

Fairbairn's Combative Stick Method

Part One - The Double Handed Method

This short article hopefully will bring a greater understanding to what is arguably the most recognised portion of Fairbairn's combative stick system – the double-handed method¹.

It is not designed as a training manual or guide and is not meant to be any type of recommendation; rather in this article I'm attempting to help preserve the knowledge of W.E Fairbairn's historical Legacy. No liability is accepted or can be held by the author or the owner of this website for any actions resulting from the use or misuse of this information, this article is for information purposes only:

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!

The techniques of the double handed method are the most well known of Fairbairn's stick system but they are only a small part of his combative stick instruction. The Double Handed method is shown in the greatest part in Fairbairn's books "All In Fighting²" and Self Defence for Women and Girls³" – the latter having the most complete explanation of the two works. Fairbairn's first combative type book "Scientific Self Defence" only shows one double handed technique so it is my opinion that the techniques were developed after this book's publication, possibly during wartime. As a method it has several things to recommend it; the techniques are gross motor, they are both easy to learn and to perform and retain under stress. The use of two hands also aids in stick retention should the weapon be grabbed or the opponent attempt a disarm. Two Hand use also allows greater control over the stick's movement during a technique and adds to a blow's focus and power.

The method became standard instruction during World War Two for SOE, & OSS agents and to the Commando, SAS, MITC, Ranger and other "Special" type forces, it was also taken up to some degree by the Military Police and even the US Marine Corps. With the exception of some Law Enforcement Agencies the double-handed method was largely forgotten after the War, one can still see some of the techniques shown in self defence books (mostly as "Self-defence using an umbrella") to this day but it is doubtful that the authors themselves know of their true origins.

Program of Instruction

Stick

To begin Fairbairn advised that a stick of between "18 and 24 inches in length and about 1 inch in thickness" be obtained, in "Self Defence for Women & Girls" he shows the techniques using a traditional umbrella but he also writes that a stick can be broken from a tree. The same techniques can be utilised with a broom or mop, iron bar, baseball bat or even a rolled up newspaper!

Guards

Fairbairn shows three preparatory “guard” type positions or stances in his books,

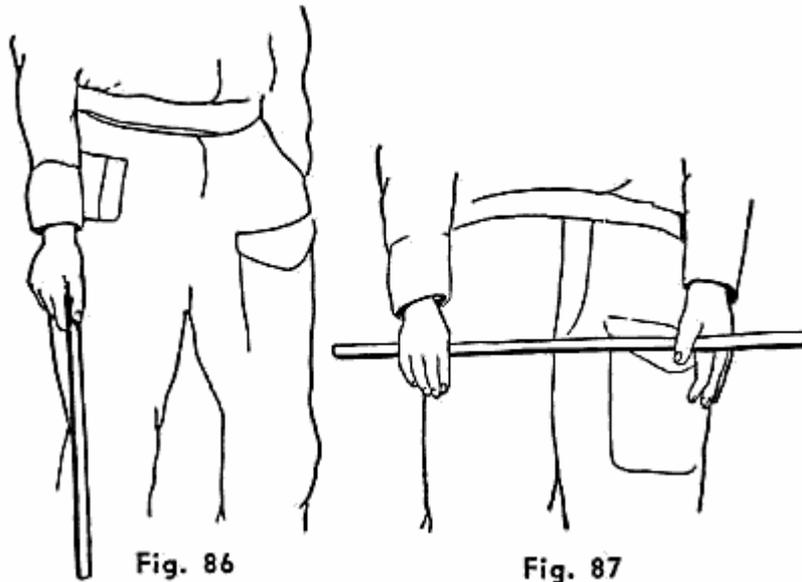
“Front waist hold”

Stick held level horizontally and in front of the body – from Self Defence for Women & Girls (Below)



“Right hand hold”

Held in Right hand stick is held down, alongside right hand leg, - from “All-In Fighting” (Below Left)



“Snooker Hold”

(Similar to the “Front Waist Hold” but the left hand grip is between thumb and forefinger like holding a Snooker/Pool Cue) – again from “All-In Fighting” (Picture Above right)

In practice it would be better to begin from the “Front Waist hold” then later try to execute the techniques from the other positions. An Umbrella would look pretty innocent in these positions and smaller umbrellas wouldn’t look particularly offensive if held in the “Front Waist Hold”.

Grip and Nomenclature

The stick is held with both hands, each one approximately six inches from either end, the left hand grips with palm up and the right with palm down – this gives plenty of length to strike at either end. For simplicity I will use these terms;

The left end of the stick as “The Point”

The right end of the stick “The Butt”

The middle of the stick “The Bar”..

