

Defending the Defenceless

An interview with defensive
tactics instructor Karl Thornton



When he discovered an Australian charity that sends men to infiltrate and take down child-prostitution rings in South East Asia, Karl Thornton – security professional, martial artist and father – knew he had to help. The co-founder of Modern Defensive Tactics Australia, Thornton is now using his 28 years of combative experience to help train operatives of 'The Grey Man' charity. He recently chatted to **Blitz** about his system and how it's helping the defenceless victims of sex-trafficking.

INTERVIEW BY BEN STONE

Karl, can you please give us a brief outline of your background in martial arts?

Around 28 years ago I started martial arts with Norton Karate-Do (the founder being Shihan Richard Norton), in the clubrooms of a football ground in Croydon South. Although training with Richard in the class environment was rare, the times I was honoured with this opportunity, it gave me the mindset and belief to this day, of training with purpose. (Sometimes those we spend the least amount of time with, leave the biggest impression – thank you, Richard.) Now 42 years of age, I've trained over the last 28 years in many different styles, from karate to boxing, to kickboxing with Eastside in Bayswater, Victoria. It was kickboxing that gave me the passion for the full-contact side of combat, so I started pursuing Close Quarter Combat training. This included private tuition and open classes via different CQC seminars and courses over the years, while still training in traditional martial arts. My later years I've spent training in Gan Gan Tao, where I hold my 3rd degree Black-belt, with Australian principal instructor JD Moorehead-Rashid.

And from that, how did you come to form MDTA?

It was with my 28 years training in mixed martial arts, CQC training and my work experiences over the past 25 years that MDTA came about. I could see the need for reality-based training, but not just the international military-based systems that were available.

Working in security as a crowd-controller and as a bodyguard, and with the knowledge and experience from a security veteran in JD, the foundations of MDTA were developed.

As the founder of MDTA, I knew we had a system that worked. JD and myself were already training individuals from bodyguards and security personnel, to personnel within the disability sectors, so it was time for MDTA.

Where did your own qualifications in weapon defence come from?

My weapons defensive tactics qualifications came from years of training, courses and seminars, which are great for the

the back from a .22-calibre rifle. I have witnessed multiple slash and stab wounds to an individual, still communicating while bleeding out, and at the same time I was providing trauma support to him, knowing he may turn on me at any moment.

I have felt and experienced the fear and adrenaline of standing in a crowd of potential threats while undertaking covert operations in a foreign country, where my cover had been compromised, not being able to understand the language being spoken around me, and all the time having to keep my wits about me.

I have been in highly testosterone-fuelled situations

"I have seen and experienced what it is like first-hand to see a human with their head blown off by a shotgun, or the neat little piercing hole in the back from a .22-calibre rifle."

technical and theoretical aspects of defensive tactics. However, the question we all ask ourselves in DT's is: 'When I get hit by the reality of fear and adrenaline in a real situation, what will I do?'

My reality-based foundations come from my life's working journey so far; experiencing the reality when confronted by a real threat, and putting into place my training. I have seen and experienced what it is like first-hand to see a human with their head blown off by a shotgun, or the neat little piercing hole in

where my weapon has been drawn but not used due to my negotiation skills. I have also had the unfortunate need to physically deal with a threat when required.

I could go on, but the point I am making is that MDTA is based on reality, and not 'perceived reality'.

Many defensive tactics systems rely heavily on traditional martial arts as their base, drawing from them and applying what suits each specific organisation's tactics

and operational rules. In your view, is that still the case in general, and with MDTA?

MDTA has taken a different approach. If you look at the more popular defensive tactics systems these days, such as Kapap and Krav Maga, they are very efficient and serve a purpose, and are very effective in their delivery. However, these systems predominantly have a military background and applications. Yes, they deliver techniques where you don't have to spend years training in complex systems, as you do with many martial arts, but still we felt there was something missing.

