

INTO BATTLE

An interview with Kapap instructor Albert Timen



Albert, what originally influenced your decision to learn unarmed combat?

I am an Israeli who grew up in a country that has been involved in wars and conflicts since its inception. Generations of our families had been actively involved in protecting and building its strength through military and security services. So for us Israelis, we don't have

much choice to avoid exposure to this type of lifestyle, since we have compulsory service right after we finish high school for a minimum of three years, and a reserve duty every year until we turn 40. But most of the people continue to further volunteer. Now most of the teenagers strive to serve in the best units and it's a real challenge to be accepted to a Special Forces unit due to the high numbers of

motivated individuals applying to get selected. So you have to prepare yourself beforehand and many of us did this by taking active forms of physical preparation that also included unarmed combat, in order to toughen us up towards our goal of becoming SF material.

How long have you been in the martial arts and what styles and systems have you previously trained in?

My martial arts 'career' started at the age of nine when my mother signed me up to learn judo. I was a very energetic kid and my mother looked for something that could channel all of it into a positive direction. I stayed with judo for four years. A bigger influence came later when I found boxing to be a better form for me, since the physical demands were higher, as well as the disciplinary

Few men can claim to have foiled a suicide bomber's plan for death and destruction by taking him out with their bare hands. Albert Timen, who served in one of Israel's elite counter-terrorism units, is one who can. Now head of Israel's Kapap Academy combat system, he and other instructors have modified and upgraded their military-based martial art to fit the legal aspects of civilian self-defence, and to be applicable for law-enforcement, military and security operators worldwide. Australian-based Kapap Academy representative Paul Johnstone interviewed Timen for *Blitz* when the Israeli instructor recently visited Queensland to teach Kapap.

measures taken by the coach at the time. I needed to be challenged, since I was not an easygoing kid, and I found the judo more like a game at the time, since I wasn't mature enough to understand what I was really getting. I then started to learn boxing and studied it for three years, but since the sport was not developed in Israel, I gradually took it less and less, until I had stopped a year-and-a-half before my military service.

You have served in both the military and police. Can you tell me a bit about your background and experiences in both roles and how it has influenced your skills and knowledge as an instructor?

Like everyone else in my country, I had to serve when I turned 18 and my goal was to do my service in the best possible way. I aimed to be selected to SF units. In the process of selection, I and other recruits were separated from the main group and were relieved from duties for the rest of the last day.

We were sure we'd failed. Then we were approached by an officer who commanded us to follow him into an empty building, where we would go through a debriefing and further testing. At the end of the process we were told we had been selected to a unit that is unknown and will remain such due to the nature of its operations. Little did I know then that this unit would be the spearhead of our nation's

counter-terror units and would serve as a model and inspiration to other successful units that would follow its model.

That day started the course of training and the most exciting years in my military service, which I cannot speak much about, but these years shaped me into a totally different person and matured me very much in many different ways.

Surrounded by exceptional people and given special missions to carry out, this tested our mental and physical abilities to the extreme and contributed to my understanding of [combat] realities like nothing else before. It was the best testing ground of using my own skills and abilities, and perfecting them as an operator. Missions in my unit were carried out in single-operator mode and in teams of two or three maximum, when back-up is at a certain distance away from the operation, not giving out any signs of activity in order to keep the adversaries at bay. We used a lot of close, unarmed combat techniques to subdue and overcome resistance while arresting wanted terrorists. I participated in hundreds of missions and gained a lot of experience dealing with the unexpected and the unknown, but what helped me to succeed was the ability to adapt quickly in a fluid situation and make split-second decisions under stress.

I followed my military service into police and I served in similar capacity units as well. By utilising my operational



Timen teaching Kapap gun-disarms

experience I had gained in the military, I became an operational Tactics and Firearms Instructor at the Police Academy, as well as for several of the SWAT units as well. I was selected, among others, to take a few special

courses with the US Department of State and also did a duty tour at the Israeli Diplomatic Security Service in one of its neighbouring stations. I think that the variety of service and different capacities of duties

carried out, influenced my perception of problem-solving and contributed to who I am today as an instructor.

It is reported that you went hands-on and arrested a suicide bomber who was in the final stages of preparing to detonate the explosives that were strapped to his body. Are you able to discuss this matter and if so, what can you tell us about this incident? What were you thinking at the time, and did your tactical firearms and defensive tactics training prepare you for this?

Indeed, I had a very close encounter with a live suicide bomber in his final stages; it was reported in the national media, so I can repeat the details that were released to the public. The incident took place in January 2002. It was a weekend and my team and I were on duty when we got an urgent call to get immediately to a meeting point. Upon arrival we got a briefing about the situation unfolding as it took place. The person of interest had crossed the border from West Bank into Israel and had collected his explosive belt from its hiding place and he was on the way to detonate it in the city of Haifa in northern Israel. His target was a mass-populated

teen club in which his cousin had worked months before as kitchen worker, so he knew the location and had a plan in hand.

We gathered few of my team members and decided to divert the vehicle in which he was transported, in a way that he wouldn't suspect the activity around him. I got a good piece of information [as to] where he was sitting inside the vehicle and I had briefed how we would intercept the bomber while we were closing in, since we didn't have time for a dry-run practice. My concern was that he would reach the place where we could not stop him from committing his actions or if he knew that we were on his tail he would choose a target of opportunity and detonate the explosives at a different place.

I had shut down all communications, since I was afraid radio frequency would cause the charge to detonate while we were closing in, so all the rest was done as we coordinated on the briefing. I was the one that initiated contact while his attention was drawn to something else; I smashed the window and extracted him out of the vehicle while controlling his hand. It turned out that he broke a few fingers and was knocked



unconscious while I engaged contact, but when I had him on the ground and stripped his shirt off, I saw the belt connected to the on/off switch that was taped to his inner palm. I credit all members of the team involved for the success of this event, as this wouldn't have been possible without them. The fact that I made the arrest successfully is based on the mixture of the elements of surprise, speed and violence of action that determined the outcome. These elements were instilled in me due to my prior experience and helped me to prepare for this worst-case scenario.

When did you officially start the Kapap Academy?

I started Kapap Academy five years ago in the USA and it was officially incorporated on 1 January 2005.

I had been involved in many projects as a subcontractor and a freelance consultant/instructor, and I worked for others in the industry until I decided it was about the right time to start to form the academy.

Why did you decide to call it the Kapap Academy?

KAPAP is literally an acronym for face-to-face combat or, in short, CQB [close-quarters battle] in Hebrew. Originally it was a term used by the Palmach [Jewish underground resistance] describing a set of skills in the preparation of its fighters for their struggle towards achieving independence for

the state of Israel under British rule. It included combat sports and operational fitness, as well as armed and unarmed skills, both with knives and short and long sticks, as well as improvised weapons. The academy name is both a tribute to the truly forgotten fighters and the history they made, as well as a short and to-the-point description of what we are truly doing in our academy: preparing people from all walks of life to achieve self-defence skills, and training professionals such as military and police in CQB skills.

In what countries do you currently have instructors and where is there a prominent influence of Kapap?

We currently have Kapap Academy certified instructors in the following countries: USA, Canada, UK, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Mexico, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina and Australia.

Not to be mixed up with other systems that are calling their system KAPAP, but in fact are engaged in teaching traditional martial arts forms, Kapap Academy instructors are focused on teaching a progression of effective self-defence and CQB skills that have proved to work where they count the most: on the street, not in the dojos.

*Check out part two of this interview in the next issue of Blitz, on sale 1 September. **BLITZ***

