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Tracking – Work Together and Accomplish More

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At the beginning of every course we present a “big picture” introduction to the content of the instruction to come, as well as the intended application of the information received. Miyamoto Musashi so properly stated back in 1645, that “In order to learn the small things (individual skill and technique – the “how”) you must first understand the big” (big picture application of individual skill and technique – the “why and when”). This presentation begins with the question of who in the class knows about tracking or knows how to track. Invariably, we get many raised hands and nodded heads.



Each raised hand and nodded head represents something. As explained to the attendees within, that “something” is confirmation bias. We “conformation bias” for a full explanation. It’s the inner battle a tracker or manhunter deals with routinely as a student of the arts, yet much less so as they gain expertise. The lessons are sometimes learned hard in training as tracks and hunts are “forced”. As the skills are

learned, and inductive/deductive logic understood and applied over time, the small and big come together and become a systematic process of Combat Tracking the way it has always been intended to be taught, learned and applied – for those that truly understand it.

After reading the first paragraph, you've probably either formed an opinion about what we do (or other schools), or reinforced a bias that you already have. If you have not viewed our website, especially the "About TTOS" content, you should do so. We wrote-up the content in a manner to assist people in understanding what we do and teach others to do. This blog posting draws from those thoughts and ideas, but also goes into details in a different direction and explains a new and very powerful "teaming" agreement that was forged no more than a month ago; one that has been overdue in the making.

What we do at our core is "Training in Context", which is one of our primary operating mottos. We do not train attendees how to track in a vacuum. We teach an ADVANCED TARGETING PROCESS. We tailor instruction to fit the missions to come and how tracking fits into the approach and response to the problem-set, and when. This targeting process uses tracking and K9's as a tool, but not the only tools, to facilitate the process toward the end result, which is mission/ROE dependent, always. Another piece at the core of our instruction is division of labor/coordination of work effort within a common operating picture.



Within the introduction and questions detailed in paragraph number one, I routinely state/ask, "So it's the tracker's job to find the tracks, follow, catch up with the persons sought and engage them from the rear when they catch up, right?".....Wrong! That is what Combat and Tactical Tracking has been perverted into by others of lower understanding and experience/operational expertise. That said, however, invariably trackers and team will do exactly that – contact from the rear at a disadvantage – if the skillset is applied operationally over time. It's not the preferred method, but it will happen sometimes.

Contemplate this quote from the old knowledgebase (Scout trackers of the late 1800's): "A rabbit trap will catch a wolf, but it won't hold him". They understood these things and learned lessons the hard way from time to time. It is a statement about small unit tactics in context to tracking and targeting. A tracking team, as the rabbit trap, can track and "catch" an element that may end up being more formidable than initially estimated. In this instance, the rabbit trap is at a tactical disadvantage. This is why, as a tactical operating guideline, the tracking team's job is to bring the unit into contact with those pursued. The size of the unit used to finish/interdict the pursued, or the means (CAS, arty, ground forces), is dependent on the information gathered by the tracking team and relayed to command. It's the same way the scout trackers did it in the old days; forecast, and find and then send a rider back to the fort for a command of superior numbers at the time of the fix.

It's the principal trackers job (or K9) to stay in positive contact with the trackline and advance the hunt, advising the team leader along the way of the tactical information the ground and environment holds. The team leader's job is to advise command of the progress and findings so that they can bring assets to bear in the right place and time, following PID from the tracking teams on the ground. It's the cover trackers job to watch over him/her (or K9 handler) as they do so and to work together as a team of two trackers, within a tracking team of three to four others to continually advance the hunt and bring the team, unit or assets (organic or not) to the fix position, wherein the mission/ROE and command will decide the appropriate finish – all of which to be done with or without any other ISR assets.



Tracking in and of itself (absent the rest of the targeting system and task organization we teach) is absolutely, positively, wholly insufficient to accomplish the majority of the tasks at hand. I carefully worded this because there are areas in which tracking is positively sufficient to accomplish the task at hand and in these cases it takes a lot of training and expertise in the purest form of the skill – recognition, identification and interpretation of ground sign, tracks and action indicators.

