From December 15th to the 19th, the United States National Standards of Training Association (U.S.N.S.T.A.) hosted its 9th Annual National Training Conference at the Bally’s Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, NV. Over two hundred law enforcement officers, military personnel and security specialists from the United States and Canada attended the conference. The main theme of this year’s conference was virtual training. Controlled F.O.R.C.E., which is the cornerstone training system of the U.S.N.S.T.A., demonstrated throughout the week how tactical based video games such as Rainbow Six Vegas 2 can be used to link people together from across the world to develop tactics, teamwork and communication in a simulated combat setting. The knowledge gained from this can then be applied to actual tactics. The Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Team, led by Directors Tony Grano and Don Roberts, was able to apply the use of a video game system that is accessible to anyone to train individuals and teams in a similar fashion that the military has done with simulators that cost millions of dollars to create and are not accessible to everyone. Rainbow Six Vegas 2, which is set in Las Vegas, tied in perfectly to the seminar. The location of the seminar was great from a training standpoint as well. The main training room was the size of a football field. We also had access to several ballrooms, corridors, and service hallways which were ideal for the tactical structure clearing training. As a certified Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Instructor for my department, I attended the conference to further develop my own skills and to learn new ones. My wife Tracy, who is also a police officer, recently completed a Controlled
F.O.R.C.E. instructor course and was able to participate in the conference with me this year to hone her own skills.

Most conferences I've attended in the past consisted mostly of classroom lectures and presentations. The U.S.N.S.T.A. conference was quite different in that it was almost all hands-on techniques and drills. Each day was full of fast-paced and intense training: from the effective and practical Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Mechanical Advantage Control Holds™ (M.A.C.H.) techniques and drills to dynamic team search techniques. This was by far the most beneficial and well-organized conference I have attended in my 12-year law enforcement career. From skill development to learning new techniques and concepts, I felt confident that I left at the end of the week with the tools to be a more effective and safer officer. My wife, who had no prior martial arts or serious defense tactics training, felt that the M.A.C.H. techniques were effective, especially since they enabled her to control her training partners who were men that were significantly bigger and stronger than she. Tracy also liked the fact that at the end of each day she was able to not only memorize the M.A.C.H. techniques, but felt comfortable with them since they didn’t require fine motor skills and each day’s techniques and drills were built upon what was learned on the preceding day.

The morning session of day one focused on handling non-compliant and passive-resistant subjects. We went right into the Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Level 1 curriculum, starting with warm-up drills and the M.A.C.H. 1 through 5 control holds at a fast and intense pace. There wasn't one person in the room who wasn't sweating within the first 15 minutes. By lunchtime, we had gone through the entire Level 1 curriculum, covering both single officer and team arrest techniques. Some attendees completed the training as end-users, and prior instructors were able to re-certify as instructors. After lunch, we again ran through Level 1 individual and team arrests, and added in the M.A.C.H. techniques with the use of a baton. The M.A.C.H. drills with baton were useful because they gave students options for integrating the baton into arrest control techniques in situations where the baton has been deployed with the result of gaining a level of compliance.
The baton drills were especially helpful for officers of a smaller stature, like my wife, because they increase leverage, which increases the dynamics of a subject control technique. Students then had the opportunity to attend a break-out session that focused on a realistic high-risk traffic stop scenario. By the end of day one, everyone looked beat. The attendees had done hundreds of repetitions, and I could tell that students were feeling confident and rewarded for their hard day of learning and work.

We began day two by warming up with stretches and a quick review of M.A.C.H. 1 through 5, which by now attendees were doing with their eyes closed. The focus of day two was on self-protection from sudden and violent attacks, which was in line with the Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Level 2 curriculum. We began with simple “windshield wiper” drills to develop hand-eye coordination and the concept of protecting instead of blocking a punch or strike coming at you. We then moved up to high intensity protection drills that began with a sudden punch from your training partner. These drills consisted of a five step process, with each step building off of the previous drill. By the end of the last step, the majority of hands in the room were moving smooth, fast and efficient. We then dove straight into ground defense, which consisted of two main concepts: 1) protecting yourself, and 2) getting off the ground and up to your feet as soon as possible. Several techniques and drills to hammer these concepts in were taught and practiced. After ground defense, we finished up the morning session with knife defense and out-of-holster weapon retention. I was impressed with the realistic concepts taught about knife defense. Students were first taught to create distance and protect so they could transition to a higher level of force when faced by an attacker with an edged weapon. Students were then taught that protecting from a sudden knife attack is the same as protecting from a punch because we don’t have the reaction speed to change our techniques mid-attack. After knife defense, we ended the
morning session with out-of-holster weapon retention techniques. These techniques were effective due to the ease of movement and speed at which they could be done. After lunch, we reviewed Level 2 and added the baton to the techniques. Day two was just as intense as the first day, and once again instructors were able to re-certify as Level 2 instructors.

