

# Karate

ILLUSTRATED

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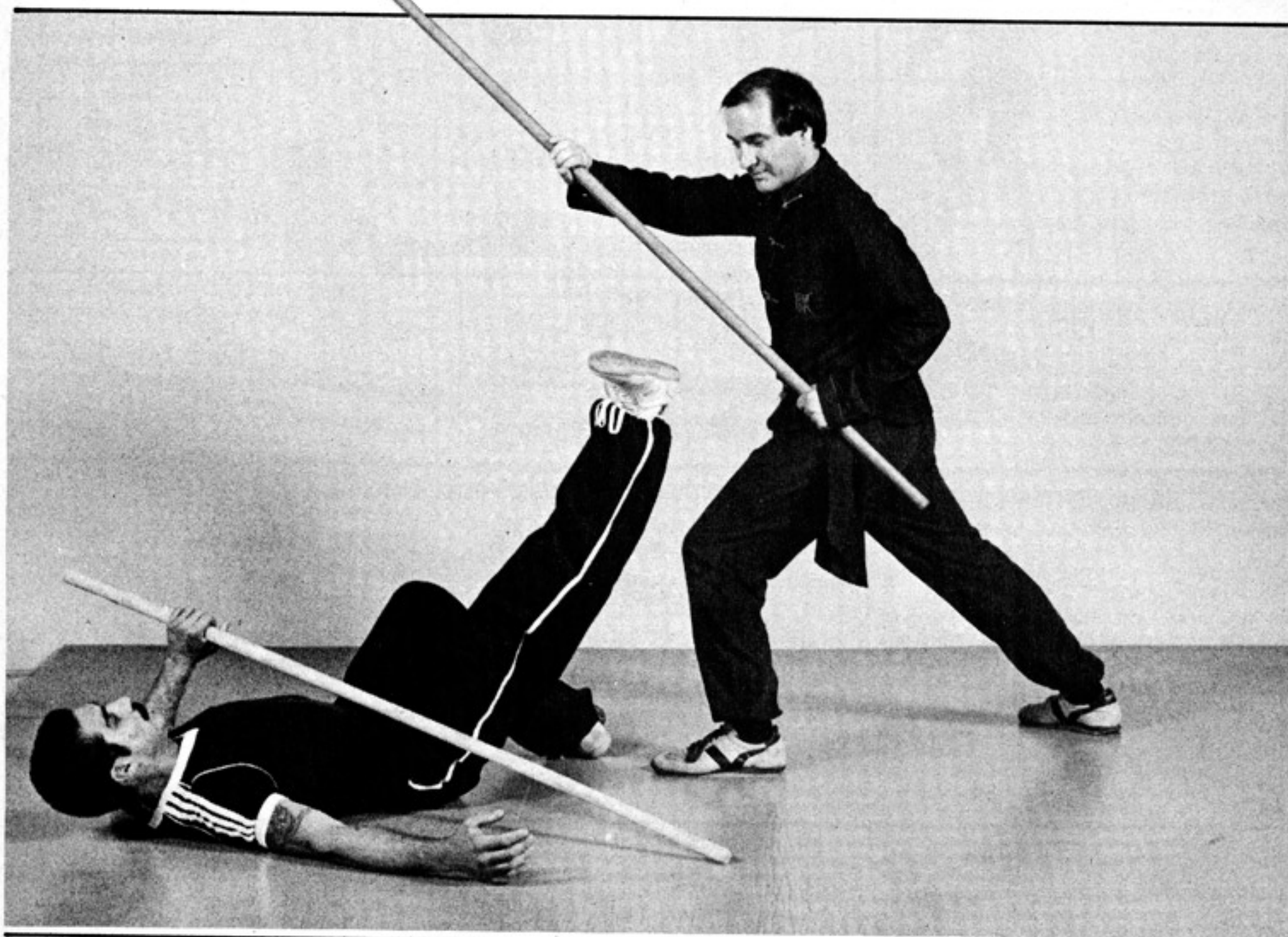
**CHOOSE  
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Self-Defense





# The Classical Chinese Quarter-Staff

by Alexander S. Holub, Ph.D.



After the rock, the stick is probably the oldest weapon known to man. A stick, of course, is nothing more than an extension of the hand and arm, so it stands to reason that possession of this little item will ordinarily keep a flailing attacker at bay and prevent injury.

More than likely, the stick or staff was first used to keep wild animals away. Man discovered, once armed with a stick, that he could injure or even kill beasts that would otherwise simply have been too much for him. In time, stones were added to these staffs, increasing their weight, striking power and lethality. When the stone was pointed, *voilà*, man had a spear.

Interestingly enough, the Bronze Age man did not use metal. Bronze by itself was too soft, but for a time, weapons of this of this ore were used for show as status symbols. It wasn't

until the Iron Age that man was able to devise metal weapons durable enough to withstand battle.

One of the most effective long-range fighting sticks even today is the quarter-staff. This weapon is usually about six feet in length and smooth all the way around. This handy tool was used by many people, including shepherds and travelers.

The quarter-staff is a cross-cultural weapon. Some of the techniques are quite similar among any of a number of peoples, but many cultures have techniques that are uniquely their own.

There's a story concerning an expert quarter-staff fighter in medieval China. It seems that after years of hard work and practice, he had quite perfected his craft. He could swing his staff and strike his target precisely on the tip, bringing the power directly to the point of impact. He then went around the

countryside challenging the best staff fighters to be found.

In every town and village, challengers fell. His ability to control the power in his staff allowed him to swing the weapon and break an opponent's staff or bones. No one could stand up to his technique.

The fighter conveniently had an apprentice who took care of details such as letting the towns know that the fighter was coming, and setting up the matches. This was the way the fighter would make money.

In one town where the fighter had several matches, one man watched the fights very closely. After the matches, the man decided he would challenge the staff fighter. But due to the fact that the latter was highly skilled, the man decided to develop his technique to a higher degree and challenge the fighter the following year.



