

Could you survive a terror attack?

How would you react if the bombs were exploding? Julia Horton finds out what it takes to stay alive

CRASH to the ground, face twisted to one side, eyes shut tight, heart pounding, terrified to move and terrified not to. Acrid smoke fills the air and an eerie silence descends. I remember a shout but the grenade seems to come from nowhere, rolling towards me and exploding in a flash, sending shrapnel flying. When I look up a bloody mess of body parts ripped apart by the blast lies scattered in front of me.

Thankfully, neither the bomb nor the carnage is real. I am taking part in the first terrorism survival and awareness course for the public in Scotland. It has been launched by Helensburgh-based international terrorism expert Simon Leila, who runs 360 Defence and has spent the past decade offering the same kind of training to the government, police, military and businesses.

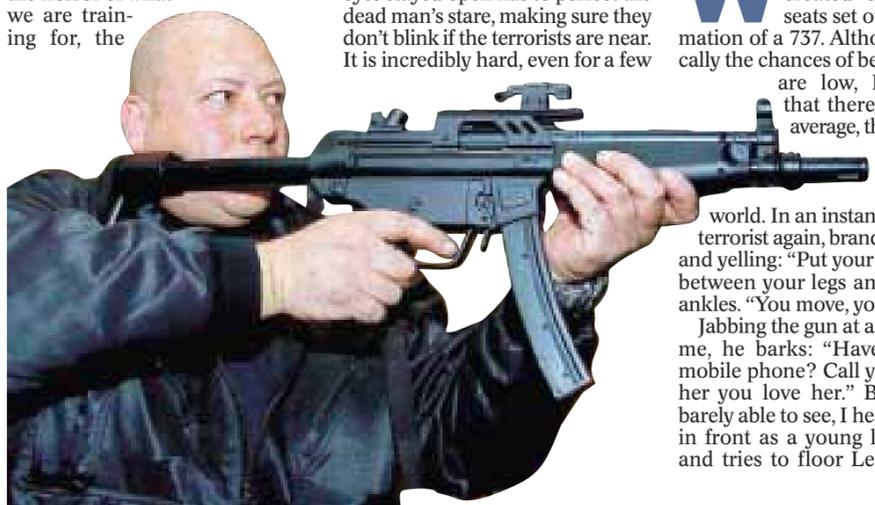
You could argue that, given the already legendary reactions of baggage handler John Smeaton at Glasgow Airport, ordinary citizens, in the wild west at least, need no such training. Leila points out that most have-a-go heroes, however, end up dead and the course is about teaching people to survive.

The Glasgow attack also confirmed just how real is the threat at home as well as overseas, giving the course a greater relevance. Of the 20 or so people here, the youngest is a schoolboy and the oldest is a grandmother, supporting Leila's claim that there is growing demand from all of society. If my reactions and those of everyone else in the group are any indication, the public could do with a few tips.

I can confess that when Joe, Leila's fellow instructor, turned "suicide bomber", without warning, our initial response was to jump back a few steps from the grenade in shock, laughing nervously and glancing around the room, wondering what to do next. Not that there would have been a next if it had been a real attack, for, as Leila puts it: "You're all dead."

What we should have done is drop to the floor instantly – and we spend the next 15 minutes practising falling forwards and backwards on to safety mats. Leila explains that once a bomb has gone off, the safest place to head is towards the explosion because there could be more than one terrorist. If you run away, you risk heading towards another bomb. We move on to practice dodging sniper fire, which Leila demonstrates by running in a zig-zag towards the cover of a concrete pillar.

Despite, or maybe because of, the horror of what we are training for, the



EXPLOSIVE EXAMPLE: Course participants play dead after a "bomb" attack. Fortunately, this was make-believe, but there is growing concern about the terrorism threat. Pictures: Richard Scott

atmosphere is good-humoured. It is difficult to take yourself too seriously when you are wearing safety goggles, to protect us from the ball-bearing "bullets" and pyrotechnic flash-bang grenades used as fake bombs. But when Leila and Joe let rip with guns to re-enact a hostage situation similar to the Russian theatre siege by Chechen rebels, it suddenly feels very real as we dive to the floor once more.

The idea is that we pretend to be dead and try to move "while dead" to escape. As they pace around the room, occasionally kicking us (albeit gently) to see if we will react, I find myself trying to hold my breath as I creep forward, millimetre by millimetre. Luckily, I landed with my eyes shut. Everyone who's eyes stayed open has to perfect the dead man's stare, making sure they don't blink if the terrorists are near. It is incredibly hard, even for a few

minutes. In real life, survivors have crawled like this over the dead bodies of less fortunate victims for 24 hours or more before getting far enough to escape.

