

## Chapter 3

# The Classical Weapons of the Art

Indonesian martial arts are well known for their huge variation of bladed weapons they use. I will not attempt to list or show all of them but only those that this art uses most often in classical training.

We will start with the most commonly seen and used bladed weapon and that of course is the knife or *pisau* in Indonesian martial context. Everyone in almost every style teaches some sort of knife fighting and knife defenses. One of my biggest complaints is that most of these defenses are almost worthless against a fast, randomly moving assailant. One of my teachers, *Pendekar* Suryadi Jafri, used to open his knife training at a new school by allowing the most inexperienced student to hold a rubber knife. This student was then instructed to write their name as fast as possible over the face and chest of the most experienced student or teacher there and have this victim use the best knife defense they knew. They always failed because the sad fact is most systems don't practice knife fighting and they don't know how to defend against this type of attack. On the other end of the spectrum I have seen some of the Filipino styles demonstrate the most complex and intricate redirections with locks and counters that work just fine at slow to medium speed, or at fast speed when both players are doing the same drill. All of these defenses also fell apart when I saw them applied against the same type of inexperienced student who did not know the drill and so figuratively speaking "sliced and diced" them.

All "real" *Pencak Silat* is based on the use of bladed weapons, period. All of the true masters that I have studied with, who really were masters, were experts with the

knife and other bladed weapons. I liked some of their techniques more than others. Finally, when I observed real knife fighters in Indonesia and was shown the keys I understood it at once. Do not confuse this with what some call knife mastery over here. I watched with amusement, some years back, as one of these so called “masters of the knife” showed how to fight with a huge Pakistan made bowie knife trying to add a *Pencak Silat* low *siloh* position. All the while he was holding his knife at arms length which would have been a perfect target to destroy. Later someone showed me a picture of this “want to be” in a magazine with caption that my knife fighting was getting better after attending “his” seminar. The caption forgot to say that I had been invited to the seminar to teach and not to be taught, until this guy discovered himself as a master.

Most of these knife techniques were developed hundreds of years ago and came from lands where both combatants may have even held to a common code of ethics. No such luxury exists in Indonesia or the Philippines. Speaking of the Philippines, do not get me wrong, some at their arts have very good knife fighting abilities. One of my teachers, Grand Master Leo Gaje Jr., also studied *Petjut Pencak Silat* and was one of the deadliest men with a knife I have ever seen. It’s just that some of the other styles I have seen, seem to take up too much time using two men drills using techniques that under random combat conditions fall apart.

## Proper Grip and Position

We shall begin with the method and placement of the grip <sup>1</sup>. You will notice that the knife is held tightly between the first finger and the thumb and more loosely by the last three fingers. The back of the blade is resting on the web between the thumb and first finger. (Photo Knife Grip) The practitioner is advised to develop the proper grip strength with the hand so that these first two fingers offer a secure hold.



Knife Grip

The knife is always held back to the body or slightly behind it to make it a harder target for the opponent to reach. If the knife is being held in front of the body, but close to it, it must be positioned so that the wrist area is facing you and not to the attacker. This also holds true for the free hand. You must never present the wrist area as an easy target since this is a high blood loss region. (Photo Knife Position)

The rather loose looking grip is deceptive but this position is the key to the effectiveness of this knife style. It allows fast and powerful snap cuts to be made by closing the last three fingers while torquing the wrist forward with a quick snapping motion. (Photos Snap Cut a. - Snap Cut c.) Immediately after the snap cut is made the



Knife Position

knife returns to the original position, ready for the next snap, which is usually done immediately into another target. A snap cut is very different from a draw cut. There is very little movement with the snap cut as compared to the draw cut and more importantly it cuts deeper. What we are trying to do is to cut to the bone, especially on the arms and hands. Once the bone is nicked the opponent is much more likely to go into shock than from a simple slash. In the case of slashes many people may not know they have been cut until later. However a bone cut is extremely painful and drains the body at once under most circumstances. Of course if the person is on drugs, etc. their pain threshold may be very high. In this case the snap cut can go through tendons, ligaments and muscles making further movement impossible despite the absence of pain. In this type of knife fighting no attempt is made to redirect the opponents arm unless that redirection is accomplished by diverting the opponents limb with a snap cut, followed by either more



Snap Cut a.



