

All About Impact Weapons

From the ancient fighting stick—to today's police baton!

By David Steele

From the time the first proto-hominid snatched a branch to bop his neighbor, the stick has been one of man's primary weapons. The modern baton and blackjack, not to mention the occasional tire iron and lead pipe, are descendants of the original tree limb.

Blunt instruments, like rocks, roots, animal bones, logs and other devices were used by prehistoric man, brain animals as well as people. Sharp instruments, like stone knives, at this period were mostly used as tools, though their potential for arrows and spears was realized soon enough.

Prior to the development of bronze, edged weapons were short and brittle. Early tribal warfare depended on sticks, sometimes weighted with a stone, or given a sharp point. While we refer to this period as the Stone Age, it was at least as much a Stick Age, only the sticks have disappeared with time.

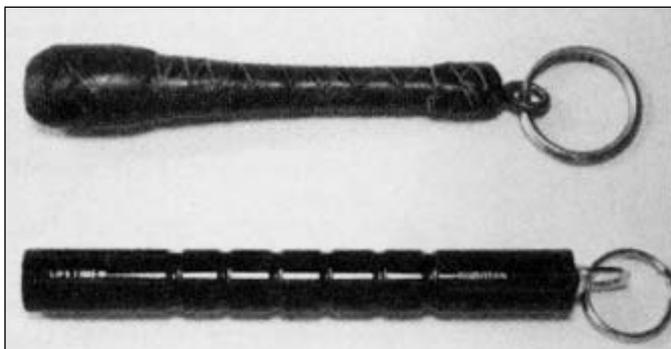
In most of the world "civilized" warfare began with the sword, first in the Bronze Age, then the Iron Age. Virtually all of the known blade shapes were explored in bronze by the Egyptians. However, sticks were still used by the peasantry, as well as for sword training by the gentry.

Asian Stick Weapons

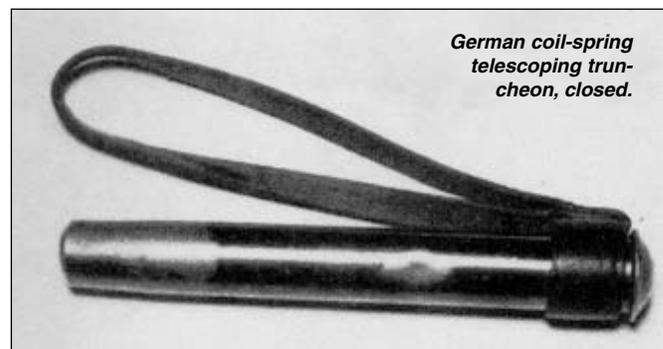
As a weapon, the stick was developed further in Asia than anywhere else, especially in Japan and the Philippines. In typical obsessive fashion, the Japanese warrior class developed marital styles around every length of stick, giving them names like *hanbojitsu*, *jojitsu*, and *bojitsu*. Swordplay was practiced with training weapons of white oak (*bo-ken*) or bamboo (*shinai*). Jointed sticks, the *nunchaku* family, were adopted from their Okinawan colony.



Defensive stance with extended ASP tactical baton.



Light plastic Kubotan compared to keyring Bucheimer blackjack.



German coil-spring telescoping truncheon, closed.

Japanese stick fighting usually combined restraint moves with strikes, maximizing the potential of the weapon. This is why traditional styles could be adapted to the Tokugawa Era policeman's *jitte* (iron truncheon with swordguard) and the modern officer's *tokushu-keibo* (special police club, the telescoping baton).

