



QUARTERLY

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Winter 1998, Vol. 4, No. 1

THE IMPORTANCE OF REALISTIC SELF-APPRAISAL

by John McSweeney, 10th Degree Black Belt

The primary purpose of self-defense training is to gain the skill needed to effectively protect yourself against an attacker. Such training can be in a striking art, a grappling art or a blend of both. In our kenpo system, we devote approximately 85% of our training to striking and 15% to a variety of joint locks, throws, chokes and ground-fighting techniques. In addition, we train students in the use of contemporary weapons, including the handgun, knife and club. This is what sets us apart from the vast majority of "traditional" martial arts schools, most of which teach weapon techniques based on old-fashioned farming implements like the nunchaku and tonfa.

For most students, significant ability in unarmed self-defense develops only after years of training. The reason it takes so long is because of the time required to master the techniques, as well as the time it takes to train the motor nerves for "spontaneous" action. No matter how long you've been training, at some point you must ask yourself: "Just how effective am I?" It's a simple question that may actually have life and death implications.

Realistic self-appraisal is crucial, at least in part, because of the martial arts mystique that often encourages students to think of themselves as being even more competent than they actually are. We must all keep in mind that skill alone isn't the only important factor in self-defense. Size and strength must also be taken into consideration. For example, a powerful 240 pound man has a distinct advantage over a much smaller person simply because of his larger size and brute strength. To overcome this kind of mismatch, smaller people must develop a realistic understanding of which targets are most vulnerable (e.g., throat, neck, chin, eyes, groin), and then train themselves to accurately strike those targets when confronted by a much larger attacker.

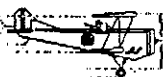
Unfortunately, even the most powerful empty-hand techniques may be ineffective when you're facing an armed criminal. Although it's true that kenpo offers some brutally devastating ways to incapacitate the armed attacker, closing the distance to deliver the necessary

techniques can be a highly risky proposition at best. In these kinds of situations, you need something more than skill in unarmed self-defense to give yourself a fighting chance. That's why many storekeepers have guns handy, and why many honest citizens carry concealed handguns in those states where it's legally allowed.

The fact is that there's a lot you need to consider when it comes to self-defense, and the stakes are very high. That's why it's important that each individual be totally realistic when it comes to appraising his or her self-defense capabilities. If you doubt this, ask yourself whether you could defeat a 300 pound professional wrestler or three criminals armed with knives, using nothing more than your bare hands. Even if you believe you could, prudence would dictate that you try to escape from these extremely dangerous situations. But if you can't escape, you might very well be able to save yourself with the legal pocketknife that you've been trained to use. A quick slash to a vulnerable target would most likely be a great deterrent against an armed assailant who's threatening your life.

Of course, since many, if not most, self-defense situations don't require an armed response, you should continue to consistently train to increase your striking power, so that even in old age, you can hit hard! I just turned 70, yet I know that my strikes can drop anyone at anytime. Why? Because I've never stopped training. However, I also know how important weapons can be, so I continue to train regularly in handgun combat shooting, as well as with the knife and club. I do this because I'm a realist. I recognize that there may be times when unarmed techniques simply aren't enough to defeat a criminal attack.

In the final analysis, no matter how long you've trained or what your skill level is, you owe it to yourself to do a regular, realistic appraisal of your self-defense capabilities. In addition to giving you a reliable perspective on your skill level, it will also help you realize just how far you've come in your training—and how far you have to go.



The Chinese Kenpo Association of Yonkers has become the newest member of the AKKA. The school's owners, Tony Fox and Stuart Barksdale both trained under the late Eric Paseltiner, one of the earliest students in John McSweeney's New York City school. Incidentally, Master McSweeney's NYC studio, which was founded in January of 1965, was the first kenpo school on the east coast. If you'd like to contact Tony or Stuart, you can write them at The Chinese Kenpo Association of Yonkers, 226 Sommerville Place, Yonkers, NY, 10703.

And from the White Tiger Kenpo school in Addison, Illinois, comes news that Rob Hinds fought in the Chicago Challenge II on November 15th, and will fight again in April, 1998. Also, Tom Saviano, owner of the White Tiger school, taught two rape awareness classes for Superior Coffee Co. (A division of Sara Lee) Approximately 100 women attended the seminars on December 5 and December 12.

Climbing Toward The Mountaintop

Recent AKKA promotions:

3rd Degree Black

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Stuart Barksdale

1st Degree Black

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Brown I

John Batiste
Larry Briley

Brown II

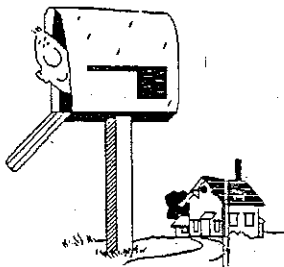
Craig Bultemeier
William Combs
Todd Custable
Chris Heneghan

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Brad Dawson
Keith Dawson
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Send us your student promotions (*brown belt and above*), so we can honor their progress.

Don't forget this is *your* newsletter, so please send news items, comments, letters and other contributions. We reserve the right to edit all copy for length and content.



Continuing Education

All AKKA books and tapes are available at a **discount to members.**

- *Battleaxe: A Warrior's Tale*, by John McSweeney: \$10.00 (reg. \$12.95)
- *Kamikaze Fighting: The Self-Defense of Last Resort*, by Mike Vassolo: \$15.00 (reg. \$18.95)
- *Rape Defense Manual*, by Chris Manglaris: \$3.00 (reg. \$3.95)
- *Introduction to the White Tiger System* (40 min tape by Tom Saviano & Keith Hackney): \$29.95 (reg. \$39.95)

(For mail orders, please include \$4.00 for shipping and handling)

Credits...

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