

Knives, Bottles and Sharp Sticks

PART 1 an insight to Knife Attacks

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I'm sure that most people would believe having someone pull a knife on them is one of the most dangerous situations to be faced with. Knife attacks seem to be getting more brutal and more attackers seem to cut or stab their victims even if the person has done what their attacker asked them to do. This leaves little room for doubt to just how dangerous someone with a knife is, indeed any edged weapons should be treated with the greatest respect. The size of the blade does not matter, a 1inch blade or a 7inch blade both have one thing in common they can both kill you.

A knife is deadly. I'm sure you're thinking that's as obvious as if you drop a stone it will hit the ground or giving a child a packet of crisps, will be followed by the sounds of the vacuum cleaner. And you're right, but do you know what makes the knife more dangerous? It's the rubbish information given to people about dealing with someone armed with a knife. It's bad enough when groups teach blocking or controlling wrist grabs without the reality of a strong non-compliant attack. And the student is faced with trying to do something in the street that doesn't work. If lucky, they may just end up with a smack in the mouth and question why their training did not work. But if your attacker is armed, he may not only be willing to cut you, but you could be putting yourself in greater danger just by trying something unworkable. We need to look closely at how knife attacks happen and who and what do we look out for. We have to get away from the standard view of knife attacks as a face off with the attacker lunging at you with the knife. Like many of you I have seen countless demos with knife attacks where the instructor controls the knife-attacking student, with controlled attacks and controlled defences. I mean would you like to grade in front of an Instructor who you made look like a Pratt the week before, because you attacked just a little bit too fast and his wonderful knife defence technique did not work?

Not only will you be taken off guard when faced with a real knife, but the fear factor will takeaway most people's ability to anything about it. Add the fact that the chances of you actually seeing the knife that has stabbed or cut you are rare, it makes the idea of controlling a fast moving blade almost impossible. Like most things that work simplicity is the key. You can do something to increase your chances of surviving a knife attack. The first step is to see and feel how quickly someone can cut and stab you in a frantic attack. With the truth being by the time you get control or get away you will have more holes in your body than a Tea Bag.

The Truth is in the Pen

As I said before in most cases of knife attacks the victim will not even see the knife (more about that latter) but once the attack has begun it's a stabbing, slashing, frantic bloody mess. Before we go on I would like to get this point over to you in a real and safe way, just

how big the problem of dealing with a frantic knife attack is. I would love to take credit for this training drill but the idea comes from my good friend Dave Turton 7th Dan Black Belt & Founder of the Self Defence Federation. This training drill will get the point across very quickly also it will bring home the points I am trying to make within this article.

Face your partner, who is armed with a felt tipped pen, you will need to wear an old white tee shirt or shirt. Now get your partner to attack you with slashing and stabbing attacks. You both have to make it as real as possible, you have to make your partner want to make as many marks with the pen as they can. So add a financial incentive, as Dave Turton would say, "The attacker gets half a crown for every pen mark on your shirt", for anyone reading this who was born after 1970 that's 25p. (A lot of money in Yorkshire) Within a short time you will find yourself covered in felt tip, lines from the slashes and dots from the stabs. If you managed to grab your partner you will find marks all over your back, from your fingertips to your nose you will have more lines than an underground tube map. Take a good look at the marks and just think of the mess that you would be in if it had been a real knife or a broken beer glass. Still happy with your knife defences as you count up all the marks on your shirt? Or is a ray of doubt shining as you hand over the £5.00 you now owe your training partner?

What is a Knife?

This may seem obvious, but the point is that you can use many things to cut and stab. So don't assume your attacker is going to have a six-inch blade with a wooden or plastic handle, if he shoved a sharp pencil into your throat it's just as deadly. Anything from a hand made hunting knife to a cheap craft knife. All are used on the streets, along with screwdrivers, bottles, beer glasses, pens, plastic or metal combs, the list goes on. Anything with a point or an edge is potentially dangerous, even your teeth could be classed as an edged weapon. You may agree, or have never thought of them in that way but it makes a good point that anything that can cut can do massive damage. If someone bites off your nose or your ear the effect is the same as if it had been cut with a blade, but it does seem more brutal.

Knives along with most stabbing or cutting weapons used on the street are easily obtained and easily replaced, and without any special training anything with a point or edge is still deadly. When I give seminars on knife defence I always make a point of demonstrating the cutting and stabbing power of items not normally thought of as weapons. People are taken back when they see how easily a credit card can cut through a large potato or the hard skin of a melon. So what is a knife? Almost anything that can cut or stab. Remember its not what type of weapon he has in his hand, it's what he is willing to do with it.

Unseen and Deadly

The real danger is the unseen attack what looks and feels like a punch may have been a knife attack with all the deadly consequences coming from just one blow. Most martial arts have you trying to defend yourself against an attacker having the knife out in front of him slashing or lunging at you. Ok this can happen but if he is showing you the knife then he is someone who is more likely using it for intimidation purposes. So if you can see it flashing in front of you run away, keep it simple. He's showing you the knife to put the fear of God into you. A practical training idea would be drills in controlling your fear so you could runaway, if you've got a gap use it, REMEMBER YOUR PEN COVERED SHIRT.

There are many books, Videos and instructors around teaching people how to defend themselves against a knife attack, but they tend to talk and show disarming techniques.

Example, attacker moves in and stabs down at you with a knife, you cross your arms and block the attack, then grab the attacking arm and lock with a twisting action to control, then put attacker into painful arm lock making the attacker drop the knife.

Its all well and good trying to give people confidence to deal with a situation if confronted by someone with a knife. But many of the things they talk about and expect you to do against a knife attack are bollocks. You can rap the information up so many ways and say it will work in all these type of attacks and finish it off with a big red ribbon, but its still bollocks. To talk about performing a complicated disarming technique is like juggling in quicksand, the more you move the deeper you sink. Practising something in a class or face to face with someone in the street are two different things, if it goes wrong in a class you can start again, if it goes wrong on the street the person with knife maybe the last thing you ever see.

