

*"It isn't that people are ignorant.
It's that they know so much that ain't so"*
Josh Billings

Marc MacYoung <http://www.nonnonsenseselfdefense.com/knifelies.html>

Weapon Disarms

On this page:

My Answer to Fantasy Weapon Techniques | In Conclusion

Some of the worst fantasy/lies/suicidally STUPID misconceptions in MA/ RBSD/ DT instruction are about weapons.

Both using them *and* facing them.

We speak of the problem of 'technique decay' on the *Failure to Perform* page, but with weapons, technique failure becomes -- literally -- a matter of life and death. If the technique fails, you're *not* just going to get punched. The problem is often these techniques have lost *critical elements* necessary for them to function *or* the move has been taken out of context(1).

What results is a situation politely described by the Josh Billings' quote. That same situation, described bluntly, is: *What you **think** you know will get you killed!*

Lawrence Kane, author of *Surviving Armed Assaults*, contacted me about a thread on Iain Abernathy's forum. As the moderator, he was concerned that the thread was going off into fantasy land. I read the thread and saw that indeed, the same old fantasies about facing a weapon were being promoted.

This is my answer to him...

The problem with so many knife and gun disarm techniques is that the person teaching them is usually like a virgin claiming that he can teach you everything you need to know about sex because he's watched a lot of porn. The instructor has neither faced a knife or used one on another person. In short, it's more about mental masturbation than actually getting it on.

Let me tell you that losing your cherry when it comes to facing weapons ain't no fun a'tall. Aside from all the other things I've been *attacked* with, I've been shot at, had people attack me with knives *and* I've been threatened with both. I tell you this to familiarize you with an important concept. At ground zero, there is a fundamental understanding that most martial arts and reality based self-defense virgin ... I mean instructors **DON'T** tell you. That's because they *don't know it themselves*. Yet, in a situation involving a weapon, it is the difference between you getting away unscathed or going to the hospital/morgue. This bedrock concept is: You have to realize that there is a HUGE difference between a threat display and an actual attack.

Threat displays are deeply intertwined with the different kinds of violence. Basically three out of four kinds of violence can be prevented by simply *altering your behavior*.

It is critical to recognize threat display *in these three contexts*. The brandishing of the weapon *isn't* a bluff. *It is a statement of commitment*. It's showing how far the person is willing to go to get you to change your behavior. It is a warning to *stop doing what you are doing*.

The problem is that people are often engaged in what Rory Miller calls 'The Monkey Dance' (I call it 'Escalato'). They are so caught in an adrenalin rush, wrapped up in their little duck feelings, intent on winning and proving a point they fail to see that *they are being offered a choice*. Again -- and we cannot press this point enough -- "Stop what you're doing or bleed."

In *their* little adrenalin/emotion/prideful/fear washed brains, they 'think' the other person waving a weapon is just another chip in the poker pot that they're trying to win. So instead of recognizing it *as a warning*, they react to it as though it is a bluff.

I wish I was joking when I say that the stupidest last words ever spoken while looking at a weapon is "You don't have the guts." Unfortunately, that ARE the last words of any number of people who don't recognize the option *inherent* in threat displays.

The biggest failing of most of what is taught as weapon disarms, counters or defenses is that they automatically assume that *if a weapon is present it IS an attack*.

In pursuit of heroic fantasy, they're ignoring the elephant in the room. Namely violence can *usually* be avoided by changing your priorities.

One of the biggest indicators that you're facing a threat display is distance. Specifically they are usually carried on outside of attack range. That guy waving a knife around three feet away from you *isn't* attacking, *it's still a threat display* -- usually involving him telling you to leave.

However, Captain Karate there -- upon seeing the knife -- doesn't take up the option to run like hell, instead HE CLOSES! That's right! What the jury is going to see on the security recording is an unarmed man charging a man with a knife. Then claiming that it was self-defense. Suuuuure. If it was self-defense then why did you run over to attack him when he told you to leave?

Well, okay, that only becomes a problem if you don't get killed for attacking the guy. This is why we say there are only two problems with these moves, one is if it doesn't work. Two is if it does work.

So, the first thing to realize about all the b****t people tell you about how to handle a weapon is how often the best answer *isn't to engage*. It's to run fiercely.

Which, quite frankly, when facing a real weapon in the hands of someone who's pissed off and screaming at you to leave ... *ain't that hard to do*.