Snap Cut b.



Snap Cut c.

cuts or a strike with the free hand and/or the butt of the knife.

In short the attacking limb is continuously struck with snap cuts and blows until the knife is gone before anything else is accomplished. Locks and grabbing are not attempted unless the blade is gone, the fist is shattered, (Photo Guru Besar Jeff Davidson) the elbow is broken, etc. You must make sure that the knife has fallen out of their hand or can't be used before attempting various other methods. Over the last 25 years nothing has worked as well or made me feel as safe under actual combat conditions. A few years ago a man pulled not one but two knives on me in the street and I believe I would be dead today had I tried a lock, throw or redirection. Every part of the knife and body is used to make this hit on the "incoming death". If you are forced to fight empty handed against a knife attacker you must use your hands in the same manner as if you had a knife. You must apply quick, short and very fast strikes aimed at the vulnerable back part of the opponents hands, as well as the joints, muscles, nerves and energy drainage points located on the arm.



Guru Besar Jeff Davidson

## Seated and Standing Drills

Practice at first seated<sup>2</sup> on the ground with a partner in what is called the *duduk* position. (Photos Duduk Drill a. - Duduk Drill f.) This is done so that the student does not have to worry about moving around and instead learns to concentrate on body angling and most importantly hitting, hitting and hitting. You should use the half fist, the fist, the elbow, the knee and the shin bone and keep viscously striking until the weapon is gone. In the *duduk* position one also learns the very important concept of accepting the blade into your space so that the blade is easier to eliminate. At a longer range one is faced with a faster moving weapon and if you attempt to reach for it you can open yourself up to viscous cuts before you know what has happened. Body angling is important and you should also practice this in the *duduk* position.

Once you feel confident in the seated position, practice the same drill standing. (Photos Standing Drill a. - Standing Drill e.) You will find it easier to deliver knee blows as you strike the arm and hand down into the rising knee blow. This is a very good “dislodging” technique. The blows can be diverted slightly with the first strike to allow a clear target to be struck with the succeeding blows, but always keep in mid - strike, strike, strike. If the slash is directed low, at say your knee, then the leg can be used to crash into his wrist area using your shin or knee area and pointing your knee towards the floor while bringing your foot upwards. This movement will cause the slash to pass under your folded up leg. As it passes under your leg you should use the principle of adhesion, (Sanders Vol. I, 16). As you pivot on your support leg his arm will travel across your body and head away from you. At that time you reach down and slap strike the attackers hand back towards you while you kick his arm with the shin bone of the leg that just diverted the strike. (Photos Knee Slash a. - Knee Slash c.) This technique is also illustrated on the traditional weapons tape from Raja Naga. These are but some possibilities of this very effective striking system of knife defense.



Duduk  
Drill a.



Duduk  
Drill b.



Duduk  
Drill c.



Duduk  
Drill d.



Duduk  
Drill e.



Duduk  
Drill f.





Standing  
Drill a.



Standing  
Drill b.



Standing  
Drill c.



Standing Drill d.



Standing Drill e.



Knee Slash a.



Knee Slash b.



Knee Slash c.

## The Free Hand

One thing that is often overlooked is the fact that the opponent has a free hand.<sup>3</sup> With most so called “knife experts” the knife is coming out in a predictable fashion with the other hand of the knife wielder just hanging there as if it were paralyzed. A smart attacker will often strike and grab with their free hand in order to distract you from the real weapon - the knife. Often an unsuspecting victim can be spun around and stabbed from the rear in this manner. Even if you have a knife your opponent can spin you to the opposite side in which you are carrying your knife and execute a thrust before you can react if you are not prepared for this scenario. In order to guard against this situation quick poison hand type snap cuts and empty hand blows are a huge help in retracting the hand quickly.

