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SELF-D

by Frank Dux

"But what if he has a knife? . . ."

This is the question that comes up, sooner or later, when a person considers the reality of self-defense on the street. And unfortunately, most thugs and muggers aren't looking for a fair fight.

Although it is true that a blade is a deadly weapon in the hands of an experienced knife fighter, there are some tactics and concepts that could save your life when threatened with a knife. Author Frank Dux gained his expertise in blade fighting in actual military combat and has consented to sharing some of what he learned with BLACK BELT.

Historically, the knife has been readily drawn during a hand-to-hand confrontation. Since its discovery, it has served as a primary tool for survival, regardless of circumstances. One of the assets of the knife is purely psychological: In the hands of a professional, it automatically injects a deadly lethality to his capabilities. To his enemy, the knife presents a terrifying specter that is amplified by visions of the possibilities of maiming, or even death.

In order to develop a real ability to defend against a knife attack, one must understand the knife—its capabilities and the variances in its application. Without this insight, one cannot begin to develop functional and efficient techniques or strategy for self-defense.

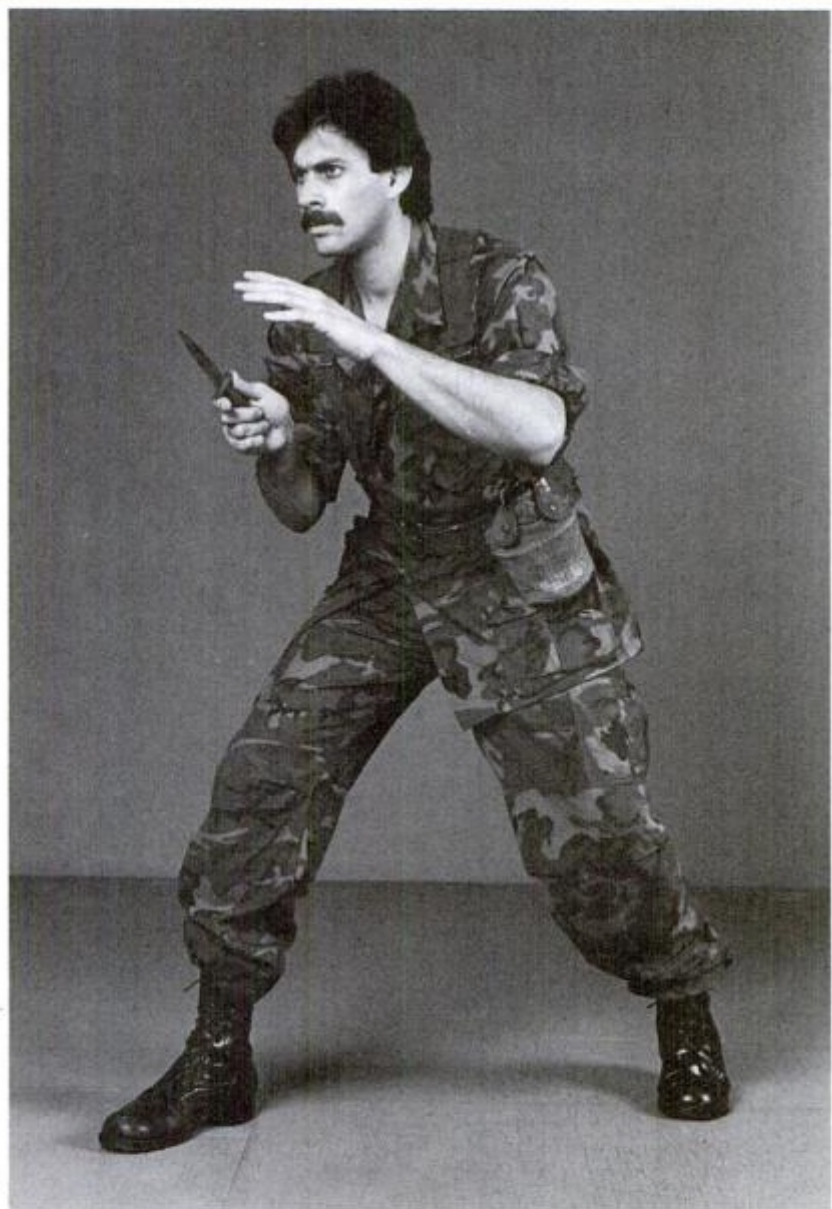
Although each kind of blade has its own characteristics, there is a common property that they all share: The weapon is an extension of the hand. This means that an attacker armed with a

WRONG: The amateur stands flat-footed, weight high, knees locked, attention focused high, with blade exposed and held carelessly, away from the body.