MDTA is similar and is what we see as the Australian version, except we also deliver tactics that are based on non-military defensive systems to combat threats from professionals from other realms – the street fighter, the murderer and career criminal.

MDTA doesn't just deal with the physical, we also deal with environmental/situational awareness and readiness.

We have a base foundation we call, 'Dealing with the FACTS':

- **F** is fear – the response to fear and the fight-or-flight effect
- **A** is adrenaline – dealing with the adrenaline dump
- **C** is conditioning – mental and physical preparation for dealing with an attack
- **T** is technique – quick, basic yet effective defensive techniques
- **S** is strength – working with your strengths to control and deal with a situation.

Where did the martial arts skills that make up Gan Gan Tao come from, specifically?

MDTA VS BOTTLE



1
A mugger sees an opportunity and grabs it...



2
...but Karl has seen him and listens for his approach.



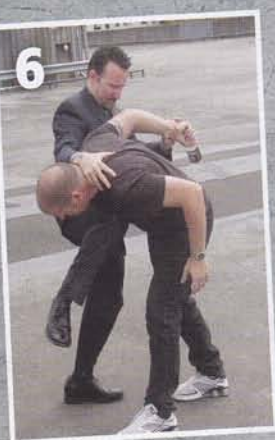
3
Turning to confront the attacker as he comes...



4
...Karl takes the initiative and steps in with a strike and cover...



5
...seizing the weapon-arm and controlling the attacker's head...



6
...to pull him into a knee-strike to the solar plexus.



7
Karl uses the captured arm for leverage to take the attacker's balance...



8
...and fires another knee into the shoulder joint/nerves to drop the attacker.

Gan Gan Tao is a style based on Shinjimasu karate and Wing Chun kung fu, and over the years, like many forms, has been modernised for today's environment to incorporate kickboxing, as well as close-quarter combat skills. However, it also encompasses a compassionate philosophy to its applications and delivery techniques. Gan Gan Tao's principal instructor, JD Moorehead-Rashid, has over 25 years experience in the security industry and in defensive tactics.

JD was awarded his Black-belt in 1991 in Shinjimasu by the international chairman and master instructor of Shinjimasu International Martial Arts Academy, Saint Godson Adeogba, 8th Dan, and by Charles A Dixon, 9th Dan, and became the head of the Australian chapter. The origin of the Australian chapter is via the Shinjimasu Temple in Chaparral, New Mexico. Saint Godson Adeogba was an instructor for the US Military Special Forces in White Sands, New Mexico. His belief was "The military don't care where a technique comes from — only that it works quickly and efficiently".

Together with his training in Shinjimasu, JD spent six years with Master David Chueng, training in his style of Wing Chun.

What is taught at MDTA and to what types of people or specific groups?

At MDTA we teach a system of self-defence tactics and techniques developed to deal with physical threats and attacks, through to life-threatening situations. MDTA systems range from full non-pain-compliance techniques and tactics such as deflecting, redirecting, warding, and restraint and control, through to techniques and tactics required for fast defensive applications, restraining and controlling a possible lethal threat, and the potential delivery of lethal force.

Like all defensive tactics systems, there is training in body-language triggers, reaction triggers, locks, escapes, strikes, kicks, blocks, combinations, physical conditioning, and weapons defence, etc. However, our main training process is reality-based.

MDTA is the base foundation for defensive tactics training for companies such as 538 Pty Ltd, one of Australia's elite bodyguard companies, as well as defensive tactics training as used by many law-enforcement personnel, private security personnel, military personnel and covert special operations personnel.

Although originally training industry personnel only, MDTA is now also available to the general public.

Tell us about your work with The Grey Man charity. How did that come about and what does MDTA do for them?

