics.

RULE 1: GET TO SAFETY NOW!

The best purpose and function of a Taser for civilian use is to buy you time to move to safety. The Taser is a short term incapacitation device. After 30 seconds the Taser C2 will shut off and the incapacitation will be over. The attacker may be fatigued, but not so much that an attacker of at least average health would be prevented from resuming the attack. Consequently your mindset must be to deploy the device and then move to safety as quickly as possible. And when I say move to safety, I don't mean just run away. I mean get to the closest place where an attacker either can not or will not follow you. Don't wait around to see how effective the device will be. Even an effectively incapacitated attacker may fall or thrash about in such a way as to dislodge an electrode or break a wire. If you hang out to make sure your attacker gets his full thirty second ride, you'll have wasted all your opportunity to get out of Dodge. Use the device and go.

If you are attacked by small group,

deploying the device against one individual may buy you a few seconds time to get away from the rest. Certainly the other members of the group will pause to reassess their own safety. Maybe they'll even take time to assist their fallen comrade. Either way, that's a few seconds you didn't have before. So make use of them.

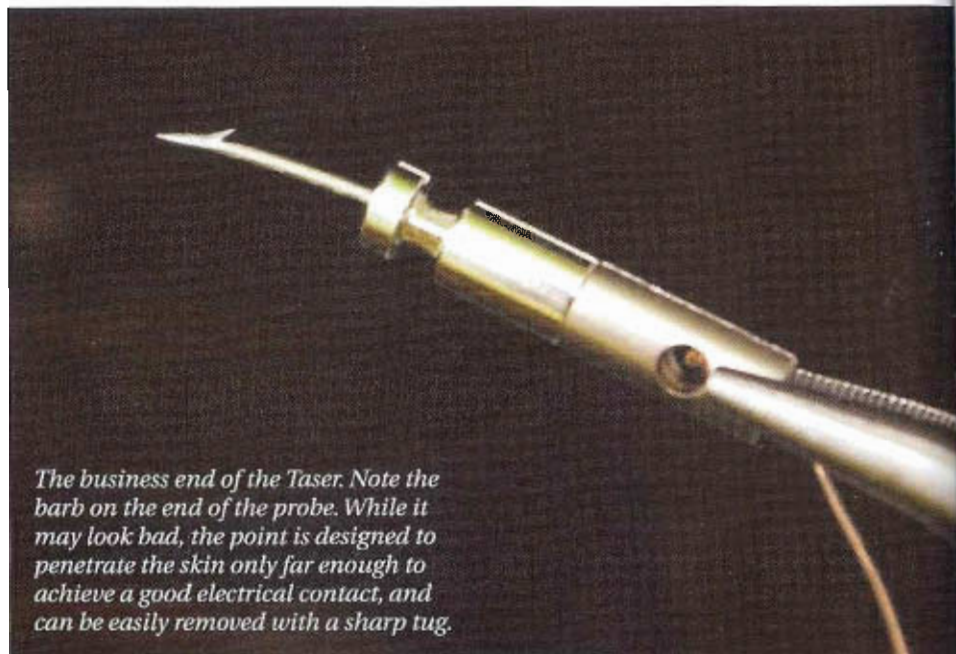
Do not let yourself get into the mindset that you will use your Taser to subdue and apprehend an attacker. I realize that some people have in the past, and will in the future successfully use a Taser to that end, but it won't always work that way. Attempting to control a person is extremely risky business and generally requires overwhelming force. It is far less complicated and far less dangerous to move to safety. As a civilian, your first priority is to protect your own life, not to apprehend criminals. Do the thing mostly likely to keep you alive.

RULE 2: SURPRISE IS YOUR FRIEND

I do not recommend threatening an attacker with the Taser like you would threaten a vampire with a cross. You may be able to effectively thwart a fairly non-committed aggressor by waving the Taser at him. But against a more committed attacker you will have simply given him an opportunity to strategize a better attack.

I said previously that once the device shuts off there are very little lingering physical effects. There may, however, be some strong lingering psychological effects. The attacker may be disoriented, confused, scared, and with any luck has lost all interest in proceeding with the attack. These psychological effects will be significantly stronger if the attacker is surprised than they will be if the attacker has had time, even a few moments, to prepare for them. Even if an attacker is not fully incapacitated, the shock (no pun intended) of being seriously stung by something unexpected will almost certainly buy you valuable moments to obey Rule Number 1, get to safety NOW!