AGAINST

DEFENSE



knife is likely to have a longer reach than the defender, although that may depend on how the blade is held.

There are two common methods of holding the knife, either "outside" or "inside." These different grips call for different ways of attacking, and consequently, different defenses. The "outside" grip (see illustration) resembles a fencer's forward position, which allows him to use slashing and lunging techniques. If he is an expert, he will use a figure-eight motion combined with darting thrusts.

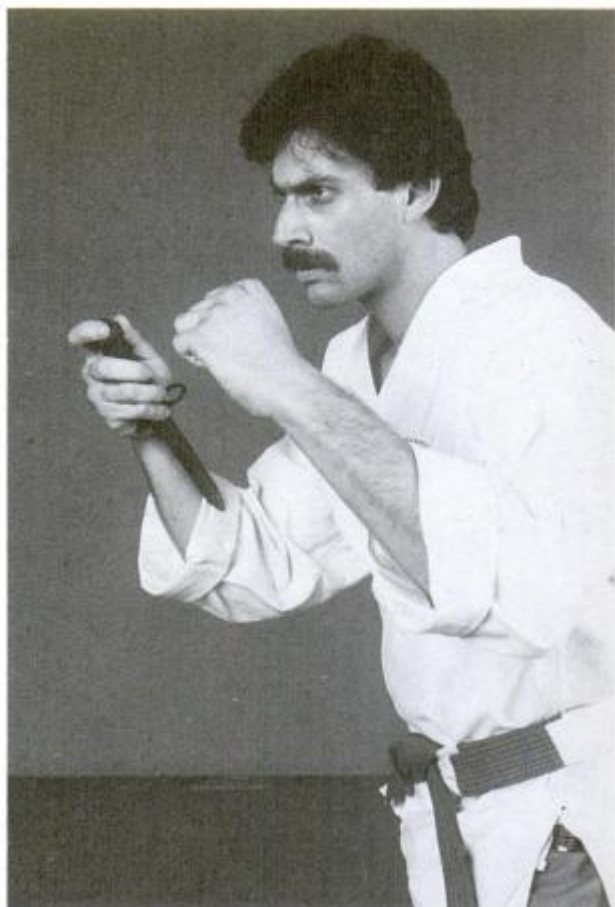
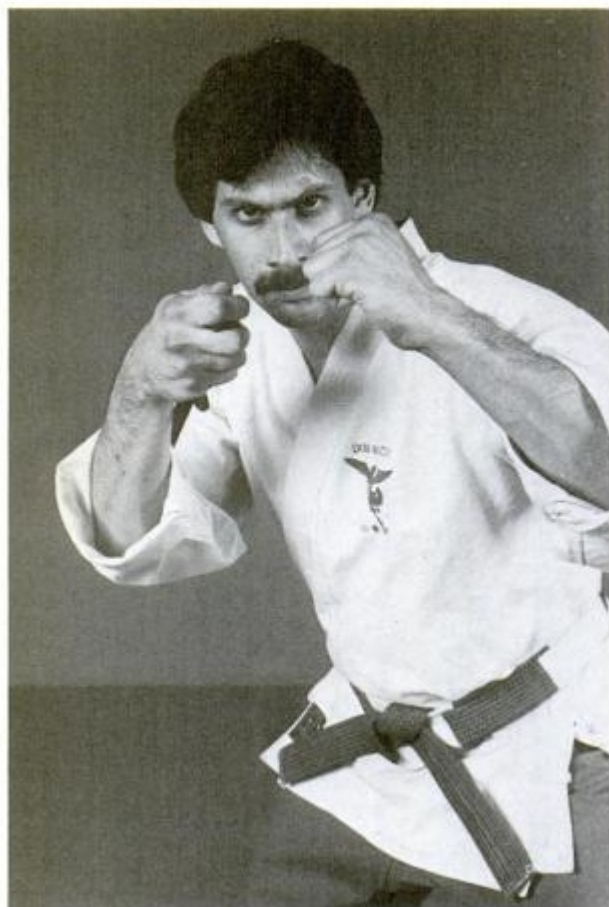
The "inside" grip (see illustration) uses an almost icepick-like grasp on the knife and is the most difficult to defend against. The expert using this kind of grip can stay on the defensive and, with a quick twist of the hips, explode with ripping power when a block or counter is attempted.