Leila talks us through more issues, including how to spot a terrorist. Of course, they look like everyone else, but can be identified by their behaviour. He says: "If something looks a bit odd, it probably is. Terrorists who are about to attack will be trying too hard to blend in. You need to remove yourself from that British reserve of thinking something looks suspicious but is probably nothing. That nothing was 7/7."

WE ARE all now sitting in a mock aeroplane, created simply from seats set out in the formation of a 737. Although statistically the chances of being hijacked are low, Leila warns that there are still, on average, three attempted hijacks every week around the world. In an instant, Leila turns terrorist again, brandishing a gun and yelling: "Put your heads down between your legs and hold your ankles. "You move, you die!" Jabbing the gun at a man behind me, he barks: "Have you got a mobile phone? Call your wife, tell her you love her." Bent double, barely able to see, I hear a cry from in front as a young lad leaps up and tries to floor Leila. Another

It suddenly feels very real as we dive to the floor

passenger in the row behind goes for Joe and gunfire erupts as the four men fight in the aisle. The would-be heroes are soon dead. But although they failed, Leila says that in a 9/11 scenario, in which mobile phones are used to trigger a bomb, you may as well try to overpower the terrorists because you have nothing to

lose – if you do nothing, you are going to die anyway.

Wannabe hero number one, Adam Flint, 17, of Newton Mearns, his T-shirt spattered in fake blood, says afterwards: "I was just thinking I'm going to go, so I shouted, 'Let's get them!' and went for it."

"I felt tense; I don't know what I'd do if it happened for real. Doing this course has given me confidence, though, and made me more aware of what's going on around me."

Glasgow father of three Eric Hamilton, 41, an engineering firm manager, the second passenger to fight back, said he joined the course

to help protect his family. He said: "My children are eight, seven and four, and they are growing up in a different world."

"When they are older I want to be able to teach them how to be more aware, not just of possible terrorism, but crime in general, especially of street crime in Glasgow."

At 74, Deborah, who did not want to give her surname, is the oldest on the course. The Glasgow grandmother signed up because she believes everyone now has a role to play in public safety.

She says: "People are reluctant to think about these things but unfortunately we have to now. It's being



I don't know what I'd do if it happened for real
Adam Flint, 17



I was not surprised when Glasgow was attacked
Elizabeth Huber, 32



What we've learned is very practical
David Sutherland, 36

forced on us. You used to read about these things [terrorism] happening far away. It's frightening now we have had the Glasgow Airport attack – that was a big shock. No-one ever thought it would happen there.

"I will still fly anyway; I'm not worried about it at all, but it's something I think people should take more seriously."

As I listen to Leila's advice, I am tense, alert, wondering when the next test will come. And this time when the next "suicide bomber" attacks, we all crash to the ground, hands over our ears, eyes shut, legs together, crawling towards the scene on our stomachs as the smoke clears. "You're all alive," Leila says grinning.

Such is the sensitivity over the course that the central Glasgow venue where it is taking place today asked for its identity to be kept secret. Perhaps more understandably, bosses also refused to let Leila recreate the Glasgow Airport Jeep attack outside with his own vehicle in case it alarmed the public.

Leila is aware of critics who claim the course, which costs £159 for a full day, is capitalising on fear and breeding paranoia, but he rebuts the allegations outright.

As he says, in Nick Ross Crime-watch style: "Don't be paranoid. Be aware. All you want to do is survive if you are involved in an incident. Hopefully, this course will help make sure you do so you can all get home and have a nice cup of tea."

julia.horton@theherald.co.uk

'Trust your instincts if you think something looks odd'

SIMON Leila (pictured) and his 360 Defence team of anti-terrorism experts have a background in the security and special services. As a result, much of the self-defence work they teach in the survival and awareness course is based on a technique called Krav Maga, which is aimed at fine-tuning people's instinctive responses in real situations.

Literally meaning "contact combat", Krav Maga includes practising the best way to hit back if under attack by battering a punchbag with open palms, elbows and knees. The mantra throughout the course is about trying to stay

out of trouble in the first place, by following the three As: awareness, anticipation and avoidance.

You can boost how alert you are by practising what Leila calls "sneaky peaks" to help you spot signs of trouble. He demonstrates by hiding behind a pillar and poking his head round for a second to scan the room. Another message is to trust your instincts if you think something looks odd. For an immediate threat, dial 999, and for



suspicious behaviour without an apparent risk of imminent danger call the Anti-Terrorism Hotline UK on 0800 789 321.

Sceptics remain, but Leila points out that the idea of training the public has won support from Professor Paul Wilkinson, head of terrorism studies at St Andrews University, who said recently that "there is room for this type of course and we just have to accept it in the world we live in".

To book a place on the next course, likely to be held later this month or next, visit the 360 Defence Ltd website at www.360defence.co.uk.