



**A Sudden Impending Attack**

## **Defensive Knives for Urban Environments – Part II**

### **A Sobering Analysis of Safe Knife Grips**

We're all familiar with esoteric and flashy knife grips in the movies, unbelievably, these fantasy grips are actually taught by many Southeast Asian Martial art groups as well as Western knife stylists. These grips often include placing the thumb on top of the spine of the knife and more often, keeping one or more fingers off the handle.

### **"Ministry of Silly Knife Grips."**

Just because your teacher and your teacher's teacher have enshrined these fantasy grips doesn't mean they are safe. The human hand is biomechanically designed to grip with all fingers for maximum strength and control - extending fingers or placing thumbs on the top of blades works against our natural grip mechanics and creates serious injury risks. It's more important and practical to use safe grip positions over

flashy Hollywood depictions. (Note: I am referring to compact knives, not large knives or swords).

Medical research as well as anecdotal evidence from EMTs and law enforcement regarding finding severed fingers on the ground after gang fights are a stark reminder that what looks dramatic in movies can have catastrophic real-world consequences.

A common issue in martial arts and self-defense is the difference between highly controlled training environments with skilled practitioners versus real-world applications under stress. What might work for a highly skilled practitioner with decades of training and perfect technique may not be appropriate for most people, especially in high-stress situations where fine motor control deteriorates.

The two safe grips for compact knives (standard-forward and reverse) both with full-hand purchase, it makes perfect sense from both a biomechanical and practical safety standpoint. It prioritizes weapon retention, injury prevention, and reliability over stylistic considerations.

This kind of reality-based analysis, backed by actual field experience from first responders is invaluable for cutting through the myths and misconceptions that surround knife techniques.

*See the full study on this topic in a 2-part article in the following links:*

<https://defensescience.com/training/knife-grip-properly-hold-knife-self-defense-military-applications-part/>

Part II

<https://defensescience.com/training/knife-grip-part-ii/>

## Targeting + Tactics - Slashing vs. Stabbing

\*The Goal = Stop and Shut Down a Life-Threatening Attack

Slashing someone with a compact knife is the least effective way to stop an attacker immediately. Most victims of slashing attacks survive.



Inasmuch as stabbing has a far greater chance of stopping an attacker (with a compact knife) it really depends on where you target.

It's been endlessly verified that individuals can still fight effectively even after sustaining what would seem like devastating wounds. Adrenaline, shock, and simple determination can keep someone functioning for a few minutes or even longer after severe trauma. Military surgeons from the American Civil War and the Napoleonic Wars documented a large number of soldiers continuing to fight effectively even after being stabbed through the body. Historically, in war, the most effective targets have always been the heart and lungs.

So, why do some knife instructors teach stabbing and slashing an attacker dozens of times all over their body if only one targeted stab would do the trick? 1. Because they really don't know, 2. They lack an

understanding of legal proportionality principles, 3. they're creating dramatic displays to attract new students rather than teaching practical defensive skills.

\*Reviewing the fallacy and overconfidence of stopping power...

### **The Dubious Quick Kill**

[http://realfighting.com/dubious\\_quick\\_kill\\_part\\_1.php](http://realfighting.com/dubious_quick_kill_part_1.php)

### **A Crucial Consideration**

*Whether you are defending yourself with a gun or a knife it should be viewed as a tool to create an opportunity to escape rather than to definitively "stop" an attacker. The psychological deterrent effect is often more reliable than the physical stopping power.*

### **\*Legal Issues**

#### **Understanding Proportional Response with Weapons**

When examining self-defense instruction, there's an important distinction between what's legally defensible and what some training videos demonstrate. Effective self-defense focuses on stopping an immediate threat with the minimum force necessary.

#### **Legal Considerations**

Self-defense law generally supports using reasonable force to stop an imminent threat. A defender who stops once the threat is neutralized typically acts within legal bounds. However, continuing to strike after an attacker is incapacitated has crossed the Rubicon.

## **The Legal Risk**

Multiple wounds inflicted after initial incapacitation often cannot be justified as self-defense. Prosecutors may argue that subsequent strikes constitute assault or worse, since the defender was no longer protecting themselves but attacking someone already disabled.

## **Key Principles**

Effective self-defense training should emphasize stopping the threat efficiently while remaining within legal and ethical boundaries. The goal is - escape to safety, not retaliation. This distinction is crucial for anyone studying personal protection - understanding both the physical and legal aspects of defensive action.

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## **Questions and Answers**

Most asked questions from students over the years...

### **Can a Knife be Taken Away from You and Used Against You?**

This is the biggest myth of all time propagated by the media. We have all used knives since childhood to cut food, but with the proper mindset and training, no one can easily take your knife from you.

### **Is Dueling Still Practiced?**

The last official duels were in the 1880's. Are there duels today? Not likely however, when someone is attacking you with an edged weapon, and you draw your knife to defend yourself, it's not a duel - it's survival.

## **Are Compact Knives with Serrations Better?**

Not on a small knife, if the serrations can catch onto a piece of clothing like a jacket or coat there is a good chance the knife will be ripped out of your hand.