The techniques are as follows

1. Point – Drag Halfway Across Opponents Stomach Horizontally



2. Point – Directly Up and Under Chin Vertically



3. Point – Directly Down Face Vertically



4. Butt – Horizontally Across Face Horizontally



5. Bar – Held Horizontally but Smashed Up and Under Chin Vertically.



The Next two images show how the sequence should be performed as one technique.



Fig. 88

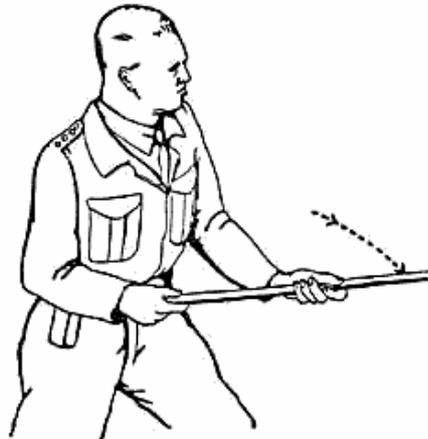


Fig. 89



Fig. 90

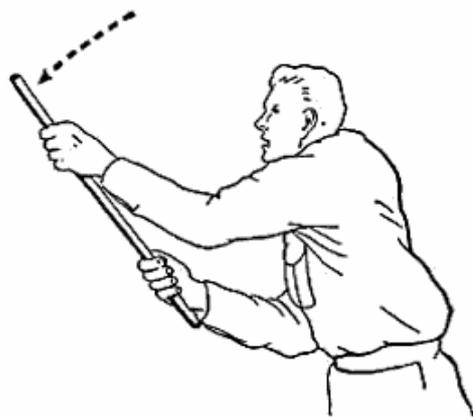


Fig. 91



Fig. 92



Fig. 93

The illustrations show the techniques better than I can describe them but this quote from one of the first SOE agents may enlighten more;

“Just do as I say with your Umbrella. Is it only a small one? Big or small, you will see what an excellent weapon it can be. Hold it tightly in both hands, one at each end, and drag it’s point briskly and horizontally across your aggressors stomach – just as though you were trying to strike a giant safety-match. This is quite pain-less but always brings about the same reaction: surprised, your aggressor pull’s in his midriff sharply and leans slightly forward.

He is then in the ideal position for the second and most important part of this simple operation. Still holding your umbrella firmly, you sweep the point up and jab it as hard as you can into his face.

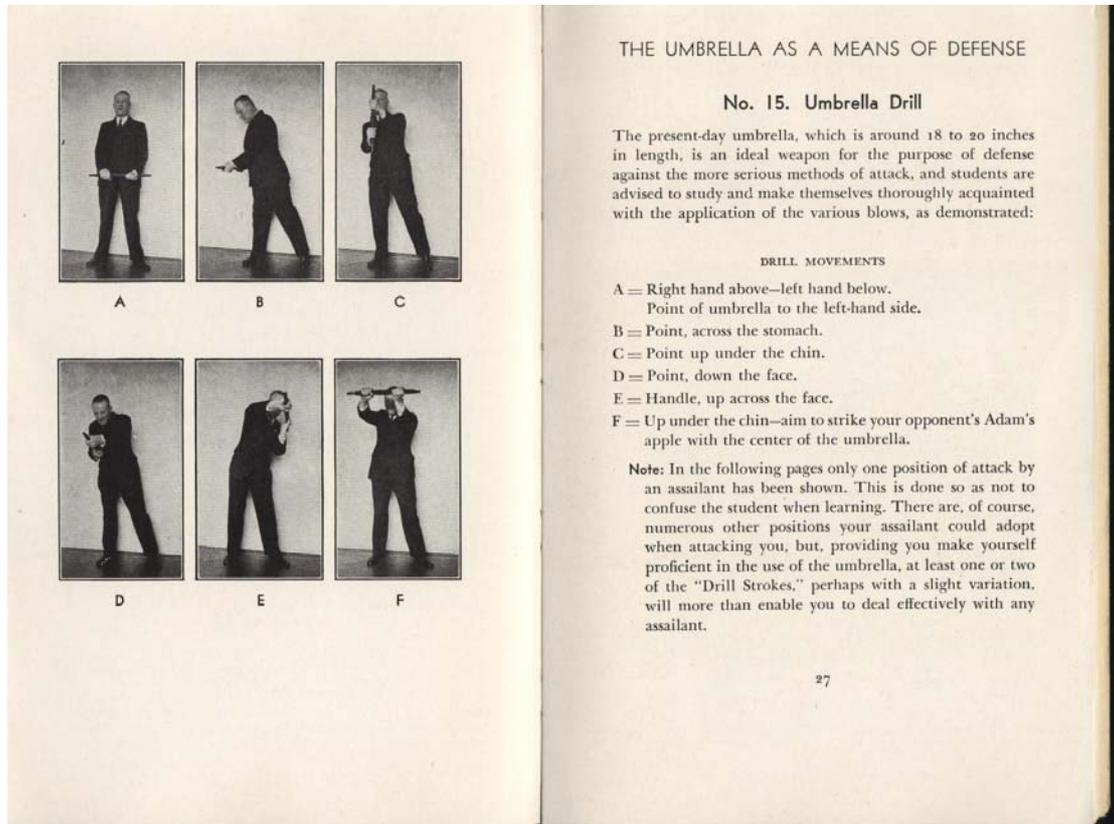
Now indeed, it is all over bar the shouting, so scream as much as you can and call the police, but if you are the kind-hearted person you seem to be, you will also call an ambulance for your victim.”