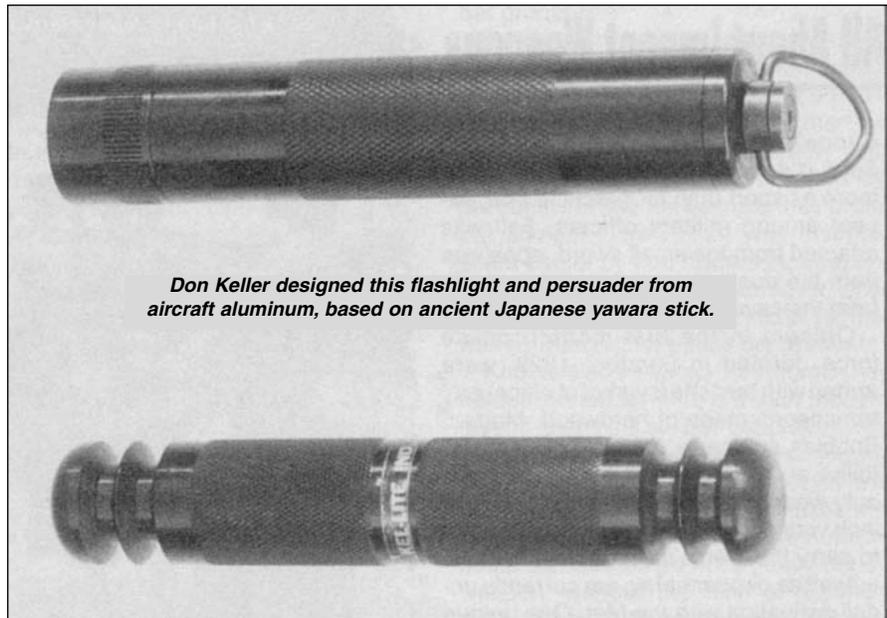
Philippine styles were equally varied, though taught in a less formal manner than the Japanese. Eventually these developed into family and clan styles taught by "moonlight and candlelight" to avoid persecution from the Spanish colonial government. Depending on the region, these arts were called *Kali*, *escrima* (or *eskrima*), or *arnis de mano*. Sticks were used as weapons and to train for using the kris and bolo.

The primary stick in Filipino fighting is a two-foot length of rattan sometimes called a *baston*. Fire-hardened, the rattan vine is extremely strong but very light.

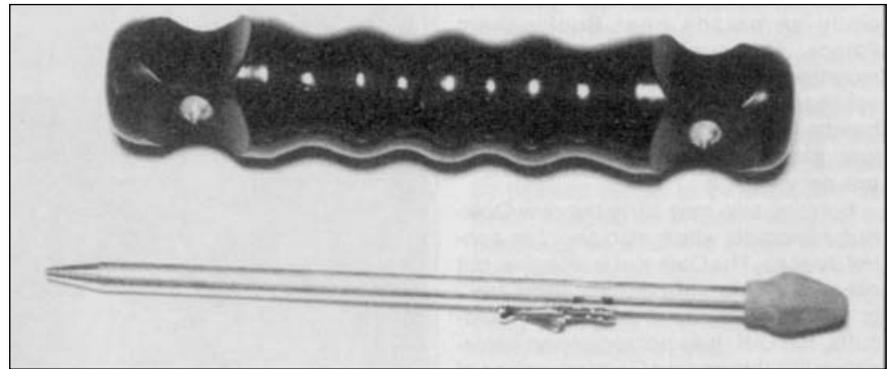
European Impact Weapons

The stick held little prestige in Europe compared to the sword. Except for the quarter-staff in medieval combat, there are few arts associated with blunt instruments. Still, the metal-reinforced stick turned out to be more effective on plate armor than the sword. The mace, the "morning star" (flail), and the war hammer were superb close combat tools for knights and fighting bishops.