THAT'S why it's important to know the difference between an attack vs. a threat display. And yet that message gets lost in the teaching of all these half-baked weapon disarms and counters. If it's a threat display, look for the option to escape, don't think that just because a weapon is displayed you have to go killer kung-fu ninja commando on the guy. We call this kind of thing "Rattlesnake cornered" Rattlesnakes are so stupid they can think themselves cornered in an open field. Instead of moving away they strike. The usual result of this is one dead rattlesnake because whatever big thing they just bit, stomps them to death.

Worse though is that the guy is standing there demonstrating how far he is willing to go if you don't knock it off and what do you do? You not only don't knock it off, *but you attack!*

WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK HE IS GOING TO DO? He's there, cocked, locked and ready to rock and you decide to attack? Oh wait, and do an attack that tries to *control the gun and punch him* out instead of splattering his skull on the concrete?

With these half-****** counters someone's going to get shot here; and odds are it ain't him.

Perhaps the biggest problem with most of what is being promoted as weapon disarms/defense is they are based in sports fighting concepts, *not* combative requirements. To be more specific, they are based on the idea that you have time to deliver several attacks that cumulatively cause enough damage to stop him.

Well, that's the problem right there, against a weapon, you don't have time for moves that aren't immediately effective for achieving your goal

Facing a weapon you have two major problems:

1) with ineffective movement, he can cause a LOT more damage than you can. 2) as long as he is on his feet, mobile and conscious, he remains a threat

Point one: With all the hubbub about fine motor control loss under adrenalin and how -- under stress -- your technique decays, people tend to forget *guns and knives work just fine no matter **what** his adrenal stress level.*

At point blank range it don't matter how much his trigger pull technique decays, that gun will still go off. And if it's pointed at you when it does, you're screwed. (This is why it is critical to deflect the weapon, MOVE and check *his arm* -- NOT the weapon -- you do this to so arm *so the weapon can't come back at you*. If the gun is pointed elsewhere, if it goes off the bullet doesn't go into you). That weapon makes up for all kinds of decay in technique. That's an advantage he has that you DON'T. The same goes for a knife, a wild, defensive slash cuts you just as well as an intentional one.

Point two: Forget about controlling the weapon, disarming him or joint-locking the weapon arm (see point one). The problem ***isn't the weapon; it's the guy holding it!*** It is HIM you need to render incapable of functioning. A big problem with most of the BS weapon defenses I have seen is that they focus on the weapon and *not the guy holding it*. That weapon is a symptom, *that guy is the problem*. It is him you must render incapable of functioning.

Here's the major problem of focusing on the weapon instead of him: As long as he is functional, he is going to be fighting your attempts to control the weapon. And that means *the odds are great that he will have a chance to use the weapon on you*. Let me repeat that in a different way: The longer he remains functional, the more likely you are to be injured.

This is why HE, ***not the weapon***, needs to be the focus of your counter strategy.

Sub clause of point two -- but strongly based on point one -- is you ain't going to stop someone with punches, kicks and point sparring hits. You got time for maybe one strike. And it better be a set up for slamming his head into the concrete. Ineffective punches and kicking (and remember they're going to decay under stress) are *not* an option. If that guy isn't unconscious or dying within three moves, the person who's going to the hospital is YOU! If you think you're going to punch someone out with a weapon, *you* are going to get your brains blown into a fine pink mist or end up sitting on the curb trying to hold your guts from spilling out onto the street. That's the common result of trying to 'wrestle the weapon' from someone.

You're especially going to run into this bloody reality if you try any of these fantasy b****t

moves that comes 'down' on the weapon (e.g. hold your hands up in fake surrender and then dropping down onto the weapon to seize it). The problem with many of these BS moves is that the 'bad guy's eyes are going to detect your big movement as you move into position and all he needs is small finger twitch to blow your brains into a fine pink mist (2).

George Patton once said "*A good plan violently executed now is better than the perfect plan next week.*" Unfortunately, a bad plan executed next week is *almost always* a disaster. The problems aren't just that the technique is flawed from the start, he's ready to use violence and that it's going to take less movement on his part to hurt you more. Additional problems arise in that many people hem and haw before they proceed to act. Don't think he isn't going to see you decide to resist. There's a good chance you will get shot right there.

