

Use a Cane as a Weapon

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LIEUT. COMMANDER ARTHUR CHASE CUNNINGHAM, U. S. N., Naval Inspector of Public Works, who, while a midshipman at Annapolis, and subsequently throughout his long career as an officer of the civil engineering department of the navy, has been recognized as one of the premier fencers of America, has published a little book in which he tells how a cane or even an umbrella can be used as a weapon of defense quite as well as pistol, sword, or knife. The book is entitled "The Cane as a Weapon," and was issued under the auspices of the Army and Navy Register of Washington.

The value of a cane as a weapon, says Commander Cunningham, is in the increased reach and space which it covers as compared with the hands, the great variety and diversity of motions that can be made, and the multiplication and concentration of the muscular force applied to it. As self-defense is rarely needed in these days the use of a cane as a weapon is not well known. Nevertheless self-defense may be needed, and that with a cane is a quick and good one when it is understood. In these pages will be formulated a system of defense and attack with the cane which is simple, effective and easily understood, and which may be acquired without the necessity of an instructor.

A full comprehension of the system alone will be of use, and such practice as can be given to it will greatly increase its value. It can even be made an excellent systematic exercise of a light and attractive nature, with the satisfaction of knowing that proficiency in it may prove of material value. The work may be done in the ordinary clothing, as the system would be used in actual application. An opponent is not necessary for the understanding and acquirement of the system, but where two persons can work together a better appreciation of the possibilities will be had. Practice assaults should not be made without masks and padding, as otherwise serious injury may result.

As a system of self-defense, much or all of it may be acquired by men of advanced age, or not in specially good physical condition, and it is to these who are least prepared for defense with the hands that it might prove of the greatest value. All intricate and difficult movements and motions have been omitted from this system and nothing used that is not easily performed and of practical value. In case of the system coming into use for actual self-defense, it is not likely that in most cases more than the simplest and most elementary portions would be used.

The proper way in which to hold such a weapon in readiness for instant attack or defense is to grasp it at a distance of about one-quarter to one-third from the butt with the thumb toward the point. This permits quick action, gives a needed balance, and makes it possible to bring both the butt and point of the cane into use. The exact location of the grasp is a matter of individual preference, modified by the kind of cane used. But at least from four to six inches of the butt should always project back of the hand.

For close direction and control, Commander Cunningham adds, the thumb may be extended along the cane. For free swinging cuts the thumb may be grasped around the cane. The position of the thumb is changed instantly. The grasp should be sufficiently firm to prevent the cane from slipping through or being knocked from the hand.

The Left Guard. Commander Cunningham describes what he calls the left guard as follows: Left foot and left side of body slightly advanced, left arm raised from the elbow and held across the chest. Grasp cane in right hand, point down, and right arm nearly extended downward. Legs nearly straight, weight equally on both feet. Position should be comfortable and easy, yet alert and ready for movement. A similar left-handed guard can be used.

This is the guard, Commander Cunningham says, to use against assault with the hands. The left hand is ready to parry or strike; the cane can not be seized, but can be used in many directions.

The Right Guard. Reverse the foot and body position used in left guard, the position of the left arm being the same in both. Cane held in right hand, point down and extended to the front. Leg position same as in left guard.

This is the guard, explains Commander Cunningham, to use against an assault with a cane or other weapon. It allows a longer and stronger defense to the front than the left guard, but a less and shorter defense in the other directions, especially in the rear.

By reversing the relative position of the feet the right and left guards may be changed quickly from one to the other.

Double Guard, Right or Left. The same general position of body as in the first two positions, the cane grasped in both hands, with the thumbs toward the center, each end projecting from the hands for a distance of six or eight inches. Arms bent upward from the elbows, and the cane held in a horizontal position about six inches from the chest.

This guard, we are told, is used against assaults from two or more directions, and it may be used in place of the single guards. It may be instantly assumed from the single guards. As blows may be delivered from either hand from this guard it is evident that both the reach and space are much extended. The assailant is also less certain from where to expect a blow.