You should also practice having your “free” hand grabbed so that you know how to react should it occur. There are a few counters for this type of move. One counter is to grab their arm and drop low using your weight to pull them forward where you can counter thrust with your knife. (Photos Free Hand a. - Free Hand b.) The other counter is to adhere to them. As the opponent pulls on your “free” hand you follow the pull into them thus winding up on their weak side and countering with a thrust or a strike. (Photos Free Hand c. - Free Hand e.)



Free Hand a.



Free Hand b.

Free Hand c.



Free Hand d.



Free Hand e.



## Concluding Comments

Included are some photographs of some of our more important traditional weapons. The *kujang*, a wicked knife, originally made by an ancient king in Java to be roughly the shape of the island. It is sharp on both sides, often with vicious jagged points along the top edge. Because of its various curves and balance it can be used to slash, stab, redirect like the *karambit* (tiger claw) and has even been used as a sort of spear. As one can imagine handle length and type vary as shown. Of the *kujang* that are pictured the most unusual is the one with the antler Balinese handle, probably owned by a Javanese who traveled to Bali. All of the previously discussed knife techniques also apply to the *kujang*. (Photos Kujang a. - Kujang b.)

Also pictured is the *tongkat* or *tombak*. Usually *tongkat* refers to a stick and *tombak* refers to a spear, however I have only seen these terms used with this weapon. It is a four-corned blade made in the traditional *pamor* fashion as are the *kujang*. The *tongkat* is primarily a stabbing weapon and is used much like the *keris*. Both the *tongkat* and the *keris* are steeped in mystical traditions. (Photo Tongkat and Arit) The *pedang* is the long sword of the art. The *pedang* comes in various shapes with the one pictured having a fine old *pamor* blade and ivory handle. (Photo Pedang a. - Pedang b.) The *karambit* originates in Sumatra, but since we incorporate *harmimau* in our art we have adapted its use. The one pictured also shows a fine *parmor* blade. (Photo Karambit) We also employ a very short stick that is referred to as a bolt (*kanching*) or thunder bolt (*panah petir*). (Photos Kanching Grip a. - Kanching Grip c.) The *keris* is considered such an important weapon, talisman and integral part of the art that I have devoted an entire book and video to it. The interested reader is directed to the videos on the *keris* <sup>4</sup>, the *pedang* <sup>5</sup>, the *karambit* <sup>6</sup> and the *kanching* <sup>7</sup> for further instruction.

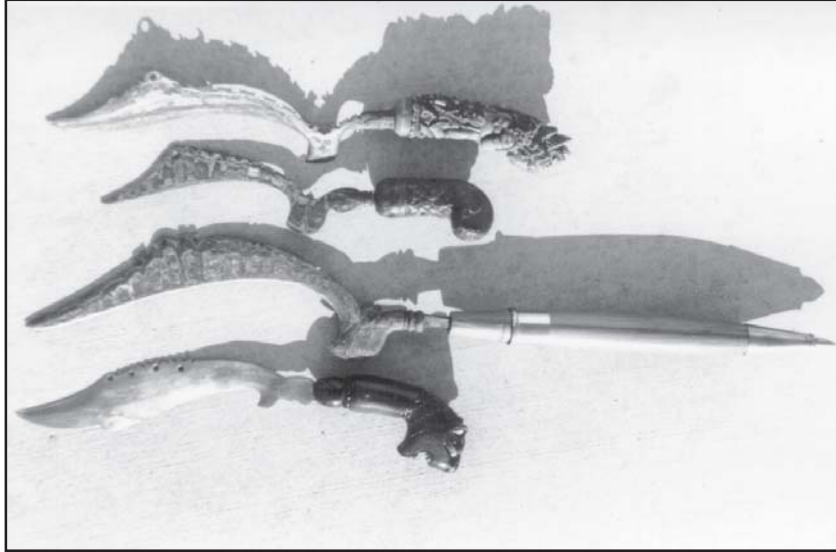
The student is advised to study the text and videos, carefully practicing with rubber or other soft non-lethal copies until your skills have improved. Practicing with a