The factors to consider when defending yourself from a knife attack include being able to identify the amateur from the expert, recognizing his strategy, and remaining calm enough to use strikes and counters.

If the assailant is an expert with a knife, chances are that he will take a stance that will keep the knife hidden until the last second, or until an opening in your defense is spotted. The expert will stay low with his knees bent, hide the blade with his lead hand—which will be kept in close—and his attention will be focused low or to the center of your body. The amateur will stand flatfooted with his weight high, expose the blade prematurely, and focus his attention high. The amateur will not be able to spring from his stance; the expert will.

RIGHT: The expert stays low, knees bent, attention focused low with blade hidden by lead hand. Expert can spring quickly—amateur cannot.

KNIVES



An aggressive attacker, if he knows what he is doing, is likely to try sweeps and kicks to your legs, and to use his lead hand to draw out a counter that will be followed by a slash or lunge with the blade. The targets the expert looks for are the eyes, throat, abdominal area and any extended limbs, but the target he chooses will depend on your reactions.

It is important to have some understanding of what to expect, because it is then possible to consider some techniques useful when facing a knife attack. First, remember to stay calm, and think in terms of openings and weaknesses in your opponent's defense. Evaluate the situation and *don't panic*. Do not concentrate solely on the knife—a skilled attacker can mesmerize with a few wild fakes and broad slashes, then follow with a swift, short thrust directly at you.

The first and simplest method of avoiding an attack is to utilize evasion—run! Unless you are familiar with and skilled at drawing techniques (in which you pretend to withdraw and which creates a momentary opening when the attacker tries to get to you), then turn and run. To do otherwise could be a big

mistake, and remember, man was not meant to run backwards.

If it is not possible to evade your attacker, try to put a barrier between yourself and him. A barstool, chair or metal trash can lid are possibilities, and if they aren't available, look for a bottle, stick or crowbar to arm yourself with.

Try to distract your opponent before he can initiate his attack. Spit in your attacker's face, throw rocks or sand at the eyes, or yell or stamp your feet to break his concentration. Then carry out your plan.

Aside from running, there are two strategies that can work against a knife: blocking and jamming.

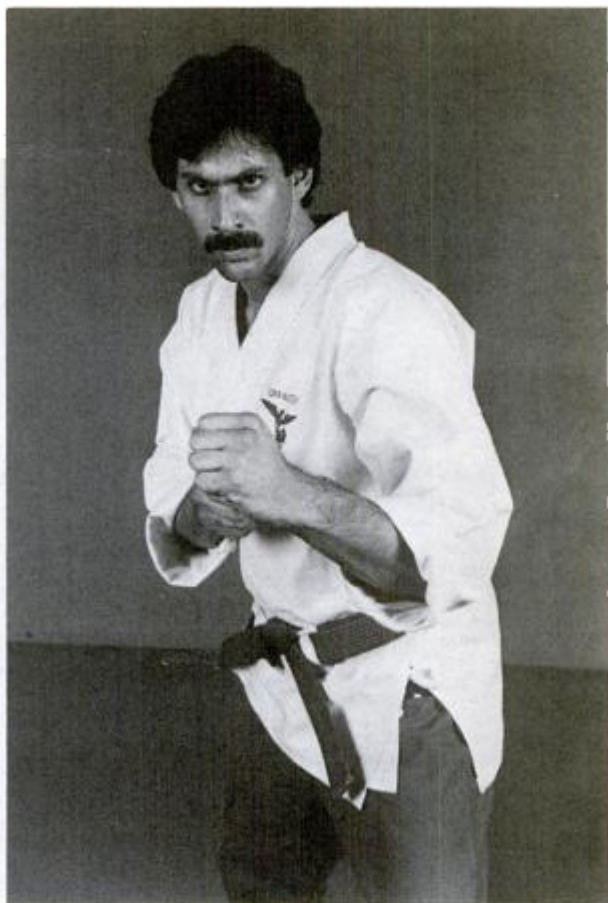
Jamming is accomplished by taking the initiative and attacking first, or stepping inside as he moves toward you, meeting him half way. This can be an extremely effective maneuver in situations when your opponent is off guard, slow, careless or unskilled, and would be best used against someone holding the blade in the outside grip. However, it is important to note that your jamming technique must be swift, powerful and with proper timing. These things can be developed in the dojo using a wooden

The outside grip (opposite page) resembles a fencer's forward position, allowing slashing and thrusting techniques (note how lead arm hides blade). The inside grip (above) is the most difficult to defend against and uses an icepick-like grasp. Again, notice how blade is hidden.

knife.