## **What About Belt Knives?**

Inasmuch as belt-knives are popular, they are also easy to spot. I have heard several stories where individuals protecting themselves from violent attackers with belt knives were sentenced to serious prison time because the wearing of a belt knife indicated planning and intent. (according to prosecutors and judges).



## **Are There Knives I Can Draw Quickly?**

Yes, Emerson Knives created the “Wave,” Several companies are using it including: Kershaw and Spyderco (pic above). Spyderco features 4 knives that look similar but have different blade lengths: blade lengths – Dragonfly (2-3/8”), Delica (3”), Endela (3.5”) and Endura (3.75”). I favor both the Delica and Endela with the Wave opening feature, they don’t look threatening, the blades are small but can still punch above weight.

**\*Video Demo** - Emerson Opener FRN Folding Knife, VG-10 Blade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0o4cYU4OGk&t=26s>

## **Should you Ever Train with Live Blades**

Only if you are **REALLY STUPID** - the word “accident” is in the dictionary for a reason. I have heard about several tragic accidents in training sessions and seminars using live blades.



## **Should you Ever Use a Kerambit for Self-Defense?**

Not unless you enjoy being vilified as a mad killer! Never ever carry a kerambit. In SE Asia the kerambit is considered a weapon of assassins – the weapon of vile murderers. It’s vicious, it looks like a large claw it can have a blade of up to 6”. The goal is to disembowel the victim and/or rip apart their throat. Many SE Asian police have told me directly that they would shoot anyone approaching them with one – On Sight. Use one in Europe or the U.S. and every member of a jury will vote to imprison you for life... but train with it for your own knowledge.



## **Are Balisongs Legal?**

We're all familiar with the balisong (butterfly knife) having seen dozens of theatrical flipping moves in the movies. In reality, the knife is opened with both hands. The purpose of the twin handles is to keep the user safe while carrying it concealed. It's actually much faster to draw a straight blade than use a balisong.

Contrary to popular opinion, the balisong did not originate in the Philippines, the story is it came from French sailors who used it as a tool around the 1700's. It made its way to Spain and eventually to the Filipinos who perfected it. Batangas became the center of balisong manufacturing, and the hotbed of its use was from Batangas to Manila.

The balisongs are classified as prohibited weapons in many U.S. states - they are often cited alongside nunchuck's, brass knuckles and switchblade laws as examples of weapons legislation driven more by cultural fears than by objective danger assessment. Check with your state laws before carrying one.

### **Can I Travel with a Knife?**

Before 911, but not now. In addition, never enter any government buildings with a knife. It will be taken from you. If you enter any government building with several knives, it's likely you will be arrested.

### **Should you Learn Stick Fighting Before Training with a Knife?**

If you had all the time in the world, sure. I don't teach it for several reasons. 1. Individuals that come to me for knife training come in for a few days at a time, they only want to focus on the knife, 2. Much of FMAs deals with slashing with a longer weapon – slashing someone



with a compact knife will not cause any debilitating wounds that stop the attack; someone wearing heavy clothing – even less so.

### **Can I Defend Myself Without a Knife?**

Against a determined knife attack there are a few options:

1. A handgun, or 2. A hardwood stick. OC spray and/or tasers are not reliable. I Personally carry a short (15”) stick made of oak. I can draw it from my attaché briefcase quickly. I use the bayonet grip, left palm up, right palm down. I can intercept strikes and strike back.

\*Note – For obvious reasons - if you are in a foreign country, it's far better to use a stick than to defend yourself with a knife.

### **Is Fencing a Good Foundation for Knife Work?**

Absolutely, 102%. Some of the most skilled knife instructors I have known have a fencing background. In fencing, *distance* and *measure* are fundamental tactical concepts that determine when and how attacks can be executed effectively.

#### ***Distance***

Refers to the physical space between two fencers and is typically categorized into several ranges: out of distance, long distance, medium distance, close distance and infighting distance.

#### ***Measure***

Changes constantly as fencers move and controlling it is a key strategic element. A skilled fencer will try to stay just outside their opponent's measure while keeping their opponent within their own attacking range. Even though the knife is a completely different weapon than the longer sword or machete – the fundamentals still apply.

## **Should I Carry a knife Even if you Carry a Handgun?**

Absolutely, a knife can always be drawn faster than a handgun, especially with quickdraw mechanisms. It can also act as a backup weapon if your gun jams. Read about the Tueller Drill.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckz7EmDxhtU>

## **Do I Need Unarmed Skills Even when I'm Carrying a Knife?**

Without question! Basic unarmed skills are necessary to get to your weapon in the event you are suddenly ambushed and unable to draw your weapon immediately.

## **What Companies Produce Good Quality Defensive Knives?**

At one point I had over 100 knives, now I only have half a dozen. There are endless choices, some the top U.S. knife companies include: Spyderco, Benchmade, Cold Steel, CRKT, SOG, Microtech, Emerson, Tops Knives, Mercworx etc. and so many more.

\*I avoid knives made in China especially with their cheap quality liner locks - I have found them unreliable and potentially dangerous.

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*\*Coming Up - Defensive Knives for Urban Environments – PART III*

*\*Handles, Locks, Blade Steel and Blade Types...*