Day three was an end-user introduction to the Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Level 3 curriculum. Students were first taught M.A.C.H. 6 through 10. Once students were competent with these holds, the baton option was again integrated into all the holds. By this time, students began understanding that practicing with the baton made them smoother and faster when applying the holds without the baton. Tony Grano and Don Roberts then introduced the concept of counter-measure training, which they defined as both you and your training partner constantly working to gain a position of advantage over each other. This concept was hammered in with several drills that applied Level 1, 2, and 3 techniques, as well as transitioning to weapons and dealing with multiple attackers. After lunch, students reviewed techniques and drills taught earlier in the day and attended an eye-opening presentation on officer suicides. My wife and I had the opportunity to participate in a demonstration of team entry and searching techniques with three other Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Certified Instructors. This demonstration, put on for G4 Television’s X-Play show, compared the realism of actual searching with the Rainbow Six Vegas 2 video game, which re-creates tactical operations with extraordinary accuracy. The demonstration ended with a “guys vs. girls” airsoft team competition with four-person teams. I was on the guys team and my wife was on the girls team. I wasn’t really used to the idea of shooting at my wife with an airsoft gun that shot BBs at over 300 feet per second. But I realized that this was training to prepare for life-threatening encounters, and I wouldn’t be doing her any favors by going “soft” on her. After the airsoft battle, we transitioned to a “guys vs. girls” team competition on Rainbow Six Vegas 2 where all four of the guys were able to play and interact together, exactly like during the airsoft battle. The girls did the same, and my wife was amazed at how she was able to learn and practice team movement concepts through the realistic video game. I also felt the actual team movement combined with the virtual team movement really tied in the virtual training theme of the
conference. I also realized that by utilizing video games like what I already own and like my teammates own, I could train with the same group of guys even though we are all scattered throughout different parts of the country!

Day four consisted of a review of Level 3 techniques and drills. The students were also introduced to body movement and positioning through collar ties, pummeling and other drills. Once again, the intensity and hard work of the students was apparent by all those who were soaking wet with sweat. Even though students appeared to be tired, there was still a strong positive energy among them because the students knew they were learning valuable techniques and concepts that had practical application. After lunch, students had a presentation on how to react and respond to dog attacks, which was demonstrated by U.S.N.S.T.A. Commissioner Kevin Rittenhouse, followed by a 4-person SWAT competition where teams were judged on how well they conducted a building search. A 2-person force-on-force competition with airsoft guns ended the day’s formal training. Later that evening, the U.S.N.S.T.A. hosted a social event that was attended by everyone involved in the conference. This not only was a great time for everyone to let loose after a week of hard work, but it provided an invaluable opportunity to network with other attendees. It was a chance for everyone to drop their “professional” personas and for the attendees to share their personal and “human” side with everyone. Attendees “talked shop,” but also shared about their families and hometowns. I personally made contacts and became friends with officers, full-time SWAT operators, and military personnel from all over the country that I now communicate with every week.

By day five, most attendees looked proficient with Level 1 through 3 techniques. The morning was dedicated to polishing up techniques and reviewing drills. A four station hands-on scenario drill was set up for the security specialists and other police officers that were completing their
initial Controlled F.O.R.C.E. Instructor Certification where they were able to apply what they had learned to "real situations."

Everything my wife and I had learned throughout the week had value to us and we felt proficient with the material by the end of the week. We both attributed this to the relative ease of the techniques and concepts as well as from the high number of repetitions and drills performed. We enjoyed networking with and learning about the other law enforcement, military and security elements that attended the conference. The quality, professionalism and knowledge of the instructors were truly impressive. Both the instructors and students "checked their egos in at the door" from day one, which allowed for a positive and intense learning environment. What’s also great about the conference and the Controlled F.O.R.C.E. program is that people from all over the world who have been through the training can get together in one place and work as a team for the first time and look and work together as if they had had worked together for years! My wife and I would confidently recommend the U.S.N.S.T.A. annual conference to anyone who desires personal development with hands-on control and arrest techniques, self-protection and tactical techniques. We are both highly anticipating what Controlled F.O.R.C.E. and the U.S.N.S.T.A. Instructor Cadre have in store for next year’s conference.