The purest form of tracking is what is often referred to as “micro tracking” or “step-by-step tracking”. I would go even further and state it a little differently. TTOS teaches pure observation, logic and reasoning to a conclusion based on facts and circumstances observed over time and distance. This is a “tactical observation” and interpretation process. There is another process to be considered, and over time, mastered. This is best stated as “forensic observation and interpretation”, the most pure and way, way into the weeds form of using tracking on a scene to completely recreate what occurred in a specific place or space, not over time and distance. HOWEVER, they are complementary skills and both sides of the same coin.



At TTOS we quickly bring students to a point in which they can complete rudimentary micro tracking, only as needed to advance the hunt, profile quarry, or assess an incident site to get the “guts” of the five W’s (who, what, when, where, why) and move out to continue the targeting/follow/recce process. The JOEL HARDIN SCHOOL takes a much slower and methodical route on the forensic side of tracking, using strong micro tracking, or step-by-step tracking to not only recognize and interpret, but to recreate the entirety of the scene during a lengthy exploitation process. Could you imagine if we took both schools of instruction and brought them together? Well, we just did.

In paragraph four I wrote of our core and the “division of labor/coordination of work effort within a common operating picture”. Practicing what we preach and recognizing the strengths of the two styles of tracking (micro and macro), the two oldest tracking schools in the United States have come together within a teaming agreement, coast-to-coast and worldwide.

Joel Hardin Professional Tracking Services and the Tactical Tracking Operations School have teamed to set the standard in the United States on forensic tracking and Combat and Tactical Tracking. Working together to accomplish more is accomplished through the recognition of the strengths of both schools coming together to complete a top-to-bottom path to the top of the mountain (“There are many ways to the top of the mountain” – another Musashi quote).

Furthermore, for purposes of organization and representation on the Special Warfare Center Board, this team is represented by [Seaux Larreau as VTATI, the Visual Tracking and Training Incorporated](#). Most everyone in special warfare knows, or knows of Seaux. He’s one of the legendary for sure. For those on the inside, feel free to contact Seaux with any questions or requests you may have. He’ll get them to the

right place, on way or another.



The Tactical Tracking Operations School is now actively promoting and deferring to Professional Tracking Services for those who want to learn or expand on their abilities in forensic tracking. In kind, JHPTS defers to TTOS in all matters of Combat Tracking, LE Tactical Tracking and complex manhunting operations instruction and command and control therein.

As a team, we do this together to bring about the best outcomes in micro tracking and macro tracking, recognizing there is a need for both. Not all context is the same and our goal, collectively, is to create programs that positively affect public safety, survivability of expeditionary units and the justice that will follow through this approach. This team is dedicated to the highest standards in tracking, targeting and manhunting; as well as keeping it alive in a world consumed with material plug-and-play solutions that rarely work. Our students are then next "us", and through them live forever, as will they and instructors they create and partnerships they forge.

Our two schools and programs of instruction came together and just completed a long course in the jungle, together. The approach and outcome has been validated. We have big expectations for this crew as they rotate into their AOR. They have been given the uber-system, supported by both styles of tracking, to accomplish missions that are ugly and dangerous, in places fitting the same description.

There is no doubt in our mind, especially given the quality and caliber of the unit members, that they will do the right things, for the right reasons, TO the right people in an area where the only ISR assets are their eyes, reasoning and logic capabilities, teamwork and individual and collective skills in Combat Tracking and Forensic Tracking. This system is wholly sufficient to accomplish the tasks at hand.



This was the ninth full-time Combat Tracking Team/Unit we have trained-up and fielded within an 18 month period to support this mission and those that follow. We take our role within VERY seriously and are passionate about it, collectively.

Kind and warm regards from both the Tactical Tracking Operations School and Joel Hardin Professional Tracking Services (VTATI). Feel free to comment or contact us with any questions you may have.

Cheers!

G. Tango Lima



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Gregg Jorgenson says:

May 5, 2016 at 9:49 pm

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Insightful article. Proud to see where Peter Kerr and you have taken the program, both in the U.S. and abroad, and how you've remained not just on the cutting edge of mantracking but have looked towards future applications and operations as well. The proverbial cutting edge doesn't mean much unless it's cared for and honed and that's the hallmark