A day or so before the staff fighter was to fight in the town a year later, the challenger went to the champion's room. The fighter's apprentice was there alone. The man talked to the apprentice, and after paying him a good deal of money, the apprentice cut off two inches from the fighter's staff and made it look well-worn as it was before.

The day of the fight came around.

The man was ready to do battle with the staff fighter and he was the first to challenge.

The fight began and the challenger wasted no time in putting his theory into action. He quickly attacked taking a swing at the champion. The champion blocked the attack and countered with one of his own. However something strange happened.

The counter missed, much to the champion's surprise. He took another shot at his opponent, yet once again he came up short.

"How could this be?" the confused champion wondered. The challenger tried to take advantage of his opponent's perplexity by taking a swing to his head. The champion recovered, blocking the challenger's staff and knocking it downward. The champion knew the next move would be an attack to the foot. He reacted with a block but again he was short. The staff struck the champion's foot, shooting pain throughout his entire body and unnerving him for a split second.

Wasting no time, the challenger swung his staff striking the champion's skull. He continued his assault until the champion lay on the ground, defeated for the first time.

Following the match, the champion questioned his apprentice about his staff. The boy admitted that he had altered the weapon at the request of the challenger. Hearing that, the champion realized his mistake.

In all of his hard practice, he had worked on bringing the power out to the very tip of the staff—gauged at six feet. He did not make allowances for anything less than that length. Once the staff fighter found this out he was able to adjust his fighting to any length staff and was not defeated again.

Many classical Chinese quarter-staff techniques are quite unique. There are several things that are very indigenous to the Chinese style.

Most techniques are based on holding the staff solid with both hands and swinging the ends somewhat like it's being pushed. The blocks are done in a similar manner.

The classical Chinese technique stresses the hands being in constant motion which makes the staff more maneuverable and more difficult to block. Most the blocks themselves are designed to go directly into a counter-attack.

The first thing to be learned when working with the classical quarter-staff techniques is the side spin of the staff. From this spin one can block and protect the sides and go directly into a head strike, groin or low strike, a side strike or into a scoop of a low thrust.

Probably the most important thing to remember about the spinning of the staff is that, as you turn to the side during the spin, make sure you twist only your waist. The knees should still be facing directly forward. Also, the hands are placed in a position where they are always facing downward. This hand position is kept during any movements that are done with the quarter-staff.

The next thing that must be learned is the proper basic attacks and blocks.

Place the object on a stool. Swing the staff across the waist in a side strike and hit the object with the tip of the staff. This may seem to be an easy task but there are several things to remember. First, the staff must be kept level with the waist as you swing it across the waist. Second, the chi must be brought out to the tip of the staff. In order to do this you have to have control of the staff. When you hit the can you must *not* go beyond the point of impact. This also goes for the upward, downward and forward strikes. By not going beyond the point of impact the power comes out to the tip of the staff. Further, if the swing across the waist is correctly done and the hands move properly, the tip of the staff then will whip and snap. Therefore, you can see that being in control of the staff is of utmost importance. When you hit the can properly it will have a flat trajectory like a line drive in baseball and there will be a flowing of movement and chi through your body out to the tip of the staff.

***"The quarter-staff is a cross-cultural weapon. Some of the techniques are quite similar among any of a number of peoples, but many cultures have techniques that are uniquely their own."***

Here again the Chinese classical techniques are rather unique. This is where the constant movement of the hands is extremely important. It is through this hand movement that the power (*chi*) is directed outward to the tip of the staff.

Probably the simplest way to describe the movement of the hands is this: one hand will reach to a point about four inches from the end of the staff. The other hand then swings the staff across the waist and ends up across the waist. Consequently, both hands will end up on the same side of the body.

On the side strike the staff is swung across the waist. On the upward strike, (to the groin, chest or jaw), or the downward strike, (to the head, shoulders or arms), the staff is swung either upward along the side of the body or downward across the chest respectively.

One of the training techniques used to create accuracy and power in the strikes involves the use of a small object such as a piece of wood or a soda can.

Another basic move is the forward or backward thrust. This is usually referred to as a "shoot." Again, it is important that the hands move. This is not just a pushing of the staff but an on-the-spot strike. With this motion vulnerable spots which are open can be struck.

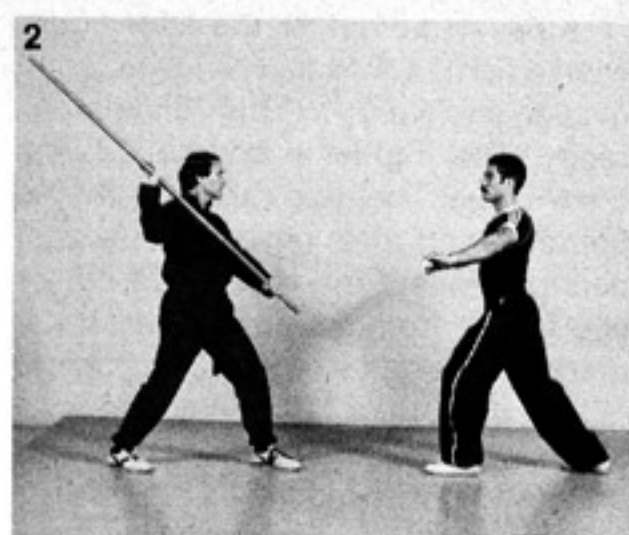
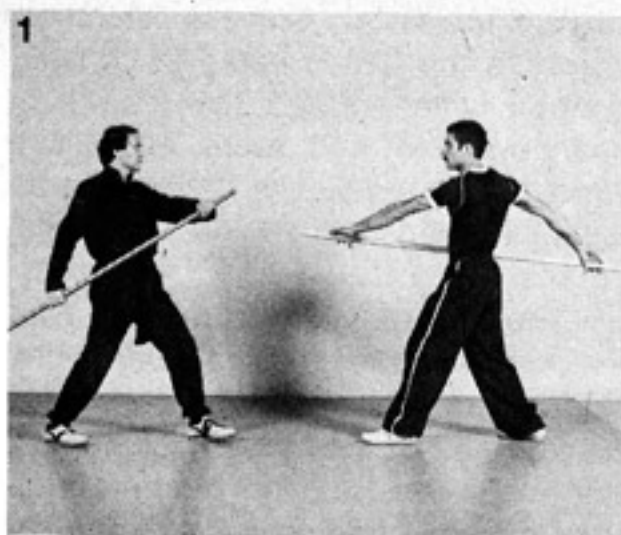
Here, too, you can use the can. This time the movement is a straight forward strike to the center of the can. This will help to develop accuracy and pin-point striking power. Again, control is important. It is a quick strike and pull back.