After thinking about it for a while, often when people decide to resist, they try to execute the flawed move with only partial commitment. Their mind may have decided to resist, but their *** ain't in agreement with this stupid plan. So now you have a half-baked technique combining with half ***** execution. That's a good way to end up bleeding on the floor. Again, this is especially true with "I've raised my hands in surrender, but now I've changed my mind" techniques that are commonly taught by virgins. Free hint here: Getting shot or stabbed when you try to do them tends to cause even more hesitation. Your best chances of success when facing an attack by a weapon are based on how well you meet the following criteria:

- 1) deflect the weapon so it is pointing else where (personally I like coming up from below)
- 2) instead of trying to 'control' the weapon, do something to keep his arm from coming 'back' and bringing the weapon back into play (I call this 'shielding')
- 3) MOVE -- personally I am REAL fond of getting behind his elbow and keeping going.
- 4) Immediately pile drive his head into the concrete before he can figure out how to return the weapon into play (crushing his throat is optional, but it does make pile driving easier -- especially if you can't move to the outside and get behind his elbow). While we're on the subject, moving -- aside from making it harder for him to bring the weapon back towards you -- makes pile driving him a WHOLE lot easier.
- 5) Buy distance (DON'T stand there and admire your handy work)

The details of *how* you achieve these standards aren't nearly as important as the fact *that you meet them*. If you want to minimize damage to yourself, you must not only achieve these five points, but do it without hesitation and with full commitment.

These are core concepts that have saved my life on numerous occasions when it WASN'T a threat display, but *an actual attack*. How I do them is different than how other styles do them, but you can incorporate those concepts into your system so you can apply your training.

Basically DON'T buy any technique that you haven't tested out with a paintball gun. See if you can do it fast and effectively enough without getting zapped. It also helps if the shooter is in a Bulletman suit to keep him from getting injured.

Also, forget this "expect to get cut" ****. That becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as some jack *** tries to 'fight' an armed opponent. This isn't a fight, *it's combat*. You are **NOT** there to try to fight him. Your goal is to neutralize him ASAP!

In any kind of weapon situation my rule is simple "Trade a cut for a kill." As I splatter his skull into the concrete I may take a slash. That is okay. It's a price I am willing to pay in order to make sure he can no longer attack. I have a very good chance of surviving a single wound. What I cannot survive is multiple shots, slashes/stabs, strikes from a crowbar because I did not render him incapable of attacking again.

And that is exactly what is going to happen if you try to 'fight' an armed opponent or disarm him.

In Conclusion

Let me end this by saying

1) When faced by a threat display that offers you a chance to leave/stop a behavior/give something up -- *take him up on the offer*. In fact, it's usually better if you follow instructions. This, especially, if it is **NOT** your job to deal with these kinds of problems.

2) If it is your job to deal with such problems, the time to arm yourself with a superior weapon is *during the threat display!* Remember the Tueller Drill (3).

3) Although threat displays in criminal violence tend to be much closer than other kinds of violence, do NOT attempt to close with the threat displays of other kinds of violence.

3) If attacked by a close range weapon, **DO NOT attempt to draw a 'superior weapon!'** It's too late. You should have done it during the threat display stage. But attempting to draw your own weapon makes a bad situation worse. Such an action:

- a) leaves you exposed and unable to protect yourself. Your hands are down fumbling for a weapon instead of up and dealing with the problem.
- b) So-called 'superior weapons' do NOT have the necessary defensive capabilities to save your life (4)

immediately do something that will prevent his attack from landing (see the above section). When you have time and distance THEN draw your superior weapon.

4) Accept that you're in a screwed situation. One that requires immediate resolution (see the above section). Do NOT attempt to 'fight.' Your countermeasures must be immediately effective to render him incapable of further, effective, aggression. And do this while NOT preventing damage to you, but minimizing it.

5) Based on the tactical assessment of point 4, do NOT waste time trying to secure a totally safe entrance. The longer you are out there attempting to 'gain control of the weapon,' the greater the odds are of him successfully using it on you (5).

6) If he's still standing, he can still be effective. If he's still conscious, he can still be a threat. Remove these two options ASAP.

Return to top

1) Perhaps one of the best examples of concepts being taken out of context -- and then misinterpreted -- is Kubudo. Kubudo is the Okinawan weapons system, mostly based on the fact that the Okinawans were legally prohibited from carrying weapons. As such, they developed a fighting system based on agrarian and fishing items that would be immediately available. Items like nuncaku (nunchucks), sais, tonfas, kamas, eku (boat oar) and tekko (modified net pulling tools) are NOT weapons *in and of themselves*. They are tools that can be used as *improvised* weapons. Against an actual weapon -- especially in the hands of someone who knows how to use it -- they WILL fail.*

However, Kubudo, which is a distinct martial art by itself, has been 'absorbed' into, not only Okinawan forms of karate, but also Japanese and Korean martial arts systems as well. Which, when you hear a TKD instructor talking about how sais were used to disarm samurai you should realize how incredibly wrong a white guy trained in a Korean system talking about how Okinawans disarmed Japanese warriors really is.