These three guards are the basis for the system of defense formulated by Commander Cunningham. From them a variety of blows is possible and, as the author points out, some are derived from or merge into the others. One of these blows is called "the jab." It is a short or stabbing blow given with the point of the cane. It is preceded by a drawing-back of the hands and may be delivered either high or low. The jab is one of the quickest attacks with the cane, as well as one of the hardest to avoid. Point jabs are best made with the thumb on the cane, while butt jabs may be made with the thumb either on or around the cane.

Next is the thrust. This is a stab-

bing delivery and varies from the jab in that it is delivered over a longer distance and with a full extension of the arm.

The jab and thrust, we are told, are among the most effective blows that can be given with a cane, as they are very concentrated and their force will penetrate clothing where a cut would have little or no effect. As a cane decreases in weight the more effective become jabs and thrusts as compared with cuts. Jabs and thrusts are also the most effective blows with an umbrella. The thrust is given with the point or long end of the cane, and with the thumb extended on the cane for better directing the point. The knuckles may be turned up, down, or to either side.

Upper cuts are made from downward up, and may be delivered from the position of guard without preparatory motion. Upper cuts are not strong, but they are valuable because they come as a surprise to one's antagonist, and are hard to parry or avoid. Right, left and down cuts are delivered in the directions named, and require more or less preliminary motion in the opposite direction. They are given with the knuckles turned in the direction of the blow, and the thumb may be on or around the cane.

Other cuts are: The diagonal, which may be either downward or upward, or to the right or left; the circular cut, which can be made in any direction and which is deceptive because of the fact that the point of delivery may be changed without stopping the motion; the snap cut, short and quick and deriving most of its motion from the wrist, a good cut to use against the hands, and does not carry the cane out of line; the half-arm cut, which starts from the elbow and includes a wrist motion. The preliminary position of the half-arm cut will start from the shoulder, but when delivered it is from the elbow.

In delivering a cut, Commander Cunningham says, there should be a definite idea of landing on a certain point where the full force of the blow will be developed. The force should be cumulative up to the objective point, and should cease as soon after this is reached. Otherwise, if the blow is not landed, the cut goes wild and before control of the cane can be gained the assailant may deliver a counter attack. The force of the blow lies as much in the skill with which it is delivered as in the strength applied.

Under the caption, "Points of Attack," the author refers to the kick of the adversary. A kick is not hard to evade from a guard position, and it may be placing one's adversary in unstable balance, lead to his undoing. If the assailant attempts a kick, present him with a snap cut on the shin, if possible.

The hands should be made one of the principal points of attack, and a comparatively light blow, if well delivered, will result in disablement.

Should the assailant be armed with a knife or other short weapon, says the author, his hands are all the more important as a point of attack. A pistol may even be knocked from an assailant's hand by a quick and unexpected blow.

The head, face and neck are also important points; but they can not always be reached on a direct attack, although they may be on a return, or after a feint at some other point. The lower half of the trunk being much exposed is difficult to guard, and may frequently be reached on direct attack. It is sensitive to jabs and thrusts. The elbows, knees and shins are also sensitive, and when exposed can be attacked to advantage.

In defending one's self against a knife, cane or other striking weapon, parries are often necessary, and are best and most strongly made from the right guard. Having parried or evaded an assailant's attack, there is generally an opportunity when a return attack may be made to advantage. As a rule, the return has a better chance of success than the direct attack, because the adversary is usually not in the best position while the former is under way. Counter parries are made quickest back-handed, or with the knuckles turned away from the direction of the parry.

One of the great advantages of the cane, says Commander Cunningham, as a weapon is the possibility of passing it from one hand to the other and back. As either end of the cane may be used for attack or defense, this possibility of passing it from one hand to the other gives it a range and variety of application possessed by no other striking weapon. On account of this possibility it is worth while to familiarize the left hand with carrying and using the cane in alternation with the right.