Next, to the basic blocks. The most obvious blocks are the straight-out blocks. These are used to protect from the side, over the head or below the knees. On this block most people tend to hold the staff too tight. When this is done you are in danger of having your fingers hit by the opponent sliding his staff hard and quickly along your staff. Also, if the hands are too tight around the staff you won't be able to move them quickly enough for a good

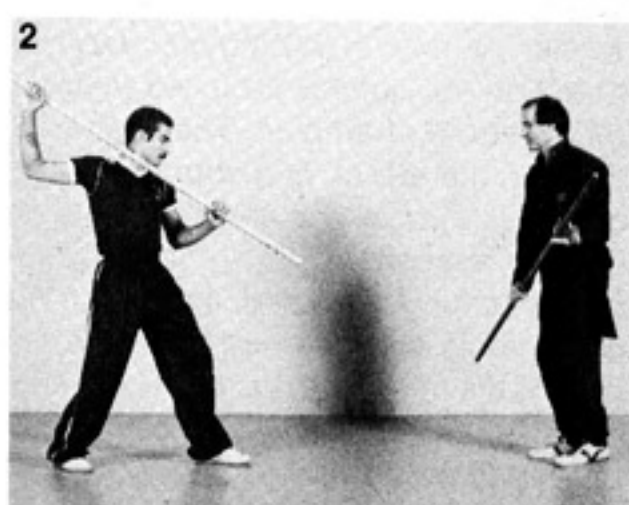
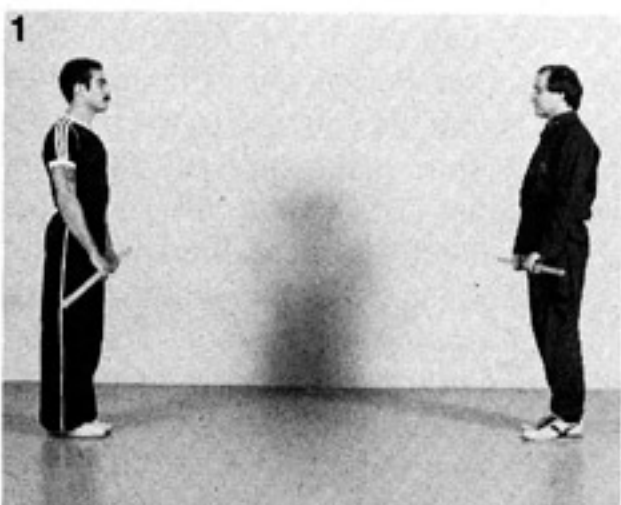


# Chinese Quarter-Staff

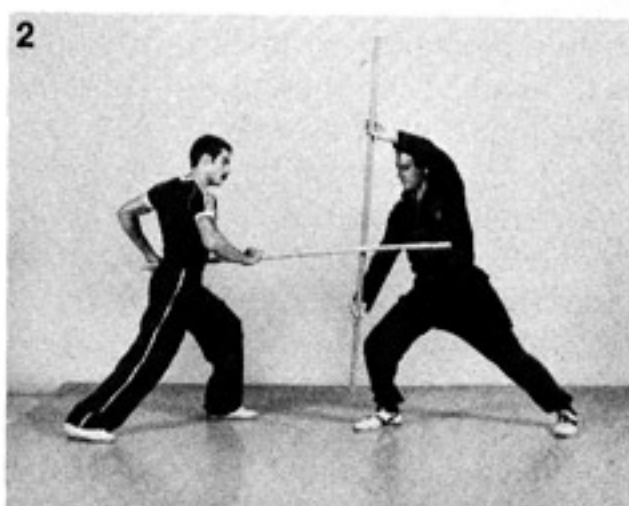
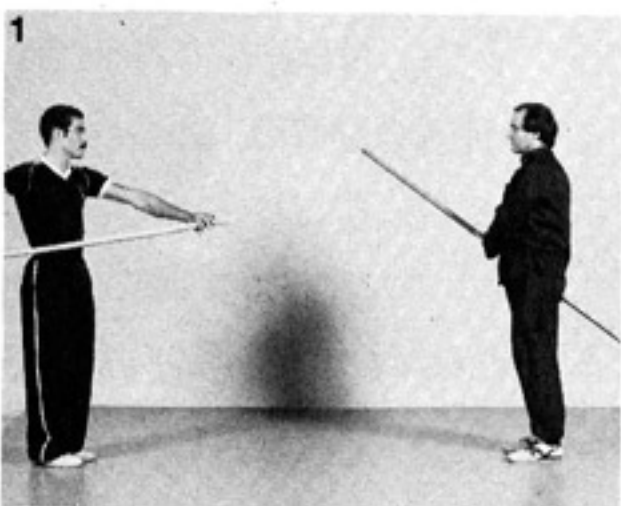
As the author (left) prepares (1) for an overhead strike, his partner counters with what may seem at first to be the most obvious defense in shielding himself behind the staff (2) and thus uses the middle of the weapon (3) to block the attack. However, the defender is now restricted for a second defense or a counterattack. By changing the positioning of his hands, the attacker is able to quickly pivot (4) the staff and move in with a low poke (5) to the midsection. Even though the defender is able to block certain moves, by relying only on the middle of the staff for his protection, he has restricted his range of defense to the length of his arm.



