

FIGHTING WITH STICKS



Nick Evangelista

This book is sold for informational purposes only. Neither the author nor the publisher will be held accountable for the use or misuse of the information contained in this book.

Fighting With Sticks
© 1998 by Nick Evangelista

Published by:
Loompanics Unlimited
PO Box 1197
Port Townsend, WA 98368
Loompanics Unlimited is a division of Loompanics Enterprises, Inc.
1-360-385-2230
E-mail: loompanx@olympus.net
Web site: www.loompanics.com

Cover art by Mark Lang
Photos courtesy Nick Evangelista
Illustrations by Holly Tuttle

ISBN 1-55950-176-6
Library of Congress Card Catalog 98-85460

Contents

Foreword	i
Preface	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One	
Why A Stick?.....	3
Chapter Two	
The Approach.....	5
Chapter Three	
A Short History Of Sword Fighting.....	7
Chapter Four	
Fighting Sticks.....	17
Chapter Five	
Peaceful Sticks: The Shepherd's Crook.....	25
Chapter Six	
Some Wooden Swords In History.....	29
Chapter Seven	
Fighting With Sticks.....	35
Chapter Eight	
The Singlestick And Its Ancestors.....	45
Chapter Nine	
Singlestick: The Game.....	57
Chapter Ten	
Holding The Singlestick.....	63

Chapter Eleven	
Singlestick: Game 1.....	67
Chapter Twelve	
Singlestick: Game II.....	77
Chapter Thirteen	
Singlestick: Game III.....	95
Chapter Fourteen	
Self-Defense.....	97
Chapter Fifteen	
Cane Fighting.....	107
Chapter Sixteen	
Staff Fighting.....	111
Chapter Seventeen	
Making A Singlestick, Fighting Stick, Or Staff.....	117
Chapter Eighteen	
Making A Cane Or Walking Stick.....	127
Chapter Nineteen	
Organizations Of Interest.....	129
Chapter Twenty	
Fencing Equipment Suppliers.....	133
Chapter Twenty One	
Fighting Stick Suppliers.....	137
Chapter Twenty Two	
Cane Suppliers.....	139
Chapter Twenty Three	
Selected Reading List.....	141
Chapter Twenty Four	
Fighting With Sticks In The Movies.....	145
Afterword	147
Appendix	
Fighting Terminology.....	149

This book is for my good friend,
Anthony De Longis.

"If(a man) is knocked down with a Stick, he will hardly get up again and say, it just brushed him."

— Captain John Godfrey (circa: 1750)

"Walk softly and carry a big stick."

— Teddy Roosevelt (1858-1919)

Acknowledgments

First, as always, thanks to Ralph Faulkner for setting me on my life's path.

Next, much thanks to Chris Amberger for his sound comments.

Thanks, also, to Tom Cragg for his input.

Thanks to William Gaugler for his continued support for my writing projects.

And thanks to Justin Evangelista, my son, for helping with this book.

Finally, thanks to Polly and Joe August for always being there.

Foreword

i

Foreword

The "Foreword" for *Fighting With Sticks* was not written by a presently living person. The following lines were penned by an Englishman, C. Phillips-Wolley, in 1920, for a little volume entitled *Broadsword and Single-Stick, with Chapters on Quarterstaff, Bayonet, Cudgel, Shillalah, Walking Stick, Umbrella, and Other Weapons of Self-Defense*. His thoughts, nearly 80 years old, seemed to be in keeping with the tone of my book, so I decided to borrow a few lines for my readers.

Says Mr. Phillips-Wolley:

"It seems to me that single-stick is the most thoroughly practical form of sword-play for use in those 'tight places' where men care nothing for rules, but only want to make the most out of that weapon, which the chance of the moment has put in their hands.

"As a sport, it [single-stick] is second to none of those which can be indulged in the gymnasium, unless it be boxing; and even boxing has its disadvantages. What the ordinary man wants is a game with which he may fill up hours during which he cannot play cricket [basketball, baseball, football, or

Fighting With Sticks

tennis for the U.S. citizen] and need not work, a game in which he may exercise those muscles with which good Mother Nature meant him to earn his living, but which custom has condemned to rust, while the brain wears out; again in which he may hurt someone else, is extremely likely to be hurt himself, and is certain to earn an appetite for dinner. If anyone tells me that my views of amusement are barbaric or brutal, that no reasonable man ever wants to hurt anyone else or to risk his own precious carcase, I accept the charge of brutality, merely remarking that it was the national love of hard knocks which made this little island [England] famous.

'There is just enough pain about the use of the sticks to make self-control during the use of them a necessity; just enough danger to a sensitive hide to make the game thoroughly English, for no game which puts a strain upon the player's strength and agility only, and none on his nerve, endurance, and temper, should take rank with the best of our national pastimes.

'There is just enough sting in the ash-plant's [single-stick's] kiss, when it catches you on the softer parts of your thigh, your funny bone, or your wrist, to keep you wide awake, and remind you of the good old rule of 'grin and bear it.'"

Finally,

"If you want to learn to play quickly, if you want to get the most out of your lessons, never encourage your teacher [or opponent] to spare you too much... If you are not spared too much... you will, after the ash-plant [single-stick] has curled once or twice round your thighs, acquire a guard so instinctively accurate, so marvelously quick, that you will yourself be delighted at your cheaply purchased dexterity."

Thoughts on martial skills haven't changed much over the years.

Preface

The idea for this book came out of my life as a teacher of fencing. I have been a fencing master for over 20 years; and, in that time, have come across many principles that while not directly applicable to what I do, either compliment it or run along a similar track.

To cut, to parry, to thrust — these are the mechanics of my world, the world of fencing; and yet fencing, for the last 200+ years, has been relegated mainly to the realm of sport. How to apply my information to a general population deficient in swordspersons?

It suddenly occurred to me one day that fighting with sticks could be such an activity. Certain oriental martial arts employ sticks. But I am not a master of these arts. How could I make use of what I know?

Then, I recalled that in my research for my first book, *The Encyclopedia of the Sword*, I'd encountered a purely Western form of stick fighting. It was primarily an English form of play called Singlestick. And, best of all, it was an outgrowth of the fencing I knew, something I could identify with. Here,

Fighting With Sticks

IV

then, was something I could use as a foundation for my own system. Sticks — canes and walking sticks — unlike swords, after all, are an acceptable part of modern life.

And so I had my starting point.

The rest is this book.



The Author.

Introduction

You have a gun, but you can't get ammunition for it. Swords are expensive, somewhat hard to come by, and take some proficiency to use. You don't necessarily have the intestinal fortitude to go at someone mano a mano in a knife fight. You don't have time to mold your body into a lethal fighting machine with an oriental martial art. And you aren't big enough or aggressive enough to just plain duke it out John Wayne-style.

So, what do you do?

Simple.

Learn to fight with a stick. Sticks are plentiful, easy to come by, fairly simple to operate, and, with just a bit of practice, possess some pretty decent stopping power. A good whack in the head, or a sharp jab in the solar plexus, with a stout stick can do some real damage.

You can make your own weapon if you want personal input. Of course, if the stick breaks you can always obtain another. Even if there were a total breakdown of society, Nature would continue to provide an abundance of fighting ma-

Fighting With Sticks

terials. In normal times, if you're seeking convenience, any hardware store has a selection of sturdy dowels to choose from. If you're pursuing class, a cane can fill the bill. Best of all, a cane, or walking stick — unlike various martial arts weapons such as nunchackus — is not illegal to sport in public.



Fighting with quarterstaffs.

In a world where guns are becoming harder and harder to come by — and where people are getting odder and odder — having access to even a minimal form of self-defense makes sense.

In the following pages we will explore the concept of stick fighting.

Chapter One

Why A Stick?

A stick, for most folks, is harder than a hand. Moreover, a stick in a hand gives anyone an extension that exceeds their normal reach. And there is, as has been noted, an inherent stopping power in a stick that the average individual may lack when unarmed. Let's face it, not everyone is a Bruce Lee or an Arnold Schwarzenegger. Basically, the stick is a tool that overshadows one's physical nature. It becomes an equalizer — both physical and psychological — pure and simple.

Having some form of self-defense, no matter how basic, helps remove you from the unenviable status of potential victim that being a believer and follower of law places you in. Laws only contain the lawful. Talking your way out of a confrontation may or may not work for you these days. Certainly, "Letting the police do the protecting," will do you no good as a fist slams painfully into your nose. But, as most martial artists agree, having the calm knowledge of one's ability to protect oneself is often enough to remove you from the predator/prey cycle. You don't have to use what you know, simply because you know it. But if that remote mo-

Fighting With Sticks

4

ment of truth does arise, well, you're the one who walks away from the encounter.

These ideas will be our operating principles.

To hit and not be hit, a concept as old as personal combat, will be our motto.

Chapter Two

The Approach

We will not be following a single martial art in the self-defense portion of this book, but will borrow good ideas from various systems. Overall, we want to keep things simple. Becoming a competent martial artist takes time. Self-discipline is at the heart of the matter. You need something that you can integrate into your life with a minimum of effort —now!

Luckily, it doesn't take a lot of skill to whack someone with a stick. We're not dealing with intricate forms of weapon manipulation. If you have an inclination to strike (if you don't hold back, that is, because you're afraid you'll hurt your attacker), and know how to exploit the element of surprise, you have what you need for self-defense. Remember, the stick, well placed, is doing the work for you.

Chapter Three

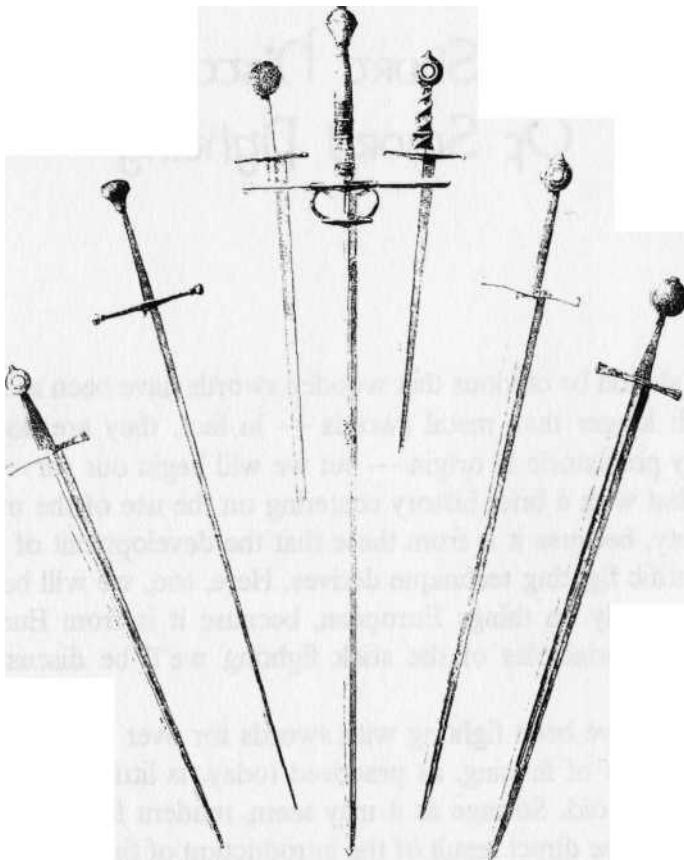
A Short History Of Sword Fighting

It should be obvious that wooden swords have been around much longer than metal swords — in fact, they are doubtlessly prehistoric in origin — but we will begin our survey of combat with a brief history centering on the use of the metal variety, because it is from these that the development of true scientific fighting technique derives. Here, too, we will be focusing only on things European, because it is from Europe that the principles of the stick fighting we'll be discussing originate.

Men have been fighting with swords for over 5,000 years, but the art of fencing, as practiced today, is little more than 500 years old. Strange as it may seem, modern fencing came about as the direct result of the introduction of firearms in the 16th century. Before that time, specifically during the Middle Ages, the sword was used exclusively as an offensive weapon. Protection came from armor. In effect, each man wore his own personal fort. Broad, heavy blades were used to smash through an adversary's armor. This was no mean task.

Fighting With Sticks

It took strength and determination. Armor, as its continued use for centuries proved, performed its job well.



Swords of the Middle Ages.

Rifles and bullets took the time-worn principles of armed combat and rendered them immediately null and void. With little pieces of metal propelled at high velocity (by gun pow-

Chapter Three
A Short History Of Sword Fighting
9

der) easily piercing armor, armor was no longer a major obstacle to overcome in a fight. Presumably, anyone could stop a heavily armored knight in his tracks. Moreover, bulky plates slowed a man down on the open battlefield, making him a ready target for the musketeer. By the end of the 1500s, the wearing of armor for personal defense was virtually abandoned.

The man of the sword was abruptly thrown out into the cold, so to speak. Where once armor had been all, defensively speaking, there was now a great void.

High-born knights and nobles turned for assistance to the common swordsman who, lacking funds for expensive helmets, breastplates, and so on, had long depended on personal skill with weapons for survival. While much of the curriculum taught employed liberal amounts of kicking, tripping, and wrestling, it was a starting point in the development of fencing.

Unofficial schools for teaching the "proper" use of the sword had been around since the Middle Ages. These early congregating places for swordsmen, however, had little to do with academics. In fact, they were little better than robbers' dens. Such operations were outlawed in England during the 13th and 14th centuries because they tended to attract the worst elements of the community, and masters of fencing were considered no better than, it was said, thieves and actors. An edict enacted in London, England, in 1286, stated, for instance: "Whereas it is customary for profligates to learn the art of fencing, who are thereby emboldened to commit the most unheard of villainies, no school shall be kept in the city for the future."

Historian Arthur Wise noted in his book *The Art and History of Personal Combat* (1971) that the reputation of fencing schools "...did not encourage lively, analytical, and dis-

Fighting With Sticks

criminating minds into the profession." For centuries, at best, they were places where even a simple practice session could lead to bruises, eye loss, broken bones, and, occasionally, even death.

The first attempt to establish a single, organized approach to fencing was adopted in Germany in the 14th century with the founding of the Fraternity of St. Mark, or Marxbruder. At their headquarters in Frankfurt, they set up a university where aspiring swordsmen in the country came to earn their degrees in arms. Before long, no one could teach fencing in Germany without their approval. The Marxbruder enforced this rule with their swords for nearly 100 years. Eventually, as the art of fencing spread through the land, other fencing groups were formed, and by sheer weight of numbers, remained in operation.



Two-handed swordplay of the fifteenth century.

Chapter Three
A Short History Of Sword Fighting
11

As time went on, with dueling more and more coloring the fabric of everyday life, all across Europe men began studying and analyzing swordplay with hopes of finding scientific principles based on human responses that could be counted on to work time and again.

In 1536, Italian fencing master Achille Marozzo, considered the greatest teacher of his time, wrote the first book to approach fencing with anything that could be vaguely linked to art or science. Known in his later years as the "Master general of the art of fencing," Marozzo thought that there was nothing more noble in life than the study of swordplay. His teachings, primitive by today's standards, continued to depend as heavily on violence and inspiration of the moment as on practiced skill; but they were far advanced beyond any other fighting methods of the period.

Fencing styles developed quickly. Camillo Agrippa, Salvator Fabris, and Rodolpho Capo Ferro, all great masters of the 17th century, brought forth concepts that helped to fashion the direction of fencing. With every new reliable idea that was advanced, an old bit of useless nonsense fell by the wayside.

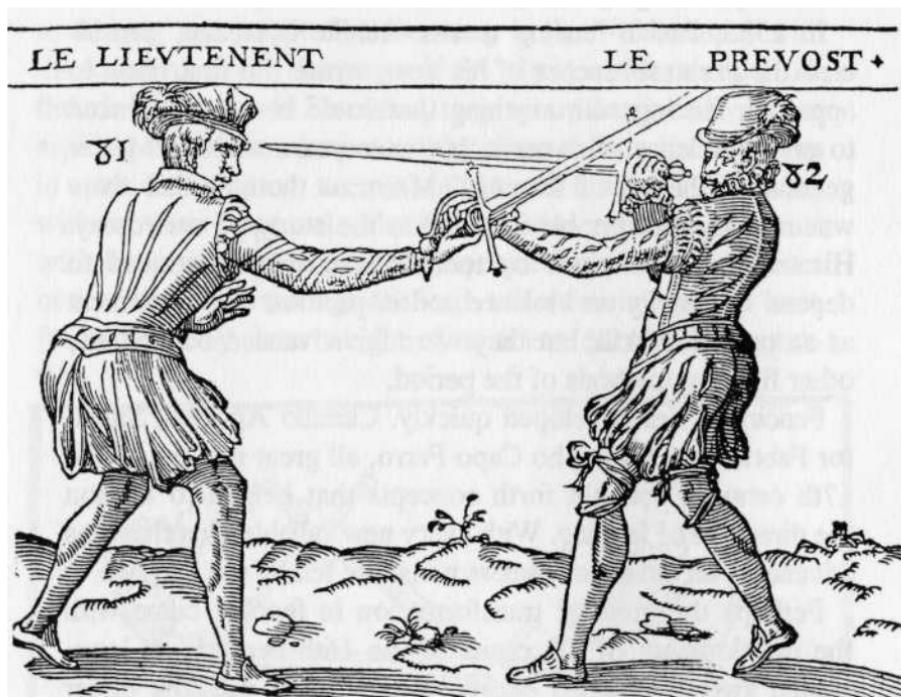
Perhaps the greatest transformation in fencing came with the development of the rapier in the 16th century. A long-bladed sword designed exclusively for point use, the rapier changed the nature of the sword fight from a cutting game to one of thrusting. Controversy raged for years over which method of combat was superior. So heated was the disagreement among the two schools of combat that proponents of both styles often fell to dueling when they encountered each other.

Masters of the old school, men who carried the sword and buckler — the buckler being a small shield worn on the free arm— looked on rapier play with contempt. The English, the last holdouts of the cutting sword in Europe, were particu-

Fighting With Sticks

12

larly brusque in their appraisal of the new weapon. Their attitude was best summed up in the writings of the fencing master George Silver. His *Paradoxes of Defence*, published in 1599, was a violent attack on swordplay's new wave.



A sixteenth century sword fight.

Silver fiercely dismissed rapier play as "Schoole-trickes and jugling gambalds." He then wrote, 'To seek a true defence in an untrue weapon [the rapier] is to angle on earth for fish, and to hunt in the sea for hares... And if we will have true defence we must seeke it where it is, in short swords... or such like weapons of perfect length, not in long swords, long rapiers, nor frog pricking poniards."

Chapter Three
A Short History Of Sword Fighting
13

Certainly, Silver's prejudices regarding the sword combat methods of his day can easily be understood. His ideas on fighting reflected an established form that had been worked out and perfected over decades of practice. Rapier play at this time, on the other hand, was still in its infancy, imperfect, full of odd notions and much charlatanism, and without a set of standards by which to judge technique.

Yet, the seed of dynamic change was in the rapier. And this is what Silver and his colleagues failed to realize. The cutting sword versus the rapier was as the horse to the horseless carriage. The potential for efficiency had only to be molded and channeled; and when this happened, the new form would easily outstrip the old. It would take time to accomplish this, to weed out the nonsense surrounding the rapier. But once started, there was no stopping progress.

Why was the point weapon superior to the cutting sword? The reason was simple: guided by an economy of movement, and possessing a point likely to be devastating when it hit, the rapier proved to be the most efficient tool for dispatching an opponent. To give an example: in France, between 1600 and 1780, 40,000 noblemen were killed in sword fights — due to the death-dealing potential of the point weapon.