So how can we begin to control a deadly knife attack? The first step must be awareness of your surroundings and any confrontation must be viewed as a possible knife attack. Getting away from your attacker or destroying them before they have started their attack, is the basic breakdown of knife defence. It is a sad fact that people who attack with a knife will attack when you can not see the danger. From holding the knife behind their back or concealing it in their hand until its time for them to make their attack. Everything is done to draw you into the trap. You won't see the attack. Your only chance is to understand what is going on beforehand.

Seeing the Unseen

Not only is the speed that someone can cut their victim terrifying but just thinking about why someone is willing to cut and stab a helpless victim will drive you crazy. You could sit around a table and discuss the rights and wrong for years and never get the answer to why. But the one thing you have to get clear from the outset in regard to people using knives is that people do.

Your assessment of any situation you may find yourself in is the key to not being a victim, not only someone punching you but also someone stabbing you. Threat assessment is something you can assess over time from the number of people around you to the place and time. And if you feel that you are in a dangerous situation you should always act on that feeling and get away. But lets look at what you can do if you find yourself confronted and the only option you have left is a physical one. It's the same as if it was a fistfight and that is you being pre-emptive with your physical response to the threat of an attack. Your attacker can give off some physical signs that they have a knife but you may not see them. You should always assume that your attacker is armed.

Your attacker's confidence comes from the knife and they will always make sure it is to hand. From keeping one hand out of sight or the way they hold their arm straight with their fingertips curled up out of sight. A hand tucked into their jacket or rubbing their hands on the outside of their pocket just making sure the knife is there. These are just some of the signals given off by someone who is armed and wants to take you off guard. But the fact

that you are being confronted can make these signals difficult to see if you are not prepared to think that anyone could be carrying a knife. If you only practise knife defence in respect to someone already having the knife out in front of them you will miss the signs and will not be prepared for what happens next.

In the same way you develop speed and power in your punch or kick it take time and practise. So to your training add some hidden knife attacks, just to practise looking for the signals someone concealing a knife gives off. With a training partner stand close to each other one of you hold a knife and try and conceal it from your training partner. Please don't use a real blade, now try and pull out the knife not to attack but just to get the knife ready for an attack. You are training not to see the knife but to recognise body language, look for unnatural movements of hands, arms and legs. Check how many times you can't see their hands or their fingertips, remember the only warning you may have is someone just putting their hand into a pocket. From just a simple movement they can pull a knife and attack before you can react.

If you control the attacker before the knife is pulled you have a better chance of getting away from the situation or controlling the vital few seconds you have before the attack. You could tell them to show you their hands and if they refuse you could attack straight away. Or maybe better still, make your body language less aggressive you could bring one of your hand's in line with the attacker's arm you feel is reaching for a knife. This will help if you do not attack in time because if your attacker pulls the knife your arm is already covering the angle of attack.

Be First

If you feel threatened this is the time you should act, don't wait for the knife to come out to make sure, you are wasting time, go with your feelings. Your hands should be forward in the fence position, move your leading hand to cover the suspect arm. Now attack with your best technique. Hit hard and finish off. Let me make it clear, if you feel that you are in danger, then to delay could result in you being stabbed. Be first, we are talking about a violent confrontation, not your mum asking if you would like a cup of tea. If the knife is pulled and does not cut you the first time you are in a stand off and in greater danger.

Jamming and covering techniques work well. With jamming techniques you are controlling the arm you suspect the attacker is holding a weapon in. This could be with your lead hand touching the attackers arm or keep your hand just away from the attacker's arm keeping a relaxed open handed gesture. Again as soon as you feel in danger from them moving forward or a hand moving out of sight, cover their arm and attack.

Lets look at a couple of drills that bring home the point. If you stand in front of a partner get them to point a finger at your throat and then rest it on your Adams apple. Now when they like they can push you in the throat just hard enough to make you move back and cough. You have to try a push their hand away as soon as they start to push, you will be coughing more times than Kurt Russell in the film Back Draft. Now do the same thing again but this time your partner cannot push you in the throat until they see you move to push their hand away. You will find this much more comfortable, I have see this trick put forward as some fantastic skill level of an Instructor. Its not action will beat reaction.

Let's go back to the felt tip again. Have your partner hold the pen behind his back, face each other now have him attack you with stabbing or slashing attacks, but only one attack at a time. You can only move out of the way when you see him move to attack. Looks like another trip to the laundrette for your old white shirt.

Now do the same again but this time he cannot attack you with the pen until he sees you move. So line up your partner with a good right hook with more firepower than a small army. Remember he can't move, until you make your attack so let him have it right on the jaw and see his unconscious body hit the deck. ONLY JOKING but it made the point. Always treat someone as armed and if you feel you are about to be attacked and you have no other option BE FIRST.

We will look at what you can do against a knife that is in the open in part 2 of Knives, Bottles and Sharp Sticks. But as most likely you will be confronted by an unseen blade start training for this now. The person who is willing to use a knife in a fight may be soft and weak without a knife, but cold and deadly with it. They will stab you from your blind side, or when you are beaten to the floor will carry on the attack, cutting and stabbing as you lay helpless on the ground. The people who do this cannot be bargained with; it is hard to bargain with someone who has just opened the side of your face with a razor. Telling him that this is not a civilised way of carrying on in a democratic society, believe me will be falling on deaf ears.

I hope that you will try out the ideas in this article. It doesn't matter what system you practise you can always add to your knowledge. Enjoy your training and remember it's your right to protect yourself and only you can do anything about it.