Additionally, don't let it become general knowledge that you carry a Taser. If you do, a long term aggressor, such



The business end of the Taser. Note the barb on the end of the probe. While it may look bad, the point is designed to penetrate the skin only far enough to achieve a good electrical contact, and can be easily removed with a sharp tug.

as a stalker or a psychotic ex, will take pains to avoid and thwart your chances of using the Taser in self defense.

RULE 3: KNOW YOUR TOOL

Unfortunately some people are going to buy a Taser, stick it in their pocket, and consider themselves fortified against even the most violent foreign invasion. Some of them won't even bother to watch the convenient video that comes in the package. To use a tool effectively you must know what it can do and what it can't do. Taser international provides excellent resources, so take advantage of them. Watch the DVD and practice some of the things shown there. Measure out fifteen feet in your living room or in your front yard. Stand in one spot and have someone else stand fifteen feet away. Get a feel for that distance, and learn to recognize when someone is that far away from you.

I know the cartridges are expensive, but you should try to deploy at least one. You can purchase practice targets online but you don't really need one. Simply stretch an old T-shirt over a piece of plywood, or a couple of layers of cardboard and lean it up against something outside. (Tip: don't hang a T-Shirt or even a practice target on the wall in your house. The probes will punch two nasty little holes in the sheetrock, which will irritate you for a long time.) Stand five to seven feet

from the target, aim the laser at the upper chest and fire. The Taser will make a rhythmic crackling sound, and a blue arc will be visible at the front of the unit. Keep your fingers away from there and don't touch the probes. It is safe to hold onto the unit, though, and touching the wires won't hurt you either. Don't forget to practice Rule Number 1 while you're at it: *Aim, Fire, Go*. You want to have the *whole* process trained into memory. Not the part where you stand around and say, "Oh wow, that looks cool."

You should also consider enrolling in a quality martial arts or self-defense course. You don't need to learn how to beat an attacker to the ground with your bear hands. But learning a few simple escapes from grabs and holds, may gain you the little bit of time and distance that you need to deploy your Taser effectively.

RULE 4: MAKE SURE IT'S AVAILABLE

The Taser won't do you any good if you leave it at home or in the glove box of your car. It may not even do you any good if it's buried too deeply in the bottom of a purse or inside a brief case. Criminals don't like to give fair warning before they attack. So find a system of carrying the Taser that will allow you to access it quickly.

During periods of greater risk, have the Taser already in hand. If you are, for

example, required to lock up a business late at night, and walk to your car. Get your Taser out and carry it. Don't wait till you see something suspicious to go digging around. For that matter if you see something suspicious, don't wait for an attack before you start obeying Rule 1. The nice thing about Rule 1 is that often it can be effectively employed even before the Taser is.

Taser International sells a holster for the C2 that will prove convenient for some people. In colder weather you may find it just as handy to carry in a coat pocket. But don't let the unit get away from you when you step inside a warm building and take your coat off.

If you plan to use it to defend yourself at home, make sure you find a place where it is easily accessible to you but where young children can not get a hold of it. The Taser may not be as deadly as a gun, but it still looks like a fun toy and can cause serious injury. In fact it is more likely to cause serious injury being played with than it is being used as intended.

FINALLY, THE UNWRITTEN RULE:

I'd prefer to add one more rule to this list, however I suspect most people who elect to carry a Taser will disregard it, either because circumstances won't allow them to follow it or because they have already decided they absolutely won't. That rule would be: Carry a Firearm for backup. We are still a few years away from the ultimate less-lethal self defense device. It would be nice if we had a tool so powerful that we could stop any sort of attack, no matter how violent, with less than lethal force. But, for the time being anyway, there are some forms of violence that can only be stopped by the application of lethal force. ■

[Don Stahlnecker earns his living as a computer programmer but he is also a student of Danzan Ryu Jujitsu and a certified instructor at the Firearms Academy of Seattle. Living in Washington state, Don has been involved in teaching self defense tactics and techniques since 2003.]

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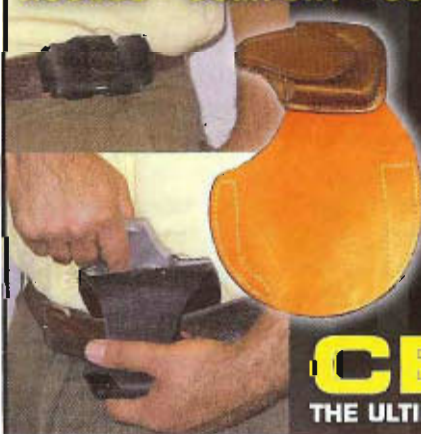
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