After the partners square off (1), as the attacker angles (2) his staff for a poke to the lower body, the defender pivots his weapon and utilizes the end (3) for a block. When the defender inverts (4) his staff, he limits the attacker's own weapon and is able to easily (5) move in for a poke to the attacker's head.



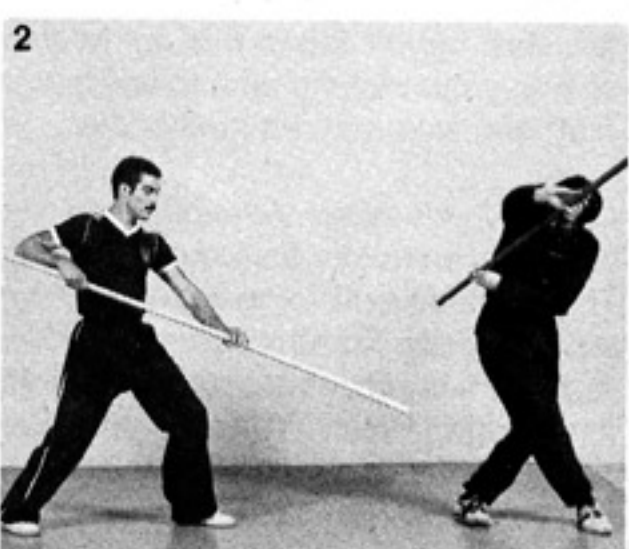
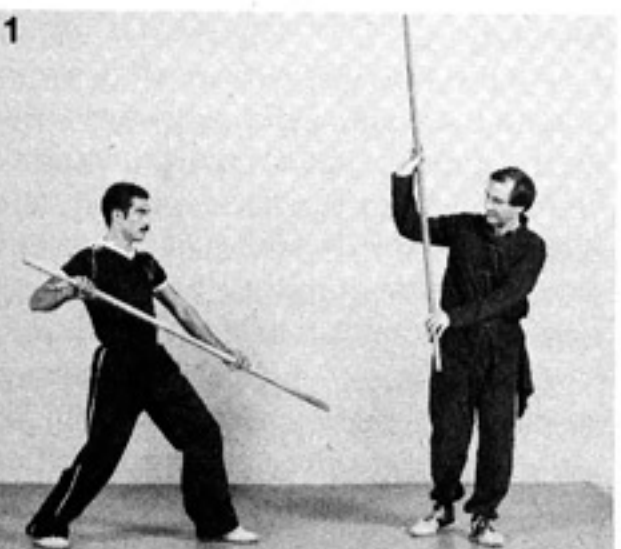
The two square off again (1), and as the attacker begins a midbody thrust, the defender moves in (2) for a block. While he does use the middle of the staff, note how the technique is different than in the first sequence as now the defender blocks in such a way as to force his foe's weapon out of the attack area. With minimal movement, the defender uses the tip to break (3) the grip of the attacker. As the attacker drops (4) his staff, for more power the defender inverts his own weapon and strikes (5) the attacker's neck. Note that by positioning his hands toward the end of the staff, the defender is able to deliver much more power in the strike.



