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Return of the

The Much-Maligned and Often-Underestimated Technique Is the Key to Self-Defense!

by Damian Ross

It's been called the edge-of-the-hand strike, the ax hand, the *shuto*, the thousand-hand strike and the judo chop. It can be found in virtually every martial art from karate to kung fu and in every *kata* from those practiced at the Kodokan to those done at Kukkiwon. So how did this time-honored technique go from martial arts mainstream to martial arts punch line? How did the only strike found in almost every established martial art go from secret technique to something your grandfather did? >>

OFFENSE AND DEFENSE:

Just by tucking his chin, Damian Ross can remain protected behind his edge of the hand while he hacks through his opponent's defenses (1). The edge of the hand continues to provide cover while he prepares for another strike (2), which he slams into the side (3) and then the back of the man's neck (4). When angled downward and delivered with sufficient power, the technique can be a knockout blow.

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REAL GROUND AND POUND:

The edges of the hands are strong enough to bust through an assailant's cover. Here, Damian Ross mounts his opponent and begins wearing him down with strikes until a target of opportunity presents itself (1-2). Once he makes contact, he switches to the heel of the hand to finish him off without risking an accidental ground strike (3). With his toe stunned, Ross transitions to an eye gouge (4) and, using the environment, a head smash (5).

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAMIAN ROSS

The fate of the edge-of-the-hand strike was sealed in 2002 when Austin Powers executed his patented "judo chop" in *Goldmember*. Since then, it's been called outdated, labeled ineffective or simply ignored. While most martial artists and self-defense enthusiasts have abandoned the technique for Western-style closed-fist strikes, there's still a group of steadfast practitioners who know the full story and understand how to correctly apply the technique that was described as "the most deadly blow without the aid of a weapon" by American close-combat pioneer Col. Rex Applegate.

Applegate and other close-quarters-combat experts in the early 1900s realized how effective the edge-of-the-hand strike could be, and they proved it time and time again in real-world situations. However, because of the rise of Western boxing, kickboxing and now the mixed martial arts, it's been put on the back burner. While the strike has little application in the ring, it's still effective for what it was designed for: up-close combat and self-defense. In fact, it's the most versatile method of striking and—even better—it can be mastered relatively easily.

Tough by Design

Despite the delicate bone structure of the appendage, the edge and heel of the hand are the only two places that can naturally take a lot of punishment while suffering a minimal amount of damage. That's in stark contrast to the punch, which may appear formidable in the ring but, when delivered without the protection of hand wraps and gloves, frequently leads to shattered knuckles or dislocated fingers if a skull or elbow is hit.

To be effective with a punch, you must condition your hands—which can take months or even years of dedicated training. To be effective with the edge-of-the-hand strike, however, you need only invest in a few weeks of training, after which you'll be able to hit any target on your opponent's body and inflict maximum damage with little or no injury to yourself.



FIGHTING FROM THE GUARD:

Lying on his back, Damian Ross uses his left arm to provide cover while his assailant goes on the offensive (1). When the man punches, his fist is stopped by Ross' elbow (2), which opens the door for an edge-of-the-hand blow to the face (3-4). Once he's inflicted enough damage to get to his feet, Ross "shrimps out" from the bottom and uses his feet to knock the man back (5). When one of the shots drops him, Ross uses kicks to finish the altercation (6).

mizes the chance of making contact with the ground. That empowers you to deliver a series of hard, fast strikes without the risk of sustaining an injury that might render you incapable of continuing the fight.

Even from the bottom position in a grappling encounter, you can distract and defend yourself against an onslaught of punches from an assailant. By maintaining a rocking motion and keeping your chin tucked, your head off the ground and your elbows raised, you can protect yourself while trying to improve your position.

King of Combat

Experts agree that when it comes to survival, you need to cause as much damage to your target as rapidly as possible while maintaining the integrity of your bone structure. The edge-of-the-hand shot is the keystone of this concept. It enables you to strike anywhere with a sharp, powerful blow, the results of which can range from a stunning strike to a fight-ender. With a little training, an average person can develop good technique; that same amount of training will enable a martial artist to create an awesome strike that works in a variety of situations. >>

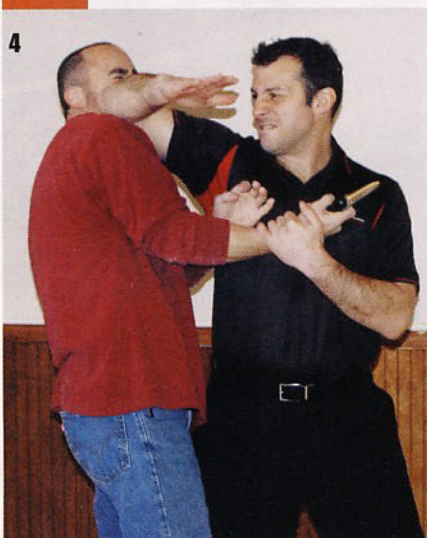
Anytime, Anywhere

The edge-of-the-hand blow can be used from any angle or position. On your feet, it enables you to protect the vital areas of your head and neck while you take ground, keep your target off-balance and deliver a barrage of strikes.

From a rear-body grab or bear-hug position, the technique can be delivered as

an elbow at extreme close range. As you create space using it in conjunction with head butts and stomps, you can inflict more damage with the edge of the hand.

On the ground, it's also useful. From a dominant position—for example, the mount or guard—the edge of the hand is incredibly effective. If you try to punch a constantly moving target, you stand a good chance of shattering your knuckles on the ground. You also run the risk of breaking bones in your hand if you hit an elbow or head. Because the edge-of-the-hand strike is delivered along an arcing path, it mini-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAMIAN ROSS

KNIFE AND COLLAR DEFENSE:

The attacker holds a training knife to Damian Ross' neck (1). Ross raises his arms (2) and twists his torso counterclockwise as he captures the knife hand and drives his right hand into the man's face (3). Ross then reverses direction, hitting him with an elbow (4) and an edge-of-the-hand blow (5). Next, the self-defense expert pulls his head down into a rising knee thrust (6), which he follows with another edge-of-the-hand strike to the back of the neck (7). When the assailant is on the ground, Ross finishes him with a stomp kick (8).

With the rise of reality-based fighting, the judo chop is making a comeback as more and more people are recognizing their need for no-nonsense self-defense techniques. It proved itself on the streets of Shanghai in 1910, and it's every bit as effective in the deserts of Iraq—or the small towns of America—in 2009. ✘

About the author:

Damian Ross is president of The Self Defense Company, an 11-year-old organization that uses a worldwide network of instructors to teach fighting skills. He holds a fourth-degree black belt in tekken-ryu jujutsu, a second degree in Kodokan judo and a second degree in taekwondo. He wrestled at Lehigh University and has worked as a doorman and security specialist. For more information, visit www.blackbeltmag.com/archives/who/.

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More From the Founder of The Self Defense Company

Damian Ross' article "The Quick and the Dead: Avoiding the Biggest Mistake in Self-Defense Training" is available for free viewing at www.blackbeltmag.com/quick.