



## Defensive Knives for Urban Environments Part VI

### Less Accessible Knife Training in 2025 - The Full Stories

#### The Tanto - Japan

Japan did not have a knife culture per se for much of samurai history. It was not the weapon of choice in combat. The bow, spear (yari) and the naginata were the samurai's primary battlefield weapons, not the katana. The katana was used when things got close-up and dirty, the wakizashi was a backup weapon and the tanto was more of a utility tool and used for fun things like taking off heads and committing Seppuku.

Additionally the tanto was also considered a weapon for women of the samurai class because of its size and skills required to use it. They used it to protect themselves and their households, especially when men were away at war or on duty. Inasmuch as some tanto were nearly 16" in length, samurai women typically carried a shorter tanto (6"-8") as part of their personal equipment.

## Videos

Tanto Fighting Techniques

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7N97qblWqbk>

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/E1ynl6ieiqE>

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/pjBxot9yGXo>

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## The Modern Tanto Point

The modern tanto point was inspired by the traditional Japanese tanto blade profile, though modern interpretations are typically more angular and geometric than the traditional curved-edge Japanese versions. The angular, chisel-like point concentrates force into a very small area, making it extremely effective for piercing through tough materials including clothing, leather, and other barriers.

The wide, thick point is much less likely to break or bend compared to traditional drop points or clip points when encountering resistance. The geometric design provides excellent tip strength for tactical applications; many defensive and tactical knife manufacturers have adopted tanto points for their designs.

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## Italian Knife Styles

Knife fighting has a long history in Italy; there are several distinct knife fighting traditions. Paranza Corta (Sicilian Knife Fighting) is the traditional knife fighting style of Sicily, still taught by individual masters but not organized in a format suitable for divulgation to the masses. The Sicilian stiletto was a common self-defense weapon and knife duels

being a way to settle disputes. The stiletto dates from the late 15th century and is thought to be a development of the rondel dagger or misericordia, a needle-pointed weapon with a narrow blade designed primarily for thrusting.

Traditional Italian Knife Fighting is still taught in Italy: The most prominent instructors are: Maestro Luciano Trimigno (Apulia/Puglia Region), Giuseppe Trimigno and Maestro Roberto Laura

## Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LbT4weO8xM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKp4cLWCMF4>

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## Spanish Navaja

Spain's most famous knife fighting tradition centers around the *Navaja*, a traditional Spanish folding - fighting and utility knife. Used as a fighting knife, the navaja typically featured a blade length of 400 mm (15") or longer. The navaja was first adopted as a fighting knife by the peoples of Andalusia in southern Spain, including the Spanish gypsies of the day, the Gitanos. In this part of Spain, knife fighting was regularly taught as a skill, often passed down from father to son.

The navaja tradition spread throughout Spanish-speaking territories and colonies, carrying over into Puerto Rico, South America, Mexico, Guam and the Philippines as part of el legado andalusí (the Andalusian legacy, or tradition). Unfortunately, it's extremely difficult to find instruction in this style. One of my former students, a wealthy Russian industrialist was interested in learning this style and hired Spanish nationals –

(detectives) to search major cities in Spain and was unable to locate any formal instruction.

## Videos

[https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Z39\\_LlkWXq8](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Z39_LlkWXq8)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2x7syKi2UUk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EySzJ2F2s2o>

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## The Piper System - South Africa

*\*South Africa (Capetown) and Seminars*

The Piper Knife style is NOT a martial art, it's essentially a South African blade system developed by the "number gangs" (in South African prisons). The goal of the system is to kill, to assassinate. Nigel E. February studied and catalogued the system to teach students how to be aware of its tactics for self-defense.

They say it's an amalgam of Indo-Malaysian Silat, N'guni stick fighting, boxing, and Zulu spear and shield, with Indo-Malaysian Silat coming from skilled slaves taken from Indonesia and Malaysia who were brought to South Africa by the Dutch and British. There are clearly some Spanish movements in the footwork, most likely from the Portuguese and their knife the "Okapi," closely resembles a navaja.

Piper is primarily a point driven ice pick knife grip. The core of the system seems to be rooted in Malaysian Silat. It's emphasis is on deception and concealed movements, like a magician who uses misdirection to manipulate an audience's focus, as in Silat, which

employs subtle movements and false intentions to disguise their true attacks.

The system leverages this misdirection concept by teaching practitioners to mask their genuine intentions through body language, positioning, and preliminary movements that suggest one course of action while preparing for another. Just as a magician's flourishes and gestures serve to hide the mechanics of an illusion. That's not unique, many fencing and knife systems do the same thing. The root of the Piper system is not a martial art, instead it was developed to quickly murder someone. It's good to learn aspects of this system for self-protection – what you don't know can kill you.



### **Okapi Knife**

One of the most popular weapons in the Piper system is the Okapi knife. It's is a ratchet-lock clasp or slip-joint knife originally produced in Germany. The Opaki knife was made in 1902 for export to Germany's colonies in Africa. You can clearly see the heritage from the Spanish navaja. Okapi knives are no longer produced in Germany; in 1988, Okapi South Africa (then trading as All Round Tooling) bought the trademark and tooling and began producing the Okapi line of knives in South Africa.