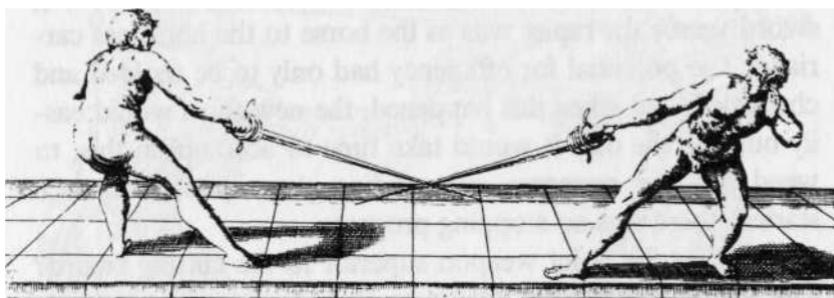
Despite the staunch opposition provided by old-time sword masters, by the end of the first quarter of the 17th century the rapier was king.

In an effort to make swords even more versatile and lethal, during the 18th century the rapier was streamlined into a weapon known as the small sword. The small sword, with its shorter, slimmer, lighter blade and smaller hand guard, became the ultimate blade weapon for personal combat.

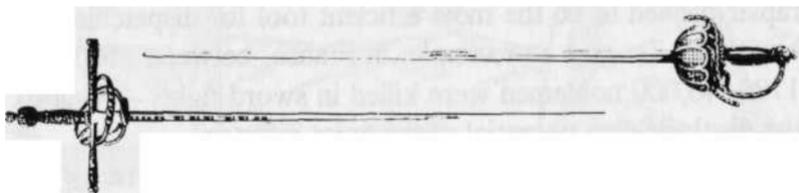
Here, fencing took on a new look. Compared to later swords, ponderous rapiers generated slow movement. Reaching out too far to hit an opponent, or trying any action

Fighting With Sticks

that was too elaborate, meant putting oneself in a position that could not easily be defended and was, therefore, wide open to counterattacks. Rapiermen usually fought in a circular fashion, something like modern boxers, which allowed them to keep their target area covered even while on the offensive. The small sword freed up the sword fight, not only increasing the speed and intricacy of weapon maneuvering, but also increasing the fencer's mobility.



Seventeenth century sword fighting taking on a scientific look.



Two varieties of rapier, the dueling sword of the seventeenth century.

Something else took place during the 1700s: fencing gained respectability. With the invention of the small sword specifically designed for training — the mechanics of swordplay could be practiced and examined to a much greater degree. The fencing master became a learned man of breeding — a combination teacher, historian, artist, scientist, and philoso-

Chapter Three
A Short History Of Sword Fighting
15

**

pher — and the fencing school became a place where young noblemen were sent to gain refinement.

The leader in this revolutionary movement was a dashing 42-year-old Italian named Domenico Angelo. Famous as a talented amateur fencer throughout Europe, Angelo eventually settled in London, England, where his numerous high-ranking friends urged him to establish his own school. With the lure of fame and fortune constantly in front of him, it didn't take long for him to make up his mind. Angelo's new salle d'armes quickly became the most popular in England. Furthermore, as a "school of refinement," it was frequented by the rich and talented of society who wished to bask in the atmosphere of culture the Italian had created.

Angelo's book *The School of Fencing* (1763), laying out his scientific style of swordplay in great detail, was the first fencing volume to insist on the value of fencing being practiced for the improvement of health, poise, and grace. Angelo lived to the age of 85, and taught right up to his death. In the meantime, he established a line of fencing masters that was to dominate European teaching for 150 years.

The more academic fencing became, the more its emphasis shifted to its aesthetic elements. This, coupled with the increased reliability of guns, brought an end to the carrying of swords. By the beginning of the 1800s, the sword was no longer part of a man's everyday dress and was pretty much a thing of the past for most private martial encounters. The era of the sword as a personal weapon was over.

At this same time, the sport of fencing was born full-blown. Sword fighting revolved almost entirely around the aspects of personal development, entertainment, and competition. A man's ability on the fencing strip, rather than on the dueling field, became of prime importance. The refinements of fighting techniques, with a few exceptions, were aimed at pro-

Fighting With Sticks

16

moting the manly graces. It is from this period that much of what we recognize as modern fencing springs.

Eventually, three fencing weapons took form — the foil, the epee, and the sabre — each with its own distinctive technique and strategic approach. But this is not a fencing manual, so we will end our discussion of "official" fencing right here.

Rather, it is time now to concern ourselves with the wooden sword, its development through history, and its ultimate avenues of expression.

Chapter Four

Fighting Sticks

After the stone, the stick became the first personal weapon. Where the rock would have been tossed, the stick had to be wielded. Its use was intimate and immediate, its impact felt by the user. According to historian George Cameron Stone in his book, *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor* (1961), 'The club is doubtlessly the... most widely distributed, most generally used, and longest lived weapon.' He adds that it is the starting place for all cutting and thrusting weapons in existence, and that while originally nothing more than a rough stick, it has since been elaborated into works of art. The stick, then, might be called the "Adam" of personal weapons.

Since the stick weapon can be found in virtually all prehistoric societies, the idea of picking up a piece of wood, and bashing in an enemy's skull with it, apparently was a pretty easy thought to come by. Australian aborigines, Native Americans, Egyptians, Ethiopians, India Indians, Africans, Samoans and Hawaiians, Arabs, Chinese, Japanese, and Europeans each had their own versions of the stick weapon.

Fighting With Sticks

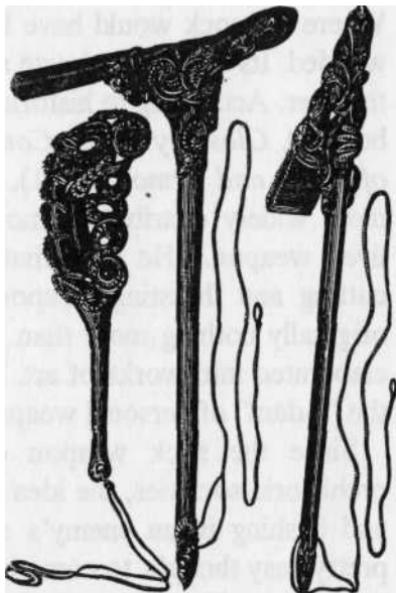
18

The Incas, even after they mastered working with gold and silver, still fought with spears minus metal tips. Even today in primitive cultures, the stick remains a valued combat/hunting tool.

Clubs



Aboriginal club.



Carved New Zealander clubs.

Chapter Four
Fighting Sticks

19

Clubs come in countless shapes and lengths: straight sticks; tapered bats; sticks with balled ends, hook ends, and sharp ends; sticks shaped like leaves, paddles, golf clubs, hockey sticks, and picks; curved sticks; S-shaped sticks; wavy sticks; some plain and some intricately carved.

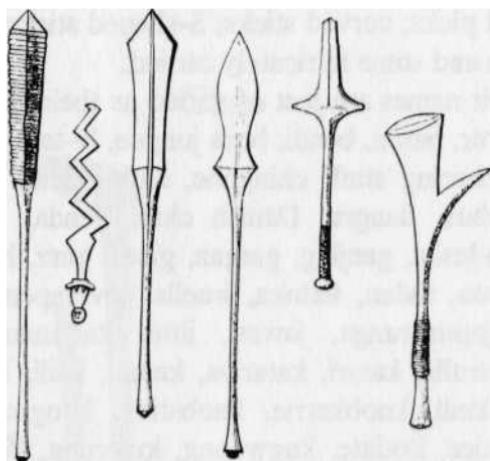
And their names are just as varied as their forms: an-gora, barkal, barur, baton, bendi, birra jungee, bi-teran, boomerang, burrong, chacing staff, chingone, club shield, croc, cudgel, dadda, dabus, dangra, Danish club, denda, furibo, gada, ganeeugaodusha, ganjing, gargaz, gibet, gurz, hani, Hercules club, hoeroa, indan, induka, iruella, inverapens, iwatajingga, jadagna, japururunga, jawati, jitte, kadumango, kanabo, kandri, kasrulla, katari, katariya, kauah, keili, kerri, kirasso, kirikobu, knili, knobkerrie, knobstick, kongozue, kinnung, koombamalee, kotiate, kugweong, kujerung, kulluk, kunnin, langel, leonile, leowel, lilil, lisan lohangi, lohangi katti, mabobo, macana, makana, maquahuiti, massue, massuelle, mattina, mazule, merri, merai, miro, morro, mugdar, muragugna, naboot, nilli, nolla-nolla, nyaral, pacaho, pagaya, pahu, patu, periperiu, pernat, phalangae, plombee, pogamoggan, potu, powhenua, purtanji, quayre, quarterstaff, quirrang-an-wun, rabbit stick, rang-kwan, rungu, sapakana, schestopjor, seki-bo, shakugo, singa, siwalapa, suan-tou-fung, taiaha, tambara, tanda, tebutji, te-gi, te-ingkajana, tetsubo, tewha-tewha, throwing club, tiglun, tindil, tombat, trombash, truncheon, ulas, uramanta, u'u, waddy, wadna, wahailka, wairbi, wakerti, wa-ngal, wanna, warbi, warrawarra, watillikiri, weerba, weet-weet, wirka, wona, wongala, wonguim, yachi, yeamberren, yaribo, yu-lun, yural-barra, and zai.

The use of the club is fairly straightforward. It could be employed like a baseball bat; if sharpened at the end, a jabbing spear; or thrown. For ancient man, the spot usually

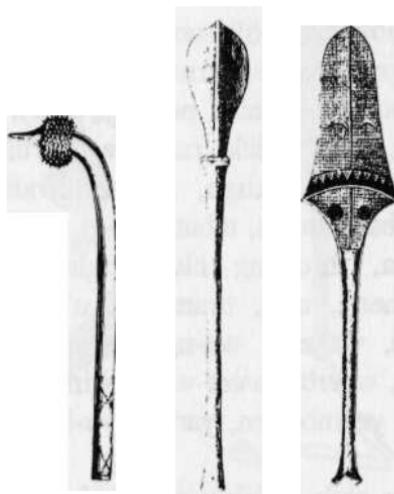
Fighting With Sticks

20

chosen for striking one's enemy was the head, right above the ear, where the skull is weakest.



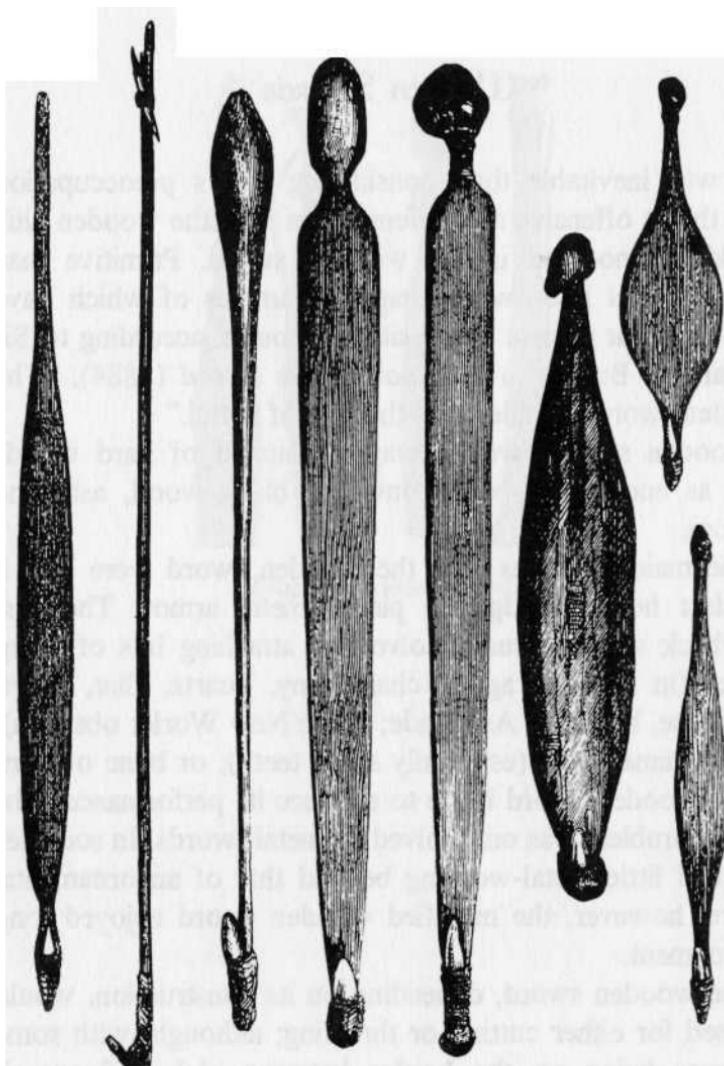
Wooden clubs come in a variety of shapes.



South Sea Islander clubs.

Chapter Four
Fighting Sticks

21



African throwing sticks.

The best-known throwing stick, the boomerang, is synonymous with the Australian aborigine, although, in fact, varieties of the weapon were used in early Egypt, Thebes, India, Abyssinia (Ethiopia), and Gaul.

Wooden Swords

It was inevitable that, considering man's preoccupation with things offensive and defensive, in time the wooden club would be modified into a wooden sword. Primitive man crafted sticks into sword shapes, examples of which have been found at ancient burial sites, although, according to Sir Richard F. Burton in his *Book of the Sword* (1884), 'The wooden sword extended into the Age of Metal.'

Wooden swords were always fashioned of hard woods such as eucalyptus, oak, ironwood, black wood, ash, and mimosa.

The main problems with the wooden sword were that it couldn't hold an edge or pierce metal armor. The first drawback was eventually solved by attaching bits of sharp stones (in Europe: agate, chalcedony, quartz, flint, chert, hornstone, basalt; in Asia: jade; in the New World: obsidian), shells, animal teeth (especially shark teeth), or bone or horn to the wooden sword blade to enhance its performance. The second problem was only solved by metal swords. In societies that had little metal-working beyond that of an ornamental nature, however, the modified wooden sword enjoyed long employment.

The wooden sword, depending on its construction, would be used for either cutting or thrusting; although, with some weapons being on the border between club and sword, bashing was not out of the question.

Wooden sword varieties include: the baggoro, bokken, callua, cudgel, iverapema, macana, pagaya, singlestick, tacape, and waster.

Chapter Four
Fighting Sticks

23



Brazilian wooden swords.

Chapter Five

Peaceful Sticks: The Shepherd's CROOK

We would be remiss if we didn't discuss, for a moment, the peaceful use of the stick, if only to show its versatility as a potent tool and universal symbol. And there is no more effective or long-lived version of this than the shepherd's crook.

In these times of sophisticated livestock management, it's strange to think that one of the best tools ever created for a shepherd was a long stick with a hook on the end of it.

The shepherd's crook.

The origin of this highly useful tool is, as one might expect, lost in the dim shadows of man's early attempts to domesticate animals he deemed useful. No historians were present when one thoughtful shepherd picked up a long stick, and began poking his sheep to get them moving in a particular direction. Or when he found that a short, angled branch on the end of the stick could be used to hook his animals when it became necessary to catch them. Or when he found that by actually bending the wood itself to make a hook, the strength of the overall instrument was increased. But one might assume, following the logical progres-

Fighting With Sticks

26

sion of thought, that the creative process went something along those lines.

It's safe to say, however, that the shepherd's crook has been around for a long, long, long time. We find evidence of it in Egyptian art drawn well over 4,000 years ago.



The stylized shepherd's crook of the early church.

It's interesting to note, too, that in the case of Egypt, the shepherd's crook became a symbol of sovereignty. Which, if you think about it, points out just how effective a tool it must have been. For something to become a metaphor for supreme control, especially for the practical-minded Egyptians, it had to first effectively demonstrate that trait in real life.

Moreover, this symbolic aspect of the shepherd's crook as a representation of power became so ingrained in the mind of man that, centuries later, the early Church continued its usage to denote leaders of importance.

Underscoring the universal recognition the shepherd's crook inspired, medieval wool merchants often displayed its likeness prominently on their business signs to represent the nature of their trade.

Of course, as a practical part of everyday farm life, the crook continued, as it always had, as the shepherd's long arm. Trained herding dogs were added to the picture to direct a flock this way and that, but a man still needed that hook to grab individual animals. In illustrations of rural life from the Middle Ages, the shepherd was nearly always defined by his curved staff. Doubtlessly, in those wild days, one can imagine that the crook also doubled for a defensive weapon against both predatory beasts and potential human robbers.

In all these years, the shepherd's crook remained pretty much the same. But, by the 1700s, we find preserved examples of equipment bearing a distinctly modern touch. Crooks with small iron hooks were made to specifically hold a sheep's leg. Larger crooks, crafted from horn, could be used to grab a sheep by the neck. Many of these items, as antiques, have been sold at prices that were vastly greater than the value of the flocks they originally helped to manage.

The shepherd's crook has proven its usefulness almost as long as man has been civilized. Yet, in recent years, it has fallen out of favor as a shepherd's favored tool. One might wonder why this would be so. But the answer is pretty obvious: it takes a certain skill to use it, a skill that doesn't necessarily develop overnight. One needs balance, timing, and a good eye to nab a full-grown ewe or ram as it crashes past at a dead run. Furthermore, the ability to angle the hook on the animal's neck so that it doesn't slip away is a technique only practice grants. The use of the shepherd's crook ends up being in effect, a kind of martial art. Stack that up against a nice, solid portable fence. You achieve instant success with a fence. The animal is contained. It

Fighting With Sticks

goes where you want it to. No muss, no fuss. And there's no need to develop a special skill.

People often go for the simple fix, the easy out; but, in the end, without personal skills, without challenges, where are we as human beings? What are our brains for? What should we be doing with our arms and legs? The shepherd's crook, it seems, might be a symbol for much more than it used to be. (Of course, this could also be said of learning anything else. Experience is what life is about.)



The shepherd and his crook.

The shepherd's crook—simple in design, efficient in its basic application, and inexpensive to use — will serve to remind us that the simple ways of farming are sometimes the best; that once upon a time, a shepherd stood on a hillside with a stick in his hand, and that was all he needed to successfully guide and protect his flock.

Chapter Six

Some Wooden Swords In History

The wooden sword has a wide distribution around the world. The following is only a small sampling of its varied incarnations:

In ancient Egypt, soldiers practiced swordplay with a wooden sword. The blade was flat and narrow; the hand guard was a woven basket. When wielding this sword, the left forearm was covered by splints of wood which were strapped on, doubtlessly serving as a shield. Such a sword was never a true implement of combat, but was used only as a training tool and for sport.

The Egyptians also possessed a stick-sword known as a lis-an, meaning "tongue-weapon." Some were no more than 23 inches in length; the longest, 29 inches. Some were straight, others were curved. All were fashioned of hard wood, and had a distinct cutting edge.

Fighting With Sticks

30



Stick fighting in ancient Egypt.

Rome

Roman gladiators used a wooden sword or rod called a rudis to train for their bouts in the arena.

Mexico

When first encountered by Europeans in the 15th century A.D., the Indians of Mexico fought with swords made of ironwood and inlaid with chips of black obsidian. Some of these were nearly four feet in length.

Britain

Numerous wooden swords have been recovered from ancient British burial sites. Some were apparently only of a

Chapter Six
Some Wooden Swords In History
31

ceremonial nature, the blades of which were inscribed with magic runes. Others, though, were definitely of a fighting nature. The latter were of both cutting and thrusting varieties. Thrusting swords often possessed fire-hardened tips.

During the 16th century, the waster, a wooden sword with a rounded blade, was used for practice purposes. It consisted of a wooden blade set into a regular metal sword guard. In the 17th century, the waster was replaced by the cudgel, a heavy wooden stick which employed a hilt in the form of a wicker basket. This was, in turn, refined into the somewhat lighter singlestick, which also sported a basket hilt.