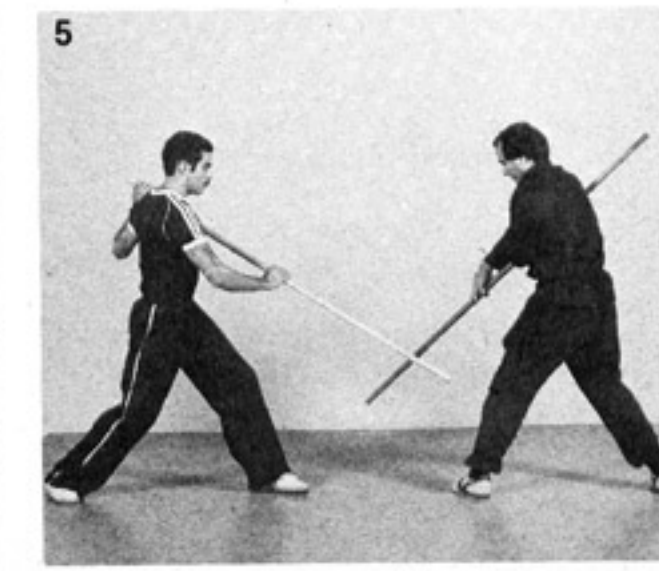
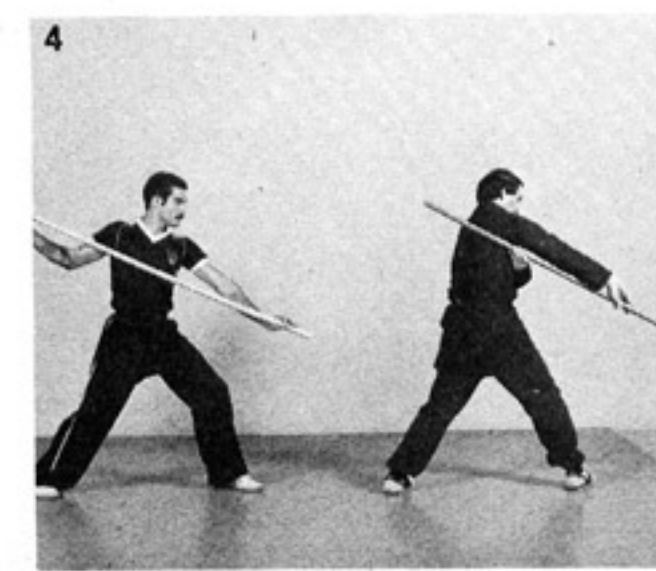
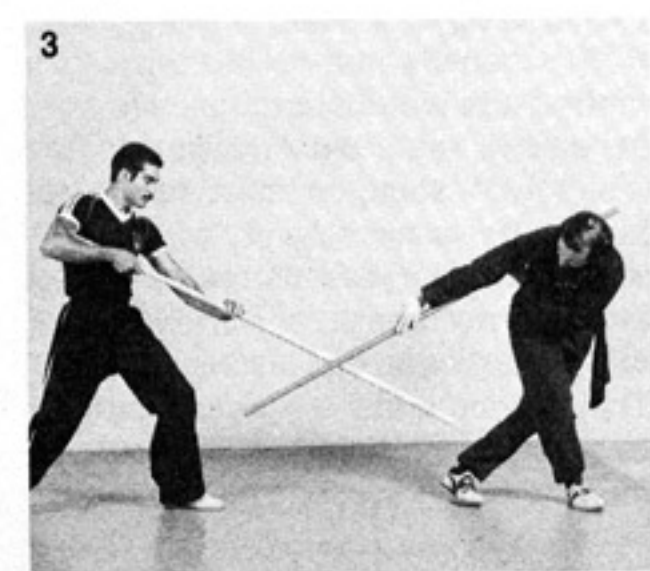
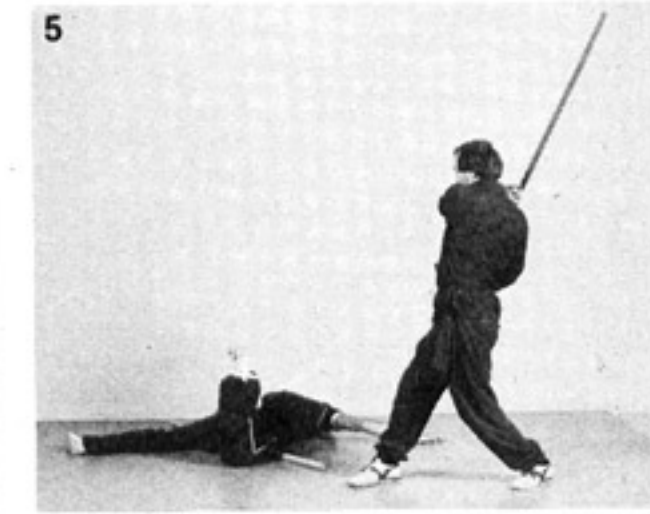
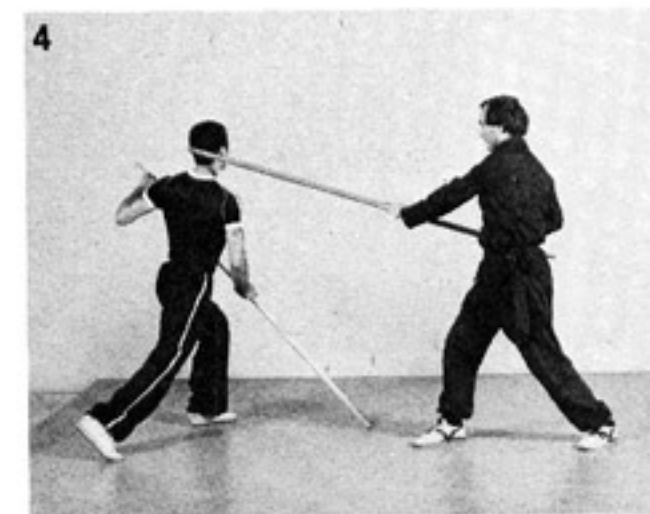
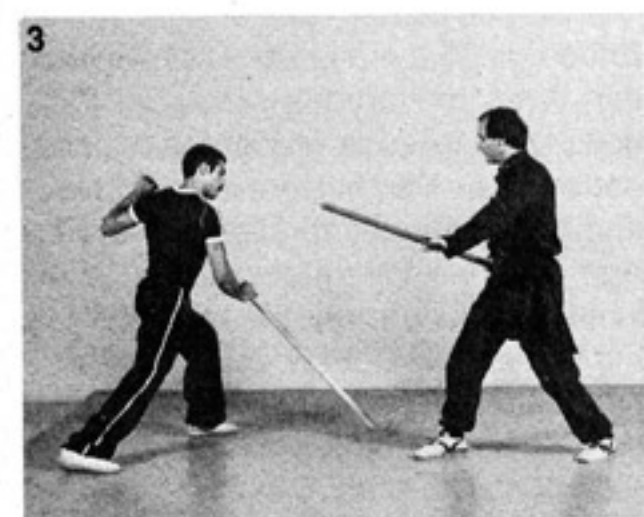
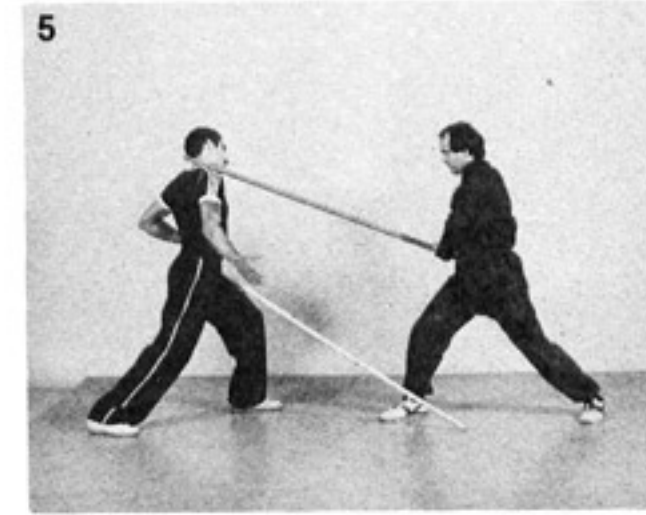
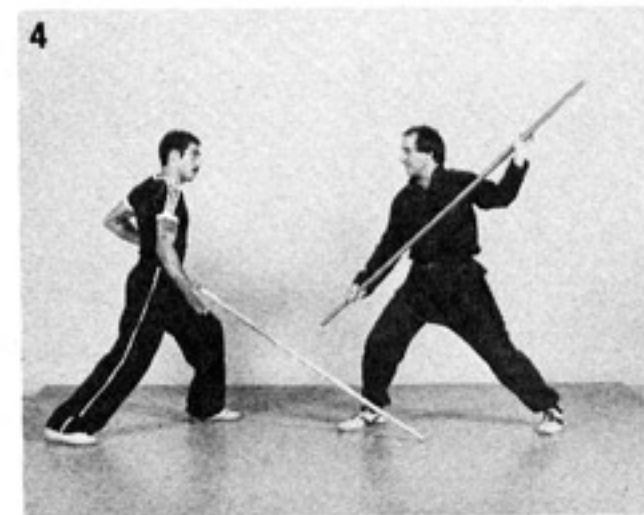
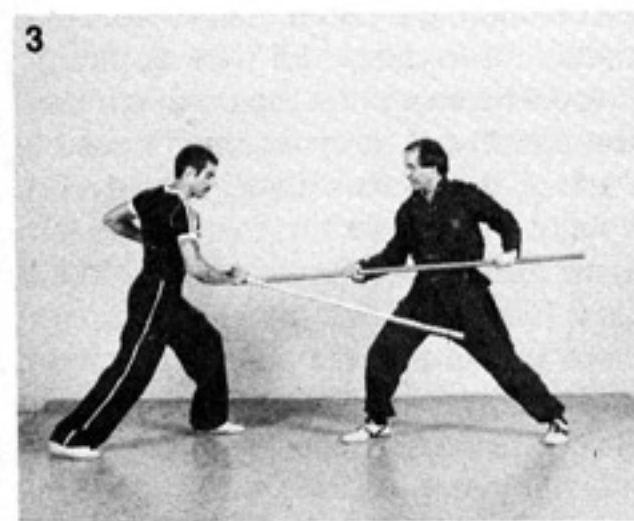
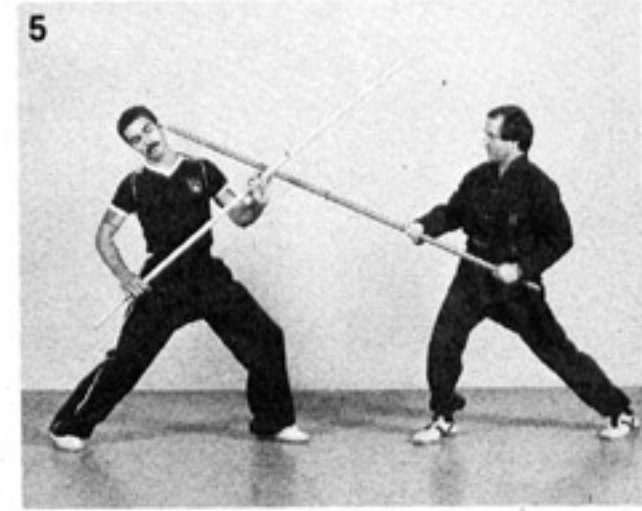
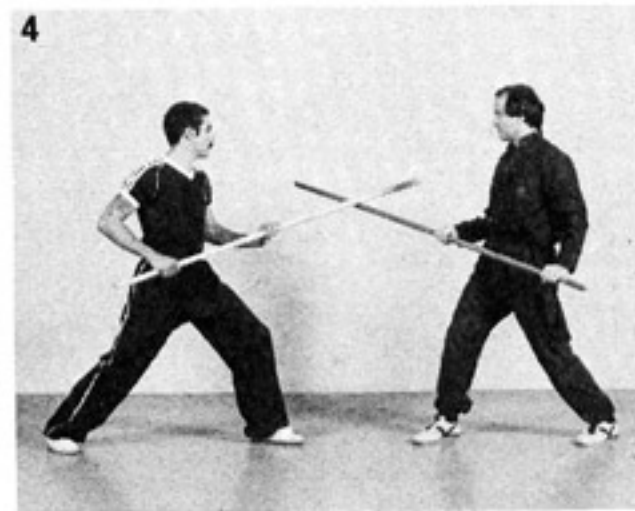
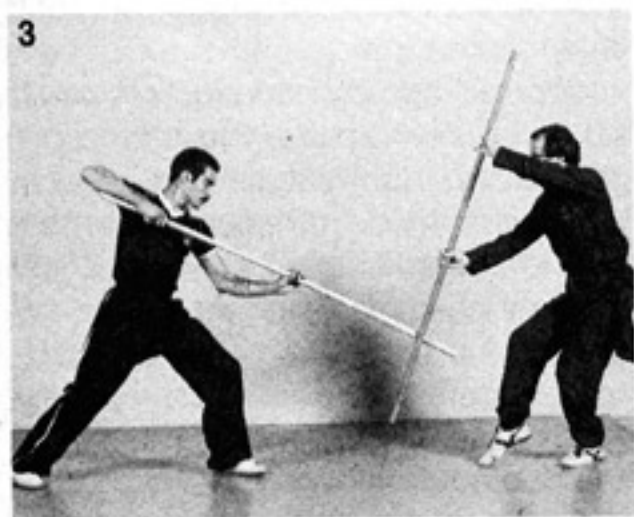