### **Video links**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyyYyC77cP0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQQwuac1v8g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-isFu-x2hpg>

<https://wartacsystems.com/piper-knife-seminar>

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## **Libre Knife System**

The Libre Knife Fighting System is a modern edged weapon combatives system that originated in the United States. It was developed by Scott Babb, a martial artist and former bouncer with a background in various fighting arts and real-world experience with violence. Libre was created as a response to the perceived shortcomings of traditional martial arts when dealing with real-world knife violence.

The goal was to develop a knife-based system grounded in realistic violence, ambush-style attacks, and fast, brutal efficiency, rather than martial arts traditions. The philosophy "Knife as a force multiplier," focuses on the knife being used for ambush, surprise, or in chaotic close-quarters.

Libre is based on gross motor movements. The system avoids fancy disarms often seen in more traditional or demonstrations. The influences come from Filipino Martial Arts, the Mexican prison knife culture, and a study of real-life surveillance footage, crime reports, and interviews with violent offenders, rather than sparring or sport-based combat.

Libre uses a mix of solo drills, blade sparring, and scenario-based training. It incorporates training blades, but often moves beyond typical “stick sparring” used in FMA to simulate more realistic chaotic confrontations. Emphasis is placed on mindset, deception, and violent intent, not just technique. Critics say it lacks the depth of traditional martial arts; supporters argue “that’s precisely its strength” it’s not a martial art but a combatives methodology.

Their choice of blades include - Small to medium fixed blades, easily concealable, some are double-edged, minimal design for concealment and fast deployment. I can see the Libre system being used on a battlefield, in a prison, or fighting the Hells Angels in a bar, however other than that you might fare better legally with a gun – instead of shredding someone to pieces - that might get you 50 years to life.

## Videos

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XT71Ep4KkLQ>

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## **Systema** (and their not so knife system)

Many people have asked me for a review of Systema’s knife system. Since it’s a core part of the overall style, I’ve decided to address the entire style here. While some people support Systema or try to defend it, I intend to give my blunt and honest opinion without sugarcoating.

Systema (Russian: Система, meaning “The System”) is a Russian martial art and combatives method that emphasizes relaxed movement. It's

known for fluid and awkward movements, focus on breathing, and applications in hand-to-hand combat, knife defense, and gun disarms.

1. Fact - Systema is unrealistic, their videos show people reacting dramatically to minimal movements - falling down, convulsing, or being "controlled" with barely a touch. This looks like choreographed compliance or placebo-driven responses, not real combat. It invites comparisons to “no-touch” martial arts frauds.

2. Fact - there's a lack of resistance or sparring  
Systema places a heavy focus on relaxed movement, fluidity, and energy redirection—often practiced with compliant partners.  
However this leaves students unprepared for actual resistance, pressure, or chaotic violence. If it worked so well, why don't they fight in the UFC?

3. Fact - "Military Roots" = Marketing  
Systema is often marketed as being used by Russian special forces (Spetsnaz), which gives it an aura of elite combative legitimacy.  
However, there's no verifiable evidence that it was ever an official or standardized Spetsnaz system. The Spetsnaz thing is just marketing fluff.  
If it worked so well, why aren't more soldiers using it?

4. Fact - Philosophical vs Practical Gap  
It's more like a wellness retreat than a martial art. Too much philosophy, not enough fight.

5. Fact - Bad Instructors and Overhyped Schools



The lack of standardization in Systema means anyone can claim to teach it. There are no belts, and little structure compared to other arts. As a result, unqualified instructors often teach wildly unrealistic interpretations, giving the art a bad name.

#### 6. Fact - Difficult to Test or Measure

Unlike Muay Thai or Judo, Systema doesn't offer competitive sparring formats, so it's hard to test or pressure-check.

Practitioners often claim that it's too dangerous to spar fully, which raises red flags for skeptics. If you can't test it, it doesn't work. Show me, don't just explain it.

7. Fact - I criticize Systema's method of proving its effectiveness by asking people to volunteer to be punched, it's nonsense. It's similar to the intimidation tactics used on foreigners studying Kung Fu in China. Instead, I prefer sparring, which provides a more realistic and revealing test.

#### **My direct experience with Systema:**

1. I recall attending a Vladimir Vasiliev seminar where, during a demonstration, Vasiliev was surrounded by four men who began punching him. He responded by grabbing their fists and using each man's fist to strike the others. I found the display so absurd that I couldn't stop laughing and had to leave.
2. After the seminar, some students, including my student (a Pitbull-owning dog trainer), went to dinner with Vasiliev. During the meal, Vasiliev offered him \$10K to buy the dog so he could fight it unarmed – when I heard that - I concluded Vasiliev had too much vodka.

3. I encountered several Systema students at seminars in Europe and North America. Two challenged me with practice weapons, and one even insisted on using a live blade, which I refused. I then easily defeated the students using practice knives and realized that none of the Systema practitioners I met had any real understanding of edged weapon use; even though they had all been studying Systema in excess of 3-years each.

\*For Systema it's just another day of the Emperor's New Clothes. Their knife work and their whole system IMO is just another form of Tai Chi – but with more Camo.

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\*Fencing Advice for KNIFE FIGHTING: CUTTING

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4pYnnm5\\_kQ&t=1041s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4pYnnm5_kQ&t=1041s)

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\*The Fairbairn Knife Method

We will be covering the Fairbairn knife, knife system and the man in a future article

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

*\*Knife Tests, Recommendations and Hi-Lights*