

**Simulation and the Sailor – Preparing for the Worst
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In a moment, the serenity of a lazy Friday dissipates and a deadly situation escalates.

A routine vehicle check goes awry. As your watch partner asks the driver to step out of the vehicle, **a weapon is drawn, shots are fired, and your partner is suddenly wounded.**

The crack of the shot echoes in your ears as the seconds fizzle **by in slow motion.** Two men speed away from the gate, **and your shipmate is down on the ground unconscious.**

Stunned by what has just gone down, you reach for your weapon, still hanging in its holster. Hesitation has just made your worst nightmare come true.

“The threat of attack is very high today, both at home and abroad,” said Cmdr. Matthew Bobola, **the Task Force for Excellence through Commitment to Education and Learning (EXCEL)** Anti-Terrorism Warfare Project Lead. “We have asked our Sailors to assume frontline defense without providing them the best training that is available. Recent events have proven that we need to train more than just marksmanship.”

The average gunfight lasts less than two seconds; a mere half-second is all **an individual** has to make the right call. Neither improved shot speed, nor the posting of additional sentries can fully compensate for inexperienced judgment. Agencies across the nation agree that training in a realistic, albeit simulated environment is the best way to prepare for the real deal.

“We need to ensure our Sailors are developing their judgment and decision making skills in addition to their tactical skills,” said Bobola. “Quality training allows commanders to know their forces will react in accordance with their guidance; and, Sailors gain confidence knowing their supervisors will support them when they must make this decision.”

Research shows first time engagement to be simple reaction; habits form during the training process. If Sailors are not trained properly, they will not react properly, and that may end in disaster. If Sailors only train on static targets under non-stressful conditions, what will happen when the target is a man waving a gun, running and yelling?

Enter the world of simulation training.

Crouching behind cover, 9mm pistol drawn, sweat beading on your forehead. Your heart rate skyrockets and your breathing becomes heavier, choppier. You lose your focus on the **perpetrator** in front of you, still wielding **their weapon**.

“Drop the weapon,” you yell. “Drop it, **NOW!** Get your hands up!” **They** move on you, your arms weaken under **your weapon’s** weight, **their** 12-gauge **shotgun** pointed directly at you. **BLAM!** You get off a clean shot; **they** drop in **their** tracks. Your mind races, eyes scanning the scene for anything. The lights come up and the scene freezes. An instructor, standing behind you the entire time, calls for the replay. You wonder if you did the right thing or not. Was there something else you could have done? Did you actually hit your target? Did you hit any innocent bystanders?

“This is where security forces find out what they would do in real life,” said Frank Perry, Advanced Interactive Systems vice president of government programs. “It forces them to deal with their emotions in a critical situation.”

While having the benefit of simply pressing the replay button to review the scenario, trainees in such simulators experience the same levels of stress, respiration and blood pressure as in a real life situation, making this technology vital to the survival of Sailors on watch.

“I was actually surprised by the level of excitement I felt while shooting,” said Petty Officer 2nd class James Ratliff, a Navy master-at-arms and former Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek Base Police training petty officer. “You experience the same adrenaline rush, the same tunnel vision, the same increased heart rate as you would if you were on watch on the pier.”

A unique feature of this advanced technology is the ability to film scenarios anytime, anywhere and incorporate them into training sessions geared for specific situations, such as port watch standing in a foreign nation or training the ship’s self defense force. After filming scenarios in digital video format, technicians download the video to begin the ‘authoring’ process. In this stage, technicians ‘branch’ the video, or create multiple outcomes for a given scenario based on the decisions made by the trainee. For the Navy, this technology would provide the ability to create scenarios on the spot, in preparation for pending port visits, special security details, or for dealing with a frequently encountered situation.

“Interactive simulator technology is the tool the Navy needs to constantly improve our Sailor’s proficiencies,” said **Director of Task Force EXCEL** Rear Adm. Harry Ulrich. “Sailors get to handle weapons with real kickback, make the tough decisions and experience their own emotions under stressful situations. This is as real as it can get without putting live rounds in the guns and going out on watch.”

Task Force EXCEL is the catalyst for the “Revolution in Training,” Chief of Naval Operations **Adm. Vern Clark’s** number one initiative for the year. To learn more, log on to www.excel.navy.mil.