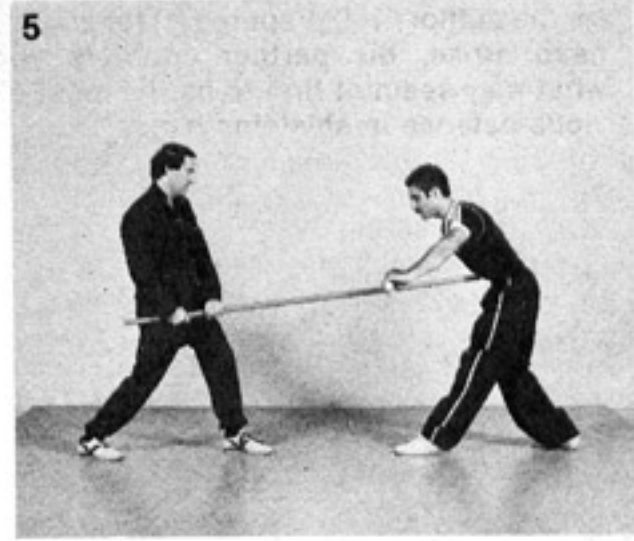
After the two have squared off, as the attacker begins to attempt (1) a low strike, the defender whips his staff around (2) and blocks the attack, again knocking the attacker's weapon out of the effective striking area. The author then pivots his staff (3) by exchanging his hands, strikes the attacker (4) in the back of the neck and forces (5) the attacker to the ground. Note how the defender is now preparing for a second strike.