In the 19th Century gentlemen replaced their small swords with decorated canes and walking sticks, for defense against beggars, thieves and mongrels. The French developed an art called "La



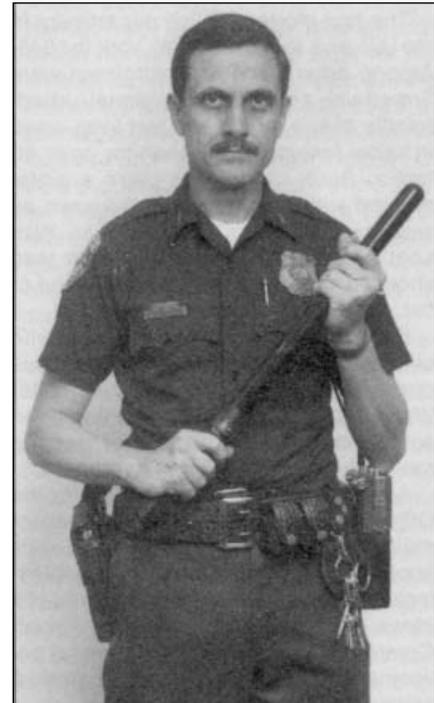
Don Keller designed this flashlight and persuader from aircraft aluminum, based on ancient Japanese yawara stick.



Maysuyama yawara stick compared to a limited production "pointer" self-defense weapon.



Special Weapons Products shoulder rig, with S&W M66, cuffs, badge, extra ammo, and clip-on Bucheimer "Knockout" flat sap.



Author, with S&W M66 .357 in snatch-resistant holster and Monadnock 26-inch plastic baton.

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Canne” for defense on Paris streets. *Salle d’Armes* still taught fencing, but more as sport than for practical skill, except among military officers. Foil was adapted from the small sword, *épée* was from the duelling sword, and saber was from the cavalry weapon.

Officers in the first modern police force, formed in London, 1829, were armed with tipstoffs (symbol of office) and truncheons made of hardwood. Modern Bobbies still carry a 15-inch truncheon (billy) as their primary and sometimes only weapon. Female officers carry a 9-inch version, but have recently petitioned to carry the men’s model. Other batons, as well as pepper spray, are currently under evaluation with the Met. One unique baton is the riot stick carried on the saddle by horse mounted Bobbies, especially on parade near Buckingham Palace. This crowd control weapon is mounted and sheathed like a sword. The scabbard and guard are still leather. The handle is wrapped with white cord. The long plastic shaft has a metal insert to prevent warpage.

Bobbies also may carry the new Quik-Kuf, handcuffs which also serve as control devices. The Quik-Kuf is effective, but not a PR problem like the old “Iron Claw” or “Twister.” Since it serves as handcuffs, the Q-K does not require an explanation like the modern German version of the Claw.

American Versions

The first modern police department in the U.S. was formed in New York in 1845. Among other weapons, patrolmen were armed with a billy, of conventional turned-handle shape, about two feet long, used in saber fashion rather than for point attacks. Such nightsticks were supplemented with blackjacks, also known as saps or slung-shots after the Civil War. Leather blackjacks were filled with lead shot or a solid lead pod, shaped round or flat, sometimes with a spring handle.

Bopping suspects over the head with billy or blackjack was the usual modus operandi for American cops until after World War II. Prior to that there had been some movement as a result of wartime research done by Col. Rex Applegate.

Applegate taught hand-to-hand for the Office Strategic Services, as well as for military police protective details. His book, *Kill or Get Killed*, published in 1943, included a chapter on stick fighting. His ideas had been influenced by British Commando instructor and Shanghai policeman W.E. Fairbairn, who had studied jujitsu for years in Asia.

Wartime research on stick fighting also influenced John Styers’ *Cold Steel*, published in 1952, which included a stick

Stick fighting in Japan starts with kendo practice, here with the bo-ken.



Karate master Tak Kubota shown with Kubotai he invented.



Kubotai restraint device designed by master Tak Kubota.



Application of German “claw.” Grasp subject’s left hand. . .then apply device to lower arm or wrist for control.



Pre-war tear gas billy shown with palm sap. Neither is common in U.S. law enforcement these days.

chapter. Prof. Matsuyama developed a new 8-inch device, which he called a "yawara stick," in 1947, based on ancient Japanese weapon. The hard plastic Matsuyama version provided point blows with either end. It had quarter-inch track shoe spikes imbedded behind the tips to keep an assailant from snatching the stick away.