Australia



The baggoro.

Fighting With Sticks

32

During the 19th century, the baggoro, a flat, sharp-edged sword/club, was used by the natives of Queensland, Australia. The blade was about five inches wide up to the slightly rounded point, and reached from foot to shoulder. The grip was a very small handle, and was intended for only one hand. It was said that the baggoro was so heavy as to be unusable except in a practiced hand.

Polynesia

The Polynesians produced wooden swords, and fitted them with either shark's teeth or shells to enhance their cutting capabilities. These items were fixed in such a way as to produce damaging wounds when either drawing or withdrawing the sword's blade.



Polynesian shark tooth swords.

Chapter Six
Some Wooden Swords In History
33

Africa

The wooden sword — in various shapes, sizes, and weights — was employed all over the African continent. The paddle sword, which doubled, as its name suggests, as a boat oar, was perhaps the most popular form among African warriors.

South America

South American Indians, like the natives of Africa, were especially fond of paddle swords, although wooden swords of a more traditional "sword" shape were also used. Swords were fashioned from everything from palm wood to chonta-wood.



Amazon paddle swords.

Fighting With Sticks

34

Japan

The Japanese produced the bokken, a wooden sword designated for practice, although because of its hardness, it could easily be pressed into actual combat situations. Made in the shape of the traditional samurai sword, the katana, the bokken was fashioned from either red oak, white oak, or loquat.

Europe

During the 16th and 17th centuries, practice with cutlass, dusack, and falchion, three heavy cutting swords, was carried on with broad, curved pieces of wood called laths. The grip was merely a hole in one end of the implement. A glove was needed when using such a weapon, as there was absolutely no protection for the sword hand.

Chapter Seven

Fighting with Sticks

Stick fighting has produced a number of complex combat styles, each depending on the design of the fighting stick, the philosophy of the area, and the result desired from the combat. For killing or play, the fighting stick has proven itself almost as versatile as its metal relative.

The following is a sampling of fighting techniques built around stick fighting:

Kenjutsu/Kendo

Over the centuries, the Japanese have developed an elaborate sword-fighting system called kendo, which means "the way of the sword." This grew out of kenjutsu — the art of swordsmanship — which was less concerned with art than killing techniques. Within the realm of kenjutsu, there were countless fighting techniques being offered, each based on the ideas of a particular swordsman/teacher.

In the earliest days in the development of kenjutsu, live swords were used in practice. Unfortunately, this sometimes

Fighting With Sticks

led to injury or death, even in the relatively safe confines of one's school (dojo). At the very least, students complained that they had to hold back for safety's sake, so they could never really stretch their skills to the limit.



Famed Japanese swordsman Miyamoto Musashi practicing his fighting technique with sticks.

Chapter Seven
Fighting With Sticks

37

To stem the problems inherent in working out with sharp swords, the bokken, or wooden sword, was created around 400 A.D. Patterned after the samurai sword, this simple alternative proved to be a great advance when teaching fighting skills; but the bokken was still a stout piece of wood, and could do considerable damage if it made contact with enough force (imagine being smacked with a baseball bat). To underscore this fact, the wooden sword often proved itself superior in duels against its metal counterparts.

One of the most memorable such encounters occurred in the 17th century between the great Japanese swordsman Miyamoto Musashi and his arch rival Kojiro Sasaki. While being rowed to the duel's location on an island off the coast of Japan, Musashi carved a sword from a wooden oar. He liked the feel of the wood, and it was his thought that a true swordsman should be able to fight with any object. In the end, Musashi proved victorious, smashing in his adversary's skull with a single well-placed blow.

During the 18th century, the bokken was replaced in practice sessions by the relatively safe shinai, or bamboo sword. Made up of individual strips of flexible bamboo, the shinai, used in conjunction with various pieces of specially constructed armor, allowed the student of swordplay to put his best effort into mock combat without fear of accidentally wounding his opponent. It is from this period that kendo, which stressed the technique and individual spirit of each individual swordsman, rather than his ability to kill, came into being. Thus began the development of a highly ritualized and structured sword-fighting skill, which flourishes to this day.

Fighting With Sticks

38

Escríma/Kali/Arnis

Escríma, arnis, and kali are the fighting arts of the Philippines. Kali is the oldest of the three forms, and is thought by some to be the most complicated. Moreover, according to experts, kali emphasizes bladed weapons, while escríma and arnis focus more on sticks (although there is some controversy in the ranks on this matter). Escríma and arnis have been characterized as "streamlined" versions of kali.

In the beginning the systemized fighting arts of the Philippines were based in great part on the sword and dagger skills of invading Spanish soldiers during the 16th century. Natives took what they observed, and either copied or developed a new system of fighting based on what they observed. There are numerous systems of fighting today, but they are all based on geometry, that is, on principles based on a pattern of angles that all attacks must adhere to.

Stick fighting includes singlestick, long and short stick, and double short sticks. Skills also include fighting with the staff, the spear, and the empty hand, to name a few alternative forms. Escríma, the term deriving from the Spanish word for sword fighting, may be the most popular of the three fighting arts. The practitioner of escríma is called an "escrimador."

Kempo Karate

Kempo karate employs twin-stick techniques that have been long associated with escríma.

Chapter Seven
Fighting With Sticks
39

Black Sword Aikido

Seventeenth century samurai Muso Gonnosuke, originally master of the long staff, was beaten in a celebrated duel with revered Japanese Swordsman Miyamoto Musashi. Retiring to the mountains to contemplate his fighting skills, Muso eventually created a new form of combat based on the use of a shortened staff. He believed the less lengthy weapon would allow him to get closer to his opponent, and thus allow him to land more blows. Within his new method, he combined movements of the spear, the sword, and the naginata (sword-bladed spear). In a rematch with Musashi, Muso handed Musashi his only defeat on record.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan

Viewed primarily as a relaxing Chinese art designed to produce a healthier, more balanced spirit, t'ai chi ch'uan is also a dynamic art of self-defense. This oriental skill, while most often practiced in its empty-handed form, also integrates a long staff into its technique.

Ninjutsu

Training of the Japanese ninja, the "Shadow Warriors," included staff and stick fighting. This brought into play the bo, or long staff (six feet long), the hanbo, or cane (three feet long), as well as sticks and wooden clubs of various lengths. Ninja walking sticks often concealed sword blades.

Fighting With Sticks

40

Jodo

Jodo means "way of the stick." The official jo is a staff or stick 128 centimeters long, and 2.5 centimeters thick. The best jo is made of white oak grown slowly in the cold Japanese highlands. A high water content makes it very heavy.

There are two jodo styles, the original being called Shindo Muso Ryu Jodo. The second, or Seitei Jodo, has been found to be useful in kendo training. There is no "free fighting," or sparring, in jodo, as the staffs are too heavy for striking an opponent, so its work is done primarily in kata (exercises).

A popular weapon in Europe's Middle Ages, the quarter-staff had both length and weight in its favor in a fight. It was made famous in the legendary fight between the outlaw Robin Hood and the giant Little John over which man would cross a tree-trunk bridge first. Robin Hood, of course, was bested by his opponent, and was so taken by the feat that he made Little John his second in command.

That the staff was such a successful weapon is born out by the official 15th to 16th century coroner records of Nottinghamshire, England. It was found that in 103 cases of murder between 1485 and 1558, the staff was implicated as the killing weapon in more than half of them. One account states: "John Strynger... assaulted Henry Pereson... with a staff... which he held in both hands, striking him on the top of the head so that his brains flowed out and giving him a wound 1 inch deep, 2 inches wide, and 3 inches long of which he immediately died." The sword, it was also pointed out, only accounted for ten deaths.

Chapter Seven
Fighting With Sticks
41

The use of this very effective weapon was taught in most fencing schools of that time period. Stated quite matter-of-factly by English fencing master George Silver in his book *Paradoxes of Defence* (1599): "The short staffe hath advantage against two swords and daggers, or two rapiers, poniards, and gantlets." The reason was simple: the staff almost always created a distance factor most favorable to its user.



The quarterstaff being taught at a sixteenth century German fencing school.

Club and Baton

In medieval times, the club and baton were used, notes J. Christoph Amberger, in his book *The Secret History of the*

Fighting With Sticks

Sword (1996), "not only in the tournament, but also in judicial combat." In England, the club continued as a tool for settling property disputes almost until the end of the 1500s.

In his book, *The Sword and the Centuries* (1901), Alfred Hutton, writer and fencing master, describes a public club fight between two men during the Middle Ages: 'The fight begins, and they charge each other vigorously. Mahuot, seeing that he is something overmatched by the size and weight of his enemy, attempts a ruse. He picks up a handful of sand, with which the lists are plentifully strewn, and dashes it into Plouvier's face, following the action with a blow of his club on the forehead, which causes the blood to flow freely. This, however, only serves to enrage Plouvier, who is a sturdy, powerful fellow, and he attacks Mahout so furiously as to make him fall headlong, whereon he springs upon him, tears his eyes out of their sockets, finishes him with a tremendous blow on the head, and finally, taking him by the arms, flings him over the railing into those of the executioner, who promptly hangs him on the gibbet which has been erected for the accommodation of the vanquished man."

The baton — basically, a small formal club (sometimes fitted with a handguard), often a badge of authority — was used, states historian Amberger, in conjunction with the free hand to protect the head, neck, and face, all favorite striking areas, although the torso could also fall under attack. The striking moves employed with the baton, he says, were well-defined, resembling many modern fighting techniques.

Amberger finally observes that an analysis of many medieval combat systems, such as baton fighting, indicate that they, rather than being crude displays of brute force as was once believed, may instead have been highly developed methods of combat.

Chapter Seven
Fighting With Sticks
43

Shillelagh

The stick/club of the Irish. The first object of fighting with this weapon was to knock off an adversary's hat so that one could attack the head with greater facility.

Cane/Walking Stick

Fighting with the walking stick became a popular form of fencing toward the end of the 19th century, especially in Germany and France. In time, cane and single stick play became virtually the same thing. Some old military manuals actually treated the cane as a training tool for sabre. Both cuts and thrusts were allowed to all parts of the body, and it is said that the blows exchanged could be quite punishing. Therefore, masks, heavily padded vests and gloves, even shin guards were a required part of all cane fencers' gear.

In Germany, cane fighting was known as "stockfechtn" (although the term was a fairly broad one, and could be applied to any form of stick fighting). In France, cane fencing was called simply "canne."

Cane fencing was introduced in England, according to Alfred Hutton in his book *The Sword and the Centuries* (1901), by Pierre Vigney, a professor from Switzerland. Says Hutton: "The instrument he employs is nothing more than the ordinary walking-stick of daily life... The exercise, when played merely as a game, is a remarkably attractive one, so brilliant, indeed, that our time-honoured English singlestick is not to be compared with it. In the first place, the player is not hampered with a buffalo or wicker hand-guard, a fact which of itself lends variety to the play, for the man can, and does, frisk his cane about from one hand to the other, so that his opponent

Fighting With Sticks

44

can never precisely tell which hand will deliver the attack, and careful practice of the various lessons will shortly make the student pretty nearly ambidextrous. One of the first things to understand in such play as this is to preserve the hand which holds the weapon, a thing which an occasional tap on the knuckles impresses on one's memory. M. Vigney does not confine himself to teaching a mere exhilarating game of play; he shows his pupils also the more serious side of the system, instructing them carefully in what they should do if attacked by a gang of ruffians..."

Cane fencing, interestingly, is still practiced in France to-day. There are even some practitioners in the U.S.

Singlestick

Singlestick will be covered in the following section.

Chapter Eight

The Singlestick And Its Ancestors

In Western cultures, the wooden sword, it seems, has often, though not always, been the prerogative of the lower classes. Doubtlessly, as has been suggested by historian J. Christoph Amberger, it was because of the rather prohibitive costs of metal-bladed swords. Moreover, wooden swords lent themselves favorably to the safe practice of certain fighting styles that required cutting techniques. That is, when you hit an opponent with a live sabre, you could do them some real damage. At the very least the damage might consist of some cosmetic rearranging of someone's features. But a wooden sword used in the same manner would most likely only bruise or raise a bump or welt. About the worst injury you could inflict would be to coax a bit of blood from your adversary's head (which was sometimes actually the "pleasant" goal of some wooden sword systems). Nevertheless, these European forms of stick sword fighting rarely focused on killing, as was the case with most Oriental arts.

In general terms, we will be talking about the Western wooden sword as a "singlestick." That this is not 100% cor-

Fighting With Sticks

46

rect in terminology is only a matter of degree. Historically, the term has become a catchall for such weapons. Generically speaking, then, it will do.

If we want to get more precise, however, and determine who was actually using what wooden sword at any given time, we end up running into a bit of a problem. Early writers on the subject often seem less concerned with exact categories. Any "singlestick" reference might be replaced with "cudgel" or "backsword."

This could be simply because the terms themselves were not always applied with an eye for official accuracy. In the world of fencing and swords, the ugly head of ambiguity has come bobbing up more than once from the ashes of time to confuse the unwary — myself included.

Another factor: some weapons have a funny habit of not being relegated alone to a certain time period, but bleed over into other eras and are called by some popular name of that period. This, of course, blurs actual differences significantly. Hence, a "cudgel" of one era might easily be tagged a "singlestick" a few decades later. Also, sometimes names employed to describe a weapon or fighting style might vary according to the popular notions of a particular locality. The rules and techniques of play might vary as well. The singlestick fighting of one area might be known only a few miles away as backswording. Or backswording as cudgeling. Or cudgeling as singlestick play. Or...! The style of the game might be highly muscular or light, static in movement or highly mobile, confined to a limited target area or opened up to include the whole body.

Yet, there are some general points we can adhere to in our quest to get a grip on stick weapon types.

These we'll now discuss:

The Singlestick as A Staff

To start with, the earliest use of the term "singlestick" had nothing at all to do with wooden swords, but rather with staffs. The original singlestick was a staff reduced in size to five feet from the seven foot length of the traditional quarter-staff. It could be used with either one hand or two.

Waster

The waster was a wooden sword used from the 16th to early 17th centuries when practicing the backsword, a heavy single-edged broadsword. Originally, the weapon consisted only of an ash stick a yard long and an inch wide that tapered toward the tip. Later, the stick was often set into a standard sword hilt. The blade might be rounded or fashioned with one flat side which became the striking edge. Much used by the lower classes, the waster was often employed in conjunction with the buckler (a small shield carried in the free hand).

On occasion, the waster was also called a "backsword," since it represented that weapon, and its play was characterized as backswording.

Backsword and Backswording

While initially referring to fighting with the waster, the term "backswording" eventually also covered the use of the cudgel and the singlestick.

Said 19th century fencing historian Egerton Castle of backswording: "... it was an art that required not so much science and agility as coolness and muscular vigor... It was generally held with all fingers close around the grip..." He

Fighting With Sticks

48

went on to note that although to strike below the belt was considered poor form in the 16th century, by the 18th century the game embraced the entire body as the target area. Parries (defensive blocking) were always done with the sword hand in pronation (palm down). Also, to hit with the point was positively forbidden.

The object of backswording, as was the case in all English forms of stick fighting, was to crack one's opponent on the head until blood was drawn. Said Captain John Godfrey, a well-known fencing master of the 18th century, "I have purchased my knowledge of the Back Sword with many a broken Head and Bruise in every part of me." He adds that he "...followed chiefly the practice of the backsword, because Conceit cannot readily be cured with the file [foil]... as with the Stick... though a Man may dispute the full Hit of a File, yet if he is knocked down with a Stick, he will hardly get up again and say, it just brushed him."

Cudgel

The cudgel was primarily a 17th century wooden stick made of ash, like the waster, but its hilt was a heavy wicker or leather basket. Sometimes the term "cudgel" and "singlestick" are used interchangeably. Cudgeling might also be known as backswording, which referred more to a style of fighting than the weapons being used.

Cudgel play, according to Alfred Hutton in his book *The Sword and the Centuries* (1901), descended from the sword and dagger fight of Elizabethan times. When such duels were copied, a wooden sword a yard in length and a shorter one, some 14 inches long, replaced the live weapons. The hilts, called "pots," were usually wicker baskets.

Chapter Eight
The Singlestick And Its Ancestors
49

By contrast, "backswording," states Hutton, was simply the use of the longer sword by itself.

One of the great masters of the cudgel and backsword was James Figg, known as the "Atlas of the Sword." Remarked the aforementioned Captain Godfrey of Figg, "I chose to go to Figg, and exercise with him; partly as I knew him to be the ablest Master, and partly, as he was of a rugged Temper, and would spare no Man, high or low, who took up a Stick against him."



*A business flyer for the redoubtable Figg.
Notice the wooden swords at the top of the illustration.*

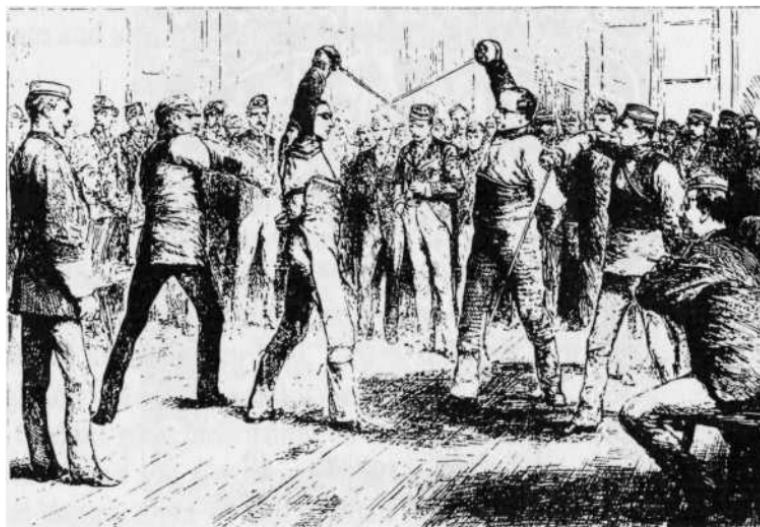
Fighting With Sticks

50

The Singlestick as A Sword

The singlestick of the 18th century was much like the cudgel, baskethilt and all. It seems that perhaps the cudgel was a bit shorter and thicker. The 19th century singlestick possessed a triangular guard of hardened leather.

J. Christoph Amberger describes the development of the singlestick first as a military tool serving purely hostile ends, then as a civilian weapon, finally developing into a sport. He adds, "As the military practice is continued in civilian life, it develops into a closed system." Moreover, from the 1830s on, he says, the term "singlestick" is applied to all kinds of systems of fighting with wooden weapons. It is from this time, no doubt, that much of the ambiguity surrounding backswords, cudgels, and singlesticks arises.



*The schlager fight possesses many characteristics
of classical singlestick combat.*

In time, the game was fairly fixed. The distance between opponents was greatly reduced to a few feet, the target had shifted entirely to the head, and the left hand was bound with a bandanna or strap, keeping it from being used to ward off blows or grab an opponent's sword. In some ways it resembled the schlager encounters — the mensur — engaged in by German university students in the 19th century and beyond.