To me, The Grey Man (TGM) is something that 'just is' a worthy and noble cause. When I heard about TGM and their work trying to eradicate the trafficking and exploitation of children in the countries of South East Asia, like many, especially those with children themselves, I said to myself, 'What can I do?' So to cut a long story short, over a period of about two years, our bodyguard company 538 Pty Ltd had been sponsoring in a small way (via financial donations) to help TGM and its work. Over the years of sponsoring, I still thought we could do more, so by corresponding with the founder of TGM, John Curtis, 538 — who not only provide bodyguard services but also train elite bodyguards — offered training to TGM field personnel and covert operations operatives, in defensive tactics. The go-ahead was then given by TGM to put together a training package, specialising in defensive tactics including weapons defensive

tactics, for their related environments.

MDTA since has developed a specialised defensive tactics program for field operatives and covert special operations personnel deployed into high risk environments. Defensive tactics for personnel engaged in covert surveillance, intelligence gathering and physical response work. This program is only available to individuals that have passed the vetting process of both TGM and 538 Pty Ltd.

So how did we know what TGM operatives faced, and the dangers they were exposed to? Well, by experiencing it first-hand.

JD and myself were part of a TGM deployment in Thailand and were placed in the thick of it. We were part of a covert special operations team that had to gather intelligence, confirm targets and execute a raid. Both of us conducted surveillance in high-risk environments. JD was part of the TGM team that had to enter a premises to be raided and pay for an underage (child) sex worker, by posing as a paedophile and taking her to a room, stalling, and waiting for the raid. I was part of the TGM Physical Response Unit working with the Royal Thai Police Anti-Human Trafficking division.

When all was set in place and the (suspected) underage girls had been secured and were in the rooms, the signal was given. Like a tornado we raided the premises, always with it in the back of our minds that on one of the last raids, four Thai police were shot and wounded.

We (TGM & the AHTD) were successful in that raid at rescuing three underage child sex workers.

A lot of people sit at home and see news reports of the horrific child prostitution The Grey Man works against, but feel like there's nothing they can do. What do you say to them?

Every little bit helps. You have choices in life, I know I prefer to sleep with my eyes closed, and make sure they're wide open when awake. You cannot shut your eyes to reality. Individuals and organisations can do many things. One is donating directly to TGM to help in eradicating the trafficking and exploitation of children. Funds help to not only rescue children but to instigate educational programs to prevent the initial trafficking of children, and to provide infrastructure for hill-tribe villages to bring them out of poverty and prevent trafficking. The other is to get involved in our 'Armchair Warrior' program.

The reality is that more ground operations including intelligence gathering, surveillance, and raids, are hampered by two main issues: The first, is that the large majority of field personnel or operatives are self-funded volunteers that simply cannot afford to be deployed. The second, is that many who would volunteer, don't, as they don't have the adequate training for the dangers involved. And the NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) such as TGM cannot afford to supply training in one of the more critical areas, personal security and defensive tactics.

So MDTA, through The 538 Pty Ltd group, have put together the Armchair Warrior program to gain financial support to help train and deploy field personnel and operatives, to make sure the great work of TGM can continue and grow. We're working together for a common goal: the children.

To find out more about becoming an 'Armchair Warrior' in the fight against child prostitution and human trafficking, visit www.mdta.com.au or call 1300 856 538. For more information about The Grey Man or to donate funds for its operations, visit www.thegreyman.org **BLITZ**

MDTA VS BLADE



1 Karl is ambushed at his car. As the attacker jabs his knife into Karl's back and makes his demands...



2 ...Karl spins inward and simultaneously sweeps the weapon-arm aside...



3 ...hooking and capturing it as he steps in with an elbow to the face.



4 Securing the weapon-arm tightly to his chest, Karl strikes the neck and hooks it to control the attacker's head...



5 ...pulling him into a knee-strike to the solar plexus.



6 Having winded the attacker, Karl seizes his weapon-hand/wrist...



7 ...and uses it for leverage to roll the arm over into a shoulder-lock.



8 Removing the knife, Karl stomps the attacker's shoulder to keep him away.