The real Japanese influence, however, began in the 1960's when Officer Robert Koga developed a new method for LAPD based on Asian technique rather than saber fencing, which had once been standard. The straight Koga baton was 26 inches long. Both ends were the same, so officers would not think of one tip as the "handle," not a striking surface. For the same reason, thongs were removed, with the baton being held in the ring by a rub-

ber grommet.

Tak Kubota, Japanese-born karate master, became the next big influence at LAPD, a trend-setting department. He first trained their karate team, then became instructor for their Academy staff. When LAPD adopted the PR-24 side-handle baton in 1980 Tak became their principal advisor. The PR-24 was invented years earlier by Lon Anderson, adapting its design from the Okinawan *tonfa*. It had been adopted by L.A. Sheriffs in 1975, as well as many other police departments.

Kubota also invented the Kubaton key-holder named from him, a 6-inch piece of plastic that has all but supplanted the yawara stick in police work, even though it was developed as a restraint device, and its technique came from a style used with the Japanese bamboo pen. The Kubotan could be used as an emergency impact weapon, without the bulk of a yawara stick. It could be carried constantly attached to keys.

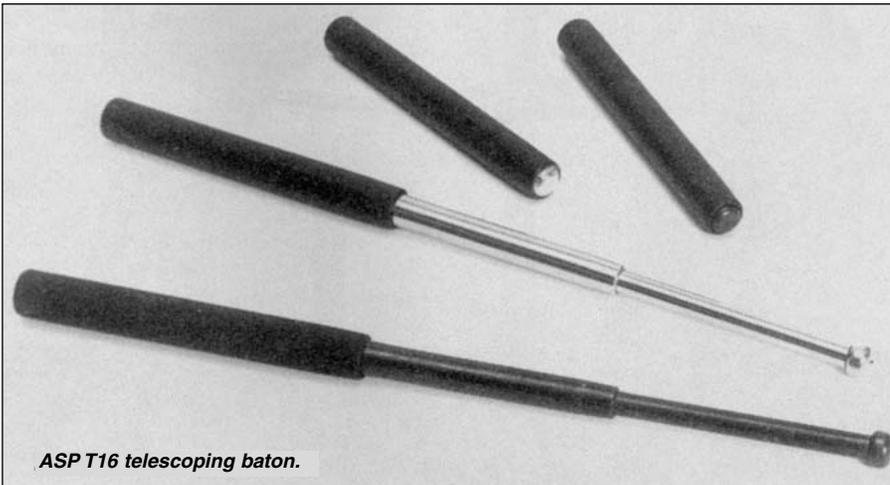
Lately, Tak has invented another restraint device called the Kubotai. This weapon uses a cord and two sticks of cunning design meant to cure some of the police problems with the *nunchaku*. The *nunchaku*, colloquially known as "nunchucks," was an Okinawan rice flail used by peasant rebels to kill Japanese soldiers. Adopted as a karate weapon, the *nunchaku* became well known to American police departments in the 1970's, sometimes on the receiving end from gang members who had watched too many Bruce Lee movies.

The *nunchaku* made an excellent striking weapon, but using it for "nutcracker style" restraint hold on the suspect's wrists could require both the officer's hands. Also, the leverage applied might cause nerve damage and extreme pain without controlling the suspect's movements (or lack of movement, since the problems usually came with the *nunchaku*'s use on passive demonstrators). The cord placement at the middle of the Kubotai made it less effective as a flail, but more effective as a restraint tool, with excellent one-handed control, allowing the other hand to guide or manipulate the suspect.

The Japanese art of jujitsu also influenced the Gripton Handler 12, a restraint weapon Al Wong developed in 1982. Manufactured by the Gripton Corporation in Los Angeles, the Handler is shaped like a shepherd's crook, a design which gives greater leverage to jujitsu "small circle" takedown techniques. Comes along which could be resisted if put on by hand are irresistible with the Handler. This baton is also a powerful impact weapon, but its primary use is for control. Straight stick techniques are still used with wood baton and sap, for example with the method developed by Arthur Lamb in Boston. One straight stick taking on new life is the Filipino baston. For several years arnis master Sam Tendencia



Special Weapons Products rig with SIG P226, mags, cuffs, and ASP F21 airweight expandable baton.