A most colorful description of a classical singlestick fight comes down to us from the novel *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) by Thomas Hughes: 'The weapon is a good stout ash-stick, with a large basket handle,' he begins. 'The players are called 'old gamesters' — why, I can't tell you — and their object is simply to break one another's heads; for the moment that blood runs an inch anywhere above the eye-brow, the old gamester to whom it belongs is beaten, and has to stop. A very slight blow with the sticks will fetch blood, so it is by no means a punishing pastime, if the men don't play on purpose, and savagely, at the body and arms of their adversaries. The old gamester going into action only takes off his hat and coat, and arms himself with a stick; he then loops the fingers of his left hand in a handkerchief or strap, which he fastens round his left leg, measuring the length, so that when he draws it tight with his left elbow in the air, that elbow shall just reach as high as his crown. Thus, you see, so long as he chooses to keep his left elbow up, regardless of the cuts, he has a perfect guard for the left side of his head. Then he advances his right hand above and in front of his head, holding his stick across so that its point projects an inch or two over his left elbow, and thus his whole head is completely guarded, and he faces his man armed in like manner, and they stand some three feet apart, often nearer, and feint, and strike, and return at one another's heads, until one cries, 'hold,' or blood flows; in the first case, they are allowed a

Fighting With Sticks

minute's time, and go on again; in the latter, another pair of gamesters are called on. If good men are playing, the quickness of the returns is marvelous; you hear the rattle like that a boy makes drawing his stick along palings, only heavier, and the closeness of the men in action to one another gives it a strange interest, and makes a spell at backswording a very noble sight."



The tough "old gamesters" of Henry Angelo's day.

In *The Sword and the Centuries*, Alfred Hutton describes a number of singlestick contests that took place at Henry Angelo's London school (Henry was the grandson of the celebrated master Domenico Angelo) during the mid-19th century. Quite often the encounters possessed a somewhat physically punishing quality. This, of course, was a reflection of the times, given the "manly" nature of healthy competition. While, by and large, men no longer played for blood (Master Angelo, for instance, made all his students wear sturdy helmets when fencing with the singlestick), "...good honest knocks on ribs and shoulder and on arms and on legs did they both give and receive, and that most good naturally." And this without any kind of padded, protective clothing.

Singlestick play was not meant to be cruel or sadistic. Yet, it was impossible to keep questionable players out of the game, the same way it's impossible to keep the undisciplined poker out of fencing today. So, the game was by no means without incident. While striking delicate areas of the body — as to hit "inside the leg" — was universally considered "foul" play, this fact was sometimes overlooked by the odd individual intent on doing real damage as a way of gaining a reputation as a serious competitor.

Before long, however, these transgressors were usually paid in kind and sent briskly on their way.

Hutton described such a visitor to the Angelo school in the early 1860s, who proved himself both brutal and unwilling to learn from his misdeeds, even after being given back some of his own medicine.

But, as the story goes, in a climactic encounter with one of Angelo's crack players, the offender at last received his due. From the outset, he laid into his opponent with such unrestrained violence that he quickly broke the latter's singlestick blade. Then, without regard to sportsmanship or tradition, he

Fighting With Sticks

continued his assault, landing five or six heavy hits. At that, in self-defense, the disabled competitor took the buffalo hide hilt of his damaged weapon, and slammed it full into his attacker's face mask, which sent the transgressor sprawling across the room. When he came to rest, Henry Angelo gave him a kick on the backside, and advised him calmly to go away, and never return to his school again.

The singlestick was also employed in British naval training. Some wooden swords of this type, explains J. Christoph Amberger, looked rather like table legs.

It should also be noted that in England, during the 17th and early 18th centuries, the singlestick, along with other weapons — such as the backsword, quarterstaff, sword and dagger, sword and buckler, and the falchion — were weapons of choice in great public contests for money. These prize-fights, which were nothing more than legally sanctioned brawls, were usually bloody affairs (to the joy of the spectators), with combatants continually hacking bits and pieces off one another with swords, or knocking each other out with various stick implements. Surprisingly, as gruesome and barbaric as these assaults were, fatalities were rarely experienced. Highly popular in their time, they were eventually overshadowed and replaced by the sport of boxing.

Interestingly, a singlestick competition was included in the fencing contests at the 1904 St. Louis Olympics, although it is not now known which singlestick system was used. This event was never repeated in subsequent games. The event was won, by the way, by an American, Albertson Van Zo Post. Two other Americans, William Scott O'Conner and William Grebe, came in second and third respectively. This was the only time an American has ever won a gold medal in an Olympic fencing competition.

Chapter Eight
The Singlestick And Its Ancestors
55

The singlestick continued to be practiced well into the 20th century, mostly in British public (private) schools. But, by the 1930s, it was pretty much abandoned.

Chapter Nine

Singlestick The Game

Now, at last, we come to the game of singlestick fighting! It can be approached for exercise, or simply for fun; or it can be a stepping stone to developing a personal self-defense strategy. Whatever your motive, it is an ideal way to develop self-discipline and physical control.

Purposeful Play

If self-defense is your goal, more than anything else, you need to know how to handle yourself under fire — how to move, how to think clearly, how to effectively respond psychologically. Singlestick can teach you such things.

It is important when defending yourself not to flinch, not to hesitate. You must strike with balanced force and with accuracy. You need to follow through. These things may be learned in singlestick play. In the first game we shall survey, for instance, you are forced to maintain a distance. No running away. You learn to attack and defend with facility. You must think under fire. You develop endurance, speed,

Fighting With Sticks

58

and flexibility. You learn to deliver your actions with intent. In the second game, you learn to employ distance offensively and defensively. Balance improves. You learn to move with grace. In both games, you become a fighter in spirit.

Any martial experience tends to affect one's life in ways not at first perceived. Self-confidence grows. Applying one's actions strategically improves over-all problem-solving ability. You also learn self-discipline, to handle your emotions so that they don't get the better of you. Fear and anger undermine any combat situation. I might add that my years of fencing improved my tennis game, and became a factor in my learning to ride horses.

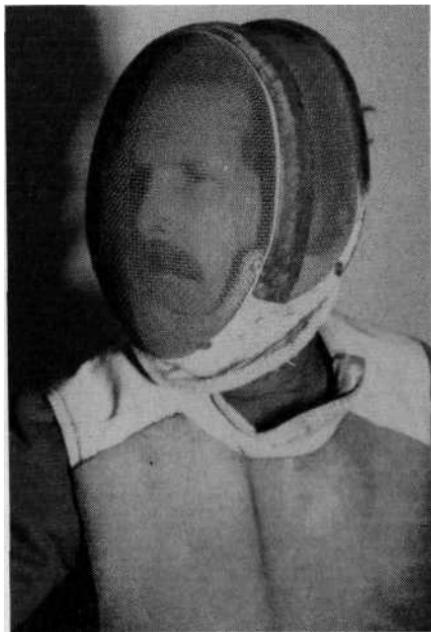
On the other hand, maybe you just enjoy the competition. A fast-moving combat-like encounter with another human. A plain, old skirmish! That's all right. Fun is OK, too.

Safety

We plan on deviating from the original game in one respect: no blood-letting or physical damage here. I'd recommend that each singlestick fencer purchase himself a fencing mask to protect his head and face. Concussions are costly in terms of medical bills and loss of brain cells; and you only have two eyes, neither of which can be replaced. Also, whether you wear a fencing jacket or a regular everyday jacket when you practice singlestick, it should have extra padding in the shoulders and chest. Maybe a towel or two. Don't attempt the "fighting in your street shirt" of the old gamesters. A winning score won't make up for a broken rib or a bunch of bruises. A well-placed blow could even conceivably break a collarbone. Too, you should wear a fairly

Chapter Nine
Singlestick: The Game
59

heavy-duty glove — just in case. You have a baskethilt on your weapon, but a little extra protection can't hurt.



Protection for the head: a fencing mask.

Wooden singlestick blades may also be sheathed in protective foam-rubber coverings, which will lessen the carnage experienced. More on that later.

You can probably improvise when it comes to protective gear, but for the more traditionally minded singlestick player, protective fencing clothing may be purchased from a fencing equipment supply house. Addresses for these are included in the back of the book.

As a fencer of some 30 years, I've found that adherence to common-sense safety concepts is the best way to avoid injury. Which is true of about almost everything.

Remember: it's not a game if someone gets hurt.

Fighting With Sticks

60



*Dressed for singlestick play: A) padded "fencing" jacket,
B) glove, C) knickers, D) sturdy woolen socks,
E) athletic shoes with good traction, F) singlestick.*

Styles of play

We will be setting down two basic game plans for singlestick combat. The first will follow the more classic description of singlestick play; the other is a looser game, somewhat akin to modern sabre. However, if you find somewhere down the line that you wish to add something to your system, or develop a whole new approach, do it. Improvise. Nothing here is set down in stone. Just keep in mind that anything and everything you do is guided by a need for safety.

It should be noted here that however you choose to frame your game of singlestick, the point should never be employed in the byplay. There is no give with wooden blades, as there is with metal ones. *They do not bend.* Hitting an opponent in the solar plexus or the throat with a sound thrust could do some real damage.

Don't forget this fact.

Getting Started

"But I don't have a singlestick," you're saying right about now. "I went down to my local sporting goods store, and asked the salesman for a couple, and he looked at me like I'd just escaped from the local nut emporium. What do I do now?"

OK, that's a fair question.

My reply is: trust me.

In an upcoming section, we'll teach you how to put together your own singlesticks. Cheaply; I think I spent maybe three dollars on the materials I didn't already have.

Fighting With Sticks

62

Once you have all the parts, you can make a singlestick in about 30 minutes, maybe less.

Approaching the Leaning Process

Take your time. Don't try to be expert all at once. That will only heighten your sense of frustration. It has been said that the secret to the mastery of any art or activity is repetition. Of course, I might add that what you're doing should be done correctly, or you'll only be developing bad habits. You can become a good singlestick fighter if your approach is honest, systematic, and deliberate.

Now, let's get on with the action.

Chapter Ten

Holding the Singlestick

There are two methods of holding the singlestick. The first is the "club" grip. The other is the "sabre" grip. Which one you use will be determined by how you want to frame your game.

Club Grip

As its name implies — "club" grip — you hold the grip like a club, with fingers and thumb wrapped firmly around the handle. If your game is to be one of flipping your singlestick from the wrist, this grip will be your best bet.

SABRE GRIP

The "sabre grip" is patterned after the hand hold used on a modern sport sabre. That is, thumb on top of the grip, first finger directly opposite, the last three fingers wrapping lightly but firmly around the grip. If you're going to employ

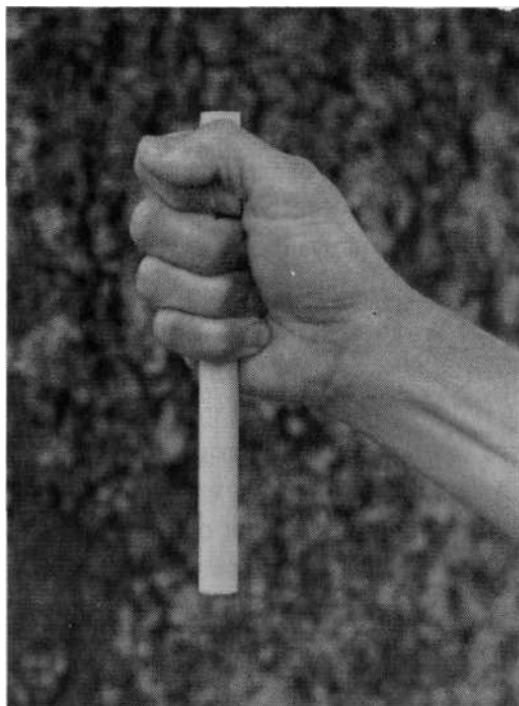
Fighting With Sticks

64

snapping cuts from the fingers, this should be the grip you use.

YOUR SINGLESTICK HANDLES

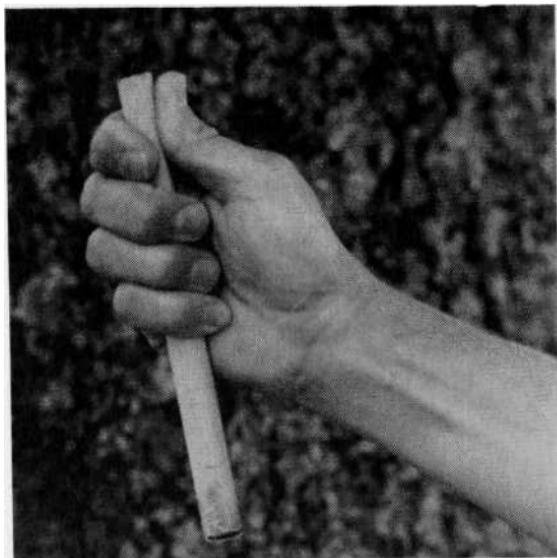
As you'll be making your own weapons, you'll be able to facilitate one or the other method of gripping by how you fashion your handles. We will discuss this in the chapter dealing with singlestick production.



The "club" grip.

Chapter Ten
Holding The Singlestick

65



The "sabre-style" grip.

Chapter Eleven

Singlestick: Game 1

The old game of singlestick, as practiced prior to the mid-19th century, was one of speed, strength, and dexterity. And, of course, courage. It took ample guts to stand up to the constant thrashing that the ash stick must have inflicted on a body. Not to mention the realization that the outcome, on either side of the encounter, would be a cracked and bloody head.

This, as it is traditional singlestick, is the game we will begin with. However, we'll be amending the old-time practices to include some modern safety innovations. No more battered heads and badly bruised ribs. Still, hopefully, the spirit of early singlestick will be preserved intact.

History

In his *Schools and Masters of Fence* (1885), fencing historian Egerton Castle recounts that Donald Walker's *Defensive Exercises*, published in London in 1840, was the only work he could locate that systematically recorded the rules of sin-

Fighting With Sticks

glestick play as it was carried out in the 18th century. Castle summarized Walker's information:

'The combatants, each armed with a basket-hilted stick, somewhat stouter and shorter than our modern singlestick, faced each other within very close measure [distance] — somewhat like the German students [schlager combatants] — holding their weapon in a high hanging guard, with the basket a little higher than the head, the point [of the blade] about on a level with the shoulders. The left arm was used to screen the left side of the head, elbow upwards as high as the crown [top of the head], and as much brought forward as a handkerchief or a belt passed under the left thigh, and grasped in the left hand, would allow. With such an attitude all consideration of distance had to be abandoned, and the player's sole attention was directed to that of time [economizing offensive and defense motions of weapon and body to only what is most necessary] and guard [being in the best physical position to either launch an attack or to defend as necessity dictates].

'The object of the play was to draw blood from an opponent's head, victory being achieved as soon as at least an inch of it appeared anywhere on his head or face. This was called [not so strangely] a 'broken head.' Thus the only decisive blows were those that reached the head, but they were also addressed to the arms, the shoulders — in fact, anywhere above the girdle [waist] where the result of a blow might be to effect a temporary opening to the head.

'The requisites [requirements] for this very particular play were chiefly strength and suppleness of wrist, from which all cuts were delivered with great swiftness, and so as to disturb the guard as little and for as short a time as possible; a quick perception of 'time' — most successful hits being delivered either on the adversary's feint [fake attack] or on his attempt

to bring down the protecting left arm by a cut on the left flank [ribs]; lastly, great caution and a certain amount of endurance, to enable the player to seize the right time for a flip [a quick, rotating flick or snap made from the wrist] at his opponent's head without exposing his own, heedless of many smart raps on the elbow or across the ribs."

Other singlestick techniques from this time period involved varying the target area, allowing advancing and retreating, and leaving open to choice what guard position might be used. Also, some styles of play allowed the free arm to hang loose so that it might be used to parry any which way, or even to grab an opponent's blade.

A number of graphic accounts of lively singlestick encounters can be found in Alfred Hutton's *The Sword and the Centuries* (1901).

A Modern Approach

If you enjoy pain and blood-letting, you may follow the game of singlestick as described by Castle. I hope you have plenty of health insurance, because you're going to keep the doctors busy patching up you and your opponents. But, as I have already said, I will suggest an alternative.

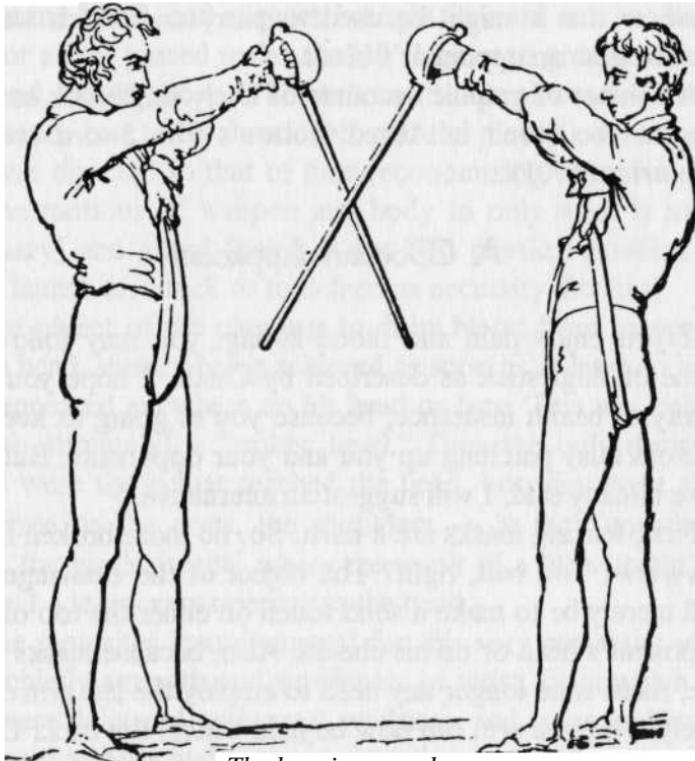
First, fencing masks are a must. So, no more broken heads. Awwww! Too bad, right? The object of the exchange now will merely be to make a solid touch on either the top of your opponent's head or on his cheeks. Also, because masks are in use, there is no longer any need to employ the left arm defensively. The free arm can now be held behind the back. On the other hand, in the interests of tradition, you may wish to incorporate the strap/handkerchief-guided elbow parry into your game. It's your choice.

Fighting With Sticks

70

On Guard

With the hanging guard, the sword arm is only slightly bent. The hand and blade positions have already been described. The body is erect; the legs straight. The feet, both of which pretty much point straight ahead, should be spaced no more than 18 inches apart. Weight should be equal on both feet. The free arm is bound (if desired) or placed behind the back.



The hanging guard.

Technique

Time and practice will smooth out your technique. The attacks should be directed from the wrist in either a flipping or pivoting motion, depending on where you are aiming your weapon. Parries are directed from the forearm. Actions that emanate from the shoulder will, by and large, be much too heavy and slow for successful maneuvering.

Play

The sequence of any exchange should be guided by common sense and not by blind, knee-jerk reactions. Here, we may look at a logical encounter conducted between two opposing players (Mr. A and Mr. B):

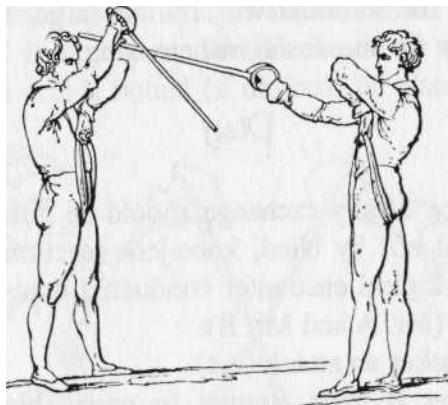
1. Player A makes an attack (cut).
2. Here, player B must attempt to parry (block) the approaching offensive action.
3. If A's cut lands successfully, the action must stop at once. Striking after a touch has occurred is a big no-no. Basically, if one player is hit, he can't immediately lay into his opponent, whack him five times, and say he won.
4. If B successfully blocks A's cut, A should terminate his offensive action at once.
5. At this point, a successful parry gives B an opportunity to safely counter-attack (rioste-cut). The riposte, to be effective, should be made without hesitation. A hesitation before counterattacking may be met by A with a resumption of his initial attack (remise). But if A meets an immediate riposte from B, he must parry it before continuing with his offense.