*The 'legend that samurai were disarmed with sai has been misinterpreted by martial artists. During the Meiji Restoration the domination of Japanese society by the Shogunate and the samurai class was ended. Under the Tokugawa Shogunate, a samurai had the legal right to kill anyone who dared to insult him, much less attack him (Not very impressive since the populace was unarmed). The Haitorei Edicts were a series of edicts to strip away the power and symbolism of the samurai. Samurai were required to give up carrying swords in public. As various rebellions show, many samurai did NOT like this idea. While full-scale rebellions were few, conflicts with individual samurai over giving up these symbols weren't. And believe it or not, this also included forced hair cuts.

As well as being weapons, the sai and jutte WERE symbols of civil and police authority. (sai two prongs, jutte one prong.) During the Restoration, special police 'teams' were developed to handle samurai who refused to cooperate with the Haitorei Edicts. Each member of such a team was armed with different 'weapons' to ensure the safety of the officers. Each item served a *particular* purpose -- and in turn -- 'covered' the weakness of the other items against the sword. For example jutte pole arms and manriki kusari (both distance weapons) were used to hinder the movement of the katana long enough so the officer with the sai/jutte could safely close and disarm the samurai.

Hindering of the samurai's movement was critical *because*, contrary to what you see in demonstrations, the swordsman isn't just going to stand there while you close the distance. So in that sense, the idea that sais were used to disarm samurai is partially true. However...

a) this period of disarming samurai only lasted a few years

b) If you try to disarm a competent swordsman with sai alone, you're going to get killed.

Yet, the legend that sai work against swords is a staple among martial artists. Although there remains a vague resemblance to the truth, the sai/samurai myth has eclipsed the reality. But legends *do NOT need to have the factors that make them work in real life*. You *need* those pole arms. It's also easier if those same pole arms are pinning the samurai against a building. While you will not find the above facts in most modern martial arts books or MA schools, what you just read is history and you can find reference to it in older books like *Karate: My Way of Life* by Gichen Funakoshi. Return to Text

2) I don't like using a squirt gun to prove this point, I prefer goggles and paintball guns:

a) getting shot at point blank range hurts like hell.

b) You can get ones that shoot multiple times. With this feature you can 'riddle' the person to show how badly such moves DON'T work. Return to Text

3) Figure out and practice 'distraction draws.' These are seemingly normal movements (that one would expect in certain circumstances) that actually incorporate a stealth weapon draw. For example, when facing a person with a knife engaging in an at a distance threat display, raising your left hand, extending it and turning your body while saying "Whoa." In the meantime, your right hand has grasped your gun. Your right hand doesn't move, so the

body turn draws the gun with minimal arm movement. Often you'll have armed yourself before the person realizes what you've done. Return to Text

4) Most people do NOT understand the concept of 'defense' -- especially in close quarter combat. The reason a bullet works out at a distance is that it impedes an attacker's ability to effectively counter attack (e.g. after you've shot him, it's harder for him to accurately shoot back). The concept of stopping power is very important when someone is at a distance and/or attempting to close to attack. The problem with this is *many people mistake this offensive concept for being defensive*. They are **NOT** the same thing. The closer the quarters of an attack, more important an item's defensive capabilities become. That means 'how well can it be used to deflect or absorb (block) an incoming attack?' At a distance, there's a good chance his offense is going to miss, so offense is paramount and this kind of defense less important. Up close you **NEED** defensive capabilities. The 'stopping power' of a weapon is far less important than it's use to prevent his potentially fatal attack from landing as well. A so-called 'superior weapon' *isn't* when it is out of its range. Return to Text

5) General George Patton said: *Death in battle is a function of time. The longer troops remain under fire, the more men get killed. Therefore, everything must be done to speed up movement*. I cannot stress how important this concept is. In a close quarter weapon attack immediately getting 'past the weapon' to remove the threat is critical to survival. Most people lose because instead of focusing momentarily getting the weapon out of play in get to the real threat, they instead try to ensure complete control of the weapon before attacking the source of the danger. This leaves them 'under fire' for longer. Return to Text