ASP T16 telescoping baton.

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made some of these to Koga baton dimensions for police departments in Orange County, California. The rattan baton was much lighter and faster than hardwood, also less likely to break bones. The only drawback to these batons was they weren't regulation black, because the porous rattan vine absorbed any stain. However, now a new company, Celaya Defense Systems of Naples, Florida, markets a *baston* with black rubberized coating called the Celayaton. This has the required uniform appearance with the speed and unbreakability of the traditional Filipino fighting stick.

However, many departments are going to a straight stick that combines concealability with full length effectiveness. This weapon is the telescoping baton first developed as the *tokushu-keibo* (special police club) in the early 60's by a Tokyo detective. A variation of this weapon was also marketed by Professor Ni of the Central Police College in Taipei. I brought some of these weapons to the U.S. in 1971, but there was little interest among American coppers in those days. Now, things have changed, thanks to larger police equipment budgets and more sophisticated officers, as well as American-developed batons and training programs.

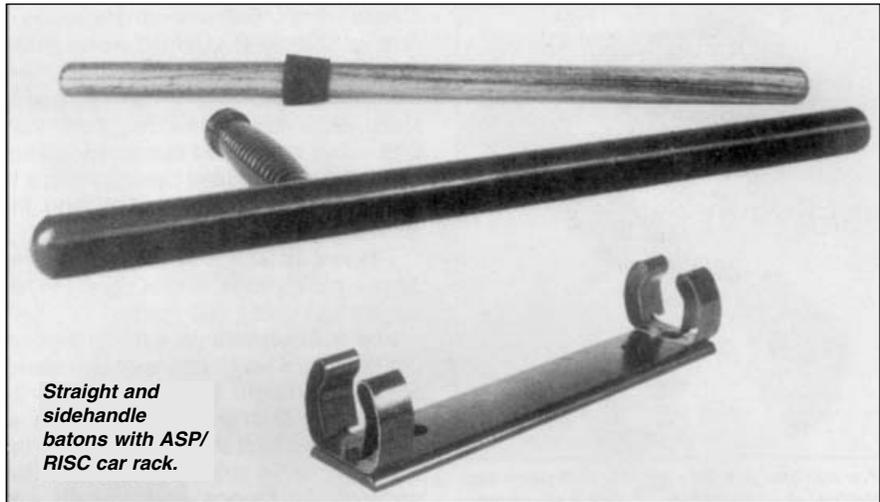
Unlike the flexible coil-spring, telescoping baton made in Germany since 1929, the Japanese and later versions have three stiff metal tubes, allowing a much larger range of blows and restraint techniques. Probably, the best know telescoping baton is the one currently marketed by ASP Inc. in Appleton, Wisconsin. High manufacturing standards, a variety of available models, and a comprehensive police training program designed by Kevin Parsons has given the ASP baton a substantial lead. For concealment combined with effectiveness I would have to rate the ASP telescoping baton and Kubotai twin-stick above the rest.

***Celaya Defense Systems**
125 N. Airport Rd.
Naples, FL 33942

Gripton International Corp.
11939 Gorham Ave. #103
Los Angeles, CA 90049

***ASP Inc.**
Box 1794
Appleton, WI 54913

***Kubotan & Kubotai Tng.**
Int'l Karate Assn.
1236 Glendale Ave.
Glendale, CA



Straight and sidehandle batons with ASP/RISC car rack.



Mounted London bobby with riot control stick.



Mounted bobby, with riot baton. Note leather sheath, stiff leather guard, white cord handle. Plastic shaft has metal insert.

French stick fighting is taught in the art of "La Canne."