Fighting With Sticks

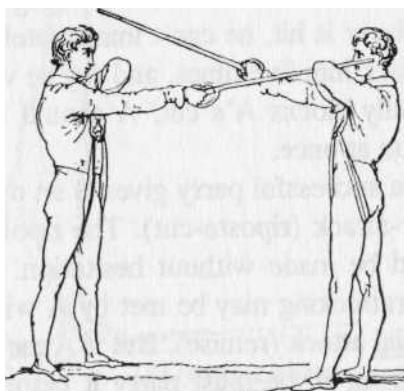
72

6. This back-and-forth play goes on until a valid touch is accomplished.

Remember: *The goal is to hit and not be hit*, so everything you do offensively and defensively should reflect this sensible premise.



A cut to the left side of the head parried.



A riposte to the left cheek over the elbow.

Exchanges

An exchange between A and B might go as follows:

Begin. A cuts to the head; B parries and ripostes with a cut to the right cheek; A parries and counter-ripostes with a cut to the left cheek; B parries and counter-counter-ripostes with a cut to the head and hits. Halt.

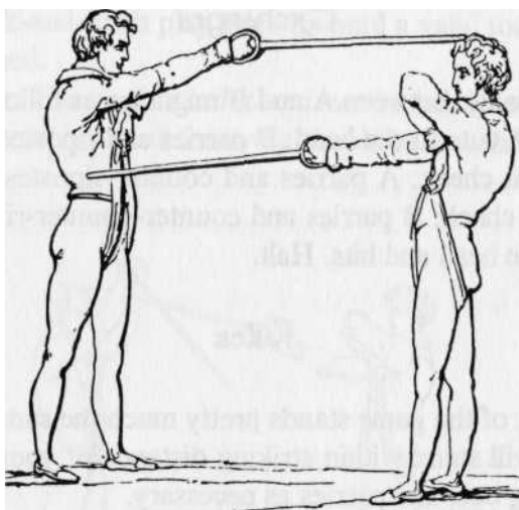
Rules

The rest of the game stands pretty much the same.

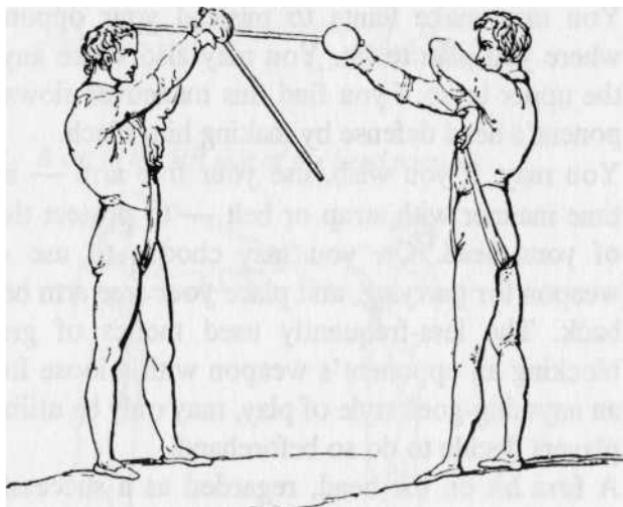
1. You will stand within striking distance of your opponent, making cuts and parries as necessary.
2. There will be no advancing or retreating, no leaning, no leg or groin shots, and absolutely no thrusts.
3. You may make feints to mislead your opponent as to where you plan to hit. You may also strike anywhere on the upper torso if you find this maneuver slows your opponent's head defense by making him flinch.
4. You may, if you wish, use your free arm — in the old-time manner with strap or belt — to protect the left side of your head. Or, you may choose to use only your weapon for parrying, and place your free arm behind your back. The less-frequently used tactics of grabbing or blocking an opponent's weapon with a loose free arm, in an anything-goes style of play, may only be utilized if both players decide to do so beforehand.
5. A firm hit on the head, regarded as a successful attack, takes the place of dripping blood, and stops the action. Five such touches, as in modern fencing, win the bout.

Fighting With Sticks

74



A successful flip cut to the head, timed to an opposing cut to the body.



A flip cut at the head.

Benefits

So, what does one derive from such a confrontational, in-your-face game such as this? Certainly reflexes are improved. Also, suppleness and strength of arm and wrist. Moreover, by giving and receiving in proper time — by closely following those ideas that will preserve you in combat — you develop self-discipline. Finally, out of all this turmoil, comes confidence.

Of course, if you happen to be using singlestick to enhance your self-defense skills, you'll find it will do that nicely (to be sure, as would any martial art).

Chapter Twelve

Singlestick Game II

Writing in *Broadsword and Singlestick* (1920), C. Phillips-Wolley remarks that modern singlestick "is to sabre what the foil is to the rapier." That is, a tool for teaching fundamental skills of sword fighting. He suggests for singlestick — in variance with the demands of sport sabre, which call for strict adherence to specific behavior — that any rules affording artificial protection should be avoided. Only the weapon and personal skill, in his estimation, should be the measure of one's defense. More than anything else, his game of singlestick resembles an eppe bout — where virtually any action, short of slugging the other guy, goes — with the cut being substituted for the point.

This, then, is the second singlestick game — let's call it singlestick II — we will pursue.

Singlestick II

Because singlestick II much resembles modern sabre in the way the weapon is handled, it would be advisable for the

Fighting With Sticks

78

newcomer to blade-oriented combat to purchase a good fencing book to supplement the knowledge we'll be imparting here. William Gaugler's *Science of Fencing* (Laureate Press; 1997) or my own *The Art and Science of Fencing* (Masters Press; 1996) would prove useful in this respect.

Old Singlestick Play Versus New Singlestick Play

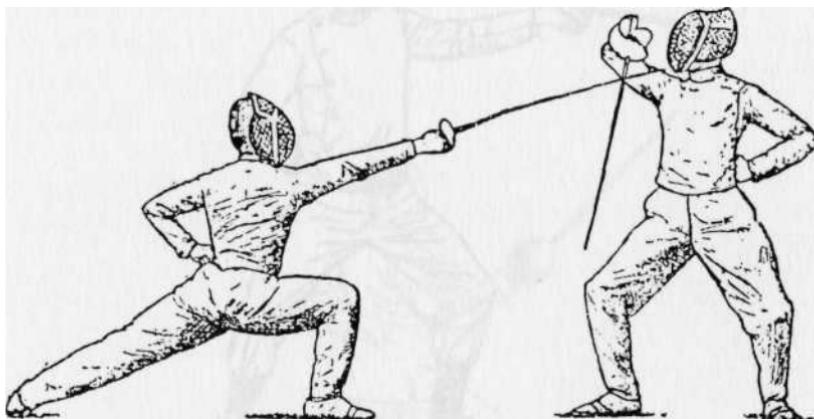
There are a number of differences separating singlestick II from its earlier incarnation. Where the first game appears rather static in its application, with only one basic "on guard" stance and an anchored distance, there is now some variety to contend with. This new singlestick is highly mobile, footwork playing a vital role in delivering touches. Even the lunge, a staple of modern fencing, is brought into play. Moreover, with the entire body to deal with — both offensively and defensively — form and blade-handling have been modified, and given greater scope and complexity than before. Now there are two "on guard" position possibilities (which we will presently be describing). Flipping cuts from the wrist may be used as before; also, firm, direct cuts from the fingers. Too, the strap/handkerchief of the "old gamester" is gone, the free arm being merely tucked behind the back. Parries are accomplished with the blade alone, and are more numerous than in the previous system.

Singlestick/ Sabre

Although singlestick II much resembles sabre fencing in its mechanics, three points in particular will be altered for our purposes. First, although point work (the thrust) is permitted in sabre, it will not be allowed in singlestick II. (Remember,

Chapter Twelve
Singlestick: Game II
79

as I've mentioned before, there is no give or flexibility in your wooden sword blade, and, with a simple thrust, you could do considerable damage to your opponent.) Second, in sabre, everything from the waist up comprises the target area; in singlestick II, the entire body is open to attack. And, third, while sabre possesses rules of right-of-way (that is, conventions that govern who has the right to hit whom at any given time), our second singlestick style will follow Phillipps-Wolley's program of "the first to hit gets the touch." Period! Hopefully, this will produce combatants who approach their game carefully and with much deliberation, as they would have to do in a real fight — or suffer the painful/deadly consequences.



Modern sabre and singlestick share many similarities in form.

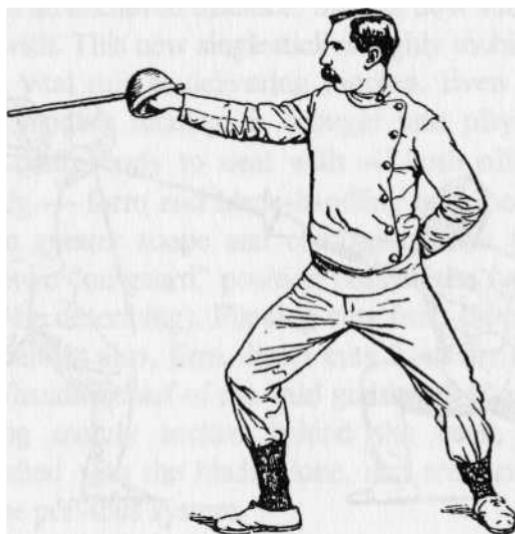
Singlestick II's parallels with sport sabre include the use of the cut, the "on guard" stance, footwork, and the use of feints, parries, and the lunge.

Fighting With Sticks

80

On Guard

The "on guard" for singlestick II has two distinct stances. Number one is the more traditional singlestick hanging guard with its high hand and low point. Number two is the modern sabre guard, with its high point, sword hand held slightly to the right of the body's center, and blade angled slightly inward (called, in sabre, the line [body area] of "tierce," or three). Because we described the hanging guard fully in the previous section, we'll now focus solely on the form of the latter "on guard" position.



The hanging guard.

With the sabre guard, the sword arm is bent so that the guard of the weapon may be held at about chest level, and about 18 inches forward from body (see: illustrations of "on guard" positions). The feet are held at right angles to one another, and spaced between a foot and a half and two feet

Chapter Twelve
Singlestick: Game II

81

apart. The front foot points directly ahead (towards one's opponent); the rear foot points to the left. To keep the feet lined up properly, you should visualize an invisible line running forward from your back heel upon which your front foot rests. (Keeping the feet thus will help maintain your balance.) Body weight, as with the hanging guard, should be maintained on both feet equally. As for the legs, the sabre guard requires you to bend the knees slightly. Not so much that it causes tension in your legs, but not so little that it becomes easy to fall out of your guard. In fencing, this bending of the knees is referred to as "sitting down." This lowers your center of gravity to improve balance and enhance movement. The free hand rests on the left hip, or is held behind the back.



The upright guard in the line of tierce.

Fighting With Sticks

82



The lunge.

Advancing And Retreating

Now, because we'll be dealing with changing distances in our new method of singlestick combat, to be able to advance and retreat easily is a must.

To advance: step forward with your leading foot, and then bring up your rear foot so that you are once again in your basic "on guard" stance.

To retreat, step backward with your rear foot, and then withdraw your front foot so that you are once again in your basic "on guard" stance.

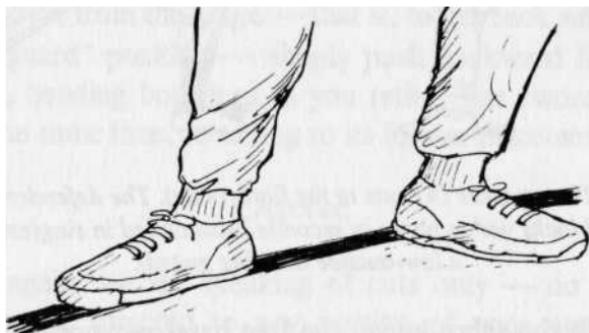
Remember, for every step you take, either backward or forward, your feet should be the same distance apart after the step as before it. Smooth movement takes practice, though, so don't get discouraged if it does not come easily. Practice.

Chapter Twelve
Singlestick: Game II

83



*Front view of the upright,
or "sabre," "on guard"
position.*



*The "on guard" position for the feet. Notice how they are
lined up along the line that runs from the rear foot.*

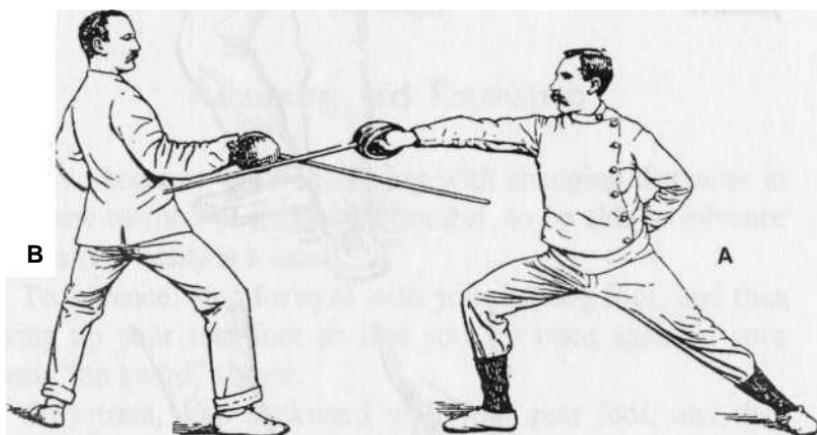
Fighting With Sticks

84

The Lunge

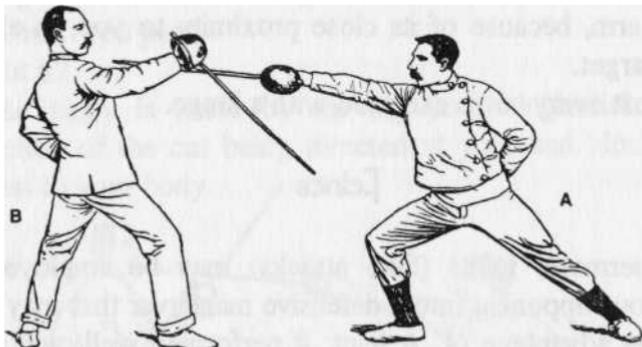
In this game, the lunge also comes into play. "What's a lunge?" you ask. Simply put, it is an action that propels your attack forward. It is not carried out by stepping forward, as it might appear, but rather by straightening the rear leg quickly. It is a pushing action, then, as opposed to a pulling one.

As the back leg snaps straight, moving the attack forward, the front foot is just picked up and set down, the front knee coming forward until it is directly over the front ankle. The rear leg, because of its role in the lunge, should end up completely straight. The back foot must remain flat on the ground.



The attacker (A) cuts to the flank (side). The defender (B) blocks with a parry in seconde (also called in singlestick a low-outside hanging guard).

As with the sabre lunge, the free hand remains on the rear hip, out of the way of an opponent's cuts.



The attacker (A) cuts to the chest. The defender (B) blocks with a parry in prime (also called in singlestick play a low-inside hanging guard).

The sword arm — the arm that guides the weapon — must extend as leg motion commences. If you lunge with your sword arm pulled back, you will leave yourself open to counterattacks from your opponent.

Recovery

To recover from the lunge — that is, to get back safely into the "on guard" position — simply push backward from the front leg, bending both legs as you retire. The sword arm is bent at the same time, returning to its former placement.

Offense

Here, again, we are speaking of cuts only — no thrusts! They may be directed to any portion of your opponent's body. Cuts are made by extending the sword arm and snapping the cut from fingers, wrist, and forearm, rather than from the shoulder.

Fighting With Sticks

86

The head is always a good spot to attack, although the sword arm, because of its close proximity to you, is also a ready target.

Almost every cut is executed with a lunge.

Feints

Furthermore, feints (fake attacks) may be employed to draw your opponent into a defensive maneuver that may then be taken advantage of. A feint, if performed well, will open an opponent's defense by drawing his blade from a position of readiness to one where his weapon has been sent parrying in the opposite direction of the true attack.

The basic structure of an attack would be (again we'll use Mr. A and Mr. B):

1. A makes a feint of a cut to the head of B.
2. B draws his blade upward to parry the supposed attack.
3. A dodges (or, as we say in fencing, "deceives") the parry.
4. Once B's blade has been avoided, A cuts at B's leg, delivering his actual attack with a lunge.
5. B, fooled, is impotently protecting his head with his blade.
6. A places a successful cut across B's thigh. Touche!

Feints are never full cuts, but only suggestions of cuts. Nevertheless, they should be made with a strong emphasis on body language so that they look like actual attacks. A feint that looks like what it really is, is sure to be ineffective.

Defense

We are now talking of parries. Parries block an opponent's attack. If you don't want to be hit, you parry. You don't close your eyes. You don't try to hit your opponent as he's

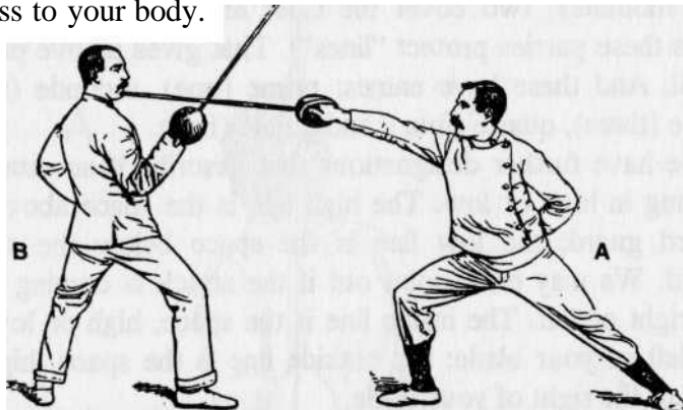
Chapter Twelve
Singlestick: Game II

87

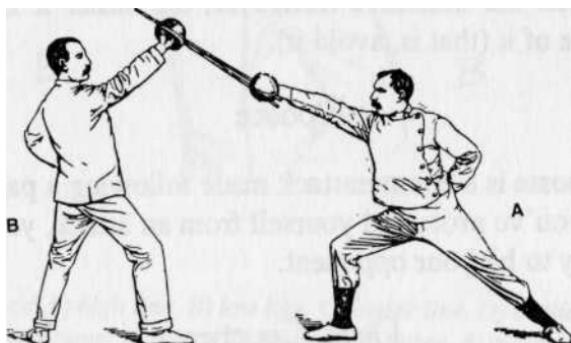
hitting you. You don't lean back. You don't scrunch up in a little ball. You parry!

Got it?

The parry is made by moving your singlestick in the direction of the cut being directed at you, and blocking its access to your body.



The attacker (A) cuts to the right cheek. The defender (B) blocks with a parry in tierce (also called in singlestick play an outside upright guard). Should the attacker cut to the left cheek, the defender would block with a parry in quarte (also called in singlestick play an outside upright guard).



The attacker (A) has cut to his opponent's head. The defender (B) blocks with a parry in quinte (also called in singlestick play a high hanging guard).

Fighting With Sticks

88

In fencing, we employ both lateral and counter parries. Lateral parries move back and forth in a straight line. Counter parries go around in a circle. In singlestick II, we will only be dealing with lateral parries.

In sabre, we have five basic parries. Three cover the head and shoulders; two cover the sides and chest (we call the areas these parries protect "lines"). That gives us five parries in all. And these have names: prime (one), seconde (two), tierce (three), quarte (four), and quinte (five).

We have further designations that describe if an attack is coming in high or low. The high line is the space above the sword guard; the low line is the space below the sword guard. We may even point out if the attack is coming from the right or left. The inside line is the space, high or low, to the left of your blade; the outside line is the space, high or low, to the right of your blade.

Prime covers the low-inside line; seconde, the low-outside line; tierce, the high-outside line; and quarte, the high-inside line. Quinte protects the top of the head.