Defense to Front.

If an attack is threatened from the front, the left guard is the easiest and most quickly assumed; and since it is not an especially belligerent position it need not precipitate the attack. The left guard is a good one if the attack is with the hands. As your assailant advances meet him with snaps and half-arm cuts at his hands, always exercising great care that he does not get a chance to seize your cane. If he gets within striking or grappling distance, parry with the left hand; then using the point of your cane, jab at his body. If a low grapple is made, jab with the butt of your cane at his head and neck.

If the attack from the front is with a striking weapon, the right guard should be assumed, as all of the cuts, thrusts and parries can be executed at their best from that guard. If the attack is with a cane you will easily discover whether your assailant is familiar with its use as a weapon; if he is not familiar, defense becomes a comparatively simple proposition. No chance to attack his hands should be overlooked, and great care should be exercised to keep him from getting within your guard.

If the attack is with a knife, Commander Cunningham explains, the assailant's hand should be the object of short continuous attacks varied with thrusts and jabs at the body when opportunity offers.

Defense to Right.

This defense is fairly good from left guard. Right and down cuts can be strongly made, but left cuts and point thrusts are poor; footwork is limited, and the position of the body is not stable. Parries are valuable and, in case of a closure, butt jabs can be made, or, by passing the cane to the left hand, both butt and point jabs become possible.

This defense from right guard is poor; as also are point thrusts and left cuts. However, right cuts, down cuts

and upper cuts are possible. Parries are poor, footwork limited and the position is an unstable one. In a closure butt jabs are possible, and, by passing the cane to the left hand, both point and butt jabs can be made.

Defense to Left.

Defense to the left from left guard is poor, while from the right guard it is fairly good. Front left guard parries are difficult and poor, but from right guard they are good. From left guard all thrusts and cuts are limited and poor; but from right guard right cuts and thrusts are fairly good. In both guards the footwork is limited and the position unstable. In left guard, by passing the cane to the left hand, left and upper cuts and butt jabs can be made. In right guard point jabs can be made either high or low, and high butt jabs are possible.

Defense to Rear.

From left guard such a defense is fair, but from right guard it is very poor. From left guard down, right and upper cuts are fairly strong; while from right guard only short and weak left and down cuts and short point and butt jabs can be made. From left guard, left cuts and thrusts are poor, but jabs are good. From right guard the possibility of cuts is improved by passing the cane to the left hand.

Defense in Two or More Directions.

Quick judgment and rapid action is necessary. The position of double guard left gives the most all-around uniform reach, and holding the cane in both hands gives the choice of direction in which either to strike or thrust. Footwork is of great importance. The quickest change of direction is a face rear, which may be alternately reversed for quick action all around. If there are two or more assailants they must be prevented from acting in unison by attacking them quickly and in turn. The most powerful jabs may be given with the cane held in both hands, and these jabs can be delivered in all directions and may be either high or low. The hands of the assailants should be struck whenever possible. Having delivered the blow on one assailant, do not watch for its effect, but immediately threaten or attack another.

A few special cases in which the cane is used to advantage as a weapon are mentioned. Thus, to guard against a dog, use the right guard, with cane held well within the line of attack. Left, back-handed cuts may be used as feints, quickly followed by right-hand snaps.

Another special case described is the guard with the hat:

In the case of an assailant with a knife a very valuable guard can be made by holding the hat in the left hand by the brim. It should be firmly grasped at the side, and can be removed from the head in one motion. The hat can then be used to catch a blow from the knife, and before it can be repeated, it should be possible to deal an effective blow or jab with the cane. In case of an attack with a pistol a chance may occur to shy the hat into the opponent's face and thus secure a chance to strike with the cane. The use of the hat as a guard is, of course, not confined to the knife, but it may be used against any weapon. The only disadvantage is that it prevents passing the cane from hand to hand.