As the attacker attempts (1) a low poke, the defender draws his weapon up out of the line of attack (and also the attention of the attacker). The defender then takes one step back (2) and upends the staff for a low block (3). As the attacker prepares (4) for a second strike, the defender spins around counterclockwise for a second block (5). While this sequence may initially look awkward, note that by using a minimum of weapon repositioning and force behind body movement, as well as the greater power at the end of the weapon, the author is able to deliver two blocks with significant force.









# Chinese Quarter-Staff

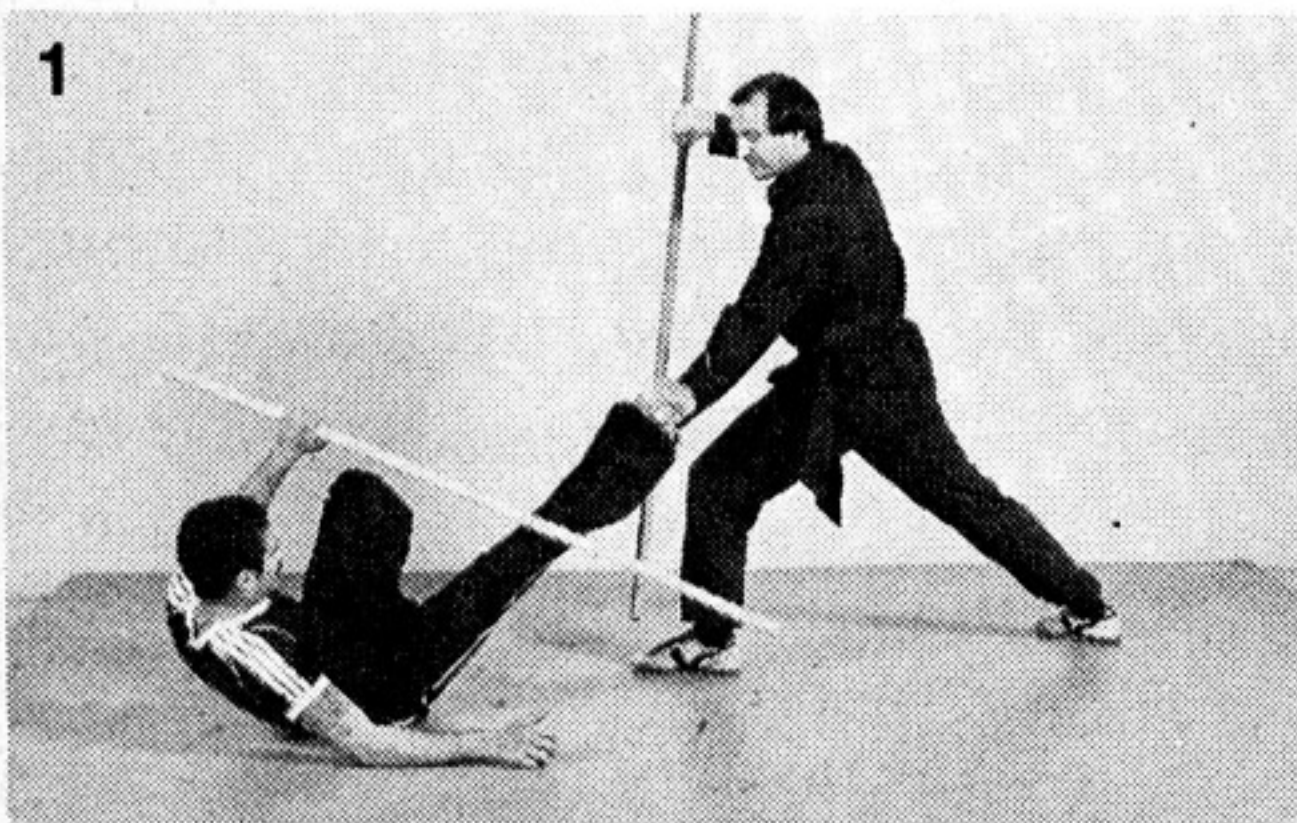
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counter. You've already got pressure against the staff with the opponent's strike. All that's necessary is to hold the staff tight enough to keep it from jumping out of your hands.