Finally, parries should never be heavy. The more pronounced the defensive maneuver, the easier it is to take advantage of it (that is, avoid it).

Riposte

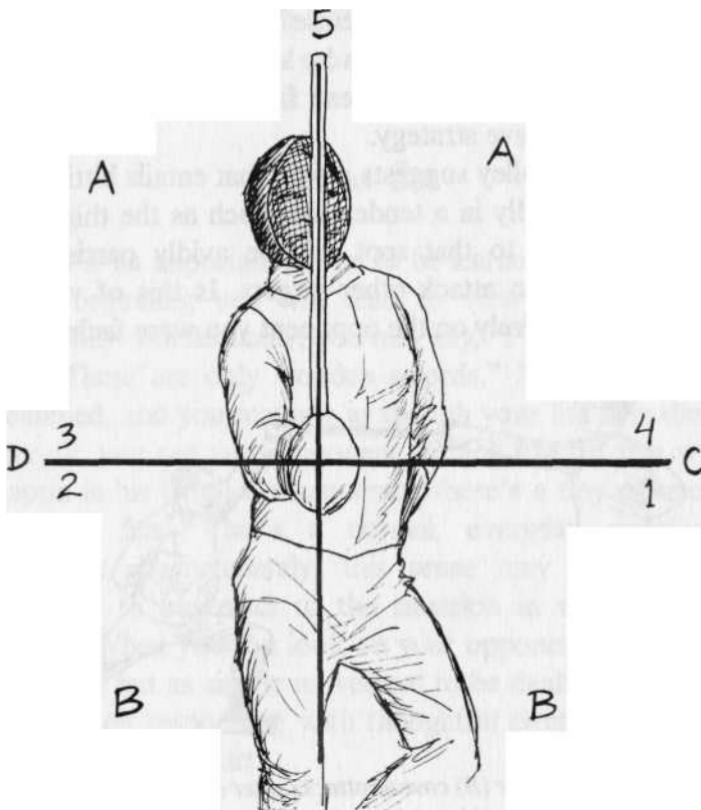
The riposte is a counterattack made following a parry. That is, once you've protected yourself from an attack, you can go on and try to hit your opponent.

Hits: Touches

Touches should be firm, but never hard. Hard hits not only betray a lack of control, but also, because they necessitate

Chapter Twelve
Singlestick: Game II
89

drawing one's arm back to execute them, they take extra time to deliver. Hard hitting also telegraphs your moves.



Lines: A) high line, B) low line, C) inside line, D) outside line.
Blade positions: 1) prime, 2) seconde, 3) tierce, 4) quarte, 5) quinte.

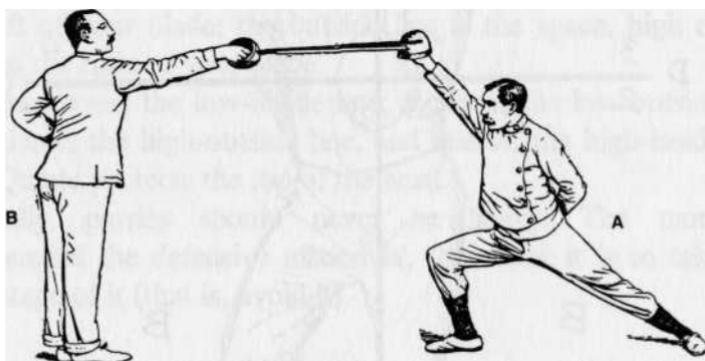
Fighting With Sticks

90

Strategy

Attacks should be formulated according to how your opponent defends himself. Does he hold back? Is he aggressive? Are his actions precise? Are they heavy? Is he reactive? Is he thoughtful? Does he lose control if pressed? Is he cool under pressure? All these factors play an important role in your offensive strategy.

Mr. Phillips-Wolley suggests a ploy that entails hitting your opponent repeatedly in a tender area such as the thigh, until every feint made to that spot will be avidly parried, thus making it easier to attack other targets. Is this of value? It would depend entirely on the opponent you were facing.



*Defender (B) counterattacks after a parry.
The attacker (A) parries a riposte cut to the head.*

Finally, keep your responses as simple as possible. Only get more complicated when necessity dictates you do so.

Finally, keep a point of view that would approximate the approach you'd take if your weapon and your opponent's weapon were real killing tools. To be sloppy and careless in your actions will teach you nothing and give you no skill. On

the other hand, adds Phillipps-Wolley, "If you only want to see who can stand the most hammering with an ash-plant, then your pads are a mistake and a waste of time. Ten minutes without them will do more to settle that question than an hour with them on." But most of you reading this will presumably want to gain more out of your singlestick game than a high pain threshold.

Mind Set

There is an important lesson to be learned from this game. In the beginning you will tend to view your encounters emotionally. Intellectually, you may say, "I'm not going to be killed. These are only wooden swords." Still, you will feel threatened, and you may act as though your life is in danger. After all, you see your opponent coming toward you with a weapon in his hand. Consequently, there's a tiny moment of panic, of fear. That's a normal, everyday reaction to aggression. Unfortunately, this sense may cause you to freeze, or to overreact to the situation in which you find yourself. When you can look on your opponent's actions not as a threat but as simple movement to be dealt with, you will find yourself responding with thoughtful control. This is the goal of any martial art.

Safety

Again, no thrusting. Also, once again, wear your protective gear: fencing mask, jacket, and glove. And, of course, you must always stop if the blade of your singlestick develops a crack in it. A broken wooden blade could be lethal. Use your common sense on this!

Fighting With Sticks

92

Rules

1. The entire body, unless otherwise stated, forms the target area.
2. Only cuts — no thrusts — are allowed.
3. The first player to make five touches before his opponent wins the bout.
4. Generally speaking, the player who hits first, period, gains the touch, as it would be in a real fight. Sabre rules of right-of-way, however, may be substituted if desired.

Fouls

There are only two fouls in this game of singlestick. The first is to strike a touch intentionally after one has been hit. The other is to use one's free arm defensively (i.e., to block a touch). Each, when done, causes the immediate forfeiture of a gained point.

Sportsmanship

Not acknowledging touches in this game is considered poor form, and while not exactly a foul, should not be tolerated on the field of play. Also, do not argue over touches.

Benefits

Singlestick II builds a sense of confidence, as it teaches you to move gracefully under fire. As with the first singlestick game, it teaches self-control and self-discipline. It develops hand-eye coordination. Of course, it is also good exercise, and an outlet for aggressiveness.

In Conclusion

I've tried to encapsulate an entire fighting form into just a few pages. In part, if you want to learn more, you'll have to do some extra research; also, do some bouting with your singlestick. With a bit of experience under your belt, the things I've been expounding on will prove easier to grasp.

Chapter Thirteen

Singlestick Game III

If you decide you don't want to follow either of my game plans, singlestick III will be anything you make it. If you want a rough-and-tumble, anything-goes encounter, set your game along those lines. If you want something more highly structured than the original game, go for that. If you want to stand on one leg, or fight blindfolded, or parry with a box of breakfast cereal, it's your choice.

But, once again, I would caution against using the point of your singlestick in any form of combat you create for yourself. You will run into medical problems somewhere along the line if you do. Believe me.

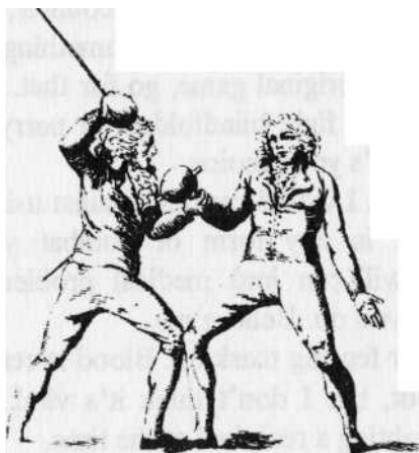
And keep your fencing mask on. Blood is certainly one way to gauge a bout, but I don't think it's vital — unless you happen to be fighting a real duel at the time.

Fighting With Sticks

96



Lunge from the hanging guard, then parry with the left hand.



Disarm from the hanging guard.

Chapter Fourteen

Self-Defense

Teddy Roosevelt said, "Walk softly and carry a big stick." And just so. The following is not meant to be an offensive blueprint for wreaking havoc on your less able neighbors. You don't use acquired fighting skills to be belligerent. For the most part, they are there to enhance your life, and to broadcast to congenital goons that you are not to be messed with. Creeps prey on the weak. If you display strength of purpose, you will not be preyed on. Only rarely in life does the fully prepared and truly confident individual have to bring his or her martial abilities to play.

Simplicity

Of course, this material is no substitute for a full-blown martial art on the level of karate, escrima, or judo. What we have here are some suggestions for simple, straightforward protective measures.

Fighting With Sticks

98

Training

Ideally, these actions take little martial training to execute. You needn't be Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, or Arnold Schwarzenegger to perform them. No mystifying ninja tricks. It's "slip tab A into slot B" stuff. The moves focus directly on the matter at hand, hopefully halting any problem before it has a chance to get the better of you.

Guns

However (and this is very important!), nothing covered here will work against guns. This is unfortunate, but nevertheless a fact of reality. With a .45 shoved in your gut, you give the scum your wallet, OK? However, if employed with a level head, these uncomplicated actions will effectively deter fists, knives, and clubs.

Behavior

To be sure, keeping a calm demeanor is a must. That is the only way you'll be able to launch an effective defense. Tension is a killer. Smooth responses flow out of calmness. Therefore, you must practice what you have learned, so that, when faced with a problem, you have confidence in your ability to end it quickly.

Timing

Moreover, you must not hesitate. Hesitation to act gives your attacker a distinct advantage. To catch him off guard is a must. Timing is everything. Waiting too long to strike

allows too many variables into the equation. You must stop him before the action gets complicated. Simply put: take the sucker out before he can think. Hit him hard, and hit him fast. Hit him when he's down, if you have to! His first words upon waking up should be, "What happened?" Therefore, you must address and resolve any ingrained notions you might have of social taboos about behaving aggressively against other people. Moral and philosophical discussions with bullies, muggers, and sex offenders are a waste of time. Besides, if you're a pacifist, what the heck are you reading this book for, anyway?

Since you're not going to be using the information you acquire here for purely offensive purposes, we will only be discussing and illustrating defensive and counteroffensive responses.

The Encounter

To begin with, you must keep in mind that with your stick, you have the advantage of reach (distance) over your adversary, especially if you employ the thrust as opposed to the cut. Also, remember, your stick is doubtlessly harder than he is. So, when you hit him, you will cause him damage as well as pain. If performed with sufficient intent, this will stop him in his tracks.

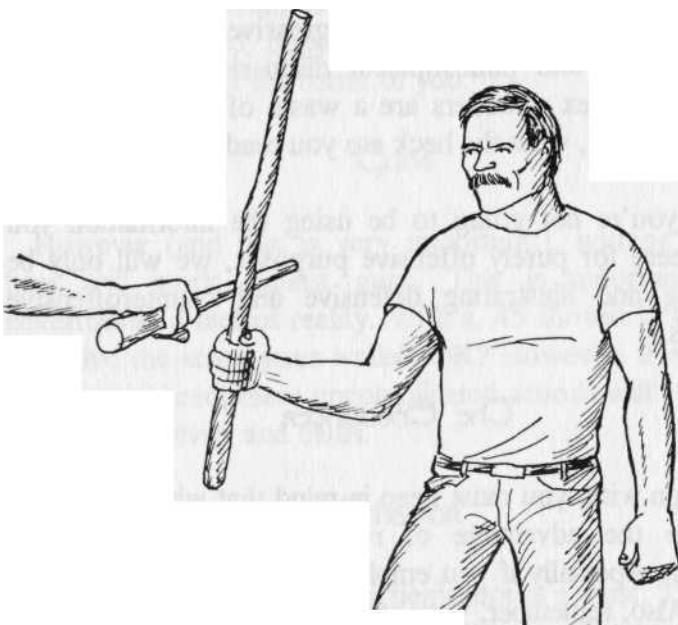
Cut V ersus Thrust

Whether you employ the cut or the thrust will, in part, be determined by the situation in which you find yourself, and what you are attempting to accomplish. The thrust will definitely keep your attacker at bay, but you can certainly hit

Fighting With Sticks

100

harder with a cut. The thrust has limited striking areas, whereas the cut may well be delivered almost anywhere on your attacker's body. Also, the cut may be used to disarm, while the thrust should be avoided for this purpose since it may not hit hard enough to dislodge a weapon.



A single-handed parry against a club.

One Hand/ Two Hands

You have the option of employing one or both hands in your counterattacks. Two hands will definitely deliver a harder strike. One hand will facilitate a more steady thrust. One-handed attacks will also allow you to use your free hand against your attacker, if you wish.

When using both hands on your stick, the hands should be spaced apart. This will produce a steadier hold.

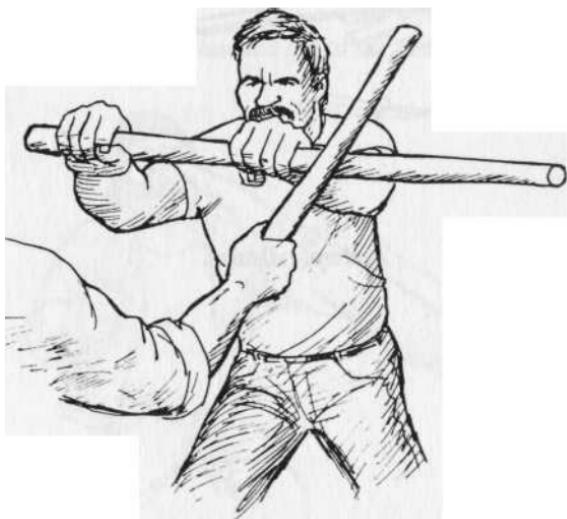
Striking points

You should always hit your opponent where it will do the most damage. Again, don't feel sorry for him. He deserves what he gets (as long as it isn't your money).

Specific cutting points include: the top of the head, the side of the head, the collarbone, the hand, the groin, the side of the rib cage, the neck, and the arm.

Thrusting areas include, the forehead, the throat, and the solar plexus.

Defense



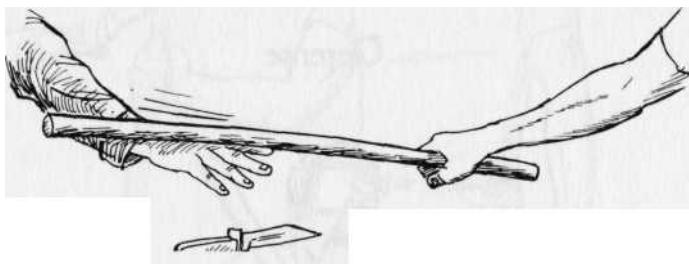
A back-handed, two-handed parry.

Fighting With Sticks

102

In fencing, an action that blocks an opponent's attack is called a parry. The parry should always be followed up with an immediate counterattack, or riposte, because this is when your attacker will be most vulnerable.

Parries may be made using one or both hands on your stick. Two hands will allow for a steadier block. One hand will produce faster thrusts. Of course, if you wish to pack extra power into your counterattack, use the two-handed block, as it will be easier to initiate a two-handed cut.



A simple disarm.

Chapter Fourteen

Self-Defense

103



A one-handed cut to the head.



A quick thrust to the forehead stops a knifer's attack in its tracks.

Strategy

It may seem obvious to say that in any confrontation of a threatening nature, your objective would be to somehow render your adversary harmless. But how to do this effectively? In part, it will be determined by your situation. Is your attacker active or a lumbering slug? Is he cautious or careless? Is he confident or afraid? These factors must be taken into consideration when formulating a plan of attack.

Never move without thinking first. If you act rashly or foolishly, or with a knee-jerk reflex, you'd better have a lot of luck on your side. Know what you want to do before you do it.

There are questions, then, you must ask yourself:

1. What is my attacker doing?
2. How is he doing it?
3. What can I do against him? And, finally,
4. Can I carry out what I've planned to do?

If your answer to any of these questions is, "I don't know?" you are up the proverbial creek. If you can answer each question logically and positively, you are on your way to safety.

Also, as I've said before, keep your responses simple. Trying to dazzle your attacker with your footwork looks good in the movies, but remember movies follow a script. If you get too complicated, you may trip yourself up.

Outcome

Remember, your goal in any dangerous encounter is to hit and not be hit, which is an objective as old as armed conflict. But you can only accomplish this if you know what you are

Chapter Fourteen

Self-Defense

105

doing, and have the will to do it. If you are truly set on these points, your personal safety will not be a matter of chance, it will be a foregone conclusion.

Chapter Fifteen

Cane Fighting

In his book *The Sword and the Centuries*, Alfred Hutton suggests that the cane is superior to the singlestick in combat in that the cane is unencumbered by a handguard, making it more maneuverable than the singlestick. In respect to the basic mechanics of cuts and parries, however, the two are almost identical.

Therefore, as we have gone into some detail with regard to singlestick encounters, we will not dwell overly long on cane fighting techniques, but rely instead on the illustrations to give us an idea of how the game is to be played.

In general terms, though, cuts are made with one hand, as are parries. A short lunge is employed to deliver attacks. Also, thrusting should be avoided for safety's sake. As for the target area, it may be limited by choice to include only the area above the waist, or expanded to take in the entire body. (It should be noted that the drawings included depict a game that restricts touches to the upper torso.)

Of course, it is already a foregone conclusion that you'll employ head protection and body padding before you have a

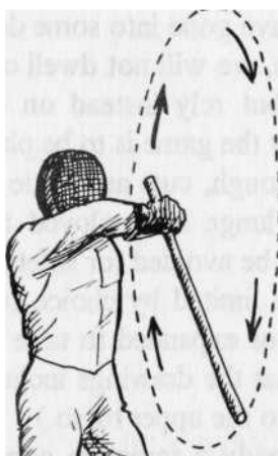
Fighting With Sticks

108

go at an opponent. Too, as there is no handguard with the cane, you'd better find yourself a sturdy glove.



A circular cut (clockwise) to the head, made from the right side. When cutting lower, the direction of the action may be reversed.

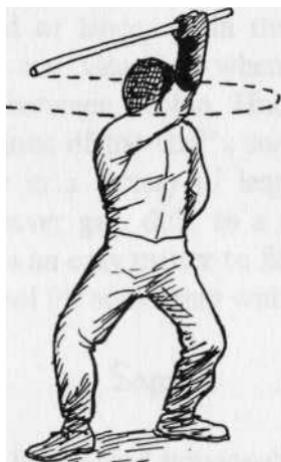


A circular cut (clockwise) to the head, made from the left side. When cutting lower, the direction of the action may be reversed.

Chapter Fifteen
Cane Fighting
109



A circular parry (clockwise) covering the head.



A circular parry (counterclockwise) covering the head.

Fighting With Sticks

110

If you are truly bent on injecting a touch of truth into your play — that is, you wish to feel touches given and received — you may wish to employ an actual cane in your game. These can be purchased or made (see: "Making a Cane" and "Fighting Stick Suppliers"). In lieu of a cane, a dowel will work nicely at putting "realism" into your exchanges (see: "Making a Singlestick, Fighting Stick, or Staff").

If you merely wish a game without the pain, cover your dowel with a section of foam water-pipe insulation (see, again: "Making a Singlestick, Fighting Stick, or Staff"). Although this will give you a thicker weapon, making it slightly less wieldy than a naked stick, it will most certainly cut down on the hard knocks.

If you plan to use a cane for personal protection on the street — as we have outlined in the previous section — the cane game will doubtlessly improve your abilities in this direction.