Langelan, 1959

Notes

As far as footwork is concerned note that in the SDFW&G picture Fairbairn is demonstrating the techniques with his back against a wall and that his feet never appear to move more than a few inches. He is transferring his bodyweight via small

steps (diagonally forward) and by hip and shoulder rotation, this adds extra power and impetus into the blows at close quarters. This is close range stick work where the opponent is "In Your Face". Compare the photo sequence below to the one we have above from "All In Fighting"



Notice the difference?

The line diagram above shows how footwork can be used against an opponent at a greater distance; the bodyweight is still transferred via stepping, hip and shoulder rotation but *“the greater the distance the more body weight is behind the blow.”* Two of the most important things Fairbairn believed were a strong grip on the stick and “the weight of the body behind the blow”.

As a system the techniques can be used at almost any range from 5 inches outwards, practice could start by being conducted backed against a wall, then increasing the distance. A variation as training is more advanced could be to start the training at close range then increasing the distance so the trainee ends up running to the target and executing the techniques. Remember these techniques are all designed to be wholly offensive in nature, there are no defensive movements or wasted flourishes, there are only five moves, (which is a plus if you believe in Hicks Law as I do) the system is just bare bones close combat designed to do the job and allow the person to carry on.

Practice can be solo (a mirror is especially helpful here in checking your movements) and could be conducted anywhere there is around three foot of clear space. Partner work should begin slowly with light contact *only*, hard contact must be avoided at all costs as even so called “safety sticks” made of foam or other materials cannot be relied on to take the power out of the strikes. Kickshields, Thai pads and focus mitts can provide excellent targets to develop technique although with Spar-Pro or Bob type targets it may be preferable to use a safety type stick to prevent damage to the surfaces.

The techniques should be practiced in sequence until they can be executed automatically, then practice should be varied. Maybe instead of performing techniques One through Five you could try Techs ~ 1,5,4,3 then 2 or another variation. Experiment with what works for you and your body type, remember there are no rules written in stone, it all comes down to what works for you personally. The techniques could also be practiced with the opposite side of body e.g.: right hand side grips stick “palm up with point” and left hand grips “palm down with butt”.

Further Study

“Providing you make yourself proficient in the use of the umbrella, at least one or two of the "Drill Strokes," perhaps with a slight variation, will more than enable you to deal effectively with any assailant.”

Fairbairn, 1942

Many people have developed techniques that work quite well with or appear to be a development from the double handed method – what Fairbairn termed the “slight variation”. Charles Nelson has excellent material on double-handed methods in his Red Book that could be added onto Fairbairns. Also if one end of the stick is released you could try Fairburn’s one-handed methods or “Kengla’s short end method” could be employed. Malcolm Harris advised that technique number one should be directed at the groin and blended double handed and one-handed methods in his books. The

US Military and Law Enforcement have excellent work on the bar smash which is well worth further study.

Here are a few of books I used to research this article;

Knights of the Floating Silk, George Langelaan, The Quality book Club, 1959
Red book, Charles Nelson
Cold Steel - Technique of Close Combat, John Styers, Paladin Reprint
All-In Fighting, W.E Fairbairn, Faber & Faber, 1942
Hand's Off, W.E Fairbairn, New York Applegate
Technique and Use of the Police Baton – FBI – 1967
Effective Secrets of Self Defense – Malcolm Harris - 1974
Combat Conditioning - The US Marine Corps Physical Training and Hand to Hand
Combat Course” Paladin Reprint
Hand to Hand Combat Manual - V5, United States Navy, 1943, 1st Ed
The Military Police Club – 4th AIT BDE (MP) – US Army – nd
FM 19-15 Chapter 10 – Riot batons

Have fun but train safe!

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¹I've used the term double-handed method in this article for ease of explanation (because it uses two hands!) as far as I know Fairbairn himself never used this term!

²All-In Fighting was published in the US as “Get Tough”

³Self Defence For Women & Girls was published as “Hands Off!” in the US.

This manual is downloaded from:

<http://www.get-tough.net> – Swedish Close Combat Website