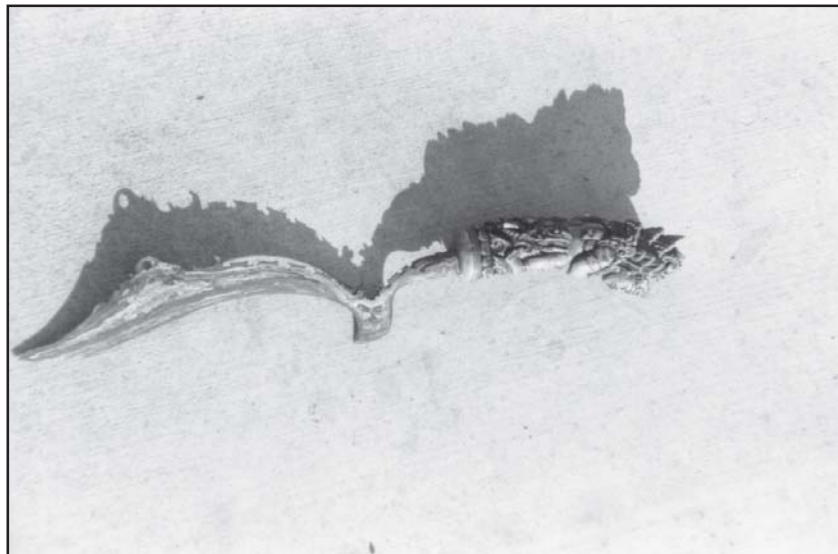
partner using real weapons is not advised unless under the guidance of a qualified teacher. An additional specialized weapon the *siku siku* is reserved for advanced students. It is similar to a sai but it has a wide sharpened blade in its center and a long skull crusher on its end. (Photo Below)



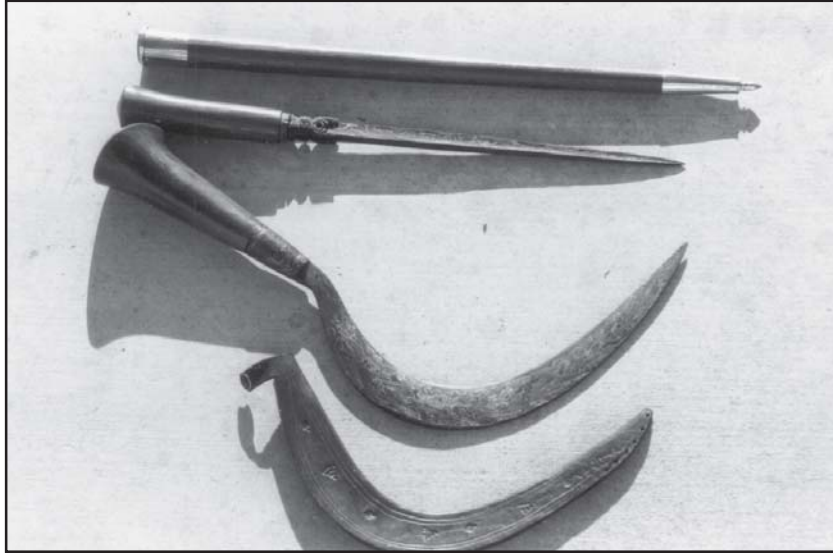
Pendekar Sanders's First Pencak Silat Teacher with a Siku - Siku in His Left Hand



Kumpang a.