Chapter Sixteen

Staff Fighting

The staff is an extremely simple, yet highly versatile, weapon. It can be employed at a considerable distance from one's opponent, or it can be used up close. Although it is basically a two-handed weapon, maneuvering it with one hand is not out of the question. Both the cut and the thrust are part of its methodology. It may be handled in the same manner as a sword or lance, or in the side-to-side swipe-pivot-block style we visualize when we think of the quarterstaff duel between Robin Hood and Little John. Moreover, all portions of the staffs surface may be brought into use. It comes in a variety of lengths, from eight feet down to four. It never gets dull, as a metal weapon might. And if it breaks, it's an easy matter to fashion a new one. It's a unique fighting tool for something with no moving parts.

Safety

The staff, as has been noted previously in this book, can be a lethal weapon, so care should be taken when practicing with

Fighting With Sticks

112

a piece of fighting equipment that should, above all, do no harm. It is best then, not to employ an actual wooden staff, as it will be much too heavy and ungiving for our purposes. A light, foam-padded dowel-staff will do just as well (see: "Making a Singlestick, Fight Stick, or Staff").

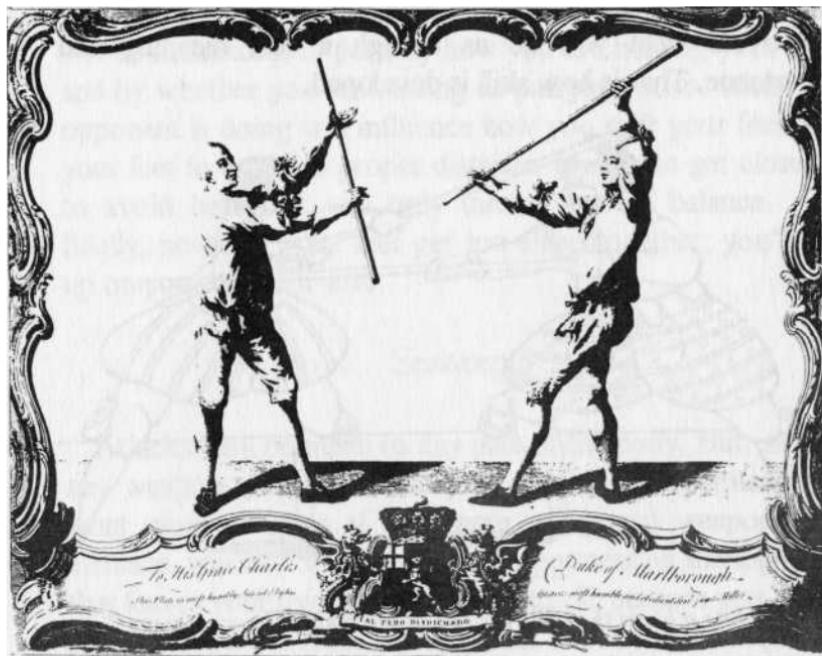
There is one instance, though, where an actual wooden staff would be acceptable to work with. This would be if your goal was simply to learn moves without making actual body contact. But, of course, any time you pull your "punches," you lessen the impact of your training.



Employing the stafflike a sword.

Regardless of your choice in staffs, however, you should always deck yourself out in protective head gear, gloves, and body padding, the same as you would for singlestick or cane play. I will state this over and over. It's my responsibility,

because I am presenting this information to you. Safety should never be anything less than your first consideration before you start practicing. Your education in stick fighting should not include the inner workings of your local hospital emergency room.



The balanced hand-hold.

Technique

Historically, both the cut and thrust have been part of the staff's game, but, for safety's sake, we will only be using the cut in our game.

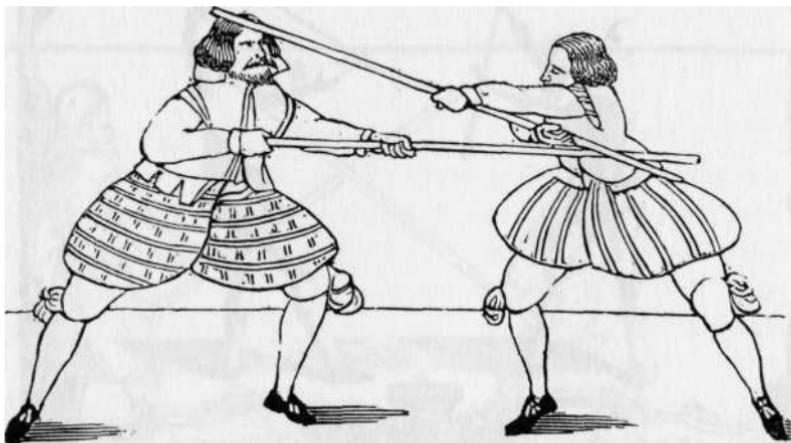
Fighting With Sticks

114

As for basic method:

Your distance will be determined by how you hold your staff. Your play will be quicker if you use the centered hand-hold. Also, quick, firm cuts are easier to administer and easier to recover from than heavy smashes.

And never just try to duke it out with an opponent, smashing away mindlessly while you are being smashed upon. Do your best to establish a definite offensive-defensive style that treats what you do as though it had meaning and importance. That is how skill is developed.



Trading a hit to the head for one to the body is poor strategy.

Hand Position

The staff has an advantage over many other weapons in that the position of the hands may be shifted to produce varying effects. With the hands at one end of the staff, it may be employed like a long sword. Cuts and parries come from one end alone. With the hands placed on either side of the staff's middle, both ends may be brought into offensive and

defensive play. These variations make it a highly versatile combat tool.

Foot Position

Unlike singlestick and cane fighting, the foot positions of staff fighting will vary according to the action at hand. One moment the right foot will be forward; the next, the left. This will be influenced, in part, by how you are holding your staff, and by whether you are cutting or parrying. Also, what your opponent is doing will influence how you shift your feet. Use your feet to establish proper distance: leaning to get closer or to avoid being hit will only throw you off balance. And, finally, never let your feet get too close together; you'll end up on your back for sure.

Strategy

Attacks may be made to any part of the body. But, as with any weapon, you should keep in mind the consequences of what would happen if you were using real weapons. For instance, you may want to hit your opponent on the leg, but if that leaves your own head open to attack, perhaps you should reconsider your intent. Always think about the consequences of your actions.

Offense

When using the staff like a long sword, cuts will be directed naturally from the arms. Make them firm, but not heavy. Not too much shoulder. Heavy translates into slow.

Fighting With Sticks

116

And, when you miss, you create openings that your opponent may easily take advantage of.

On the other hand, when using the middle hand hold, much of your maneuvering will flow from both shoulders. But because the staff is being gripped in a balanced manner, this will not create a problem. Because only a small portion of your weapon is being brought into play, you can only go so far with a cut. Moreover, the middle hold on your staff makes feinting with one end of the staff and cutting with the other a highly effective ploy.

Defense

As has already been pointed out, the staff has multiple applications when it comes to both offense and defense. When it comes to defense, though, the staff truly shines. When held like a two-handed sword, the length of the staff produces a distinct advantage when parrying (because of its extended reach). With both hands on either side of the staff's middle, the defender has an equal opportunity to bring the middle and both ends into play at any moment.

Further Training

The information offered here can be little more than a starting point. But many oriental martial arts include staff fighting in their curriculum. Should you desire a more formalized approach to staff fighting, you might phone your neighborhood martial arts school, and find out if they can help you.

Chapter Seventeen

Making A Singlestick Fighting Stick OR Staff

If you're going to get involved with the material in this book, you're going to have to do some weapon assembling on your own. There are no singlesticks out there for you to buy. You could buy a staff or a fighting stick (such as an escrima stick), of course, from any martial arts equipment supplier, but there is a certain satisfaction in making your own weapons.

Moreover, we'll be adding some information in the following paragraphs on creating "safe" weapons; that is, ones with padding for extra protection. You may want the hard knocks of real combat, but some folks won't.

OK?

Making A Singlestick

If you did try, somewhere along the line, to order a singlestick from Sears, you must have missed some reading in this book. Go back to page one and start over. You probably missed some other important items, too. Re-read every

Fighting With Sticks

118

section five or ten times until it sinks in. Then, come back to this point, and try again.

YOU HAVE TO MAKE YOUR OWN SINGLESTICKS!

Got that?

Anyway...

Before I could write this book, I had to be able to come up with singlesticks. There was no point in regenerating a weapon-fighting style that had no weapons to go with it. That I'd have to make something for myself was obvious. I was treading in new territory here. I had to think about it for a long, long while before the picture came to me.

Actually, the concept came to me bit by bit.

The stick, itself, was easy to come by. Instead of the traditional ash stick, I got myself a half-inch oak dowel from a nearby hardware store. The ash stick was supposed to be about three-quarters of an inch in diameter, but that seemed a bit drastic to me. A stick that thick is a pretty darned stout item. You can really do some damage to a body with something like that. No, a half-inch seemed plenty big enough. I brought a couple of them home, and whacked them together for a while —just in case — to see how they'd hold up to actual contact. They did just fine. So, I had my "blades."

For me, the biggest problem was the basket handguard. I searched all over the place for appropriate baskets, roundish wicker ones, such as I'd seen in old illustrations. I couldn't find anything suitable. They were either too big or too small, or the wrong shape, or too flimsy. I was stumped for a long time. Then, it came to me. Plastic tubs! Like food-storage containers. They're easy to come by. I had a couple already that had once contained ice cream, I think. If you need to purchase some, you can find suitable items in the kitchen section of any Wal-Mart type store. (Sorry, if you have to

Chapter Seventeen
Making A Singlestick, Fighting Stick, Or Staff
119

spend a few bucks, but it won't be that much. Go out and price a new pair of skis or a bowling ball, and then tell me I'm putting a hardship on you.) Just make sure you buy containers big enough to fit your hand into. On an average, the tub should be about six inches wide at the mouth, and no less than five and a half inches wide at its base if it tapers. And it should be at least five inches deep, but not too much more than that. Also, they should be fairly sturdy, as they'll be taking a pretty good beating.



*Make sure that the container you choose for your handguard
is big enough for your hand to fit into.*

Fighting With Sticks

120

The rest of the construction material was a snap: duct tape, electrician's tape, baseball-bat tape (optional), a PVC pipe cap for half-inch plastic water pipe, a two-inch-wide metal washer, and glue.

Now, let's start putting all this stuff together. Don't worry, it's not like assembling a clock. It may take you all of 30 minutes. Yes, you'll have to invest some money *and* time. But, think of it this way: if you were buying a commercial singlestick — if there was such a thing — you'd probably end up paying 40 or 50 dollars for one. You're lucky. New skills will be dropping into your lap right and left.

So, here we go:

Step one: Cut your dowel to its proper singlestick length: 41 inches.

Step two: Punch or cut two small holes through the sides of your plastic tub, each hole exactly opposite from the other. These holes should be just big enough to allow you to push your dowel through. The fit should be snug. If the holes are too big, the dowel will move around (which you don't want).

Step three: Feed the dowel through the holes in the tub until about an inch is showing through the far side. This small protrusion will become the weapon's pommel. The part of the dowel inside the tub will be the grip.

Step four: Take your metal washer, and slide it onto the singlestick blade, so that it ends up resting on the top of the handguard. The washer is there to strengthen the hilt, and to bring the weapon's weight down toward your sword hand.

Chapter Seventeen
Making A Singlestick, Fighting Stick, Or Staff
121

Step five: Bind the outside of the tub — every part of it — with duct tape. Repeat this until you have created a good, thick skin. Make it look like an Egyptian mummy. This will add strength to your guard, and keep it from eventually cracking apart from the punishment it is bound to encounter.

Step six: Glue the PVC pipe cap onto the inch of dowel showing through the tub. You can use Elmer's, or, if you want a stronger hold, a good contact cement. The PVC cap will help keep the blade anchored in one place.

Step seven: Now, take a moment to consider the singlestick's handle (the part of the dowel inside the handguard). The style of play engaged in, how you hold your singlestick, and the handle's shape are intertwined. You have two handle shape choices in front of you because you have, basically, two styles of play: the "wrist-forearm" flipping game, and the snapping "finger" game. (All of this was covered earlier in the book.)

If you decide to employ the former method of play — which goes well with the "club" grip — you should probably leave the handle as it is: round. If you choose the latter form — enhanced by a sabre-style fingering — you may want to flatten the side of the handle, which faces the handguard's opening. To shape the handle, just take a knife, and do a little simple whittling, until you've established the desired surface. It won't take long.

Step eight: Now, bind the grip — again, the part of the dowel inside the tub — with electrician's tape. This will not only delineate where you'll be holding your singlestick, but by enhancing the handle's thickness, you further ensure the dowel will remain in place.

Fighting With Sticks

122

Step nine: The handle may be additionally bound with baseball-bat tape, which, to me, has the perfect surface for gripping.

Step ten: Finally, repeatedly wrap the portion of the single-stick blade immediately above the handguard with tape — electrician's tape will do nicely — until you've built it out to a decent thickness. This will add one more bit of insurance against the blade slipping out of place.

Ta-da! You now have a singlestick.



Singlestick parts: 1) blade, 2) handguard, 3) grip, 4) pommel.

Chapter Seventeen
Making A Singlestick, Fighting Stick, Or Staff
123

By the way, you can improve your singlestick's appearance by applying a bit of wood stain to the dowel. The color is your choice. I, personally, prefer English walnut. Rubbing a bit of linseed oil into the wood will make it look even better.

If you want to add a safety factor to your game, you may employ a length of foam water-pipe insulation tubing as blade padding. Designed to fit over half-inch plastic water pipe, the insulation — soft and pliable — will slip neatly over your blade, which should be the same thickness as the aforementioned pipe.

Of course, not knowing initially how well this foam covering would cushion hits, I couldn't very well endorse its use. I decided I'd have to make a test. I put a length — from tip to hilt — on one of my singlesticks, and handed the weapon to my wife.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"I can't very well recommend padding a singlestick blade without trying it out, can I?" I said. "Go on, hit me."

"No."

"So, who are you, Mrs. Mahatma Gandhi?"

"I just don't want to."

"Are you volunteering to take my place?" I asked.

"This isn't my game, buddy."

"OK. So, hit me."

My wife stared at me, and shook her head.

"Oh, alright."

"And make it hard."

I braced myself.

"Hard? Are you sure?"

I nodded.

"Conan the Barbarian stuff."

She gave me a tap on the arm.

Fighting With Sticks

124

"What was that?"

"I hit you."

"You hit like a girl."

"I am a girl."

"Well, you're also a wife. Come on, lay into me. Haven't I ever done anything to make you mad?"

She gave me a pretty good smack on the shoulder.

'That's better,' I finally said, "But there's one test left. You have to hit me in the head."

"Without a fencing mask on?"

"It's the most important part of the experiment. I have to know if this stuff works to the max. If it doesn't, I shouldn't be telling folks to use it."

"In the head?"

"As hard as you can."

"In the head."

"Cut my nog off if you can."

"You're nuts."

"Do it already!"

My wife laid back, and gave me a good solid whack across the side of the head. There was a loud pop, and I certainly felt it, like a dull slap; but it didn't really hurt.

I shook my head.

"Hmmm! That'll work."

The experiment was a success!

"Crash test dummy," my wife muttered.

So, use the padding if you wish to, with my compliments. And my wife's.

Making A Fighting Stick For Cane Play

Should you wish to try your hand at cane fighting, you can go the hard route, and buy, or make, a real cane for yourself. You can even use a dowel: a three-quarter-inch one will work nicely at putting "realism" into your exchanges (the dowel's length should be approximately 42 inches).

If you merely want the game without the pain, take a half-inch dowel cut to cane length, and cover it with the previously mentioned foam insulation tube. This will give you a solid-feeling fighting stick you can wield with impunity.

Making A Staff

Staffs come in lengths from eight feet down to four. Like the fighting stick or cane, you can buy an already-made piece of equipment, or you can make something for yourself.

If you make a full-fledged wooden staff, you'll have to be careful how you use it. No body contact should be permitted. Remember, accounts from the Middle Ages attest to the death-dealing nature of the staff. Crushed skulls and all that.

But, you can make yourself a full-contact staff, if you follow the safety game plan using foam padded dowels. In this case, you'll have to fit two half-inch dowels together to establish an adequate length, since the average individual dowel is only about 48 inches long. You can accomplish this by gluing two dowels into a PVC plastic water-pipe fitting (the kind used for straight pipe extensions), and reinforcing the connection with a good winding of duct tape. After that, you can trim your construction to the desired length. Then, cover the connected dowels fully with a length of foam tubing. This will give you a workable staff that, like the

Fighting With Sticks

126

fighting stick, can be used without fear of damaging your opponent.

Safety

Of course, even if you use the safety padding, please remember to wear protective gear. A padded singlestick, cane, or staff just means you won't break bones or induce bleeding. You'll still feel the touches.

Be smart about this. I know there'll be individuals who'll take up one of the stick-fighting systems in this book and say, "I can do that crap without any old damned protection. I'm a man. I watch *American Gladiators*." And there's nothing I can do to regulate stupid behavior. I can only tell you right now that I've been involved in the sport of fencing for nearly 30 years, working with literally thousands of fencing students at all levels of achievement, and I've never been seriously injured. That's because I take what I do seriously, and I don't mess around.

Keep that in mind when you begin construction of whatever weapons you decide on.

OK?

Chapter Eighteen

Making A Cane Or WALKING STICK

The first thing I would say about making a cane or walking stick is, go down to your local library and check out a book on the subject. The best I've found is *The Craft of Stickmaking* (1992), by Leo Gowan. Gowan is a founding member of the British Stickmakers Guild, and his knowledge on the subject is about as complete as anyone could hope for.

However, if you've let your library card expire, and/or you just can't find a book on stickmaking anywhere else, here are some general rules to follow:

1. The stick you cut is referred to as a "shank." The most popular shank thickness among experts is one inch in diameter.
2. Good, solid woods for stickmaking include oak, hickory, ash, and blackthorn. Also fruitwoods, such as apple, cherry, pear and plum.
3. Conifers, by and large, do not produce very sturdy shanks if you are looking for durability. The wood you select, of course, should be hard if you plan to use your stick for protection.

Fighting With Sticks

128

4. The best times to cut shanks are November, December, and January, while tree sap is down. If cut at other times, more drying time will be needed.
5. When you cut the shank of your choice, you'll have to let it season for at least one year before working with it. It may be stored in a closet or garage while drying, but always keep it away from direct heat, which will dry it out too quickly, and cause it to develop splits.
6. Depending on your preference, the shank may be debarked, or left with its bark on. If debarked, you may want to consider staining the wood.
7. Debarking a shank is accomplished most often with a sharp knife. Afterward, a good amount of sanding will be required. Some experts recommend sandpaper, while others prefer emery cloth.
8. Wood stains may be obtained from any hardware store. As there is much variety in stain color and darkness, the choice becomes a personal one.
9. Bending the end of the stick into a "cane" curve or adding some type of horn material to its end are both processes that require some specific tools and detailed knowledge. Therefore, I leave these two possibilities to the reader who wishes to look elsewhere for more information.
10. When finishing a stick, rather than using varnish, stickmakers usually use linseed oil. This produces both a luster and a protective finish that can be regularly renewed. Varnish, on the other hand, tends to chip and scratch easily.
11. The ground end of the stick should be fitted with a protective covering. In stick terms, this is called a "ferrule." It may be made from a piece of copper pipe, although rubber ferrules are available commercially.

Now, go to it.

