



Defensive Knives for Urban Environments – PART IV

Edged Weapons Training for Self-Defense and Combat

Throughout history, knives have served dual roles as both practical necessities and cultural symbols across diverse societies worldwide. For many, bladed weapons represented the most accessible form of personal defense when economic constraints made swords, firearms, or other expensive armaments unattainable.

However, beyond their utilitarian function, knives became deeply embedded in the traditions and identities of numerous subcultures, from military units like the Gurkhas to the Scottish Highlanders who incorporated dirks into their ceremonial dress, to Indo-Malay societies where the kris were worn by the nobility and revered for their sacred status in religious rituals.

The cultural significance of blades extended across religious, occupational, and regional boundaries, creating distinct knife traditions

that reflected the values and lifestyles of their respective communities. Religious groups such as Sikhs integrating the kirpan as a fundamental symbol of faith, while Tibetan Buddhists employed the kilaya dagger in spiritual practices.

Occupational cultures developed their own blade traditions - South American Gauchos relied on their façon knives as essential tools for eating and daily tasks, Finnish woodsmen carried puukko knives as indispensable forest implements, and maritime communities depended on rigging knives for their seafaring work.

From the Bowie knife dueling culture of the American South to the traditional blade-crafting practices of Native American tribes, these diverse communities transformed simple cutting tools into powerful symbols of identity, status, and cultural heritage that were carefully preserved and transmitted across generations.

Why Everyone Needs to Carry a Knife Today

Due to an epidemic rise of violent crimes around the world today, the knife has metamorphosed into a valuable tool for self-defense, with an ever-growing interest from the general public to purchase and train with edged weapons.

Contemporary knife training encompasses a diverse spectrum of martial traditions and practical systems from around the globe. Southeast Asian methodologies dominate much of the modern landscape, particularly Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) and the various regional expressions of Silat found throughout Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei, each offering

distinct approaches to blade work rooted in centuries of warrior culture.

The training options that extend beyond traditional Southeast Asian systems include Western reality-based-training and combatives programs that emphasize practical self-defense applications. Classical European approaches such as HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts) preserves medieval dagger techniques, and regional specializations like Italian stiletto methods.

The most ubiquitous edged weapons training in 2025 comes from two main sources, the Philippines, in the form of FMA's (Filipino Martial Arts) and from the West - Reality Based Training and Combatives. However, more specialized and culturally specific systems prove significantly more challenging to locate. Traditional European knife fighting systems like Italian stiletto techniques and Spanish navaja methods are quite rare to find nowadays. These represent historical martial traditions that have largely disappeared from mainstream instruction.

Tactical Knife Training

There are virtually dozens of methods of knife training, I have listed the most well-known. Find knife training from a credible, accessible source that allows for regular practice sessions. Some training academies are easy to find, however others are more challenging.

Readably Accessible Knife Training Classes and Seminars

FMA (Filipino Martial Arts) Worldwide

Reality-Based-Defense / Combatives (Worldwide)

Silat (Smaller instructor base outside SE Asia)

Bowie Knife / FMAs- James Keating (Classes/Seminars - USA)

Knife Training that is Less Accessible

Krabi-Krabong (Thailand)

Japan – Tanto (Japan)

Italian (Europe & Italy)

Spanish Navaja (Spain) but unlikely

Piper System (South Africa & Seminars)



Filipino Martial Arts (FMA)

**Worldwide training*

The most ubiquitous knife training comes from the Philippines; you can find many hundreds of academies worldwide. Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) knife styles encompass many systems under the umbrella terms Arnis/Escrima/Kali. These weapon-based fighting styles emphasize adaptable and versatile techniques suitable for close combat that apply a single set of techniques across sticks and bladed weapons.

**Full Story in Part V*



Reality-Based & Combatives Training

**Europe, USA, Parts of Asia*

Reality-based Training (RBT) is a modern self-defense training system that teaches skills that anyone can use to deal with a wide spectrum of situations from the smallest of daily intrusions right up to winning a violent physical attack. RBT teaches awareness, threat assessment, and unarmed and weapons skills. It emphasizes that effective self-defense must account for the psychological, physical realities and legal aspects.

Combatives

**Europe, USA, Parts of Asia*

Combatives refers to hand-to-hand combat training and techniques, that originated from the military around the turn of the century. It combines elements from various martial arts and fighting disciplines to create practical, effective combat skills for real-world situations.

*There's a significant overlap between modern combatives training and reality-based defense principles, and many combatives instructors have adopted RBD methodologies.

**Full Story in Part V*



Silat

**SE Asia, Europe, USA and Seminars*

There are not as many training centers as FMAs worldwide. Silat knife training is integral to the art, with the principle that "There is no Silat without the knife." There are three main styles, Indonesian, Malaysian and Brunei.

**Full Story in Part V*



Krabi-Krabong

**Thailand, Some Instruction in Europe and USA*

Thailand does not teach knife fighting apart from the broader krabi-krabong weapons system rather than existing as a standalone knife-specific martial art. Within krabi-krabong, the weapons include the krabi (curved sword/cutlass), but the system also encompasses various shorter bladed weapons and daggers.



Bowie Knife

**Oregon – USA, Private sessions and Seminars*

Why am I including Bowie knife training in an article for defensive knives, after all, it's a very large knife, or a small sword? - because 1. It is a knife system that is part of American history - about 200 years old – and it's taught by James Keating the foremost authority on the subject today, however, 2. James Keating "Master at Arms" is also an expert in various knife FMA styles and Drawpoint.

**Full story in Part V*



Renaissance Dagger

HEMA

**Europe / North America*

There are many HEMA organizations in Europe and several in the U.S. Some HEMA schools (Historical European Martial Arts) teach both unarmed knife defense and dagger versus dagger, and historical dagger/knife techniques.

**Full story in Part V*



Tanto Blade

Japanese Tanto

**In 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 heads and committing Seppuku.

**Full story in Part V*



Italian Stiletto

Italian Systems

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.



Spanish Navaja

**It would be easier to find the Fountain of Youth than Navaja Training!*

The 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.

**Full story in Part V*



Okapi Knife

Piper System (South Africa & Seminars)

**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. Nigel E. February studied and catalogued the system to teach students how to be aware of its tactics for self-defense.

**Full story in Part V*

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**Coming up - Defensive Knives for Urban Environments Part V*

**Edged Weapons Training – Full Stories*