

SIX MARTIAL ARTS MYTHS ABOUT KNIFE DEFENSES

by Ted Truscott

Myth 1: The knifer will square off with you, giving you time to assess his style, plan your moves and just plain get ready.

Reality 1: An experienced knifer will not show his blade to you or anyone else before he tries to bury it in your gut. He is trying to murder you and will not advertise the fact. Most martial arts and military styles of knife work were developed in a lawless society or where the soldier was the law. Today's reality is that cutting someone is illegal and the knife work that has come out of the North American prisons reflects that reality. The ambush and the sucker strike are here to stay.

The person who waves his knife in your face wants something from you: your fear, your money or for you to leave him alone. In this situation you will have a martial arts response available, but if you like to wander on those parts of the map where it says "dragons be here" you'd better have a reflexive response ready for the ambush.

Myth 2: After he shows you his knife and his intent, the knifer will use the knife like a long-range weapon: i.e. he will hold it in his forward hand and lunge into a slash. Or, he will thrust with full body movement, extending his knife hand as he moves with a major body part (read: a killing blow) as his target.

Reality 2: Let alone the fact that it is pretty hard for a knifer to keep his intentions to kill you a secret with a full driving lunge attack, none of the Oriental martial arts knife work I've been involved with have taught this approach to killing; they are notorious for slicing and dicing before they finish (this includes Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Filipino styles). Even the military styles are taught to cut their way in and to cut their way back out--taking all targets of opportunity on their way. American prison style of shanking with only the point (no edge) does not usually drive in this way either.

The full body, lunging style of attack seems to be a movie style that

was developed to be able to picture what was happening on the screen to the best advantage, and has been pictured a thousand times in the "Do it this way(and die)," rags [martial arts magazines].

Where you may see this is in the ambush or surprise attack, where the extra distance is seen by the attacker as a safety zone. This may be used by someone who is feeling secure that he is not going to be seen or who is too enraged to care. When the knifer combines the ambush with a lunge attack, using strongest-weapon-to-major-target principle, the victim (you) is surprised, caught off balance, not in fight mode and very vulnerable. Therefore, your training must include defences from surprise lunge attacks. But, due to the fact that other types of attacks are possible and even more probable, especially if you are being confronted with a knifer who wants to hide his stuff, training against the other types of attacks must be learned and drilled.

Myth 3: The myth of the frozen hand. This is actually two myths because it can apply to both the knife hand and to the attacker's free hand. It means that once you have blocked his knife hand, he either leaves it out there for you to ju jitsu all over, or he does not involve his free hand at all.

Reality 3: The knife you block will cut its way back out of your reach as fast as it came in, it will twirl and cut up your forearm, it will "tip-rip" your forearm or his other hand will tear out an eye or give you a thought provoking shot in the throat.

I was taught three principles of Oriental knife work:

- * hypnotise with the blade, kill with the free hand
- * flash the knife to get a defensive block up then cut it
- * starting with the closest target, cut your way in, then cut your way back out, wait for blood loss and shock

As for the prison style attacks, it is much more direct with less flash and slash without the disadvantages of the lunge attack. It depends upon the proper use of the free hand to catch and pull the victim in close where the knife can be used "discretely."

Myth 4: "You get close to fight a knife;" or "You must rush a knife."

Reality 4: The knife is a short range weapon and if you choose to fight

in its range the chances are you will lose, for sure you will get cut. Unless you must fight the knife, you should stay away and fight from long range with long-range weapons, like chairs, garbage cans and thrown objects. It doesn't matter if the bad guy is trained or not, he must get close to you to cut you, and once he is close, he can cut you.

There is no power needed for cutting -- the knife has all the power. All the knifer provides is a delivery system and the knife can come in at incredibly high speed with erratic motions. Do you really want to walk into a blender?

Myth 5: "You can take a cut while you kill him," or, "While he's cutting me, I'll be killing him."

Reality 5: The one-shot kill is so hard to pull off on a fresh and committed opponent that you can't count on it, as the No Holds Barred fighting has proven. Of course it's available but if it fails you are in deep doodoo while you are inside his range, cut and in shock. This is not where you want to be.

The problem of shock relates to the body's natural dismay at being invaded by a foreign object; it has nothing to do with how tough you are... a deep cut in a minor place like the forearm may stop you in your tracks due to physiological responses outside your control.

I have heard about a teacher who gets his students to relax, knocks the wind out of them and then forces them to defend themselves. That is a bit of what the shock will be like. The shock of the cut on your forearm may give him the opportunity to sink his putt in your gut.

Sacrificing an arm to avoid a kill shot to the throat is a smart move, but don't intentionally take a cut just to set up your own shot, no matter how many others have successfully done it.

Myth 6: If you are good at sparring, you are ready for fighting.

Reality 6: Sparring is a game that is safe and no matter how good you get, it isn't fighting. It will teach you balance, movement, range and openings, but it will not prepare you to face death, adrenaline dumps and brutality.

A criminal who is seriously trying to kill you with a knife will not

spar or look for openings and fake you out--his psychology is totally different. He has no fear because he has made himself invincible with his weapon and previous successes, and he wants it over fast so he can escape the attention of the police. He charges in with no apparent regard for his own safety so as to overwhelm his victim.

If he starts waving his knife around and sparring, you are lucky. Now you have time to run to get a distance weapon, or just to get out of Dodge!