Chapter Nineteen

Organizations Of Interest

For those interested in learning about stick fighting/fencing/kendo in more detail, the following is a list of organizations that in some way pertain to the subjects covered in this book:

Fencing

The United States Fencing Association
1 Olympic Plaza
Colorado Springs, CO 80909

Kendo

All Kendo Federation
PO Box 2004
Lomita, CA 90717

Arnis

North American Arnis Association
PO Box 2248
Durango, CO 81302

Fighting With Sticks

130

Babao Arnis
1443 Antoine **Drive**
San Diego, CA 92139

Cane

Comte Nationale De Canne De Combat Et Baton
25 Boulevard des Italians
75002 Paris, France

Kali

World Kali Jukune Do Martial Arts Association
972 North Vermont Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90029

Canadian Kali Association
5A, 21 15-30th Avenue N.E.
Calgary, Alberta T2E 6Z6
Canada

Minnesota Kali Group
420 North Fifth Street, #280
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Kenpo/Kempo

World Wide Kenpo Karate Association
1400B Riesterstown Road
Pikesville, MD 21203

American Kempo-Karate Association
PO Box 667892
Charlotte, NC 28266

Chapter Nineteen
Organizations Of Interest
131

International Kenpo Karate Association
1505 East Walnut Street
Pasadena, CA 91106

Escríma

Filipino Escrima Association
236 Wenster Avenue
Jersey City, NJ 03707

Filipino Combatative Systems International
299 Bloomfield
Nutley,NJ 07110

Philippine Martial Arts Society
PO Box 214433
Sacramento, CA 95821

Inosanto Academy
7298 West Manchester, Suite B
Westchester, CA 90045

Martial Arts Research Systems
2537-D Pacific Coast Hwy., Suite 220
Torrance, CA 90505

Philippine Integrated Martial Arts Academy
367 Reuter Avenue
Elizabeth, NJ 07202

Solis Martial Arts
20015 Faye Oaks Drive
Humble, TX 77346

Fighting With Sticks

132

Bahala Na Club
2120 S. San Joaquin
Stockton, CA 95206

Medieval-Style Combat
Society For Creative Anachronism
PO Box 360789
Milpitas, CA 95036-0789

Chapter Twenty

Fencing Equipment Suppliers

While much of what you need for learning to fight with sticks can be manufactured on your own, some formal equipment — such as fencing masks, gloves, and jackets; also, books — will have to be purchased from fencing-equipment supply companies. These businesses handle mail-order purchases, and will send catalogues to interested parties.

The following is a current list of fencing equipment suppliers:

American Fencers Supply
1180 Folsom Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415)863-7911

George Santelli, Inc.
465 South Dean Street
Englewood, NJ 07631
(301)671-3105

Fighting With Sticks

134

Blade Fencing Equipment
212 West 15th Street
New York, NY 10011
(800) 828-5661

Triplette Competition Arms
101 East Main
Elkin, NC 28621
(910) 835-7774

Herb Obst Agency
CP 788 NDG Station
Montreal, Quebec, H4A 3S2
Canada
(514)482-2140

Vintage Sporting Equipment
PO Box 364
Sheboygan, WI53082
(800) 690-4867

Physical Chess, Inc.
2933 Vauxhall Road
Vauxhall, NJ 07088
(908) 964-3092

Colonial Distributing Fencing Equipment
N77 W7287 Oak Street
PO Box 636
Cedarburg, WI 53012
(414) 377-9166

Chapter Twenty
Fencing Equipment Suppliers
135

Blue Gauntlet Fencing Gear Inc.
505 Saddle River Road
Saddle Brook, NJ 07663
(201) 845-9277

Southern California Fencers Equipment Company
16131 Valerio
Van Nuys, CA 91406

Winsor Sport Fencing
PO Box 3181
Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067
(800) 713-4732

Chapter Twenty One

Fighting Stick Suppliers

The following is a sample listing of companies that supply various types of fighting sticks, such as escrima sticks, the bo, the jo staff, and the bokken:

Century Martial Art Supply
1705 National Boulevard
Midwest City, OK 73110
(800) 626-2787

(Supply: escrima sticks, bo staff, bokken, shoto, and shinai)

Asian World Of Martial Arts, Inc.
11601 Caroline Road
Philadelphia, PA 19154
(800) 345-2962
(Supply: escrima sticks, bo staff, bokken, shoto, and shinai)

Fighting With Sticks

138

East/West Seminars And Sales
255 Tompkins Street
Cortland, NY 13045
(800) 343-WEST
(Supply: escrima sticks)

Museum Replicas Limited
2143 Gees Mill Road
Box 840
Conyers, GA 30207
(800) 883-8838
(Supply: staffs)

Smokey Mountain Knife Works
PO Box 4430
Sevierville, TN 37864
(800)251-9306
(Supply: escrima sticks, shinai, and tai chi practice swords)

Lightning Products And Services
208 Calle Marguerita
Los Gatos, CA 95030
(408) 886-0325
(Supply: escrima sticks, all sizes)

Chapter Twenty Two

Cane Suppliers

If you're more interested in buying a protective cane/walking stick than making one, the following may help you in that pursuit:

Cane Masters
PO Box 7301
Incline Village, NV 89452
(800) 422-CANE

Altanta Cutlery
2143 Gees Mill Road
Conyers, GA 30207
(800) 883-8838

Smokey Mountain Knife Works
PO Box 4430
Sevierville, TN 37864
(800) 251-9306

Chapter Twenty Three

Selected Reading List

The following is a list of books related to the subjects covered in this book:

A Book of Five Rings (Barnes and Noble, 1997, reprint: original edition, 1645), Miyamoto Musashi

Aikijo Techniques: Suburi and Kata for Four-Foot Staff (Oak Tree Publications, 1980), Don Zier

The Art and History of Personal Combat (Arma Press, 1972), Arthur Wise

The Art and Science of Fencing (Masters Press, 1996), Nick Evangelista

Baton Techniques and Training (Charles C. Thomas Publishing, 1974), Takayuki Kubota

Baton Techniques for Officer Survival (Charles C. Thomas Publishing, 1983), Robert Downey

Bo: Japanese Long Staff (Unique Publications, 1986), Tadashi Yamashita

Bo Karate: Weapon of Self-Defense (Ohara Publications, 1989), Fumio Demura

Bokken: Art of the Japanese Sword (Ohara Publications, 1985), Dave Lowry

Fighting With Sticks

142

The Book of the Sword (Dover Books, 1987; reprint: original edition, 1884), Richard F. Burton

The Craft of Stickmaking (Crowood Press, 1992), Leo Gowan

The Encyclopedia of the Sword (Greenwood Press, 1995), Nick Evangelista

Fatal Flute and Stick Forms: Wah hum Kung Fu (Unique Publications, 1985), Pio Chan

The Filipino Martial Arts (Know Now Publishing, 1980), Dan Inosanto, Gilbert L. Johnson, and George Foon

Filipino Martial Arts: Cabales Serrada Escrima (Charles E. Tuttle, 1994), Mark V. Wiley

Jo, the Japanese Short Staff (Unique Publications, 1985), Don Zier

The Martial Spirit (Overlook Press, 1977), Herman Kauz

Martini A-Z of Fencing (Queen Anne Press, 1992), E.D. Morton

Modern Arnis: Filipino Art of Stick Fighting (Ohara Publications, 1983), Remy A. Presas

Ninja Warrior: Bojutsu Defense Techniques (Contemporary Books, 1987), Jack Hoban

Ninjutsu, History and Tradition (Unique Publications, 1981), Dr. Massaki Hatsumi

Pananandata Yantock at Daga (Paladin Press, 1988), Amante P. Marinas

Schools and Masters of Fence (Shumway, 1969; reprint: original edition, 1885), Egerton Castle

Chapter Twenty Three
Selected Reading List
143

The Science of Fencing (Laureate Press, 1997), William Gaugler

The Secret History of the Sword (Hammerterz Verlag, 1996), J. Christoph Amberger

The Secret History of the Sword (Hammerterz Verlag, 1997; enlarged from previous volume bearing same title), J. Christoph Amberger

Stick Fighting (Kodansha, 1981), Massaki Hatsumi and Quintin Chambers

Stick Fighting: Self-Defense (Thor Publishing Company, 1972), Bruce Tegner

Stick Fighting: Short Forms (Thor Publishing Company, 1982), Bruce Tegner

The Sword and the Centuries (Barnes and Noble, 1995; reprint: original edition, 1901), Alfred Hutton

T'ai Chi Ch'uan For Health and Self Defense (Vintage Books, 1977), Master T.T. Liang

Techniques with Thirty-Six Inch Baton: Modern Methods Made Easy (Charles C. Thomas Publishing, 1983), George M. Pekar

This is Kendo (Charles E. Tuttle. 1984), Junzo Sasamori and Gordon Warner

Chapter Twenty Four Fighting With Sticks In The Movies

You may not realize it, but stick fighting — whether with staff or wooden sword — has its place in the movies. The following is a sample listing of films in which fighting with sticks, in one form or another, has played a role.

- The Adventures of Robin Hood*, (1938), Errol Flynn
Lassie Comes Home, (1943), Roddy McDowell
Seven Samurai, (1954), Toshiro Mifune
Samurai III, (1955), Toshiro Mifune
Sodom and Gomorrah, (1962), Stewart Granger
You Only Live Twice, (1967), Sean Connery
Zatuichi, (1968), Shintaro Katsu
Enter the Dragon, (1973), Bruce Lee
Game of Death, (1978), Bruce Lee
Circle of Iron, (1979), David Carradine

Fighting With Sticks

146

Escape From New York, (1981), Kurt Russell

Lethal Weapon, (1989), Mel Gibson

Stick Fighter, (1989), Dean Stockwell

Blind Fury (1989), Rutger Hauer

Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, (1991), Kevin Costner

Jackie Chan's First Strike, (1997), Jackie Chan

Afterword

As has happened with every book I've written so far, this is not the book I intended to write. The book I had in mind was much smaller, less encompassing, less detailed. But, as often happens, a book in progress takes on a life of its own, making demands you never thought of. One topic opens up another opens up another opens up another, and so on, until at last you have what you intended to write about without knowing it. That, I guess, is the nature of many writing projects.

I am pleased with this book. It covers a lot of material, embraces a number of concepts, without being overly wordy or complex. This book is meant to be used, to be a starting point for some sort of personal growth. Too, if it helps even one individual avoid an assault on their person, it will have been a worthwhile endeavor.

Appendix

Fighting Terminology

The following is a list of swordfighting terms you may encounter when learning to operate a sword — wooden or otherwise. Some will apply directly to your singlestick or cane training. Others will merely enhance your understanding of swordfighting, fencing, and stick fighting.

Fencing

Advance: Step forward (toward one's opponent).

Attack: An attempt to hit one's opponent with one's weapon.

Back Foot: Foot farthest away from one's opponent.

Beat: Knocking away an opponent's blade offensively.

Blade: The striking portion of one's weapon.

Change: To change lines.

Composed Attack: An attack made up of a feint of an attack and an evasion of a parry.

Fighting With Sticks

150

Conventions: Rules.

Coule: A simple attack running along an opponent's blade (means "running").

Counterparry: A circular parry.

Coupe: A simple attack from one line to another line passing over the top of an opponent's blade (means "cut-over").

Cut: Attacking with the side (cutting edge) of a sword blade.

Deception: Dodging an opponent's parry with one's blade.

Disengage: An attack from one line to another passing beneath an opponent's blade (means "to pull away").

Distance: The measured area that separates one from one's opponent.

Double: A composed attack comprising a feint of disengagement and a deception of one counterparry.

Engagement: Blade together, touching or very close.

Epee: The dueling sword of fencing. Teaches the concepts and techniques required in a real sword fight. A point weapon. The target area includes the entire body.

Extension: A completely straight sword arm.

Feint: A fake attack (executed without a lunge). Made to startle or misdirect an opponent; to refocus his attention where it will do him the least amount of good; or to simply find out how he plans to defend himself. When speaking specifically of the composed attack, the feint is employed to induce an opponent to defend in a particular direction so that this parry may be taken advantage of (i.e., evaded).

Appendix
Fighting Terminology
151

Foible: The weakest portion of a sword blade (closest to the tip).

Foil: The beginning weapon of fencing. Teaches both the fundamentals of swordplay and self-discipline. A point weapon. The target area is the trunk of the body.

Forte: The strong portion of a blade (closest to the hand guard).

Free Hand: Hand not holding one's sword.

Front Foot: Foot closest to one's opponent.

Glove: Glove for the sword hand.

Grip: The handle of a sword. In French: "poignee."

Guard: The hand-protecting portion of a sword.

High Line: The two quarters above the sword hand.

Hilt: The entire lower portion of the sword, including the hand guard, the grip, and the pommel.

Inside Line: The two quarters, high and low, closest to one's chest. Basically, to the left of a right-hander's blade, or to the right of a left-hander's blade.

Jacket: A fencing jacket, usually padded for protection (made of either canvas or nylon).

Knickers: Knee-length fencing pants.

Lateral Parry: A parry that moves in a straight direction.

Lines: In general terms, the four separate and distinct sections into which the body is divided (high, low, inside, and outside).

Fighting With Sticks

152

Lunge: The fencing action — a movement employing a forward push from the rear leg — that propels an attack forward from the on guard position.

Low Line: The two quarters below the sword hand.

Mask: A protective fencing helmet.

Moulinet: A sweeping, windmill-like action made with one's sword blade; sometimes called a circular cut or parry.

Non-Conventional: Without rules.

Off Target: An attack that has landed outside the prescribed valid target area.

One-Two: A composed attack comprising of feint of disengage and a deception of one lateral parry.

On Guard: A position of readiness in fencing.

On Target: An attack that has landed in or on the prescribed valid target area.

Outside Line: The two quarters, high and low, closest to one's back. Basically, to the right of a right-hander's blade, or to the left of a left-hander's blade.

Parry: To block an attacking weapon with one's own (always defensive).

Point: The tip of a sword blade.

Pommel: A heavy nut at the bottom of a sword guard that both keeps a sword blade tight in its setting and acts as a counterweight to a sword's blade.

Pronation: Sword hand is palm down.

Retreat: Step backward (away from one's opponent).

Appendix
Fighting Terminology
153

Riposte: A counterattack following a parry.

Sabre: Of military origins. Combines both the cutting edge and the point (the cut and the thrust). The target area includes everything from the waist up.

Simple Attack: An attack made up entirely of timing and speed that lands before one's opponent can make a successful parry.

Simultaneous Touch: To hit at the same moment as one's opponent.

Supination: Sword hand is palm up.

Stop Thrust: Extending one's blade directly into an opponent's attack. A counterattack.

Sword Hand: Hand holding one's sword.

Target Area: The prescribed area for hitting with one's sword. Modern fencing makes a further distinction depending on whether the sword hand is in supination or pronation.

Timing: The body and blade rhythm employed when attacking.

Thrust: Extending one's sword arm toward one's opponent offensively.

Touch: Hitting one's opponent. Also, "touche."

Kendo

Ateru: To hit, strike, score a point.

Ato-Uchi: A delayed blow or a jab, almost like a feint.

Bogu: Kendo armor.

Fighting With Sticks

154

Budo: Chivalry.

Chikara: Strength.

Debana-Waza: Attacking-at-the-start technique.

Do: Trunk of body; also, chest armor.

Dojo: Fencing hall.

Fumu: To Step.

Furu: To raise and lower shinai.

Gedan No Kamae: Shinai held lower than waist, with point towards floor.

Hai: Yes.

Hansoku: Violation.

Hara: Abdomen.

Harai-Waza: Warding off technique.

Harau: To parry.

Hashiru: To run.

Hasso No Kamae: Shinai held vertically with both hands at right side of the head and at shoulder level.

Hidari-Do: A blow to left side of do.

Hidari-Jodan-Men: Blow to left side of men.

Hidari-Kote: Blow to left side of kote.

Hiki-Waza: Stepping-back technique.

Jodan No Kamae: Shinai held above head with one or both hands; or held in front with either right or left hand.

Appendix
Fighting Terminology
155

Kaeshi-Waza: Technique of receiving an opponent's cut and deflecting it with the reflexive power on one's shinai.

Kata: Exercises used to build form.

Katate-Waza: Any single-handed technique.

Keikogi: Kendo jacket.

Kissaki: Point of a shinai.

Kote: Kendo glove.

Maai: Distance between two opponents.

Matsu: To wait.

Mawaru: To turn around.

Men: Mask.

Metsuki: Point of observation.

Migi-Do: Blow on right side of the do.

Migi-Kote: Blow on the right kote.

Migi-Men: Blow on right side of the men.

Mune: Chest.

Nidan-Waza: Two-step technique.

Nuki-Waza: Luring an opponent to make a cut and then dodging.

Nuku: To draw shinai or sword.

Oji-Waza: Defense plus counterattack technique.

Osu: To push or shove.

Rei: To bow.

Fighting With Sticks

156

Sagaru: To retreat.

Sandan-Waza: Three-step technique.

Sasu: To thrust a sword or shinai forward.

Shikaka-Waza: Technique of delivering a cut when an opponent is off guard.

Shinai: Bamboo sword of kendo.

Shizentai: Natural standing position.

Sonkyo: Crouch position.

Tai-Atari: Body contact.

Tare: Waist armor.

Tsuba: Handguard of shinai or sword.

Uchiotoshi-Waza: Technique of striking opponent's shinai downward and taking advantage of his unbalanced posture.

Ukeru: To block a blow.

Ukedachi: Counterattack.

Utsu: To hit.

Wakigamae: Method of holding shinai horizontal and extended at either side of body.

Waza: Form or proper technique.

Yokomen: A blow to the side of the head just above the ear.

Yoru: To come closer.

Appendix
Fighting Terminology
157

Kali/Arnis/Escrima

Abierta: A fighting technique whereby a fighter dances about to avoid his opponent's strikes, rather than parrying with a weapon.

Cinco Teros: Called "five cardinal blows." Patterned around four areas divided by an "X," plus a dot in the center signifying thrusts.

De Cadena: Described as "chain-like" movement; that is, movements are connected, one flowing easily into the next.

Fondo Fuerte: Non-retreating style. Devised for situations where time is of the essence, especially when retreating is impossible.

Largo Mano: Meaning "long hand." So called when a 30-inch stick or blade is used with various tactics.

Lastico: "Rubberband" style, characterized by a forward sway followed by a backward snap that goes along with every strike.

Numerado: An in-fighting style of combat.

Orascion: Mediation.

Repeticion: Continuous, repeating attacks that don't let up, wearing an opponent down physically and mentally.

Riterado: "Retreating" style. It was designed to give a fighter time to study his opponent.

Serada: Lock and thrust method. Each opposing offensive stroke is met with a block (a check with one's stick to lock the adversary's position) and a thrust with the free hand which carries a second stick or dagger. These move forward continually; there is no retreating.

Sumbrada: A fast-paced style that teaches one to counter-attack with the same action with which one is being attacked.

Errol Flynn, Bruce Lee and Sean Connery did it. So did Medieval swordsmen and African warriors who wielded their oars as weapons. It's the ancient art of stick fighting, revered and explained in the pages of this book.

Author Nick Evangelista shows the reader how to use stick fighting for fun and self-defense. It doesn't matter if you're flaunting a foil or gripping a dowel from the hardware store — the techniques in this book teach you how to wield the stick with grace, power, and optimum effectiveness.

You'll learn the comprehensive history of the stick and all its forms: shepherd's crook, wooden swords, canes and foils are just a few. Detailed lists provide places where you can find special equipment and organizations. The step-by-step approach makes stick fighting safe and fun. In this book, you'll find:

- How to play variations of the singlestick game
- The proper way to hold your body and your stick for games and real-life combat situations
- How to make canes, walking sticks and singlesticks
- Sportsmanship and attire for the stick-fighting realm

Why sticks? Because they're handy, easy to operate, and don't require ammunition or a license. And in the event of a societal breakdown or nuclear holocaust, you'd still be able to find a stick — and use it.

\$15.00

