

## Airsoft Replicas - Useful Training Tools or Worthless Toys?



There are several schools of thought on firearms training weapon systems. Some believe that the best weapon simulators are "Simunition" firearms whilst others believe that Airsoft trainers are the better option. Others still believe that the "Red Gun" and "Blue Gun" dummy trainers are a better option. There are "Pros" and "Cons" to each system....

*(The picture on the left shows a Heckler & Koch USP firearm and it's Airsoft replica - the bottom one is the real firearm)*

There are obvious limitations to training with a real firearm - one is limited only to shooting at static, inanimate targets in strictly controlled environments due to the obvious dangers of training with live ammunition.

This poses a severe problem to the operator since his or her training will be limited to punching holes in a paper target in very unrealistic conditions. Even if it is possible to introduce moving targets, those targets are still predictable and therefore an unrealistic training aid.

It is not the presence of a weapon that makes an encounter on the streets a dangerous one, but rather the presence of another human being, capable of separate thought process beyond the control of the operator that makes that situation dangerous - not knowing what the other person is thinking or what they are going to do next - thus, for any training to be effective, it needs to mimic reality as much as possible by introducing a real human 'adversary' to the mix.

Obviously, this rules out the use of real firearms with live ammunition.

So what is available out there that will allow the operator to train in a more realistic environment without the danger of being killed or permanently injured?

One solution is the Simunitions trainers that are prevalent in law enforcement circles. Simunitions firearms are in fact, real firearms that have simply had their barrel assemblies swapped out with the slightly smaller bore Simunitions trainer barrel assembly.

The Simunitions system uses a pyrotechnic cartridge which propels a paint-filled marker projectile at slower velocity than the actual rounds usually used in the weapon.

The "Pros" of using Simunitions trainers are that you get the benefit of "felt recoil", realistic shot discharge and the fact that you would be using the exact same firearm that you would be carrying out on the street. The "Cons" are that there are serious potential dangers involved with using pyrotechnics and the fact that there currently exists a solid plastic projectile for the Simunitions system that is used for punching holes in paper targets (effectively making it a live round) so there exists a possibility that, during training, the wrong cartridges can be loaded into the weapon and serious, possibly fatal accidents could occur. Additionally, the cost of a Simunitions marker round is about \$0.55 each thus making it cost prohibitive for most to use this system for any serious training.

Another possible solution (as used by various military units around the world over several decades past) is the use of blank ammunition and blank-firing attachments on real firearms - one gets the benefit of felt recoil for realism however, since no actual projectile is fired, there still lacks any positive feedback from the "attacker" in training exercises to indicate success or failure to hit the target and, there still exists the very real danger of loading live rounds into the weapon by accident during intense training sessions.

The cost and availability of blank ammunition makes it a poor choice for any serious training efforts.

"Blue Gun" and "Red Gun" training systems allow for somewhat effective, weapon retention training however, that is where their usefulness ends as a training tool - there is no projectile, felt recoil or the sound of shots being discharged therefore they lack any real use as a firearms trainer with regards to training for a real gunfight.

Enter the Airsoft replica training weapon.

Airsoft "toys" offer an excellent training aid because they are safe, cost effective and readily available in almost any conceivable configuration.

There are still some downsides to Airsoft systems, namely that they do not offer much in the way of felt recoil and they have a muted report so some of the element of realism is lost however, it should be noted that in almost all life-or-death encounters, one is usually subject to the body alarm response (adrenaline dump) during which time, the body experiences auditory exclusion (no weapon report or voice commands are heard) and a loss of fine motor skill and increase in gross motor skill (little is felt in the way of recoil) so as far as realism is concerned, the lack of felt recoil and of auditory report in Airsoft trainers is largely irrelevant.

Another "downside" to using Airsoft is that, because of the inferior materials used in manufacture and the obvious differences in how the weapon delivers it's projectiles compared to it's firearm counterpart, it is sometimes necessary to 'modify' certain immediate action drills and malfunction recovery drills in order to prevent damage to the trainer.

In my humble opinion, the "Pros" far outweigh the "Cons" of using Airsoft trainers:

1. They are very cost effective since the average Airsoft pistol costs around \$80 to \$220 and long guns such as the M4 platform costs from \$150 to \$400 and each 6mm BB projectile costs around \$0.004 (about \$15.00 for 4,000 BBs) compared with the \$0.55 that each

Simunitions round costs. There are some Airsoft systems that are specifically labeled as "Professional Training Weapons" such as the Systema M4 PTW which are specifically designed to stop firing when the attached magazine is empty which forces the operator to conduct a combat reload and, are built from more robust materials allowing for more realistic drills to be employed however, these systems come at a premium with the average cost of \$2,500 for the M4 variant (about twice the cost of a real M4) and \$1,500 for the H&K MP5 variant (about half the cost of a real MP5).

2. They offer positive feedback whilst remaining relatively safe since the kinetic energy transfer of a 0.2 gram plastic BB traveling at an average of about 350 feet per second will most certainly "Sting" and can, in some rare cases cause welts and minor abrasions but lacks the ability to actually penetrate the skin thus with the proper use of good quality eye protection, they remain a very safe alternative to Simunitions.

3. They offer realism of appearance - in fact they are so realistic in appearance that they are often mistaken (sometimes with tragic results) for real firearms.

4. Most Airsoft trainers are so close in matching their real firearm counterparts that often, many real ancillaries for firearms (such as tactical optics and sighting systems, slings, holsters, etc.) will fit perfectly with the Airsoft trainer allowing for training in the use of said ancillaries such as correct use of sighting systems, drawing from a concealed carry holster, etc.

Now, for the naysayers out there that would rather rubbish the idea of the use of Airsoft as a realistic training aid, it may be worth noting that almost every law enforcement agency, including their tactical units, in the Metro Detroit area and outlying cities use Airsoft as their preferred training system.

The use of Airsoft allows the operator to train more realistically than with a real firearm - if you feel this is not accurate then ask yourself either of the following questions:

"Would actually having to draw down on a charging 300-pound man armed with a knife so that I can practice having to actually draw my weapon while under real (albeit controlled) duress, where I am not in control of the charging attacker and have no means of accurately anticipating his next move, and have to accurately engage said attacker, benefit me greater than having to fire my real firearm in a controlled manner, in a controlled environment, at a target that does not move and has no positive means of letting me know that I passed or failed a live or die test?"

"Am I ever likely to encounter an armed attacker in a real life or death situation where that attacker will allow for me first draw my weapon and then to fire slow, well-aimed shots in a controlled environment and in a controlled manner thus justifying my current training habits which reflect this scenario as being the reality?"

Obviously, both of the above questions employed a degree of sarcasm but the point is this:

In the real world, if your training doesn't allow for you to practice realistic events then if placed in a real life or death situation it is an unfortunate certainty that you will fall foul of your lack of realistic training and will most likely not prevail.

Remember - in times of dire necessity, we never rise to the occasion but rather default to our lowest form of training - that which you do most often in training will dictate how you react when your life is on the line.

Using systems such as Airsoft trainers will allow for far more realistic training with few restrictions on how and where training is conducted - using real firearms poses obvious dangers and using Simunitions places restrictions on when, how and where training is conducted.

By [Miguel Denyer](#)