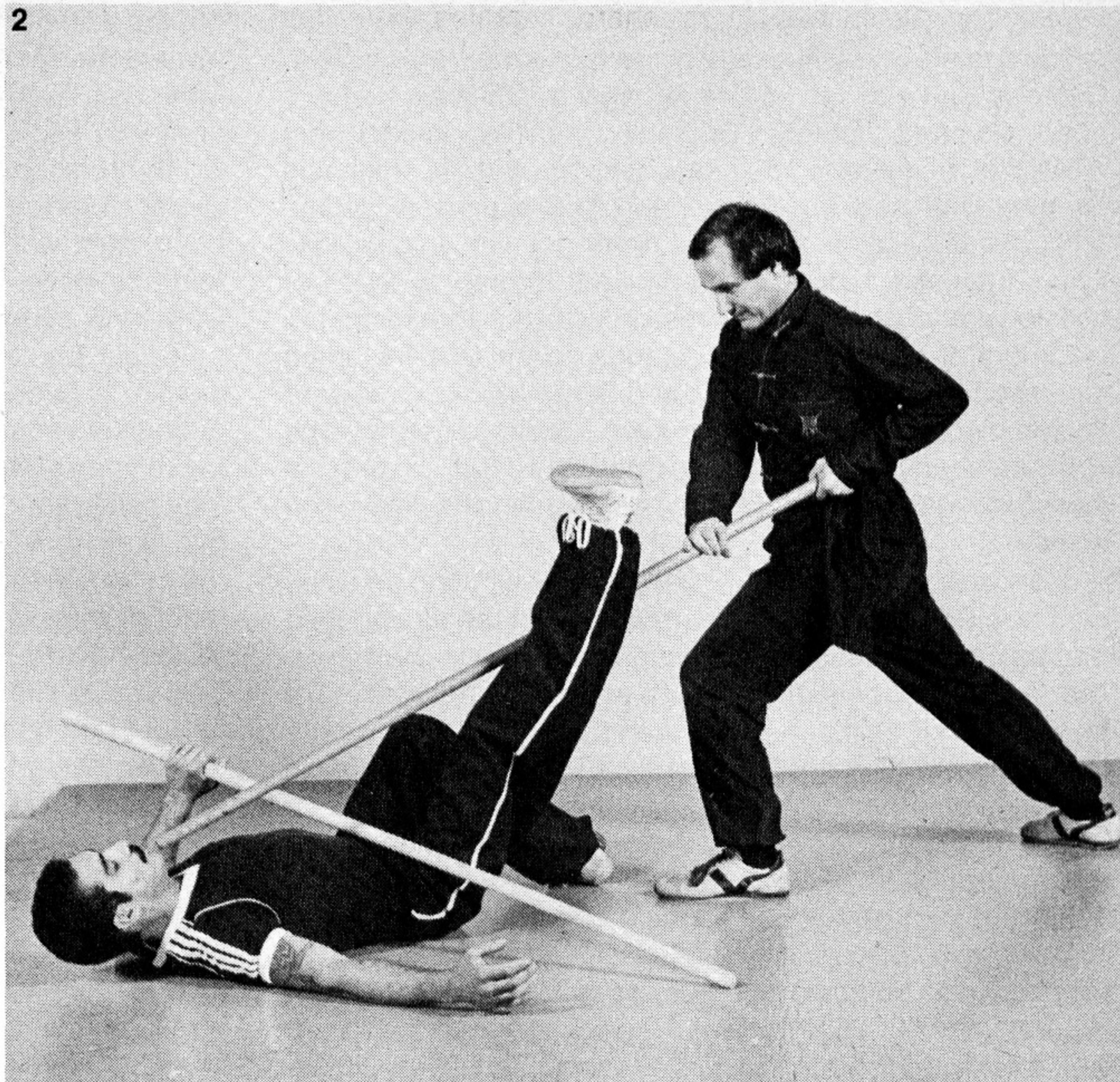
Another good block is a circular tip block. In the temples this block was taught in two ways. The first drill had the person place his staff's tip in the hole in the center of a large stone wheel. The staff was then moved along a trough in a circular manner which helped develop strength in the block.

The other drill was used to make students move the staff and not their hands. Both were placed in a barrel-like

**The author demonstrates after sweeping his opponent (1) with the staff, how easily it is (2) inverted by just sliding the hands down the weapon.**



2





object. The barrel had large sharp spikes within it. The circular moving block was then practiced. The tip was the only part of the staff which was to move. If the hands and arms moved they were cut by the spikes. This was to help students develop control of the staff.

The circular tip block works in this manner: First, it sweeps the tip of the opposing staff up, redirecting the power. Second, it pushes that staff to the ground, stopping its movement and holding it from coming up. The third movement is usually to slide up the opponent's staff and hit the fingers or make a quick movement upward to an unprotected area. One could also step in with a downward head or shoulder strike.

Another quick block that works well for a counter is what may be termed the "broom" block. This title is rather apropos due to the fact that the movement used to make the block is similar to movements used when sweeping the floor. The block is done while in a cat stance or a back stance for it's a protection against a thrust or shoot to the foot, ankle or leg. With this block the hands are already in a good position for many different strikes.

For those who like their blocks a bit more fancy there's always the back crossover block. This block is done in the crossover horse stance. It is the same as the standard crossover horse stance. It is the same as the standard crossover back hand block except that you're holding the weapon. A counter could then be done with a turn-around, swinging the staff quickly around the waist hard and strong, encircling the body and affording 360 degrees of protection.

Probably the simplest block is the 360-degree overhead block. This is

nothing more than swinging the staff over the head and around the body. This also affords a person complete protection against more than one attacker. Usually this block culminates in a downward head or shoulder strike or a side strike.

One extremely important aspect of this or any other weapon is the horse stance. It is very important to have a strong foundation before learning any weapon. A strong horse stance leads to strong hits and blocks. The blocks and hits are less likely to be out of place and the movements of the weapon and the body can be timed perfectly. Also, with a strong horse stance there will be less chance of going off balance with each strong and solid movement or when defending against an opponent's strong strikes. In fact, the weapons should not even be taught until the student has a strong and solid foundation. That is why in China when one began kung fu, the first six months of training was nothing more than learning to stand in the front horse stance for hours on end. The next six months dealt with learning to move on the horse or learning other horse stances.

As in all other aspects of classical kung fu, the most important details are: first, the horse stance; second, the flow of the chi from the ground outward to the point of impact; third, the control of the breath; fourth, the control of the power in each movement; and fifth, efficiency of movement. With the weapons it is important that one realize that the weapon is an extension of the body and not something other than the body. The power must be brought out to the tip of the weapon. Power that is either in the hands and arms or along the line of the weapon is wasted power. For maximum strength, speed and efficiency always bring the power to the tip. **KI**