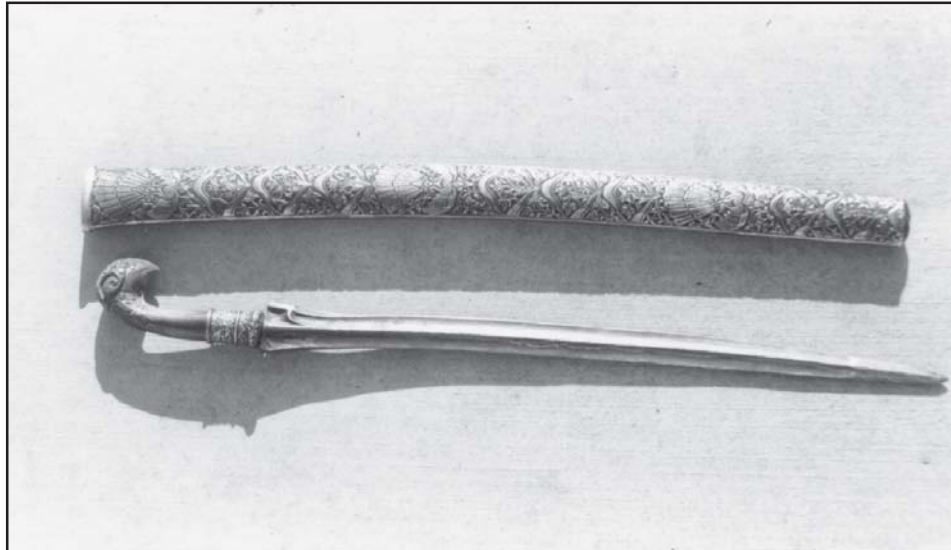
Kumpang b.



Tongkat (above) and Arit (below)



Karambit



Pedang a.



Pedang b.

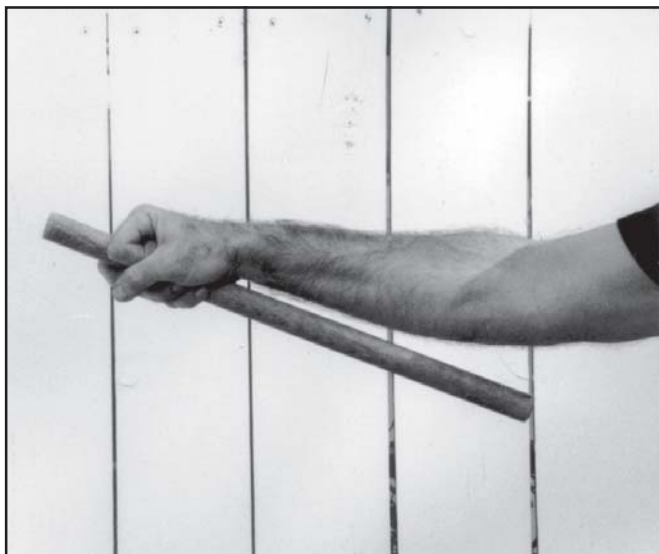
Kanching Grip a.



Kanching Grip b.



Kanching Grip c.





Pendekar William Sanders with a Keris



Pendekar William Sanders and Guru Besar Jeff Davidson both with Keris

# Notes

Further information can be found on the following videos:

1. Traditional Weapons 2, by *Pendekar* William Sanders, produced by Raja Naga.
2. Traditional Weapons 1, by *Pendekar* William Sanders, produced by Raja Naga.
3. Traditional Weapons 3, by *Pendekar* William Sanders, produced by Raja Naga.
4. Indonesian Kris Fighting, by *Pendekar* William Sanders, produced by Raja Naga.
5. Indonesian Sword 1 and 2, by *Pendekar* William Sanders, produced by Raja Naga.
6. Indonesian Weapons, by *Pendekar* William Sanders, produced by Raja Naga.
7. Traditional Weapons 1, by *Pendekar* William Sanders, produced by Raja Naga.