Blocking is most effective when combined with movement and low kicks. The idea is to throw your opponent's timing and rhythm off by moving laterally and at angles to him, throwing kicks to keep his attention. Bobbing, weaving and shuffling techniques are also useful here, as they can create an opening to use a sharp counter. It could be dangerous to commit yourself to a block if you have not been able to keep your opponent off balance, however. Rather than just blocking, practice and develop your skill at simultaneously throwing a counter to your opponent's vital areas.

A premature block can lead to disaster. The author once worked with a martial artist from South Africa who had prepared a technique of blocking an overhead knife thrust with a high block of the left arm, followed by a punch. Because he knew and relied on only pre-



Tips on throwing

The rules to remember when throwing, especially when throwing in combat situations, spell out the word **BRASS**.

Breathe: Breathing is thought to be the essence of all power. Stabilize your breathing during the preparation of the throw, inhaling deeply through the nose and then cutting the air off in your throat and holding it.

Relax: Let the weapon do the work. Avoid muscling a knife with too much force so that it either flies too high, too low, or totally off-target. If you are too tense, you will lose the ability to concentrate and are likely to overcompensate.

Aim: This is best understood in terms of visualization. When preparing to throw, imagine a smaller target within your target. For example, when throwing a weapon at a man-sized target, do not aim at his chest, but at a

buttonhole at chest level. Suddenly you will find that your actual target will seem infinitely bigger.

Set: This is the most common cause of inaccuracy. Nothing can be accomplished without a strong foundation—form and footwork must be consistently perfect. When throwing a weapon, if you jerk in your movements, so will the knife. Finish like a rock—solid and immobile.

Sling: This applies to the moment of release. Do it with ease; avoid whipping the weapon with the wrist. Instead, use the whole arm, as in tennis. Imagine a baseball pitcher using his entire body, driving the power up from his toes through the center of his body. Making a twisting, thrusting motion with your hips will extend the power. Remember; form, not muscle.

During an actual confrontation, the knife would probably be thrown at a three-to-twelve foot distance from the target. The distance is based on the

choke on the blade and the way you choose to throw. A direct overhand throw, like a baseball pitcher, is best for long distance. An underhand throw, which will cause the blade to rise as it travels, is very accurate at short range. A sidearm throw, which will cause the blade to drop somewhat, is best thrown at the legs or thighs—when your opponent is in a front stance, for example. The choke on the blade affects the rotation—the more you choke up, the quicker the blade will rotate. Practice will tell you where to hold the blade; everyone throws differently.

One final word—learn on a sturdy blade, like a bayonet. It is not true that you need a balanced blade to learn to throw, and besides, you may not have access to a balanced blade when you need it. It's like learning to drive a big car—if you can learn on that, then a smaller car will seem that much easier.

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Jamming technique (left to right, top to bottom) begins by quickly stepping inside of attacker as he moves forward. Knife wielding forearm is trapped and bent back, using left arm as a fulcrum. As right knee is delivered to the midsection, attacker is thrown on his back.

your attacker's intentions.

One last warning. During a confrontation, there is the constant risk of losing your space. Many martial artists have been cut because they have run out of space, finding themselves bumping into and off walls or fatally cornered. Look for a way out early in a dangerous situation, and do whatever is necessary to avoid being cornered.

Regardless of what plan you choose or may be forced to attempt, remember that there is only one rule—that there are no rules. Survival is the name of the game and the only way to survive depends on your ability to remain calm and use your training and instincts decisively, swiftly and accurately. ✕

Frank Dux is a former consultant to the armed forces who has trained military units in blade use, and who has used—and been decorated for—his blade fighting techniques in actual combat in Southeast Asia.